

Marion, Metropolis, Murphysboro, Shawneetown, and West Frankfort; and the Southern Illinois University Library, Carbondale. Maps and other information are also available for review on the Shawnee National Forest's Web site: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/shawnee>. Click on "Trail Designation Project" under "Current Management News."

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

##### **Purpose and Need for Action**

The Shawnee National Forest's 1992 Amended Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) anticipated an increasing demand for trails on the Forest. In addition to identifying a potential trail-corridor system, the Forest Plan allowed equestrians the use of then-existing user-developed trails and the freedom to ride cross-country in most areas of the Forest. In the years since publication of the Forest Plan, public demand for trails has grown without any additions to the Forest's designated trail system. The existing designated trail system does not adequately meet the need for public access to many scenic attractions, nor does it provide equestrians a loop-trail experience. Numerous user-developed trails have been formed outside of the designated trail system; but agency policy prevents the Forest from managing these trails with trail-maintenance funds.

The Shawnee National Forest is ready at this time for a decision on the designation of additional system trails in order to provide recreational users a longer, well-marked, well-maintained trail system and to reduce resource damage from non-designated, unmanaged, user-developed trails. Since the majority of equestrian use occurs in four neighboring watersheds that contain many popular attractions—about 30 percent of the Forest—the first phase of trail designation is focused in these watersheds. The Forest Service intends to conduct further analyses in the remainder of the Forest following implementation of the decision that results from this environmental impact statement.

##### **Proposed Action**

The Shawnee National Forest proposes to: (1) Identify a number of miles of trail to add to the Forest's designated trail system within the watersheds of Lusk Creek, Upper Bay Creek, Big Grande Pierre Creek and Eagle Creek, with the additional miles drawn primarily from existing user-developed trails reconstructed and relocated as necessary to avoid resource impacts; (2) construct additional trailheads to provide access to the trail

system; (3) amend the Forest Plan to restrict equestrian use in these four watersheds to system trails and roads; and (4) amend as required the trail-density standards in the Forest Plan.

##### **Possible Alternatives**

Possible alternatives for evaluation in the environmental impact statement include taking no action, designating trails in the four watersheds within the constraints of the Forest Plan's trail-density standards, and designating all trail-routes identified during a series of public workshops on the trails master-planning process.

*Responsible Official:* Allen Nicholas, Forest Supervisor, Shawnee National Forest, 50 Highway 145 South, Harrisburg, IL 62946.

##### **Nature of Decision To Be Made**

The responsible official will decide whether or not to designate more trails on the Shawnee National Forest, whether or not to construct additional trailheads, whether or not to amend the Forest Plan to restrict equestrian use in the four watersheds to designated trails and roads, and whether or not to amend the trail-density standards specified in the Forest Plan.

##### **Scoping Process**

The Shawnee National Forest proposes to scope for information by contacting persons and organizations on the Forest's mailing list and publishing a notice in the newspaper of record. The Forest will accept comments at the above-stated addresses on the scope of the proposed action and alternatives until January 30, 2004.

Two informational public open houses will be held to answer questions regarding the proposed action and to receive scoping comments. The first will be 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday, January 20, 2004 in the Knights of Columbus Hall, 100 Columbus Drive, Marion, Illinois (next to the church on the west side of Russell Street, three blocks south of U.S. Highway 13), and the second will be 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesday, January 21, 2004 in the Commons Area of the Vienna High School, 601 N. 1st Street, Vienna, Illinois (across the street from the Vienna Ranger Station).

##### **Preliminary Issues**

The Forest Service has identified from previous public comments several preliminary issues related to the proposed action: (1) Designation and construction and/or improvement of additional system trails may cause increased erosion and soil compaction and adversely affect water quality; (2) Increasing trail-density standards may

adversely affect wilderness and natural area attributes; (3) Use of additional trails may exceed the physical carrying-capacity of the affected watersheds; and (4) Designation of additional system trails may not provide quality recreational experiences.

##### **Comments Requested**

This notice of intent initiates the scoping process that guides the development of the environmental impact statement. In order to ensure adequate identification and discussion in the environmental impact statement of all relevant issues and alternatives, the Forest Service seeks comments related specifically to the proposed action and alternatives. We are especially interested in information that might identify a specific undesired result of implementing the proposed action. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have the right to appeal subsequent decisions under 36 CFR parts 215 and 217.

Those who comment during the scoping period will be listed to receive a copy of the draft environmental impact statement. In order to conserve resources, the Shawnee National Forest encourages all recipients to view and/or download the draft environmental impact statement from the Shawnee National Forest Web site or accept a copy of the document on a CD. If you are unable to utilize the Web site or a CD, please specify in your comment submittal that you prefer to receive a paper copy of the draft environmental impact statement.

Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any persons may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that under FOIA confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality and, should the request be denied, return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 90 days.