DECISION MEMO

Stubblefield Hazard Tree Removal

USDA Forest Service
Sam Houston National Forest
Walker County, Texas

Decision

I have decided to remove approximately 300 hazard trees at Stubblefield Recreation Area, located in Walker County, about six miles northwest of New Waverly (see attached map). The trees will be removed by using a commercial timber sale and by a hazard tree removal contractor.

Hazard trees are trees that are dead, dying or leaning over roads or campsites, posing a hazard to the public. The hazard trees are scattered among campsites, within 200 feet of the outside of the campground, in the u-shaped center of the campground, as well as the Overflow camping area. Up to 12 of the dead trees farthest from the campsites will be left standing, or cut and left. All hazard trees among the campsites will be cut and removed.

Stubblefield Recreation Area lies on flat to gently rolling slopes typical of the West Gulf Coastal Plain. Loblolly and shortleaf pine with scattered, mixed hardwoods dominate the overstory vegetation. The 1996 Revised Forest and Land Management Plan for the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas (the Plan) allocates this project to Management Area 2, Red-cockaded Woodpecker Emphasis and Management Area 9a, Developed Recreation Sites. The purpose for this decision is to ensure safety for visitors to Stubblefield Recreation Area. This project falls within the Plan’s guidance for operation and maintenance in the Developed Recreation sites Management Area.

This project is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the following reasons:

- Past projects which are similar to the proposed action have had no significant effects on the quality of the human environment, directly, indirectly, or cumulatively.
- No extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects on the human environment.
- This proposal is consistent with and similar to the categories of action which may be excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS as described in 36 CFR 220.6 (e) (13).

I have considered the best available science in making this decision. The project record demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information, consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.
I have considered the effect of this project on climate change, as well as the effect of climate change on this project. Any resulting greenhouse gas emission would not be measurable on a global scale.

**Public Involvement**

On October 20, 2011, I mailed a scoping letter, requesting input, to 50 individuals, organizations, and agencies that in the past have shown interest in district planning. The letter outlined the proposed action and asked for public input.

I received two responses to scoping, one of which included comments and recommendations about the project. I have reviewed these responses and considered them in making my decision. The key recommendation has been incorporated into the project, on page 1, in the second paragraph. Some comments are listed below with my responses.

*Use some of the trees, in association with gates and fences, as obstacles to reduce illegal all-terrain vehicle or vehicle use on trails or roads throughout the Sam Houston National Forest.* Some of the trees could be used to block openings resembling woods roads around Stubblefield Recreation Area; however, the district lacks equipment to move large pine tree boles for distances over ¼-mile.

Internal information revealed that no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause this action to have significant effects on the quality of the human environment.

**Findings Required by Other Laws**

This project is consistent with the management direction, including standards and guidelines, in the Plan. This direction is summarized as follows:

- The proposed tree removal will conform with the forest-wide standards and guidelines for Recreation Management (the *Plan*, p. 73), and with standards and guidelines for MA-9a (the *Plan*, p. 266) and MA-2 (the Plan, p. 105).

- The actions of this decision are consistent with direction for Management Area 9a – Developed Recreation Sites (the *Plan*, pp. 262-269) and Management Area 2 – Red-cockaded Woodpecker Emphasis (the *Plan*, pp. 96-134).

In accordance with FSM 2671.44 and 2672.42, and regulations set forth in Section 7 (a) of the Endangered Species Act, a Biological Evaluation (BE) was prepared to evaluate the effects of planned activities on Federally listed and proposed threatened and endangered (T&E) species, and Region 8 Forest Service (R8 FS) sensitive species. The Biological Evaluation dated September 29, 2011, states that the proposed project will have no effect on any federally listed endangered or threatened species, and no impact for any Region 8 sensitive species. Formal consultation or concurrence with the US Fish and Wildlife Service is not required.
In accordance with the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), Executive Order 13007, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), and others, an archaeological inventory report was prepared to evaluate the effects of this project on heritage resources. The report determined that the proposed actions will not adversely affect any historic properties. The State Historic Preservation Office concurred with this determination on November 8, 2011. Consultation has also been conducted with the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas and the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma and identified no concerns.

No known cultural resource sites will be affected by the proposed activity.

Implementation

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately

Administrative Review and Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to notice, comment, or appeal.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision contact contact me at the USDA Forest Service, Sam Houston Ranger District, 394 FM 1375 West, New Waverly, Texas 77358 (telephone: 936-344-6205).

Signature and Date

/s/ Warren L. Oja

Responsible Official

WARREN L. OJA

District Ranger

November 21, 2011

Date

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