

# **RUMNEY ROCKS CLIMBING MANAGEMENT PLAN**

## **White Mountain National Forest**

### **Pemigewasset Ranger District**

**July, 2008**

#### **Introduction**

The Rumney Rocks Climbing Area encompasses approximately 150 acres on the south-facing slopes of Rattlesnake Mountain on the White Mountain National Forest in Rumney, New Hampshire. Scattered across these slopes are approximately 28 rock faces known by the climbing community as “craggs.” Rumney Rocks is a nationally renowned sport climbing area with a long and rich climbing history dating back to the 1960s. This unique area provides climbing opportunities for those new to the sport as well as for some of the best sport climbers in the country. The consistent and substantial involvement of the climbing community in protection and management of this area is a testament to the value and importance of Rumney Rocks.

This area has seen a dramatic increase in use in the last twenty years; there were 48 published climbing routes at Rumney Rocks in Ed Webster’s 1987 guidebook *Rock Climbs in the White Mountains of New Hampshire* and are over 480 documented routes today. The White Mountain National Forest Management Plan states that when climbing issues are “no longer effectively addressed” by application of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, “site specific climbing management plans should be developed.” To address the issues and concerns regarding increased use in this area, the Forest Service developed this Climbing Management Plan, the first on the White Mountain National Forest, with input from the local community and other interested parties. This plan is to be used as additional guidance along with standards and guidelines identified in the Forest Plan for climbing.

#### **Goals and Objectives**

This Plan is an effort to effectively meet the following needs for the Rumney Rocks area:

- Recognize and respect the value and importance of Rumney Rocks to climbers and members of the community
- Assure sustainable long-term conservation of the resource
- Ensure Rumney Rocks remains accessible to the climbing community and other members of the public
- Provide opportunity for a quality climbing experience while protecting natural and cultural resources
- Work closely with the climbing community to address emerging issues and adaptively manage the area in a cooperative manner
- Clearly identify thresholds for acceptable change to the natural and social environment
- Set forth clearly defined management actions to be supported and implemented by the Forest Service and the climbing community

This climbing management plan includes three sections: Management Actions, an Action Plan, and Partnerships. Management actions describe what the WMNF will do to effectively address recreation activity and its potential impacts at Rumney Rocks. The action plan lays

out, in clear format, what specific actions will be completed to accomplish management as described in the management section. The action plan also lays out objectives for these actions, timelines, and a description of the level of additional environmental analysis required for each action prior to implementation. Finally, a brief discussion about partnerships and how the Forest intends to maintain relationships with these partners is described.

This Plan is intended to be used in conjunction with the White Mountain National Forest Management Plan and other laws and policy governing Forest Service land management. Appendix A outlines WMNF Forest Plan standards and guidelines pertaining to rock and ice climbing Forest-wide.

## **Management Actions**

### **1. Protection of natural and cultural resources, including Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species**

The Forest Service will work with the climbing community and cooperators to protect known natural and cultural resources and address findings of any new natural or cultural resources. The following specific actions will be followed:

#### **a. Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) management/voluntary cliff closures**

Peregrine falcons have consistently nested on the crags at Rumney since 1995. Nesting falcons successfully fledged 34 young in 13 years (1995-2007) at Rumney, making this cliff one of the most successful breeding sites in the state. The NH Audubon Society monitors breeding peregrine falcons in NH with guidance from, and under contract with, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHFGD) Nongame Program. NH Audubon posts annual cliff closures at Rumney and other climbing areas to protect nesting falcons from frequent human disturbance which could ultimately result in nest failure. The Forest Service will continue to work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), NHFGD and NH Audubon Society or any organization involved with future falcon management efforts to monitor and protect nesting falcons at Rumney. Through this collaboration, specified areas of the crags will typically be posted closed to climbing for a portion of the spring and summer. Voluntary compliance with these efforts to protect nesting sites has been successful and will continue to serve as the model for management. The Audubon Society will coordinate with the Pemigewasset District Biologist before posting closure of any crags.

The climbing community, Audubon Society, and the Forest Service will monitor the effectiveness of these closures. If voluntary compliance with posted closures is ineffective or it is determined that human disturbance is affecting falcon breeding success, additional management actions potentially including an enforceable closure order will be developed.

If USFWS, WMNF, NHFGD or NH Audubon determines that peregrine falcon-related management actions should change at Rumney, adaptive management methods will be coordinated with the White Mountain National Forest.

**b. Fragrant Fern (*Dryopteris fragrans* var. *remotiuscula*) monitoring**

Fragrant fern was first formally identified at Rumney Rocks in 1959 (UNH herbarium specimen). Monitoring of this species began in 1993. Since monitoring began, it appears that populations of this fern have remained stable, despite their sometimes very close proximity to established climbing routes. The Forest Service will continue to monitor colonies of fragrant fern at Rumney Rocks. Currently, known colonies are on the following crags: *Bonsai*, *Orange Crush*, and *New Wave*. If continued monitoring results in the determination that climbing activity is resulting in a decline of these populations, the Forest Service will implement management actions necessary to protect this species. This may include closure of climbing routes or restriction on new route development in areas with documented fern populations.

Other uncommon plant species and communities have been identified in the Rumney Rocks area. The New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau maintains records of these occurrences and monitoring information. If it is determined that recreational activities around the climbing area are impacting these populations beyond established thresholds, measures such as closures or restrictions will be developed and implemented to protect these species or other natural or cultural resources not currently identified at Rumney Rocks. New discoveries of cultural sites or remains will be noted and immediately reported to the Pemigewasset Ranger District for review and management direction.

**2. Moratorium on new route development on selected crags**

The Forest Service, in cooperation with the local climbing community, has determined that some crags in the Rumney Rocks area have reached their carrying capacity for route development. No new fixed protection is permitted on the following crags: *5.8 Crag*, *New Wave Wall*, *Kennel Wall*, *Pulse Wall*, *Monsters from the ID*, *Bonsai*, *Jimmy Cliff*, *Crow's Nest*, *Meadows*, *Parking Lot Wall*, and *Apocalypse Wall*. These crags will be posted closed to new route development.

The Forest Service will allow new fixed climbing protection on the remainder of the crags. The Forest Service will permit responsible new route development on currently undeveloped rock formations. Climbers must make every effort to minimize climbing impacts to natural resources as new routes are developed. Climbers should carefully consider whether the value of a new route justifies its impact to the natural environment.

The Forest Service and the local climbing community will monitor the status of new route development at Rumney Rocks. If at a future date the Forest Service determines that additional crags have reached their carrying capacity, they will be closed to new route development. The Forest Service will look to the local climbing community to educate the climbing public regarding the policies of new route development and prohibitions at certain crags.

### **3. Replacement of unsafe bolts and anchor systems**

Climbers will replace unsafe bolts and anchor systems according to Forest Plan guidelines:

- a. 3/8" expansion bolts with hangers (or other acceptable industry standards that have the same or less impact) should be used. Ring hangers should be used for rappel stations. Webbing should not be used on new bolt anchors.*
- b. Replacement bolts should use the existing holes when possible.*

Climbers are responsible for assessing the safety and condition of any fixed protection they choose to use. It is important to recognize that cursory visual inspection tells very little about most safety aspects of climbing bolts and other hardware. This equipment is not property of the Forest Service. It is the responsibility of each climber to assess the safety of all aspects of any climb and make informed decisions based on one's assessment and ability.

### **4. Removal of stored or cached equipment**

The White Mountain National Forest Plan dictates that storing or caching equipment on National Forest land (excluding wilderness, where it is prohibited entirely) is permitted for no more than 14 days. Forest personnel have painstakingly reviewed this standard in an effort to most appropriately interpret this language. "Fixed protection" such as bolts with hangers and pitons are not considered "cached" equipment. Quickdraws left hanging on bolted routes **are** considered "cached." Though this is a slight distinction, it is an effort to choose the appropriate "line" for managing the WMNF as we intended when we wrote the Forest Plan. Any such equipment left on climbing routes or stored on National Forest land in excess of 14 days is considered abandoned property and may be removed.

National Forest staff recognizes that some climbers desire to leave quickdraws in place on difficult routes to afford more climbers the opportunity to ascend these challenging climbs. Some climbers may not be able to complete these climbs without the aid of pre-placed quickdraws. Due to the location of bolts on some routes, the use of quickdraws is necessary to complete the climb. The Forest Plan "standard" prohibiting lengthy "caching" of gear is intended to protect the recreation experience for the public at large. The Forest Service believes that leaving quickdraws hanging from climbs for extended periods is contrary to the climbing ethic promoted in White Mountain National Forest Plan direction.

### **5. Management of ice and mixed climbing**

There are approximately 50 ice or mixed climbing routes at Rumney Rocks. Some of these routes are also identified rock climbs. In an effort to protect rock climbs from damage due to "dry tooling," or using ice climbing equipment to climb bare rock, mixed climbing is discouraged on routes only established as rock routes. First mixed ascents are also strongly discouraged on rock routes.

There is the possibility that unique conditions may occasionally arise when ice forms in areas that generally remain ice-free. The intent of this plan is to protect the rock from chipping or damage on rock routes due to the use of ice tools. It is not to

prohibit the exploration of new ice routes that may occasionally “come in” and be climbable.

There is currently not a large concern regarding ice and mixed climbing at Rumney. If damage to rock climbs or rock faces from ice tools is clearly affecting the quality of rock climbing routes or the natural environment, the Forest Service will limit the use of ice climbing equipment to designated routes. The Forest Service will remain in communication with the climbing community to monitor the effects of this use.

**6. Management of commercial use and the Outfitter/Guide (O/G) program**

All “commercial users” of White Mountain National Forest lands, including Rumney Rocks, must obtain an outfitter/guide permit through the Forest Service.

Outfitter/Guides must carry their permit card when providing services at Rumney Rocks. There are numerous schools, commercial guiding companies, and other organizations that are registered in the Outfitter/Guide system and use Rumney Rocks. There currently are no limits to the number of outfitter/guide permits issued for Rumney Rocks.

To minimize social and environmental impacts from commercial group use, rock and ice climbing outfitter/guide group size is limited to 12 persons, including instructors. If the Forest Service determines that outfitter/guide use is causing an unacceptable impact to natural resources or the recreation experience, the Forest Service will limit permits issued or add restrictions to permits issued for Rumney Rocks. Unacceptable impacts may include considerable interference with general public use of or access to the cliff, monopolization of a large portion of a cliff for a long period of time, or natural resource damage.

The Forest Service will work to create a tracking system to monitor outfitter/guide use at Rumney Rocks. During the annual review process, The Forest Service and the local climbing community will discuss the status of outfitter/guide operations at Rumney.

**7. Monitoring use levels and changes at Rumney Rocks**

If monitoring results or communication with the climbing community concludes that increased use levels at Rumney Rocks are altering the desired condition of the land beyond acceptable levels, the Forest Service will evaluate and implement methods for limiting use. This process of evaluation would involve the climbing community, cooperators, and the general public. Parking lot use and overflow, impacts to trails and staging areas, impacts to biological communities, and social impacts will all be used to assess use levels at Rumney and their effects to the natural and social environment.

**8. Design and construction of facilities to improve access to climbing areas and protect natural resources**

The Forest Service will conduct an environmental assessment for the proposal of improved parking facilities and a clearly defined trail network at Rumney Rocks. The trail network at Rumney has developed by climbers seeking access to crags. A more intentional approach to trail establishment will result in a network minimizing “social” trails and providing more sustainable access to the same areas.

The Forest Service will address concerns regarding use of Buffalo Road by climbers accessing crags west of the existing parking lot. Currently, climbers must walk along this narrow road in order to access popular climbing areas such as *5.8 Crag* and the Rattlesnake Mountain Trailhead. A proposed new trail would provide an off-road pedestrian route roughly paralleling Buffalo Road enabling recreationists parking at the main parking area to access the western crags or trails without walking along Buffalo Road.

#### **9. Annual Meeting**

The Forest Service will remain in close communication with the local community in managing this very unique resource. A part of this management plan, the Forest Service will coordinate an annual meeting with the local climbing community and interested members of the public. The agenda for this meeting should include discussion of current management strategy, concerns from any involved parties, recommendations for adaptation or change, and resource monitoring results. This Management Plan may be amended or revised based on new information, monitoring results, or other conclusions drawn from this meeting or based on conclusions by Forest Service staff.

## Action Plan

The following table summarizes the specific activities that will implement this management plan:

Action	Objective	Timeline	NEPA Requirements
Continue trail maintenance activities	Improve trail stabilization as existing grant funding permits.	Summer/Fall 2008.	CE—Trail maintenance.
Reconstruct and pave parking lots (main parking area and second area)	Minimize environmental damage and safety concerns due to poorly defined parking areas.	Complete environmental analysis in 2008. Paving done in 2009 or 2010, funding permitting.	Currently, an EA is being prepared incorporating all of these proposals.
Design and construct staging areas below crags	Reduce environmental damage created by ever-expanding staging areas.	Complete environmental analysis in 2008. Design and construction in 2009 or 2010, funding permitting.	
Design and construct access trails to crags	Reduce environmental damage created by incidental access trails to various crags and climbs.	Objective to complete environmental analysis by October, 2008. Trail design and construction in 2009 or 2010.	
Construct new hiking trail parallel to Buffalo Road	Mitigate safety concerns regarding recreationists walking along Buffalo Road to get from parking area to trails and climbing areas	Objective to complete environmental analysis by October, 2008. Trail design and construction in 2009 or 2010.	
Monitor peregrine falcon population on cliff	Evaluate whether climber's activities may be affecting breeding success	Annually (coordinated through NHFG, currently monitored by NH Audubon)	
Monitor rare plant populations	Ensure recreationists' activities are not threatening populations of rare plants; establish thresholds for impacts.	Annually (coordinated by USFS Botanist and NH Natural Heritage Bureau)	None
Create outfitter/guide tracking system for Rumney Rocks	Determine threshold for group use	2009	None
Update MOU with Rumney Climber's Association	Increase communication with RCA and work cooperatively to manage Rumney Rocks	2008	None
Hold annual meeting with RCA	Maintain and improve relationship with RCA, address issues and concerns in a timely manner, review monitoring results and assess thresholds for acceptable change	Annually	None
Post route development and other restrictions and regulations on kiosk and FS website	With help of climbing community, educate climbers regarding FS policy	Ongoing	None

## Partnerships

The Forest Service recognizes that the local climbing community has been integral in preserving and advocating for climbing opportunities at Rattlesnake Mountain and Rumney Rocks. The Access Fund, in cooperation with the Rumney Climber's Association, acquired 36 acres at the base of Rumney Rocks which it then sold to the Forest Service in 1995 for the purposes of protecting access to the cliffs and providing a parking area for climbers. The Forest Service and the Rumney Climber's Association maintain a Memorandum of Understanding for the purpose of "forging and continuing a cooperative working relationship for planning and accomplishing mutually beneficial projects and activities within the Rattlesnake Mountain climbing area."

The Forest Service acknowledges that this climbing plan will be most effective and successful with the voluntary support and compliance of the climbing community. The comments and input the Forest Service received in developing this plan revealed that the climbing community is not united in their support of all of the provisions identified in this plan, particularly regarding the removal of quick draws and other stored equipment on climbs. The Forest Service recognizes that this provision does pose increased challenges for climbers associated with affected routes. The Forest Service is, however, obligated to abide by Forest Plan direction, which specifically prohibits storing equipment for more than 14 days. Current interpretation of this standard includes prohibiting quickdraws placed for more than 14 days.

The Forest Service hopes that the 14 day window will allow a period of time to "work" routes and ultimately climb them with all of the desired protection in place. Following the completion of the route, and within the 14 day limit, this plan provides the direction necessary to "realize the importance to society of a natural appearing landscape distinct from the human altered environments otherwise dominant in the East." Recognizing and respecting this distinction of climbing on the White Mountain National Forest will further the partnership the Forest has maintained with the climbing community that has made sport climbing a success at Rumney Rocks.

/s/ Molly Fuller  
**MOLLY FULLER**  
District Ranger

8/28/2008  
Date

## **Appendix A**

### **WMNF Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for Rock and Ice Climbing**

#### **Definitions (from Forest Plan glossary):**

**Standard (S):** A course of action that must be followed, or a level of attainment that must be reached, to achieve management goals and objectives. In general standards limit project-related activities. Deviations from standards must be analyzed and documented in a Forest Plan amendment.

**Guideline (G):** A required course of action or level of attainment. It is intended to move the Forest toward desired conditions in a way that permits operational flexibility to respond to variations in conditions. Guidelines can be modified or not implemented if site-specific conditions warrant a deviation. The rationale for deviating from a guideline must be documented in a project-level analysis and signed decision.

**Fixed Protection (Climbing):** In climbing, permanent or semi-permanent installations placed to protect a leader or provide an anchor. Common examples of fixed protection include 3/8" stainless steel masonry bolts with hangers, pitons (which are metal pins with eye holes that are hammered into cracks in the cliff face), and nylon webbing tied around trees or looped around blocks. The first ascent party usually places fixed protection. It is considered unethical for subsequent parties to add or remove fixed protection placed on the first ascent.

#### **Rock and Ice Climbing Standards and Guidelines:**

**S-1** The White Mountain National Forest is open unless designated closed to rock, ice, and mixed climbing.

**S-2** Except in Wilderness (see MA 5.1) where it is prohibited, storing (caching) equipment, including fixed ropes is permitted for no more than 14 days.

**S-3** Chipping to create foot and hand holds, gluing to stabilize features, and attaching permanent artificial handholds is prohibited.

**S-4** Route cleaning is prohibited where federally-listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive species occur.

**S-5** To protect natural features, the use of mechanical or motorized devices, explosives, or chemicals for cleaning or developing climbing routes is prohibited. Hand drills and power drills are permitted for the installation of bolt protection, except in Wilderness where power drills are prohibited.

**G-1** Specific areas should be closed or limitations placed on use, including group size, if recreational climbing creates unacceptable social or natural resource impacts. This may result in temporary or permanent closures or limits on number of outfitter/guide permits authorized.

**G-2** To minimize social and environmental impacts, climbing party size should be limited to 12 persons, except in Wilderness, where group size is limited to 10.

**G-3** Removing, altering, or manipulating vegetation, soils, or other natural features at the cliff edge, talus slope, or cliff base should be avoided.

**G-4** Climbing or new route development may be restricted to protect federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.

**G-5** Climbing should be restricted where there is potential to impact heritage resources.

**G-6** When issues are no longer effectively addressed by application of standards and guidelines, climbing plans for specific areas should be developed to minimize environmental and social impacts.

**G-7** Removable traditional protection should be used. Fixed protection may be considered when the use of removable protection is impossible, impractical, or causes increased or ongoing unacceptable resource impact. If installation of fixed protection for a new route, or the replacement of fixed protection on an existing route, is required, the following guidelines should be used:

a. 3/8" expansion bolts with hangers (or other acceptable industry standard that has the same or less impact) should be used. Ring hangers should be used for rappel stations. Webbing should not be used on new bolt anchors.

b. Replacement bolts should use the existing holes when possible.

c. Natural-colored webbing should be used on tree anchors.

d. All bolt hangers should be painted to blend with the color of the cliff face.

e. Hand drills, battery powered rock drills (except in Wilderness), hammers, crowbars, and wrenches are recognized as standard tools for fixed anchor installation and maintenance.

**G-8** Reasonable cleaning of a route is allowed (except per S-4). Hand tools such as wire brushes, hand brooms, and toothbrushes are recognized as standard tools.

**Standards and Guidelines pertaining to Rock and Ice Climbing Special Use Permits:**

**S-1** To minimize social and environmental impacts from commercial group use, rock and ice climbing outfitter/guide group size must be limited to 12 persons. In Wilderness, the group size limit is 10 persons.

**G-1** Rock and ice climbing recreation events permits should limit group size to 12 persons.

**G-2** Numbers of permits per cliff for outfitter/guide and recreation events may be limited to protect natural resources or the recreation experience.

**Additional standards and guidelines in Wilderness (not applicable to Rumney Rocks):**

**S-1** Wilderness is open unless closed to rock, ice, and mixed climbing.

**S-2** The use of power drills is prohibited.

**S-3** Storing equipment, including fixed ropes, is prohibited.

**S-4** Installation of fixed protection, including webbing, bolts, or pitons, is prohibited on new climbing routes.

**G-1** Existing fixed protection on established climbing routes may be replaced consistent with Forest-wide standards and guidelines, as necessary to preserve known routes and to protect visitor safety.