

APPENDIX D
ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES
CONTENTS

1. Introduction	D-1
2. Public Involvement Process	D-1
3. Notice of Intent 1998	D-1
4. Major Public Involvement Opportunities and Activities.....	D-1
5. Public Scoping Comments and Content Analysis Process	D-2
5.1. Management Activities to Conserve and Enhance Native Species	D-2
5.2. Scientific, Environmental, and Land Use Education and Research	D-3
5.3. Agriculture Uses of Land.....	D-4
5.4. Recreational Opportunities.....	D-4
6. Public Involvement in Alternative Development	D-5
6.1. Expert Panel of Scientists	D-5
6.2. Selected Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities	D-5

APPENDIX D

ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. INTRODUCTION

Setting direction for Midewin begins with identifying the major issues, concerns, and opportunities affecting management of the National Forest System lands that make up the Prairie. The planning process is based on this important step. The planning issues have evolved over the last four years. The following section serves as a summary to put the issues in perspective and explain the public involvement program that we have followed.

2. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

The Forest Service considers public understanding and direct involvement crucial to the success of a vital land and resource management plan. Involving the public has been occurring in an open, continuous, and equitable manner. Public outreach efforts began well before any formal planning announcements. Forest Service employees began meeting with people both individually and in groups in 1996 and 1997 to discuss the planning strategy and the need to development a land and resource management plan for Midewin. In addition, Openlands Project, in partnership with the Forest Service, sponsored focus groups to discuss early planning issues in 1997.

3. NOTICE OF INTENT 1998

On June 26, 1998, formal public involvement was initiated with publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register, announcing the Forest Service intent to prepare an environmental impact statement in conjunction with a proposed land and resource management plan. The Forest Service hosted a series of five public open house meetings 1998 in various locations in northeastern Illinois. The formal phase for public comments, called "scoping" was open until August 31, 1998. Sixty-six written comments were received during the 60-day public comment period.

4. MAJOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIVITIES

The following is a list of the major public involvement opportunities and activities. There have also been numerous meetings and briefings with individuals, organizations, user groups, and county, state, and federal officials. In addition mailings announcing planning meetings or updates on planning were mailed to our extensive mailing list. In September 1999, the first Midewin Quarterly was published and new issues have been published each quarter giving updates on the planning process at Midewin.

Open Houses

July 21, 1998, Wilmington, IL
July 23, 1998, Lisle, IL
July 28, 1998, University Park, IL
July 29, 1998 Evanston, IL
July 30, 1998 Morris, IL
July 15, 1999 Oglesby, IL
July 17, 1999 Wilmington, IL
July 20, 1999 Oak Park, IL
August 24, 1999 Joliet, IL
August 28, 1999 Wilmington, IL

5. PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENTS AND CONTENT ANALYSIS PROCESS

This summary includes public comments received from the early public outreach efforts beginning in 1996 and includes those received in response to the formal request for public comments announced in June 1998. All opinions, feelings, preferences contained in the public comment documents including written letters, form letters, and meeting notes, were read, analyzed and considered. Individual statements were coded into major topics based on the four legislative purposes of Midewin, and most of these topics were further broken down into subtopics.

5.1. MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES TO CONSERVE AND ENHANCE NATIVE SPECIES POPULATIONS AND THEIR HABITATS***Bison and Elk Reintroduction***

Respondents stressed the need for the Forest Service to carefully consider reintroduction, of both species, and the potential conflicts with people on such a relatively small space for an animal that historically and expansive free range.

Bunkers

Comments ranged from leaving the bunkers in place with suggestions for their use including tornado shelters, seed storage, bat habitat, or leaving them in place and the use the money to control exotic species, to calling for their removal or filling in the terrain to restore the prairie.

Reintroduction of Other Extirpated Species

A couple of people commented on this topic. One supported reintroduction of bison, elk, prairie chickens and even wolves and bears. Several were in favor of prairie chicken reintroduction. Another stated that reintroduction would be really establishing a wildlife park or zoo under the circumstances at Midewin. A number stated that resources would be better spent on prairie restoration.

Integrated Pest Management

Comments on this issue recognized that some herbicides may be needed to control unwanted plants, but herbicide use should be limited, instead rely more on mechanical or hand removal and prescribed fire to control weedy or invasive species.

Prescribed Fire

A few comments on this topic expressed concerns for burning in the spring, (preferred fall burning) and for emissions resulting from prairie grass burning in Will County which is in the 1-hour national ozone standard non-attainment area.

Water Quality

One letter stated that water quality issues near streams and wetlands will need to be addressed.

Wetland Restoration

Arguments were presented regarding the importance of wetland restoration. Some argued that all drain tiles be removed and waterways restored, while other recommended a more cautious approach,

Woody Vegetation Management

People expressed concern that the Forest Service proposed removing all trees in the landscape, and asked that shade trees remain in picnic areas, rest areas, or that trees remain to support sensitive species.

5.2. SCIENTIFIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND LAND USE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Cultural Resources

One person recommended that the Forest Service provide a better definition of “cultural and historical”.

Environmental Education and Interpretive Programs

Many comments on this topic favored providing environmental education and interpretive opportunities and only differed in the types that should be provided. Suggestions included a plot to demonstrate how Native Americans cultivated maize, squash, and beans; Others disagreed with dividing up the space further for any reconstructed villages. Several suggested a visitor center, kiosks, viewing platforms, and other facilities to encourage public understanding of the natural resources and cultural history.

Research Opportunities

All comments received were in support of providing research opportunities at Midewin and provided specific suggestions including setting aside a

portion for research activities, a location for a research laboratory for use by visiting researchers and students. One comment suggested that a Research Natural Area be designated to be more protective and allow innovative research and permanent plots.

5.3. AGRICULTURE USES OF LANDS

Gradual Conversion of Cultivated Row Crops

Most comments generally understood that the legislation provides for gradual conversion of agricultural leases, and supported continued cultivation practices to avoid weedy areas until enough seed is available to restore 19,000 acres. One suggestion was to award new leases or permits to organic farming as a transition to prairie. Others encouraged agriculture to provide food and habitat for deer, sandpipers, and waterfowl. Another noted that trapping and hunting would help to reduce surplus wildlife and thereby reduce crop damage.

Continued Use of Domestic Livestock

Many comments supported maintenance of shortgrass habitats for sensitive species, but not all agreed on how this should be accomplished. Some stated that livestock should be kept out of waterways. Other comments disagreed and stated that domestic livestock will diminish the prairie habitat, or that short grass could be provided and maintained in other ways. Several suggested that utilizing cattle to maintain sandpiper habitat was artificial and that perhaps the short grass dependent bird species were not native to the area.

5.4. RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Camping

The conflicts and concerns associated with opening Midewin to camping were evident in many comments. Comments were divided on whether camping should be allowed or not. Some suggested less developed campsites, other suggested horse camping sites and accessible camp sites for disabled people. Semi-primitive campsites in the backcountry were recommended and in limited number to made available only by permit. Several suggested that camping should not be provided, that adequate camping facilities are available in nearby state or private campgrounds.

Dog Trialing and Falconry

Some comments were opposed to dog trialing, while others requested grassland areas be made available. One comment requested consideration of falconry as a sporting opportunity.

Fishing, Hunting, and Trapping

Interest was expressed in catch and release fishing for small mouth bass on Prairie Creek or fishing for educational purposes. Concerns were raised that if the Forest Service permitted hunting only as a tool to manage wildlife populations, then other recreational hunting opportunities for waterfowl, upland game and turkey would be lost. Some comments encouraged the Forest Service to conserve fish and wildlife through trapping, hunting, and fishing, and to provide outdoor experiences for the public. One suggested that a goal should be to open land for public hunting. Several comments requested the Forest Service to open the site to fur trapping to control beaver, rabbit, coyote, raccoon, and possum as a viable management tool and recreational activity.

Public Access

Comments encourage linking Midewin trails on both east and west sides to trails systems adjacent to Midewin's boundaries. Questions on control of users were raised and how would off-road vehicles and motorcycles be excluded.

Internal Transportation System

Most comments supported the proposed tram system with discussions of different ways to provide internal public transportation. Motorized trams, horse drawn wagons, or rail shuttle were suggested.

Rail Line Access

Two comments addressed this topic, with concerns for impacting resources and limiting resources made available for a rail line access.

Short Auto Loop

There were many varied comments on this topic. Some agreed that a short auto loop would be reasonable, some wanted a longer route, and others felt that no auto routes should be established.

Trails

There was opposition to use of ATV, snowmobile and off-trail mountain biking. People were generally in favor of bicycle trails, but were against off-trail mountain bike use or single track trails, that would disturb habitat. They encouraged the Forest Service to clearly mark trails and prohibit off-trail use. Comments ranged from requests to allow equestrian use, to strongly stating that horses should be prohibited from trails. Some comments addressed specific resource damage that horses may cause, while others requested at least 30 to 50 miles of equestrian trails. Most comments on hiking trails wanted trails accessible only to hikers, thus limiting user conflicts. Some reflected that the trails proposed offered a compromise.

6. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Three public open houses were hosted in July 1999 to review the Forest Service Analysis of the Management Situation for Midewin, to explain the planning process and how the alternatives would be developed. In addition, two site tours were held to offer people the opportunity to see the site. Two public workshops were held in August, 1999, providing public input on alternative development. The Midewin Prairie Explorer, a Geographic Information System CD-ROM based application that allows users to browse through data collected for Midewin and explore relationships between animal habitat, ecosites, and the human dimension, was designed and made available for use at the public planning workshops. The Midewin Prairie Explorer was developed jointly by the Forest Service, the Illinois DNR, the Conservation Fund, Panda Consulting, and ESRI.

6.1. EXPERT PANEL OF SCIENTISTS

An Expert Panel of 30 Scientists in November 1999, reviewed conservation assessments and draft conservation strategies for sensitive species, addressed the biological framework, and recommended management conservation strategies to maintain viability of sensitive species.

6.2. SELECTED ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

The individual issues raised in 1998 are listed in the Content Analysis Report, November, 1998. The issues selected for consideration in the Final EIS were based on planning criteria listed in the Analysis of the Management Situation, 1999. Each issue represents a subject of widespread interest raised by either the public or by management; the issue is within the authority of the Forest Service at Midewin to address; and the issue is appropriate to the planning process.

Each concern raised could not be addressed in the planning process. Many issues and concerns were screened out as not being within Forest Service jurisdiction, outside the planning process, or were operational or administrative in nature.

The remaining issues, those that we deal with in this planning process, were grouped into five areas. For further information and background on the development of these issues, the planning records are on file at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Office in Wilmington, Illinois.

The significant issues addressed in this document include:

- Humans Health and Safety
- Sensitive Species Habitat
- Contributions to Regional Biodiversity
- Grassland Bird Habitat Requirements
- Recreation Opportunities
- Bison and/or Elk Reintroduction
- Environmental Education and Research Opportunities

Each significant issue is described and addressed in this Final EIS. Key indicators are identified for each issue. These indicators help compare the six alternatives by describing the effects of implementing each alternative.