



Hoosier National Forest

Buffalo Springs Restoration Project Update, August 2022

Greetings,

You are receiving this newsletter because you expressed interest in, or recently provided comments related to, the proposed Buffalo Springs Restoration Project on the Hoosier National Forest. Thank you for your interest in the management of your National Forest and its resources, and particularly for taking an active role in the process by making the time to write and submit your comments. Feedback from the public is an important part of the project development and planning process on any National Forest and helps us improve the end product. An engaged citizenry has always been an important part of public land management and something that I personally, my colleagues, and the U.S. Forest Service in general, value highly.

I want to assure you that forest management decisions and action on the National Forest are not driven or motivated by financial rates of return. Rather they are informed by the latest, prevailing natural resource science and our mission to serve the American public and balance a broad and diverse range of interests and points of view.

Chris

**Chris Thornton,
District Ranger**

A Mission of Multiple Use Natural Resource Management

The U.S. Forest Service, which is given the responsibility of administering approximately 193 million acres of National Forest System lands across the country, has a broad, diverse and complex mission. Since our founding in 1905, we have been charged by each Presidential administration and Congress with managing these lands on behalf of the American people with a multiple-use mandate.

Multiple-use means we must balance the varied and sometimes conflicting, sometimes complimentary, needs of the public and the land for the purposes of recreation, providing timber and other forest products, fish and wildlife habitat, clean water and mitigating the effects of climate change among many other values. National Forests play a key role in providing habitat for many wildlife species, both endangered and otherwise; providing sustainable forest products, such as timber and mushrooms; contributing to local economies in communities across the country; providing quality of life through recreational opportunities such as trails, campgrounds, rivers and other resources enjoyed by millions every year.

Our mission is challenging, often difficult, sometimes controversial, yet truly inspiring: “to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”

In order to achieve this mission, each National Forest has a Forest Plan which guides the decisions we, as land managers, make when designing, planning and implementing projects.

The Hoosier National Forest Plan can be seen as a social contract between the U.S. Forest Service and the American people and guides our decisions. Prior to approving any project for implementation, we must ensure that it is consistent with that Forest Plan, is informed by the latest relevant science, as well as complies with a number of laws and policies such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, among many others.

The proposed Buffalo Springs Restoration Project would comply with all of these laws and regulations and would be a part of the implementation of the Forest Plan. During our planning and environmental analysis process for any project, a team of resource specialists spends many months reviewing the proposed actions, investigating the existing conditions on the ground, and analyzing the potential impacts the proposal would have on soil, water, wildlife, recreation and other important forest resources, considering alternative actions and potential mitigation measures we could employ—all using the most recent scientific findings. These efforts take time, but are important to ensure that a well-informed decision is reached about the actions to be taken and the trade-offs that are always present. These are the steps in which we are currently engaged for the Buffalo Springs Restoration project.



Overstocked non-native pines are experiencing health issues and do not provide suitable wildlife habitat.

Congress has affirmed through appropriations bills that forest plans over 15 years are still valid, therefore our 2006 Plan will remain in effect until the plan revision process is complete and a new plan is signed, a process conducted at a national level which can

take many years.

Project Overview

The Buffalo Springs Restoration Project has been proposed to meet the desired conditions set forth in our 2006 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Its purpose is to promote tree growth, reduce insect and disease levels, move the landscape toward historic conditions, and increase the resiliency and structure of forest stands by restoring the composition, structure, pattern and ecological processes necessary to make these ecosystems sustainable (see current age class conditions in Figure 1, pg. 3).

Proposed Actions in the Project Area

(figures cited are the maximum proposed and are most likely to decrease during the analysis and/or implementation process)

Proposed Activity	~ Unit of Measure
Clearcut (Pine)	707 acres
Oak Shelterwood	516 acres
Thinning (Pine)	1,558 acres
Thinning (Hardwood)	1,131 acres
Selection (single or group)	957 acres
Stand Improvement (mid-story removal)	255 acres
Herbicide Spot Treatment	771 acres
Prescribed Fire	12,135 - 15,100 acres
New Road Construction	6 miles
Road Reconstruction	13 miles
Road Decommission	4 miles
Stream Flow Improvement	8 structures

The proposed actions will address the following needs:

- Provide a mosaic of forest conditions dominated by hardwoods and restore dry hardwood forest ecosystems
- Reduce the amount of non-native pine to provide more suitable habitat to a wider array of wildlife species by restoring native hardwood communities

- Reduce the density of trees to improve forest health – making it more resilient to the effects of insects, disease and climate change
- Control the oak wilt and prevent it from spreading
- Utilize the Paoli Experimental Forest for research
- Repair poorly maintained roads, trails and eroded areas to reduce sediment deposition into streams and lakes



One of several culverts that impede passage of organisms and cause erosion that is proposed for replacement.

to advance our understanding and ability to predict outcomes from innovative use, new combinations and novel sequencing of forestry practices

Of the 204,000 acres of National Forest System land comprising the Hoosier, an average of 266 acres, or 0.13%, are actively managed for timber annually. If approved, the intention would be to continue that same pace across the Forest and implement the Buffalo Springs Restoration Project actions incrementally over 10 –15 years, and likely longer for prescribed fire.

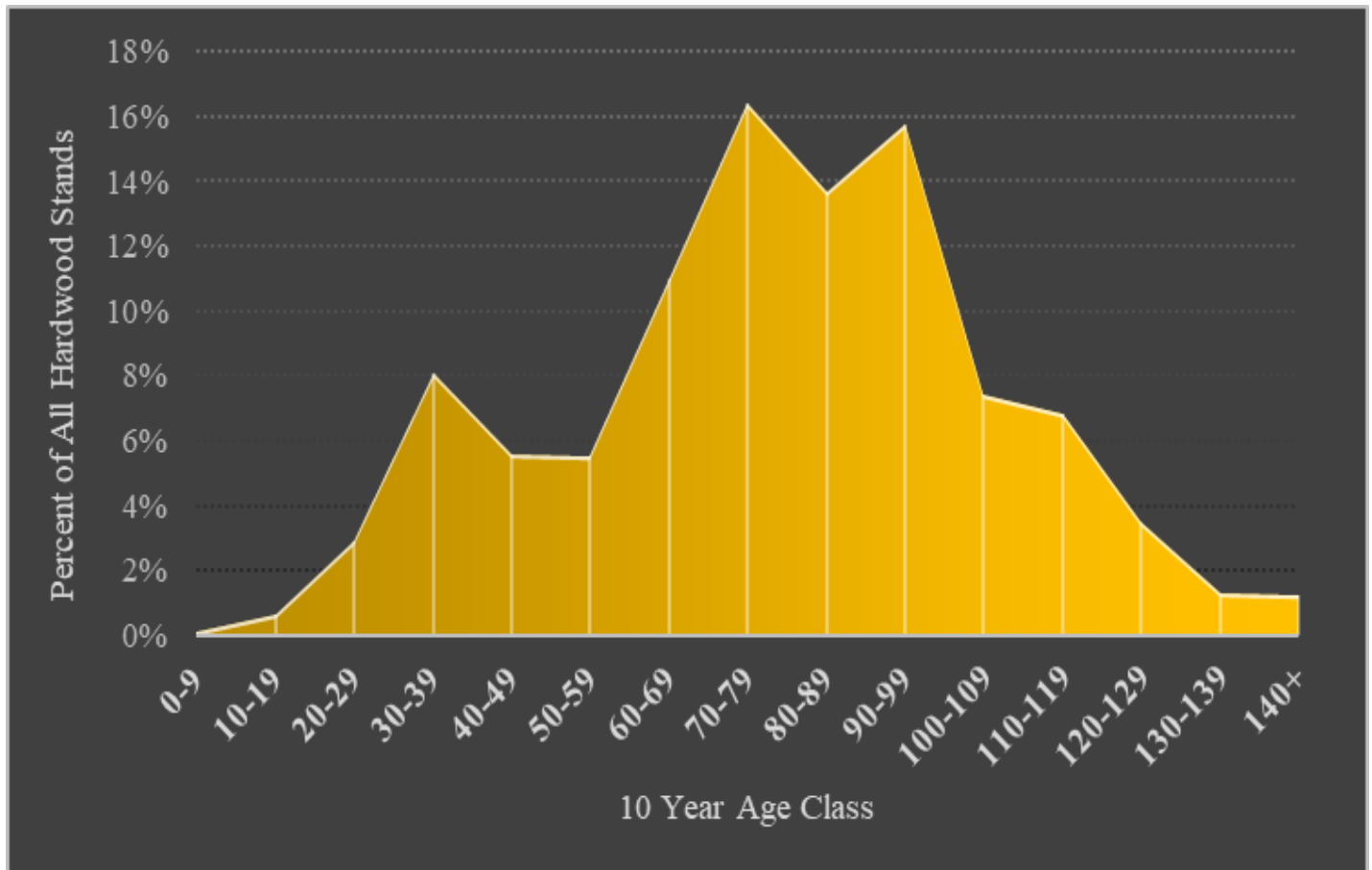


Figure 1. Age class distribution of hardwood stands in inventory area.

A Commitment to Public Involvement

As a federal agency proposing an action to address a need on public land, we are bound by the NEPA process and are following all procedures as mandated by the Act. In fact, we have exceeded the requirements by offering additional opportunities for public input throughout the process. While we asked the public to comment on this project by November 15, 2021 to be most helpful in our analysis, we have stated that we would accept and consider comments received after that date, and are continuing to do so. Please be aware that your comments will not receive an individual response. They will be considered as part of the analysis, become part of the official record and will be addressed in the Environmental Assessment in a section labelled "Response to Comments".

Our efforts to engage our stakeholders have included:

- A newsletter and press release (January, 2021)
- Video presentations (on website) by our resource specialists (February, 2021)
- A public scoping letter (October, 2021)
- Numerous articles in local news outlets and media
- An on-line digital map (March, 2022)
- Four public field tours (April, 2022)
- A virtual public information meeting (April, 2022)
- An on-site visit with interested individuals (July, 2022)

Next Steps

Forest Service staff are currently working on the draft environmental assessment. We expect it to be released for public review in October, 2022. Following the release, there will be a 30 day public comment period.

We are in the process of making the recordings of the field tours and public meeting available on our website. We have initiated a programmatic agreement to consult with interested Native American Tribes.

Thank you again for taking the time to comment on this project and for your interest in your public lands. If you would like further details about the proposal, please see our website at this link:

<https://go.usa.gov/xAn24>



Inventory data shows no stands in the 0–9 year age class, a necessary habitat for many bird species including the prairie warbler (shown), American woodcock, blue-winged warbler, yellow-breasted chat and more.