

School House Prescribed Fire Project
USDA Forest Service, Land Between The Lakes NRA
Trigg County, Kentucky
Request for Comment
October 2008

The proposed School House prescribed burn area is located in Trigg County, KY, west of FSR 165, and bordered by FSR 342 (a loop road). See the map below. The project area contains a mix of upland oak hickory forests and open lands (532 acres forest, 46 acres open lands).

Purpose and Need for Action

The focus of this action is to support Land Allocation Prescription 1.A. for General Forest areas, as prescribed in the LRMP. A portion of the open lands portion of this project (8 acres) has already been burned, and this proposed action is in part for continued maintenance of these and the other open lands. Specifically, this proposed action will maintain existing native grasses and forbs within the project area by reducing weedy competition from non-native species such as autumn olive and *Sericea lespedeza*. The fire will reduce woody growth in the open lands and maintain early-successional conditions.

The proposed action will also burn woodland area surrounding the open lands areas. This will create a soft transitional “edge” between the open lands and surrounding forest, as well as eliminate the need for fire line construction by using existing Forest Service roads. The creation of this transition zone will eliminate existing hard edges, and create more habitat diversity, which will in turn support a wider diversity of wildlife, including both forest interior species, mid-successional species, and early successional species. Examples of species for each of these ecosystem types are cerulean warblers, Bewick’s wrens, and Indiana bats, respectively. A soft transition zone also reduces stress on forest interior animals by lowering the risk of predation and parasitism commonly associated with edges.

The fire will reduce plant litter on the ground in both the open lands and forested areas: excessive plant litter has been found to retard the growth of native open lands plants and diminish the quality of habitat for some early- and mid-successional wildlife species. The fire will also reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by reducing fuel loading.

Fire will enhance wildlife viewing adjacent to the road for dispersed recreation by improving habitat for deer and turkeys, and nesting habitat for ground-nesting birds including bobwhite quail, Bachman’s sparrows, and blue-winged warblers in the open lands. Fire will also enhance hunting opportunities by improving habitat for game species such as deer, turkeys, and quail.

This project is instrumental in achieving LRMP Goal 5... *“Use a collaborative approach to maintain and restore: 1) a diversity of plant and animal communities that support viability of associated plants, fish, and wildlife; and, 2) sustainable levels of habitat and wildlife populations to support public demand for wildlife-related recreation”* (LRMP pg. 51-54). It also will support LRMP Goal 7... *“Enhance dispersed recreational and environmental education opportunities throughout the LBL”* (LRMP pg. 55).

This action will also support goals and objectives of the 2007 Open Lands Revised Environmental Assessment (OLEA). These goals and objectives are for the maintenance of early successional habitats and control of non-native invasive and undesirable species. It calls for the

use of prescribed fire as one means of maintenance and for controlling non-native invasive species (OLEA 1.3 and 2.1.2).

This project will help to achieve the following LRMP objectives:

- OBJ5a: In mature oak forests, provide open forest structure on approximately 19,000 acres by the end of the first decade with a long-term objective of 31,000 acres.
- OBJ5b: In mature oak forests, provide woodland structure on approximately 6,000 acres by the end of the first decade with a long-term objective of 30,000 acres.
- OBJ5i: Maintain approximately 10,600 acres in open lands – cultivated and grassland cover types – to support game species, early successional species, and watchable wildlife.
- OBJ5j: Restore and maintain fire regimes and fire return intervals in fire dependent communities by prescribed burning an average of approximately 10,000 acres per year by the end of the first decade, with a long-term objective of 21,000 acres per year on average. Some acres will incur repeat fire application during the planning period.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service is proposing a single prescribed fire of 578 acres in the School House burn area in February-April, 2009. See below for a map of the proposed prescribed burn area. This fire will occur in the transition season (prior to full green up and nesting season) to maintain native grasses, stimulate herbaceous development, and facilitate a significant reduction in the shrub layer in the surrounding woodlands. Hand crews will use drip torches to conduct interior and perimeter ignition. No fire lines will be constructed; instead, existing roads will be used in conjunction with experienced firefighters to manage the fire and the smoke it produces.

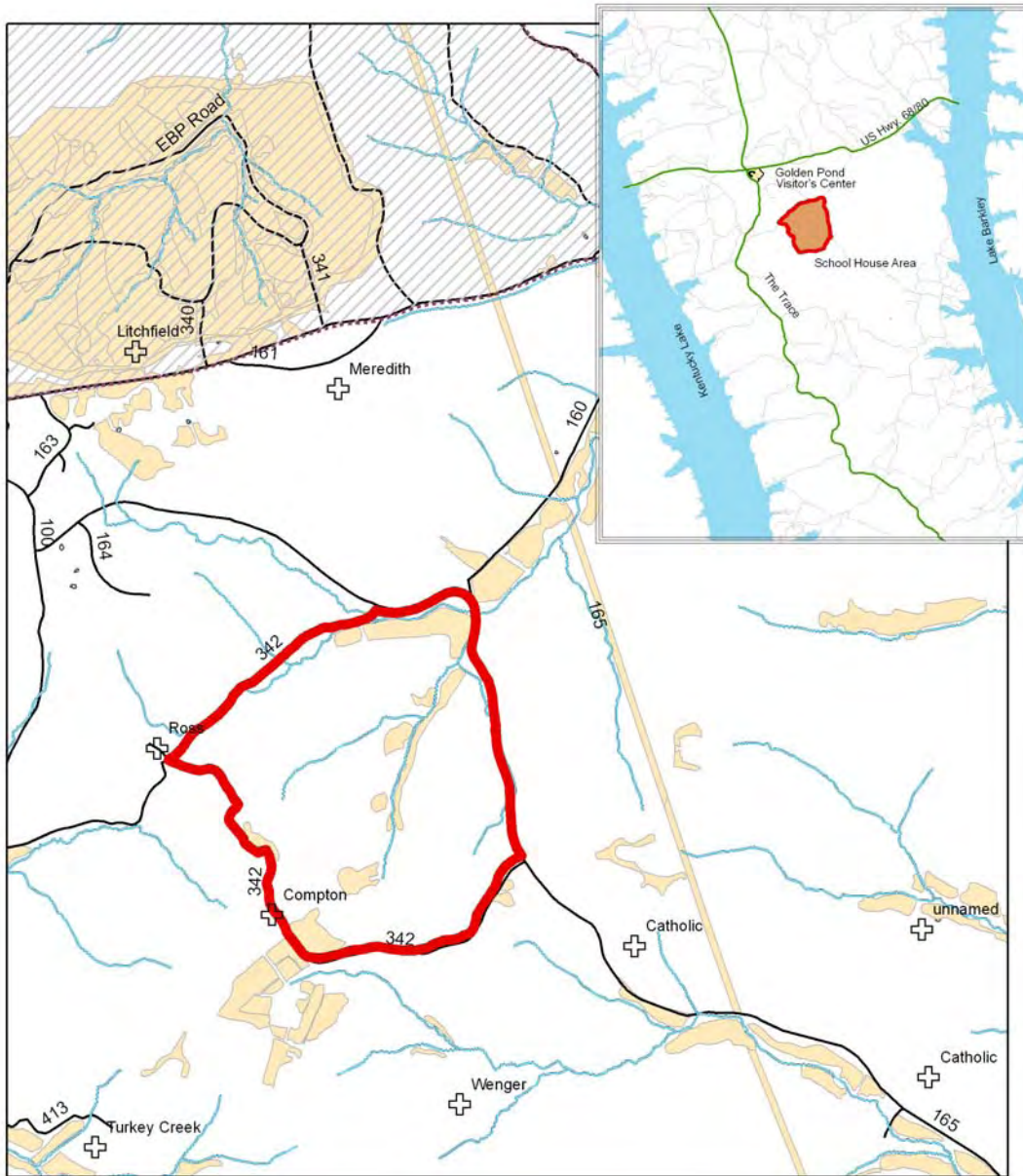
The category of these actions is Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, 31.2 Category Number 6, “Timber Stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.”

How to Comment

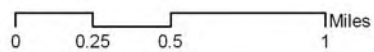
For the School House project, please send comments by e-mail in common digital format to: comments-southern-land-between-lakes@fs.fed.us; please include “School House” in the subject line. You may also send comments by postal mail to: Steve Bloemer, Land Between The Lakes NRA, 100 Van Morgan Drive, Golden Pond, KY 42211; or telephone (270) 924-2069. Comments can be hand delivered to this address between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. To be most useful, your comments must be relevant to the actual project location, supported by any evidence you can provide, and should be received as soon as possible. Only those providing comments or otherwise expressing interest by the close of the comment period will have eligibility for appeal purposes (36 CFR 215.6). In order to have appeal eligibility, each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request; and, **comments must be postmarked or received within 30 days following the date of publication of the Request for Comments Notice in the legal notices of the Paducah Sun.**

Approved by:

/s/ William P. Lisowsky
WILLIAM P. LISOWSKY
Area Supervisor



School House Prescribed Fire Project Area



Legend

- Fire boundary
- Oak Grassland Area
- Open lands
- Road
- Stream
- + Cemetery