Shawnee Wilderness Area Management Plan

2013-2023

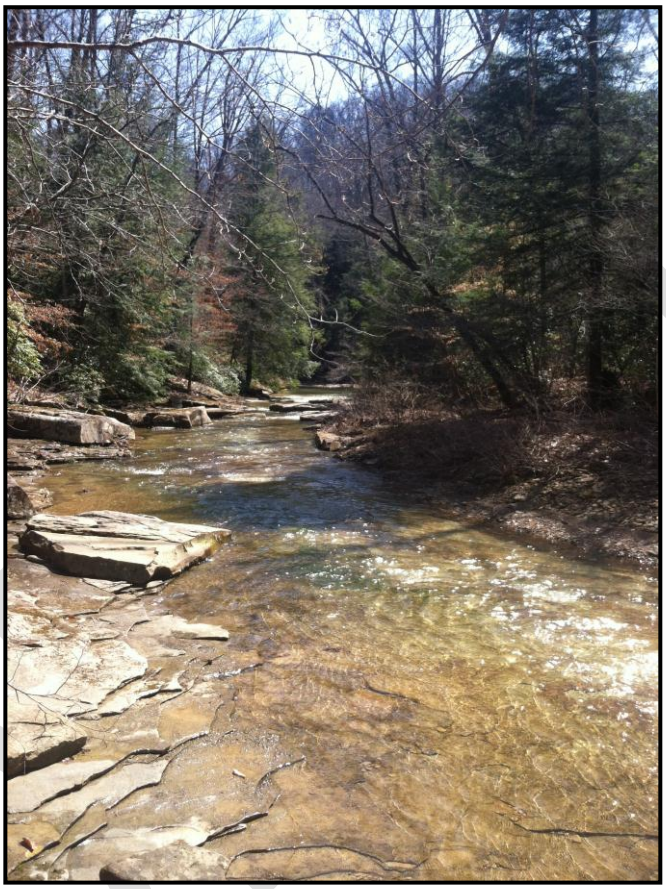

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction 3

II. Goals and Objectives 3

III. History 4

IV. Citizen Participation 5

V. General Wilderness Rules 5

VI. Wildfire Management 6

VII. Emergency Response 7

VIII. Insect and Disease Management 7

IX. Recreation Management 8

X. Vegetation and Trail Management 9

XI. Wildlife Management 9

XII. Research Management 9

Appendix A - Ohio Revised Code, 1503.43 Shawnee Wilderness Area 10

Appendix B - Shawnee Wilderness Area Map 13

Appendix C - List of Plan Amendments 14

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I. Introduction

The Shawnee Wilderness Area was first designated in 1972 with statutory protection occurring in 1988 (Ohio Revise Code 1503.43). Bounded by Forest Road 17 and Sunshine Ridge to the north, Upper Twin Creek Road to the east and northeast, US 52 to the south, and Lower Twin Creek Road to the west and south west, the area contains 8,466 acres of contiguous state forest ownership in Adams and Scioto Counties. There are numerous private properties within these boundary roads, but they occur primarily along the roads themselves.

Shawnee State Forest lies on the un-glaciated Allegheny Plateau. Topographically it is very rugged and steep. Most of the Shawnee Wilderness Area is traversed by Buckhorn Ridge extending from the north near the junction of township road 202 and county road 7 and progressing south toward Buena Vista. There are numerous small valleys and slopes descending to the east and west towards Upper and Lower Twin Creeks. Several small drainages descend south into Upper and Lower Twin Creeks and eventually the Ohio River.

Shawnee State Forest is part of the Central Hardwood Region, the largest conglomeration of deciduous hardwoods in the world. The forest is composed primarily of deciduous angiosperms and contains mostly oak-hickory forest types, typical of forests in southeastern Ohio.

The Division of Forestry employs a passive management strategy for the Shawnee Wilderness Area, consistent with Ohio Revised Code. Under this strategy, obvious signs of human influences are minimized and late-succession forest communities increase in abundance. The Department of Natural Resources is unaware of any other area in the state containing over 8,000 acres of undeveloped forest land where obvious evidence of human activities is gradually disappearing. As a result, the Shawnee Wilderness Area affords unique opportunities for current and future generations to enjoy the sense of solitude, awe, and grandeur that wilderness provides.

II. Goals and Objectives

- To uphold the law according to Ohio Revised Code Section 1503.43, Shawnee Wilderness Area
- To maintain a contiguous area of undeveloped State owned land as a designated Wilderness Area
- To provide an area in which humankind's past influences are largely unnoticed
- To allow for natural forest succession and natural forest disturbances to occur without human influence
- To provide an area that has outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation

III. History

Prior to settlement by Europeans and their descendants, up to 95% of what is now Ohio was covered by forests and woodlands. As the population grew, forests were harvested and land was cleared for agriculture. As the decades passed, the forests were reduced until, by the early 1900s, only about one-tenth of Ohio remained forested.

Thanks to an aggressive reforestation program statewide, improved forest management of private woodlands, and expanded public ownership of forest lands, approximately 30 percent of Ohio is now forested. ODNR's Division of Forestry manages over 190,000 acres of state forest lands for multiple uses.

As a result of the public's appreciation of natural resources, there has been a nation-wide movement to protect undisturbed wilderness areas. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Congress enacted legislation creating a National Wilderness Preserve system. In 1972 the Ohio Department of Natural Resources added to this effort and designated an 8,000 acre tract of contiguous forest land within Shawnee State Forest as a "Wilderness Area." Most of the land was acquired by the Division in the 1940s and 1950s, and some as early as the 1930s. Prior to acquisition by the state, some of these properties had been heavily impacted by settlement, mining, and other activities. After state acquisition, these lands were managed in accordance with sound forestry practices and some timber was harvested from the area through the 1960s.

Since the 1972 decision to designate these lands as wilderness, no logging has taken place. Other than hunting, trail use, and other low impact recreation, little human activity has occurred in the area. The effects of past activities are now largely unnoticed.

The 1972 administrative designation of these lands was an important step in providing a wilderness experience for Ohioans. In 1988, House Bill 699 placed this wilderness designation in statute, formalizing the Shawnee Wilderness Area. HB 699 specified in Ohio Revised Code the management intent, the boundaries of the area, and prohibited certain activities.

In 2003 a major ice storm impacted much of the Shawnee State Forest, including the Wilderness Area resulting in a substantial amount of downed woody debris. Many trees were uprooted and fell over, some snapped off at the trunk, and many received significant crown damage. Consistent with the wilderness designation, forest succession following this disturbance is proceeding without human intervention with the exception that hiking and bridle trails in the wilderness area were cleared of downed trees. The ice storm has provided an opportunity to observe how forest ecosystems recover following such events.

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IV. Citizen Participation

The 2013-2023 Shawnee Wilderness Area plan is the fourth management plan version for the area. Plans have been written or revised in 1989, 1999, and 2009. The fourth, and current, revision is taking place in 2013 to address changes to the wilderness area law. These changes will simply allow mechanized maintenance of the trail systems already established in the Wilderness Area. See the following section on "Vegetation and Trail Management" for more details. The plan will be reviewed again in 2023.

The plan will be posted on the internet at the Division of Forestry's website and will also be presented at the 2013 (Fiscal Year 2014) Open Houses. Public comments will be solicited throughout the review period and are accepted in writing, via e-mail, and through conversation with Division of Forestry staff.

Public participation is important to the Division of Forestry and, most importantly, to the people of Ohio as stakeholders. To ensure citizen participation, the review process in 2013 will begin with a minimum 60-day review and comment period of the draft 2013-2023 plan. Comments will be reviewed and incorporated as appropriate into an updated draft plan. The public will be given another 60-day review period to provide comments about this draft. Comments will be incorporated as appropriate and a final 2013-2023 plan will be adopted after the second 60-day comment period.

V. General Wilderness Rules

The following are prohibited within the Shawnee Wilderness Area:

- Picking, removal, cutting, or alteration in any manner of any vegetation unless the person first has obtained written consent from the Chief of the Division of Forestry for that activity and the action is necessary for appropriate public access, the preservation or restoration of a plant or wildlife species, or the documentation of scientific values.
- Granting of any easement or license, or sale or lease of any of the land, for any purpose. This does not apply to any private easement or license in existence on September 14, 1988.
- Exploration for, or extraction of, any coal, oil, gas, or minerals.
- Operation, construction, or installation of a utility facility above or below the surface of the land.
- Operation of a commercial enterprise.

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The following are also prohibited within the Shawnee Wilderness Area, except as necessary to meet emergency, operational, and administrative requirements:

- Use of the land as a temporary road.
- Construction of a road upon any of the land or use of the land as a road.
- Operation of a motor vehicle, motor boat, other form of mechanical transport, or motorized equipment.
- The landing of an aircraft.
- Construction of any building or other structure.

The following areas, which are necessary for the administration of Shawnee State Forest and the state forest system, are not subject to the prohibitions of this section:

- The Buena Vista manager's residence
- The Buena Vista walnut seed orchard

The status of the Buena Vista manager's residence and the Buena Vista walnut seed orchard will be re-assessed in the next evaluation period.

VI. Wildfire Management

Wildfires are a common occurrence every year in southern and southeastern Ohio. Division of Forestry statistics show that from 2002 through 2012, nearly 900 fires burned over 9,000 acres in Scioto and Adams counties. Most of these fires are caused by either careless debris burning or arson. Fire danger is at its highest during the fall months of October and November and before green-up in March, April, and May. However, wildfires may occur at any time of the year, particularly during times of drought.

In most wildfire situations, it is critical to contain the fire early in its development. This is even more essential during the next ten years because of the heavy woody debris buildup that resulted from the 2003 ice storm. In order to accomplish these suppression goals, firefighters must attack the fire quickly and aggressively. Wildland fires occurring in the Wilderness Area will be suppressed using tactics normally available to firefighters and the following details will be considered when appropriate:

- Heavy mechanized equipment (bulldozer, blade, or plow) for fire line construction will be used as a last resort. Severity of fire conditions, the fire's size, rate and direction of spread, weather, location, availability of personnel and equipment, and other factors will be evaluated to determine if non-mechanized methods (such as hand lines) will effectively and safely contain the fire. With the exception of circumstances where lives are at risk, bulldozer use will be limited to that necessary to establish containment lines. Minimum Impact Suppression Techniques (M.I.S.T.) will be utilized whenever possible to effectively meet

suppression and resource objectives and minimize environmental impacts. The use of heavy mechanized equipment will be approved by the Fire Protection Area Supervisor. This decision will be communicated immediately to the District Manager and Chief of the Division of Forestry.

- Non-powered and powered hand tools (leaf blower**,** chain saw, small hand tools) may be used at the discretion of the Incident Commander.
- The Forest Manager will determine the appropriate amount and intensity of fire line rehabilitation. The additional disturbance created by fire line rehabilitation will be evaluated against the benefits rehabilitation provides prior to any rehabilitation efforts.
- The Fire Protection Area Supervisor may allow small low intensity fires to burn only if the fire is not threatening or does not have a high potential of threatening the surrounding private property, public safety, or firefighter safety. This decision will be communicated immediately to the District Manager and Chief of the Division of Forestry.
- If a fire is determined to be of natural origin, the Fire Protection Area Supervisor may forgo suppression actions if the fire is not threatening or does not have a high potential of threatening the surrounding private property, public safety, or firefighter safety. This decision will be communicated immediately to the District Manager and Chief of the Division of Forestry.
- Prescribed burning will not be utilized as a management tool within the Shawnee Wilderness Area.

VII. Emergency Response

Due to the recreational uses and work performed within the Wilderness Area, it is probable that rescue personnel may need to address emergency response situations. An emergency is defined as an immediate life threatening or safety situation.

The Incident Commander will assess the emergency and deploy resources appropriately in consultation with the Forest Manager or other supervisory personnel.

Mechanized equipment may be used but only if critical to the situation. Critical decision will be relayed to the District Manager and Chief of the Division of Forestry as soon as possible.

VIII. Insect and Disease Management

Currently, insect and disease populations within the Wilderness Area are at an endemic level. These populations will continue to be evaluated, but will generally be allowed to fluctuate naturally within the Shawnee Wilderness Area boundaries. The following principles will be followed to evaluate insect and disease issues.

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- Native insect infestations and disease infections will not be controlled except in extreme epidemic situations in which the lack of control would significantly affect the forest resources outside of the wilderness area.
- If non-native forest pests or diseases populate the Wilderness Area and begin to threaten forest resources, any treatments will be consistent with ODNR management goals and policies. Other ODNR divisions, federal agencies, and scientists will be consulted prior to the decision to treat for non-native forest pests or diseases.
- Cutting of trees by ODNR Division of Forestry personnel or any other agency, person, or group, is not permitted except for trail maintenance, safety, or as approved by the Chief of the Division of Forestry for the prevention of the spread of pests and diseases as described above.

IX. Recreation Management

The Wilderness law prohibits the use of mechanical transport or motorized equipment for recreation. However, the wilderness area is available for non-motorized forms of recreation. Buckhorn Ridge (5.5 miles) and Cabbage Patch Hollow (2.5 miles) bridle trails are accessible for horse riding recreation. Also, within the Wilderness Area are approximately 5 miles of backpacking trail as well as a portion of the Buckeye Trail. Hunting and fishing activities are permitted as well as wilderness camping. No new trails or other recreational developments will be constructed during the 10 year planning period covered by this plan. The following conditions apply to public access of the wilderness area:

- Bicycles are considered mechanized and are prohibited.
- Signage will be kept to a minimum.
- Horses must stay on the designated bridle trails.
- Parking is permitted along the berms and legal road right-of-ways.
- Dispersed wilderness camping is permitted but the following regulations apply:
  - (a) A permit must be first obtained from the Shawnee Forest Manager. Permits may be denied during periods of high fire danger, an actual ongoing fire, or other unforeseen safety threats.
  - (b) Permits must be applied for 10 days in advance and in writing, but this provision may be waived as determined by the Forest Manager.
  - (c) Fires are prohibited except in portable stoves.
  - (d) Cutting of trees is prohibited.
  - (e) “Leave No Trace” camping practices must be exercised.

X. Vegetation and Trail Management

Vegetation management will be conducted according to the following:

- Volunteer assistance will be relied upon as much as possible to clear trails of debris and to perform trail maintenance. Trail maintenance will also be conducted by forestry personnel. Lesser maintained trails will also contribute to the wilderness recreation experience.
- All trail maintenance will be performed with hand tools as appropriate, but mechanical equipment such as weed eaters, chainsaws, leaf blowers, four wheelers and utvs, trail dozers, skid steers, tractors with bush hogs and buckets, or similar equipment may be used at the forest manager's discretion to maintain all designated trails.
- Any proposal for managing endangered or threatened plants and animals will be reviewed by the Chief of the Division of Forestry on a case by case basis. The Division will also rely on the expertise of other organizations and agencies, such as the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves and Division of Wildlife for their input.
- There are approximately 26 acres of non-native planted pine in eight different plantations. These plantations were established before the wilderness designation. They will not be maintained in any manner and natural succession will occur allowing the plantations to revert to native vegetation.

XI. Wildlife Management

All hunting, fishing, and trapping within the Wilderness area will be according to the Division of Wildlife's rules and regulations as provided in Ohio Revised Code 1503.43, Shawnee Wilderness Area.

Efforts to stock or reintroduce species of game and non-game wildlife will not be considered by the Division of Forestry unless the efforts are consistent with state or district-wide Division of Wildlife goals and are initiated by the Division of Wildlife.

XII. Research Management

Because of its unique protection status, the Wilderness Area is a valuable source of information for natural resource studies. In order to further limit the impact on the Area, only scientific studies that are dependent upon the wilderness area will be allowed.

- All research in this area must be conducted in a manner consistent with the Wilderness Area law.
- All studies must have little or no impact on the forest environment.
- Permission from the Division of Forestry is required using the "Special Use Permit" process.

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Appendix A

Ohio Revised Code, 1503.43 Shawnee Wilderness Area

(A) As used in this section:

(1) "Wilderness area" means a contiguous area of relatively undeveloped state-owned land administered by the division of forestry and consisting of not less than five thousand acres or of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition that either has retained its natural character and influence or has been substantially restored to a near natural appearance and that meets both of the following qualifications:

(a) The area is one in which humankind's past influences are largely unnoticed;

(b) The area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

(2) "Utility facility" includes, without limitation, towers, poles, pipes, sewers, tubing, conduits, conductors, cables, valves, lines, wires, manholes, and appurtenances thereto owned by a utility facility operator.

(3) "Utility facility operator" means a person or public authority that supplies any of the following materials or services by means of a utility facility:

(a) Flammable, toxic, or corrosive gas;

(b) Crude oil, petroleum products, or hazardous liquids;

(c) Coal;

(d) Electricity;

(e) Electronic, telephonic, or telegraphic communications;

(f) Television signals;

(g) Sewage disposal or drainage;

(h) Potable water;

(i) Steam or hot water.

(B) That portion of contiguous state lands located in Scioto and Adams counties and within the Shawnee state forest and bounded by forest road seventeen and sunshine ridge to the north, by upper Twin Creek road to the east and northeast, by United States route fifty-two to the south, and by lower Twin Creek road to the west and southwest is hereby designated the Shawnee wilderness area. Except as otherwise specifically provided by this section or by rule adopted under this chapter, the provisions of this chapter apply to the Shawnee wilderness area, and that area shall continue to be a part of the Shawnee state forest.

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(C) The Shawnee wilderness area shall be managed to preserve natural conditions and ensure the continuance of natural processes. The chief of the division of forestry, with the approval of the director of natural resources, shall administer the Shawnee wilderness area in accordance with a management plan, which the chief shall develop and adopt within one year after September 14, 1988. Sixty days prior to adopting a plan, the chief shall solicit public review and comment on a draft plan. At least once every ten years, the chief shall conduct a review of the plan, with public input, and revise the plan as appropriate. The chief shall make the plan available for review by any person upon request.

(D) Notwithstanding any other authority granted to the chief under this chapter, the chief shall include within the management plan adopted under division (C) of this section prohibitions of the following activities within the Shawnee wilderness area except for the areas exempted in division (E) of this section:

(1) Picking, removal, cutting, or alteration in any manner of any vegetation unless the person first has obtained written consent from the chief for that activity and the action is necessary for appropriate public access, the preservation or restoration of a plant or wildlife species, or the documentation of scientific values;

(2) Granting of any easement or license, or sale or lease of any of the land, for any purpose. Division (D)(2) of this section does not apply to any private easement or license in existence on September 14, 1988.

(3) Exploration for or extraction of any coal, oil, gas, or minerals;

(4) Operation, construction, or installation of a utility facility above or below the surface of the land;

(5) Operation of a commercial enterprise;

(6) Except as provided in division (D)(7) of this section, construction of a road upon any of the land or use of the land as a road;

(7) Except as is necessary to meet emergency requirements for administration of the area:

(a) Landing of an aircraft;

(b) Operation of a motor vehicle, motor boat, other form of mechanical transport, or motorized equipment;

(c) Construction of any building or other structure;

(d) Use of the land as a temporary road.

(E)(1) The following areas, which now are necessary for the administration of the Shawnee state forest and the state forest system, are not subject to the prohibitions of division (D) of this section:

(a) The Buena Vista manager's residence;

(b) The Buena Vista walnut seed orchard.

(2) The following areas, which now are necessary for the administration of the Shawnee state forest and the state forest system, are not subject to the prohibition established in division (D)(7)(b) of this section for the purpose of trail maintenance:

(a) The hiking trail west of upper Twin Creek road known as the wilderness loop;

(b) Buckhorn ridge bridle trail;

(c) Cabbage patch bridle trail.

(3) At any time that the chief makes a determination that it is no longer necessary for the administration of the Shawnee state forest or the state forest system for an area excluded in division (E)(1) or (2) of this section to be excluded, the area shall become subject to the prohibitions established in division (D) of this section or the prohibition established in division (D)(7)(b) of this section, as applicable.

(F) The chief, in developing a management plan under division (C) of this section, may not prohibit any hunting, fishing, or trapping that is done in conformity with Chapters 1531. and 1533. of the Revised Code or any rules adopted under those chapters.

Amended by 129th General Assembly File No. 127, HB 487, § 101.01, eff. 9/10/2012.

Effective Date: 03-18-1999

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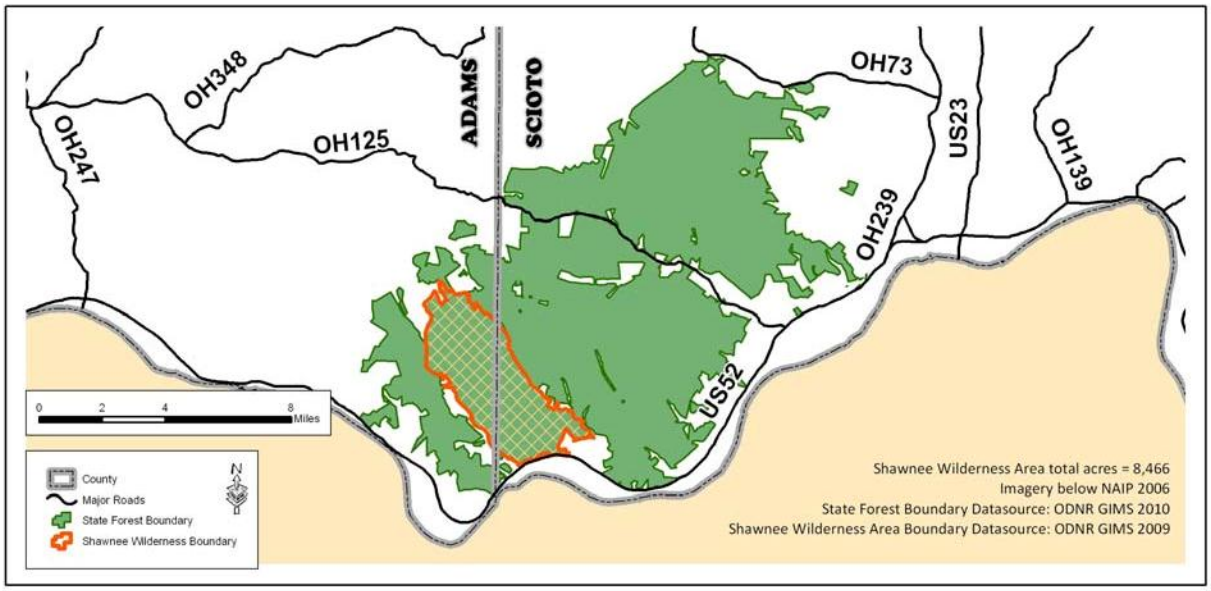
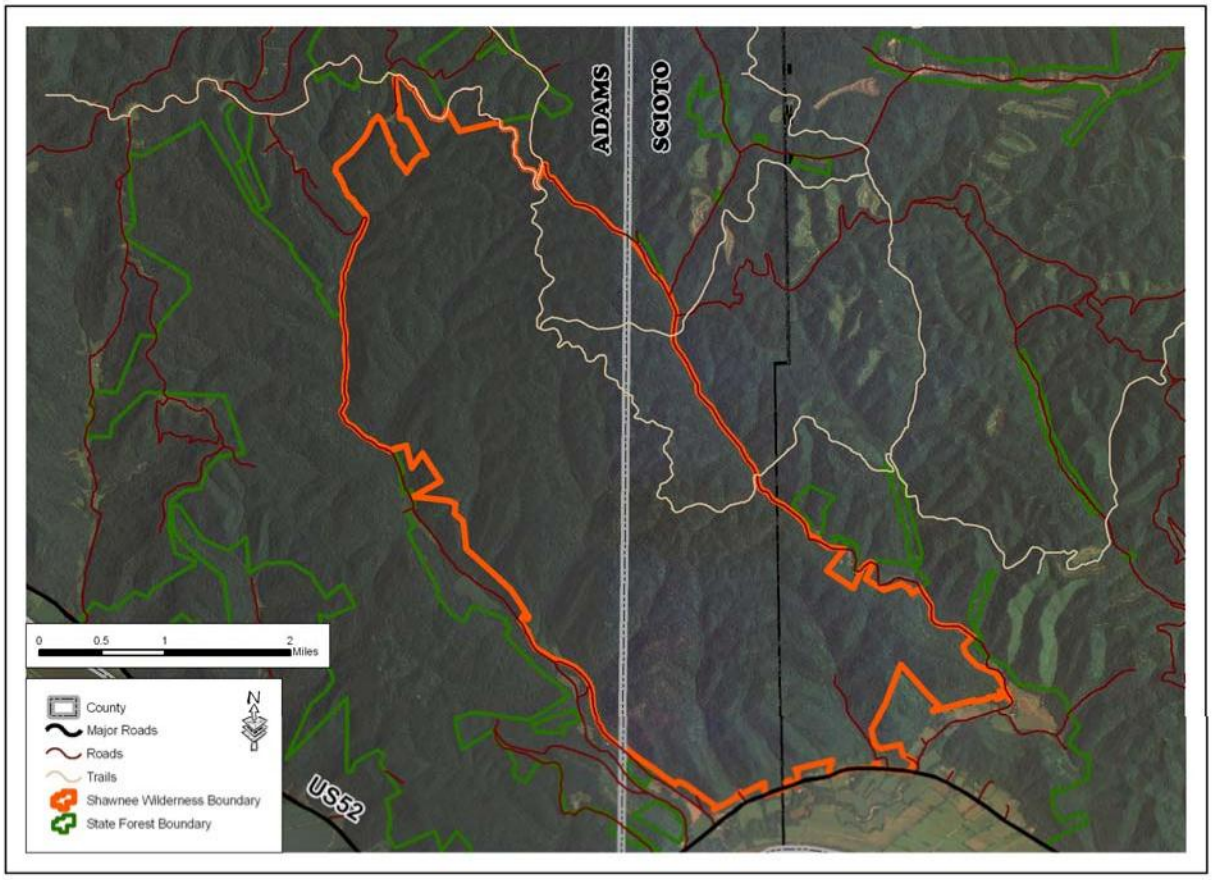
APPENDIX B

Shawnee Wilderness Area - Vicinity Map and Detail Map

March 10, 2010





Appendix C
2013 Plan Amendments

- Title page updated
- Pg 5: updated section IV. Citizen Participation to reflect latest plan revision process
- Pg 6: added term "operational" to the following sentence:

  The following are also prohibited within the Shawnee Wilderness Area, except as necessary to meet emergency, operational, and administrative requirements:
- Pg 6: deleted Twin Creek Fire Tower from the second bulleted list. Also deleted the last sentence in this section that also addressed the fire tower area as an exemption from the law. The tower does not exist, so this area is now part of the wilderness area and is subject to prohibitions of the law.
- Pg 6: updated fire stats in first paragraph of "Wildfire Management"
- Pg 6 and 7: updated personnel list for approvals needed for addressing wildfires
- Pg 9: updated Vegetation and Trail Management section to reflect law changes and allow certain mechanical trail maintenance activities to take place.
- Replaced ORC 1503.43 in Appendix A with version amended in HB487

<u>Law Changes</u>

Amended by 129th General Assembly File No. 127, HB 487, § 101.01, eff. 9/10/2012.

Ommited (E)(1)(c) The Twin Creek Fire Tower no longer exists so this area is now part of the wilderness area and is subject to the prohibitions of the law.

Added (E)(2) The following areas, which now are necessary for the administration of the Shawnee state forest and the state forest system, are not subject to the prohibition established in division (D)(7)(b) of this section for the purpose of trail maintenance:

(a) The hiking trail west of upper Twin Creek road known as the wilderness loop;

(b) Buckhorn ridge bridle trail;

(c) Cabbage patch bridle trail.

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