

# Decision Memo

## Interim Service Campground

USDA Forest Service  
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie  
Will County, Illinois  
T33N, R9E, Section 1

### **Background**

The Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie was established in 1996 as the first national tallgrass prairie in the United States on approximately 19,000 acres of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant. Transfers of Army land to the Forest Service currently total 17,730 acres. Also, an additional 466 acres have been acquired in other properties within or along Midewin's boundaries. Midewin's total acreage at this time is 18,186 acres.

The purposes for which Midewin was established by the enabling legislation include management of the natural resources to conserve native populations of plant and animals while providing for a variety of recreational opportunities that do not conflict with the other purposes for which Midewin was created. Volunteers are an essential component to the restoration and recreational projects completed and in-progress on Midewin. Recently, we have had individual volunteers and groups decide not to volunteer at Midewin because we could not help them defray their cost by providing overnight camping. We believe that having rudimentary interim service campground available for organized groups involved with long-term volunteer projects on Midewin would increase volunteer contributions to our plan implementation. In addition, we currently have to go to Mokena to provide overnight experiences as part of our environmental education program. Having such a campground might allow us to host some environmental camping trips on site when the group can tent camp. We have also initiated partnerships with non-profit organizations to outreach in urban communities that would benefit from such a site.

This project will provide limited use interim service campground, and not the permanent group campground envisioned in the Plan. However, the interim group campground will help Midewin continue to move towards desired conditions outlined in the Plan until the establishment of the permanent group campground. I have chosen to call this a "Service Campground" because I consider it an administrative, rather than a recreation, site because it will be used in support of service efforts.

Prairie Plan – Record of Decision (ROD), p. 6, Groups that come to learn or volunteer for longer periods can camp overnight in the group campground.

ROD, 14.2: Changes made in response to public comments.

14.2.4. Changing the developed campground use to group camping only (Final EIS 2-21, 3-244 and Prairie Plan 3-6).

## Decision

I have decided to establish an interim location of less than one acre for a group camping facility to host organized educational, non-profit and service volunteer groups that are working on scheduled projects on Midewin. The “service campground” will not be open to the public or used as a recreation site but will be dedicated to official use. It will be on the site of the former temporary hotshot base facility north of Explosives Road and west of State Route 53. Using this existing site minimizes any potential for environmental effects.

We are making this site available based on recent request and may use it until the permanent group campground is established. We will only do so if the demand warrants and we are increasing our capacity to meet environmental education and program goals by using the site. At a minimum, use of the site will be evaluated and reviewed on a yearly basis. Use of this interim location can be discontinued at any time upon discovery of impacts beyond the already-disturbed area of lack of use.

The campground will be used for organized education, non-profit and volunteer projects only, and will not be open for use by the general public. The interim group campground will be used for groups ranging from 15 to 50 people for up to two weeks at a time, and up to five times per year. Should there be competition between groups for the same dated that cannot be accommodated the Prairie Supervisor will determine which project contributes most to Midewin’s mission. The Midewin NTP project leader in charge of the organized group will be responsible for detailing expectations for use of the site as well as regulating the number and type of vehicles allowed at the site. [Guidelines](#) for use of the service campground are attached.

Activities and temporary facilities that will be improved on site include:

- Grading the existing graveled parking lot
- Mowing an area up to 0.5 acre around the parking lot
- Portable sanitation stations
- Fire pit construction

The decision is within category 3, 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.

## Public Involvement

A proposal to designate an interim group campground was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in April 2007. In addition, several other organizations were contacted including; The Nature Conservancy, Will County Trail Riders, and the Midewin Tallgrass Prairie Alliance.

**Findings Required by Other Laws**

This decision is consistent with the Prairie Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. Also, the Illinois Land Conservation Act of 1995 (PL 104-106), which directs Midewin to provide recreational opportunities to the public compatible with prairie restoration goals.

**Implementation Date**

This project will be implemented immediately.

**Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is not subject to administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f).

**Contact Person**

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Marta Witt during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at the Midewin Supervisor's Office (Address: 30239 S. State Route 53, Wilmington, IL 60481; Phone: 815-423-6370; Fax: 815-423-6376; or [Email](#)).

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
LOGAN LEE,  
Prairie Supervisor

8/31/07  
Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**Guidelines for Midewin Interim Service Campground  
Finalized 7/20/07**

Intent

The intent of designating an interim group campground at Midewin is to have a place for organized service groups to camp while volunteering at Midewin. Target groups include Boy Scouts, American Hiking Society, Illinois Native Plant Society and more. This offering should help facilitate additional opportunities for volunteers at Midewin and more projects accomplished with volunteer hours.

Guidelines for Qualifying Groups

Groups may include external service groups such as Boy Scouts or South Point Academy or they may be Forest Service sponsored groups such as PIT or other project work volunteers.

All groups are subject to prior approval by team leader. Groups wishing to use the group campground at Midewin must fulfill all of the following recommended requirements:

- The majority of campers must be volunteers.
- Volunteers will receive the opportunity to utilize the campground for one night for each 6 hours work that the group provides.
- Limited to organized service groups (15-50 people)
- There is a 14-day stay limit for each group.

In addition, groups and campers will follow the following rules:

- All Prairie Supervisor Closure Orders must be followed
- All camping activities must stay within the designated area.
- Sound/noise restriction: Recommend quiet hours after 10 p.m.
- No animals allowed
- All vehicles must stay on paved surfaces
- Follow “Pack it in, pack it out” rules unless otherwise arranged.
- Keep access gate closed.

Responsibilities of project manager:

- Coordinate toilet and hand washing stations with toilet contract COR as agreed upon with group.
- Coordinate trash receptacles and trash pick-up as agreed upon with group.
- Coordinate showers in the Horticulture Building as agreed upon with group. (Sun showers are acceptable within the designated group camping facility.)
- Number of vehicles and/or RVs allowed will be set prior to each use, depending on group size and/or need.

**Use of the interim group campground can be discontinued at any time for not adhering to guidelines or if resource damage is occurring.**