

Fourche Creek Conservation Area

Ten Year Area Management Plan FY 2015-2024



Joel M. Allen

Forestry Division Chief

5-26-15

Date

Fourche Creek Conservation Area Management Plan Approval Page

PLANNING TEAM

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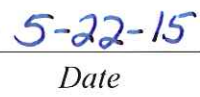

Signature


Date

FORESTRY DIVISION

Unit Chief


Signature


Date

OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Fourche Creek Conservation Area, #6519
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1965
- **Acreage:** 3,768 acres
- **County:** Ripley
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Forestry
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Forestry, Design and Development
- **Statements of Purpose:**

A. Strategic Direction

Manage for multiple uses with emphasis on providing diverse wildlife habitats, maintaining a contiguous cover of healthy forests and woodlands, and protecting the Fourche Creek watershed.

B. Desired Future Condition

The desired future condition of Fourche Creek Conservation Area (CA) is a diverse contiguous forest/woodland landscape that provides appropriate wildlife habitat and supports outdoor recreational opportunities for the public.

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: A portion of Fourche Creek CA is within a priority forest landscape. A portion of the area is also within the Eleven Point Hills Conservation Opportunity Area. Some of the strategies for the Conservation Opportunity Area are:

- 1) Restore shortleaf pine woodlands, areas of concentrated glades and other natural communities.
- 2) Restore riparian natural communities, including giant cane stands.
- 3) Control problematic invasive plants and animals.

B. Natural Areas: None

C. Other: Since 2005, a Management and Evaluation project was conducted at Fourche Creek CA with collaboration between the Forestry and Resource Science divisions. Since the inception of the project, periodic prescribed burns have been conducted during the fall and spring project sites, at the Area Manager's discretion.

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:** Yes, records kept with the Missouri Department of Conservation (the Department) 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:** There are nine small springs known in the area.
- D. **Other:** Fourche Creek CA has high quality dolomite glade and dry chert woodland natural communities.

III. Existing Infrastructure

- Approximately 7.25 miles of gravel roads
- 18 wildlife watering holes

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

- A. **Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations:** The University of Missouri maintains a half interest in oil, gas, and mineral rights on the portions of the property bought with Pittman-Robertson funds.
- 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:** Public road easements are on Missouri Highways 142 and P and on two county roads. Ozark Border Electric Co-Op has several power line easements across the property.
- D. **Cultural Resources Findings:** Yes, records kept with the Department Environmental Compliance Specialist. Managers should follow Best Management Practices for Cultural Resources found in the Department Resource Policy Manual.
- E. **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** None observed.
- F. **Endangered Species:** None observed.
- G. **Boundary Issues:** Establishing accurate and identifiable boundary markers is a priority for this property.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Improving and restoring forest/woodland habitat. Increasing tree mortality due to natural aging and weather events.
- 2) Conducting prescribed burns safely, despite an abundance of combustible materials (“fuel load”) from dead trees.
- 3) Monitoring and eradicating invasive exotic plant and animal species.

Management Objective 1: Maintain, enhance and restore forest/woodland natural communities.

Strategy 1: Inventory compartments according to schedule. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Implement management recommendations, as outlined in approved inventory. These may include non-commercial thinning (timber stand improvement), commercial harvests and prescribed burning. (Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Maintain biodiversity.

Strategy 1: Conduct prescribed burns to manage for open woodland/glade natural communities. (Forestry).

Strategy 2: Survey for high priority exotic species (e.g., spotted knapweed, Japanese stiltgrass and feral hogs). Eradicate and/or control these species as possible utilizing chemical and mechanical methods. (Forestry and Wildlife)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Reducing sedimentation by protecting and establishing riparian corridors.
- 2) Repairing and/or redesigning failing stream crossings in order to maintain and enhance water quality within Fourche Creek watershed.

Management Objective 1: Protect and enhance the riparian corridor and erosion within Fourche Creek watershed, including springs, seeps and other unique communities associated with bottomland forest.

Strategy 1: Minimize sedimentation within Fourche Creek watershed from land management practices and/or road systems which will affect biodiversity of unique habitats by following the practices recommended in the Department’s *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines* (2009). (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Maintain a riparian corridor with a minimum of 50 feet from the top of the bank on each side of stream orders one and two, as recommended in the Department's *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines* (2009). (Forestry)

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 *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines* (2009). (Fisheries, Design and Development)

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Monitoring special hunting regulations to provide a quality hunting experience for the public.
- 2) Maintaining a safety zone surrounding school and residences.

Management Objective 1: Evaluate bucks-only special hunting regulation and change, if appropriate.

Strategy 1: Propose regulation changes as needed. (Protection, Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Maintain safety zone around school and residences.

Strategy 1: Maintain archery-only deer hunting in Compartment 7, Gatewood School Tract (Figure 4). (Protection, Forestry)

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) The area has inholdings, partial inholdings and an outlying tract, which creates management challenges and opportunities.
- 2) There are two areas that may produce boundary disputes because of field encroachment on Department property. Property lines were re-marked in Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 and are scheduled to be done again in FY2019.

Management Objective 1: Resolve boundary line disputes, if and when they arise.

Strategy 1: Request surveys to determine boundary locations. (Forestry)

Lands Proposed for Acquisition or Disposal:

When available, inholdings may be considered for acquisition from willing sellers. Tracts that improve area access, provide public use opportunities, contain unique natural communities and/or species of conservation concern, or meet other Department priorities, as identified in the annual Department land acquisition priorities may be considered. (Forestry)

The Compartment 6 portion of the area may be considered for disposal in order to facilitate management. (Forestry)

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table:

	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Terrestrial Resource Management										
Objective 1										
Strategy 1	X			X			X	X		
Strategy 2			X			X			X	
Objective 2										
Strategy 1		X			X			X		

APPENDICES

Area Background:

Most of the acreage at Fourche Creek CA is land that was given to the University of Missouri from the federal government under the Morrill Act of 1862. This law established land grant colleges and gave them land to sell to generate money to support themselves. During its century of ownership, the University paid little attention to the property, other than selling a site on Compartment 7 for the Gatewood School. Many local residents used the property by cutting timber, grazing livestock and farming. As many as 17 squatters lived on it at one time, the last of whom moved away in the 1990s. In the words of one man raised in the area, “many families made it through the Depression on the Agriculture land.”

The portions of the area obtained from private landowners had more timber harvests and conversion to fields. An area plan from 1983 (Missouri Department of Conservation) estimated that as much as half of that land was in old fields when bought by the Department.

Early management by the Department consisted of planting pine trees in some of the fields and converting stands of low-quality hardwood to pine. There were some timber sales in the 1980s and each of the eight compartments has had a timber sale since 1990. Twenty-seven small food plots and numerous wildlife watering holes were established by the 1980s. Maintenance of the food plots was discontinued in 1990.

The entire area has been under fire protection since 1963. No major wildfires have burned on the area.

Current Land and Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	% of Area
Upland Forest/Woodland	3,661	97
Old Fields/Upland Fields	43	1
Bottomland/Riparian Forest	41	1
Glade	13	<1
Warm-Season Grass Fields	10	<1
Total	3,768	100

Public Input Summary:

The draft Fourche Creek Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period January 1–31, 2015. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from four respondents (Appendix A). The Fourche Creek 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.

Department responses to themes and issues identified through Fourche Creek Conservation Area public comment period

Opposes bicycle use, kayaking and rafting on conservation areas.

There are no bicycle trails on Fourche Creek CA and none are planned. There is not a sufficient water resource on the Area to provide opportunities for kayaking or rafting.

Suggests adding a multi-use trail (for bicycling/hiking/horseback riding) and parking lots.

The area planning team considered the suggestion of developing a multi-use trail that would allow equestrian use. There are currently three multi-use trails in the vicinity maintained by the US Forest Service. In addition to these trails, there are multiple equestrian trails in the Eminence District maintained by the Department and the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

The establishment of a multi-use trail would increase area maintenance and enforcement requirements such as erosion control, litter patrols, unauthorized trail use and the potential spread and/or introduction of invasive plant species. Given that there are currently many other public multi-use trails allowing equestrian use in the vicinity, the planning team does not recommend developing an equestrian trail on Fourche Creek CA.

Concern with too many deer eating neighbors' gardens near Fourche Creek CA.

The planning team sympathizes with our neighbors experiencing this problem. The team will recommend that deer hunting regulations for the Area be changed from antlered only hunting to state wide regulations. Allowing does to be harvested may alleviate this problem.

Recommends statewide hunting regulations (instead of antlered deer-only regulations) at Fourche Creek CA.

The planning team agrees with this comment. The team will implement management objective 1 of the Public Use portion of the plan to recommend changing to state wide hunting regulations, with the exception of maintaining archery only hunting on Compartment 7.

References:

Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri. (2005). *Eleven Point Conservation Opportunity Area*. Website accessed 01-09-13
<http://mdc.mo.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2010/10/18001.pdf>.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (1983). *Fourche Creek Conservation Area plan*.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2003). *Fourche Creek Conservation Area plan*.

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

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2011). Decision Support Tool.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2012). Heritage database.

Maps:

Figure 1: Area Map

Figure 2: Aerial Map

Figure 3: Topographic Map

Figure 4: Compartment Map

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A: Fourche Creek Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Area Map

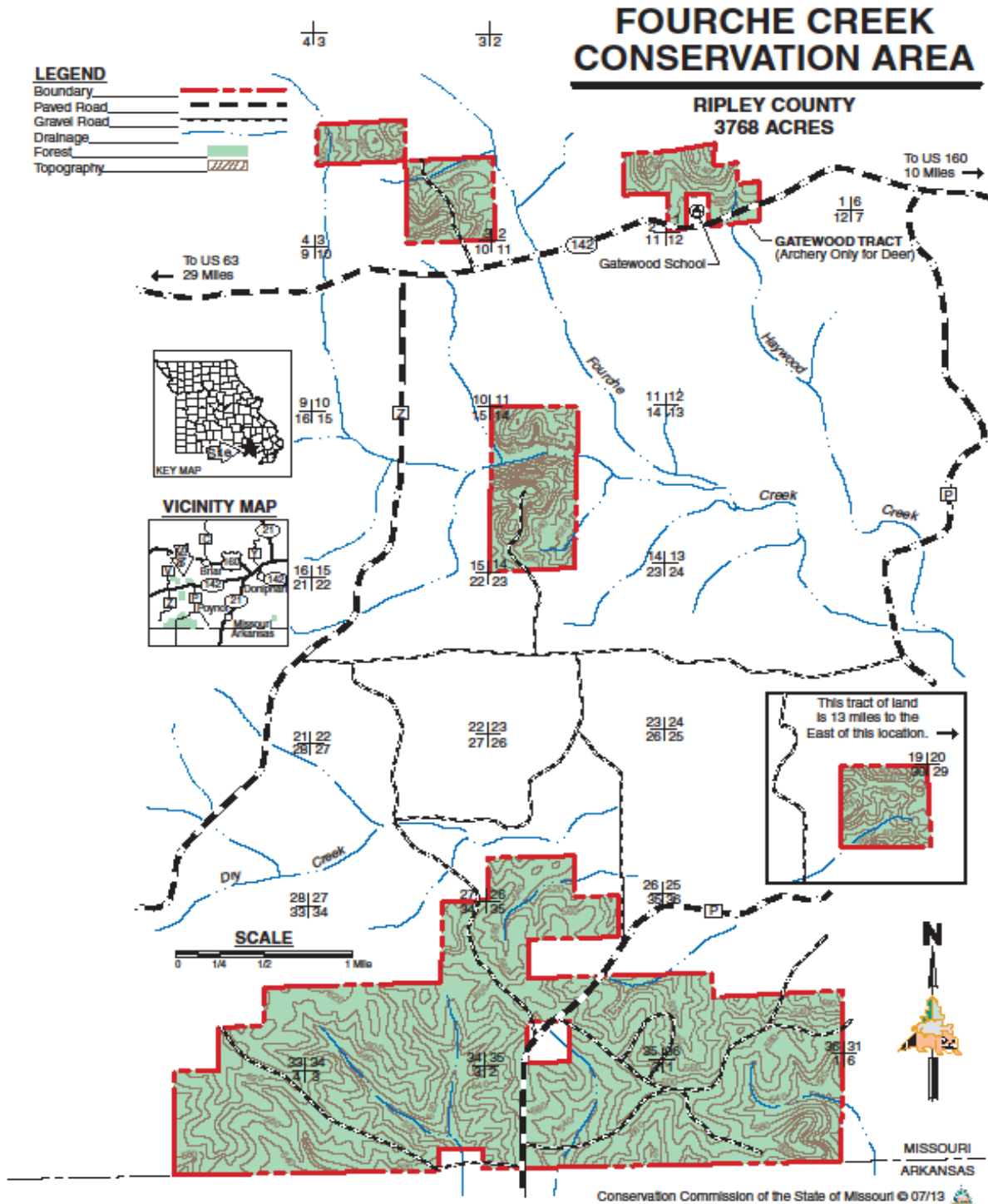


Figure 2: Aerial Map

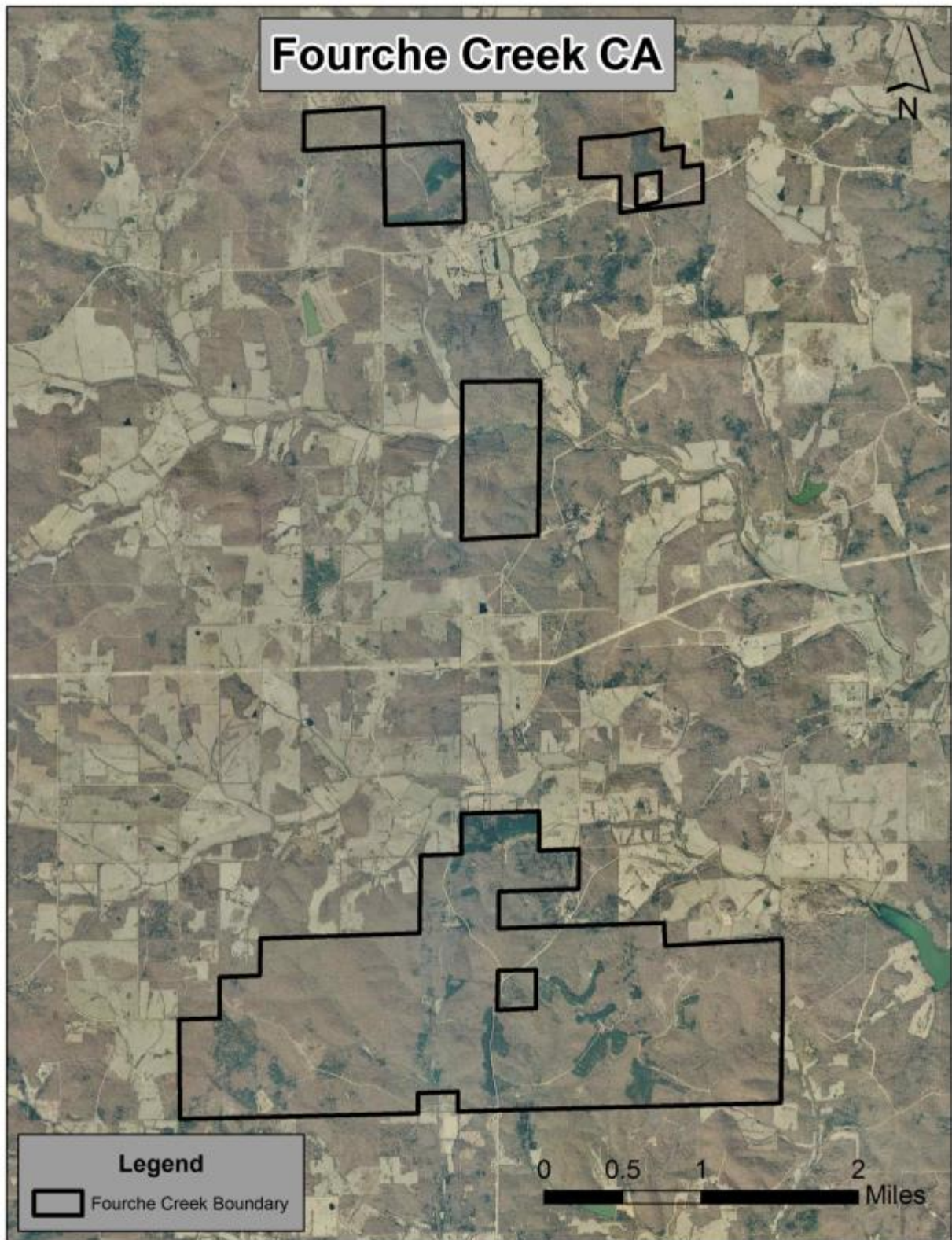


Figure 3: Topographic Map

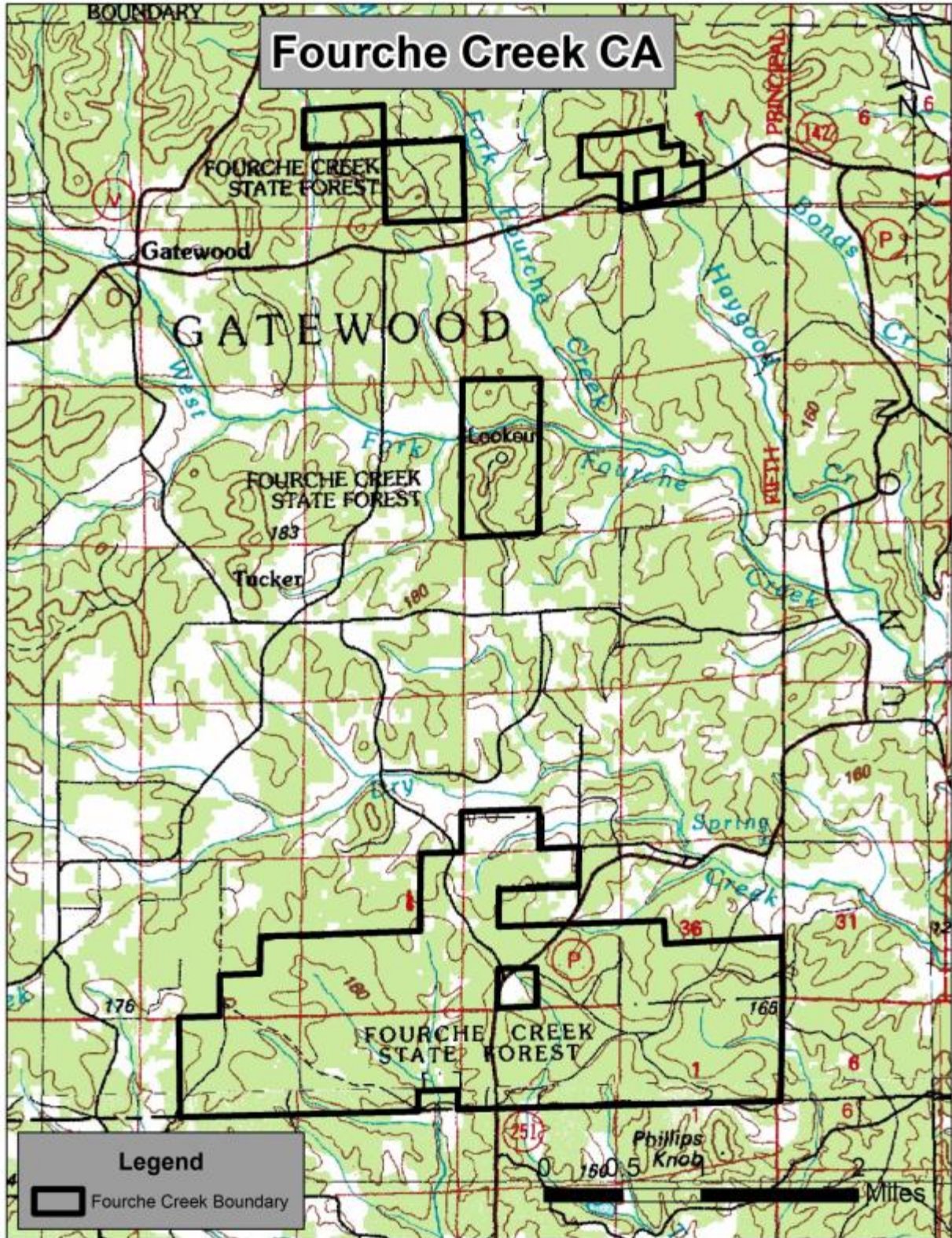
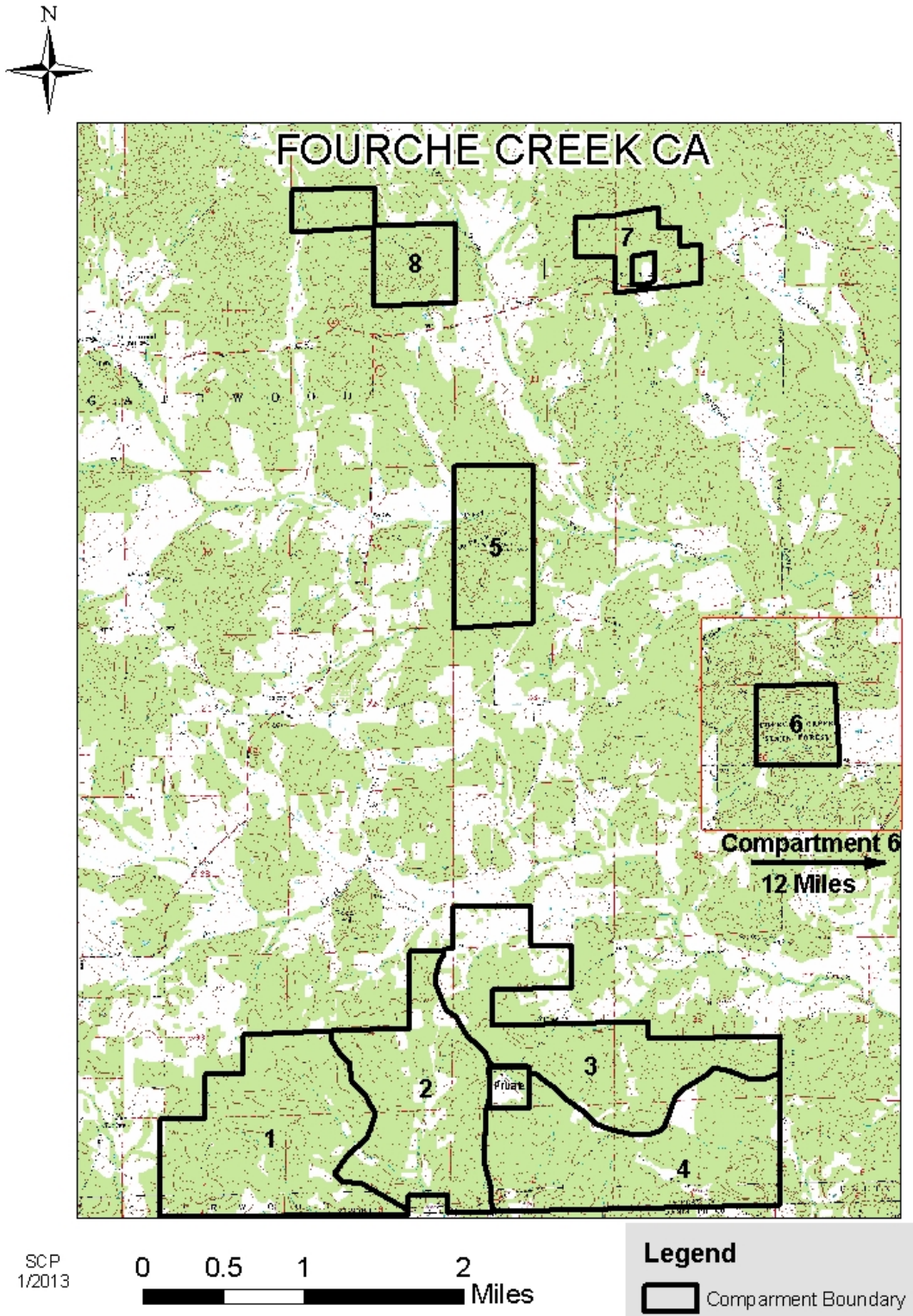


Figure 4: Compartment Map



Appendix A. Draft Fourche Creek Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (January 1-31, 2015)

Please apply to all conservation areas:

Bicycles should not be allowed in any natural area. They are inanimate objects and have no rights. There is also no right to mountain bike. That was settled in federal court in 1996: <http://mjvande.nfshost.com/mtb10.htm> . It's dishonest of mountain bikers to say that they don't have access to trails closed to bikes. They have EXACTLY the same access as everyone else -- ON FOOT! Why isn't that good enough for mountain bikers? They are all capable of walking...

A favorite myth of mountain bikers is that mountain biking is no more harmful to wildlife, people, and the environment than hiking, and that science supports that view. Of course, it's not true. To settle the matter once and for all, I read all of the research they cited, and wrote a review of the research on mountain biking impacts (see <http://mjvande.nfshost.com/scb7.htm>). I found that of the seven studies they cited, (1) all were written by mountain bikers, and (2) in every case, the authors misinterpreted their own data, in order to come to the conclusion that they favored. They also studiously avoided mentioning another scientific study (Wisdom et al) which did not favor mountain biking, and came to the opposite conclusions.

Those were all experimental studies. Two other studies (by White et al and by Jeff Marion) used a survey design, which is inherently incapable of answering that question (comparing hiking with mountain biking). I only mention them because mountain bikers often cite them, but scientifically, they are worthless.

Mountain biking accelerates erosion, creates V-shaped ruts, kills small animals and plants on and next to the trail, drives wildlife and other trail users out of the area, and, worst of all, teaches kids that the rough treatment of nature is okay (it's NOT!). What's good about THAT?

To see exactly what harm mountain biking does to the land, watch this 5-minute video: <http://vimeo.com/48784297>.

In addition to all of this, it is extremely dangerous: http://mjvande.nfshost.com/mtb_dangerous.htm .

For more information: <http://mjvande.nfshost.com/mtbfaq.htm> .

The common thread among those who want more recreation in our parks is total ignorance about and disinterest in the wildlife whose homes these parks are. Yes, if humans are the only beings that matter, it is simply a conflict among humans (but even then, allowing bikes on trails harms the MAJORITY of park users -- hikers and equestrians -- who can no longer safely and peacefully enjoy their parks).

The parks aren't gymnasiums or racetracks or even human playgrounds. They are WILDLIFE HABITAT, which is precisely why they are attractive to humans. Activities such as mountain

biking, that destroy habitat, violate the charter of the parks.

Even kayaking and rafting, which give humans access to the entirety of a water body, prevent the wildlife that live there from making full use of their habitat, and should not be allowed. Of course those who think that only humans matter won't understand what I am talking about -- an indication of the sad state of our culture and educational system.

First, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Fourche Creek CA Draft Management Plan. Fourche Creek CA is near the southwest corner of Ripley County; neither Ripley County or nearby Oregon County are underserved by public land equestrian opportunities in relation to the equine population. That being said the larger tract of the CA, around 2,800 acres located on the Arkansas line, is large enough to facilitate a nice multi-use trail network. This portion of the area is made publicly accessible by MO Hwy P and county roads; the soils, landscape position, and topography are conducive to trail development. Parking lots are, of course, needed.

Show Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen recommends developing a multi-use trail network on Fourche Creek CA to benefit hikers, bikers, and equestrians. SMMBCH offers our services (availability of volunteers permitting) to help decide on the best location and then clear and mark the trails.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Hand-written note: We like conservation but we cannot have a garden because of the deer eating everything we plant even onions, tomatoes, radishes, and even wild greens, squash, greens we plant, lettuce just to name it. We need our food with prices as high as they are. Thanks for giving us a chance to comment.

Phone call: Requested that there be statewide hunting regulations on Fourche Creek CA (at present it is antlered deer only).