

## DECISION MEMO

### STATE ROUTE 53 TURN LANES FOR MIDEWIN HEADQUARTERS

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie  
Will County, Illinois



## **I. DECISION**

### **A. Description of Decision**

I have decided to approve construction of deceleration turn lanes on Illinois State Route 53 directly in front of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Headquarters. Turn lanes are needed to provide for safer access to the Headquarters, and the engineering design plans have been approved by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). Because State Route 53 will be designated as a Federal Forest Highway, funding for construction of the turn lanes will be provided by the Federal Highway Administration. The US Forest Service, Illinois Department of Transportation, or Will County may oversee a contract for construction of the turn lanes.

The turn lanes will consist of: 1) a 450-foot long south-bound deceleration lane for a left-hand turn traversing the two northbound lanes of Illinois State Route 53 into the Midewin Headquarters, and 2) a 450-foot deceleration lane along the right-hand shoulder of State Route 53 for the right-hand turn into the 26-foot wide Headquarters driveway from the south. One deceleration turn lane along the eastern-most side of State Route 53 will be within the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie right-of-way along the highway. The second deceleration lane will be constructed adjacent to the south-bound highway lanes next to the median under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). From this turn lane, traffic will cross the center median and the north-bound highway lanes for access to the Midewin Headquarters.

All design elements, including surfacing, road shoulders, arrows, striping, drainage scheme, and signage will conform to IDOT specifications for planning and constructing turn lanes. Five-foot road shoulders will be located adjacent to the turn lanes and are also designed according to IDOT specifications. Additionally, construction will conform to *U.S. Forest Service Specifications for The Construction of Roads and Bridges* (EM-7720-100, 1985).

The location of my decision is in Will County along a stretch of Illinois State Route 53 directly in front of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Headquarters between intersecting Quigley and Doyle Roads in Section 18, Township 33 North, Range 10 East.

My decision affects projects being funded by the Federal Highway Administration, and extends to lands under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), including lands under a right-of-way for the Forest Service.

### **B. Purpose of Decision**

Traffic along State Route 53 in front of the Midewin Headquarters is posted at 55 miles per hour; however, the speed of many vehicles is much higher. A grassy center median separates the two north bound lanes from the two south bound lanes. Substantial

increases in both automobile and truck traffic are expected over the next five years along this highway with the increasing housing, industrial, and recreational development south of Joliet. Currently, there are no turn lanes for slowing down to access the entrance to the Midewin Headquarters, posing a current and growing threat to the safety of employees and visitors. The Forest Service wishes to provide deceleration lanes as a safety mechanism for those slowing to enter the Midewin driveway.

This project is specifically intended to respond to the Prairie Plan Goal of providing and maintaining a safe, efficient transportation system for Midewin employees and visitors while minimizing resource impacts (Prairie Plan p. 2-11). There will be no net reduction of National Forest System lands affected by this project, and natural and heritage resources will be unaffected.

### **C. Background**

Illinois State Route 53 connects the town of Wilmington, located approximately 3 miles south of Midewin, and Joliet, located approximately 12 miles to the north. In order to enter the Midewin Headquarters, vehicles must turn immediately from the 55 mile per hour traffic lanes. Because of the need to decelerate from fast moving traffic, several accidents have been narrowly avoided when fast-moving vehicles have not slowed adequately to allow for safe turning into Midewin, placing employees and visitors in jeopardy.

The USDA Forest Service currently maintains a 25-foot right-of-way with the Illinois Department of Transportation along the east and west edges of State Route 53, as well as through the median, for access to and from the south-bound highway lanes. However, with increased public recreational use of Midewin along with heavy increases in general traffic related to rapid population and industrial growth in the region, this means of access is no longer viable to provide for the safety of Midewin personnel, visitors, and the public traveling along State Route 53.

## **II. Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action**

**A.** The proposed action falls under Category Number 3, in Section 31.2 of the *Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook*. Based on past experience, the effects of implementing this action will be of limited context and intensity and will result in little or no environmental effects to either the physical or biological components of the environment. The action does not involve any extraordinary circumstances. Therefore, this action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.

### **B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances**

#### **1. Steep Slopes or Highly Erosive Soils**

There will be no effect, as the area has rolling to flat terrain that is conducive to the activities included in the decision. The soils present are highly resistant to

erosion. This is supported by topographical map review and field visits. To further ensure that soil-related impacts are minimized, Best Management Practices are incorporated in construction and maintenance activities.

2. 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. It was determined that no listed species are present at this project location and that this decision will have "no effect" on listed species or their critical habitats.

3. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds -

Floodplains

The project is located ½ mile from the floodplain of Prairie Creek. This has been validated by map and site-review. Similar past projects in this area were determined to have no significant floodplain-related impacts (Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for Midewin Demolition and Removal of Unneeded and Unsafe Facilities and Structures, April 20, 2001). My decision should not result in significant floodplain-related impacts. Field review (monitoring) of similar projects validates acceptable resource effects from similar activities. To further ensure that floodplains-related impacts are minimized, Best Management Practices are incorporated in my decision.

Wetlands

My decision should not result in significant wetland-related impacts as it affects only a short segment of an existing road where no wetlands are found.

Municipal Watersheds

There are no municipal watersheds on Midewin. This decision will not affect municipal watersheds.

4. Congressionally Designated Areas -

This decision does not affect Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National Recreation Areas, or Wild and Scenic Rivers. The project is not in or near Wilderness, National Recreation Areas, or Wild and Scenic Rivers.

5. Inventoried Roadless Areas -

There are no inventoried roadless areas at Midewin. This decision will not affect inventoried roadless areas.

6. Research Natural Areas -

There are no Research Natural Areas at Midewin. This decision does not affect National Recreation Areas.

7. Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas -  
No historic properties or other heritage resources are located within or near the project area. Impacts to Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas will not occur as a result of this decision.

No other extraordinary circumstances related to the project were identified.

### **III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The following state and local governments have been contacted for their input: Will County, the town of Wilmington, and the Village of Elwood, Illinois.

The following agencies have been contacted for their input: The US Army Joliet Training Area, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration. Additionally, contact was made with the Will County Landfill, CenterPoint Industries, Deer Run Industrial Park, Abraham Lincoln Memorial Cemetery, and partners and individuals who would benefit from having a safer entrance to the Midewin Headquarters from State Route 53.

Comments received were used to refine the project and analysis and were also used to explore the possibility of extraordinary circumstances and potential effects to those resources. None of the individuals or groups contacted voiced a negative reaction to our proposal and all were in favor of providing for increased safety along State Route 53 in the vicinity of Midewin.

### **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 laws and regulations below.

Prairie Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act) - This Act requires the development of long-range land and resource management plans (Forest and Prairie Plans). The Midewin Prairie Plan was approved in February 2002, as required by this Act. The Plan provides guidance for all natural resource management activities on Midewin. The Act requires all projects and activities to be consistent with the Prairie Plan. The Prairie Plan has been reviewed in consideration of this project. This decision is responsive to guiding direction contained in the Plan, as summarized in Section I of this document. This decision is consistent with the standards and guidelines contained in the Prairie Plan

Endangered Species Act - See Section II, Item B2 of this document.

Sensitive Species (Forest Service Manual 2670) - This Manual direction requires analysis of potential impacts to sensitive species, those species for which the Regional Forester has identified population viability concerns. In February 2000, the Regional Forester approved the sensitive species list. Potential effects of this decision on sensitive species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation (Biological Evaluation for Deceleration Lanes for Midewin Supervisor's Office, February, 2005). This decision will have "no impact" on sensitive species.

Clean Water Act - This Act requires restoration and maintenance of the integrity of waters. The Forest Service complies with this Act through the use of Best Management Practices. This decision incorporates Best Management Practices to ensure protection of soil and water resources.

Wetlands (Executive Order 11990) - See Section II, Item B3 of this document.

Floodplains (Executive Order 11988) - See Section II, Item B3 of this document.

National Historic Preservation Act - See Section II, Item B7 of this document.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act - See Section II, Item B7 of this document.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act - See Section II, Item B7 of this document.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898) - This Order requires consideration of whether projects would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. My decision complies with this Act. Public involvement occurred for this project, the results of which I have considered in making this decision. Public involvement did not identify any adversely impacted local minority or low-income populations. This decision is not expected to adversely impact minority or low-income populations.

National Environmental Policy Act - This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this decision supports compliance with this Act.

## **V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL**

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8(a)(4).

## **VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

Implementation of this decision may occur immediately upon approval by the Prairie Supervisor of the NEPA analysis completed for this project.

**VII. CONTACT PERSON**

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Enid Erickson at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Supervisor's Office (Address: 30239 S. State Route 53, Wilmington, IL 60481; Voice: 815-423-6370; Fax: 815-423-6376; E-mail: eerickson@fs.fed.us).

**VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE**

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment as it is within one of the categories identified by the U.S. 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 section 31.2d, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. This decision also complies with the permitting requirements of the Illinois Department of Transportation (technical and design data are included as part of the Planning Record for this project). My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Planning Record.

  
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LOGAN LEE,  
Prairie Supervisor

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4/13/2005  
Date

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