



**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** December 18, 2008

Friends and Partners of Midewin:

Enclosed is the Decision Notice for the Phase II Demolition of Unsafe or Unneeded Facilities and Infrastructure Project. Based upon my review of the environmental effects analysis, comments received, and the biological assessment, I have decided to approve this project.

My decision to allow for the removal of structures will move areas towards restoration objectives outlined in the Prairie Plan. Additionally, this decision also addresses safety issues and will allow more areas to be open to the public. My exclusion, at this time, of some infrastructure from this decision allows the opportunity to consider the potential for reuse of structures.

I believe this decision is in the best public interest. For more information please read the enclosed document. Additionally, this document is available on the web at [www.fs.fed.us/mntp/nepa/status.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/mntp/nepa/status.htm)

For additional information concerning this decision contact Maya Solomon, Environmental Coordinator, via e-mail at [mayasolomon@fs.fed.us](mailto:mayasolomon@fs.fed.us) by phone at 815-423-6370, or in-person at 30239 South State Route 53, Wilmington, IL 60481.

Thank you for your continued interest in Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Teresa Chase*  
TERESA CHASE,  
Acting Prairie Supervisor,  
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie



Decision Notice  
& Finding of No Significant Impact

## Phase II Demolition of Unneeded and Unsafe Facilities and Infrastructure

**USDA Forest Service  
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie  
Will County, IL**

### Background

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie (Midewin) is located in Will County, Illinois, approximately 45 miles southwest of Chicago, 15 miles south of Joliet, and 3 miles north of Wilmington. Midewin was established through the Illinois Land Conservation Act (ILCA) of 1995. The ILCA established Midewin for the purposes of managing the land and water resources to conserve and enhance the native populations and habitats of wildlife and plants, provide opportunities for education and research, continuation of agricultural uses, and provide recreation opportunities consistent with the preceding purposes. Through this legislation, the USFS was to take over management responsibilities of land formerly managed by the Department of Defense (DoD), as an ammunition plant. On March 10, 1997 the first transfer from the DoD to the Forest Service took place.

From the initial transfer of 15,080 acres, additional lands were transferred and acquired to comprise the current total of 18,225 acres. Additionally 1,445 acres will be transferred from the DoD to the management of the Forest Service over the next several years.

One mission of Midewin is to restore prairie ecosystems across the former ammunition plant. Of special value are the few remaining undisturbed remnants of prairie vegetation and sensitive grassland bird habitat. Prairie restoration provides habitat for many sensitive plant and animal species and improves the landscape for recreational activities.

The transfer of land also includes structures and infrastructures used by the former Joliet Arsenal. Since the Arsenal closure in 1996, maintenance of the structures and infrastructure ceased, leaving the structures severely deteriorated.

In 2001, Midewin's Prairie Supervisor completed an environmental analysis (*Demolition & Removal of Unneeded & Unsafe Facilities & Structures*) and began to implement the demolition of unneeded and unsafe structures. The structures designated for demolition with the 2001 decision consisted of warehouses, other building types, power poles, and bridges. Midewin has removed many of the buildings and other infrastructure which were part of the 1997 (original) land transfer under the 2001 decision as well as under other environmental assessments. Additional buildings have been transferred since then that will be included in the demolition program.

The purpose and need of a Phase II project, is to reduce the current and potential safety

hazards and improve prairie habitats by removing abandoned and deteriorating buildings and infrastructure left behind by the Army. Removing the old facilities and infrastructure is integral to implementing the Prairie Plan (2002) by:

1. preparing the area for safe public recreation opportunities,
2. preparing the area for habitat restoration, and
3. removing fragmenting features that hamper utilization of sensitive grassland bird habitat.

## Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 1, demolition and disposal of identified structures and buildings, with the exception of the infrastructure listed in Appendix 1. This decision includes recently transferred properties, structures not analyzed under the original EA, and the properties expected to be transferred from the DoD (Army) in the foreseeable future.

All remaining Arsenal-era infrastructure are included under this decision, excluding the short list of infrastructure in Appendix 1. The buildings and group areas in that list are excluded from this decision at this time. Any future decision on those structures (whether demolition or reuse) will undergo additional analysis.

Old decaying structures will be removed and restored to a more natural landscape that is consistent with the standards and guidelines in the Prairie Plan. These demolition activities will take place over the next 20 years or more as budget and partnering opportunities allow.

To increase safety and security of the groups/areas not immediately demolished, roads leading into those groups/areas may be obliterated and camouflaged to prevent any access by the public. When funding becomes available for demolition, temporary roads would be constructed on the previously existing roads to groups/areas of buildings to facilitate demolition of infrastructure.

All of the infrastructure may not be demolished immediately; demolition on some infrastructure will be postponed until funding becomes available. A priority list has been developed to identify which buildings are high priority to be demolished. The priority list is based on public safety concerns, restoration and recreation goals, and other contributing factors. The priority list is available for review upon request. While this decision authorizes the demolition of all buildings and structures (excluding Appendix 1) it does not preclude any reuse of structures that may be considered in a separate decision.

Mitigation measures (Appendix 2) were established to eliminate or reduce any potential impacts demolition activities may cause. The mitigation measures will be applied to all demolition activities.

## Decision Rationale

My decision to allow for the removal of structures will move areas towards restoration

objectives as outlined in the Prairie Plan. Additionally, it also addresses safety issues and will allow more areas to be open to the public. My exclusion at this time of some infrastructure from this decision (Appendix 1) allows the opportunity to consider the potential for reuse of structures.

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered two other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on page 13-14.

#### Alternative 2 -- No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. Demolition and removal would not take place on any buildings or structures, except those buildings included in previous project decisions.

#### Alternative 3 -- Board-up and Fence

Under alternative 3, demolition would not take place on any buildings described in the proposed action; instead the buildings will be boarded up and fenced, providing for public safety as additional areas are open to the public. This action will follow the management guidelines for the no action alternative. Demolition would only take place on the building and structures included in previous project decisions.

I did not select either of these alternatives because they do not move the area toward the prairie restoration goals as identified in the Prairie Plan.

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 Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Plan. As required by NFMA Section 1604(i), I find this project to be consistent with the Plan.

## **Public Involvement**

A proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions from January 1, 2006 to October 1, 2008. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during a public scoping period from September 13, 2008 through October 16, 2008 and again for an EA comment period from September 22, 2008 through October 22, 2008. Throughout the process for this environmental assessment and decision, Midewin staff have met formally and informally with members of the public interested in this project. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, response to comments received from the public are available for review in the project file.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an

environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because the minimal effects would be limited to lands within Midewin boundary, in which mitigation measures have been established to eliminate those effects. (see EA pages 10-12 and page 46).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because removal of buildings and structures would provide a continuity of landscape scale restoration increasing native vegetation and habitats on Midewin (EA, page 16). Over the long-term, restoration of these areas would contribute to organic matter to the soil which aids in decreasing soil erosion and increasing soil fertility (see EA pages 13-14, 32).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. Public safety and the visitor's experience is a high priority at Midewin and both were evaluated in the EA (see EA pages 42-45). Public safety will be improved with implementation of this decision and visitor experience is dependent on the desired experience of the visitor.
5. We have considerable experience with demolition authorized under previous decisions. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. (see EA pages 14-46).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because demolition of structures would take place over a 20 year period as funding becomes available (see EA pages 6-8). Mitigation measures (Appendix 2) developed for this project are also in place to minimize effects as implementation occurs.
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant. The environmental assessment describes the effects for this project in detail. Overall, the impacts are positive and with consideration of past, present and foreseeable future actions will not have a significant cumulative impact from both direct and indirect effects. (see EA pages 14-46).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1993 a *Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the United States Army Materiel Command, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Multiple State Historic Preservation Offices Concerning a Program to Cease Maintenance, Excess, and Dispose of Certain Properties* was established to dispose

of the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant (JAAP) properties while taking into account the historic nature of the property. The terms of this 1993 PA applied to the Armament, Munitions, and Chemical Command (AMCCOM), which recognized some of the facilities were included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The PA provided for specific documentation of historic buildings, structures, and equipment to mitigate the adverse effects of the Army's undertaking to dispose of JAAP installation buildings. It also specified there would be adverse effects on ground surface on the immediate areas of the buildings during the disposal process, but the actions in the undertaking would not affect historic properties that are archaeological resources. Mitigation measures (Appendix 2) were developed by the Midewin staff to eliminate or reduce the potential impacts demolition of these buildings may cause. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because surveys will be conducted prior to demolition of individual buildings (EA, page 35).

9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because the project would improve native habitat for wildlife (see EA pages 20-26). The finding of no adverse affect from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is available in the project file for review upon request.
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the Midewin Land and Resource Management Plan (See EA pages 3-4).

## **Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

This decision to implement Alternative 1 is consistent with the intent of the Prairie Plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages pg. 2-12. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines, which state "within 10 years reduce 20% of excess facilities, structures and related infrastructure remaining on site from the Former Joliet Arsenal to enhance public health and safety, and reduce adverse effects on habitat and other resource." (Prairie Plan, pages 2-12).

## **Implementation Date**

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

## **Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215.

A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Reviewing Officer within 45 days of the date that legal notice of this decision is published in *The Herald News*. The notice of appeal must contain sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why the decision should be changed or reversed, and it must include the content specified at 36 CFR 215. File a notice of appeal under this regulation to:

USDA Forest Service – Eastern Region  
Attn: Regional Forester – Appeal Deciding Officer  
626 East Wisconsin Ave.  
Milwaukee, WI 53202  
OR  
Fax: (414) 944-3963

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 7:30am – 4:00 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to:

[appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us)

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject.
- Date of the decision and name and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which the objection is made.
- The reason for the appeal including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

## Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Maya Solomon, Environmental Coordinator, via e-mail at [mayasolomon@fs.fed.us](mailto:mayasolomon@fs.fed.us), by phone at 815-423-6370, or in-person at 30239 South State Route 53, Wilmington, IL 60481.

/s/ Teresa Chase  
Teresa Chase  
Acting Prairie Supervisor  
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

December 18, 2008  
December 18, 2008

## Appendix 1

<b><u>Infrastructure Excluded from Decision</u></b>
Bldg 61-1*
Bldg 61-7
Group 2 LAP (L8) leave foundations for interpretation
Group 63
Group 23 -- L2* & L3*
Building 74-3* (Army farmhouse)
Group 5 (except change houses, 5-8 & 5-20)
Group 66 Bunker Field (North of Rd 1 N only)
Group 68 (L13) Bunker field
*Not yet transferred from Army
The above infrastructure is excluded due to potential future preservation, interpretation and/or re-use.

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## Appendix 2 -- Mitigation Measures

1. Use existing roads, rail beds, and parking areas, and avoid heavy equipment in sensitive areas during times when the soil is soft. Contractor may enter when ground is dry or frozen or with vehicles that have a low ground pounds-per-square-inch loading (not to exceed 4). Designated travel lanes will be developed by Contract Officer Representative (COR) or Project Manager (PM) to avoid compaction. Travel lanes will be marked on maps and/or marked on the ground with pin flags or flagging (EMS 04-22).
2. Avoid rutting and compaction of soils. Unless otherwise designated, soil ruts deeper than 2 inches or covering more than 10% of the designated work area will be avoided in sensitive areas identified by Midewin resource specialist (EMS 04-22).
3. Contractors working in all areas of Midewin will provide adequate water and must keep materials wet during removal and loading in order to minimize release of dust into the air. Water used to suppress dust release will be visually monitored by Forest Service to insure excessive runoff does not occur (EMS 04-06).
4. First priority for all demolition and construction waste is to be recycled or reused where economically feasible. All recycled and reused material will be fully documented with regards to amounts, dates of removal, destination, and acceptance of the material by the third party (EMS 04-07).
5. All contract heavy equipment and off-road equipment will be washed down by the contractor, prior to entering Midewin, to ensure that all possible invasive plants species are removed from the equipment. With approval from the COR, cleaning with compressed air may be an adequate equipment cleaning method (EMS 04-13).
6. Before undertaking any action to improve, modify, or demolish a building, Midewin will provide for appropriate asbestos and Lead Base Paint (LBP) testing. Removal of Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) or LBP will use all applicable regulatory-prescribed methods using properly certified and trained personnel, and will eliminate the release of asbestos fibers into the environment. All ACM or LBP waste will be disposed of in properly designated and permitted locations and all disposals will be fully documented with regards to amounts, dates of removal, destination, and acceptance by disposal company (EMS 04-05).
7. The responsible project planner will consult with the Midewin Hydrologist concerning exact locations of on-the-ground work, and potential access routes, to determine the potential for impacting wetland areas. The Midewin hydrologist will evaluate potential impacts to wetland areas, and take or recommend actions to minimize or avoid those impacts (EMS 04-19).
8. The responsible project planner will consult with the Midewin Horticulturalist and the Ecologist concerning exact locations of on-the-ground work, and potential access routes, to determine the potential for impacting T&E (Federally-listed Threatened and Endangered species) and RF Sensitive species. The Midewin Horticulturalist and the Ecologist will determine what evaluation must be made to potentially impacted areas, perform the evaluation, and recommend the scope of mitigation or avoidance necessary.

9. Areas disturbed will be minimized and kept to that needed for demolition and removal. Typically this area will not exceed 100 ft. around the perimeter of all buildings, bunkers and bridges and 50 ft. around telephone poles and aboveground water line appurtenance.
10. All channel work will be conducted at low flow. Debris nets will be used to capture wood with creosote. Removal of silt accumulations will take place after work is completed.
11. Stockpiling of debris will be only within the work perimeter or other areas approved by COR. It will be confined to the already disturbed area on and between the structures foundations. Debris will be removed from the site shortly after placement.
12. Some restrictions will be applied to the dates of demolition:
  - a. Concrete bunkers will be demolished during the period of August 15 through March, to avoid interference with the nesting activities of the nearby Migrant Loggerhead Shrike, Upland Sandpiper and Bobolink.
  - b. Bridge demolition will be conducted during the lower flow months of July through October or during other low flow time periods.
13. Site stabilization will take place at all disturbed sites. Erosion and sediment control during demolition will be conducted using EMS. Streambank stabilization will occur at all bridge sites where demolition takes place.
14. Grading, using appropriate topsoil or fill following structure removal, will take place in preparation for restoration. The goal is to create the desired topography, soil profiles, and drainage patterns to support later restoration efforts. Site stabilization using a vegetative cover of a cool season grass mixture specified by the Forest Service will occur on all disturbed sites.
15. Demolition will be limited during the main wildlife nesting and breeding season, March 1 to August 15. If demolition must take place during that period, demolition areas should be checked for nesting and breeding wildlife and measures taken to minimize disturbance. If TES species are found, these areas will be protected until nesting or breeding is over.
16. Streams having infrastructure within or adjacent to will be searched for ellipse mussels. If ellipse mussels are found, they will be moved to appropriate habitat nearby or protected from increased runoff through EMS.
17. If whooping cranes appear in or adjacent to an area undergoing demolition, halt demolition activities until the cranes continue on migration.
18. Trees needing to be removed during infrastructure removal will be evaluated for their likelihood of being nest trees for birds, bats and other wildlife. If determined to be important, removal will be restricted to non-breeding times.