FOREST SERVICE PROJECT TO IMPROVE FOREST HEALTH BY TREATING POPULATIONS OF GYPSY MOTHS

NELSONVILLE, Ohio (January 6, 2016) – The Wayne National Forest Athens Ranger District is seeking public comments on a Gypsy Moth Slow the Spread project proposal that takes a pre-emptive approach to tackling gypsy moths, before they threaten local forests.

The proposal allows the treatment of gypsy moths on the Athens Unit (portions of Athens, Hocking, Morgan, Perry, and Vinton Counties) in 2016 and in future years. The treatment products would be limited to mating disruption pheromone or Gypchek. Both of the products are specific to gypsy moths and do not impact other species. Mating disruption pheromone is a synthetic formulation of the pheromone naturally produced by the female gypsy moth. By saturating the area with the pheromone, reproduction of the moths is eliminated or drastically reduced because the males cannot find the females. Gypchek is made from a naturally-occurring virus that is specific to gypsy moths. It is applied to eliminate the gypsy moth caterpillars.

The proposal has the following restrictions:
- *Bacillus thuringiensis var kurstaki* (Btk) is not included in the proposal. If its use was warranted by high trap catches in the future, a separate analysis project would be initiated for just that treatment proposal. There would be opportunities for public input at that time.
- The Research Natural Area (RNA) Buffalo Beats is not included in this project.
- Non-forested areas would be excluded from Gypchek treatments.
- Treatments on private lands are not included in this project. Any proposed treatments on private lands are under the jurisdiction of the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA).

If approved, the ODA, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service Forest Health Protection Program, would conduct the aerial treatments during the spring and summer months. To date, there has not been any large scale defoliation events observed on the WNF. Support for this type of activity can be found in the 2006 WNF Land and Resource Management Plan.

The gypsy moth is a non-native, invasive species that has been advancing into Ohio from Pennsylvania and Michigan over the past decade. In its caterpillar stage, it feeds on the leaves of over 300 different tree and shrub species and is especially fond of oak. A healthy tree can usually withstand only two years of defoliation before it is permanently damaged or dies.
To date, 51 of Ohio’s 88 counties have established gypsy moth populations.

Public comments can be made to Rachel Orwan at Wayne National Forest, 13700 U.S. Hwy 33, Nelsonville, Ohio by January 13th, 2016, specifically stating that they are in reference to the scoping period for the 2016 Gypsy Moth Slow the Spread Project. Comments should directly relate the proposed action to a resource impact. Include your name, current physical mailing address, phone number and signature or other verification of identity with your comments.

All comments received will be considered, but to be most helpful should be received by January 13th for the initial scoping period, or during the 30-day comment period, which will be announced as the environmental analysis is completed (likely the end of January).

You may also call to discuss this project at (740) 753-0101 during normal business hours (M-F, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) or submit comments electronically to: comments-eastern-wayne-athens@fs.fed.us

Information about this and other projects being developed and analyzed can be found online at the Wayne National Forest website at http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/wayne/landmanagement/projects. For more information, visit our website at http://www.fs.usda.gov/wayne. Follow us on Twitter: @waynenationalfs and on Facebook.

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