

Forest 44 Conservation Area

Ten-Year Area Management Plan FY 2017-2026



Lisa B. Allen
Forestry Division Chief

3-14-17
Date

Forest 44 Conservation Area Management Plan Approval Page

PLANNING TEAM

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Date

FORESTRY DIVISION

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Date

OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Forest 44 Conservation Area, # 9023; Dorothy E. Aselman Memorial Addition to Forest 44 Conservation Area, #200505
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1990
- **Acreage:** 998 acres, including the 40-acre Dorothy E. Aselman Memorial Addition
- **County:** Saint Louis
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Forestry
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Forestry
- **Statements of Purpose:**
 - A. Strategic Direction**

Provide opportunities for diverse outdoor recreation; manage the natural communities and other habitats for fish, forests, and wildlife.
 - B. Desired Future Condition**

The desired future condition of Forest 44 Conservation Area (CA) is a healthy, diverse, and sustainable mosaic of stream, woodland, and forest communities; a network of hiking and multi-use (hike/horseback) trails that provide outdoor recreational opportunities for the public to enjoy; along with Jay Henges Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center that provides shooting opportunities and outdoor education.
 - C. Federal Aid Statement**

N/A

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

I. Special Considerations

- A. Priority Areas:** Lower Meramec/Missouri River Priority Forest Landscape, Audubon Missouri's Meramec Highlands Important Bird Area, Henry Shaw Ozark Corridor
- B. Natural Areas:** None

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:** None
- C. Springs:** None
- D. Other:** Occurs in the Lower Meramec Oak and Mixed-Hardwood Woodland/Forest Hills Landtype Association. This landtype association consists of broad loess-covered ridges with steep slopes and broad valleys cut into Mississippian limestones. Historically, this landtype association was dominated by oak and mixed-hardwood

forest, but now has widespread commercial and residential development (Nigh & Schroeder, 2002).

III. Existing Infrastructure

- Three parking lots, including one off Hillsboro Road with American with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible parking, and two concrete parking lots at the Henges Shooting Range
- Three restrooms, including one ADA-accessible privy at the parking lot off Hillsboro Road, and two at the Henges Shooting Range. One is near the rifle range and one is in the educational classroom.
- Losing Stream Trail, 0.4-mile hiking trail (ADA accessible)
- Dogwood Ridge Trail, 2.2-mile hiking trail
- Multi-use hike/horseback trails, 11.8 miles
- Jay Henges fully staffed shooting range with pistol range, rifle range, shotgun patterning, field archery range, static archery range, and three trap shooting fields
- Ten fishless ponds (1 acre total)

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

- A. Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations:** None
- B. Federal Interest:** Federal funds may 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 an electric distribution line easement owned by Ameren Missouri at the Aselman Tract. There is also an easement owned by the St. Louis Metropolitan Sewer District on both area tracts. An easement is held by St. Louis County for Entire Road at the Aselman Tract.
- D. Cultural Resources Findings:** Yes, records kept with the Missouri Department of Conservation (Department) environmental compliance specialist. Managers should follow best management practices for cultural resources found in the Missouri Department of Conservation Resource Policy Manual.
- E. Endangered Species:** None observed.
- F. Boundary Issues:** None

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Forest 44 CA contains approximately 927 acres of forest/woodlands and 60 acres of old field, primarily in bottomland sites that were once forested and were historically cleared

of trees. Woodland management is directed at maintaining a healthy forest natural community for wildlife habitat. Old field management is directed at minimizing invasive species with a secondary goal of providing open land wildlife habitat for native species.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Control invasive plants on the area (e.g., bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, sericea lespedeza, tall fescue, Japanese hop, tree of heaven) and prevent future infestations.
- 2) Woodland areas managed less intensely have resulted in overstocked woodlands (i.e., too many trees per acre); invasive species increasing in abundance; a tree species composition shift to shade-tolerant and fire-intolerant trees (i.e., away from oaks and hickories toward primarily sugar maple); and a major loss of diversity and abundance of ground layer herbaceous vegetation and tree regeneration.
- 3) Maintain healthy, sustainable, and diverse forests and woodlands that are approaching maturity and are mostly even-aged and have been subject to intense deer browse.
- 4) Enhance wildlife habitat by reforesting open lands or establishing warm-season grass fields and converting tall fescue, sericea lespedeza, and woody invasive dominated old fields to native vegetation.
- 5) Maintain a healthy deer population that allows regrowth of native plants and tree seedlings on the area.

Management Objective 1: Maintain healthy forests and woodlands with management emphasis on wildlife habitat.

Strategy 1: Control invasive plants (predominantly bush honeysuckle, Japanese honeysuckle, Japanese hop, and tree of heaven) to avoid significant negative impacts on natural communities. Routinely scout and seek to control invasive plants. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Conduct a forest inventory prior to conducting forest management. Once invasive species are under control, reduce tree stocking in forests and woodlands to desired stocking levels and to desired tree species mixes, as is appropriate for wildlife habitat improvement; use forestry best management practices to guide all thinning projects (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2014). (Forestry)

Strategy 3: Utilize management tools, such as mechanical thinning of trees and prescribed fire, to stimulate herbaceous vegetation in woodlands, to increase oak regeneration in forests and woodlands, and to discourage unwanted vegetation, such as bush honeysuckle. (Forestry)

Strategy 4: Reforest open lands, where invasive species invasion requires excessive work to maintain native species (such as warm-season grasses), through a combination of natural tree regeneration and mechanical or hand tree planting. Select tree species that are valuable to wildlife and well-suited to the growing site. (Forestry)

Strategy 5: Conduct managed deer hunts to control deer population at a level that will minimize excessive damage from deer browse on the natural communities. (Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Manage existing open lands and old fields to enhance wildlife habitat.

Strategy 1: Control invasive plants (e.g., autumn olive, fescue, Johnson grass, exotic thistles, and sericea lespedeza) to avoid negative impacts on natural communities. Routinely look for and seek to control invasive plants. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Remove and thin undesirable tree species growing in and around open areas. (Forestry)

Strategy 3: Where it is manageable to maintain with herbicide and prescribed fire, establish warm-season grasses and other native herbaceous vegetation in open areas to provide diverse wildlife habitat. (Forestry)

Strategy 4: Utilize prescribed fire to stimulate herbaceous vegetation in open areas and to discourage undesirable species. (Forestry)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Forest 44 CA offers valuable protection of water quality and quantity to Williams Creek and the Meramec River.
- 2) Flooding from Williams Creek is becoming more intense due to development and could threaten streambank integrity over time.
- 3) Fishless ponds provide good habitat for amphibians and a seasonal water source for wildlife.

Management Objective 1: Protect riparian corridors to maintain water quality.

Strategy 1: Maintain 100-footwide forested riparian corridors on all conservation area perennial and intermittent stream channels, minimize the number of stream channel crossings, and utilize appropriate stream crossing best management practices. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Monitor condition of stream banks and riparian corridor health along Williams Creek and implement bank stabilization or wetland projects as needed. (Fisheries, Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Ensure adequate amphibian habitat is provided on area.

Strategy 1: Monitor existing fishless ponds to ensure adequate habitat exists for amphibian species on the area. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: If too many ponds silt in and no longer hold water at any time of the year, improve ponds to provide necessary habitat. (Design and Development, Wildlife)

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Area offers valuable recreational opportunities, such as hiking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, and hunting.
- 2) Footbridge on ADA-accessible trail was damaged in flooding.
- 3) Area violations occur on this area.
- 4) Jay Henges range offers hunting/shooting/outdoor education programs to the public.
- 5) Area offers opportunities for educational programs for the public.
- 6) The area offers opportunities to build relationships with neighboring landowners.

Management Objective 1: Provide public hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Strategy 1: Conduct management activities that will provide habitats for a diversity of wildlife species. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Conduct managed deer hunts to provide a quality hunting experience and achieve terrestrial resource management goals. (Forestry)

Strategy 3: Explore options for offering managed mentored turkey and/or small game hunts for either the public or for first-time hunters. (Outreach and Education)

Management Objective 2: Work to minimize violations of area regulations.

Strategy 1: Ensure regulations are posted on Atlas Database and area bulletin boards, informing the public of area regulations. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Conduct patrols and enforce area regulations as needed. (Protection)

Management Objective 3: Provide trails to support a wide variety of area uses, such as hiking, ADA-accessible hiking, and horseback riding.

Strategy 1: Develop a plan and submit it to Department leadership for approval to remove the foot bridge on the ADA-accessible trail, and expand the existing section of the trail that goes from the parking lot to Williams Creek to continue providing ADA-accessible hiking access. (Forestry, Design and Development)

Strategy 2: Maintain existing trails to provide hiking, ADA-accessible hiking, and horseback riding access. (Forestry)

Management Objective 4: Continue to provide hunting/shooting/outdoor education programs to the public as well as staffed range access.

Strategy 1: Utilize outdoor education center facilities at Henges Shooting Range to conduct hunting and shooting programs, hunter education classes, and outdoor education programs. (Outreach and Education)

Strategy 2: Provide public range access and shooting opportunities at the rifle range, pistol range, archery range, shotgun patterning range, and trap range. (Outreach and Education)

Management Objective 5: Improve educational and interpretive opportunities on Forest 44 CA.

Strategy 1: Communicate area recreational and educational opportunities to the public (e.g., using area brochures, Atlas Database, Conservation Connections). (Forestry, Outreach and Education)

Strategy 2: Communicate to teachers, students, scout groups, and youth groups the uniqueness of the area and Jay Henges Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center to facilitate as a possible destination for ecology classes, school programs, and workshops. (Outreach and Education)

Management Objective 6: Facilitate a good working relationship with neighboring landowners.

Strategy 1: Work with neighbors to minimize any boundary, trespass, or any other issues affecting Forest 44 CA tracts. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Promote habitat management on neighboring landowner properties. (Private Land Services)

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) The variety and intensity of public use at the area requires regular area maintenance and management.
- 2) Soil erosion on trails requires extensive maintenance of trail surface reinforcement.
- 3) Consider for acquisition parcels that border this area and provide additional recreational opportunities to the public.

Management Objective 1: Maintain parking lots and trails.

Strategy 1: Perform routine maintenance on trails by maintaining signs, pruning, and adding/maintaining reinforcement of trail surface to minimize erosion.

(Forestry)

Strategy 2: Perform routine trash pickup, mowing, sign maintenance, and other maintenance activities. (Forestry)

Strategy 3: Maintain signage to encourage trail use on only the yellow trail when trail conditions are wet to minimize soil erosion and trail maintenance. (Forestry)

Strategy 4: Install best management practices to prevent soil erosion on trails and roads according to *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests: 2014 Management Guidelines for Maintaining Forested Watersheds to Protect Streams* (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2014). (Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Maintain well-marked accurate boundary lines, area signs, and shooting range boundaries.

Strategy 1: Paint boundary trees and maintain signs along boundary lines every four years or as needed. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Maintain area signs as needed. (Forestry)

Strategy 3: Inspect range boundaries twice per year. (Outreach and Education)

Lands Proposed for Acquisition:

When available, adjacent land 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.

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table:

	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26
Administrative Considerations										
<i>Objective 2</i>										
Strategy 1				X				X		

APPENDICES

Area Background:

Situated on the outskirts of a large population center, Forest 44 Conservation Area (CA) offers a unique opportunity for the public to enjoy a variety of outdoor activities. Forest 44 CA is in St. Louis County, about a mile from the intersection of Highway 141 and Interstate 44. The 998-acre area borders Interstate 44 for 3 miles.

This conservation area was once part of a 10,000-acre cattle ranch. The Missouri Department of Conservation purchased the 958-acre Forest 44 CA in 1990 from the heirs of the Reinken Estate. A 40-acre tract was acquired by a partial donation in 2004 and is known as the Dorothy E. Aselman Memorial Addition.

This rugged forestland is situated on the northeastern-most extension of the Ozark uplift and contains plants and animals typical of Ozark ecology. Trees commonly found on the area include a variety of oaks and hickory as well as flowering dogwood. Several springs feed Williams Creek on the eastern portion of the area.

The area offers the Jay Henges Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center for public use. There are also over 2 miles of hiking-only trails and over 11 miles of hiking and horseback riding trails throughout the area.

Current Land and Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	Feet	% of Area
Forest and Woodland	927		93
Old Field	60		6
Other	11		1
Total	998		100
Williams Creek Stream Frontage		5,600	

Public Input Summary:

The draft Forest 44 Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period Sept. 1–30, 2016. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from 10 respondents (Appendix A). The Forest 44 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 draft area management plan, the Department conducted a public input process (the Forest 44 Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage) from Feb. 1-29, 2016. During this “idea gathering” stage, the Department received comments from nine respondents. The area planning team took comments into consideration as they drafted this 10-year management plan. Department responses to comments received during the February 2016 idea gathering stage can be found in the report, *Missouri Department of Conservation Responses to Public Comments – Forest 44 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 the Forest 44 Conservation Area Management Plan public comment period.

Concerned that aerial spraying of bush honeysuckle could be dangerous to native plant species, animals, and people.

We are conducting a study on methods for controlling honeysuckle and the study is designed to capture the effects on non-target species. We do not plan on performing any more aerial spraying until the results are known. If it is found that this practice is cost effective and there is minimal impact to non-target plants, we will again look at using aerial spraying honeysuckle as a management tool.

Concerned about removal of undesirable trees. Suggests replanting with native bird-friendly trees and bushes.

Our management is scientifically based with a goal of restoring natural communities. The restoration process normally occurs through native natural tree regeneration, but planting is always an option. The native vegetation that results from management will benefit wildlife in the area.

Enjoys multi-use trails for equestrian use and supports maintenance of these trails. Appreciates the opportunity to horseback ride during the hunting season.

We are happy to hear that you enjoy our trails. We work hard to keep them in good condition.

Suggests gravelling more trails to prevent damage from equestrian use during wet conditions.

We look at multiple factors when determining which areas need to have rock added. Depending on the slope and soil type, any rock added will likely wash down the trail as easily as the soil. We only add gravel in areas where it is prudent to do so.

Offers volunteer service to maintain multi-use trails.

The Department does offer volunteer opportunities. Anyone interested in volunteer opportunities should contact the area manager to discuss options and protocol.

Suggests improving trail markers to clearly lead back to the parking lot.

We have assessed the entire trail marking system in the past. When we do this, we try to take into account the opinions of all our users. Some users prefer minimal signage, while others prefer a very heavily signed trail system. It has been awhile since our last assessment. We will look at assessing our signage again and will try to bring in co-workers who do not routinely work on the area to add a new perspective as to how to possibly improve the signage.

Suggests providing more bowhunting opportunities.

Hunting is one of our major emphases, but so is recreation, and we do our best to balance public use needs. When we look at the hunting opportunities we provide, we look not only at a specific conservation area, but also at areas located nearby. In addition to the two managed hunts offered on Forest 44 CA there are several other conservation areas located within a short driving distance from Forest 44 CA. Young CA and Myron and Sonya Glassberg Family CA both allow open archery hunting throughout the season. Rockwoods Range has two monthlong managed hunts and Rockwoods Reservation added three separate one-week managed archery hunts in 2015.

Suggests adding a skeet shooting range to Jay Henges Shooting Range.

At this time a skeet field is not being considered as an addition to the Jay Henges Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center; however, we will continue to evaluate this option as we work to provide safe and convenient shooting sports opportunities to Missouri residents. Trap/skeet overlays will be incorporated into the August A. Busch Shooting Range & Outdoor Education Center in St. Charles.

Concerned about unleashed dogs on the area.

Dogs are required to be on a leash on this area. If an area user witnesses a dog off leash, they can contact a conservation agent, the area manager, or the Regional Office.

Appreciates Forest 44 CA.

We thank you for your comment, and hope that our efforts continue to help you enjoy our area.

References:

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, MO: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

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

Maps:

Figure 1: Area Map

Figure 2: Aerial Map

Figure 3: Topographic Map

Figure 4: Current Vegetation Map

Figure 5: Easement Map

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A: Forest 44 Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Area Map

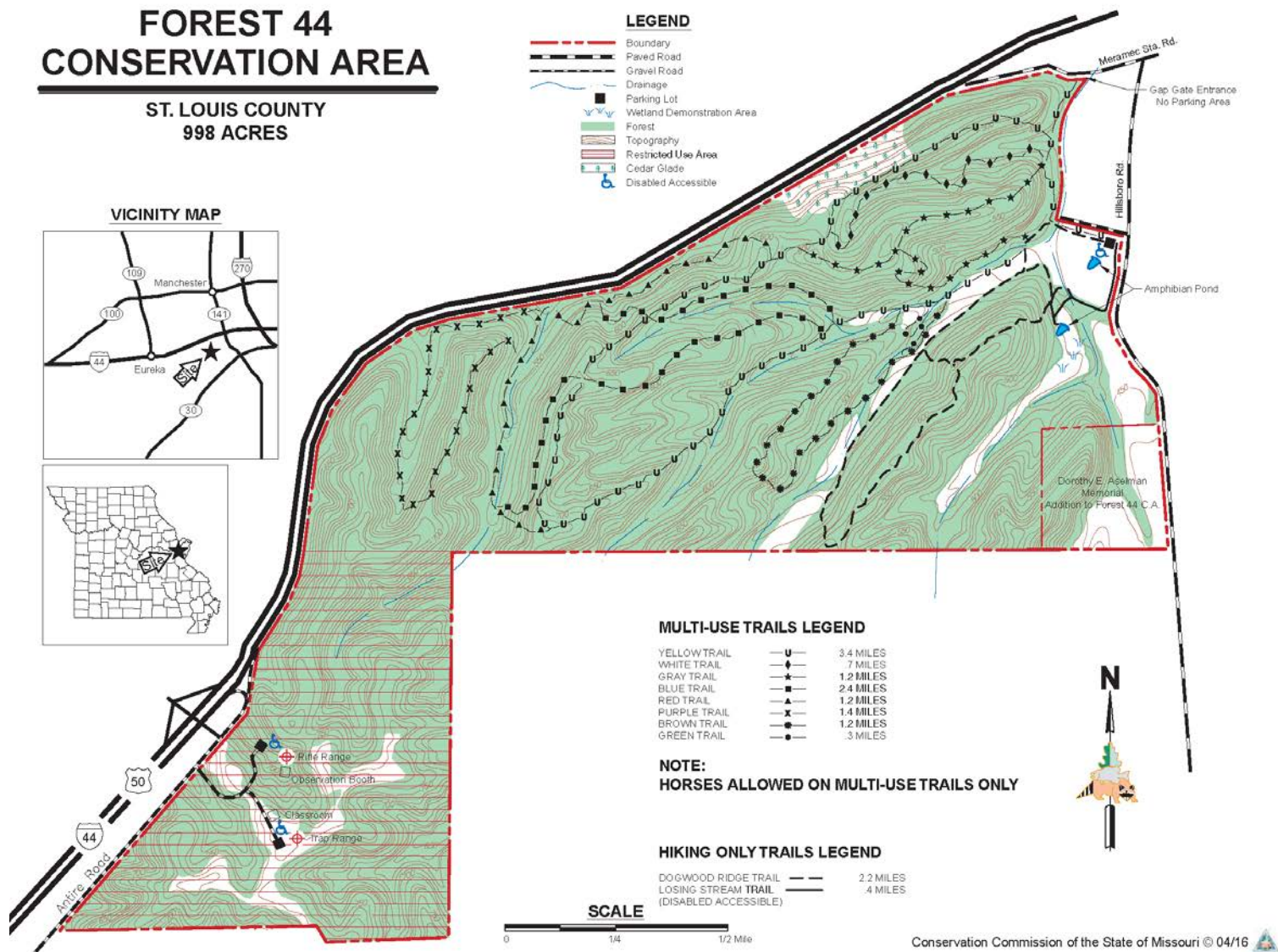


Figure 2: Aerial Map



Figure 3: Topographic Map

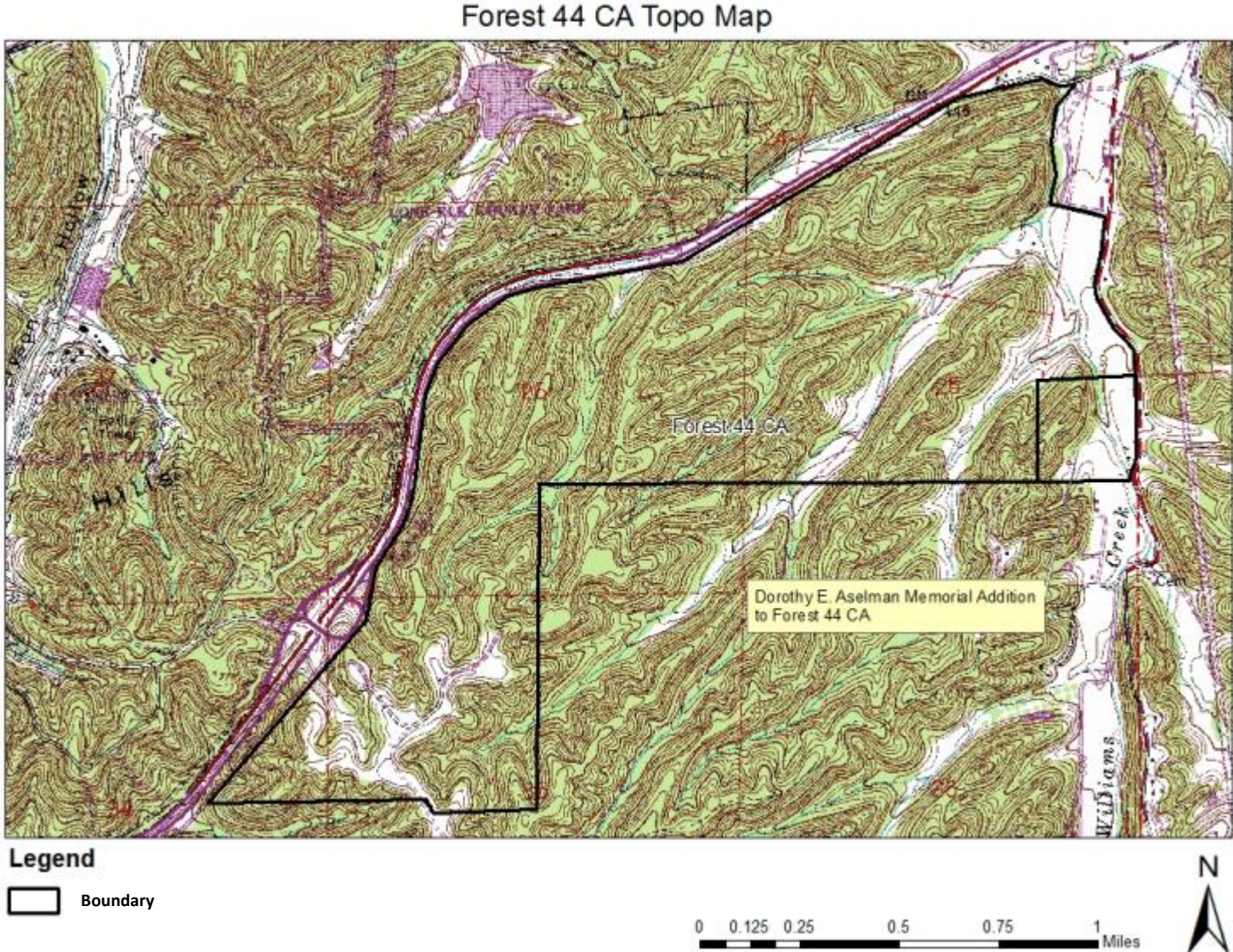


Figure 4: Current Vegetation Map

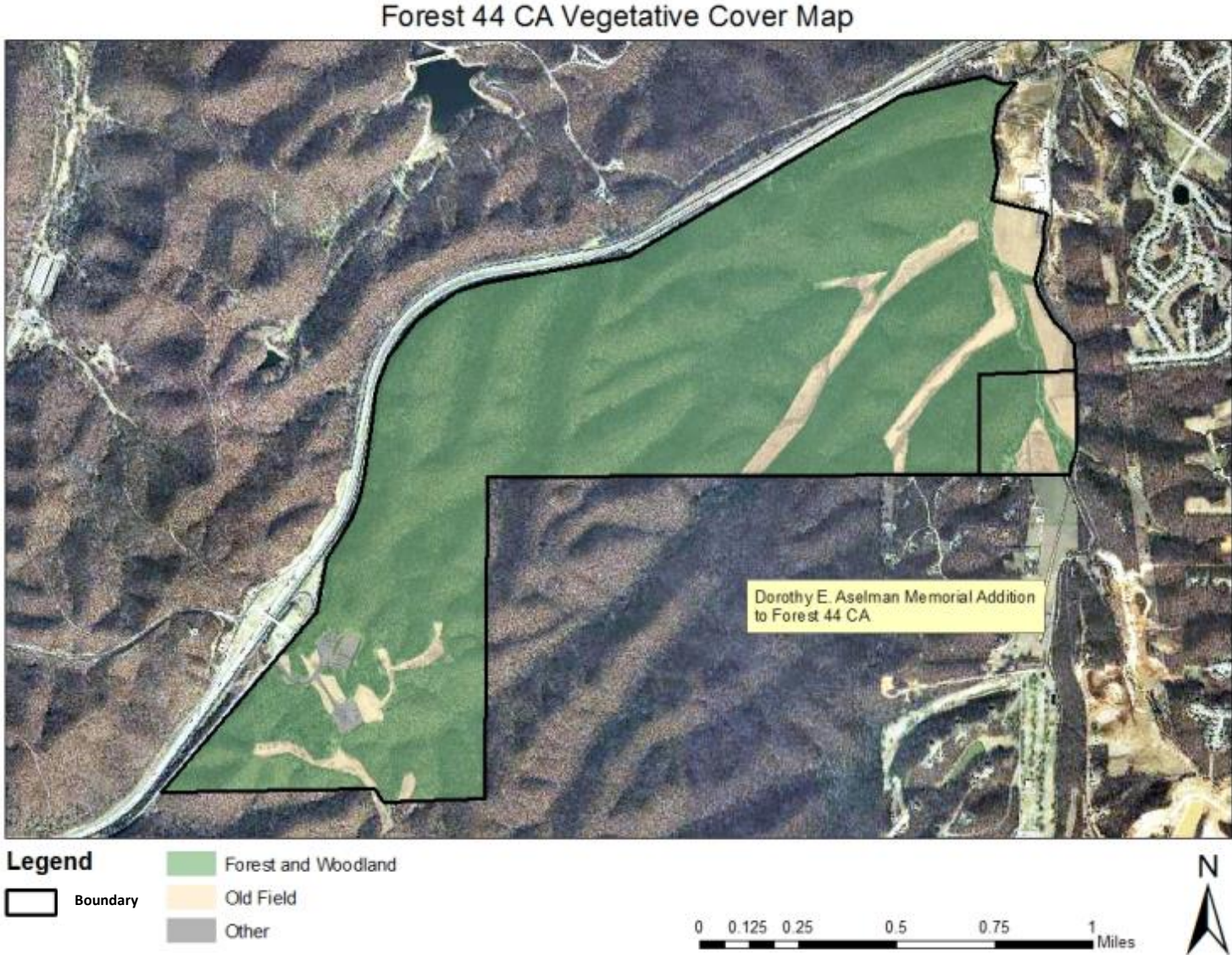
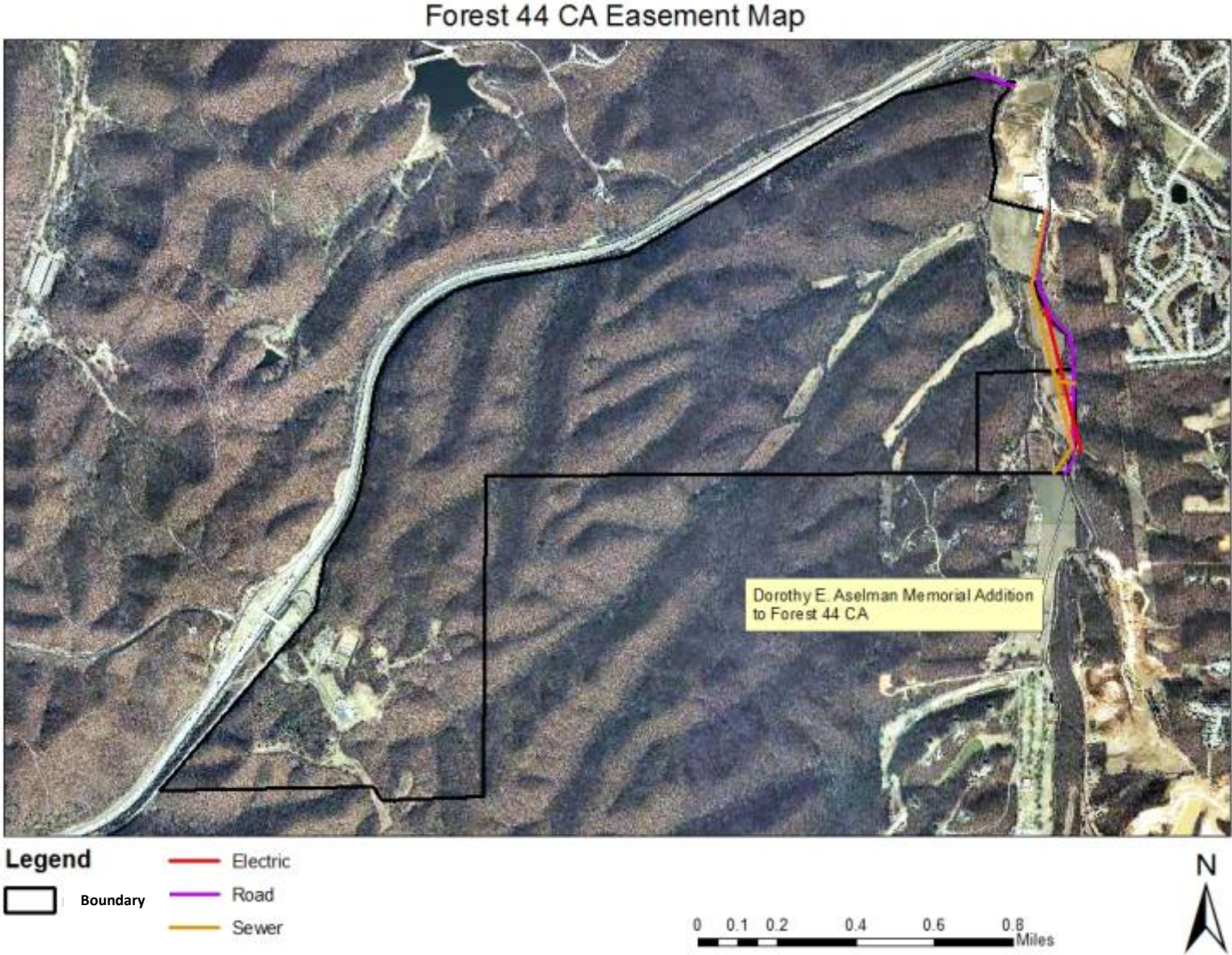


Figure 5: Easement Map



Appendix A. Forest 44 Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (Sept. 1-30, 2016):

I think Forest 44 is a beautiful area that provides remote hikes in the city. I feel it is well managed overall. I would like to see more trails graveled so they are not damaged by the horses when wet. I would also like more opportunities to bowhunt. It seems like a lot of tags are available but few deer killed.

I'd like to suggest adding a skeet shooting range at Jay Henges if there's suitable space, to cut down on the travel required to go to an affordable skeet shooting location. Especially if the Busch conservation area range gets shut down again at some time for some sort of improvement. That way both Busch (whenever it gets completely renovated), and Jay Henges have the full assortment of rifle/pistol range, trap range, and skeet range. Staff at the Jay Henges range are very friendly by the way.

I horseback ride in Conservation 44 several times a week. My trail riding friends and I always stay on the marked trails and understand the importance of this effort for trail health and prevention of erosion. We are also courteous to hunters and hikers, fully understanding that this is a shared space to be enjoyed by all. I hope that a "few bad apple" trail riders will not negatively impact those of us who enjoy the trails immensely - and follow the rules! I would also like to add that the bird watching is terrific during migration season! I have seen many "firsts" while trail riding. Thank you

I am aware that Forest 44 CA has over eleven miles of trails that are open to equestrians. This is a needed resource in St. Louis County, and Missouri Department of Conservation is COMMENDED for this multi-use designation that includes horses. Keep in mind that Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen (SMMBCH) is a service organization with the mission to keep equestrian trails open in Missouri. Please consider us a resource in the maintenance of, and education and advocacy for trails, on the Forest 44 CA. Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the Forest 44 CA Management Plan. I comment as an interested individual and as a representative of SMMBCH. ***** ***; President, Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen

About 2 years ago I walked on your horse trail next to Jay's Ranch. I was looking for my lost dog. There were no signs telling me the way out. I got lost for 2 & a half hours. It got dark and I couldn't find my way out. The only way I got out was by hearing the traffic on 44. The police had been called and we're trying to find me and I couldn't hear them. I'm 74 years old. I am the niece of Dorothy Aselman.

I am one of the horseback riders from Kraus Farms and I would like to complement the department on their work on maintaining the trails, especially after the storms and floods as they waste no time in removing dangerous obstacles, fallen trees and logs .

I am a horse back rider from Kraus Farms and I would like to complement the department on the timely maintenance of trails after storms and floods. Regarding hunting, first thank you for not

considering closing trails for the whole hunting season as fall is the absolute prime time for horseback riding. Secondly, I have never met a hunter who was rude or uncooperative when met on the trail. They always stop and move to the side when approached which is a good thing for both them and us as some times the younger horses can be skittish when they see all the hunting paraphernalia going down the trail. I know that some riders are rude and disrespectful which is a shame. Jay Kraus always puts a blurb in the newsletter before hunting season to remind riders that we do not own the world. Not everyone gets it but I think, for the most part, everyone gets along.

Page 6 objective 1 strategy 1 discusses aerial spraying of bush honeysuckle to control the invasives more efficiently. We are concerned that aerial spraying could be dangerous to native plants and dormant native plant seeds. Is there danger to animals, plants or people?
Page 7 discusses removing non-native trees to make a path for the fire. This is not ideal from a climate change perspective, so please assure that significant tree planting occurs as soon as possible to replace the carbon absorption capability lost in the felled trees.
Please study the planned burned areas to assure no threatened or rare native plants are lost.
In general, the overall plan is very good because it increases native habitat and reduces erosion due to added riparian plantings. This area gets lots of tourists due to the KATY trail, and the improvements increase the educational value of their bike rides. When replanting, please be sure to plant bird friendly trees and bushes!

Thank you for providing horseback riding trails. I have used the area for 45 years. The beauty of the area is wonderful and provides a place to unwind from the stress of everyday living.
Again, thank you for our trails.

My family and myself use the 44 area for a number of things. I ride, hike and enjoy the wildlife. We also enjoy the wildlife. My son has used it to improve his ornithology skills. We used to go to Castlewood, but have noticed a decrease in wildlife and have tired of being hypervigilant about being run down by bikers. At 44 there was a larger range of birdlife. I would like to mention that the folks who work down there have been great. They are friendly, hard working and will give information. They are very courteous to the riders. I know some people aren't as crazy about the horses, but from what I have observed, it has increased wildlife, grain in poop helps. Most of the hunters have been ok. I have observed bags of grain hidden which I try to bring to the rangers attention. One person had a tent next to a path which was creepy to the horses and women hiking. I would like to not see very young deer hunted. I also am concerned about people who let their dogs loose, some are field dogs. Others are just loose. My concern is for the dogs, the public and the horses. I have an older dog who enjoys short walks there and even a "friendly " dog charging up can injure her. Most dog folks are following the rules. I live close to the park and didn't even know it was there for years. It is a gem and we really enjoy our time there.
Again, a shoutout to the folks who work there, it's tough to keep maintaining the washed out trails and downed trees.

First, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Forest 44 CA Draft Management Plan. Forest 44 CA has 11.6 miles of trails open to horses. Trail riders commend MDC for making

this valuable opportunity available for horseback riding.

Maintaining the multi-use trails is a significant burden on the limited area staff. SMMBCH offers our services, availability of volunteers permitting, to assist with rerouting and repair of trails damaged by erosion or overuse. We further offer to assist the Area Manager to develop a partnership with local trail users to assist with development and maintenance of the trails and associated infrastructure.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.