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Farwell Mountain Vegetation Management Project

USDA Forest Service
White Mountain National Forest
Androscoggin Ranger District
Coos County, New Hampshire



Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Environmental Assessment



Appendix H – Forest Service Response to 30-Day Comments

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**Farwell Mountain Vegetation Management Project
Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest**

DECISION NOTICE and FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

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Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact Farwell Mountain Vegetation Management Project

1.0 Background

The Farwell Mountain Vegetation Management Analysis Area is located within the Albany Township, Oxford County, Maine on the Androscoggin Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest. The Analysis Area encompasses the 917 acres of Compartment 326 within the Albany Habitat Management Unit (HMU). All of the project activities are located in Management Area (MA) 2.1 lands.

2.0 Purpose and Need

2.1 Purpose of the Action

The Purpose of this project is to accomplish resource objectives to meet the overall management direction of the White Mountain National Forest, as established in the 2005 Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA-Forest Service, 2005a). The Farwell Mountain Vegetation Management project addresses site-specific needs and opportunities to move the area from the existing condition (EC) toward the desired future condition (DFC). See Location Map in Appendix A of the Public Comment Package/Environmental Assessment (EA)

The project also meets some of the goals of MA 2.1 under the 2005 Forest Plan which are to manage for a balance of habitats for the full range of wildlife species and to provide a supply of high quality sawtimber and other timber products on a sustainable yield basis. Harvesting mature and overmature trees provides high quality sawtimber to area mills while at the same time, lower quality or damaged trees can be harvested to improve future stand quality and productivity. HMU wildlife goals addressed by the project include creating regeneration age-class habitats and maintaining aspen-birch, spruce-fir, hemlock, and oak-pine habitats.

2.2 Need for Change

The Need for Change was determined by comparing existing conditions to desired conditions as outlined in the Forest Plan and determined by land capability. Habitat type and age class objectives for the Albany HMU listed in section 3.7 of the EA show a lack of spruce-fir and an overabundance of mixedwood and northern hardwood. There is also a need to maintain the existing component of oak-pine, aspen-birch, and hemlock. Age class diversity can be further improved by addressing a need to increase regeneration age class (0-9 yrs) within all habitat types. A Project Roads Analysis and field examinations by resource specialists determined a need to prevent runoff and minimize sedimentation in the East Branch Pleasant River through the use of watershed rehabilitation on an unneeded 0.5-mile segment of Forest Road 756 and a need to stabilize a 0.25-mile segment of the Old Mud City Road. At both sites sediments are presently being delivered to the river.

3.0 Decision to be Made

3.1 Decision Points

This Decision Notice documents activities to be implemented to meet the project's Purpose and Need. The decision points considered in my selection of an alternative were:

1. Which of the alternatives would best move the Farwell Mountain Analysis Area toward the DFC outlined in the Forest Plan and best meet the Purpose and Need for action?
2. Which of the alternatives best addresses relevant issues raised by the public and the interdisciplinary team?
3. Would the proposed action and its alternatives pose any significant environmental impact to warrant the need for an environmental impact statement?
4. Does the mitigation measure for the proposed action and its alternatives meet the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines?

3.2 Decision

I have decided to implement Alternative 2, the Proposed Action (see map on page 14 and Table 1). I based my decision on the EA, the direction provided by the Forest Plan (and the associated Final Environmental Impact Statement), the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and input provided through the public involvement process. I believe this alternative best meets the Purpose and Need for Change with a balanced approach to resolving issues raised by the public and Interdisciplinary team, and best accomplishes resource management objectives for the Albany HMU. I have read the comments submitted during the 30-day Comment Period, and I appreciate the quality of public input to this project. I considered this input carefully in making this decision. My rationale for selecting Alternative 2 is detailed in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 of this document.

Alternative 2 will contribute toward achieving desired wildlife habitat conditions within the Albany HMU, provide high quality sawtimber and other timber products on a sustained yield basis, establish 42 acres of regeneration age-class habitat and expand an existing permanent wildlife opening by 3 acres. Harvesting of approximately 1.055 million board feet of timber utilizing both uneven-aged and even-aged management techniques will occur on a total of approximately 299 acres of National Forest land. Connected and similar actions to the timber harvest include re-establishment of four log landings, restoration maintenance of 1.0 miles of existing road, decommissioning of 1.7 miles of existing roads, rehabilitation of a 0.5 mile section of FR 756 near the East Branch Pleasant River, and a stabilization of a 0.25 mile section of the Old Mud City Road at washout locations.

Table 1: Activities for Alternative 2

Proposed Activity Timber Harvest (Acres)	Alt 2
Clearcut & Patch Clearcut	22
Permanent Wildlife Opening	3
Seed Tree Cut	20
Shelterwood Prep Cut	14
Shelterwood Seed Cut	20
Group Selection Cut	74
Individual Tree and Group Selection Cut	146
Site Preparation (Acres)	
Prescribed Burning and/or Mechanical Treatment	20
PWO expansion	3
Transportation System (Miles)	
Miles of Road Restoration Maintenance	1.0
Miles of Road Decommissioning	1.7
Number of Log Landings Re-established	4
Watershed Improvements (Miles)	
Decommission and rehabilitate section of FR 756 near East Branch Pleasant River	0.5
Stabilize section of Old Mud City Road at washout locations	0.25

3.3 Reasons for Decision

I have selected Alternative 2 because it provides the greatest flexibility in managing the resources available in the Albany HMU. Both of the Action Alternatives are viable, but I believe the opportunities to address vegetation management goals using prescribed burning can be safely accomplished with limited damage to natural communities. My reasons for selecting Alternative 2 are:

- To perpetuate white pine habitat type through the use of prescribed fire or mechanical site preparation to promote white pine regeneration;
- To partially address our shortage of early successional wildlife habitat as desired in the Forest Plan. It will move the Albany HMU closer to its DFC by creating 22 acres of northern hardwood regeneration and 20 acres of paper birch regeneration;
- To follow Forest Plan direction for lands within Management Area 2.1 by providing timber products through intensive timber management practices and increase wildlife habitat diversity for the full range of wildlife species with emphasis on early-successional species and;
- To provide improved protection for water resources in the area through the use of rehabilitation and stabilization projects along the East Branch Pleasant River.

3.4 Other Alternatives Considered but not Selected

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered two additional alternatives. For a detailed comparison of these alternatives see Comparison of Alternatives (Section 2.1) in the Environmental Assessment.

Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the Analysis Area, and no timber harvest or connected actions would take place in the Project Area at this time.

I did not select this alternative because it does not meet the Purpose and Need for Change, nor does it achieve Forest Plan goals and objectives for MA 2.1 lands in the Albany HMU. Some stand conditions would remain unchanged, except as determined by natural disturbance; and no new regeneration age-class habitat would be generated through timber harvest. The white pine habitat type would not be maintained as other species present in the understory grow to poletimber and sawtimber size. This Alternative would continue to fall short of meeting the need for maintaining diversity for the full range of wildlife species that inhabit the National Forest. No sawtimber or other timber products would be generated by timber harvest in the Project Area at this time. Sediment contributions to the East Branch Pleasant River would go unchecked without rehabilitation and stabilization projects and the planned resurfacing of FR 756 as part of road restoration would not occur.

Alternative 3: No Prescribed Burning

Alternative 3 prescribes the same amount of acreage harvested but does not allow for the use of prescribed burning as a method of site preparation in Stands 1 and 17. This alternative would establish 42 acres of regeneration age-class habitat and 3 acres of permanent wildlife opening while harvesting approximately 1.055 million board feet of timber utilizing both uneven-aged and even-aged management techniques on approximately 299 acres. It would require restoration maintenance on 1.0 mile of existing roads; decommission 0.5 mile of an existing classified road and 1.0 mile of unclassified road; decommission 0.2 mile of unclassified road and re-establish a portion of the travelway as part of a log landing and re-establish 4 other log landings. Other activities included in alternative 3 are the decommissioning and rehabilitation of a 0.5 mile section of FR 756 near the East Branch Pleasant River and the stabilization of a 0.25 mile section of the Old Mud City Road at washout locations near the East Branch Pleasant River.

I did not select this alternative because: (1) it provides the least amount of flexibility of the Action Alternatives to meeting the Purpose and Need for regenerating white pine in the Albany HMU and increasing wildlife habitat diversity, and (2) I believe the prescribed fire goals can be safely achieved with limited damage to residual trees.

4.0 Public Involvement

A scoping letter soliciting comments on the Farwell Mountain Vegetation Management proposal was sent to 240 interested people, adjacent property owners, local newspapers and various agencies and organizations in April, 2005. The project was also listed in the Quarterly Schedule

of Proposed Actions for the White Mountain National Forest. The scoping letter was also posted on the White Mountain National Forest web page (www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain).

The 30-day Comment Period for the Farwell Mountain EA was initiated with a legal announcement in the Lewiston Sun Journal on March 8, 2006. The EA was mailed to 6 individuals who had requested it, and notice of the availability of the EA was sent to another individual who had requested it. In addition, the EA was posted on the White Mountain National Forest web page (www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain). During this period, we received 2 responses. One individual owns a parcel of land within the project area and worked closely with the Forest Service, resulting in a list of concerns (comment 4.2 in Appendix H) created during an April 22, 2005 meeting and an adjustment to the boundary of stand 27 in late May, 2005 to address visual concerns of timber harvesting from their property. Telephone conversations and impromptu meetings in the field have provided numerous opportunities to comment and exchange information on natural resources in the area. I have carefully considered these comments in making my decision, and have included my response to public comments in Appendix H of this document.

4.1 Issues Used to Formulate Alternatives

The issues considered during the analysis were raised by the public, Forest Service employees, and the interdisciplinary (ID) team during the scoping process. The main issue of concern used to develop Alternative 3 was:

Issue 1: Impacts to the natural communities, primarily visuals and soils, from prescribed burning:

This issue was brought forward by a member of the public during the scoping process and re-emphasized during the EA notice and comment period. The ID team considered this issue a viable alternative given the location of this individual's property within the project area and their concerns with prescribed fire here and in other areas of the HMU.

5.0 Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

Both Beneficial and Adverse Impacts Have Been Considered

Both beneficial and adverse impacts of implementing Alternative 2 have been considered in the EA (Chapter 3). My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. Though the effects from Alternative 2 may be both beneficial and adverse to certain resources, the EA demonstrates that these effects are relatively minor and the impacts generated are not directly, indirectly or cumulatively significant.

Effects on Public Health and Safety

There will be no significant effects to public health and safety because design features are in place to minimize conflicts between timber harvest activities and recreational users in the area. (EA, 2.0.4, Design Features & Mitigation Measures Common to all Action Alternatives). Similar activities have been implemented in the past and the described controls have proven to be effective.

Unique Physical and Biological Characteristics

There will be no significant effects to unique characteristics, such as prime farmland, within the project area since most of it has been forested for well over 100 years. There are no ecologically critical areas, such as wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, adjacent parklands, Roadless or Wilderness areas within the proposed project area.

Controversy

Consultation with natural resource organizations (Maine Natural Areas Program and Maine Historic Preservation Office) did not raise any highly controversial or uncommon concerns regarding the effects of the proposed action on the physical or biological environment (see EA, Chapter 3). Comments received from one individual during the 30-day Comment Period raised concern with the use of prescribed burning, a management tool commonly used by the Forest Service. Based on the involvement of these organizations, the public and Forest Service resource specialists, the effects on the human environment from the proposed action are not highly controversial.

Highly Uncertain, Unique or Unknown Risks

We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (Chapter 3 of the EA). The effects of the alternatives, as well as the range of site characteristics are similar to those types taken into consideration and disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (USDA-Forest Service, 2005b, ch. 3). Past knowledge gained through records of timber sale inspections, stand examinations, monitoring and research have provided a basis for determining the effects likely to occur in response to the proposed action.

Precedent for Future Actions

The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, since the timber harvest proposal is similar to many other harvests conducted on the White Mountain National Forest over many decades. Implementing Alternative 2 is consistent with the Forest Plan goals for Management Area 2.1.

Cumulative Impacts Related to Other Actions

The proposed action does not individually or cumulatively reach a level of significance. The EA (Chapter 3) describes the anticipated cumulative effects on vegetation, recreation, soils, water resources, air resources, fisheries, visuals, wildlife, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, heritage resources, roadless areas and socio-economic. I am satisfied after review of the Environmental Assessment that none of the cumulative effects of the alternatives are significant.

Where appropriate, design features or mitigation measures will be applied to minimize any potential adverse effects.

Effects to Significant Scientific, Cultural or Historical Resources

A cultural resource report (CRRR #05-02-08) was completed for the Project Area. Based on field surveys and a review of historic maps and literature there is no anticipated loss of significant historic or cultural resources. The Maine State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with the findings of our archeological survey and is in accordance with our actions (April, 2006). Design Features (EA, 2.0.4, Design Features & Mitigation Measures Common to all Action Alternatives) will be employed to eliminate or lessen any impacts to undiscovered artifacts caused by timber harvesting, road restoration, prescribed burning, watershed rehabilitation and stabilization and mechanical site preparation .

Threatened, Endangered Species and Their Habitats per the Endangered Species Act.

The action will not adversely affect any threatened or endangered species or habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Biological Evaluation, Project File).

A landscape analysis and subsequent field reviews conducted by a private contractor in 2003 and 2004 found no records of listed plants in the Project Area (Project File).

The Threat or Violation of Federal, State or Local Laws or Regulations that Protect the Environment.

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws were incorporated into the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines (USDA-Forest Service, 2005a, p 2-3), and Alternative 2 complies with the Forest Plan. In addition, Maine “best management practices” are incorporated into the project design.

6.0 Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The decision to implement Alternative 2 is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long term goals and objectives. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. Other applicable regulatory requirements and laws are listed below:

NFMA (National Forest Management Act)

This project complies with guidelines that insure vegetation management provides a sustained yield of forest products, promotes diverse plant and animal communities, and occurs in suitable locations. The harvested areas lie within Management Area 2.1 which allows timber harvesting in accordance with the National Forest Management Act and its implementing regulations, 36 CFR 219.27(b)(1) and was confirmed by field examinations.

The uneven-aged prescriptions proposed for stands 326/3, 326/4, 326/5, 326/14, 326/15, 326/18, 326/25, 326/26, 326/27, 326/32, 326/44, 326/51 and 326/54 are appropriate methods to promote regeneration growth in the understory (Safford, 1983; Leak, et al, 1987).

The even-aged prescription (shelterwood preparatory and seed cuts) proposed for stand 326/1, 326/17 and 326/59 is an appropriate method to improve chances for oak and pine regeneration in the understory (Lancaster and Leak, 1978; Hibbs and Bentley, 1983).

The even-aged prescriptions proposed for stands 326/10&10a, 326/27a, 326/50&50a and 326/62 are optimal methods to create structural characteristics and regeneration-age wildlife habitat in northern hardwoods (DeGraaf and Yamasaki, 2001).

The even-aged prescriptions proposed for stands 326/43 and 326/56 and are optimal methods to create regeneration-age habitat in the paper birch community type (Safford, 1983).

In addition to the consistency findings pertaining to the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan this act establishes specific guidelines for prescriptions involving vegetative manipulation in National Forest Management (USDA-Forest Service, 2005b, pp 3-115 to 3-119). My decision is consistent with the guidelines for management prescriptions that involve vegetative manipulation of tree cover [36 CFR 219.27(b)] as follows:

1. *The prescription should be best suited to the multiple-use goals established for the area with potential environmental, biological, cultural resource, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts, as stated in the regional guides and Forest Plans [36 CFR 219.27(b)(1)].* The use of an even-aged management prescription is optimal because it regenerates stands that are mature, supplies wood products predicted in the Forest Plan (USDA-Forest Service, 2005b, p 3-117), and protects other resource values and mitigates effects as needed (Farwell Mountain EA: Section 2.0.4 – Design Features and Mitigation Measures common to All Action Alternatives; Section 3.3 - Vegetation).
2. *The prescription should assure that lands can be adequately restocked except where permanent openings are created for wildlife habitat improvement, vistas, recreation uses and similar practices [36 CFR 219.27(b)(2)].* The practices prescribed for the Farwell Mountain Project are the same as those that have been successful in restocking WMNF MA 2.1 lands during past management entries (Project Record: Stocking surveys for Spruce Brook, Landing Camp, Camp 19, Pond Hill and Pond of Safety Timber Sales and Forest Monitoring Reports).
3. *The prescription should not be chosen primarily because it would give the greatest dollar return or the greatest output of timber, although these factors shall be considered [36 CFR 219.27(b)(3)].* Alternative 2 was chosen because it best meets the project Purpose and Need while responding to the issues and operating within the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines (Farwell Mountain EA: Section 2.1 - Comparison of Alternatives; Section 3.13 Socio-Economics).
4. *The prescription should be chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands [36 CFR 219.27(b)(4)].* Minimal negative effects are anticipated to residual trees or adjacent stands (Farwell Mountain EA: Section 3.3 - Vegetation).
5. *The prescription should avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of soil and water resources [36 CFR 219.27(b)(5)].* The prescriptions include Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, Best Management Practices, Design Features and a Mitigations Measure designed to prevent the permanent impairment of site productivity and conservation of water resources (Farwell Mountain EA: Section 2.0.4 –

Design Features and Mitigation Measures Common to All Action Alternatives; Section 3.3 – Vegetation, Section 3.4 – Soils; Section 3.5 – Water Resources).

6. *The prescription should provide the desired effects on water quantity and quality, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired tree species, forage production, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields [36 CFR 219.27(b)(6)].* The prescriptions meet Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for the resources listed above (Farwell Mountain EA: Section 2.0.4 – Design Features and Mitigation Measures Common to All Action Alternatives; Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences).
7. *The prescription should be practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements and total costs of preparation, logging, and administration [36 CFR 219.27(b)(7)].* Prescriptions use existing roads that need only restoration maintenance for use or temporary structures. Harvesting restrictions protect other resources. Costs of preparation, logging and administration are representative of average conditions in the area. (Farwell Mountain EA: Section 2.0.4 – Design Features and Mitigation Measures Common to All Action Alternatives; Section 3.3.1 – Timber Resources; Section 3.13 – Socio-Economics).

NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act)

This Act requires public involvement, an interdisciplinary approach, and consideration of potential environmental effects for proposed actions and alternatives. The EA is used to document compliance with this Act.

National Historic Preservation Act

The White Mountain National Forest consults with the Maine State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) prior to reaching a decision on the project. We have received concurrence from SHPO on the cultural resource report and approval to implement the project. Refer to the Cultural Resource Report in the Project File.

Endangered Species Act

The White Mountain National Forest completed a site-specific Biological Evaluation (BE) of the potential effects to Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Sensitive Species (TES). It was determined that there are not likely to be adverse effects to these species (Project File).

7.0 Implementation Date

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

8.0 Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.7. A person has standing to file an appeal only if they submitted substantive comments during the 30-day Comment Period. A Notice of Appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed

pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. Appeals must be filed within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the Lewiston Sun Journal, Lewiston, Maine to:

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, Farwell Mountain Project
626 East Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 8am-4:30pm (Central Time), Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. The Notice of Appeal may also be faxed to 414-944-3963, Attn: Appeals Deciding Officer, USDA Forest Service, Eastern Regional Office; or it may be electronically mailed to: appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or any software supported by Microsoft applications.

It is the responsibility of the interested parties to respond to this notice within the established time period. Postal delays or web server failures will not extend filing times. If a document is not available or delivered when expected, contact the Androscoggin Ranger District to arrange an alternate method of delivery. The 45-day time period is computed using calendar days, including Saturdays, Sundays, and Federal holidays. When the time period expires on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, the time is extended to the end of the next Federal working day. The day after the publication of the legal notice of the decision in the Lewiston Sun Journal is the first day of the appeal-filing period. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. If you do not have access to the Lewiston Sun Journal, please call the Androscoggin Ranger Station at 603-466-2713, ext. 222 (TTY 603-466-2856) for the published date. There will be no time extensions for appeals.

When there is a question about timely filing of an appeal, timeliness shall be determined by:

1. The date of the postmark, e-mail, fax, or other means of filing (for example, express delivery service) an appeal and any attachment;
2. The time and date imprint at the correct Appeal Deciding Officer's office on a hand-delivered appeal and any attachments; or
3. When an appeal is electronically mailed, the appellant should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgment from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the appellant does not receive an automated acknowledgment of the receipt of the appeal, it is the appellant's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. At a minimum, an appeal must include the following:

1. Appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
2. Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
3. When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant (§215.2) and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
4. The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;

5. The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either this part or part 251, subpart C (§215.11(d));
6. Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
7. Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
8. Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
9. How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

The EA for this project is available for public review at the Androscoggin Ranger District, 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581. In addition, the EA is posted on the White Mountain National Forest web page (www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain). Questions regarding the EA should be directed to Pat Nasta, NEPA Coordinator, at 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581 (phone: 603-466-2713 ext. 222, FAX and TTY: 603-466-2856).

9.0 Responsible Official and Contacts

The Responsible Official for the Farwell Mountain Vegetation Management Project is Katherine W. Stuart, District Ranger of the Androscoggin District of the White Mountain National Forest.

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact: Pat Nasta, NEPA Coordinator, at 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581, or by phone (603-466-2713 ext. 222), or by FAX and TYY (603-466-2856).

\S\ Katherine W. Stuart
KATHERINE W. STUART
District Ranger

05/02/2006
Date

References:

DeGraaf, R.M. and M. Yamasaki. 2001. *New England Wildlife: Habitat, Natural History and Distribution*. University Press of New England. 482 pp.

Hibbs, D.E. and W.R. Bentley. 1983. *A Management Guide for Red Oak in New England*. Cooperative Extension Service, College of Agriculture and Natural resources, The University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06268.

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Leak, W.B., D.S. Solomon and P.S. DeBald. 1987. *Silvicultural Guide for Northern Hardwood Types in the Northeast (revised)*. USDA Forest Service, Northeast Forest Experiment Station Research Paper NE 603.

Safford, L.O. 1983. *Silvicultural Guide for Paper Birch in the Northeast (revised)*. USDA Forest Service Northeast Forest Experiment Station Research Paper NE-535.

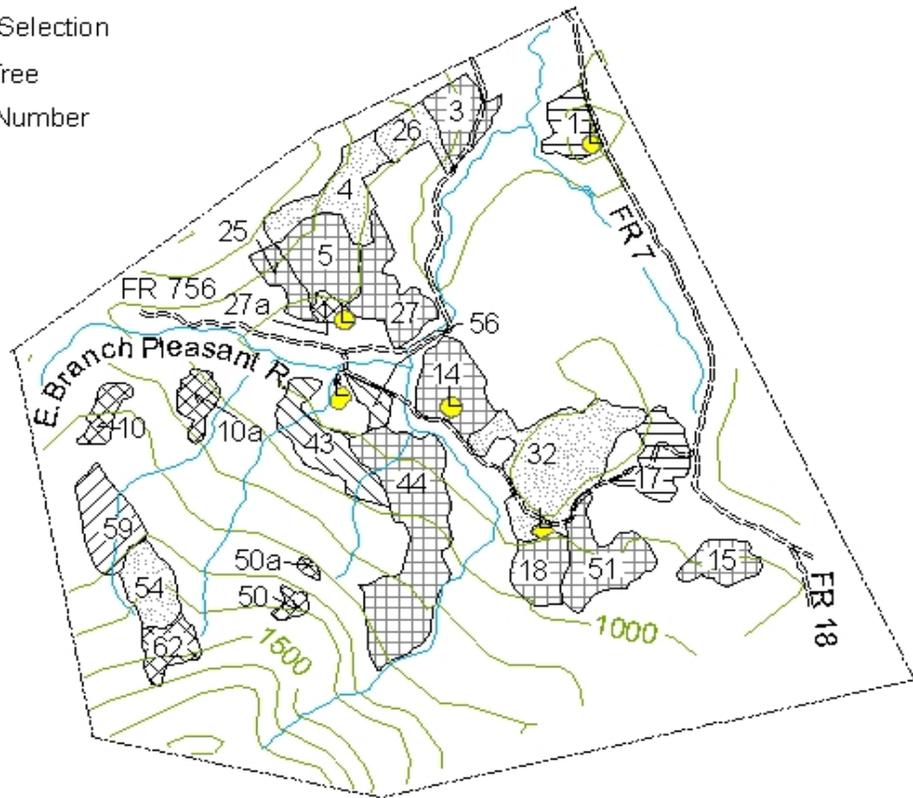
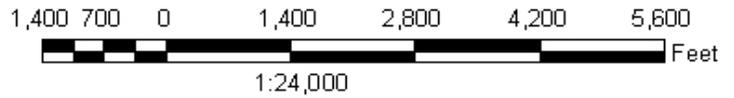
USDA-Forest Service, 2005a. *White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan*. Laconia, NH.

USDA-Forest Service, 2005b. *Final Environmental Impact Statement for White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan*. Laconia, NH.

Legend

- Project Area Boundary
- ==== Forest Road
- L Landing
- Streamcourse
- Contour Interval - 100'
- Shelterwood Prep
- Shelterwood Seed Tree
- Patch Clearcut
- Individual Tree & Group
- Group Selection
- Seed Tree
- 56 Stand Number

Map 1 - Alternative 2
 Farwell Mountain Project Area
 White Mountain National Forest
 Androscoggin Ranger District
 Albany Township
 Oxford County, Maine



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APPENDIX H
**Responses to Public Comments on the
Farwell Mountain Environmental Assessment**

The Farwell Mountain Environmental Assessment was offered for public review and comment for 30 days from March 8 through April 7, 2006. The invitation to comment was promoted through mailings, a Legal Ad in the Lewiston Sun Journal and posting the document on the White Mountain National Forest web site. Two responses were received via conventional mail.

We appreciate the time respondents spent reviewing this EA and thank you for your thoughtful comments.

The comments are arranged by category and, wherever possible, the respondent is quoted directly and in the context of their full comments.

The categories are:

1. Vegetation
2. Fire
3. Road Decommissioning
4. Other

1.0 Vegetation

1.1 Comment: “The extent of this project has diminished significantly since the initial “scoping” was done nearly a year ago.....It is not clear to me why these reductions in plan have occurred. It couldn’t be the result of negative public response to the scoping report.....I agree that it is important to continuously move the condition of the Forest towards the silvicultural and wildlife habitat objectives described in the Forest Plan.....With those goals in mind, my April 21, 2005, response to the “Scoping Report” appealed for more regeneration acres.....The thinking regarding the variabilities in habitat capabilities from stand to stand make a lot of sense. But apparently at “scoping” time it was thought that 47 acres of regeneration was achievable. Now the acreage has been reduced to 22. Frankly this reduction leaves me confused as it does not move the condition of the Forest in the direction of the Forest Plan as aggressively as the original scoping.....In summary, I am in favor of Alternative 2 but request that the regeneration acreage be returned to 47 acres as originally planned. Moose, deer, bear and many many non game species will be very appreciative. As will the visiting public who will have an improved opportunity to view them.”

Response: Changes from the proposed action presented in the April, 2005 scoping letter were briefly discussed in the cover letter attached to the March 2006 EA. Stand 23 was originally considered for a clearcut treatment by an Interdisciplinary Team of resource specialists due to: 1) past harvest history in the stand resulting in an increased occurrence of low quality and/or damaged trees; 2) the presence of an undesirable amount of advance beech regeneration in the understory, and; 3) the limited number of opportunities within the project area to meet the Albany HMU age class objectives for Northern Hardwood habitat.

Stand 23 is comprised of a mixed northern hardwoods habitat type on confirmed softwood ecological land type (ELT). Clearcutting of this stand would most likely result in the regeneration of northern hardwood species as opposed to the desired softwoods, a conflict with recently implemented 2005 Forest Plan HMU wildlife objectives that manage forest composition in a manner consistent with the capability of ELT. The silvicultural method to convert a hardwood to a softwood habitat type is through the use of unevenaged management over several decades. Repeated treatments at 15 to 20 year intervals allow for the removal of mature hardwood species in favor of establishing softwood seedlings, saplings and eventually poletimber sized trees, thus completing a change in habitat type. The stand was dropped from consideration for other treatments (single tree selection, groups, or thinnings) to allow for an additional 15-20 years growth and further establishment of softwood seedlings and saplings. An unevenaged treatment at that time would be more beneficial towards a softwood stand conversion.

2.0 Fire

2.1 Comment: One commenter expressed his desire to select the No Prescribed Fire Alternative. He strongly opposes the use of prescribed fire for the following reasons: (1) there are better means of obtaining objectives by mechanical treatment; (2) less chance of destroying good healthy trees – such as what happened on FR 59 off FR 7; (3) lowers air quality; (4) visual effects; (5) waste of natural resources and money (6) wildlife habitat loss; and (7) sends a poor message to the public when there are signs by the National Forest to prevent forest fires.

Response:

(1) Prescribed fire is being used by the New England chapters of the Nature Conservancy, The State of New Hampshire, the Green Mountain National Forest, and the Department of Defense to perpetuate pine and oak communities across northern New England and the state of New York. These land management agencies are modeling their fire program based on the prescribed fire studies conducted from the 1970's through the present by university professors such as Drs. Wierick, Patterson, and Ken Adams (University of New Hampshire, University of Massachusetts, and State University of New York, respectively) along with other researchers.

(2) Some mortality and scorching of mature pine is expected during a prescribed fire. In the case of the Harriman Brook under-burn near FR 59 in Albany Township, the percentage of scorching and mortality in some areas of the stand due to heavier fuel loading, heated smoke and a change in wind direction. Continued monitoring of this burn and others on the Forest will help refine procedures to better reach prescribed fire objectives.

(3) Air quality concerns are discussed on pages 65-68 of the EA. Increased amounts of carbon monoxide concentrations and the release of fine particular matters produced by smoke will be short-term and localized, thereby reducing potential health effects. Smoke modeling and air quality monitoring before and after a prescribed fire event are tools used to measure effects to the local area. Smoke plumes created may degrade air quality in an area for just a few hours before moving and dispersing.

(4) The visual effects of prescribed fire upon the scenery are described in Section 3.12 of the EA. Although blackened stems of remaining trees and underbrush will be visible in Stands 1 and 17 from FRs 7 and 756 these effects would be short-lived once the understory has recovered.

(5) The effects to natural resources lost as a result of prescribed fire are discussed in Section 3.3 of the EA and are expected to be temporary. Losses of timber due to fire are expected to be used by a variety of wildlife species as a source of foods and habitat. The use of fire to assist in the

perpetuation of white pine was prescribed primarily to meet silvicultural objectives, although the additional objective of hazardous fuels reduction will be accomplished as well. Funding for all site preparation activities, including prescribed burns have traditionally been funded by timber sale revenues.

(6) Underburning has been proposed in conjunction with timber harvesting to increase the amount of light reaching the forest floor. Research has found that oak and pine seedlings regenerate best when the topsoil is scarified (USDA Forest Service 1983, Demaris 1996). This reduces the competition from other species and provides for the best conditions for oak and pine seedlings to regenerate. There will be a negative effect on competing hardwoods and softwoods regeneration. However this is an opportunity to maintain oak and pine within the HMU and meet the desired goal of our Forest Plan to provide an array of habitat conditions for wildlife.

(7) Signs and other media are used by the Forest Service with the intent to reduce the occurrence of unmanaged wildland fire. News releases sent to local newspapers and posted on the forest web page update local communities with location and sizes of upcoming prescribed burns and serve as a seasonal reminder of their importance to managing National Forest lands.

2.2 Comment: The above commenter would also like to see the burning of brush piles in the permanent wildlife opening dropped from Alternative 3 for the following reasons: (1) it would be less costly if they were mowed on a timely schedule so that it would not require burning; (2) it would eliminate air quality concerns; (3) it would eliminate chances of a fire getting out of control and (4) destroying his camp which is downwind and borders on the edge of the wildlife opening.

Response:

(1) The permanent wildlife opening containing the brush piles was created during the Mud City Timber Sale in the early 1980s. All or portions of the opening were hand brushed by the Maine Conservation Corps in 1990 and were mowed in 1991, 1995, 1998, and again in 2001. Islands of growth that provided brushy cover or protected apple trees in the opening have increased in size over the past 20-25 years such that some of the saplings are too large to effectively treat with a mower or bush hog. Hand brushing and piling is a cheaper alternative than contracting a brontosaurus (excavator with a flail head) at this time.

(2) See response (3) in response to comment 2.1 above.

(3 and 4) The first priority in every fire management activity is firefighter and public safety. Other priorities include protecting human communities, community infrastructure and other property and improvements. Burn plans are developed for each site and include objectives, identified fire breaks, weather and wind conditions, firefighter and equipment, safety and contingency plans, smoke sensitive areas and neighbors to be contacted. Test burns are used to monitor fire behavior and determine if conditions are safe to conduct the full burn. The Forest Service is exploring a number of methods of burning brush piles from the center outward to reduce the heat and related damage to the surrounding soils and vegetation.

2.0 Road Decommissioning

3.1 Comment: An individual “would like to see that culverts that are removed are properly disposed of and not left behind”.

Response: As part of the proposed 0.5 mile decommissioning and rehabilitation of FR 756 and 0.25 mile stabilization of the Old Mud City Road, removed culverts will not be left on site.

3.0 Other

4.1 Comment: “It was mentioned on page 42 discussing prescribed burning that Stand 17 is not adjacent to a stream. There is a stream that is adjacent and runs through Stand 17 that flows into the East Branch of the Pleasant River. It is fed from a wet lands area and flows mostly year round, except in very dry years when it is intermittent.”

Response: Thank you for reminding the Forest Service of the location of this intermittent stream. Proposed treatments end at the boundary of Stand 17 which is in fact located adjacent to an intermittent stream.

4.2 Comment: “I would like to have my concerns which were put into a scoping letter after my meeting with district personnel on April 22, 2005 added to this document. Some of them have already been addressed and some are pending” The May 4, 2005 letter that documented an individual’s concerns with the proposed projects include the following comments: (1) Possible negative visual impacts of harvesting adjacent to his property. The view from his camp looks into Stand 27 where an individual tree and group harvest is proposed; (2) impacts to the natural communities, primarily visual and soils, of prescribed burning; (3) to make sure the Forest Service has knowledge of a cellar hole located in Stand 17 in the south side of FR 756; (4) responsibility for any damage to the gate at the East Branch Pleasant River bridge during the period of harvest; (5) the level of cleanup to be carried out after harvesting at landing sites; (6) how slash will be dealt with alongside FR 756; (7) time (to include earliest starting date) and duration of harvest; (8) past grading procedures on FR 756 and timing of proposed gravelling with emphasis on a mudhole near the first landing south of the road; (9) procedures for FR 756 decommissioning north of the East Branch Pleasant River bridge and possible increased erosion from culvert removal within this section; (10) effects of decommissioning of unnumbered old county road (elsewhere referred to as the Old Mud City Road) on the individual’s right-of-way; (11) the use of an additional landing in the vicinity of stand 3 to provide for easier skidding given the rugged terrain of the proposed stands north of the old county road; (12) location of Forest Service boundary west of the Patte Brook Road . Present boundary does not reflect actual FS ownership but is expected to be resurveyed and painted in the near future; (13) who installed rock gabions located at East Branch Pleasant River washout of the old county road; and (14) the renewal of a volunteer agreement for apple tree maintenance in a nearby wildlife opening.

Response:

- (1) A field inspection with the concerned individual resulted in an agreed upon adjustment to the proposed boundary of Stand 27.
- (2) See response to comment 2.1.
- (3) The first recorded survey of the abandoned cellar hole was made in 1982. Protection of this site and others are addressed in the EA (Sections 2.0.4 and 3.10).
- (4) Repairs to any damage of the East Branch Pleasant River bridge incurred during the period of the harvest will be made by the damaging party, or if necessary, the Forest Service. The concerned individual, the owner of an inholding parcel beyond the gate, will not be held responsible.
- (5) Cleanup of landing sites will occur after harvesting areas served by each landing is completed and is handled as part of the timber sale contract.
- (6) The removal of slash along FR 756 is addressed in Section 2.0.4 of the EA.

- (7) Harvest of timber will proceed after timber sale preparation and contracting are complete, at the earliest, the fall of 2006. Timber sale contracts last for 5 years, with extensions possible.
- (8) The proposed project includes restoration maintenance of FR 756 to occur prior to harvesting activity.
- (9) Procedures for the decommissioning and rehabilitation of FR 756 north of the East Branch Pleasant River Bridge and decommissioning and stabilization of the Old Mud City Road are discussed in section 1.4 of the EA.
- (10) Effects of the Old Mud City Road decommissioning are discussed in the individual resource sections of Chapter 3 in the EA.
- (11) Field reconnaissance resulted in the location of a skid trail from earlier harvests leading from the landing in stand 27a to stand 26. An extension of this skid road has been located to provide access to stand 3.
- (12) Boundary line location maps of the area west of the Patte Brook Road (FR 7) were provided to the individual. Boundary lines in the area were re-surveyed and painted in the summer of 2005.
- (13) It is still unknown as to whether the Forest Service or the previous landowner installed rock gabions at the location of the Old Mud City Road stabilization to prevent the issues that exist today.
- (14) The volunteer agreement was renewed in January 2006.

References:

- Demaris, K. M. 1996. Northern Red Oak Regeneration Biology and Silviculture. University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, Durham.
- USDA Forest Service. 1983. Silvicultural systems for the major forest types of the United States. Agriculture Handbook 445.