



File Code: 1950/1950-1
March 6, 2009

Dear Friends and Partners of Midewin:

RE: Request for public comments on a proposal to replace Offner Bridge and Streambank Stabilization.

The U.S. Forest Service at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie (Midewin) proposes to replace the existing bridge and abutments, designated as KC-3, located on Road 1 North near Offner Road on the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie (formerly the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant) in Will County, Illinois and stabilize eroding banks in up to (7) locations along the stream bank within .25 miles of the bridge. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), I am encouraging public comments and input on this proposal. Based on comments received, I will determine if there is a significant impact by conducting the project, and whether to complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Purpose and Need

The stream is currently eroding soil around the bridge abutments and the eroded area is nearing the road, creating an unsafe bridge structure. The need is to have safe bridge structures for public access and administrative use. Additionally managing erosion into surface waters of Midewin will improve water quality and improve aquatic habitat. The purpose of this project is to replace an existing bridge across a tributary to Prairie Creek and stabilize up to seven (7) areas of erosion along the stream banks within a quarter mile of the bridge site.

Existing Condition

The existing concrete bridge is approximately 29 feet in length and is in poor condition, chipped concrete and exposed rebar on the underside of the deck have resulted in a reduction in the load rating to 3 tons. Additionally, scour at the upstream side of the west abutment has eroded behind the existing wing wall, threatening the integrity of the gravel roadbed. This segment of Road 1 North is identified as a long term administrative road in the Midewin Prairie Plan and is necessary to maintain motor vehicle access to the Klingler Cemetery.

Several areas along the stream bank both above and below the bridge, including the west bank immediately under the bridge has eroding soil. The erosion is depositing sedimentation into the stream, which is affecting aquatic habitat. Additionally, the erosion is causing the stream channel to widen, causing damage to the bridge.

The desired condition is to improve watershed conditions by improving water quality, aquatic habitat, and soil conditions necessary to support ecological functions and intended beneficial water uses (Prairie Plan, 2-7). Also, the bridge replacement will provide and maintain a safe,



efficient transportation system across the Prairie that meets resource management and access needs, while minimizing adverse resource impacts (Prairie Plan, 2-11).

Proposed Action

The structure will be replaced by a single-span timber bridge approximately 40 feet in length. The alignment of the new bridge shall remain consistent with the existing road centerline, however the abutment walls below the bridge deck will be aligned to more closely follow the natural centerline of the stream. The bridge shall have a clear roadway width of no less than 14 feet. The increase in length will allow the new concrete abutments to be constructed outside of the existing stream channel, reducing sedimentation during this phase of construction. The old abutments will then be removed and rip-rap will be placed to protect the new abutment from scour. The stream bank located immediately upstream of the west abutment will also be repaired and armored with rip-rap to prevent future erosion. The other six erosional areas will have the existing steep banks pulled back to approximately 3:1 slopes, and then they will be covered in geotextile material and planted with appropriate vegetation.

Public Involvement

With this letter, we are initiating the procedures required of the Forest Service by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). You have been contacted as part of the public involvement process, and your comments will help us determine any unforeseen issues that should be considered.

In accordance with Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215, this information is being made available to the public for a 30-day comment period prior to my decision on whether to proceed with the proposed action. In order to be considered, comments must be substantive, or specific to the actions that are proposed. Please be sure to include your name, address, organization represented, and title. Each individual or representative of a group or organization that submits comments must sign or provide for verification of identity. Please include the title of the document you are commenting on and specific facts and supporting reasons regarding your comments for me to consider.

The opportunity to comment ends 30 calendar days following the date of publication of a legal notice in Joliet Herald News. To be most helpful and ensure your comments are considered, please submit comments within 30-days of publication of the legal notice in the Joliet Herald News.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted. Written comments must be submitted to Acting Prairie Supervisor, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, 30239 South State Route 53, Wilmington, IL, 60481. Hand-delivered comments will be accepted at the address above during regular office hours, from 8 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through

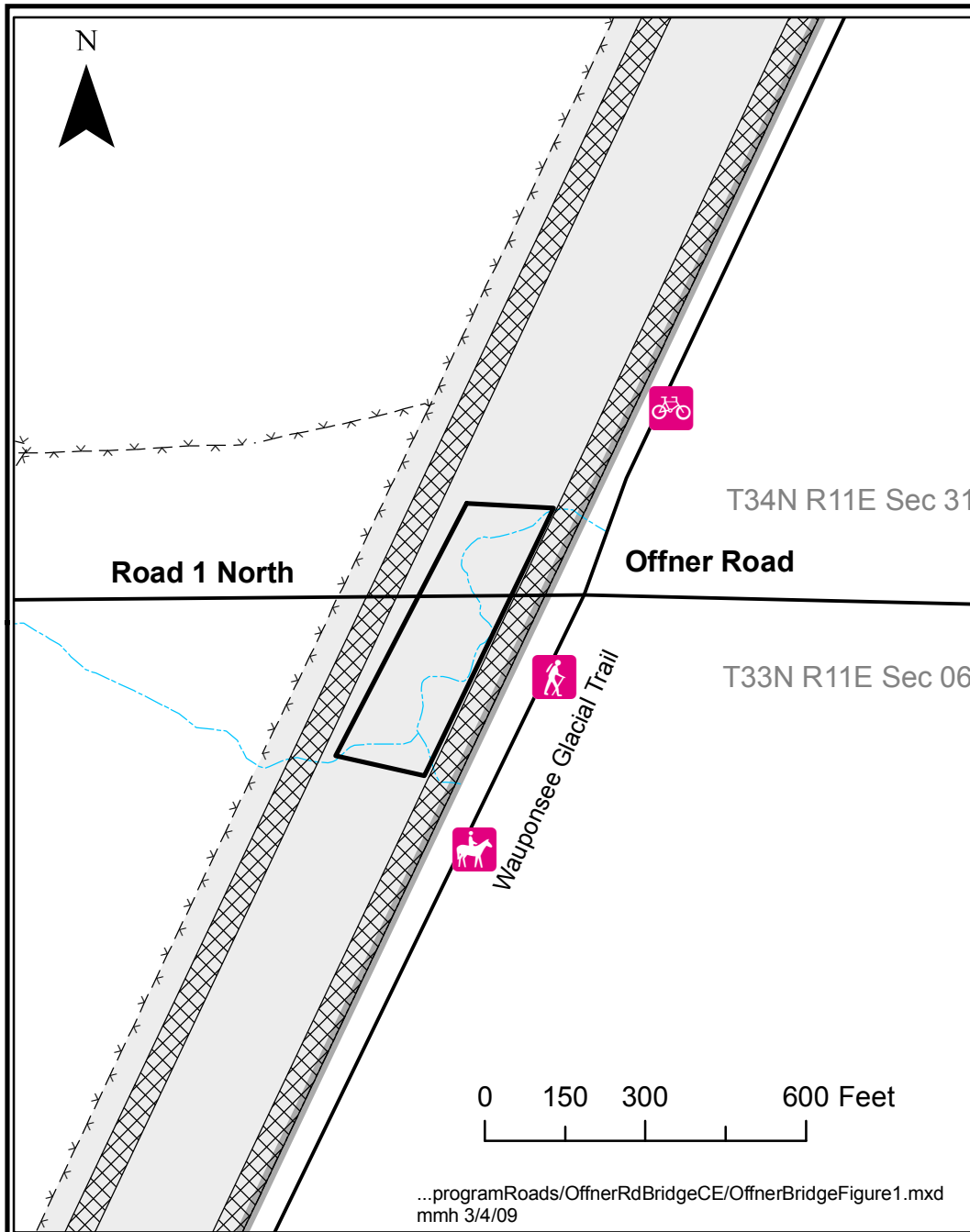
Sunday. Oral comments may be provided at the Midewin Supervisor's Office during normal business hours via telephone (815) 423-6370 or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to comments-eastern-midewin@fs.fed.us.

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Copies of my decision will be mailed to those submitting comments and to those who request copies. If you have any questions about the proposed action or the purpose and need, please feel free to contact Bob Hommes, Project Leader, at the address above, by email at rhomes@fs.fed.us, or by phone at (815) 423-6370. Thank you for your interest in activities at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

Sincerely,

/s/ Wade A. Spang
WADE A. SPANG,
Acting Prairie Supervisor, Midewin
National Tallgrass Prairie



...programRoads/OffnerRdBridgeCE/OffnerBridgeFigure1.mxd
mmh 3/4/09

Offner Road Bridge Replacement And Streambank Stabilization

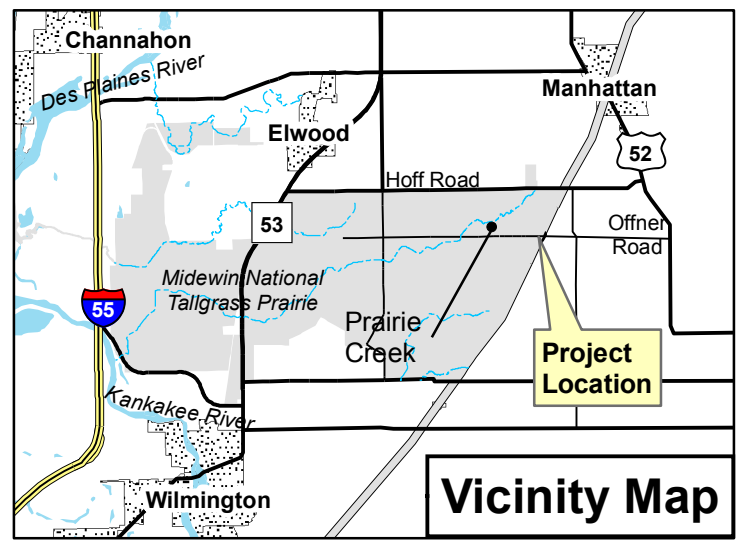
Legend

- Pipeline Right-of-Way (Approximate)
- Utility Right-of-Way
- Approximate Project Boundary
- Midwin NTP Boundary
- Fences
- Roads & Trails
- Streams

**Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie
USDA Forest Service**



*Compiled by the Midwin NTP on 3/4/2009
using the most current GIS data available. GIS
data displayed is intended for this project and
using the data for other purposes may yield
inaccurate or misleading results.*



Vicinity Map