

DECISION MEMO
Chatham Thinning

USDA Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest, Saco Ranger District
Town of Chatham, Carroll County, New Hampshire

I. DECISION

A. Background

The White Mountain National Forest has identified a need to thin a 55 acre pine stand in the town of Chatham, in Carroll County, New Hampshire. Co-dominant trees range from eight to twenty inches, with several larger white pines. The stand is currently overstocked. Tree mortality from competition for resources or from secondary agents such as insects and disease may occur in the near future. Softwoods include red pine and eastern white pine, with minor amounts of eastern hemlock and red spruce. Hardwood species including red oak, paper birch, red maple and beech are present. Reducing stand density by thinning would promote future growth and health of the residual trees. Sunlight reaching the forest floor following the treatment would stimulate forest regeneration.

B. The Proposed Action

The White Mountain National Forest is proposing to thin individual trees to a specified tree density, maintaining a mosaic of intermediate and co-dominant trees on the site. The thinning would release both white pine, red pine and quality hardwoods such as red oak. Thinning would create a more open condition and allow the establishment of new seedlings.

Removal or chipping of the tops and limbs would be allowed but not required. Residual logging slash not removed would be lopped to 36 inches from the ground. The residual stand would increase in vigor due to decreased competition for available resources. The proposed thinning is consistent with direction found in the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). The thinning project would be completed within one harvest season.

C. Description of Decision

My decision is to thin this 55 acre stand. This decision is similar to another recent decision to thin near Red Eagle Pond, in Albany, NH (see Red Eagle Thinning Decision Memo, signed January 28, 2005). Trees that demonstrate poor form, disease, or susceptibility to secondary agents due to overcompetition will be removed. The residual stand will be relatively uniform in its tree spacing. No follow-up treatments or planting is anticipated. The existing access road will be used. This project is expected to be completed during the winter or following fall of 2006.

My decision also includes the removal of all larger trees on approximately one acre in the southeast corner of the stand, adjacent to the Chatham Town cemetery. These are trees that have the potential to fall or be blown onto and cause damage to cemetery headstones. Standard contract clauses will be employed to ensure that soil and water resources, wildlife, and cultural resources are protected.

Due to the numerous adjacent private landowners, and a propensity for this pine type to have high fuel levels and fire hazard, I am allowing for whole tree harvesting or chipping and removal of logging slash. However, lopping and scattering of logging slash may be sufficient.

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

A. Category of Exclusion

The project is within the category of exclusion 31.2-12, “Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction.”

1. No extra-ordinary circumstances are present, including no known Threatened, Endangered, Proposed or Sensitive Species and/or their Critical Habitat (see Biological Evaluation in planning record). The activities planned for this project will not adversely affect the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species’ designated critical habitat. Therefore, I have decided that this action will have ‘no effect’ on listed species or their critical habitats.
2. This area is not in a municipal watershed. The project is not located in or near floodplains and will not affect floodplains or wetlands. This has been validated by site-review. A buffer will be placed on the vernal pool along the east side of the stand. The well drained soils preclude overland flow of runoff on this parcel. Hydrologic or water quality effects from minor soil disturbance are not anticipated. Similar thinning projects on other stands in similar conditions have been reviewed and determined to have had no significant wetlands-related impacts. Monitoring of similar projects validates acceptable effects on other resources following thinning treatments on the White Mountain National Forest.
3. Congressionally Designated Areas
This decision does not affect Wilderness, National Recreation Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas, or Research Natural Areas. The closest Wilderness Area, the Caribou Speckled Mountain Wilderness is approximately five miles north of the project.
4. Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Areas will not be affected by the project. The project area has been surveyed for cultural and historic resources. None were located in the project area. The likelihood that this project would affect pre-historic artifacts is low. While concurrence with the State Historic Places Office (SHPO) has not been received, implementation will not occur until it is received.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement was conducted with a project scoping report and letter that went to approximately 17 individuals, adjacent landowners and agencies. The scoping letters were mailed on June 24, 2005 asking for public comments within thirty days of postmark (ie. by July 24, 2005). Two comments were received each supporting the project and its purpose and need. On October 20,

2005 legal notice was published in the Manchester Union Leader, and the Proposed Decision Memo sent to those who had commented. Only one commenter provided comments, which were supportive in nature.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including:

- **The White Mountain National Forest Plan**
- **The National Forest Management Act;** This project complies with the following seven requirements found at 36 CFR 219.27(b) regarding vegetation manipulation of tree cover because:
 - 1) It is best suited to the goals in the Forest Plan.. This decision is responsive to Forest Plan goals and is best suited to meet those goals.
 - 2) The thinning will result in fully stocked lands following the harvest.
 - 3) The decision is not chosen to provide the greatest dollar return or the greatest output of timber.
 - 4) The potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands were considered.
 - 5) Site productivity will not be impaired and soil and water resources will be conserved. This decision avoids impairment of site productivity. The nature of the project and use of Best Management Practices will protect soil and water resources.
 - 6) It provides the desired effects on water quality and quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired tree species, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.
 - 7) It is practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements and total costs of preparation, logging, and administration. The project area is adequately roaded, no new permanent or temporary roads are necessary to implement this decision. The treatment in this decision is appropriate to accomplish project objectives, and is economically practical.
- **Archaeological Resources Protection Act -**
- **National Environmental Policy Act** - This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this decision supports compliance with this Act.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL

Public involvement, including the 30 day comment period on the Proposed Decision Memo, did not surface any substantive comments or opposition to the proposed action. Therefore, this decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented five days following the decision date.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

- 1) Further information about this decision can be obtained from Rod Wilson, Project Team Leader, Saco Ranger Station, 33 Kancamagus Highway, Conway, NH 03818. Rod can be reached at 603-447-5448 (ext 120) or use TTY @ 603-447-3121
- 2) **E-mail – rmwilson@fs.fed.us**

VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment, as it is within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1b or 31.2, there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. The absence of public controversy or substantive opposing comments further supports the proposed action. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Planning Record.

____/S/ Terry Miller _____ November 23, 2005 _____

TERRY MILLER
District Ranger

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