

Peck Ranch Conservation Area

Fifteen-Year Area Management Plan FY 2017-2031



Paul Summers

Wildlife Division Chief

2/11/2016

Date

Lisa M. Allen

Forestry Division Chief

2-22-16

Date

Peck Ranch Conservation Area Management Plan Approval Page

PLANNING TEAM

John Ackerson, Fisheries Management Biologist

David Baldrige, Conservation Agent

Skylar Bockman, Education Center Manager

Susan Farrington, Natural History Biologist

Devin Wood, Private Lands Conservationist

Vacant, Resource Scientist

Nick Zaczek, Resource Forester

Ryan Houf, Wildlife Management Biologist

Preston Mabry, Wildlife Biologist

Michael Smith, Construction and Maintenance Superintendent

OZARK REGION

RCT Chair

AJ. Pst 1-26-2016
Signature Date

WILDLIFE DIVISION

Wildlife Management Chief

Joel W. Porath 2/05/2016
Signature Date

OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Peck Ranch Conservation Area, #5203
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1945
- **Acreage:** 23,763 acres
- **County:** Carter, Shannon
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Statement of Primary Purpose:**

A. Strategic Direction

The primary purpose of the Peck Ranch Conservation Area (Peck Ranch) is to maintain, enhance, and restore native plant and animal communities, and to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities for the public. Implementation and oversight of this plan will be carried out by the Peck Ranch Planning Team and Division representatives, who will meet on an annual basis.

B. Desired Future Condition

The desired future condition for the Peck Ranch is high quality natural communities, with a focus on natural resource management that provides opportunities for low impact, diverse public use.

C. Federal Aid Statement

This area, or a portion thereof, was acquired with Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds to restore and manage wildlife, conserve and restore suitable wildlife habitat and provide public access for hunting or other wildlife-oriented recreation.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

I. Special Considerations

A. Priority Areas: Peck Ranch is roughly bisected by the Current River Hills and Eleven Point Hills Conservation Opportunity Areas. It is also considered a priority landscape for the Missouri Forest Action Plan. Peck Ranch is on the southern boundary of the Elk Restoration Zone (Figure 1), which covers portions of Carter, Reynolds and Shannon Counties.

B. Natural Areas: There are four designated Natural Areas on Peck Ranch: Stegall Mountain Natural Area (Igneous glade/woodland/forest/stream landscape), Mule Hollow Natural Area (Dolomite glade/Woodland complex), Golden Seal Natural Area (Mesic Dolomite Forest) and Grassy Pond Natural Area (Sinkhole Pond) (Figure 2). All are outstanding examples of these natural features within the Current River Hills Conservation Opportunity Area.

C. Peck Ranch Wildlife Refuge, Missouri Ozark Forest Ecosystem Project, MidcoPine Restoration Area and other research sites.

The Missouri Ozark Forest Ecosystem Project, or MOFEP, is one of the most comprehensive ecological investigations of forest response ever undertaken in upland oak ecosystems. Initiated in 1991, MOFEP includes coordinated research studies examining even-age, uneven-age and no-harvest forest management effects on vegetation dynamics, down wood, fungi, mast, birds, small mammals, herpetofauna, invertebrates and genetics. Soil, geological landforms, ecological land types and climate at the sites have also been studied. The project is designed to continue through one or more forest rotations for more than 100 years. MOFEP Sites 7 (1,240 acres) and 8 (840 acres) are located in the southwest corner of Peck Ranch; Site 9 (1,140 ac) is located in the northeast corner (Figure 3). These areas will continue to be managed consistent with the MOFEP experimental design and techniques.

Midco Shortleaf Pine Restoration Area is 2,233 acres, located in the south-central portion of Peck Ranch (Figure 3). The purpose of the area is to ensure native Shortleaf Pine and associated communities are retained on suitable sites. There is a research and monitoring study currently associated with this area. This is a management evaluation designed to work within operational plans and adapt to management needs. As such, Forestry, Wildlife and Resource Science Divisions will continue to evaluate the need and direction for any further monitoring or management that is not already consistent with the overall area plan.

Numerous other studies through the Missouri Department of Conservation (the Department) and partner organizations frequently use portions of Peck Ranch for additional research. Research will be conducted, as in the past, by working with area managers and other applicable Department staff to ensure appropriate use and permits are maintained.

D. Elk Restoration Project: In July 2010, the Conservation Commission directed the Department to re-initiate development of elk restoration. A thorough review of the entire state was conducted which included public opinion polls; habitat analysis; and relative distance to populations, row crops and other agriculture. Peck Ranch was identified as the best site for reintroduction of elk into the state. In the spring of 2011 the first group of elk arrived and was released onto the area. Reintroduction efforts continued until the spring of 2013 when the last elk from Kentucky was released. Today, research is still being conducted on the newly established elk herd in cooperation with the University of Missouri.

II. Important Natural Features and Resources

- A. Species of Conservation Concern:** Species of conservation concern are known from this area. Area Managers should consult the Natural Heritage Database annually and review all management activities with the Natural History Biologist.
- B. Caves:** Cave records are kept with the Department's Natural History Biologist. Managers should follow the Cave Management policy found in the Department Resource Policy Manual. All caves on this and other Conservation Areas are closed or restricted to public access. The fungus that causes White-nose Syndrome in bats has been documented in Missouri, resulting in the Department's *White-nose Syndrome Action Plan* that limits public access to protect bats.
- C. Springs:** No survey of the size or location of springs exists; however, several small springs are located throughout Peck Ranch. The most notable spring is Mud Spring, in the Rogers Creek Watershed. While all of these springs are small, their presence is vitally important to the aquatic community of Peck Ranch. They help maintain water flow and constant water temperature to several small drainages.
- D. Other:**
- The Stegall Mountain Natural Area of Peck Ranch features a series of igneous glades that host Missouri species of conservation concern.
 - The central portion of Peck Ranch features high quality dolomite glade and fen complexes. The fen areas are distinguished by shallow soils with groundwater flow forming ooze areas and spring rivulets.
 - Peck Ranch includes almost 7 miles of the headwaters of Rogers Creek (designated as the seventh Missouri natural area in 1971 and since added to the Stegall Mountain Natural Area). This is one of the best examples of a high-quality intact Ozark warm-water headwater stream in the region. There have been four surveys of the fish fauna on Rogers Creek. Twenty-five species of fish are known from the creek.
 - An important feature in the southern portion of Peck Ranch is the Fox Pond shrub swamp. Shrub swamps are characterized by soils that are poorly drained and have surface water present for a significant portion of each year. Soils are usually deep in these areas and often have a mucky character. These areas are quite rare in Missouri, with only a few occurrences known in the Lower Ozark Section.
 - Ecological land types for the conservation area have been delineated in the *Missouri Atlas of Ecoregions* (Nigh & Schroeder, 2002) (Figure 4).

III. Existing Infrastructure

- 5 primitive campgrounds
- 1 25-100-yard shooting range
- 1 3D and static archery range (Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible); shooting tower
- 1 fire tower (Stegall Mountain Fire Tower)
- 3 deer/turkey hunting blinds (ADA accessible)
- 5 parking lots (1 ADA accessible at Headquarters lot)
- 5 privies (3 ADA accessible at Possum Hollow, Little Pine and Pine Loop campgrounds)
- 2 hiking trails
 - 0.5 miles - Viewing deck/Tower Beaver Pond Nature Trail
 - 11 miles - Ozark Trail
- 7 buildings
- 4 pond dams
- 55 miles of roads

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

- A. Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations:** Deed #181 – Designates Department ownership of 19,751 acres at Peck Ranch, except for highway right of way and 1.06 acres deeded to Carter County School District #3. Deed #181F – Describes Department purchase of 355.93 acres from T.J. Moss Tie Company with land access easements. Deed #181S – Describes the Department purchase of 40 acres from William O. and Mary Louise Price and grants them road easement.
- B. Federal Interest:** Uses of land acquired with federal funds may not interfere with the purpose for which it was acquired. Federal funds may also be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.
- C. Easements:** There is a telephone easement, issued Sept. 19, 1979, to the Carter County Telephone Company: In the Peck Ranch Wildlife Area, 6 feet wide, originating at the eastern boundary of Peck Ranch and extending westerly for approximately 6 miles, along and adjacent to the main road, terminating at the Area Headquarters.
- D. Cultural Resources Findings:** Peck Ranch is rich in cultural resources. These include the Mill Creek Schoolhouse site, old iron ore pits, tramways and house sites. Records for cultural resources are kept with the Department Environmental Compliance Specialist. Managers should follow Best Management Practices for

Cultural Resources found in the Department Resource Policy Manual. Cultural surveys are completed prior to any earth moving projects when needed.

E. Endangered Species: Endangered Species are not known from this site, but are found in the surrounding area. Area managers should consult annually with the Natural History Biologist.

F. Boundary Issues: None

G. Other: Special regulations apply to all conservations areas. See Chapter 11 of *The Wildlife Code of Missouri* and MDC online Atlas Database.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Continue to enhance and restore high quality natural communities.
- 2) Prevent the loss of native diversity due to invasive/exotic plant and animal species.
- 3) Successfully maintain habitat that supports elk restoration and sustains associated fish and wildlife species.
- 4) Engage conservation partners who can help achieve terrestrial resource management across a larger contiguous landscape.

Management Objective 1: Maintain and enhance glades and woodland communities to reduce woody species encroachment and increase the species richness and cover of native ground flora, as described in *The Terrestrial Natural Communities of Missouri* (Nelson, 2010).

Strategy 1: Use prescribed fire, altering frequency, season and intensity of burns, based on plant community and wildlife response to fire and historical fire frequencies. (Wildlife/Forestry)

Strategy 2: Use mechanical/chemical means to reduce woody species coverage where necessary. (Wildlife/Forestry)

Strategy 3: Control invasive plants and animals. (Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Evaluate forestry and wildlife research data (MOFEP, Midco Pine Restoration Project, Elk project data including movement, habitat use, etc.) to facilitate land management decisions. (Wildlife/Forestry)

Strategy 5: Conduct forest inventory based on the inventory schedule for woodland communities to evaluate the health of the wooded component. Implement woodland management prescriptions based on the forest inventory and the condition of the woodland natural community (Forestry/Wildlife).

Strategy 6: Meet or exceed best management practices as outlined in the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests* (2014) on all woodland management, with considerations for aesthetics and viewsheds. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Strategy 7: Control and monitor for insect and disease outbreaks that pose a threat to the health and character of woodland communities, or that cause unsafe conditions for public users. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Management Objective 2: Maintain, enhance and restore diverse, well-developed forest communities.

Strategy 1: Maintain forest inventory schedule. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Implement forest management prescriptions based on forest inventory. (Forestry)

Strategy 3: Control exotic plants and animals. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Control and monitor for insect and disease outbreaks that pose a threat to the health and character of forest communities, or that cause unsafe conditions for public users. (Forestry)

Strategy 5: Meet or exceed best management practices as outlined in the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests* (2014) on all forest management, with considerations for aesthetics and viewsheds. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Strategy 6: Evaluate forestry and wildlife research data (e.g., from MOFEP, Midco Pine Restoration Project, and the Department's Elk project data) to facilitate land management decisions. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Management Objective 3: Maintain, enhance, and restore a minimum of 600 acres of grasslands, which include a mix of warm- and cool-season grasses, forbs and small grain.

Strategy 1: Use management tools, such as mechanical, chemical and fire, to clear old fields and/or food plots. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Use management practices that maintain and improve soil quality through the use of cover crops and planned crop rotation.

Strategy 3: Control invasive plants and animals. (Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Evaluate forestry and wildlife research data (movement, habitat use, etc.) to facilitate land management decisions. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 4: Maintain, enhance and restore special natural features, including caves and fens.

Strategy 1: Evaluate woody encroachment and cut and treat invading woody species, as needed, in fens, and at Grassy Pond Natural Area and Fox Shrub Swamp. Implement prescribed fire where possible. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Control invasive plants and animals. (Wildlife)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Reduce sedimentation by protecting and establishing riparian corridors, and repairing and/or redesigning failing stream crossings.
- 2) Maintain and create fishless ponds.

Management Objective 1: Enhance the riparian corridor along Rogers and Mill Creek tributaries, including springs, seeps, fens, and other unique communities associated with bottomland forests. Protect from erosion and irreversible damage. (Fisheries)

Strategy 1: Minimize sedimentation in Rogers Creek and its tributaries resulting from incompatible land management practices and/or road systems by following practices recommended in the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests* (2014). (Fisheries)

Strategy 2: Maintain a riparian corridor with a minimum of 100 feet from the top of the bank on each side for third-order streams and larger (i.e., Rogers and Mill Creeks), as documented in the Department's *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines* (2009). (Fisheries)

Strategy 3: Maintain a riparian corridor with a minimum of 50 feet from the top of the bank on each side for stream orders one and two (i.e., tributaries of Roger and Mill Creek drainages), as documented in *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines* (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2009). (Fisheries)

Management Objective 2: Design and maintain appropriate stream crossings to allow access, while minimizing impact to aquatic communities.

Strategy 1: Evaluate stream crossings, as concerns arise, and apply practices outlined in the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests* (2014). (Fisheries/Design and Development)

Management Objective 3: Maintain and create fishless ponds as habitat for amphibians and reptiles, and as a source of water for other wildlife. (Fisheries)

Strategy 1: Build fishless ponds, where appropriate, in conjunction with future forest management practices, when equipment is on-site by FY21. (Fisheries)

Strategy 2: Control woody vegetation on fishless pond dams. (Fisheries)

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Provide elk viewing opportunities.
- 2) Maintain management goals while meeting public demands.

Management Objective 1: Provide and manage for limited-access recreation, compatible with natural community management and other uses by Special Use Permit. (Wildlife)

Strategy 1: Maintain or improve existing section of Ozark Trail through partnerships. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Maintain statewide hunting and public use regulations for the area outside of the fenced or signed refuge portion and special use regulations inside. (Wildlife/Protection)

Strategy 3: Maintain existing shooting and archery ranges. (Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Maintain existing primitive campground units and restroom facilities. (Wildlife)

Strategy 5: Maintain, improve, or alter existing roads and hiking trails as needed to maintain their usability and to prevent erosion. (Wildlife/Fisheries/Forestry/Design and Development)

Strategy 6: Continue the use of managed hunts as a wildlife population management tool and to provide recreational opportunities. (Wildlife)

Strategy 7: Provide recreational use by hikers, photographers, horseback riders, hunters, bird watchers and other user groups, consistent with the Department's Public Use Policy and *The Wildlife Code of Missouri*. Staff will develop a process to evaluate recreational use, suggest ways to expand those opportunities, identify staffing and budget needs, and provide additional thoughts on how to further connect citizens to their conservation area (Wildlife/Forestry/Fisheries/Outreach and Education)

Management Objective 2: Provide safe elk viewing opportunities while maintaining quality wildlife habitat.

Strategy 1: Evaluate elk research data (movement, habitat use, etc.) to facilitate public use without compromising herd health. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Explore interpretive opportunities such as signage, print materials and radio guided tours. (Wildlife/Forestry/Outreach and Education)

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Maintain roads according to schedule.
- 2) Maintain infrastructure with increased public use.
- 3) Provide accommodations for Department staff, researchers, etc.

Management Objective 1: Coordinate road maintenance to best fit resource management needs, to reduce erosion and accommodate public use.

Strategy 1: Annually prioritize road maintenance.

(Wildlife/Forestry/Fisheries/Design and Development)

Strategy 2: Annually evaluate public access to balance public use and resource needs. (Wildlife/Forestry/Fisheries/Design and Development)

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table:

	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31
Terrestrial Resource Management															
<i>Objective 3: Maintain, Enhance and Restore Open Land</i>															
Strategy 1	X	X													
Strategy 4	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Public Use Management Considerations															
<i>Objective 2: Provide Safe and Meaningful Elk Viewing Opportunities</i>															
Strategy 1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Strategy 2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			

APPENDICES

Area Background:

Peck Ranch Conservation Area is in northwest Carter County and eastern Shannon County, north of Fremont, Missouri. The area consists of 23,763 acres of rugged, forested hills and hollows. Limestone and rhyolite glades provide natural openings among the oak-pine forest that dominates the region. Narrow ridges range from 900 to 1,000 feet in elevation. The area's highest point is Stegall Mountain, 1,348 feet above sea level. Rogers Creek and Mill Creek, which flow into the Current River, meander through the area.

Peck Ranch began as the dream of a wealthy Chicago businessman. After acquiring 19,000 acres along Mill and Rogers creeks, George Peck and other investors established the Mid-Continent Iron Company. Peck's dream included clearcutting Peck Ranch to supply the 100 cords of fuel per day needed to fire the smelter's blast furnaces. He employed 200 families and installed his own teams to haul cordwood. The company town which sprang up around the smelter became known as Midco.

During World War I, the area continued to boom. The U.S. Government spent \$3.5 million to install a wood alcohol distillery at Midco to be used in making ammunition. This period of prosperity was brief. The low-grade iron-ore mill at Midco folded after the end of the war and a flu epidemic ravaged the Ozarks. George Peck returned to Chicago and the workers who remained in the area tried to eke out a living on the abused land.

When prohibition ended, the demand for white oak barrels surged. Griffith Stave Company bought the remaining timber rights on Peck Ranch and revived the area's timber industry. The boom was short-lived, and Peck Ranch was once again for sale.

In 1945, the Department purchased Peck Ranch for wild turkey management. Today, diverse management techniques, including prescribed fire and forest products harvesting methods, are used to maintain and restore the many natural communities on Peck Ranch.

This conservation area was acquired in part through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Acquisition History:

Year	Acres and Funding Source
1945	19,751 acres (Department funds)
1952	3,097 acres Pittman-Robertson funds; Department funds)
1981	180 acres (1/8 of 1% sales tax "Design for Conservation" funds)
1995	160 acres (1/8 of 1% sales tax "Design for Conservation" funds)
2013	715 acres (Department funds)

Current Land/Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	Feet	% of Area
Woodland	16,328		69
Upland Forest	6,509		27
Glade	752		3
Warm Season Grass Fields	122		<1
Old Fields/Upland Fields	41.3		<1
Impounded Water	1.7		<1
Total	23,763		100%
Stream Frontage		70,348	

Public Input Summary:

The draft Peck Ranch Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period April 1–30, 2015. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from 32 respondents (Appendix A). The Peck Ranch Conservation Area Planning Team carefully reviewed and considered these ideas as they finalized this document. A brief summary of public input themes, including how they were incorporated or why they were not, can be found below. Rather than respond to each individual comment, comments are grouped into general themes and are addressed collectively.

Prior to writing this area management plan, the Department received public input (the Peck Ranch Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage) from May 1–31, 2014. During this “idea gathering” stage, the Department received input from 59 respondents (see *Peck Ranch Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage Public Input Summary* at <http://mdc.mo.gov/node/27589>). The area management planning team took comments into consideration as they drafted this 15-year management plan for Peck Ranch Conservation Area. Department responses to comments received during the May 2014 idea gathering stage can be found in the report, *Missouri Department of Conservation Responses to Public Comments – Peck Ranch Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage*. This report is available upon request by contacting Amy Buechler (amy.buechler@mdc.mo.gov).

Department responses to themes and issues identified through Peck Ranch Conservation Area public comment period (April 1-30, 2015)

**Supports elk restoration and current management at Peck Ranch Conservation Area.
Favors limiting the area’s use in order to support elk reintroduction.**

Between 2011 and 2013, the Missouri Department of Conservation brought the first herd of elk into Missouri for reintroduction. The Missouri Department of Conservation and specifically the Peck Ranch Management team has been involved in intensive management efforts including open field restoration, increased woodland habitat work, woodland management and forest

management. Peck Ranch CA is unique in that historically a portion of the conservation area has served as a “refuge” with one entrance, and hunting is limited to managed deer hunts. The Department also took other steps for a successful elk reintroduction by creating an Auto Tour which is designed for public viewing opportunities while also allowing certain areas within the refuge portion to be undisturbed. The Peck Ranch Management team will continue to monitor the elk herd and make science based public use management decisions in the future.

Concerned about whether Peck Ranch CA can support elk dietary needs without infringing on the needs of white-tail deer.

The management team agrees that we should continue to provide optimal forage in our existing open land on Peck Ranch as stated under Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations Objective 1 Strategy 1. Currently our goals include providing high quality forage through open lands (for example, the use of double cropping cool season and warm season forage), woodlands, and forest management. We also conduct managed deer hunts to keep deer numbers balanced. We will continue to monitor our open lands and the elk herd to develop a plan that will support our growing elk population as well as provide forage for our deer and turkey populations.

Suggests adding a stocked fishing lake.

Currently, there are no plans for the development of any new aquatic infrastructure.

Suggests allowing horseback and mountain bike riding on Peck Ranch CA’s 11-mile portion of the Ozark Trail. Groups are willing to help maintain trails.

Peck Ranch consists of 31 miles of maintained roads. These roads can be used for hiking, auto use, bicycles as well as horses to allow for various outdoor experiences. The Ozark Trail goes through the center of Peck Ranch which is considered the core of Missouri’s elk reintroduction efforts. The trail also goes through the Stegall Mountain Natural Area which is a host to several species of conservation concern and is considered one of the highest quality natural communities of the state. Our Department mission is to protect the forest, fish and wildlife of the state of Missouri. Limiting high impact recreational activities in Natural Areas is in accordance with this mission.

Suggests adding a multi-use trail system along refuge fence if the Ozark Trail portion is not an option.

Public Use Management Considerations Objective 1 states: Provide and manage for limited access recreation compatible with natural community management, and other uses. Peck Ranch consists of 31 miles of maintained roads. These roads can be used for hiking, auto use, bicycles as well as horses and allow for various outdoor experiences. Because these activities are allowed in or around Peck Ranch we do not plan on creating an additional trail system that would go around the fenced refuge portion of Peck Ranch. Our Department mission is to protect the forest,

fish and wildlife of the state of Missouri. Limiting high impact recreational activities in Natural Areas is in accordance with this mission.

Supports not allowing horses on the Ozark Trail. Concern with horses damaging trails and spreading invasive species.

While we don't plan on expanding trails within Peck Ranch Conservation Area, Public Use Management Considerations Objective 1 states: Provide and manage for limited access recreation compatible with natural community management, and other uses. Peck Ranch consists of 31 miles of maintained roads. These roads can be used for hiking, auto use, bicycles as well as horses and allow for various outdoor experiences. It is our goal to maintain proper balance for optimal public use and wildlife needs. Our Department Mission is to protect the forest, fish and wildlife of the state of Missouri. Limiting high impact recreational activities in Natural Areas is in accordance with this mission.

Requests that trails be open year-round. Suggests developing a plan that would allow hikers and outdoor enthusiasts an alternate route around the Peck Ranch refuge during seasonal closures.

Currently the Refuge Portion of Peck Ranch is closed during managed deer hunts, firearms deer season as well as a period from April 1 to July 1 for elk herd health prior to and during calving season. We plan on continuing these procedures for the near future. During this time we will allow the public to walk the perimeter fence outside the refuge to connect to the Stegall Mountain portion of the Ozark Trail.

Concern with illegal activities (poaching, dogging deer, etc.) on Peck Ranch CA.

The Missouri Department of Conservation Mission is to protect the forest, fish and wildlife of the state. Protection Division is committed to enforcing the wildlife code on Peck Ranch Conservation Area. If you witness or suspect a wildlife violation, report it to your local conservation agent or call the toll-free number 1-800-392-1111 (Operation Game Thief) which is manned 24 hours a day.

References:

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2009). *Watershed and stream management guidelines for lands and waters managed by Missouri Department of Conservation*. Jefferson City, Missouri: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2014). *Missouri watershed protection practice recommended practices for Missouri forests: 2014 management guidelines for maintaining forested watersheds to protect streams*. Jefferson City, Missouri: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

Nelson, P. (2010). *The terrestrial natural communities of Missouri*. Jefferson City, Missouri: Missouri Natural Areas Committee.

Nigh, T. A., & Schroeder, W. A. (2002). *Atlas of Missouri ecoregions*. Missouri: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Maps:

Figure 1: Elk Restoration Zone

Figure 2: Area Map of Peck Ranch Conservation Area

Figure 3: Research Areas at Peck Ranch Conservation Areas

Figure 4: Ecological Land Types

Figure 5: Forestry Compartment Map

Figure 6: Adjacent Public Lands

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A: Peck Ranch Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Elk Restoration Zone

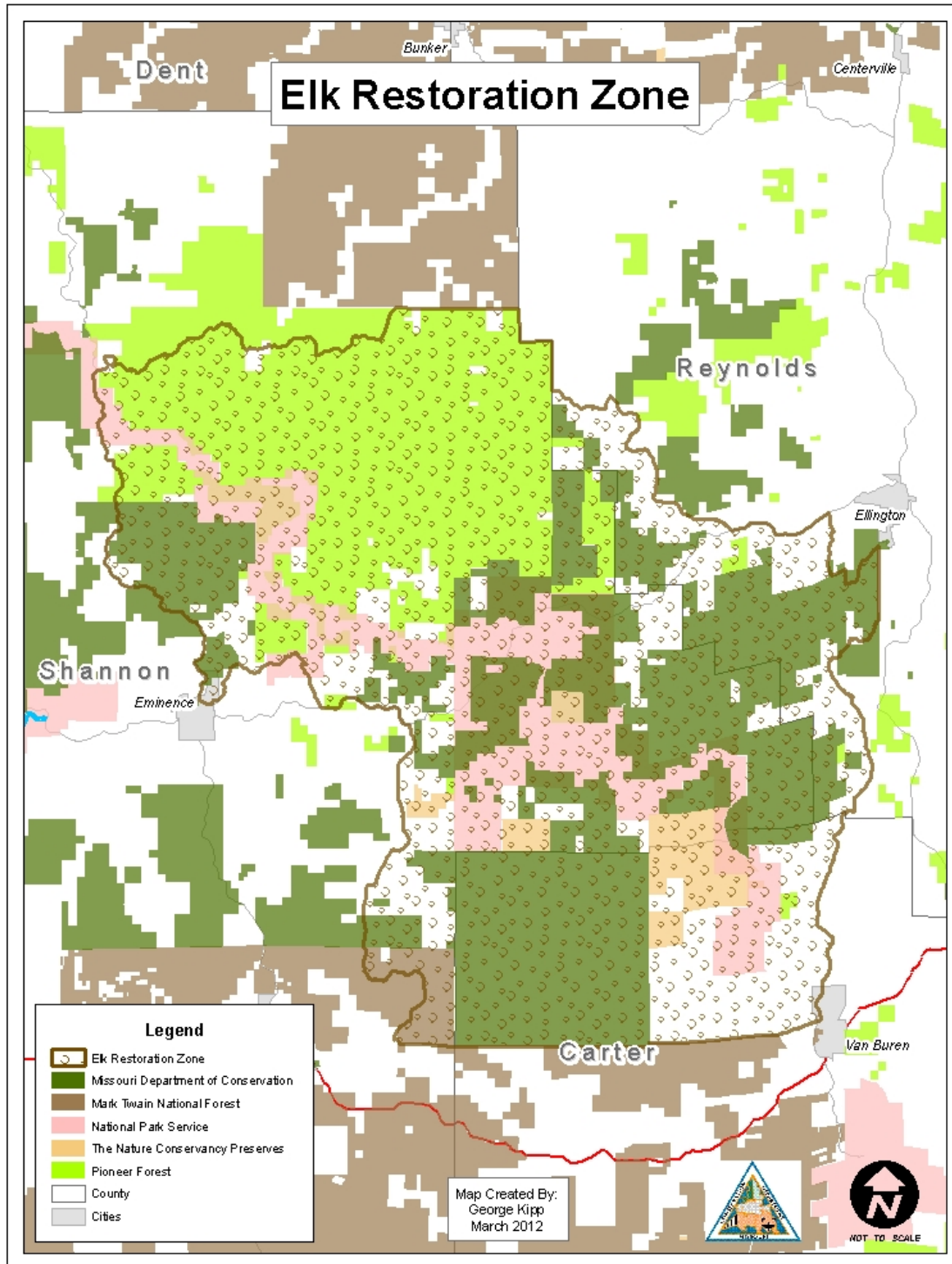


Figure 2: Area Map of Peck Ranch Conservation Area

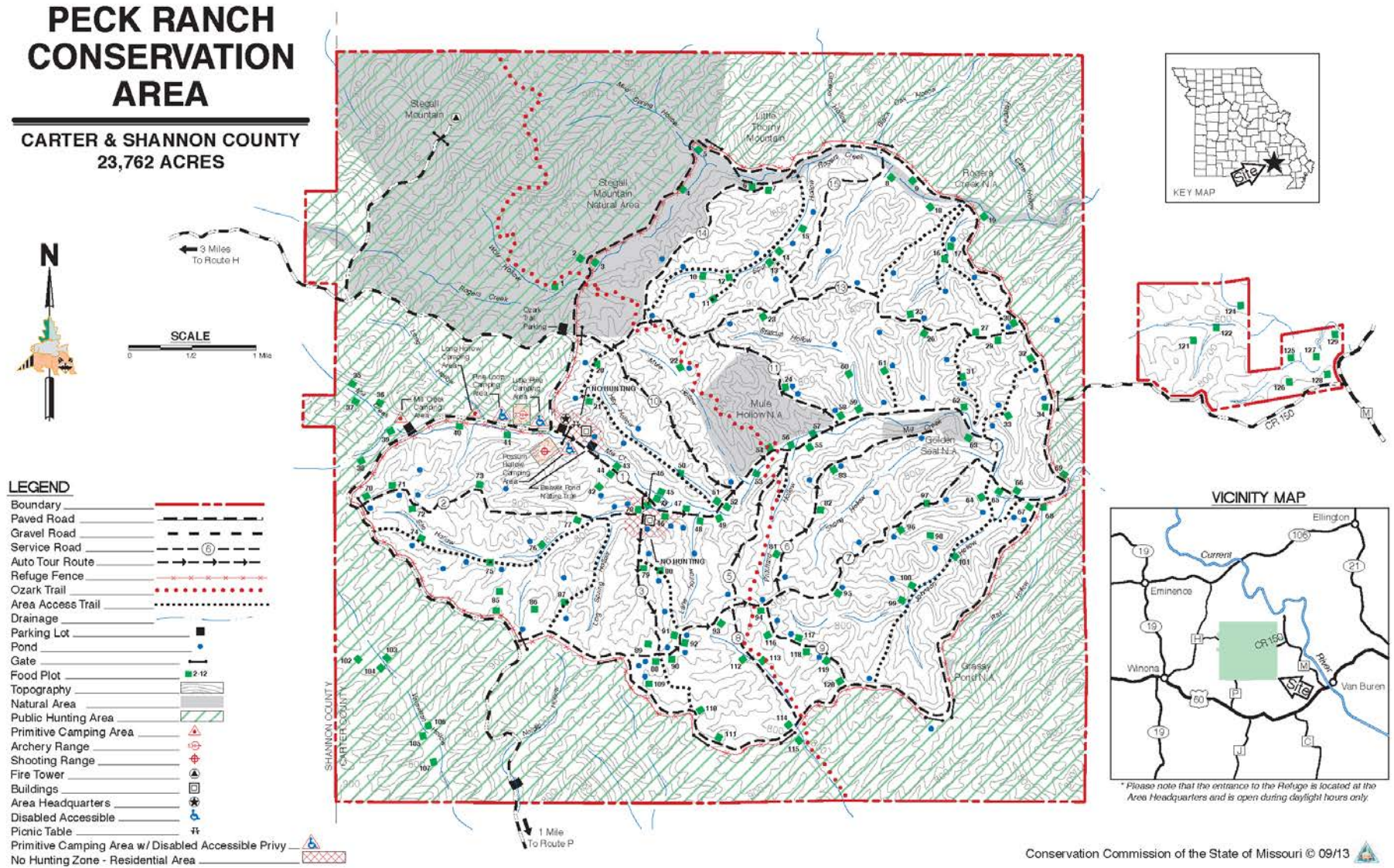


Figure 3: Research Areas at Peck Ranch Conservation Area

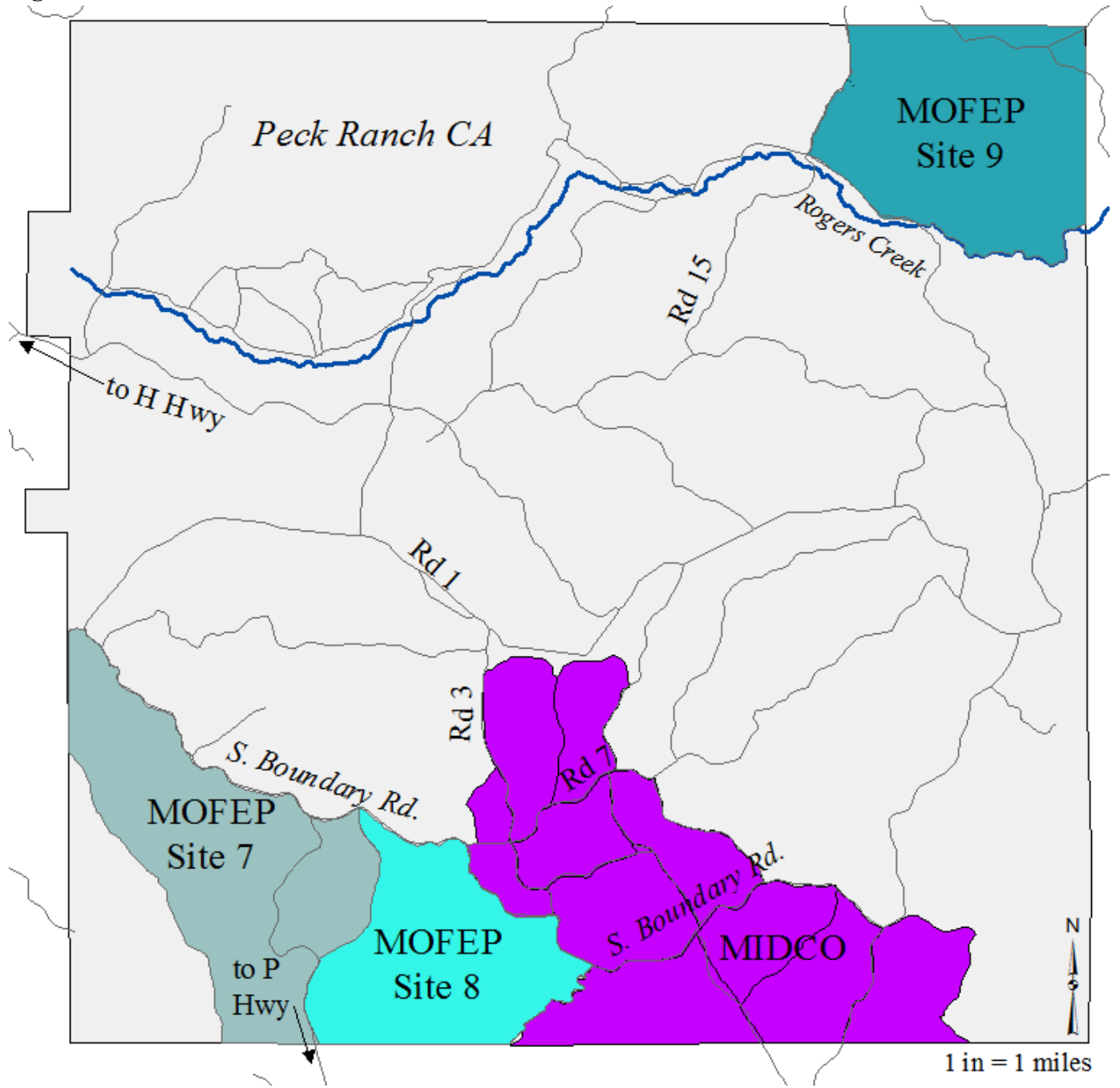


Figure 4: Ecological Land Types

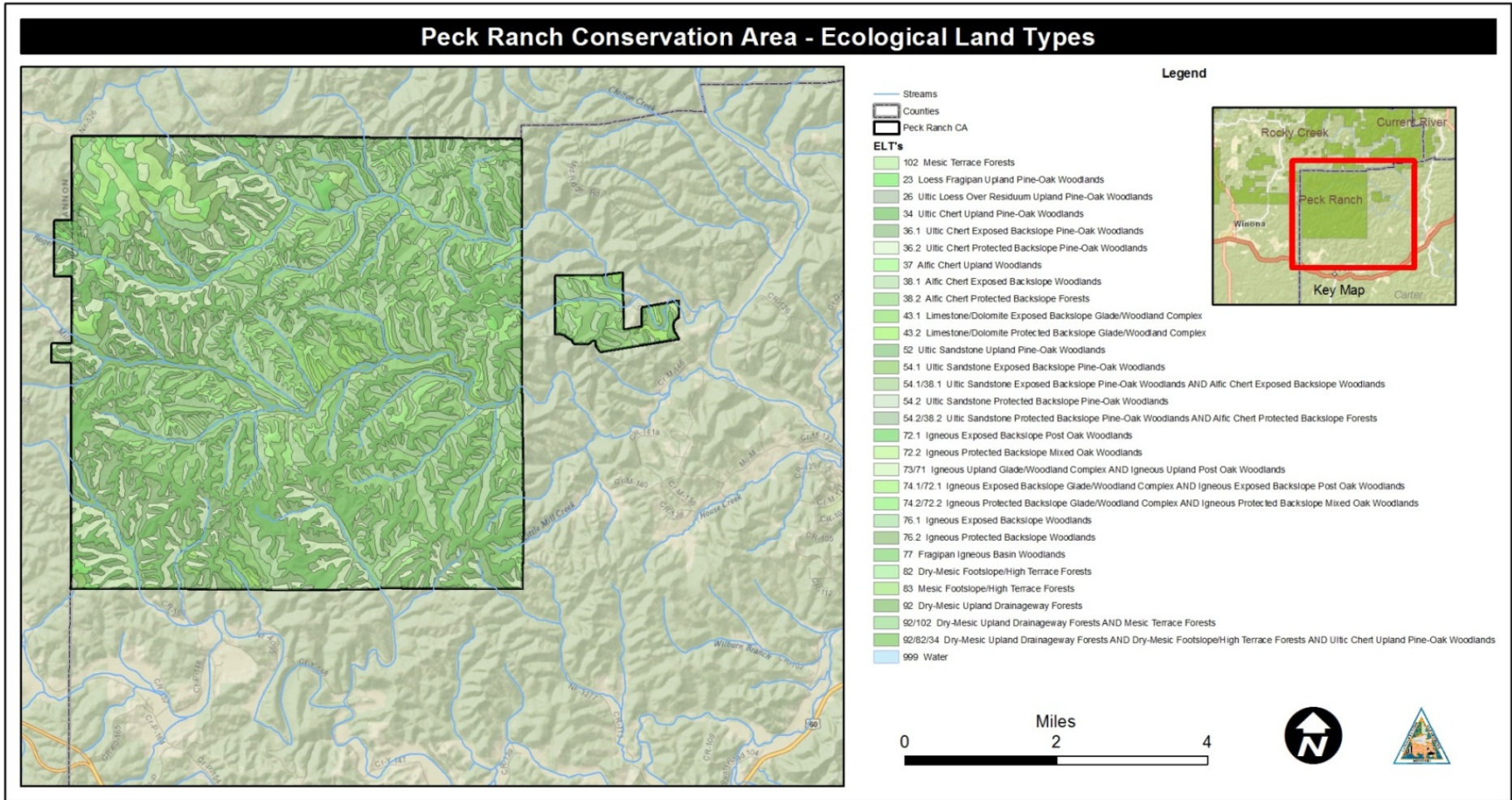


Figure 5: Forestry Compartment Map

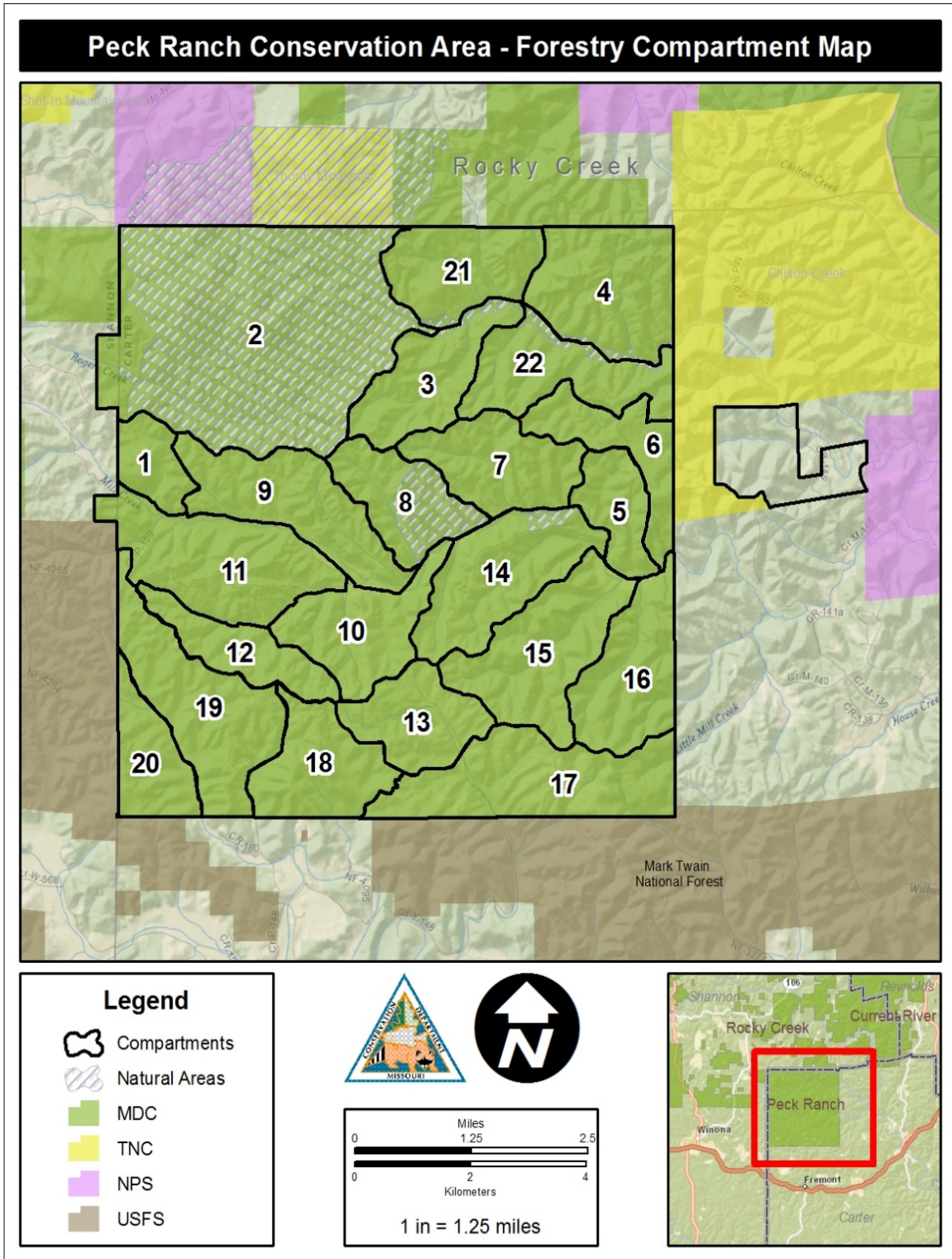
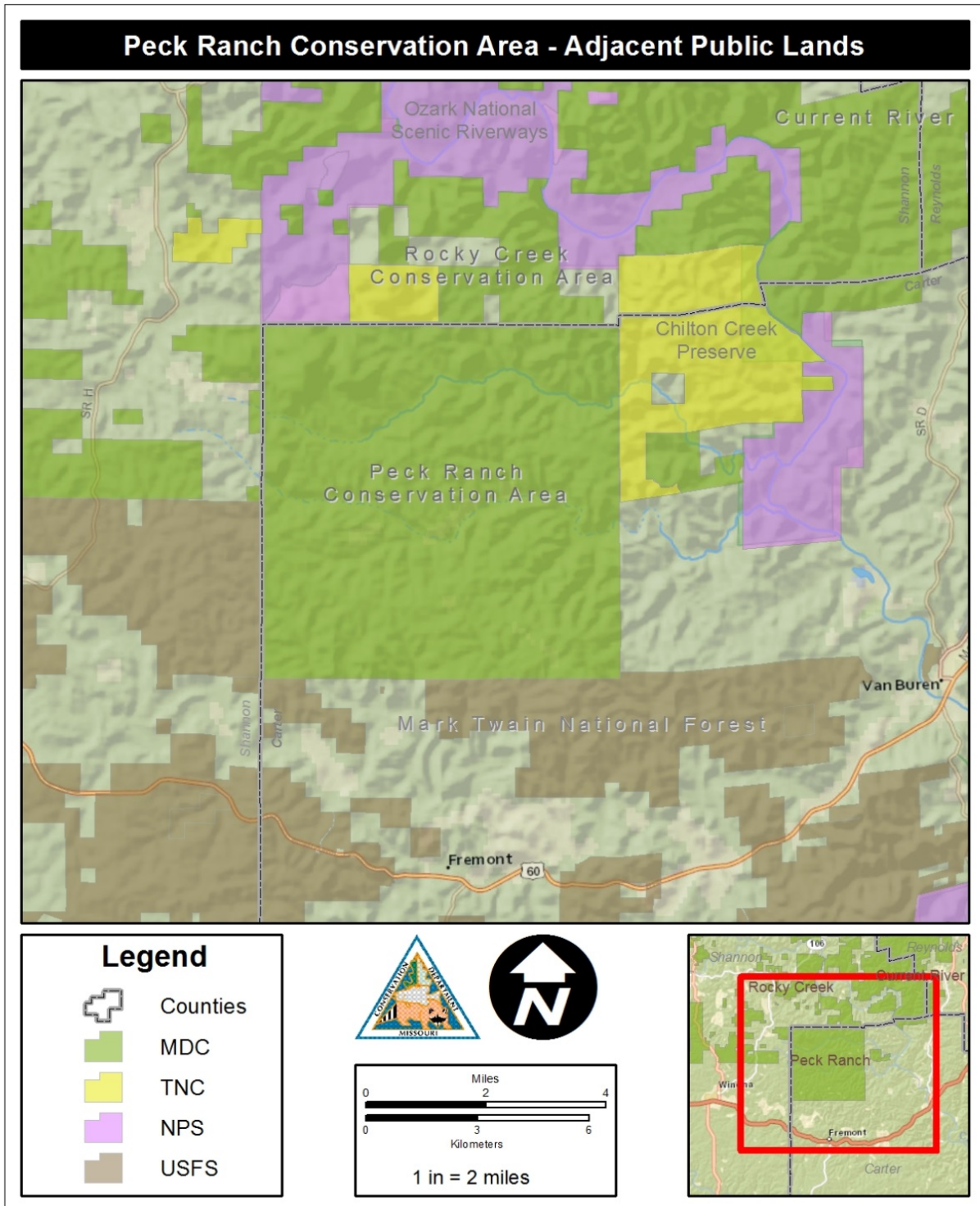


Figure 6: Adjacent Public Lands



Appendix A: Peck Ranch Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (April 1-30, 2015)

missouri can use all the Eco tourism it can get and long range off road trails are the answer to bring economy to small rural towns.

Please keep the horses off the Ozark Trail through Peck Ranch. Horses are hard on the trail and tend to spread invasive plants.

Please keep the trails open to equestrian enthusiasts.

- The Ozark Trail runs across Peck Ranch; permission to ride across Peck Ranch is key to making the OT a long distance trail riding and camping opportunity.
- The Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry Equestrian Trail parallels the Ozark Trail as it crosses the Roger Prior Pioneer Backcountry; this trail represents a hard-fought victory for SMMBCH efforts to make the OT open to equestrian use over its entire length. Without permission to cross Peck Ranch the Roger Prior Trail is effectively the end of the line.
- The chance to view elk in a natural setting is an attraction for many visitors to Peck Ranch. This opportunity should not be denied trail riders; indeed, for many very young, elderly and physically challenged persons horseback is about the only way they can enjoy nature. Public land trails in Western states pass through elk home range with few problems for riders or wildlife.

Thank you.

Please allow mountain biking on the Ozark Trail within the Peck Ranch Conservation Area. Studies have shown that there is no statistically significant difference between the impacts of hikers and mountain bike riders to trail surfaces - Thurston, E. and R. J. Reader (2001). Impacts of experimentally applied mountain biking and hiking on vegetation and soil of a deciduous forest. *Environmental Management* 27(3): 397-409.

Allowing mountain bikers access to this area would allow riders to enjoy a continuous 220+ mile through trail in the same way that hikers currently can. Because they are not motorized, mountain bikes offer a great opportunity to enjoy nature while remaining quiet and non-disturbing of the the surrounding fauna and flora. Many other conservation areas in Missouri allow mountain bike access, such as Walnut Woods, Sugar Creek, Poosey, and University Forest. Mountain bikers are also one of the most active volunteer groups for maintaining trail that they

can use. I think it would be a win-win for mountain bikers to be allowed access to the beautiful Peck Ranch.

I would like to add my vote for mountain bike use on the OT through Peck Ranch. Mountain bike use has had a positive effect on other sections of the OT. Mountain bikers were used directly to help maintain over 100 miles of the trail in a manner never seen before just last year from Highway 72 to Bass River Resort. Areas in Peck Ranch get overgrown from lack of use every year. Allowing the use of MTBs would open up the area to be more easily accessible for all trail users. Please consider allowing mountain biking in this area.

It is my understanding that it is very important to be able to ride through the Peck Ranch which links horseback riding trails together. As an avid trail rider, I do hope you will Draft the Peck Ranch Conservation Area Management Plan. Thank you. You do a wonderful job in maintaining our trails

Please consider allowing mountain bike access thru the area, as requested by Jim Davis of the OTA. We will work with MDOC on alternate access around sensitive areas and also during the Elk mating season.
Thanks!

I would like to see this area open to mountain biking.

Comment mailed to Peck Ranch: I have nothing but praise for the effort's put forth and the personal implementing those plans at the Peck Ranch (PR) Conservation Area. Since 1975 I've owned property (200 hundred acres) on Rogers Creek (RC) less than a mile from the PR boundary. My land now borders for 3/4 mi. the recently acquired MDC land on RC. I also border, on my North side, for 3/4 mi., with the Nature Cons. (TNC). My interest for the Wildlife and Nature of the area in general mirrors both. I'm totally involved with the Elk restoration effort and the Peck Ranch personal. Preston Mabry in particular has been very helpful. This included the planting of grasses and a prescribed burn on our jointed properties. I will be seeking his guidance to insure that what ever I can do , on an onging bases, to benefit the overall Elk project is carried out. All Wildlife benefits from this effort. In so far as suggestions to improving the ongoing work at PR, all I can say, is continue doing the same. The PRCA is a valuable asset to the MDC, the State, and the surrounding area it serves. My hope and suggestion to the State of Missouri is that The PR Conservation Area programs should continue to be supported and funded. Thank You.

I think your draft plan is spot on. It is critical to limit use of this area to enhance the reintroduction elk project.

It would be wonderful to be able to ride bikes via the Ozark Trail through the Peck Ranch Conservation Area. To have the chance to see the elk and other wildlife would be amazing. The goal always is to tread lightly and respect the land.

ON YOUR LAST PAGES IT IS STATED THAT DEPT POLICY IS FOR NO HOUSING TYPE RESIDENCE ON DEPT PROPERTY...I WONDER IF THAT SHOULD BE RECONSIDERED DUE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR ELK RE-INTRODUCTION AS WELL AS THIS MAY REDUCE LIKELIHOOD OF POACHING, DOGGING DEER, AND OTHER ILLEGAL ACTIVITY. PECK IS ONE OF OUR STATES BIGGEST JEWELS. HOPEFULLY YOU HAVE HIDDEN GAME CAMERAS TO THWART THESE ACTIVITIES?

Now is the time for MDC to make good on the words used to bring Elk into Missouri. "Bring Tourist to Peck Ranch" ! With the success of Elk and horse trails in Arkansas and other states. With the help that Show-Me Backcountry Horsemen have in knowledge and man- power. Plus getting grants for parking makes this a great time for MDC to be a state department that keeps its word. The department web page states "drive county roads to see Elk". I know of NO ONE that has got this to work. Ozark trail people & SMMBHC people will work together for the best trail and/or trails across the Peck Ranch if MDC will let them.

You 're doing great! The area is a wonderful example of what conservation, re-establishment and reintroduction of native flora and fauna is all about.

Please don't ban mountain bikes from this portion of the Ozark Trail. Mountain bikers create and maintain the best trails in the state. Bicycle toting volunteers love maintaining there favorite trails and the ozark trail is no different. You will lose valuable resources if this portion of the trail is closed to bicycles.

Plus riding on the ozark trail is a lot of fun and great exercise!

Sincerely,

I understand there are areas on the Ozark Trail that are not good for a horse trail, however, I would like to see a horse trail be routed around these areas. I feel the more horse trails that we can have the more the horse traffic will be spread out so that the trails are not abused and over used.

To whom it may concern - I would like to see a viable bicycle connection for the Ozark Trail. If the Conservation Area road system is available to bicycles, Is there an option to connect the northern and southern connections to the OT? Currently, Peck Ranch sits in the middle of a

potential contiguous backcountry bicycle route on the Ozark Trail from the Meremac River to the Eleven Point River. Due to the recent changes by the NPS to the ONSR management plan, the opportunity (...with cooperation from MDC and LAD) will soon be available for the Ozark Trail to offer a thru bicycle route, which when complete can provide over 220 mile point to point backcountry route .

If a connection for the OT through Peck is not an option, is it possible to create a trail system along the perimeter fence using MDC property. Without first hand on the ground knowledge I imagine an opportunity to allow for a trail along the fence with zero to extremely minimal impact the the Elk program as well as other MDC programs or sensitive areas.

Thanks for your consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Peck Ranch Conservation Area Management Plan. Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen strongly encourages the Department to permit multi-use, including equestrian, of the 11 mile section of the Ozark Trail that crosses the area. We respectfully contend that the reasons for not doing so, as stated in the draft plan, do not adequately justify the decision to restrict biking and horseback riding to public roads.

It may be true that horseback riding is not allowed on portions of the Ozark Trail immediately adjacent to Peck Ranch at the present time. That does not negate the value to the equestrian community of the opportunity to ride on Peck Ranch. Indeed, considered entirely as a stand-alone trail, the 11 miles of trail crossing the CA represent a high-quality riding and biking opportunity. It is the goal of SMMBCH to secure permission to ride the entire Ozark Trail providing a long-distance trail riding and camping opportunity unique to the Midwest; toward that end we have already had productive, positive conversations with managers of the land adjacent to Peck Ranch that are crossed by the OT. We recognize that in some places, for numerous reasons, it is prudent to establish a parallel trail to avoid sensitive features, resource degradation, unsafe trail sections, and trail maintenance problems. Recent completion of the equestrian trail across the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry shows how cooperation between landowners/managers and trail users can implement a solution that accommodates everyone. The Department has the opportunity to continue setting a positive example of cooperation on Peck Ranch.

One such example of a place where deviation from the Ozark Trail would be wise exists where the OT goes up and over the east part of Stegall Mountain; it would appear that going around the east side of the mountain would be a better location for an equestrian trail. Due consideration of the impact of a trail on sensitive portions of designated natural areas would allow key trail segments to be located in a way that did not diminish the integrity of the natural area.

The draft plan states that the 31 miles of public roads provide ample horseback riding and mountain biking opportunity. Public roads do not provide for a quality outdoor experience and are no substitute for decent trails. A review of the equestrian usage of public lands where riding is restricted to public roads, such as Indian Trail CA in Dent County, will show that riders simply won't bother. No trail rider is going to load his horse on a trailer, drive some distance on public roads and ride on public roads in a conservation area where setting foot off the road surface is prohibited. Not only is riding on public roads unattractive as recreation for both bikers and equestrians, it also poses a safety hazard for everyone including vehicles; the hilly and curvy roads found in most CAs, including Peck, make it especially so. A key point of trail riding and biking is to get off the roads. Restricting equestrian and bike use to public roads is little different, from a quality of experience standpoint, than complete prohibition.

The Department's gathering of public input prior to elk reintroduction showed common public support of this effort and a desire to be able to view elk in natural habitat. This support and desire is represented in the equestrian community. Many trail riders are unable to access backcountry areas on foot because of age and other disabilities; their horses give them the only opportunity for a regular, quality outdoor experience. Permitting equestrian use of trails on Peck Ranch would, in fact, constitute accommodation of disabilities to give a substantial public segment the opportunity to view the elk. As for conflicts between trail users and wildlife, I'm sure there are many urban legends and horror stories, but thousands of horseback riders ride through elk country in the west with very little or no issues for either the riders or the elk. I, myself, have ridden past a large herd of elk in Wyoming and consider it a highlight of over 50 years of riding. Experience in nearby states, for example Arkansas, demonstrates that horse/elk conflicts are extremely rare.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment, and thank you for appropriate consideration of our recommendations.

I would ask that you support efforts to work with Show Me MO Back Country Horsemen, the state representative of the national Backcountry Horsemen of America, to develop equestrian usage through Peck Ranch similar to what is currently being done in the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry just north of Peck Ranch. Equestrian trails parallel to the OT have been developed as well as two trailhead parking areas. Careful attention has been made to protect all natural and cultural resources. Other usage within the Roger Pryor are not being infringed upon. Trails are being maintained by equestrians which includes trash removal and communication is positive with land managers.

I would also ask that Peck Ranch trails remain open throughout the year. I understand the elk restoration is necessary, however the elk should not be being disturbed on the OT or on any of

<p>the gravel roads through Peck Ranch.</p>
<p>SMMBCH is making a serious effort to make the Ozark Trail open to equestrian use over its entire length. Being able to cross the Peck Ranch would certainly make for easier and full use of the OT.</p>
<p>Peck Ranch is one of the Crown Jewels so to speak of the MDC system. The right to ride a horse across Peck Ranch is currently denied to us. The Ozark Trail across Peck Ranch needs to be opened to equestrians. Where the trail crosses sensitive ecological areas that section could be rerouted for horses. MDC does not have a very good reputation for being sensitive to the needs of equestrians. This is your chance to change that perception.</p>
<p>My family and I really enjoy visiting Peck Ranch. We enjoy driving the food plot areas and the elk tour route. I also use the firearm and archery shooting range. I love seeing reptiles and we visit Steagal Mountain, especially in the hopes of seeing collared lizards. I would love it if MDC would put in a fishing lake. It would be wonderful to have a stocked MDC lake in the Eminence/Winona area.</p>
<p>I am interested as a person who loves to trail ride to express my opinion on making trails available for those who love to ride horses at Peck ranch. It is a beautiful area and so many beautiful places to see that can only be done on horseback . I am hoping that in the near future that this will be possible . Thanks you</p>
<p>Peck Ranch is key for equestrians to be able use the entire Ozark Trail it would be shameful if we were left out.</p> <p>I was raised in that area and horses and equestrian activities have always been a big boost to the area economy.</p> <p>We are the trail state and the trails should be equestrian friendly. Thanks for the chance to comment.</p>
<p>Thank you for considering the public's interest and needs as pertaining to Peck Ranch CA. I would like to experience the beauty and unique features of this area but being a senior can best do this by horseback. I am unable to hike long distances but am able to enjoy and maintain a healthy life through the activity of horseback riding. Peck Ranch has natural areas but also having the history of being an old ranch, can support equestrian presence without damage to resources. If the area can support elk without resource damage, horseback riding would be easily managed. The opportunity to view elk would be a great experience and with the proven history of horses and elk co-existence in the western states, there is precedent of few problems.</p>

A long distance packing and equestrian experience is something that has been long needed in our state. With the existence of the Ozark Trail and parallel equestrian trail through Roger Pryor Backcountry, this long distance trail can become a reality and a great tourism opportunity for Missouri. Without access through Peck Ranch CA, it is blocked. All other public land managers, both state and federal, are supportive of this long distance multiuse trail. Horseback access through Peck Ranch needs to be a safe and experience worthy of the area - not county roads.

I am requesting and asking as a Missouri citizen for your Department to open Peck Ranch CA as multiuse allowing equestrians. Maintaining any trails would be of interest to those organizations whose mission is to promote and protect trails. The OTA and Show-Me MO Back Country Horsemen would be good organizations to partner with to help maintain and protect the trails.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Peck Ranch CA.

Thank you for the opportunity to express myself on the planning for this important piece of public lands in Missouri. It is important that horse riding across Peck Ranch be permitted as it is key to making the Ozark Trail a long distance trail riding and camping opportunity. This would result in making the Ozark Trail open for an extended length, thus enhancing the riding experience on the Roger Pryor Back Country Trail. Additionally, I hope that it will be possible to reroute from the OT, where needed to keep the trail sustainable and safe for horse riding. I would love the opportunity to see elk in a natural setting, and riding would be my only way to view them. Please consider that I spend a large amount of money to support my horses and riding--feed, vets, property, truck, trailers, fuel, tack, insurance, tires, and on and on, much of which is returned to MDC to support these public lands. I deserve the opportunity to use the public lands in a manner that is environmentally friendly. My chosen method is on a horse. Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment.

My wife and I are avid outdoors people and also long distance hikers. We've recently had to cancel a long distance hike on the Ozark trail due to Peck Ranch closure from April-July. The dates of these closures encumber usage of the Ozark Trail during a prime season to be outdoors. The management plan states "... and to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities for the public." Closures of the ranch conflict with this but I do understand this closure is due to the elk calving season and is necessary.

I would like to see the Peck Ranch Management team work with the Ozark Trail Association to develop a plan that would allow hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts an alternate route around the ranch during closures. Whether this is merely allowing users to road walk through the ranch or to develop an alternate trail that can be used.

Peck Ranch is of particular interest to me because of the Ozark Trail connections. To elaborate:

1. The Ozark Trail runs across Peck Ranch, and permission to ride across Peck Ranch is key to making the OT a long distance trail riding and camping opportunity.
2. Without permission to cross Peck Ranch, the Roger Prior Trail is effectively the end of the line.
3. The chance to view elk in a natural setting in Missouri from horseback would be appealing to many people.
4. The OT route through Peck Ranch is not always user friendly for equestrians, in these cases I would recommend that an alternate section be established.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft plan.

Having a "through" option for human powered off road bicycles is vital to creating a complete Ozark Trail. I've been riding off road for nearly 30 years and believe the limited number of mountain bikes that would travel in this remote area if accessible, would have little to no impact. The image mountain bikes have had with the MDC has long, long ago vanished and needs to be rethought. A simple evaluation of other highly used sections of the Ozark Trail would reveal the positive impact mtbs have on tread quality, often repairing damage done by hikers and equestrians, also the large percentage of volunteer work done by mtbers. There is no other method of experiencing the beautiful outdoors Missouri has to offer that can compare to a mountain bike because of its ability to quietly take the user on longer adventures with almost no impact on the land, its wildlife or other users.

I applaud the conservation exercised in this plan and believe some sacrifice is necessary to keep the amazing features the Ozark region hides from all but those willing to blaze the path less traveled.

After many years of admiring from afar, this plan for Peck Ranch would be heaven sent for horsemen (and women) from not only the state of Missouri, but from ALL Over the USA... This would be an important trail link to other very popular areas , and a junction in which to camp and ride while traveling across the state, and beyond.

I am glad to that that you are considering adding Equestrian Trails to the Peck Ranch portion of the Ozark Trail. The OT has the potential to become a national level equine destination for people to discover the back country of the Ozarks. My understanding is that there are portions of the OT through the Peck Ranch that are not suitable for Equine use, and new trails bypassing

those areas would need to be made. You can count on Missouri horse and mule riders to help with that task. Another public benefit from equine use in the Peck Ranch area is to help monitor poaching and other illegal activities, as well as for search and rescue needs. We come to that area to ride on the OT several times a year, and have brought people from Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, and Wisconsin with us. They were all impressed by the area. Adding Peck Ranch to the Equine use list would help make it a legendary trail.. Thank You

i think it is great to have the elk back in mo. my concern i have is, will our system support there diet and not take away from the white tail deer. i'm sure you will have a season on them if they get too large. also, i own some land off 49 and county road 118. i hope that the elk will be able to expand over time and even inhabit my property. i know i won't see it in my lifetime, but my children are talking about it and are hoping that someday they will be able to hunt elk on our property along with deer and other wildlife they now hunt. keep up the good work.