

# Merrill Horse Access

## Fifteen-Year Area Management Plan FY 2017-2031



Lisa B. Allen  
Forestry Division Chief

1-25-17  
Date

## Merrill Horse Access Management Plan Approval Page

### PLANNING TEAM

Tony Peper, Resource Forester

Lexis Riter, Conservation Agent

Kevin Meneau, Fisheries Management Biologist

John Vogel, Wildlife Regional Supervisor

### ST. LOUIS REGION

RCT Chair

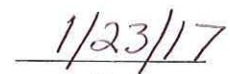
  
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### FORESTRY DIVISION

Forest Management Chief

  
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Signature

  
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Date

## OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Merrill Horse Access, #8006
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1980
- **Acreage:** 74 acres
- **County:** Jefferson
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Forestry
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Forestry
- **Statements of Purpose:**
  - A. Strategic Direction**

Merrill Horse Access is managed to provide public fishing access to the Big River for both boat and bank anglers. Management centers on providing bank and boat access to the river while preventing activities from compromising stream bank integrity.
  - B. Desired Future Condition**

The desired future condition of Merrill Horse Access is an area that provides access to the Big River for public recreation.
  - C. Federal Aid Statement**

N/A

## GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

- I. Special Considerations**
  - A. Priority Areas:** Meramec River Hills Priority Forest Landscape, Big River Fisheries Priority Watershed, Big River The Nature Conservancy Priority Stream Reach
  - B. Natural Areas:** None
  
- II. Important Natural Features and Resources**
  - A. Species of Conservation Concern:** None observed.
  - B. Caves:** None
  - C. Springs:** None
  - D. Other:** Occurs in the Big River Oak Woodland/Forest Hills Landtype Association. The Big River Oak Woodland/Forest Hills Landtype Association consists of broad ridges and moderate slopes farther from the rivers and narrow ridges and steeper slopes nearer the rivers. This landtype was historically and is currently largely timbered in oak woodland and forest, though second-growth forest today is denser and compositionally altered (Nigh & Schroeder, 2002).

**III. Existing Infrastructure**

- One concrete boat ramp
- One gravel parking lot (Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] accessible)
- One concrete low-water crossing located along entrance road

**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:** Gas pipeline easement owned by Gulf Pipe Line Company

**D. Cultural Resources Findings:** Yes, records kept with the Missouri Department of Conservation (the Department) environmental compliance specialist. Managers should follow best management practices for cultural resources found in the Department Resource Policy Manual.

**E. Endangered Species:** None observed.

**F. Boundary Issues:** None

**MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

**V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations**

**Challenges and Opportunities:**

- 1) Maintain adequate riparian corridors.
- 2) Prevent soil erosion.
- 3) Control invasive species.

**Management Objective 1:** Maintain a wooded riparian corridor at least 100 feet wide.

**Strategy 1:** As needed, develop forest management strategies to correct forest health issues in wooded riparian corridors. (Forestry)

**Management Objective 2:** Prevent soil erosion due to infrastructure, heavy public use, and flood events.

**Strategy 1:** Ensure roads and road-side drainages are managed to reduce runoff, sedimentation, and erosion. (Forestry, Design and Development)

**Strategy 2:** Clear flood debris as soon as possible following flood events. (Forestry, Design and Development)

**Strategy 3:** Plant vegetation or place rock, as needed, in areas where soils become unnaturally exposed. (Forestry)

**Management Objective 3:** Prevent the establishment of invasive plant species and eradicate them as time allows.

**Strategy 1:** Assess and determine the extent of invasive species. (Forestry)

**Strategy 2:** Promote resource management that deters the establishment of invasive plant species. (Forestry)

**Strategy 3:** Eradicate invasive species, as time allows and as warranted. Look for opportunities to utilize volunteers for control efforts through Stream Team, Adopt-an-Access, and other volunteer groups. (Forestry, Outreach and Education)

## **VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations**

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

- 1) Stabilize stream banks.
- 2) Minimize erosion during flood events on Merrill Horse Access entrance road.

**Management Objective 1:** Maintain stream bank stability.

**Strategy 1:** As warranted, develop stream bank stabilization strategies to address specific erosion situations. (Fisheries)

**Management Objective 2:** Minimize erosion along Merrill Horse Access entrance road.

**Strategy 1:** Explore opportunities to install a low-water crossing to minimize erosion along entrance road at Merrill Horse Access. (Forestry, Design and Development)

## **VII. Public Use Management Considerations**

The access contains approximately 73 acres of forest and woodland and provides a limited amount of hunting opportunity in addition to the fishing access.

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

- 1) Maintain clean, safe, and easy-to-use access for public use along the Big River. All accesses are subject to periodic flooding and the associated maintenance challenges.
- 2) Prevent vandalism from occurring and repair damage from vandalism.
- 3) Keep the public informed of opportunities, regulations, and/or activities on this area.
- 4) Provide a quality outdoor experience for the public: Encourage and enhance permissible outdoor recreational opportunities for these high use areas. Public use of any Department area involves the establishment and enforcement of appropriate management regulations. Address illicit behavior as soon as possible.

- 5) Provide fishing and hunting opportunities.

**Management Objective 1:** Maintain suitable public access on the area.

**Strategy 1:** Ensure existing infrastructure is maintained regularly to Department standards and Federal Aid requirements for areas. Maintenance of areas with concrete boat ramps must follow the Motor Boat Access Maintenance Standards. (Forestry)

**Strategy 2:** Clean ramp, parking lot, and road of flood debris as soon as possible after flood events occur. (Forestry, Design and Development)

**Strategy 3:** Promote Adopt-an-Access. (Forestry, Outreach and Education)

**Management Objective 2:** Reduce vandalism at area.

**Strategy 1:** Encourage open and timely communication between Forestry Staff, conservation agents, adjoining neighbors, and local law enforcement concerning observed unlawful activities. (Forestry, Protection)

**Strategy 2:** Determine and implement the best methods to deter vandalism. If necessary, conduct patrol operations with Protection, Forestry, and Fisheries staffs. (Protection, Forestry, Fisheries)

**Strategy 3:** Install barriers or vegetation to discourage illegal vehicular access off the parking lot, ramp, or road. (Forestry)

**Management Objective 3:** Provide information to the public about this area.

**Strategy 1:** Keep Conservation Atlas entries up-to-date for the area (including information about closures) to inform the public. (Forestry)

**Strategy 2:** Install and/or maintain signs on roadway leading to the area as needed. (Forestry)

**Strategy 3:** Keep regulations and area information on bulletin boards posted so the public is aware of them and they are clearly visible. (Forestry)

**Strategy 4:** Promote use of the area through media sources and advertise Outreach and Education programs held on these areas. (Outreach and Education)

**Management Objective 4:** Maintain a safe area for river way recreational pursuits.

**Strategy 1:** Maintain a high level of law enforcement presence through patrols by Protection Division and other local law enforcement agencies. Respond to and follow up with information provided by other agencies, the public, and neighbors. (Protection, Forestry)

**Strategy 2:** Collect information to assist Protection Staff in enforcement efforts on the access area. (Forestry, Fisheries)

**Management Objective 5:** Provide fishing and hunting opportunities.

**Strategy 1:** Maintain standard Department signs pertaining to fishing and hunting regulations. (Forestry)

**Strategy 2:** Conduct patrols to enforce area regulations. (Protection)

## VIII. Administrative Considerations

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

- 1) Ensure that flood events and related infrastructure changes are well documented for potential Federal Aid reimbursement purposes, as required under federal funding guidelines.
- 2) Provide opportunities for the public to access the area for fishing, hunting, nature observation, and conservation education.
- 3) Maintain identifiable boundaries for area users and to avoid conflict with adjoining property owners.

**Management Objective 1:** Keep all flood related activities documented and on file at local area manager's office.

**Strategy 1:** Provide Federal Aid information, as needed, to document all staff hours, maintenance activities, flooding costs, etc., as needed for reimbursement purposes. (Forestry, Design and Development)

**Management Objective 2:** Follow the Department policy concerning activities allowable through special use permits.

**Strategy 1:** Refer to the Department's Resource Policy Manual for policies concerning issuing of special use permits. If appropriate, avoid issuing special use permits during expected periods of high public use, if a user conflict is anticipated; or restrict amount of area to be used. (Forestry)

**Management Objective 3:** Maintain visible area boundaries for the area.

**Strategy 1:** Mark boundaries at least every five years, or as necessary, to prevent user/landowner conflicts by visitors trespassing onto adjoining private property. (Forestry)

**MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE**

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table:

	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31
<b>Administrative Considerations</b>															
<i>Objective 3</i>															
Strategy 1		X					X					X			



## APPENDICES

### Area Background:

Merrill Horse Access is located on the Big River, 5.4 miles downstream from the Mammoth Access, and 5.3 miles upstream from Brown’s Ford Access. Merrill Horse Access provides boat and bank fishing access to the river. The area was acquired in 1980 from willing sellers to provide better public access to the Big River. The area has a mixture of upland and bottomland forest on it.

Merrill Horse Access is located along Route H, approximately 5 miles west of DeSoto.

### Current Land and Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	Miles	% of Area
Woodland	50		68
Bottomland Forest	22.5		30
Other – Parking lot and boat ramp	1.5		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>		<b>100</b>
Stream Frontage		0.4	

### Public Input Summary:

The draft Merrill Horse Access Management Plan was available for a public comment period August 1–31, 2016. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from four respondents (Appendix A). The Merrill Horse Access 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 the Merrill Horse Access Management Plan public comment period.

### **Supports invasive species removal. Suggests washing mowing and farming equipment before moving to other areas.**

Invasive species management is a priority for the Department and is a major component of the resource management work that we do. Maintaining clean equipment to help curb the spread of invasive species is a much needed aspect of a good invasive species management plan. In most circumstances, Department staff work to clean equipment between uses on different areas. Department staff will continue to work on invasive species control as funding and workloads allow.

**Suggests providing better access to the bank for fishing.**

We will look into providing more bank fishing opportunities. New fishing locations will only be considered if they would not negatively impact any of our management objectives, specifically relating to erosion, stream bank stabilization, and protection of the riparian corridor.

**Concerned about any future development damaging cultural resources.**

The Department has strict guidelines concerning cultural resources and those guidelines are followed for all projects involving the development of new infrastructure and for work in previously undisturbed areas.

**Appreciates Merrill Horse Access.**

We appreciate your comment and hope that we continue managing this area in a way that best serves our stakeholders.

**References:**

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

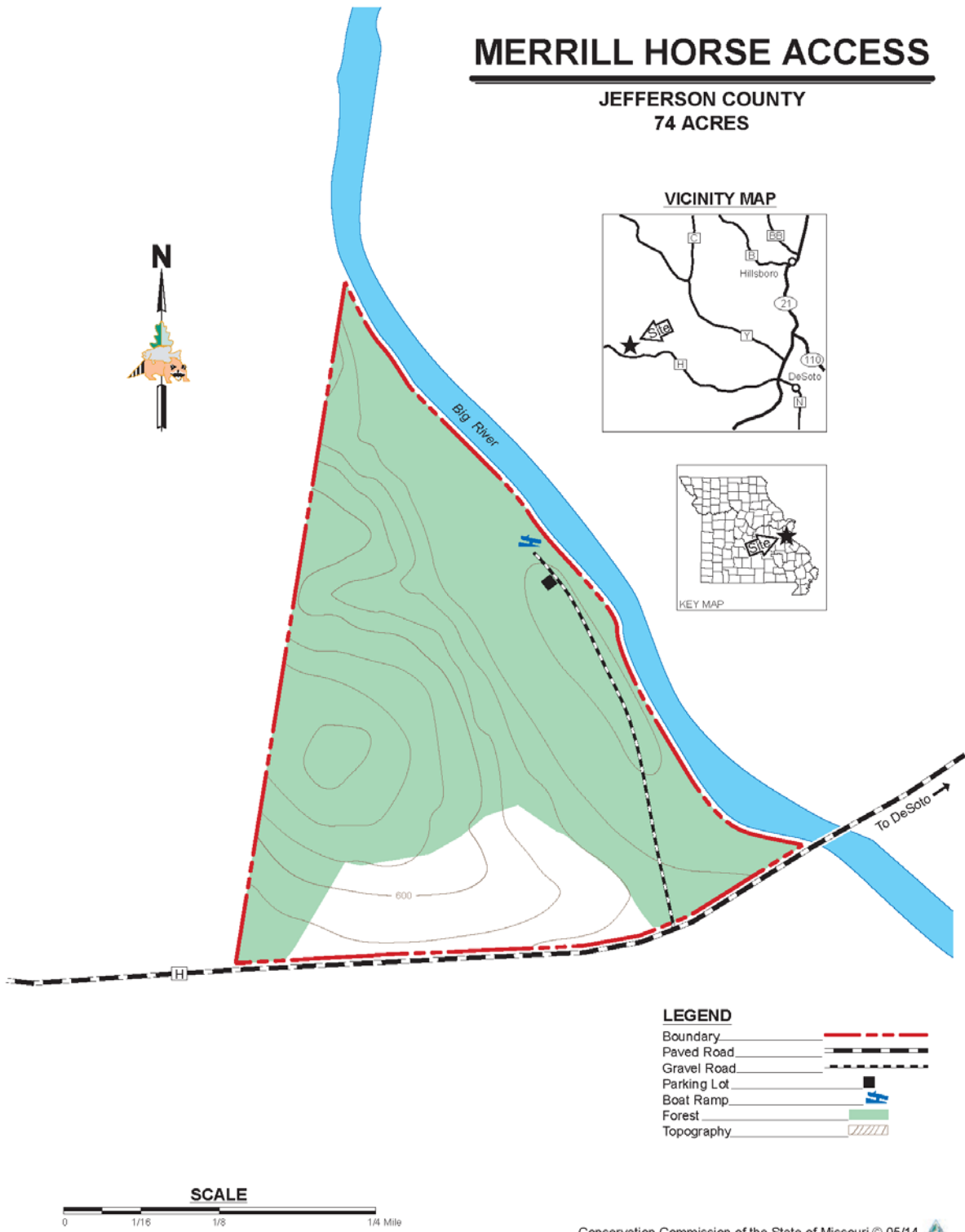
Figure 4: Current Vegetation Map

Figure 5: Easement Map

**Additional Appendices:**

Appendix A. Merrill Horse Access Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Area Map



**Figure 2: Aerial Map**

### Merrill Horse Access Aerial Map (2009)



**Legend**

 AreaBoundary

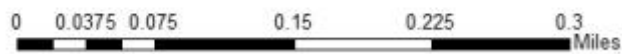


Figure 3: Topographic Map

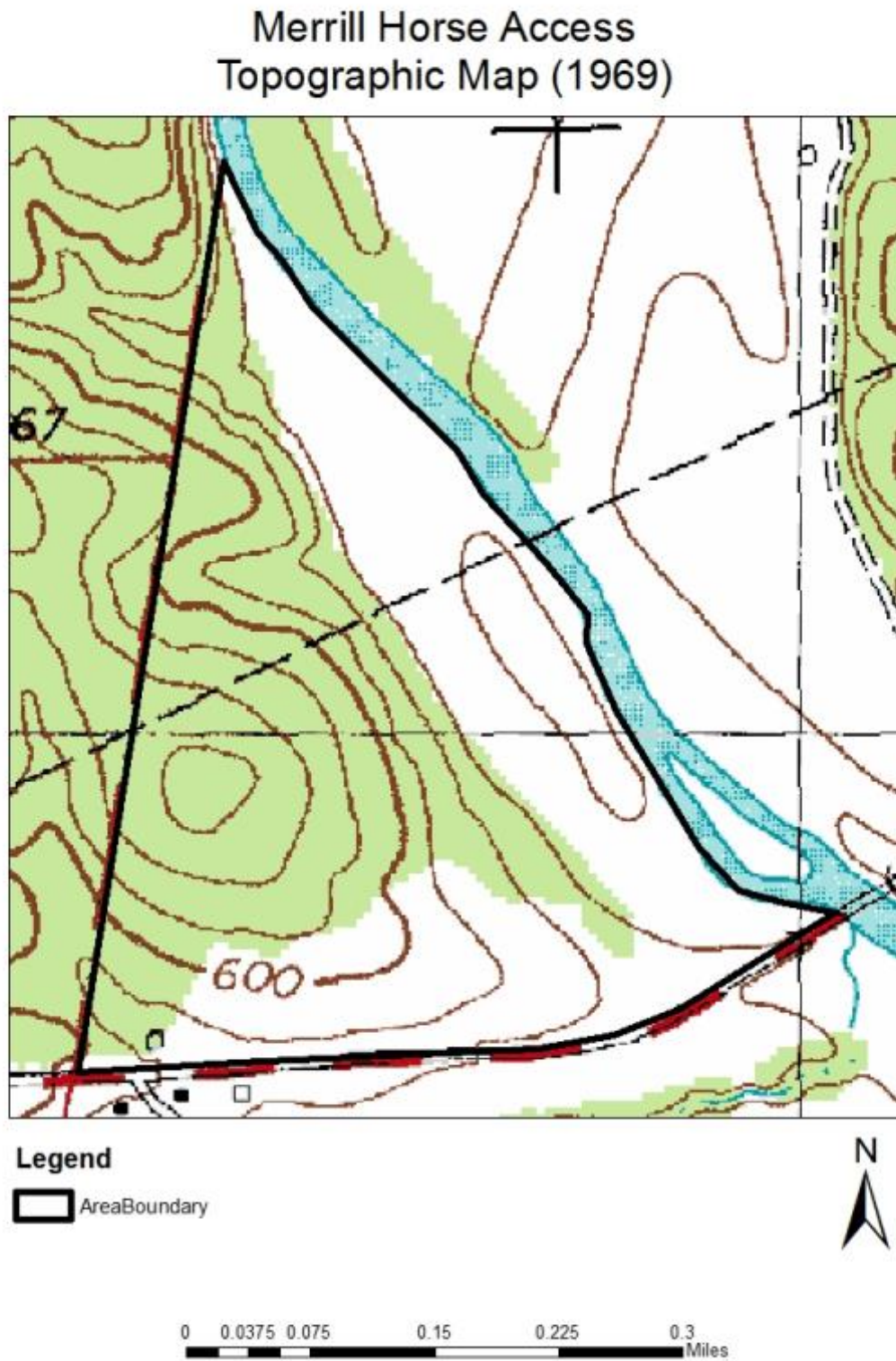


Figure 4: Current Vegetation Map



Figure 5: Easement Map

### Merrill Horse Access Easement Map



#### Legend

-  Gaspipeline
-  Area\_Boundary



**Appendix A. Merrill Horse Access Management Plan Public Comments**

Received during public comment period (August 1-31, 2016):

Some of the MDC lands are incredible with native species diversity while others are dominated by non-native species. The number one Management need is the control or reduction of non-native species. It is imperative that mowers and farmers wash their equipment before moving into a new area. There must be an active role in the control of exotic species. If there is not more of an active role then the remaining pristine sites will subcumb to exotic species and degrade ecological integrity.

Respectfully,

Is it possible to have a small area separate from the boat ramp where fishing from the bank is possible. The one time I tried fishing there, it seemed like you can't fish from anywhere but the boat ramp as far as bank fishing goes, unless the river is running real low. Everywhere else I tried it seemed like the drop-off from the bank to river, was too steep, and casting was real limited from the branches and shrubs there. A small clearing that permits a little casting, and which doesn't require fish to be chucked into the water from high up, to be released again, would be nice, as an alternative spot, for when someone else is already at the boat ramp.

used the take-out ramp just this week; easy access and parking. Old stories about an Indian painting of the sunface, somewhere on the bluffs across from this area, exact site lost. Maybe on the tall palisade just upstream from the access point. Any development should be cautious.

Sounds like all the bases are covered! Good looking out for all of Missouri's green spaces. I'm all about keeping our open green spaces ,open and green for as long as we can ,to be visited and enjoyed by all who love and respect our great and diverse outdoors. Thank You!