

Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact
Midewin-Wauponsee, Drummond Road & Klingler Parking
Lots

USDA Forest Service
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie
Will County, IL

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

The Midewin Prairie Plan identified nine administrative access points allowing management, clean-up activities, and access to cemeteries. Also outlined as one of the goals in the Prairie Plan, the Illinois Conservation Act of 1996, section 2914 requires that Midewin provide a variety of recreation opportunities. Since we opened to the general public in 2004 the public has expressed a growing interest in gaining access to Midewin for recreational and educational activities. The three parking lots proposed will address the public interest and implement the plan by providing parking for recreation and administrative use.

Currently there is no parking provided near any of the three proposed sites. The Midewin-Wauponsee and Drummond Road parking lots would expand the public's opportunity to visit, learn about, and enjoy Midewin as directed by the plan. The Klingler Cemetery parking would improve cemetery access and support administrative use as directed by the plan. An environmental assessment (EA) was completed to document the analysis of two alternatives to meet this need.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 2, which is to complete the construction of three new parking lots including the Midewin-Wauponsee, Drummond Road, and Klingler Cemetery parking lots. These projects help meet the current need for safe off road parking and provide access to areas of Midewin that we hope to open in the next couple of years. These project locations were all anticipated in the Prairie Plan.

My decision is based on the results and findings of the EA, a review of the Biological Evaluation, the Agency Response to the Public Comments, and a review of the Prairie Plan. The EA is available for review at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Supervisor's Office located in Wilmington, Illinois, and it can also be viewed online at http://www.fs.fed.us/mntp/nepa/recreation/ParkingLotsEA_May2007.pdf

After reviewing and comparing the alternatives, the selected alternative will increase the variety and quality of recreation experience that is available on the prairie. Currently, approximately 6,370 of the 19,000 acres of Midewin are open to the public for recreation activities such as: hiking, biking, horseback riding, bird watching, and deer and turkey hunting. Implementing the

Midewin-Wauponsee and Drummond Road parking lots would provide the public with easy access to current recreation activities and provide the option to increase recreation activities on the prairie in the future (See Recreation and Scenery Management section of the EA, p. 18). The Klingler cemetery is an active cemetery with new burials and frequent visits by family and friends. The cemetery is located across from a likely future interim trail that will connect to the Wauponsee Glacial Trail, by providing a parking area away from the trail, family and friends will have a semi-primitive sentimental area to visit.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered one other alternative. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on page 25. We did look at other potential sites for parking lots but felt that the identified projects were the highest priority and the ones that best increase access over the next few years. Doing one analysis for three projects was efficient and allows us to have projects that are ready for design when funds become available.

Alternative 1 –No Action

Under the No Action alternative, no action will be taken. Access on the east side will be limited to the Hoff Road and the Iron Bridge trailheads, resulting in significant travel distances for people who want to explore the eastern side of the unit. Partnership opportunities with Will County Forest Preserve District to jointly develop the Midewin-Wauponsee parking lot would not be realized. West side access would be limited to the River Road and Explosives Road access points which would require traversing the industrial park to access the Jackson Creek area.

Public Involvement

The proposal is currently listed on the Schedule of Proposed Actions'. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping March 20 through April 19, 2006.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, and the interdisciplinary team, the interdisciplinary team identified several issues regarding the effects of the proposed action (see *Issues* section, p. 4). Main issues of concern included the effects on wildlife, vegetation, and heritage sites. To address these concerns, the Forest Service created the alternatives described above.

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. The overall effects of implementing Alternative 2 will provide parking for increased public access and safety to recreation and educational activities at Midewin and also provide better access for management activities by the agency, without imposing any significant environmental effects. (see EA p. 10)
2. The parking lots will improve public health and safety by providing off road parking (see EA p. 11-18).
3. The parking areas will not effect the unique character of the locations. (see EA p. 18).
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 (see EA p. 11-18).
5. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risk that can not be addressed with mitigation measures and design criteria (see EA pages 25-29).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because mitigation measure and design criteria have been put in place to alleviate any future significant effects (see EA p. 8).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA p. 21).
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, because there are no historic sites directly or indirectly effected by the parking lot construction. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (see EA p. 18). Also see SHPO letter in reference section.
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 parking lots will not effect any wildlife habitats (see EA p. 12).
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 Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Land and Resource Management Plan and the Illinois Conservation Act of 1996.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to implement the three parking lots is consistent with the intent of the Prairie Plan's long-term goals and objectives listed in section 2.5.2 of the Prairie Plan. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plans standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for implementing a transportation

network that matches the level of management, public use, recreation, special use, and fire protection (Prairie Plan, section 2.7.2).

The EA also complied with the follow laws and regulations:

Federal Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species
Regional Forester Sensitive Species
State (Illinois) Endangered and Threatened Species
National Environment Policy Act

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.

The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer Randy Moore, Regional Forester, by fax at 414-944-3973, by [email](#), or by hand-delivery or regular mail to 626 East Wisconsin Ave. Suite 800, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202.

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. 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). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in the Joliet Herald, newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45-day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the Joliet Herald newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Mary Honer by phone at 815-423-6370, by [email](#), or by mail at 30239 South State Route 53, Wilmington, IL 60481.



LOGAN LEE,
Prairie Supervisor

5/14/07

Date

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