

Chapter 1- Purpose and Need for Action

Introduction

The Monongahela National Forest is preparing this Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This SDEIS discloses direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. This document is organized into four chapters.

- **Chapter 1- Purpose and Need for Action:** This chapter includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose and need for the project, and the agency’s proposal for achieving that purpose and need.
- **Chapter 2- Alternatives Considered:** This Chapter details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded. It also provides a more detailed description of the agency’s proposed action as well as the alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on issues raised by the public and other agencies. A comparison table of the alternatives is also provided.
- **Chapter 3- Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences:** This Chapter describes the existing conditions and the environmental effects of implementing the proposed actions and other alternatives.
- **Chapter 4- Project Consultation and Coordination:** This chapter provides a list of the Federal, State, and local agencies consulted during the development of the SDEIS.

Project Area Description

The Lower Williams Project Area (LWPA) falls within the confines of Three Forks of the Williams River, Bishop Knob, Donaldson, and Turkey Ridge, with the lower portion of the Williams River traversing through the middle (see attached project area and vicinity maps). The project area consists of 14,397 acres, entirely within Webster County between the mouth of the Williams River and the Three Forks of Williams (see Scoping Maps 1 and 2). Approximately 92% (13,244 acres) of the project area is National Forest Land and the remaining 8% (1,153 acres) of the project area is private land, mostly in Dyer and Mills Mountain. The LWPA is contained within the Williams River 5th Level watershed.

The Proposed Action

The Gauley Ranger District of the MNF proposed to perform vegetation management and wildlife habitat improvement within the project area. To successfully accomplish the vegetation and wildlife activities, associated road activities were proposed during

scoping, as well. The proposed road activities would be necessary to implement the vegetation management and wildlife habitat improvement activities within the LWPA.

Proposed treatments are designed to contribute toward meeting the LW project purpose and needs and the desired conditions for the area as described in the MNF Forest Plan.

Vegetation treatments include:

- Regeneration harvest with residuals on 1,054 acres (32 acres of the total would be helicopter logged).
- 38 acres of shelterwood harvest (2 Harvests w/in 3-7 years).
- Commercial thinning on 750 acres (229 acres would be helicopter logged).
- Manual site preparation on 1,054 acres (regeneration harvest w/ residuals).
- Advance/Pre-harvest grapevine removal on approximately 1,842 acres (includes regeneration, shelterwood, and thinning harvests)
- 10 acres of tree planting and tubing (American chestnut and butternut)

Wildlife habitat treatments include:

- Two savannas constructed & seeding on 75 acres.
- Seeding of landings to create wildlife openings on approximately 20 acres.
- One pond for each savanna (2 ponds).

Road activities:

- An estimated total of 3.26 miles of new road construction would be added to Forest Roads 82C, 82D, 101A-A, 272B, and 735A.
- Approximately 2 miles of road reconstruction on Forest Roads 82A and 101A.

Forest Plan Direction

The Lower Williams project area is in Management Prescription MP 3.0 (p. III 4-8) as described in the Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 2006 (Forest Plan). The area is identified as suitable for timber production. The 2006 Forest Plan (p. III-4) identifies the desired land conditions related to this project:

- age class diversity and sustainable timber production
- habitat for wildlife species tolerant of disturbances, such as deer, grouse, and squirrel

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the Lower Williams project is to implement management direction as outlined in the 2006 MNF Forest Plan by addressing site-specific needs and opportunities where the area's existing condition is different from the desired condition. The MNF Forest Plan divides the forest into Management Prescriptions (MP), each with specific management objectives and associated standards and guidelines.

All of the Forest Service land in the project area is within MP 3.0. For a more detailed description please refer to the Forest Plan, pages III-4 through III-8. All proposed treatments in this project are consistent with the management direction set forth in MP 3.0.

The desired condition of the area is described as “a mosaic of stands of predominantly hardwood trees and associated understories that provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species. The stands vary in size, shape, height, and species....” (2006 MNF Land Resource Management Forest Plan, p. III-6). “Management activities result in relatively high levels of sustainable timber and mast production. . . The area provides a diversity of habitats for wildlife species, a diverse visual landscape, and considerable human activity resulting from a variety of uses.” (2006 MNF Forest Plan, p. III-7)

Young forests, also referred to as early successional forests, and maintained permanent openings provide important habitat components for species such as deer, grouse, turkey, and a variety of non-game birds. The Forest Plan provides for desired vegetation conditions by Forest Community. The Forest Communities that occur within the Lower Williams project area are primarily Mixed Cove Hardwood (10,383 acres), with Northern Hardwoods (1226 acres) and Mixed Oak (2002 acres) also represented. The Forest Plan desired condition is 12% as a minimum percentage of early successional (0-19) age classes for these types, compared to the existing 2% for Mixed Cove Hardwood, 7% for Northern Hardwood and 0% for Mixed Oak in these early successional age classes.

The desired condition for maintained or natural openings is 3-8% of the Prescription area compared to the 1.1% existing openings.

Young forest habitat and permanent openings are lacking in the area and there is a need to create this type of habitat.

Fruits and nuts from trees provide forage for wildlife species and are referred to as mast. These fruits and nuts also provide seed for the maintenance of a diversity of tree and shrub species over time. Many stands within the project area are composed of extremely dense or crowded trees. These conditions result in reduced growth and crown size from water and nutrient competition. Particularly for oak trees in dense stands, but also for other species, mast production can be reduced by density and small crown size. For sustainable mast and seed production, there is a need to provide for density reductions that can increase mast and seed production.

The purpose and need for action in the Lower Williams project is to:

- increase early successional forest habitat and permanent openings within the area to improve habitat for species such as grouse, deer, turkey, and other non-game species;

- reduce the amount of competition between trees for light and water resources in dense, over-crowded stands to provide for sustainable timber and mast production.
- Regenerate shade-intolerant tree species and diversity of forest age classes to improve the long-term sustainability of timber and increase the quality and growth rate of crop trees and mast producing trees.