



United States
Department of
Agriculture

June 2004

Type of Document: **Decision Memo**

Project: **Beech Grove Pine Thinning**

Administrative Unit: **Athens Ranger District
Wayne National Forest
USDA – Forest Service**

Geographic Location: **Perry County, Ohio**

I. Decision to be implemented

A. Description of Decision

I have decided to implement the Beech Grove Pine Thinning project on the Athens Ranger District of the Wayne National Forest. We will be thinning 70 acres of white pine plantations in T12N R14W Section 32, Monroe Township, Perry County, Ohio. We will construct less than .5 mile of temporary road in Stands 31-024 and 31-06. Stand 32-007 will require some road maintenance on an existing mineral access road. No roads would be added to the Forest Road Inventory in this project.

We will also be monitoring tree of heaven at the site and pulling or treating individual stems with herbicide to control the spread of this invasive species. We will clear trees from the dam at the small waterhole in Stand 32-18 and re-seed if necessary. We will close illegal off-road vehicle trails in Unit 13 with dirt and rock mounds, rehab and seed the trails as necessary. We will close open non-authorized roads, which are not public rights-of-way or in use by Forest permittees. We will regenerate adjacent pockets of aspen trees to provide wildlife habitat and to maintain a component of aspen for the future. We will create a small parking area adjacent to Unit 13 along Township Road 435 and at the junction of Township 435 and Indian Run, where we will also fill an old water well.

In order to protect biological resources, the following mitigations will occur:

Mitigations as part of the Proposed Action

- ◆ Due to the large amount of dead pines seen in Units 31 – 24 and 32 - 7, these cutting units will be harvested between September 15 and April 15. Dead pines will be cut only if they are a hazard to forest workers.
- ◆ Any shagbark or shellbark hickory or other trees with bat characteristics over 6 inches dbh in temporary road rights of way must be cut during the hibernation season between September 15 and April 15.
- ◆ A depression to retain water will be constructed in Unit 31 – 6 to replace road ruts lost during road maintenance.
- ◆ Do not cut any healthy butternut trees.
- ◆ Minimize the spread of invasive species by washing off-road harvesting equipment prior to use in these stands. Recommend that operator harvest the least-infested units first (006 and 013) to reduce spread. Monitor for tree of heaven and multi-flora rose after harvest and treat if there is evidence of spread.

Table 1: Beech Grove Pine Thinning				
Treatment Areas T12N R14W Section 32 Monroe Township, Perry County				
Compartment - Stand	Acres	Access Needs	Additional Projects	Benefits
31 – 001	10			
31 – 006	10	.2 mile of private road to be constructed	Waterhole to be constructed in old road on federal land.	Wildlife and amphibians will benefit from ridge top water source.
31 – 024	8	.1 mile of temporary road construction	Control tree-of-heaven. Regenerate aspen by cutting.	Reduce spread of invasive species. Improve wildlife habitat.
31 – 042	7			
32 - 007	18	Existing mineral access road; maintenance only		
32 – 013	12		Clear waterhole dam; re-seed. Close illegal use road. Create permanent gravel parking area at T-435.	Prevent more expensive maintenance on dam. Reduce resource damage on forest. Provide facilities for users where need is evident.
32 - 015	4			
General work in project area			Close illegal ORV trails. Stop illegal ORV use along pipeline corridor and mineral access roads.	Reduce resource damage.

B. Purpose of Decision

This project is to improve the health and vigor of 70 acres of white pine plantations in southern Perry County, Ohio. Many white pine plantations on the District are over-stocked and under stress because of the high density of trees. Mortality has occurred in some plantations from a complex of stresses including drought, pine bark adelgid, fungal pathogens, and bark beetles. Thinning pine plantations improves the health of the stands by increasing resistance to insects and disease and allowing a fewer number of stems to grow stronger. Thinning also increases light to the ground, allows hardwood seedlings to establish and increases the growth of herbaceous vegetation. This improves understory plant diversity and the associated wildlife habitat (see Project File 3-13).

The Beech Grove (Conn Church) area is within Management Area (MA) 2.2 in the Wayne National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This MA sets a desired future condition of “a natural-appearing mosaic of small water bodies, open lands, and forest predominantly of the oak-hickory type with intermixed coniferous stands such as white pine and Virginia pine. Resource management practices such as vegetative management, are evident but in harmony with the natural-appearing environment” This project is consistent with MA direction. (Wayne

National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 1988, pg 4-99,100).

C. Alternative Actions Considered but Dismissed

It was considered to 1) do a thinning from below, but leave the trees on site and 2) not thin these stands. Due to the increased likelihood for insects and disease to spread from the decaying trees to the healthy trees, and the loss of potential contribution to the local economy, this alternative was not analyzed further. These stands would eventually break apart and convert to hardwood.

II. Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the US Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 sections 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

I have concluded that this decision is appropriately categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is a routine activity within a category of exclusion and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. The project is also in compliance with the Wayne Forest Plan. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Project File.

A. Category of Exclusion

The activity falls with the categorical exclusion category 31.2, Number 12, which allows the harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres with no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The purpose of this category is to allow low-impact silvicultural treatments through timber harvest (Federal Register, Vol. 68, No. 145, July 29, 2003 Interim Directive effective July 29, 2003). This category allows incidental removal of trees for temporary roads, landings, and skid trails as determined by the Forest Service in the timber sale contract specifications.

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

The mere presence of one or more of the following resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist.

1. Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat

The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species' designated critical habitat. In accordance with Section 7(c) of this Act, a list of proposed, threatened or endangered species that may be present in the project area was provided to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Project File 6-2 and 7-2). In the analysis of impacts from this project, it has been determined and concurred with by USFWS that, if the mitigations are followed, the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect small whorled pogonia, northern monkshood, running buffalo clover, and the Indiana bat (Project File 6-4).

Thinning the pine trees will have a beneficial effect on the Indiana bat by allowing an understory more conducive to quality foraging and future roosting habitat. The character of the landscape will be maintained in suitable habitat for the Indiana bat, as approximately 700 acres of hardwood habitat remains within these two compartments (Project File 6-2). Surveys of the project area found potential habitat, but no individuals of federally protected plant species. Pine thinning is not likely to adversely affect the monkshood, small-whorled pogonia or running buffalo clover, and it may benefit habitat for the clover and pogonia.

2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds

There are no wetland habitats, floodplains, or municipal watersheds within the project area.

3. Congressionally Designated Areas

There are no designated wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas on the Wayne National Forest.

4. Inventoried Roadless Areas

There are no inventoried roadless areas (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) II) on the Wayne National Forest.

5. Research Natural Areas

There are no research natural areas in or near the project area.

6. American Indian native religious or cultural sites

There are no heritage sites in or near this project area.

7. Archaeological sites or historic properties or areas

There are no heritage sites within the treatment units for this project (see Project File 5-2).

8. No other extraordinary circumstances related to this project were identified.

III. Public Involvement

Invitations to comment on a proposed action to treat white pine plantations were mailed to approximately 200 individuals on April 3, 2003. Letters were distributed to 25 local residences on April 22, 2003. Ten comments were received. The scoping letter and map were available on the Wayne National Forest public website. Comments supported the benefits of thinning pine and maintaining a healthy pine component on the Forest. One commentor requested we suspend the project until the Land and Resource Management Plan is revised. Agency direction is to continue under existing Forest Plans until revision is complete.

IV. Findings Required by and/or Related to Other Laws and Regulations

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below.

This project complies with the **National Forest Management Act (1976)** through adherence to guidance in the **Wayne National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)**. Endangered, threatened and sensitive species have been considered in this analysis as required by the **Endangered Species Act**. Potential effects of this decision on sensitive species have been

analyzed and documented in the Biological Evaluations for Animals (Project File 6-2) and for Plants (Project File 7-2).

This decision complies with Section 106 of the **National Historic Preservation Act (Project File 5-2)**. This decision has considered whether projects would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations as required in **Executive Order 12898: Environmental Justice**. Public involvement occurred for this project, the results of which I have considered in this decision. Public involvement did not identify, nor is this decision expected to adversely impact, minority or low-income populations. The entirety of this document and the supporting Project File is in compliance with the **National Environmental Policy Act**.

V. Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f) (published June 4, 2003) which states that decision for actions that have been categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS pursuant to FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31 are not subject to appeal.

VI. Implementation Date

This decision may be implemented immediately.

VII. Contact Person

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Athens District Ranger Dan B. Kincaid during normal office hours (weekdays 8 am to 4:30 pm) at the Athens District Office, 13700 US Hwy 33, Nelsonville, Ohio 45764; phone (740) 753-0101.

IX. Signature and Date

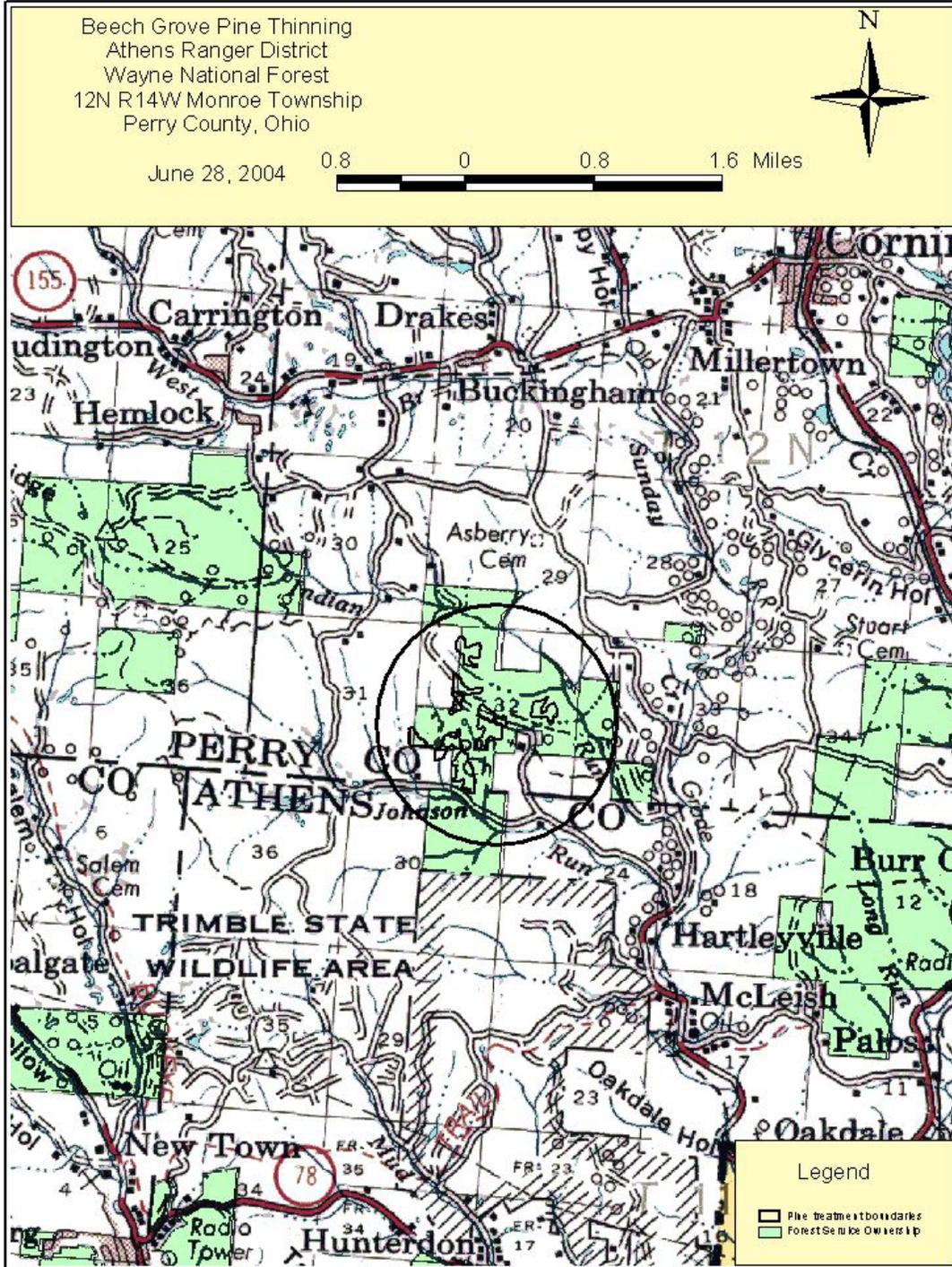
/s/ Dan B. Kincaid

June 29, 2004

DAN B. KINCAID
District Ranger
Athens Ranger District

Date

Map 1: Vicinity Map of Beech Grove Pine Thinning



Map 2: Topographic Map of Treatment Units in Beech Grove Pine Thinning

