



File Code: 1950-1

Date: October 15, 2008

Dear Forest Neighbor:

The U.S. Forest Service is proposing to implement the **Big Chase Kirtland's Warbler and Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project** (Big Chase Project) on the Mio Ranger District of the Huron-Manistee National Forests. The Big Chase Project is made up of a variety of activities in many locations to meet natural resource management objectives. These objectives are based on multiple-use management in compliance with the Forests' Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). We would like your comments on the proposed project.

Background

The Big Chase Project area and the Huron National Forest (Forest) in general, have a history of large destructive wildfires that can be life threatening, destroy homes and property, and damage natural resources. The creation of fuelbreaks and reduction of hazardous fuels are necessary to help protect local communities from wildfire.

The Forest is home to the federally endangered songbird, the Kirtland's warbler (KW). The continuous development of new breeding habitat is essential to the survival of the species.

Producing timber, creating wildlife habitat, and improving the District's recreation and trails system are also important parts of managing natural resources that benefit local communities.

Project Location

The proposed actions are located on National Forest System lands north of Roscommon and west of Luzerne in Crawford and Oscoda counties, Michigan. The legal descriptions of the proposed actions are as follows:

- T25N, R2W Sections 27, 32, 33, 34
- T25N, R1W Sections 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32
- T26N, R2W Sections 14, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 33, 34, 35, 36
- T26N, R1W Sections 19, 20, 25, 26, 27, 35
- T26N, R1E Sections 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 29

Please refer to the attached maps for specific locations of proposed actions. Maps can be viewed at the following website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hmnf/pages/PlanningandProjects/mio.htm>

Purpose and Need

The specific purpose and need of the Big Chase Project is to:

1. Reduce hazardous fuels and reintroduce fire into fire-adapted ecosystems,
2. Provide breeding and foraging habitat for the federally endangered Kirtland's warbler,
3. Improve recreation, road and trail systems,
4. Reduce or eliminate non-native invasive species (NNIS) in high priority areas,
5. Produce timber products,
6. Improve wildlife and fisheries habitat, and



7. Improve timber stand condition and age-class distribution

The Big Chase Project is designed to move the area towards the desired future condition set forth in the Forest Plan by meeting the goals and objectives for the specific Management Areas (MA). Forest-wide goals and objectives include:

- Implement fuels reduction and fuelbreak projects where conditions warrant for the protection of life, property and safety. (Forest Plan, page II-3)
- Use of fire to mimic natural processes (Forest Plan, page II-3)
- Maintain or improve the populations of endangered, threatened, or sensitive species (Forest Plan, page II-4)
- Meet species viability needs, achieve fire hazard reduction, and accomplish fiber production from regulated and non-regulated forest lands primarily through timber harvest. (Forest Plan, page II-4)
- Reduce non-native invasive species (NNIS) infestations and prevent new invasive species from becoming established, when possible (Forest Plan, page II-4)
- Restore and maintain savannahs, prairies, dry grasslands, mesic grasslands, shrub/scrub and oak/pine barrens in areas where they were known to previously occur, to provide for habitat diversity and to meet species viability needs. (Forest Plan, page II-4)
- Provide for a combination of motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities. (Forest Plan, page II-5)
- Severe and moderately eroding stream banks are restored. (Forest Plan, page II-6)

The Big Chase Project is within MAs 4.2, 4.2KW, 4.4, and 6.1, as identified and described in the Forest Plan. MA 4.2 and 4.2KW are managed to increase a variety of wildlife habitats including Kirtland's warbler, produce high volumes of softwood, and reduce hazardous fuel loads (Forest Plan, page III-4.2-2). MA 4.4 is managed to maintain or increase wildlife habitat diversity, provide recreational opportunities, emphasize hazardous fuels treatments in Wildland urban interface and intermix areas, and provide moderate to high volumes of softwood timber products (Forest Plan, page III-4.4-2-3). MA 6.1 is managed to provide semi-primitive, nonmotorized recreational experiences. Emphasis is placed on reducing life-threatening and property damaging wildfire potential. Consideration is given to providing habitat and vegetative diversity. (Forest Plan, page III-6.1-4)

For more detailed information on the proposed action, the existing condition and the desired future condition within the project area, please see the Big Chase KW and Hazardous Fuel Removal Pre-NEPA report on the internet at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hmnf/pages/PlanningandProjects/mio.htm>

Proposed Actions

Summary of Activities

1. Harvest by clearcutting approximately 1277 acres; 813 acres of jack pine in two areas to create KW breeding habitat; 388 acres in three areas to create barrens; 65 acres in one area to create an opening; and 11 acres in one area to regenerate aspen.
2. Thin approximately 965 acres of red pine in approximately 20 areas to improve growth of remaining trees, reduce hazardous fuels, and restore old growth conditions.

3. Maintain approximately 448 acres of barrens in three areas through prescribed burning and/or mechanical or manual treatments.
4. Construct approximately 2 miles of temporary roads and associated landings to remove forest products. These roads and landings would be closed and rehabilitated when harvest activities are completed.
5. Reforest approximately 813 acres of clearcut to jack pine where necessary to create KW breeding habitat; recontour and reforest approximately 47 acres of the Chase Bridge Gravel Pit to jack or red pine; reforest approximately a one-acre abandoned well pad; reforest approximately 0.5 acre erosion site to white pine on the South Branch Au Sable River.
6. Reduce hazardous fuels and improve wildlife habitat by prescribed burning approximately 1288 acres.
7. Create and maintain approximately 193 acres of fuelbreaks through timber harvest, mechanical or manual cutting, and prescribed burning. Approximately 50 acres would be removed from KW essential habitat designation to create new fuelbreaks.
8. Maintain approximately 16 acres of existing fuelbreaks by cutting encroaching woody vegetation by mechanical or manual treatments, or prescribed burning.
9. Create and maintain an 8 acre opening, and improve approximately 110 acres of existing forest openings for wildlife. Treatments include cutting encroaching vegetation by mechanical or manual means, or prescribed burning.
10. Control or eradicate non-native invasive plant species (NNIS) within the Project area (approximately 2934 acres) where necessary and appropriate. NNIS would be treated with herbicides, biological controls, mechanical and/or manual means.
11. Stabilize a 0.5-acre eroding bank on the South Branch of the Au Sable River.
12. Pick up trash and close roads and trails at the Chase Bridge Gravel Pit.
13. Enlarge and improve the parking area at the Meridian ORV Trailhead off M-72 (approximately 3 acres).
14. Enlarge and improve the parking area at Wakeley Lake off M-72 (approximately 1.5 acres).
15. Remove and dispose of discarded materials in the South Branch barrens area.

Comments

We would like your input concerning the proposed actions listed above. The input you provide will be factored into the analysis as we look to identify issues and/or concerns and develop alternatives to the proposed action.

Please submit your written or hand-delivered comments to District Ranger, USDA Forest Service, Mio Ranger Station, 107 McKinley Road, Mio, MI 48647-9314, between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Comments may be submitted via telephone during business hours by calling (989) 826-3252 or (989) 826-3592 TTY. Comments may be faxed to (989) 826-6073, or emailed to comments-eastern-huron-manistee-mio@fs.fed.us (must be readable by Microsoft Office 2000 or Adobe Acrobat 6.0 formats). Please send us your comments by 30 days from the publication date in the Oscoda County Herald and include the following information:

1. Name, address, organization represented and title (if appropriate);
2. Title of project for which comments are being submitted (Big Chase Project);
3. Specific facts and supporting reasons you believe should be considered in reaching a final decision.

Comments received in response to this project will become a matter of public record¹. Copies of the final decision will be mailed to people who request a copy of these documents. There will be a formal 30 day comment period after the comments are evaluated from the scoping period. If you have any questions, or need further information about this proposal, please contact Phil Huber, Wildlife Biologist at the Mio Ranger Station at 989-826-3252, extension 3316.

In addition, the Forest Service is willing to work with landowners to reduce hazardous fuels on private property adjacent to National Forest lands. In certain instances federal funding may be available to conduct those treatments. For more information on the *FIREWISE* program, call Paul Lyden, Assistant Fire Management Officer – Fire Prevention and Education at (989) 826-3252 ext. 3350 or visit www.firewise.org.

Sincerely,

/s/ Steven A. Goldman

Steven A. Goldman
District Ranger

Enclosures

¹ Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit such comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27 (d), any person may request that a submission be withheld from the public record by showing how the Freedom of information Act permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that confidentiality is granted in only very limited circumstances. The Forest Service will inform the requester of its decision regarding a request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the submission will be returned and the requester notified that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address.

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