



File Code: 1950-1

Date: June 16, 2004

### Opportunity to Comment (30-Day Comment Period)

#### Upper Williams Environmental Assessment

I am conducting a 30-day comment period on the Upper Williams Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with 36 CFR 215. Enclosed for your review are Chapter 1- Purpose and Need for Action, Chapter 2- Alternatives, including the Proposed Action, Appendix B-Upper Williams Alternative Descriptions and Appendix C- Upper Williams Riparian Guidelines. The proposed action for the Upper Williams project area focuses on vegetation management to meet the purpose and need of creating a mosaic of tree stands that move the area towards meeting size class goals identified in the Forest Plan, insect and disease treatment, and providing forest products to the local community. This proposal will also soon be available on our website at [www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf).

A complete environmental assessment (EA) has not been prepared at this time, and no decision has been made. A complete EA will be prepared; however, as permitted by our revised regulations for notice, comment and appeal (36 CFR 215, published in Federal Register Vol. 68, No. 107, pages 33581-33602). **There will be no further public comment period.**

The proposed action (Alternative B) includes commercial timber harvesting on an estimated 2,255 acres intended to increase the level of younger age classes across the Upper Williams project area. This includes an estimated 1,429 acres of commercial thinning, 79 acres of thinning with patch cuts, 413 acres of two-aged regeneration harvesting, 252 acres of clearcutting, and 82 acres of overstory removal. This would be accomplished with an estimated 1,953 acres of helicopter yarding and 302 acres of ground-based skidding.

In addition to the proposed action, I am considering a “no action” alternative (Alternative A) and four other alternatives developed to address issues related to logging costs, water quality and fisheries, visual impacts of clearcutting, and impacts to mature habitat and beech tree removal.

The 16,454-acre project area is located in the Upper Williams watershed, about 10 miles west of Marlinton, West Virginia in Pocahontas County. The Highland Scenic Highway and the ridge tops of Red Lick Mountain, Tea Creek Mountain, and Black Mountain border the north and west boundaries of the project area. The ridge tops of Black Mountain, Swago Mountain, and Day Mountain and the Monongahela National Forest Proclamation Boundary form the south and east boundaries. Elevations range from about 3,000' on Williams River near the confluence with Sugar Creek to 4,703' on Red Spruce Knob. The Handley Public Hunting and Fishing Area, managed by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, is located within this watershed.

There have been several changes in the Proposed Action and the Purpose and Need for this proposal since the original scoping. Further field reviews identified several proposed activities that were either not needed, required further review for site specificity, or were more appropriately analyzed in a separate NEPA document. Those I plan to address in separate NEPA documents are the recreation projects, wildlife improvement projects and watershed improvement projects.



This comment period ends 30 days following the date of publication of legal notice in the official newspaper of record, the *Pocahontas Times*. Only those who submit timely and substantive comments will be accepted as appellants, so **I ask that comments be as specific as possible in order to be considered**. To be eligible for appeal, each individual or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or verify their identity upon request. The decision will be mailed to those who have commented on this project, and to others who request the decision.

Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following:

1. Name and address.
2. Title of the proposed action.
3. Specific substantive comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that I should consider in reaching a decision.
4. Signature, or other verification of identity upon request.

I am the responsible official for this decision. Please mail comments to me, Rondi Fischer, District Ranger, Marlinton-White Sulphur Ranger District, Monongahela National Forest, at P.O. Box 210, Marlinton, West Virginia, 24954. Send electronic comments to [r9\\_monongahela\\_nepa@fs.fed.us](mailto:r9_monongahela_nepa@fs.fed.us), or faxed comments to (304) 799-6820. Hand deliver comments between the office hours of 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, at the Marlinton Ranger District Office in Marlinton, West Virginia. Provide comments by phone to Bill Shields, NEPA Coordinator, at (304) 636-1800 ext. 287 during the same office hours. Acceptable formats for electronic comments are: text or HTML e-mail, Adobe® Portable Document Format (PDF) and Microsoft Office formats.

For additional information, please contact Bill Shields, NEPA Coordinator, at (304) 636-1800 ext 287, at [r9\\_monongahela\\_nepa@fs.fed.us](mailto:r9_monongahela_nepa@fs.fed.us), or at the Forest Supervisor's office address listed above.

Sincerely,

/s/ Rondi Fischer  
RONDI FISCHER  
District Ranger

Enclosures: Chapter 1- Purpose and Need for Action  
Chapter 2- Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action  
Appendix B-Upper Williams Alternative Descriptions  
Appendix C- Upper Williams Riparian Guidelines