

# GALLITZIN STATE FOREST DISTRICT

## 2024 ACTIVITY PLAN

The mission of DCNR Bureau of Forestry is to conserve the long-term health, viability, and productivity of the Commonwealth's forest and to conserve native wild plants. One of the ways the bureau carries out this mission is through the State Forest Resource Management Plan (SFRMP), a document that guides the management of the 2.2 million-acre state forest system. The SFRMP is updated approximately every 5 years and includes an extensive public engagement process.

One of the policies in the bureau's strategic plan (Penn's Woods: Sustaining Our Forests) includes, "Public participation will be an integral part of the management of state forest lands." The purpose of this Activity Plan is to communicate to the public about upcoming management activities, projects, and events that will be conducted to implement the SFRMP on Gallitzin State Forest. This document will be revised at the start and middle of each calendar year to provide sufficient time for public review, questions, and feedback. The bureau is committed to considering the views and perspectives of the public and stakeholders and strives to accommodate public interests in planning management activities and decision making. We encourage comments or questions regarding planned or proposed activities be directed to the state forest district conducting the activity.

For questions, comments, or more information about this plan, please contact:

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## **RECREATION**

### **Babcock Division**

- **Bog Path Trail** – General trail maintenance including repair and/or replacing foot bridges and/or possible rerouting sections. Replace trail sign at intersection(s) of Boulder Trail.
- **John P. Saylor Trail** (State Forest Hiking Trail) – General trail maintenance to include brushing back and armoring of wet areas.
  - **Swinging Bridge**– Plans are currently being developed for the replacement of this bridge due to its age and continual repair needs. No time frame for this replacement has been established.
- **Lost Turkey Trail** (State Forest Hiking Trail) – Replace (3) foot bridges and armoring of a wet area. Replace deteriorating trail signs.
- **County Line Shared Use Trail** – Finish rehab of the switchback portion of this trail to address drainage and erosion issues.
- **Cross Country Ski Trail** – Replace deteriorating trail signs at the intersections of the three loops. Continue to cut dead hazard trees (beech) along the trail.
- **Babcock Snowmobile Trail** – Continue armoring wet and muddy areas of the trail.
- Expand parking lot at Wolf Rocks trailhead as time and funding permit.
- Establish motorized campsite areas in the Babcock Division as time and funding permit.

### **Rager Mountain Division**

- **Clark Run Trail** – Spray invasive plant species along the trail.
- **Rager Mountain Trail** – General trail maintenance to include brushing trail where necessary.
- **Rager Mountain Snowmobile Trail** – General trail maintenance to include brushing trail where necessary. Replace deteriorating signs along the trail.
- **Laurel Run Shared - Use Trail System** – Continue to improve existing portions of this trail system.
- Expand parking lots at Mile Hill gate and Red Gate Road as time and funding permit.
- Expand parking opportunities along Laurel Run Road as time and funding permit.

### **Babcock Picnic Area**

- Replace pavilion roofs as time and funds permit.
- Continue to replace damaged and rotten sections of split-rail fencing.
- Continue to remove hazard trees as necessary.
- Re-paint the Picnic Loop Trail, re-establish tree identification signs.
- Continue to spray brush and invasive species to maintain the open landscape.

### **Organized Events**

- Based upon historical information of requested state forest land usage:
  - MWSS 471 Det. A Marine Airwing training.

- 25<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment Truck Company training.
- 121st Transportation Company – USANG training.
- Lost Turkey Trail Marathon.
- Johnstown Saddle Club trail ride.
- Chestnut Ridge Horseman's Club trail ride.
- Babcock Bog and Bolder Orienteering Challenge.
- Occasional weddings at the Babcock Picnic Area or one of the vistas.
- Occasional birthday/graduation parties at the Babcock Picnic Area.

## **TIMBER MANAGEMENT**

Timber management will include stands identified in the landscape exam process as high priority for treatment due to high levels of natural regeneration, stand health issues, and prior (ongoing) regeneration projects.

### **Marked and sold, potentially active.**

- **Formerly Mike's Sale (06-2022BC01)**- With the departure of Mike Nelson, who moved on to greener pastures to a new job in Florida, we were left with the timber sale that he was working on (Rusty Grill). After some consideration, and knowing the current timber market conditions, we decided to combine Mike's former sale and two additional fenced shelterwoods along Gas Company Road into one large timber sale. Larger sales are easier to sell in today's market, and with the addition of the fenced shelterwoods, some higher quality timber can be offered to encourage buyers to bid on the sale. The sale will take place in three different areas of our Rager Mountain Division. Going from east to west, the first sale block is a 51-acre oak shelterwood on the south side of Route 22. A combination herbicide treatment for the area was conducted in the Summer/Fall of 2018. This consisted of a broadcast treatment for fern with a backpack mist-blower, and basal bark treatment of Witch Hazel, Red Maple, Striped Maple, and Black Birch with a back-pack sprayer. Silvah plots were conducted on this block in the spring of 2019.

The second area of the sale consists of two fenced shelterwood blocks along Gas Company Road totaling 45 acres that were harvested in 2012. These areas now contain abundant regeneration and are now ready for the overstory removal harvest. Silvah plots will be conducted on these blocks in early 2022.

The final blocks of the sale are situated between Rager Mountain trail, and Rager Mountain road, adjacent to the First Energy 500KV powerline on Rager Mountain (FM 5441). This 56-acre block will also be an oak shelterwood treatment. A broadcast herbicide application for fern control was performed on the area in the Summer of 2018, applying Oust with a backpack sprayer. Silvah analysis plots were conducted on the area in the spring of 2019.

This 138-acre sale was sold to Big Buck Lumber Company from Punxsutawney in June of 2023. The buyer began cutting in November of 2023.

**Marked but not yet sold.**

No sales meet this criterion currently.

**Proposed (not marked yet)**

- **Red Eyed Coalminer Sale (06-2024BC01)** - This is the combination of a formerly sold but uncut timber sale (06-2017BC03) and several fenced shelterwood blocks from a sale cut in 2014, (06-2012BC02).

The first treatment is a 51-acre first stage shelterwood that will target mainly smaller, low-quality trees. This portion of the sale is situated on the west side of Babcock Creek Road, .25 mile southwest of the intersection of Babcock Creek Road and Strip Mine Road. This treatment will essentially be a “thinning from below”. This type of treatment is designed to remove the present undesirable, low quality, and dying trees in the mid-canopy and co-dominant positions, to allow more sunlight to reach the forest floor and promote the development and establishment of desirable seedlings on site. Plans are to install a deer fence around this treatment after cutting is complete.

The second treatment is the overstory removal of 96-acres within 3 standing deer fences. This treatment is located approximately 1 mile north of State Route 56 along Strip Mine Road. The first stage shelterwood was harvested in 2014 and produced adequate regeneration within the fences. This treatment will remove the remaining overstory trees, releasing the advanced regeneration.

**Regeneration projects**

- A deer fence is planned for the 23-acre shelterwood block that was part of the BM sale in the Babcock Division.
- A deer fence is planned for the 45-acre shelterwood block along Rt 22, part of the Formerly Mikes timber sale in the Rager Division.
- Approximately 9,200 feet of deer fencing is scheduled for dismantling in 2024.
- An additional 10,100 feet of deer fence may be dismantled depending on scheduling.

## **RESTORATION AND HABITAT PROJECTS**

### **High Conservation Value Area - (HCVA)\* - Babcock Division**

- The Babcock HCVA Management Plan continues to be implemented as time and resources permit.
- We continue to use the skid steer with the forestry cutter and hand work to expand the areas of grassland habitat and control invasive plants on the HCVA.
- Following the forestry cutter mowing, foliar herbicide treatments will be applied to the invasive plants that re-sprout.

### **Woodcock/Grouse Habitat Project – Babcock Division**

- Plans to re-cut additional blocks in the RT 56 Grouse Habitat project in the winter months as time permits.

### **Clear Shade Creek**

- Plans are being drafted in cooperation with the Somerset County Conservation District and Trout Unlimited to conduct a large woody debris project on the Clear Shade Creek in Ogle Township.

### **Rager Mountain Division Habitat**

- We are planning on expanding the warm-season grass area on the Laurel Run Tract. Basal herbicide application targeting the black locust is complete, as well as cutting of the larger Austrian and Scotch pines. The forestry cutter will be used during the summer to remove brush and help prepare the area for planting. The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) has agreed to supply the seed for planting in Spring. **Tentative/on hold**
- Another area of habitat improvement is near the Short Line wildlife opening (food plot). This narrow strip of forest buffers a small tributary to Laurel Run and has experienced a significant loss of canopy cover due to Ash mortality caused by the Emerald Ash Borer. A variety of invasive shrub species also plagues the area. Plans are in the works to plant Pin Oaks in the canopy gaps and treat the invasive species as time permits. **Tentative/on hold**

## **ROAD AND BRIDGE PROJECTS**

- District staff to complete annual maintenance of State Forest Roads (26 miles) to include grading, ditch maintenance, mowing and culvert cleaning.
- District staff to complete leaf blowing from roadside ditches along all State Forest Roads - spring and fall 2024.

- Work continues to implement a State Forest Road sign installation program to ensure consistency and assist the driving public with locations and directions.
- Continue to construct snowmobile run-arounds at vehicle gates on the Babcock Division snowmobile trail network.
- Continue to improve portions of Laurel Run Road as time and funding permit.
- Plans to place 600 tons of 2A limestone aggregate to Pot Ridge Road in Ogle Twp, Somerset County during the spring of 2024.
- Plans to improve Strip Road in Adams Twp, Cambria County with 1,200 tons of 4 minus limestone base and 600 tons of 2A limestone surface aggregate during the spring of 2024.

## **PRESCRIBED FIRE**

Certain areas of the Gallitzin State Forest have been developed to enhance cool- and warm-season grasses. Prescribed fire is a tool used by the Bureau of Forestry to reduce fuels, control competing vegetation, and to create and maintain habitats. A side benefit of prescribed fires is that it aids in the training of wildland firefighters.

- No prescribed burns are planned currently.

## **FIRE PREVENTION**

### **Indiana/Northern Cambria Division**

- Fire prevention programs will continue throughout 2024. Attempts are made to achieve a minimum of sixteen Smokey Bear school programs (Kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) during the regular school year. Smokey Bear programs will be provided to summer school / summer daycare requests as well. These program requests may number six or more. Multiple Smokey Bear / fire prevention programs are planned with two cooperating state parks (Yellow Creek State Park and Prince Gallitzin State Park). Much of the fire prevention programming is achieved by Pennsylvania fire warden efforts or in cooperation with the fire wardens. Fire prevention programs may also occur at several other local fairs and festivals throughout 2024 including the Apple Cider Festival at Prince Gallitzin State Park and the Northern Cambria Fall Festival.

**Blair/Southern Cambria Division**

- Contact local school district/preschool programs to advise of the Smokey Bear programs/fire prevention programs and forestry related programs that are available. With the help of the fire wardens, many of previously held programs will still be attended. These include Smokey/prevention programs, Altoona Curve games, and various events around Blair County. Continue to build the wildland fire program and teach two S130 and S190 classes each year, more if local fire departments have a need. Assist the Dividing Ridge Support Crew with trainings and support them as much as possible. Continue to do annual visits of wardens and update warden identification cards.

**INSECT, DISEASE, AND INVASIVE PLANT TREATMENTS**

This year was the sixth year for our annual July/August 2-week work party involving all district personnel, where everyone pitches in labor towards keeping our HVCA bird area in grass habitat. This involves tree cutting and a lot of invasive plant treatment including cut-stump, foliar and basal bark applications. Assuming 2024 won't be too wet, we expect to have another productive year controlling invasive plants. However, over the past several years, we have observed oriental bittersweet becoming established in areas we have not seen it before. This is a concern.

- Efforts to monitor and locate new infestations of the Beech Leaf Disease within the district continue. Research continues, on the effects of this disease.
- We will continue to treat Japanese knotweed, mile-a-minute weed, Japanese barberry, multiflora rose, oriental bittersweet, bush honeysuckle, and autumn olive throughout the district in 2024 as time and funding allow.
- Monitoring and treatments of invasive plant species on the Mariner East Pipeline by Sunoco (now called *Energy Transfer Partners*) will continue in 2024.
- Spraying for invasive plants typically begins annually, after July 4, and continues through mid-September.
- Foresters from the district will be assisting with the spraying of Spongy Moth (LDD - formerly known as the gypsy moth) at Prince Gallitzin State Park this spring. No State Forest Lands will be sprayed this year.
- Other than known species such as beech scale, hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) and emerald ash borer (EAB), we are not experiencing any other serious insect infestations currently.

## **NATURAL GAS, OIL, AND OTHER GEOLOGIC RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

- Presently there are no new natural gas or oil development activities taking place within the Gallitzin State Forest.
- Routine maintenance and repairs to gas or oil infrastructure will continue as needed.

## **TOWER AND RIGHTS-OF-WAY PROJECTS**

- **Fire Tower** - Lost Mountain Fire Tower is planned to be dismantled and moved as funding is available. – No updates.
- **Right-of-Way Projects** – No new or known Right-of-Way projects are anticipated in 2024.
- **Communication Towers** – Routine maintenance can be expected in 2024.
- We anticipate powerline and pipeline maintenance activities such as mowing, tree trimming and spraying to be conducted in 2024.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

- Assist with the Blair Cambria and Indiana Envirothons in the spring of 2024.
- Plan to staff an information booth at the Nature Works event at the Bottle Works in Johnstown, March 2024.
- Plan to assist with the Kids Fair sponsored by Representative Frank Burns at the YPCC building in Ebensburg by providing prevention materials and coordinating a visit from Smokey Bear, March 2024.
- Plan to staff an information booth at the Blair Conservation District Earth Day Festival, April 2024.
- Plan to staff an information booth at the Cambria County Arts & Heritage Festival, September 2024.
- Plan to staff an information booth at the Prince Gallitzin State Park Apple Cider Festival, October 2024.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

- Maintain RST (Recurrent Selection Timber) backcross American Chestnut orchard at the Dryzal habitat management area during the growing season.
- The new Gallitzin State Forest Resource Management Center is still in the planning phase. Currently, we are working through the purchase of land for the new facility.



## **RESEARCH**

- The district continues to work with the Paint Creek Watershed Association on the “Red Eyes” project. Additional doses of limestone sand will be delivered to the 4 culvert crossings along Strip Mine Road during the spring, summer and fall of 2024. Preliminary samples are showing good promise.
- The district has plans to work with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy to begin a lime dosing program on Mile Run Creek, a tributary of Clear Shade Creek. – No updates

## **MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM PREVIOUS YEAR**

- Continued working with DCNR land surveyors to address many areas of missing boundary lines and property corners throughout the district.
- Continued to implement the plan to convert existing food plots to native, herbaceous openings.
- Assisted private landowners in Blair, Cambria, and Indiana Counties with forestry-related items when possible.
- Continued to treat approximately 200 patches of invasive plants.
- Assisted with the Indiana, Blair, and Cambria County Envirothons.
- Spread and compacted 688 tons of 2A limestone on Pot Ridge Road in the Babcock Division.
- Treated invasive species and reestablished grassland habitat throughout 200 acres of the High Conservation Value Area in the Babcock Division.
- The district fire staff with the help of volunteer fire companies, forest fire wardens, the support crew and other district personnel suppressed and/or reported 88 wildland fires.
- Placed 1,640 tons of Driving Surface Aggregate to Strip Road in the Babcock Division.
- With the assistance of the PA Outdoor Roving Trial Crew, the maintenance staff constructed the joint use bridge over a tributary of Clear Shade Creek in the Babcock Division. This project was many years in the making. In addition to the bridge approximately 1 mile of joint use trail was constructed, connecting the east and west loops of the snowmobile trail.