



DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
2013 COOPERATIVE GYPSY MOTH SLOW THE SPREAD PROJECT
USDA FOREST SERVICE
GEORGE WASHINGTON AND JEFFERSON NATIONAL FORESTS
MOUNT ROGERS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA AND EASTERN
DIVIDE RANGER DISTRICT

TREATMENT OF SELECTED NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM LANDS AND
FUNDING OF PRIVATE LAND TREATMENTS ON INTERMIXED LANDS IN
BLAND, GRAYSON, SMYTH, AND TAZEVELL COUNTIES, VIRGINIA

DECISION

Based upon my review of the analysis documented in the environmental assessment (EA) for this project and the 2012 Supplemental Gypsy Moth Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS), it is my decision to implement Alternative 1 which utilizes gypsy moth mating disruption treatments on a total of 9,361 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands. Treatments on NFS lands include 6,216 acres of Wilderness in the Garden Mountain and Hunting Camp Creek Wildernesses. It is also my decision to provide federal financial and technical assistance to the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) to implement Alternative 1 using gypsy moth mating disruption treatments in the treatment of 24,524 acres of intermixed private lands.

Mating disruption to slow the spread of the gypsy moth will be utilized on two treatment blocks involving both NFS and private lands within the geographic areas of the lands administered by the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area and the Eastern Divide Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest (See pages 2 through 6 of the EA for a description of the blocks). Alternative 1 is the modified proposed action in the EA. The total area treated with mating disruptants would be approximately 33,885 acres, of which 24,524 are private lands.

The treatments will be implemented in summer of 2013, most likely in June. The mating disruption treatments will be followed by two years of post-treatment monitoring using pheromone-baited traps to evaluate treatment effectiveness. The treatment design criteria identified on pages 8 and 9 in the EA will be followed to reduce the impact of the selected alternative with regard to the aerial application of the mating disruptants.

DECISION RATIONALE

Pheromone trapping in 2012 indicated that low-density gypsy moth populations are present in the proposed treatment blocks. Without intervention, these low-density pockets of infestation will continue to grow, coalesce and contribute to accelerated spread on adjacent public and private lands.

The proposed treatment sites in Bland, Grayson, Smyth and Tazewell Counties, Virginia addressed in the EA meet USDA Forest Service environmental, biological, and economic criteria for financial assistance. Therefore, I have determined that a Federal role exists and have approved funding.

The 2013 Cooperative Gypsy Moth Slow the Spread Project EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based. The EA is available for review at the Supervisor's Office, 5162 Valleypointe Parkway, Roanoke, VA 24070. The EA is also available at VDACS, Office of Plant and Pest Services, 1580 N. Franklin St, Suite 7, Christiansburg, VA 24073.

I selected Alternative 1 because I believe that it best responds to the management objectives of the Slow the Spread (STS) Project and also provides the best long range protection of wilderness character. Field studies and operational use of mating disruption show that it effectively suppresses mating in low-density gypsy moth populations, and therefore controls populations. Its use has been integral in the STS project. Mating disruption is species specific to gypsy moth with no known effects on other lepidoptera (moth or butterfly) species or any other species. Implementing the treatments as recommended, incorporates the most effective and efficient strategies as they have been developed over time under the STS program. Eliminating treatment in the Wildernesses (Alternatives 2 or 3) would likely create pockets of infestation, which in turn, would expand the leading edge and create an unacceptable rate of spread. Unabated rates of spread are considered an immediate threat of unacceptable damage to resources outside the Wilderness boundaries. Treatment of gypsy moth populations in the Garden Mountain and Hunting Camp Creek Wildernesses is necessary to reduce the immediate threat of the spread of non-native gypsy moth to adjacent public and private lands, including as many as eight additional Wildernesses within ten years. By not treating these areas with mating disruption, there is a strong likelihood that a more intrusive treatment would be needed within a few years at these same locations to control spread. By authorizing a low impact treatment involving mating disruption now, we may avoid future more aggressive STS treatment options in these Wildernesses and slow the spread of the gypsy moth into as many as eight Wildernesses located downrange.

Alternative 2 proposes to avoid treating the 6,216 acres of Wilderness. Mating disruption treatments would occur on a total of 23,596 acres, of which 2,856 acres would be located on NFS lands and 20,740 acres on private lands. The southern boundary of the Garden Mountain treatment block under this alternative would be moved to coincide with the Wilderness boundaries at the crest of Garden Mountain, eliminating the Wilderness and some privately held lands to the south of Garden Mountain. Alternative 2 does not fully follow the treatment recommendations of the STS program. While the treatment as designed under this alternative

does encompass the highest trap catches in this area, they do not include approximately 17 traps that caught ten or more moths. It is likely that male moths would successfully mate and these populations would continue to increase. Ultimately, the spread of the gypsy moth south and west along Garden Mountain would increase and the project would not be expected to succeed. A very similar situation in the area around Kimberling Creek Wilderness (approximately 12-14 miles to the northeast of the Garden Mountain block) occurred in 2003 and serves as a powerful case study. Based on past experience with an infestation in the Kimberling Creek Wilderness, it is highly unlikely that control actions in the Garden Mountain block, taken only outside of the Garden Mountain and Hunting Camp Creek Wildernesses would successfully reduce the population within the Wildernesses. Under Alternative 2, delaying treatment in an attempt to abate the problem by treating only outside of the Wilderness would likely allow the population to increase to the point where other treatment tactics such as *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (*Btk*) must be used for control.

The No Action alternative (Alternative 3) does not implement the STS program at all. Only natural events would control the gypsy moth spread under this alternative. Existing predators, parasites, virus and pathogenic fungus would be biological control factors for gypsy moth. Populations would be expected to increase and spread to uninfested areas and/or add to the size of the infested areas. If only implemented for this year, it is likely that next year several additional treatment areas and/or larger acreages would be proposed for treatment. It is also likely that more treatment blocks would require use of more aggressive treatments, like *Btk*. Further, it is likely that if this alternative would continue to be implemented in the future, the spread rates would quickly climb back up to their historic rates of more than 21 kilometers per year. Alternative 3 would not be expected to succeed in reducing gypsy moth populations or slowing the spread of this insect pest.

Five treatment alternatives were considered and eliminated from detailed study due to public, biological, and/or environmental concerns (page 9 of the EA). They are:

1. **Foregoing Treatment in the Garden Mountain Block entirely.** This alternative was eliminated because foregoing treatment in the entire area would not treat the highest trap catches in the area and would lead to much higher spread rates than are expected under Alternative 2; unacceptably high rates of spread considering the overall objective of STS.
2. **Use of the biological insecticide Gypchek®.** This alternative was eliminated because an alternative gypsy moth specific treatment, which is less expensive and has no production restrictions, will be effective on the low-density populations proposed for treatment.
3. **Use of Predators and Parasites.** This alternative was eliminated because previous studies are not conclusive as to the efficacy of this control technique on low-density populations (USDA, 1995. Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS))
4. **Use of *Btk*.** This alternative was eliminated because *Btk* can have impacts on non-target lepidopterans and because another gypsy moth specific treatment will meet STS project objectives on all of the treatment blocks.
5. **Use of mass trapping.** This alternative was eliminated because the efficacy has not been adequately demonstrated and the cost is high.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Forest Service has worked cooperatively with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). The Forest Service requested comments to help determine the scope of analysis. The Forest Service mailed over 730 brief descriptions of the project on October 31 and November 13, 2012 to interested and affected agencies, organizations, adjacent land owners and individuals and placed a legal notice in the Roanoke Times on December 13, 2011. Both the brief description and legal notice provided a link to a more thorough description of the proposal and maps published on the Forest's website. Comments were received from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Natural Heritage program (DCR), the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), and three private landowners. Comments received are contained in the analysis file at the George Washington/Jefferson National Forests Supervisor's Office.

Based on public comments, past environmental documents for the treatment of gypsy moths using mating disruption, the following Project-Issues were identified:

Project Issues resulting in the formulation of an alternative to the proposed action:

1. The impacts of low flying aircraft and application of inert ingredients associated with the proposed mating disruption treatment could negatively affect the untrammelled, natural, and opportunities for solitude wilderness characters within the Wildernesses.

Project Issues evaluated in the effects analysis, or addressed through mitigation:

2. The application of disparlure and the use of low flying aircraft could negatively affect Threatened/Endangered/Sensitive (T/E/S) species as well as any non-target species within the treated areas.
3. Disparlure could have negative effects on human health.
4. Treatments may, or may not be successful in reducing gypsy moth populations and contributing to slowing the spread of this pest under alternatives to the proposed action.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

Based on the Environmental Assessment (EA), I have determined that the action associated with the slowing the rate of spread of gypsy moth populations on 9,361 acres of National Forest System lands and 24,524 acres of private lands within Bland, Grayson, Smyth and Tazewell Counties, Virginia is not a major federal action significantly affecting the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. This determination was made considering the following factors

CONTEXT

This project will occur within a local context. Local issues were identified through the scoping process and were considered in alternative development and effects analysis. The project area is limited to 9,361 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands and 24,524 acres of intermixed private lands. Project duration is expected to be a few days, depending on weather. Although the project has regional interest, the people most affected by the project will be local residents.

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.** Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action (see pages 11-19 of the EA).
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because based on the available epidemiological studies and the long history of its use, there is no evidence that the application of mating disruptant formulations causes adverse effects to the general public (see page 17 of the EA).
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** There will be both beneficial and adverse impacts to Wilderness character. Adverse impacts will be short term while beneficial impacts are expected to continue for several years (see pages 11-13 of the EA).
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. The best available science was considered in making this decision. The project record demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information, consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk (see EA pages 11-19).
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with similar actions. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA pages 11-19).
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because the proposed control methods are well established and have been utilized frequently in the past (see EA pages 11-19).

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. Past, present or reasonably foreseeable future projects or activities whose effects could combine with the proposed action are limited to a small portion of the Middle Fox Creek Block which was treated two years ago. Combined impacts on water quality and aquatic ecosystems are expected to be immeasurable (see EA page 16).
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because there are is no potential to affect any cultural resources listed or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. No ground disturbing activities will occur.
9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because it was determined that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect any federally listed species and the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this finding (see EA page 10 and the BE/BA).
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA page 4 and Appendix C).

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The selected alternative is consistent with the Forest Plan and NFMA as outlined in the EA on pages three and four. Specifically in regards to wilderness areas, the Forest Plan contains three standards regarding insect and disease control (1A-008, 1A-009, 1A-010, page 3-7). In summary, these standards state that actions to control insects and diseases may be approved by the Regional Forester if there is an immediate threat of unacceptable damage to resources outside the wilderness boundary and that threat cannot reasonable be abated by control actions taken outside the wilderness boundary, or there is an immediate threat of unnatural loss of the wilderness resource due to a non-native insect or disease. Biological control methods are favored. The selected alternative fits these criteria, as discussed in the EA.

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. The EA identified applicable laws and regulations. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

The decision to provide financial and technical assistance to treat 24,524 acres of private lands with gypsy moth mating disruption tactics is not appealable pursuant to 36 CFR 215.

The decision to treat 9,361 acres of NFS lands with gypsy moth mating disruption tactics is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in The Roanoke Times. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. The appeal shall be sent to:

Regular Mail, Private Carrier, or Hand Delivery

USDA Forest Service
EMC, RPC-6th Floor
Attn: Judicial and Administrative Reviews
1601 N. Kent St.
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (202) 205-1449

Appeals may be faxed to (703) 235-0138. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a .doc or .rtf format to appeals-chief@fs.fed.us.

For further information on this decision, contact Project Leader Russ MacFarlane, Supervisor's Office, 5162 Valleypointe Pkwy., Roanoke, VA 24019, or phone (540) 265-5168.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

The decision to provide financial and technical assistance to treatments on private lands may be implemented immediately.

If no appeal is received relating to the decision to treat NFS lands, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition. (36 CFR 215.9).

CONTACT

For more information about this project, please contact Russ MacFarlane, Supervisor's Office, 5162 Valleypointe Pkwy., Roanoke, VA 24019 or Larry Bradfield, VDACS, Office of Plant and Pest Services, 1580 N. Franklin St, Suite 7, Christiansburg, VA 24073.

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Date

Regional Forester, Southern Region

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