

Decision Memo

Bailey Bridge Interim Trail & Phase III Public Access

USDA Forest Service
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie
Will County, Illinois
T34N, R10E, Sections 35&36
T34N, R11E, Section 31

Background

The Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie was established in 1996 as the first national tallgrass prairie in the United States under the Illinois Land Conservation Act (ILCA) of 1995. 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.

The Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie proposed to designate an additional 1.8 miles of shared-use interim recreational trails on the east side of Midewin. The Bailey Bridge Interim Trail will follow an existing road, Road 1 North (Offner Road) that was part of the former Arsenal infrastructure and a newly constructed Bailey bridge over Prairie Creek. The Bailey Bridge Interim Trail will connect Midewin's current interim Twin Oaks Trail to Will County's new regional Wauponsee Glacial Trail.

In conjunction with the interim trail designation, an additional 808 acres of the former Arsenal is proposed to be open for public access. The proposed open area comprises the northeast corner of Midewin north of Road 1 North (Offner Road) and east of Prairie Creek (731 acres) and the Morgan Woods (77 acres) addition, acquired in 2003. These two new open areas represent the next phase in the gradual opening of Midewin to public access as the Army completes its cleanup.

National Forest System (NFS) lands are, in general, "open unless posted closed." With the first land transfer from the former Joliet Arsenal, Midewin was closed to the general public for safety reasons as the US Army completed cleanup of the former Arsenal. We conducted analysis in 2004 when we opened the first lands to public use in case there were concerns over the proposal. There were no public concerns with the previous openings, or with this proposed opening. Therefore, I propose future openings of Midewin and future use of existing infrastructure as interim recreation trails occur without further scoping or analysis.

Decision

I have decided to approve the Bailey Bridge Interim Trail and Phase III Public Access. Additionally, I have decided to approve future openings and the interim recreational use of former Army infrastructure when land parcels are opened. The project complies with Midewin's

enabling legislation by providing recreational opportunities to public compatible with the tallgrass prairie restoration goals. The project also responds to the Prairie Plan guidelines to “locate interim multiple use trails on existing and transportation infrastructure” and “to prevent environmental impact, where feasible” (p. 4-31).

The decision is within category 1, 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 the Bailey Bridge Interim Trail and Phase III Public Access was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in April 2007. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comments April 30, 2007. During that time, four comments were received, placed in the project file, and considered during the analysis of the project. All four responses were supportive of the proposals.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the Prairie Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with Prairie Plan decisions by using existing infrastructure to prevent environmental impact (Prairie Plan, page 4-31). Also, the Illinois Land Conservation Act, which directs Midewin to provide recreational opportunities to 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 CR 215.12(f).

Contact Person

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Mary Honer 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; e-mail: mhoner@fs.fed.us).



LOGAN LEE,
Prairie Supervisor

May 31, 2007
Date

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