Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Ava Glades East Project

Project Number: 37893
Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District
Mark Twain National Forest
Ozark and Taney Counties, Missouri

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I. DECISION

INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Ava Glades East Project is available for public review at the Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District Office located at 1103 S. Jefferson Avenue, Ava, Missouri. This project is needed to address declines in the quality of area glades and forest health conditions, while protecting and enhancing native plant and animal species in the area. The EA discusses, in depth, the reasons for considering these management activities and also analyses and discusses the environmental effects of proposed activities. The direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of proposed activities on the Ava Glades East Project area resources are described. Copies of the EA are available for review upon request.

The EA evaluates two alternatives for management activities on approximately 6,701 acres of National Forest land. The project is located in an area from approximately 6 miles northwest to 6 miles southwest of Thornfield, Missouri (Figure 1). The legal description for the area is T23N, R16W, Sections 5-8, 17, 18, and 20; T23N, R17W Sections 1 and 12; T24N, R16W, Sections 3-9, 17-19, 21, 22, 27, 28, 31, and 33; and T24N, R17W Section 36 in Ozark and Taney Counties, Missouri. The 2005 Forest Plan places the project area under Management Prescriptions (MP) 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 6.2 and 8.1 (see attached map). Management Prescription 1.1 emphasizes restoration of natural communities while providing a roaded natural recreation experience; 1.2 stresses restoration of natural communities while providing semi-primitive, motorized, dispersed recreation experiences; 2.1 emphasizes multiple use resource objectives while allowing for enhancement of natural communities, improvement of forest health conditions, and roaded natural recreation experiences; 6.2 features management of natural vegetative communities under limited investments to enhance semi-primitive motorized dispersed recreation; and 8.1 describes a variety of designated special areas that exist for the protection of unusual environmental, recreational, cultural, or historical resources, and for scientific or educational studies.

DECISION

The purpose of the Decision Notice in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is to identify a selected alternative and provide reasons why that alternative was selected over others considered in the Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA for the Ava Glades East Project evaluated two alternatives. In my opinion, the analysis provided all the information I need to make a reasonable, informed decision about managing this area in a way that complies with the 2005 Forest Plan.

In accordance with 36 CFR 215.5(a), the Responsible Official has discretion in determining the most effective time to provide notice under 36 CFR 215.5(b). Based upon my review of the alternatives, I have decided to implement the actions described as Alternative 2; however, the proposal would be modified to reduce the amount of timber available for commercial harvest as well as the associated temporary road construction needed for commercial timber removal. This modification was necessary because the analysis showed that access to several of the timber stands with mechanized equipment was either not possible or not economical. Timber stands
were deemed unsuited for commercial harvest for several reasons including steepness of slope, presence of bedrock outcrops or abrupt drop-offs, and cost of temporary roads construction.

The required modification to Alternative 2 included reducing acres of commercial cedar and hardwood by approximately 578 and 890 acres, respectively (compare commercial harvest acres given in summary Table 2.5 of the EA with those in Table 2 below). Adjustments to timbered acreages available for commercial harvest are provided in detail for each unit in Table 1. They are also shown graphically in Figures 2-10 in Appendix A of this document. The desired vegetation management would still occur in affected stands, but commercial value of the timber would be lost (i.e. the timber would still be cut but would not be removed from the site).

Since both commercial timber harvest and the associated temporary road construction would be reduced by this modification, the effects of management activities to project area resources, as well as their associated cumulative effects, would be substantially less than that disclosed in the EA. My decision to implement the remaining activities in Alternative 2 would not be affected.

Table 1. Proposed activities for vegetation management in Alternative 2, as modified (refer to footnotes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Area</th>
<th>Major Natural Communities ¹</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Acres Proposed for Cutting (Harvesting) ²,³</th>
<th>Estimated Total MMBF Removed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bascomb Bald (990)</td>
<td>Glade</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>Cedar = 762 (390)</td>
<td>Cedar = 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 328 (172)</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open woodland</td>
<td>514</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttram (1,790)</td>
<td>Glade</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>Cedar = 1,186 (459)</td>
<td>Cedar = 0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 408 (138)</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open woodland</td>
<td>609</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Savanna</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haden Bald (40)</td>
<td>Glade</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJ Pine (233)</td>
<td>Savanna</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open woodland</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClurg (938)</td>
<td>Glade</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>Cedar = 473 (0)</td>
<td>Cedar = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 536 (0)</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open woodland</td>
<td>492</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panorama (316)</td>
<td>Glade</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>Cedar = 135 (133)</td>
<td>Cedar = 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open woodland</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 40 (13)</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods =&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar Tree (614)</td>
<td>Glade</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>Cedar = 335 (2)</td>
<td>Cedar = &lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 249 (53)</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Natural Communities: Glade, Forest, Open woodland, Savanna
² Acres for Cutting (Harvesting) include: Cedar, Mixed Hardwoods
³ Estimations in parentheses indicate temporary road construction

Footnotes: (1) Natural Communities: Glade, Forest, Open woodland, Savanna
(2) Acres for Cutting (Harvesting) include: Cedar, Mixed Hardwoods
(3) Estimations in parentheses indicate temporary road construction
Ava Glades East Project Decision Notice and FONSI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Area (total acres)</th>
<th>Major Natural Communities</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Acrees Proposed for Cutting (Harvesting) 2,3</th>
<th>Estimated Total MMBF Removed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open woodland</td>
<td>161</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar Tree West-Waterhole-Watershed Divide (1,514)</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>Cedar = 483 (68)</td>
<td>Cedar = 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glade</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 815 (162)</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open woodland</td>
<td>842</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Bald (266)</td>
<td>Prairie</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>Cedar = 225 (111)</td>
<td>Cedar = 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glade</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods = 62 (26)</td>
<td>Mixed Hardwoods =&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open woodland</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Natural communities that make up less than 10% of an area were not included in this table.  
2 All acres are estimates based on GIS data. The total cutting acres may exceed the total acres in the area because some areas will have cedar and hardwood cutting; therefore, the same area may be counted twice.  
3 The following MBF per acre estimates were used in calculating the potential volume for removal:  cedar only stands – 1.5 MBF; cedar-hardwood mixed stands – 1.0 MBF of cedar and 0.6 MBF of hardwoods; and, hardwood or hardwood/pine stands – 3 MBF.

Under Alternative 2, as modified, the project area will undergo the management activities that are summarized in Table 2 below. Opportunities for improvement to glades, open woodlands, and associated natural resources would occur in regards to vegetation management, roads management, prescribed fire, and wildlife habitat management including non-native invasive species control.

Table 2. Summary of activities to be implemented by this decision (Alternative 2, as modified).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Activities</th>
<th>Measures (Estimated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vegetation Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial cedar</td>
<td>1163 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-commercial cedar</td>
<td>2436 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial hardwood</td>
<td>564 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-commercial hardwood</td>
<td>1874 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Activities</td>
<td>Measures (Estimated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prescribed Fire</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total prescribed fire acreage</td>
<td>6,701 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Fire Line</td>
<td>22.3 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dozer Line</td>
<td>24.4 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand Line</td>
<td>8.2 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wildlife Habitat Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttram bottomland planting</td>
<td>49 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttram forage improvement</td>
<td>225 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter’s fields grass conversion and planting in Watershed unit</td>
<td>18 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife edge treatments in Potter’s fields, Buttram, and selected wildlife openings</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pond maintenance</td>
<td>28 ponds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterhole construction</td>
<td>10 waterholes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native, invasive plants and noxious weeds control (biological, cultural, mechanical, and chemical treatments)</td>
<td>as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Road Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Road Maintenance: 145 (2.5 mi), 147 (17.0 mi)</td>
<td>19.5 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System road reconstruction: 143 (1.0 mi), 145A (1.2 mi), 145B (0.5 mi), 147B (1.2 mi), 147D (0.4 mi), 148 (0.8 mi), 148A (0.3 mi), 156 (3.0 mi), 156A (1.0 mi), 156C (0.6 mi), 609 (1.6 mi)</td>
<td>11.6 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decommission system roads: 156B (0.6 mi).</td>
<td>0.6 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decommission non-system roads.</td>
<td>6 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary roads</td>
<td>5.7 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Use Permits (three roads to access private residences)</td>
<td>0.4 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connected Actions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trash and tire dump removal</td>
<td>as needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vegetation management through commercial timber sales will occur on approximately 1,163 acres of Eastern redecedar and 564 acres of hardwood. Non-commercial vegetation management (cut and leave) will occur on approximately 2,436 acres of cedar and 1,874 acres of hardwoods.
Acreage estimates for commercial and non-commercial vegetation management activities may overlap where cedar and hardwoods occur together in the same stands.

Prescribed fire will be implemented on the entire project area, approximately 6,701 acres. There are approximately 22.3 miles of existing fire line in the project area, 24.4 miles will be constructed using a dozer, and 8.2 miles will be completed by hand to assist with application of prescribed fire.

Wildlife improvement activities in the project area will include approximately 49 acres of bottomland planting and 225 acres of forage improvement (fertilizer and liming) in the Buttram area. Also, grass conversion and planting will occur on approximately 18 acres of the Watershed unit. Wildlife edge treatments such as thinning and brush pile construction will occur in several smaller areas including Potter’s fields, Buttram, and selected wildlife openings. Additionally, 28 ponds will be maintained and 10 waterholes will be constructed. Non-native, invasive plants and noxious weeds will be controlled by a combination of biological, cultural, mechanical, and chemical treatments where justified by population size, proximity to travel corridors, etc.

Approximately 19.5 miles of Forest Service system roads will undergo some form of maintenance and 11.6 miles will be reconstructed. Approximately 5.7 miles of temporary roads will be used for commercial timber removal under Alternative 2, as modified. This is a substantial reduction in temporary road miles as compared to the original proposal and was due to a reduction in the amount of timber determined to be accessible for commercial harvest. Temporary roads will be located approximately as shown in Figures 11-15 in Appendix A of this document. Temporary roads would be decommissioned after vegetation management activities are completed (EA, p. 23). Additionally, there are about 0.6 miles of system road and 6.0 miles of non-system roads that would be decommissioned within the project area. Special use permits need to be issued for three roads totaling approximately 0.4 miles that provide access to private residences. These three potential private land accesses are located at:

T23N, R16W, Sec 17 (Ozark County); end of County Road 919; 0.2 miles.
T23N, R17W, Sec 36 (Taney County); end of Forest Road 147D; 0.1 miles.
T24N, R16 W, Sec 7; (Ozark County); end of Forest Road 145B; 0.1 miles.

As connected actions, trash dumps and tires will be removed throughout the project area as needed, and as fouled areas continue to be detected.

As a result of this decision, the existing glades ecosystem and associated open woodlands communities will be restored, native plant and animal species will benefit, hazardous fuels will be reduced, non-native and invasive plant species will be controlled, and the existing transportation system will be improved.

General forest health will be improved by management activities that remove declining, mature, and fire-damaged trees. A combination of commercial harvest, non-commercial treatments, and prescribed fire will be used to move the area toward the desired condition. The desired condition consists of a variety of stand sizes, shapes, crown closures, and age structures in a pattern that simulates the structural variability of natural community types similar to historical vegetative patterns in the region. This decision will move the project area toward this goal while providing roaded recreation access to dispersed recreation areas.
Standards and Guidelines are management direction that applies to a particular management prescription, in addition to the Forestwide Standards and Guidelines. Where Forestwide standards and guidelines are different from those for a management prescription, the management prescription standard applies. A Standard is defined as a course of action or a level of attainment that must be reached to achieve Forestwide goals. A Guideline is a course of action that should be followed in most circumstances; however, Guidelines relate to activities where site-specific factors may require some flexibility. Standards and Guidelines for each management prescription that apply to this decision are provided below. Bolded text refers to Standards, while regular text refers to guidelines.

Standards and Guidelines for MP 1.1 that apply to this decision include the following:

Vegetation Management

- Distribute activities across the landscape to emulate the historical vegetation patterns and quantities of natural communities based on available information.
- When seeding or planting vegetation other than shortleaf pine is prescribed for restoration, use seed or plant materials from local sources unless a local source is not available or cannot be developed. If a local seed source is not available, a botanist or ecologist must approve the seed source.
- Remove, control, or contain occurrences of non-native invasive species in existing native prairies upon discovery and in other natural communities as feasible.

Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Management

- New wildlife waterholes shall only be constructed if site-specific analysis demonstrates a long-term, landscape-level viability concern for TES, RFSS, or species groups (such as herptofauna), and such concerns cannot be addressed through waterhole construction in other areas of the Forest (i.e., 2.1 Management Prescription).
- Close and rehabilitate existing wildlife food plots.

Rangeland Management

- Permit grazing only on existing improved pastures. Pastures on lands acquired in the future may be grazed only after an analysis comparing the suitability for grazing and the potential to contribute to natural community restoration.
- Control timing, duration, and intensity of livestock grazing to achieve desired structure and species composition.
- Ensure that timing, intensity and frequency of grazing maintains and/or increases sensitive plant species populations and rare plant communities.
- Close all areas that contain glade and natural woodlands when the current permit expires. Until the permit expires, control the timing, duration, and intensity of livestock grazing to achieve desired structure and species composition objectives.

Recreation Management

- Manage area to meet, as a minimum, roaded natural ROS objectives.
Visual Management

- All resource management activities shall meet, as the minimum, the Visual Quality Objectives stipulated for MP 1.1 (Table 3-2, page 3-5, 2005 Forest Plan).

Timber Management

- The following rotation ages should normally apply: 100 years for shortleaf pine; 120 years for post and white oak; and 80 years for red, black, and scarlet oak.
- Even-age silvicultural methods may be used to restore and maintain open natural communities, glades and savannas by creating forest openings greater than 40 acres, but not to exceed 500 acres within the Ava, Cassville, Houston, Rolla, and Willow Spring units.

Standards and Guidelines for MP 1.2 that apply to this decision include the following:

Vegetation Management

- Distribute activities across the landscape to emulate the historical vegetation patterns and quantities of natural communities based on available information.
- Even-age silvicultural methods may be used to restore and maintain open natural communities, glades, and savannas by creating forest openings greater than 40 acres, but not to exceed 500 acres within the Ava, Cassville, Houston, Rolla, and Willow Spring units.
- When seeding or planting vegetation other than shortleaf pine is prescribed for restoration, use seed or plant materials from local sources unless a local source is not available or cannot be developed. If a local source is not available, a botanist or ecologist must approve a seed source.
- Remove, control, or contain occurrences of non-native invasive species in existing native prairies upon discovery, and in other natural communities as feasible.

Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Management

- New wildlife waterholes shall only be constructed if site-specific analysis demonstrates a long-term, landscape-level viability concern for TES, RFSS, or species groups (such as herptofauna), and such concerns cannot be addressed through waterhole construction in other areas of the Forest (i.e., 2.1 Management Prescription).
- Close and rehabilitate existing wildlife food plots.

Rangeland Management

- Permit grazing only on existing improved pastures. Pastures on lands acquired in the future may be grazed only after an analysis comparing the suitability for grazing and the potential to contribute to natural community restoration.
- Control timing, duration, and intensity of livestock grazing to achieve desired structure and species composition.
• Ensure that timing, intensity and frequency of grazing maintains and/or increases sensitive plant species populations and rare plant communities.

• Close all areas that contain glade and natural woodlands when the current permit expires. Until the permit expires, control the timing, duration, and intensity of livestock grazing to achieve desired structure and species composition objectives.

Recreation Management

• Manage area to meet, as a minimum, roaded natural ROS objectives.

• Hold investment in recreation management to the minimum necessary to meet resource protection needs.

• Density for all types of trails should not exceed an average of 1.5 miles per square mile of National Forest System land.

Visual Management

• All resource management activities shall meet, as the minimum, the Visual Quality Objectives stipulated for MP 1.2 (Table 3-3, page 3-9, 2005 Forest Plan).

Timber Management

• The following rotation ages should normally apply: 100 years for shortleaf pine; 120 years for post and white oak; and 80 years for red, black, and scarlet oak.

• Schedule no more than 20% of an individual management area for timber harvest during each decade of the plan period.

• Even-age silvicultural methods may be used to restore and maintain open natural communities, glades and savannas by creating forest openings greater than 40 acres, but not to exceed 500 acres within the Ava, Cassville, Houston, Rolla, and Willow Spring units.

Special Uses

• Allow the use of National Forest System lands only when subject to existing rights, within existing sites or corridors, or when no other alternative is available.

Transportation System

• Manage National Forest System roads to meet, as a minimum, semi-primitive motorized ROS criteria.

Standards and Guidelines for MP 2.1 that apply to this decision include the following:

Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Management

• Distribute regeneration openings across the landscape proportionately to ELT’s and natural communities present in the area.

Recreation Management

• Manage area to meet, as a minimum, roaded natural ROS objectives.
Invest in recreation management only at minimum necessary to meet resource protection needs.

Visual Management

- All resource management activities shall meet, as the minimum, the Visual Quality Objectives stipulated for MP 2.1 (Table 3-4, page 3-12, 2005 Forest Plan).

Standards and Guidelines for MP 6.2 that apply to this decision include the following:

Vegetation Management

- Do not maintain existing vegetation communities, which differ from the natural communities for a particular site (for example legumes, food plots, fescue pastures, or pine plantation).
- Limit investments for vegetation management treatments to those necessary for restoration and/or maintenance of natural communities, or provides a specific resource output.

Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Management

- Distribute regeneration openings across the landscape proportionately to ELT’s and natural communities present in the area. Sizes of openings should encompass the full range from ¼ to 15 acres.

Rangeland Management

- Design natural grassland community management practices to enhance the visual, recreational, and wildlife values.
- Invest only at low levels for grassland management.
- Use livestock grazing only to maintain structural and/or species diversity on native grassland communities.

Recreation Management

- Manage area to meet, as a minimum, roaded natural ROS objectives.
- Hold investment in recreation management to the minimum necessary to meet resource protection needs.
- Density for all types of trails should not exceed an average of 1.5 miles per square mile of National Forest System land.

Visual Management

- All resource management activities shall meet, as the minimum, the Visual Quality Objectives stipulated for MP 6.2 (Table 3-8, page 3-38, 2005 Forest Plan).

Timber Management

- Prescribe no more than 20% of an individual management area for harvest during the 10 year Plan period.
- Salvage harvests are not subject to the 20% limit on timber harvest.
Limit the size a temporary opening created by even-aged management to a maximum of 15 acres.

Temporary openings must be a minimum of 100 feet from recreation trails.

**Special Uses**

- Allow the use of National Forest System lands only when subject to existing rights, within existing sites or corridors, or when no other alternative is available.

**Transportation System**

- Manage National Forest System roads to meet, as a minimum, semi-primitive motorized ROS criteria.

*Standards and Guidelines for MP 8.1 that apply to this decision include the following:*

**Vegetation Management**

- Manipulate vegetation to meet the intent of the law, order, or agreement designating the area.

**Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Management**

- Limit habitat manipulation to restoration or enhancement of natural communities or the needs of threatened, endangered, rare or sensitive species and species of conservation concern.

**Recreation Management**

- Unless otherwise stated, manage for, as a minimum, roaded natural ROS objectives within these areas.

- Keep investment in recreation facilities to the minimum necessary to protect the site, to meet development objectives, and to meet ROS classification objectives.

- Trails must be consistent with the special area management objectives.

**Visual Management**

- Provide for the protection of the unique visual qualities of each special area, consistent with the area’s management objectives and the law, order or agreement of designation.

**Timber Management**

- Normally do not schedule timber harvest in these areas; however, silvicultural methods may be appropriate in individual areas to restore or maintain desired ecological conditions or to meet law, order or agreement.

Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines that may apply to this decision were discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of the Ava Glades East Project Environmental Assessment, and also are provided in Chapter 2 of the 2005 Forest Plan, pages 2-1 through 2-42.
II. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

I have chosen Alternative 2, as modified, because the analysis shows that it is the best alternative for addressing the major issues identified during the scoping and analysis phases of the project, namely:

1. A deteriorating glades ecosystem and associated open woodlands natural communities due to lack of natural regulation by fire and large grazing animals.
2. Loss of quality habitat for open glade and woodland-dependent wildlife and plant species.
3. Protection of caves, springs, sinkholes, and riparian areas.

Specifically, my reasons for choosing Alternative 2 are as follows:

1. The analysis and project record effectively demonstrates that Alternative 2 best meets the issues addressed by the Interdisciplinary Team while moving the area toward meeting the project purpose, need, and future desired conditions (EA, pp. 13-15 and 17).
2. The analysis demonstrates that Alternative 2 best meets the goals of Management Prescriptions 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 6.2 and 8.1 (EA, p. 11-12; and 2005 Forest Plan, Chapter 3).
3. Alternative 2 addresses forest health concerns related to age, decline, species composition, and stocking while improving growing conditions for residual trees (EA, pp. 13-15 and 69-80).
4. Alternative 2 assures that timber stands within the project area are moved toward the desired future condition for the respective natural community by cutting and dropping in place any timber that cannot be accessed for commercial harvest (EA, pp. 15-16 and 69-80).
5. Alternative 2 will improve glade and open woodland conditions for management indicator species (MIS), including northern bobwhite, summer tanager, Bachman’s sparrow, and eastern red bat (EA, pp. 48-49; and Forest Plan Objective 1.4a and 1.4d, 2005 Forest Plan, p. 1-4).
6. Alternative 2 uses a combination of prescribed fire and mechanical thinning to reduce hazardous fuels and improve Fire Regime Condition Class; thereby, reducing the risk for catastrophic wildfires (EA, pp. 21-22 and 55-56; and Forest Plan Objective 2.2b, 2005 Forest Plan, p. 1-5).
7. Alternative 2 identifies Forest Service system and non-system roads for maintenance, reconstruction, closure, and reclassification where recreation, safety, protection of natural resources, and concerns of area landowners are addressed (EA, pp. 23-24 and 88-89).
8. Alternative 2 will improve the visual quality of the project area by reducing slash and enhancing sight distance (EA, pp.94-96).
9. Alternative 2 will provide goods and services to the local economy in the form of wood products, forage, wildlife habitats, and dispersed recreation (EA, pp. 82-84).
10. Alternative 2 will allow for treatment of non-native, invasive plant species and noxious weeds (EA, p 23.)
11. Alternative 2 will improve the Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of the Glade Top Trail (EA, p. 95).

This decision provides opportunities to perform glades and open woodlands restoration, wildlife habit enhancement, fuels reduction, and transportation system improvements in response to challenges noted during the scoping process. I am confident based on my review of the EA that Alternative 2, as modified, provides the best solution for addressing the project’s purpose and need, as well as issues brought forward during project scoping and analysis.

**SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

An issue is defined as a point of disagreement, debate, or dispute about the proposed action based on effects identified through scoping. Preliminary issues and concerns were raised and three key issues were identified. The alternatives developed by the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) demonstrate that efforts were made to be responsive to the variety of issues and concerns identified during scoping. Specifically these issues and concerns were:

**Issue 1: Ecosystem and natural community degradation:** the glades ecosystem and associated open woodlands natural communities in the area are deteriorating due to lack of natural regulation by fire and large grazing animals.

Under Alternative 2, vegetation management and prescribed fire would be used to restore and maintain the glades ecosystem and associated natural communities in the project area (EA, pp. 20-22 and 72-75).

**Issue 2: Habitat loss:** quality habitat for glade and woodland-dependent wildlife and plant species is declining in area.

Alternative 2 will improve glade and open woodland habitats for species such as northern bobwhite, summer tanager, Bachman’s sparrow, and eastern red bat (EA, pp. 48-49; and Forest Plan Objective 1.4a and 1.4d, 2005 Forest Plan, p. 1-4).

**Issue 3: Protection of caves, springs, sinkholes, and riparian areas:** there may be caves, springs, sinkholes and riparian areas within the project area. Due to the area’s karst topography, it is important that these features are protected to maintain their natural functions.

Alternative 2 would protect caves, springs, sinkholes, and riparian areas from potential damage due to resource management activities (EA Appendix A – Timber Harvest Standards and Guidelines, p. A-4,5).

**OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REASONS WHY THEY WERE NOT SELECTED**

Two alternatives were considered in detail during the analysis. A description of Alternative 1 and rationale for not selecting this alternative is provided below:

**Alternative 1**

This alternative provided a baseline or reference point against which to describe environmental effects of Alternative 2. This was a viable alternative and responded to concerns of those who
would not want activities associated with the project to be implemented. If this alternative had been selected, it would not have foreclosed options for future management on the area.

If Alternative 1 had been selected, current and on-going management activities would have continued, but no new federal activities would have been initiated without additional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses. Changes such as road maintenance might have occurred through current management direction, natural processes, or future management direction.

**Rationale** – I did not select Alternative 1 for the following reasons:

1. The condition of Forest Service lands within the project area would not be improved and forest health would continue to decline for many years due to forest insects and diseases. Portions of the project area (closed woodlands and forest) would progress toward old growth timber; which is, for the most part, uniform and unproductive wildlife habitat.
2. Glades and open woodlands would continue to be encroached by cedar and undesirable hardwood species. The resulting decline in habit would impact many animal and plant species that are dependent on open glades and their associated natural communities. Species diversity would decrease due to successive habitat loss.
3. Prescribed burning of Forest Service lands would not be implemented within the project area. Glades and open woodlands would deteriorate. Fuel loads would increase along with proliferation of brushy undergrowth and unproductive understory species. Beneficial forbs and woodland grasses would decline.
4. Opportunities to improve the Forest Service road system would not occur in the project area. Unauthorized access to the area via non-system roads and the potential for continued soils erosion would remain unchecked.
5. Non-native and invasive plant species would not be managed in the project area, and proliferation of noxious weeds would continue.

**III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The Scoping and 30-Day Comment Package – Ava Glades East Project was mailed on February 3, 2012 to 178 interested and affected parties to invite comment on the proposed action. A legal notice advertising the availability of the project proposal for public comment was published in the Springfield News-Leader on February 6, 2012. Project documents for review by the public have been posted on the Mark Twain National Forest website since February 2012 and the project is listed on the Forest-wide Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). The District Ranger received comments from 2 individuals on proposed activities that were presented in the public comment package. All comments received were reviewed by the District Ranger and the IDT.

One respondent was concerned that tax payer monies were being spent to obtain results that could be achieved by grazing and prescribed burning. Another respondent provided multiple comments on each of the following subjects:

1. Opposing Views Source Documents
2. Timber Harvest
3. Road Construction
4. Poor Lumber Market
5. Dead & Dying Trees
6. Eliminating Fire far from the WUI
7. Best Science
8. Glyphosate
9. Conclusion

Detailed responses to these comments are located in the project record and are provided as an appendix to the EA. Copies of the responses to comments are available to the public by request from the Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs District Office.

The IDT developed the issues and alternatives analyzed in the Environmental Assessment (EA) based on internal and external issues brought forward during project scoping and comments received during the 30-day comment period. No new issues were identified during the 30-day comment period and no new alternatives were developed as a result. The EA was prepared as permitted by our revised regulations for notice, comment, and appeal (36 CFR 215, published in the Federal Register Vol. 68, No. 107, pages 33581-33602).

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

I have determined that this project is being conducted in a manner that does not exclude persons from participation in, deny the benefits of, or subject persons to discrimination because of their racial, ethnic, or economic status. The activities carried out by this decision will not have disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations.

Based on the review of demographic racial characteristics of the population of the county’s communities and how they compare with suggested threshold levels of concern, there is little reason to suspect that these communities might fall under the provisions of Executive Order 12898. This project will have no direct or cumulative effects on minorities and low-income populations. Neither of the two alternatives poses a disproportionately high nor adverse environmental, human health, economic or social effect on residents of Ozark or Taney Counties and the vicinity (EA, p. 98-99).

V. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined, based on the discussion of effects in the Environmental Analysis, and from experience with similar activities, that these actions are not a major federal action, individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. No additional analysis or studies need to be conducted for me to make a determination. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. There will be no significant effects, beneficial or adverse, resulting from this project. The environmental effects are discussed in the Environmental Assessment. The beneficial effects include: a) enhanced condition of natural communities and reduced hazardous fuels, b) improved wildlife habitat, c) increased timber and wood products to the economy, d) reduced populations of non-native and invasive plant species, e) a safe and efficient transportation system with reduced soils erosion risk. There were no significant adverse effects to the environment identified in the environmental analysis. There were
no known significant irretrievable commitments of resources such as loss of soil productivity, water quality, wildlife habitat, or recreational opportunities. Beneficial effects of the action do not bias my finding of no significant effects.

2. Public health and safety will be improved by the proposed actions. The removal of encroaching cedar and undesirable hardwoods, including hazardous fuels, would reduce the potential for injury to people and property from wildfire. The removal of fuels will also improve the FRCC and augment safety conditions for wildland fire suppression (EA, pp. 57-58). The potential detrimental effects of the “no action” alternative are also discussed.

3. There will be no significant adverse effects to prime farmlands, floodplains, wetlands, historic or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, civil rights, women, or minority groups. The Environmental Assessment discusses the anticipated effects of implementing these actions (EA, Chapter 3).

4. Based on public participation and the involvement of resource specialists, I believe effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. This does not mean that the decision to proceed with the project will be acceptable to all people, as some will probably find that their needs and interests are not served by the selected alternative. However, it is my professional judgment that physical, biological, social, and economic issues have been addressed well enough for me to make an informed decision. The proposed actions are similar to other management activities recently implemented on the Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District and on the Mark Twain National Forest; therefore the results are reasonably predictable (EA, Chapter 3).

5. There are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain, or involve unique or unknown risks. Similar projects have occurred in the general area; and more specifically, on the Mark Twain National Forest. Environmental effects described in the assessment have been analyzed in enough detail to determine predictable results.

6. These actions are similar to other management activities previously implemented and do not set a precedent for other projects that may be proposed to meet the goals and objectives of the 2005 Forest Plan.

7. There are no known significant cumulative effects between this project and other projects implemented or planned on areas separated from the affected area of this project beyond those evaluated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the 2005 Mark Twain Forest Plan. Cumulative effects are evaluated for each resource in Chapter 3 of the EA.

8. This decision takes into account both known and unknown historic properties [as defined in 36 CFR Part 800.16(1)] within the project area. Cultural resources investigations were carried out using the methodology outlined in 36 CFR Part 800.4. In a letter dated March 12, 2012 (Project Record) the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) stated, “there will be no adverse effect on the condition that the mitigation measures as described in the report and on the attached table are complied with” (SHPO Log Number 020-MLT-12). This concurrence was in response to the Determination of Eligibility and Effect (DOEE), FS Report No. R2012-09-05-21-236. This project should not cause significant impacts to cultural resources.
9. Based on the Biological Evaluation for the Ava Glades East Project (EA, Appendix C) which analyzed impacts to federally-listed Threatened and Endangered Species, the MTNF had a determination of “May Affect – Not Likely to Adversely Affect” for Indiana bats; and a determination of “May Affect – Not Likely to Adversely Affect” for gray bats. On March 21, 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination.

10. This project is tiered to the Mark Twain National Forest, Integrated Non-native Invasive Plant Control EIS, signed February 14, 2012.

11. The actions do not threaten a violation of federal, state, or local law, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The EA complies with the Forest Plan, Environmental Protection Agency, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and Missouri State and National Historic Preservation Act.

12. The best available and most current scientific information was taken into account and appropriately evaluated and applied appropriately in this analysis.

VI. FINDINGS RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

I find that the actions of this decision comply with the requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976 and the 2005 Forest Plan. This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan’s goals and objectives, management direction for Management Prescriptions 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 6.2, and 8.1 and the Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines. I have also reviewed Chapter 3 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the 2005 MTNF Forest Plan titled “Affected Environment and Environmental Effects,” and have concluded that the environmental effects associated with the project are consistent with those described in the FEIS. This decision is subject to the 2005 Planning Rule and Forest Service Manuals (FSM) 1920 and 1922.

My decision is based on a review of the record that shows consideration of relevant scientific information, including responsible opposing views; and as appropriate, the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. My decision implements the 2005 Mark Twain National Forest Plan. As required by NFMA Section 1604(i), I find this project to be consistent with the Plan.

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11 (as published in the Federal Register, June 4, 2003). A written Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date of publication of this decision in the Springfield News-Leader at the following address:

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer (ADO), Teresa Chase
Gaslight Building, Suite 700
626 E. Wisconsin Ave
Milwaukee, WI 53202-4616
or **Email:** appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us - **Subject:** Ava Glades East Project
or **Fax:** 414-944-3963 **ATTN:** Appeal Deciding Officer, USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
Normal business hours (for hand-delivered appeals) are 7:30 am – 4:00 pm, Mon-Fri. Electronic appeals should be in TXT, RTF, DOC, PDF, or other Microsoft Office-compatible formats. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

**VIII. IMPLEMENTATION DATE**
If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If we receive an appeal, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of the appeal disposition.

Further information on this decision can be obtained at: http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mtnf/projects or by contacting Allen Weathersbee at the Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs, Ranger District: P.O. Box 188, Ava, Missouri 65608; (417) 683-4428; fax (417) 683-5722, e-mail: aaweathersbee@fs.fed.us.

**IX. SIGNATURE AND DATE**

/s/ Jenny Farenbaugh 8/28/2012
JENNY FARENBAUGH  Date
District Ranger
Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District

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