



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

August 2004

**Type of Document:** Decision Memo

**Project:** Ironton Roadside Fuels  
Prescribed Burning Project

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

**Geographic Location:** Lawrence, Gallia and Scioto  
Counties, Ohio

## I. Decision To Be Implemented

### A. Description of Decision

I have decided to approve prescribed burning on 543 acres of heavy fuels generated by the February 2003 ice storm along roadsides on the Ironton Ranger District of the Wayne National Forest. These same roadside areas were analyzed for fuels reduction in the Ironton Roadside Fuels Reduction Project, decision memo dated June 4, 2003. Treatment units would include the same areas as shown in the following table.

<b>Table 1-1: Ironton Roadside Fuels Prescribed Burning Project</b>				
<i>Hazardous Fuels Treatment Areas</i>				
<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Township</b>	<b>Adjacent Road</b>	<b>Legal description</b>	<b>Approx Acres</b>
Thompson Cemetery	Decatur, Lawrence County	T-160 T-140 / FR 5	T3N R18W Section 36	60
Peckerwood	Symmes, Lawrence County	CR 210 T-154, CR47	T5N R17W, Sections 15,16,21,22, 23	91
Cadmus	Perry Gallia County	CR58 (formerly CR12) SR 141	T5N R16W, Sections 29, 30	59
Pine Creek	Decatur Lawrence County	CR 34	T3N R18W, Sections 3, 4, 5, & 6	201
	Bloom Scioto County	T-162 (Lawrence) CR 10 (Scioto)	T4N R18W, Section 31 & 32 T4N R19W, Section 36	
Peniel	Greenfield Gallia County	CR 76, CR70, T-602, CR 68 (formerly CR1, 2, 10, and T-7)	T6N R17W Sections 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 34	132
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>543</b>

Prescribed burning will occur between September 15 and April 15. General activities to be undertaken in preparing for and executing prescribed fires include fire line construction, hazard tree mitigation, prescribed fire ignition, and mop-up. While all of these activities would not necessarily occur prior to each individual prescribed fire, some combination of them is likely. For this project we will construct up to 26 miles of fire line. Mechanical fire line using dozers or other heavy equipment will be constructed in those areas where hand line construction would be unsafe or where thick brush or large downed trees make hand line construction difficult or unsafe. Off-road equipment use will be limited to all-terrain vehicles used to haul supplies into the burn areas.

Hand lines would be constructed to a 3-4 foot width where no suitable roads or trails exist. Fire line construction would involve the removal of vegetation and duff layers to bare mineral soil (for all of the project areas) using hand tools (e.g. pulaskis, shovels, rakes, McCleods), power tools (e.g. chainsaws, weed eaters, leaf blowers, brush cutters, etc.), and mowers, tractors, rototillers and/or brush hogs. Vegetation, including downed fuels, would be brushed away from fire lines to ensure clear, adequate breaks. Fuels that provide a path to the crowns of trees (ladder fuels) would be removed. Hazardous trees on the fire line or directly adjacent to it will be removed for safety. Forest Service specialists would determine rehabilitation measures for fire lines following post-burn site analyses. Fire lines would be offset from private land boundaries to protect private lands.

Prescribed fire ignition would involve lighting fires in order to burn an area within the fire lines. Drip torches containing a mix of gasoline and diesel fuel would be the most common source of ignition. Fusees (magnesium), “ping pong balls” (potassium permanganate and glycol injected into plastic balls), or other ignition devices may be used. The burn area would be mopped up using hand and power tools and/or water to ensure prescribed fires are out and a source of ignition is not left behind to start an unwanted fire.

Prior to each prescribed fire, a prescribed fire plan would be developed taking into consideration weather conditions, humidity, fuel loadings, and fuel burn rates at a given moisture content. Weather conditions must be within the prescription before a prescribed fire is ignited. If a prescribed fire burned out of prescription or weather conditions changed during the fire, the Forest Service would implement a contingency plan, which may include total suppression.

The spring fire season for the Forest is between February and May and the fall fire season is between September and December. These months are generally the driest and coldest months and present the most favorable weather conditions for prescribed fire. Wildfires from unplanned natural ignitions (e.g. lightning) may be managed as prescribed fire if the area of the fire has an approved prescribed fire plan and if the fire fits the burning prescription.

#### *Standard Practices for Fire Management Activities*

- Natural fuel breaks will be used whenever consistent with safe, effective suppression techniques;
- Fire retardants must be on an approved list for use by the Forest Service;
- Earth moving equipment such as graders, bulldozers or other tracked vehicles may be used for fire suppression, especially when safety to wildland firefighters is an issue, or when there is a threat of personal injury or property damage.
- When hand line construction is required, construction standards will require the hand lines to be built with minimum impact. Erosion control will be used on slopes exceeding 10%.

### *Standard Practices to Protect Soil and Water Resources*

- Creek crossings will be limited to pre-determined locations.
- Fire line construction will not be permitted in wetlands.
- Avoid, where possible, fire line construction within 100 feet of the edges of all permanent streams. If fire lines are needed in this special attention zone, rehab immediately after use.
- The application of fire retardant or foam will be prohibited within 100 feet of surface water resources or sensitive areas.
- Monitoring will occur after each prescribed fire for signs of erosion, and actions will be taken to remedy erosion problems.
- When using streams or riparian areas as natural firebreaks to prevent the impact of fire line construction, maintain low intensity burns through minimal lighting efforts to prevent complete duff removal, erosion and sedimentation of watersheds.
- Fire lines will be rehabilitated with seed and mulch, except where specialists determine other treatment is better suited to the site.

### *Standards for Air Quality and Human Health & Safety*

- Smoke and prescribed fire warning signs will be posted on any paved roads in the vicinity of the burn unit.
- During burns, smoke will be monitored visually. Unacceptable smoke effects will be addressed by altering firing tactics, actively directing traffic, or terminating the burn.
- Temporary ATV access points and trails will be obliterated by raking leaf litter over exposed ground, and/or piling debris at entry points to discourage illegal ATV use after project completion.
- Nearby residents will be notified prior to implementation of any prescribed fires.

## **B. Summary of mitigations for Wildlife and Vegetation**

### Indiana Bat

- If dead or dying trees are safety hazards and need to be cut along the fire line and, if cut during the non-hibernation season, a tally must be kept to ensure the total number on the Wayne National Forest does not exceed 125 trees before September 2006, as allowed by the Incidental Take Statement in the Biological Opinion. This applies only to trees over six inches in diameter.

### Timber Rattlesnake

- Prescribed fires should not be forced to burn the entire area, but allowed to leave scattered unburned patches to which snakes could retreat during a burn. If any rattlesnakes are discovered during project work, all activities should stop until a wildlife biologist can evaluate the situation.

### Olympia Marble

- Prescribed fires should not be forced to burn the entire area, but allowed to leave scattered unburned patches in which butterflies could survive to re-populate the burned areas.

## Vegetation

- ❑ Do not cut any butternut trees.
- ❑ Favor use of hand-constructed fire line, over dozer created line, to minimize disturbance and soil compaction.
- ❑ Remove as few trees as possible to minimize changes to light and moisture on the forest floor.
- ❑ Avoid fire line construction within 50 feet of the top and 50 feet of the base of any exposed rock face or outcrop. Leave remnant unburned fuels in all areas for residual shade. If fires do not burn along rock outcrops and stream edges, do not re-ignite so that we can protect these habitats.
- ❑ Do not create fire line or burn within 100 feet of the known kudzu population in Peckerwood treatment area to prevent the spread of this aggressive non-native species. Contact a specialist to locate boundaries of the population before any ground-disturbance occurs.
- ❑ All equipment (dozers, ATVs) needs to be cleaned of soil and vegetation debris before entering the individual project areas. Equipment cleaning could be done at any commercial car wash facility with a high-powered water hose. The project leader should inspect equipment on site.

## **B. Purpose of Decision**

The purpose of this decision is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by reducing the high fuel loads currently on the ground in the proposed prescribed fire areas. Wildfire could threaten nearby homes and structures, damage the natural environment, and compromise firefighter safety. The February 2003 ice storm felled many trees, creating abnormally high fuel loads on the ground. The five areas to be burned in this project were selected because they were hit especially hard by the ice storm, contain a lot of pine (which is very flammable), are near private homes and structures, and are located along roadsides, which are prone to arson. These areas have already been treated once to reduce fuel loads (except for part of the Peniel area), when downed trees were lopped and scattered during the summer of 2003. The proposed project would further reduce the high fuel loads which still remain.

The National Fire Plan lists Lawrence, Gallia, and Scioto counties as “Communities in the vicinity of federal lands at risk of wildfire in Ohio” (See Project File G-1).

## **C. Alternative Actions Considered but Dismissed**

The inter-disciplinary team considered not treating the areas, but increasing surveillance to prevent the escape of an arson or lightning fire. The areas with high fuel loads are widespread, potential fire occurrence in dry seasons is high, and coverage by our limited law enforcement personnel would be very difficult. We also considered mechanically treating the areas by cutting the logs into small pieces and re-distributing them across the area. This alternative is cost-prohibitive and unsafe due to the concentration and position of logs in some of the area. We considered removing most of the large fuels with commercial harvest, but broken, downed pine did not have the value to warrant a commercial timber sale. We discussed building and maintaining fire breaks, but determined that the cost of maintenance made this impractical.

## 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 (FSH) 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 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. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Project File.

### A. Category of Exclusion

The activity falls within categorical exclusion category 31.2, number 10, which states: “Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire, not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing, not to exceed 1,000 acres” (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Environmental Policy and Procedures).

a. These shall be limited to areas:

- 1) In the wildland-urban interface (See Project File G-1);
- 2) Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups, I, II, or III, outside the wildland-urban interface. These sites fall in Fire Regime Group II with 35-year frequency and high stand replacement severity (greater than 75% of the dominant overstory vegetation replaced) (See Project File G-3). They also fall in Condition Class 2 based on how much of the overstory would be killed in an uncontrolled fire (see Project File G-4).

b. A collaborative framework was used during the development of the initial Ironton Roadside Fuels Reduction project in 2003 as evidenced by the number of public contacts made between the ice storm and the preparation of this decision (see Project File Section C). This project is consistent with the National Fire Plan’s Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan, in that communication with landowners and government officials generated the urgency for debris clean-up in the near vicinity of private lands in the wildland-urban interface. The resulting project improves suppression capability over more than 500 acres of the heaviest storm-related fuel loading on the Ironton District, it reduces hazardous fuels in the treatment areas near local residences and communities, and it reduces the potential for catastrophic fire so that natural fire can burn without disastrous results. Community input was received through personal contact with local officials and other citizens (See Project File C-15), a public field tour, mailing to interested parties (see Project File C-2 and C-3), and visitation of homes within ½ mile of the treatment area. Local residents voiced support for the project in order to protect their property improvements. Local officials and industry representatives supported the project.

c. This project is consistent with agency and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans. Preparation of this document is consistent with National

Environmental Policy Act procedures. This project is consistent with the Wayne National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

d. There are no wilderness areas on the Wayne National Forest.

e. This action does not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure. There is no sale of vegetative material in this action.

#### 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.

In the analysis of impacts from this project, it has been determined and concurred with by USFWS that, if the mitigations are followed, implementing the proposed prescribed burning on 554 acres is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Indiana bat, when considering the baseline status of the Indiana bat, the effects of the action, and any cumulative effects. Implementation of the terms and conditions associated with the reasonable and prudent measures provided on pages 36-40 of the Programmatic Biological Opinion as published by USFWS in 2001 will minimize adverse effects to the Indiana bat by maintaining suitable Indiana bat roosting and foraging habitat and protecting Indiana bats from the potential effects of burning activities. The proposed prescribed fire activity is consistent with the PBO (USFWS Concurrence letter Project File E-2). The [FWS] anticipated that the proposed action will result in the incidental take of 554 acres of potential Indiana bat habitat through prescribed fire. This level is well within the acres of incidental take anticipated and exempted for prescribed fire through September 2006 in the March 8, 2004 revised incidental take statement letter (Project File E-2).

### **2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds**

Executive Order 11988 is to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, "...the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood-prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any one year." To further insure that floodplain-related impacts are minimized, mitigation measures (as described in this document, Section IA, page 3) have been prescribed.

There are no municipal watersheds within the treatment areas. Some perennially wet soils exist in the Pine Creek area, possibly aggravated by beaver activity. This area will not be burned.

### **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 any of the treatment areas.

#### **6. American Indian native religious or cultural sites**

Communication was made with eight tribes on the proposed work to reduce ice storm damage. A response was received from the Delaware Tribe.

#### **7. Archaeological sites or historic properties or areas**

In agreement with the State Historic Preservation Officer, these sites will be monitored during operations in case any sites are revealed during fire line construction or burning and to apply appropriate protections. It was determined by the Forest Archaeologist and concurred with by the SHPO (see Project File F-1 and F-2) that it was unsafe and physically prohibitive to survey these areas prior to treatment. Sites needing protection have been flagged and will not be disturbed during operations.

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

### **III. Public Involvement**

In addition to scoping done during the initial Ironton Roadside Fuels Reduction project (see Project File C-14 for summary), letters were sent to over 300 individuals about this project. Eleven responses were received. Comments were discussed by the team (see Project File B-4), and concerned recycling the wood for furniture and firewood, use timber sales instead of burning, few opportunities for burning within prescription in SE Ohio, impacts to nesting bird populations and other forest animals, use of local organizations during operations, increase in deer browsing after burning, effect of burning on kudzu, impact of 26 miles of fire line, undocumented rare plants and animals, use landowner education instead of burning to reduce fire incidence, cutting potential Indiana bat roost trees, completing cultural resources surveys before operations, not burning in any Special Interest areas, reserving some downed woody debris, and the proximity of Dean State Forest and Symmes Township Wildlife Area to some of the burn areas. These comments were reviewed by the inter-disciplinary team. The responses appear in Project File C-14.

### **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)**. Concurrence with Plan goals are enumerated on page 1-6 in the environmental analysis.

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 Evaluation prepared for this project and in the concurrence letter from USFWS (Project File E-2).

This decision complies with the **Clean Water Act** by not constructing fire line in floodplains, wetlands, or across stream channels. This Act is to restore and maintain the integrity of waters. The Forest Service complies with this Act through the use of Best Management Practices, and mitigations prescribed specifically for individual actions. Mitigations are listed in Section A of this document.

This decision complies with Section 106 of the **National Historic Preservation Act**. See Section II, Item B7 of this document.

The entirety of this document and the Project File supports 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 (4) which states that decisions 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 the Assistant District Ranger for Natural Resources Mike Freidhof during normal office hours (weekdays 8 am to 4:30 pm) at the Ironton District Office, 6518 State Route 93, Pedro, Ohio 457659-8912; telephone (740) 534-6500.

#### **VIII. Signature and Date**

*/s/Gloria Chrismer*

*9/3/04*

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GLORIA CHRISMER  
District Ranger  
Ironton Ranger District

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Enclosures: A set of five project area maps are provided separately in Adobe format.