

White Mountain National Forest

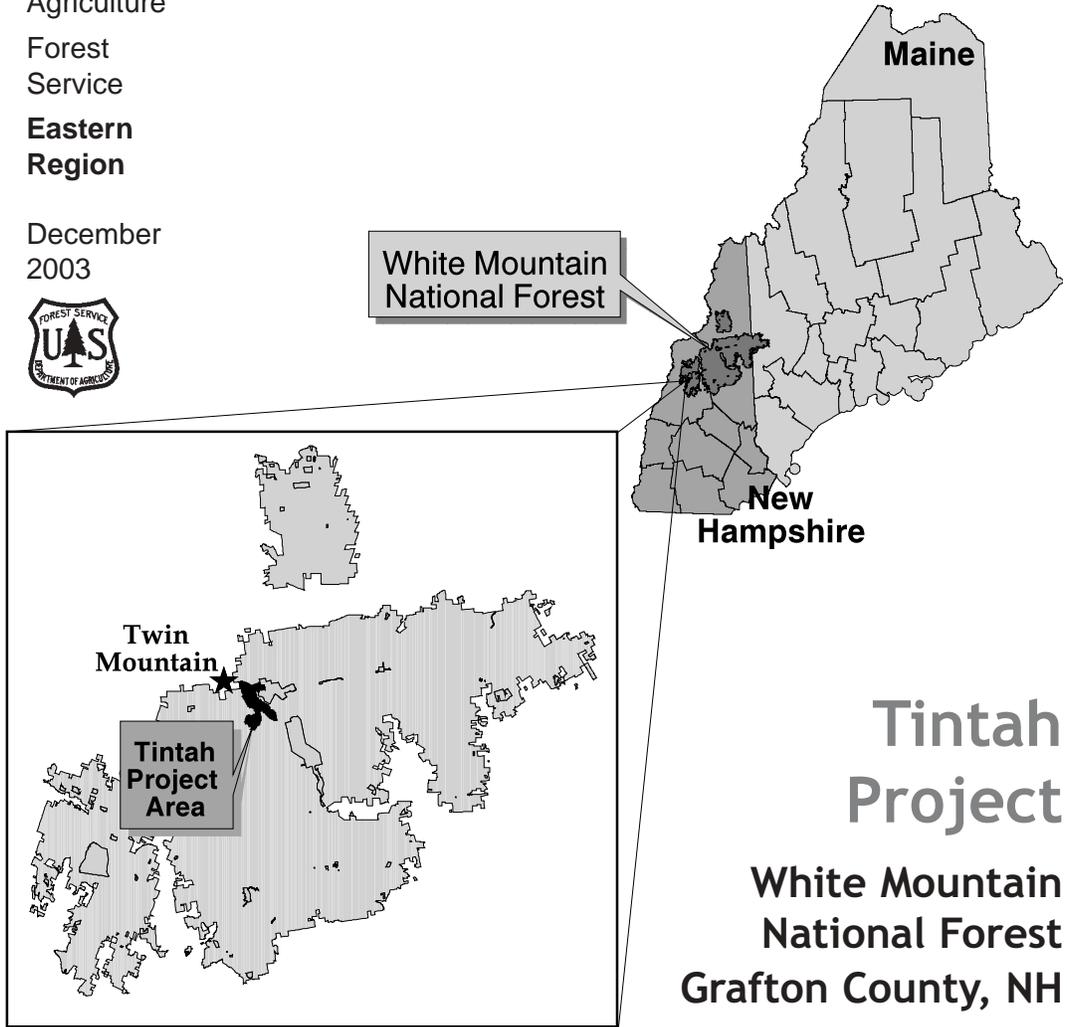


United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

**Eastern
Region**

December
2003



Tintah Project

**White Mountain
National Forest
Grafton County, NH**

Scoping Report

Information on
Proposed Vegetation, Recreation, and
Wildlife Management Activities

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What is the Forest Service proposing?

Note: Portions of the Tintah Project have been previously listed as the Trestle Timber Sale, Oscar Timber Sale, and Ruffed Grouse & Woodcock Habitat Improvement Projects in the White Mountain National Forest quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions.

The Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest is proposing the following activities within the Tintah Project Area:

- Vegetation Management;
- Sugarloaf and Mt. Hale Trailhead parking improvement;
- Universal access trail construction;
- Wildlife habitat improvement (Woodcock, Grouse, and Beaver); and
- Pre-haul maintenance of the existing road system.

The Tintah Project is named after a locomotive that was used on the historic Zealand Valley Railroad. Four different locomotives were used at various times throughout the railroad's history. Locomotive No. 2, named Tintah, was a 35-ton Baldwin saddletank locomotive built in 1886. Tintah, was also the name of a farm that the legendary New Hampshire native timber speculator James Everell (J.E.) Henry once owned in Tintah, Minnesota.

Where is the proposed Tintah Project located?

The Tintah Project is located within the Zealand Valley in the towns of Bethlehem, Grafton County, and Carroll, Coos County, New Hampshire, on the Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District (see Project Area Map, pp. 8-9). The Project Area of approximately 5,110 acres is all located on National Forest system lands. A portion of the northeastern corner of the Project Area is bordered by private land. This private land that abuts the Project Area is owned by Bretton Woods Mountain Resort. The Project Area is located in the Zealand River watershed. The Zealand River drains an area of approximately 16 square miles and flows into the Ammonoosuc River near Carroll, New Hampshire. The federal lands within the Project Area include Management Area (MA) 2.1 and 3.1 lands within Compartments 12, 15, and 16. In addition, the Project Area is part of the larger Habitat Management Units (HMUs) 107 and 109 (approximately

10,000 acres).

Background

Why is the Forest Service considering activities in the Tintah Project Area at this time?

When forested areas are managed to produce wildlife habitats and wood products, growth in the size and density of trees is important. Over time, forest management stands that have been previously clearcut have become restocked with tree seedlings. When these stands reach sapling size, they no longer provide early-successional habitat. In stands that were partially cut to reduce stocking levels (area occupied by trees), tree growth has increased stocking levels to the point where competition for light, moisture, and soil resources result in reduced growth and stress for individual trees. Over time, stands age to the point where they are considered mature.

Analysis of an area every 15-20 years is used to assess habitat diversity and the potential need for harvesting growth and regenerating stands to maintain a sustainable forest. The last vegetation management occurred in the Project Area between the mid 1980s and early 1990s. Surveys were conducted to assess the current vegetation conditions in the Project Area.

Recent assessment of MA 2.1 and 3.1 lands in HMUs 107 and 109 show that these HMUs are weighted towards mature and over-mature forests and there is little regenerating habitat. Forest Plan direction seeks to provide a balanced mix of habitats for all wildlife species and to increase wildlife habitat diversity for the full range of wildlife species with emphasis on early-successional species. Based on Forest Plan desired composition (pp. III- 13, VII B-4, & VII-B-5) there is a need for increased regenerating forest age class. Opportunities exist, through timber harvesting, reforestation treatments, and wildlife maintenance strategies to improve the growth and vigor of forested stands and diversify stand age class. At this time these improvements can be accomplished by harvesting mature and poor quality trees and replacing them with new, young trees (Forest Plan, pp. III-3, III-30, III-36), resulting in a variety of wildlife habitat types and conditions.

While vegetative growth in the Project Area has continued over the last decade, so too has recreational use of the area. Over the years, Forest Service monitoring of recreational use in the Project Area has shown an increased demand for the recreational resources by the visiting public. In response to the increased public demand and, in accordance with the recreational management direction within the Forest Plan for MA 2.1 and 3.1 lands (Forest Plan, pp. III – 34, III – 40), the District is considering increasing the size of the Sugarloaf and Mt. Hale trailhead parking areas to provide a safer and more efficient use of the trailhead areas by the visiting public. The District is also considering constructing a 1,500 foot long universal access trail to the north end of the Zealand Wildlife Pond. Construction of this

universal access trail and increasing the size of trailhead parking in the Project Area would move the Forest closer toward the desired condition per Forest Plan direction (Forest Plan, pp. III – 34, III – 40).

What is the proposed Project Area like?

The Project Area is located on moderately sloped terrain ranging from approximately 1,500 to 2,500 feet above sea level. The Project Area contains predominantly the northern hardwood, paper birch, and spruce/fir forest types. These forest types typically provide habitat for wildlife species common to the White Mountain National Forest. The annual growth of the trees and shrubs within portions of the Project Area typically provide browse or mast at various times of the year, including buds and flowers of woody plants such as aspen catkins and hobble bush in the spring, soft raspberry fruit in the summer, and hard beechnuts in the fall.

The Project Area has had a long history of vegetation management. J. E. Henry commenced construction of the Zealand River Logging Railroad in 1885. The railroad was also used by tourists seeking a train ride up the Zealand Valley to scenic places such as Thoreau Falls and Zealand Notch. In 1886 a spark from a locomotive ignited a fire that burned approximately 12,000 acres. After 13 years of use the railroad shutdown in 1897. Another large fire occurred in 1903 and burned approximately 10,000 acres in the Zealand Valley. The Zealand Valley was purchased by the Federal Government from J.E. Henry and Sons for \$6.00 an acre in 1918. Vegetative management last occurred in the Project Area between the mid 1980s and early 1990s with the Zealand Hotshot, Hoxie Brook and Rosebrook Timber Sales.

Today the Project Area receives a great deal of recreational use by the visiting public. The various activities in the area experienced by the public are hiking, scenic and fall foliage viewing, camping, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, swimming, snow-shoeing, wildlife watching, hunting, fishing, and various other recreational pursuits.

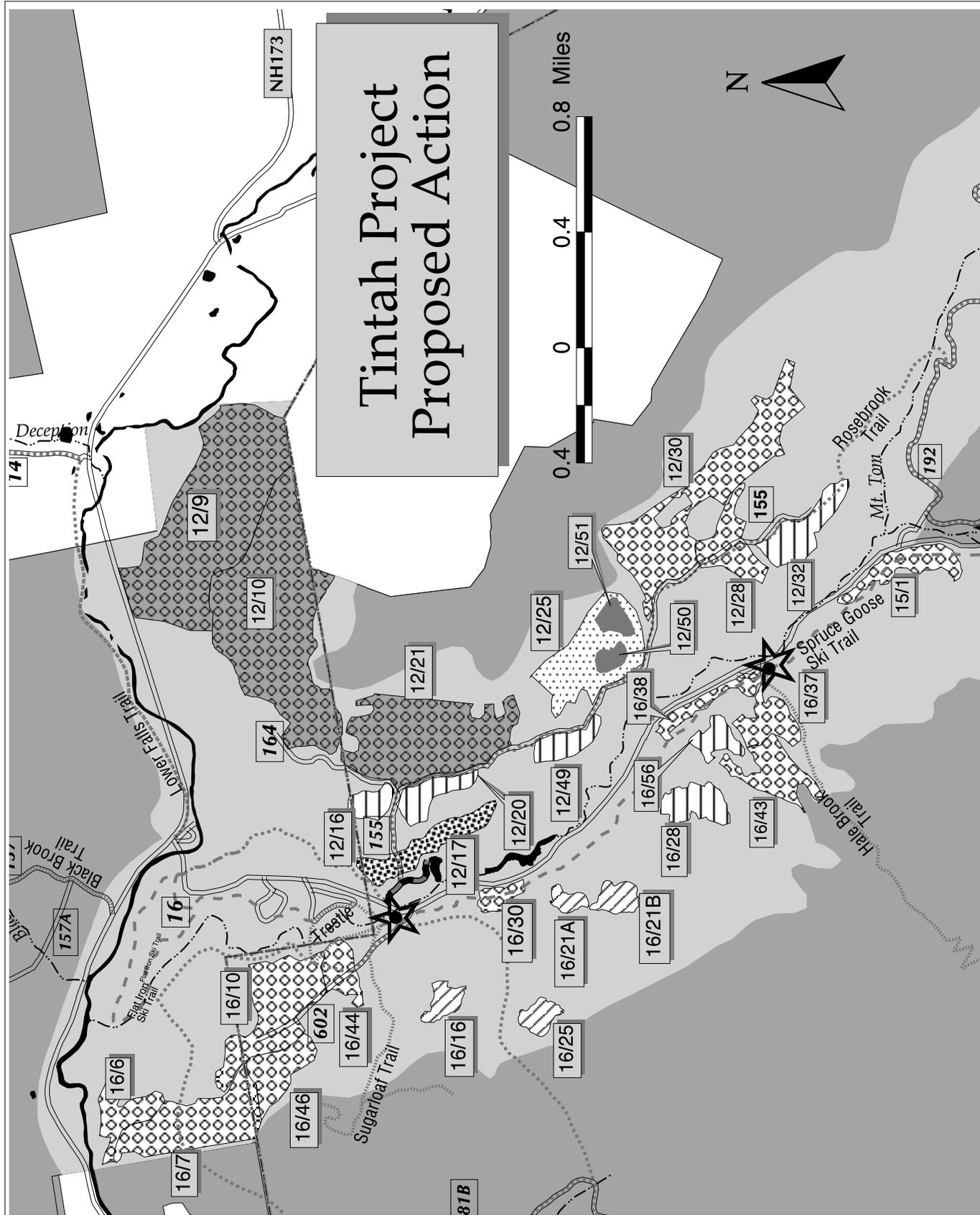
Purpose & Need

Why does the Forest Service need to implement the Tintah project at this time?

The purpose of this proposed project is to implement Forest Plan direction in the Tintah Project Area by addressing site-specific needs and opportunities to move the area from the existing condition towards the desired condition. This can be accomplished by implementing activities approved in the Forest Plan (vegetation management).

An interdisciplinary team has identified site-specific needs for natural resource management that would change or enhance the present conditions and move the project area toward the desired condition described in the Forest Plan, as amended (pp. III-30 through III-41).

There are approximately 10,000 acres of federal land in HMUs 107 and 109.



The proposed Tintah Project Area (map, pp. 8-9) is located within MA 2.1 and 3.1 lands of compartments 12, 15, and 16, which comprise approximately 51 percent of HMUs 107 and 109. These HMUs also contain areas that are not subject to vegetation management including MA 6.2.

The need for change is determined by comparing desired conditions in the Forest Plan with the existing conditions in the project area. The Forest Plan provides desired conditions for even- and uneven-aged management systems for management areas 2.1 and 3.1 and for habitat management units by even- and uneven-aged management systems. The even- and uneven-aged desired conditions apply to the Forest as a whole and are not prorated for each project area (Forest Plan, , pp. III-32 & III-38).

Existing resource conditions in the Tintah Project Area were evaluated against the Forest Plan desired condition. Based on Forest Plan goals and objectives and the differences between existing conditions and desired conditions, several needs and opportunities for the Project Area have been identified. The following list describes the “needs for change” identified for the Tintah Project Area that would meet the project’s purpose of implementing the Forest Plan. It should be noted that protecting riparian values, maintaining and protecting habitat for proposed, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, and maintaining healthy and resilient watershed into the future have been and will continue to be primary considerations in management of the Tintah Project Area.

1. At the landscape level, there is little diversity of age classes. Regeneration habitat (trees 0-9 years old) makes up 0% of Habitat Management Units 107 and 109. There is a need to increase the amount of the 0-9 year old forest type to improve wildlife habitat diversity for species that use early-successional habitat (Forest Plan, pp. III-13, VII-B-4 & VII-B-5). Opportunities exist, through commercial timber harvesting and reforestation treatments, to improve the growth, vigor, and health of forested stands by harvesting mature or poor quality trees and replacing them with new, young trees, and thus to provide a variety of wildlife habitat types and conditions. Stands would be harvested in accordance with the appropriate silvicultural guidelines and Forest Plan direction. Activities could include group selection, single-tree selection, patch cutting, and clearcutting.
2. Congress annually funds the Forest Service to provide commercial timber within the capability of the lands and individual Forest Plans. The White Mountain National Forest Plan allocates land for sustainable wood production (MAs 2.1 and 3.1). People’s demand for hardwood and other wood products continues to be high, which supports the need to supply this renewable resource. Projects such as this, which supply wood products, provide a means to satisfy people’s demand for wood and contribute to the economic viability of local communities (Forest Plan, III-3 and III-30).

3. Over the years Forest Service monitoring of public use in the Project Area has shown an increased use of the recreational resources by the visiting public. In response to the increased public use, the District feels now is the appropriate time to move the Project Area closer to the recreational desired conditions per Forest Plan (Forest Plan, pp. III-34, III-40) by enlarging trailhead parking at Sugarloaf and Mt. Hale trailheads and constructing a 1,500 foot long Universal Access Trail leading to a pond for watchable wildlife opportunities in the Project Area. These actions will help the Forest address safety issues and meet the needs of public demand.
4. In both the short- and long-term, an adequate transportation system to access the Project Area is needed for management of National Forest Lands and to provide motorized recreation opportunities (Forest Plan, III-31, III-34).

Proposed Action

What activities is the Forest Service proposing to meet the needs identified above?

The Forest Service is proposing the following activities to move the Tintah Project Area towards the Forest Plan desired condition. As the project is fully developed and analyzed, actual amounts of activities accomplished on the ground (measured in acres miles, feet, MMBF, user days, number of facilities, and signs) may vary slightly. Table 1, p. 12, displays the actions proposed to meet the needs for change identified in the Tintah Project Area.

The proposed Tintah Project affects 30 stands within Compartments 12, 15, and 16, totaling approximately 486 treated acres out of 5,110 project acres. Table 2 , P.13, displays the proposed stand treatments.

Mitigation Measures

In addition to the generally applicable Forest and Management area-wide Standards and Guidelines (Forest Plan Section III & VII-B) and the State of New Hampshire's *Best Management Practices*, the following specific mitigation or coordination measures would be used in implementing the proposed action or alternatives:

- ◆ Minimize the number of skid trail crossings of all existing designated Cross Country Ski Trails and the Snowmobile Trails to minimize the impact to the trails and users;
- ◆ A signing plan would be developed that lists the conditions which require signs to be posted and shows the location where signs are to be posted. The plan will be covered in the pre-work meeting with the timber sale purchaser. The sale administrator will obtain the required signs and have them available for the purchaser to post as needed;
- ◆ Retain mast producing beech trees heavily used by black bear unless the trees pose a safety hazard or located in regeneration units;

Table 1: Activities Proposed for the Tintah Project Area

Activity	Stand Acres	Treatment Acres	Amount
Vegetation Management:			
Even-Aged Management			
Clearcutting (northern hardwood, paper birch)	117 Acres	112 Acres	
Patch Cut (northern hardwood, paper birch)	214 Acres	30 Acres	
Uneven-Aged Management			
Group Selection (groups range in size from 1/10 to 2 acres in size; ½ acre average) *	714 Acres	147 Acres	
Single Tree Selection	44 Acres	44 Acres	
Timber Stand Improvement	390 Acres	143 Acres	
Estimated Harvest Volume			3.5 MMBF
Wildlife			
Wildlife Habitat Improvement (Woodcock, Grouse and Beaver) Noncommercial treatment of alder	23 Acres	10 Acres	
Total Treatment Acres		486 Acres	
Transportation			
Pre-Haul Road Maintenance (Forest Roads FR 16, FR 155, FR 164, and FR 620)			8.5 Miles
Recreation			
Universal Access Trail			1,500 feet
Sugarloaf and Mt. Hale Trailhead Parking Area Improvement			1 Acre

* = Groups harvested represent approximately 20% of stand acres

Table 2: Proposed Stand Treatment for Tintah Project Area

Comp / Stand	Stand Acres	Forest Type	Treatment Acres	Proposed Treatment	Season of Operation
Compartment 12					
12 / 9	147	Spruce-Fir	30	Group Selection	Winter
12 / 9	147	Spruce-Fir	11	Timber Stand Imp.	All seasons
12 / 10	148	Northern Hardwood	30	Group Selection	Summer/Fall/Winter
12 / 10	148	Northern Hardwood	119	Timber Stand Imp.	All seasons
12 / 16	9	Red Maple - Aspen	9	Clearcut	Winter
12 / 17	23	Tag Alder	10	Non-Commercial	Fall/Winter
12 / 20	20	Red Maple - Aspen	15	Clearcut	Winter
12 / 21	85	Red Maple	17	Group Selection	Summer/Fall/Winter
12 / 21	85	Red Maple	3	Timber Stand Imp.	All seasons
12 / 25	44	Northern Hardwood	44	Single Tree	Summer/Fall/Winter
12 / 28	22	Mixedwood	5	Group Selection	Summer/Fall/Winter
12 / 30	87	Northern Hardwood	17	Group Selection	Summer/Fall/Winter
12 / 32	22	Red Maple - Birch	22	Clearcut	Winter
12 / 49	12	Red Maple - Aspen	12	Clearcut	Winter
12 / 50	4	Northern Hardwood	4	Timber Stand Imp.	All seasons
12 / 51	6	Northern Hardwood	6	Timber Stand Imp.	All seasons
Compartment 15					
15 / 1	19	Spruce-Fir	4	Group Selection	Fall
15 / 11	13	Paper Birch	13	Clearcut	Winter
15 / 15	15	Paper Birch	15	Clearcut	Winter
Compartment 16					
16 / 6	17	Northern Hardwood	4	Group Selection	Winter
16 / 7	50	Northern Hardwood	10	Group Selection	Winter
16 / 10	49	Northern Hardwood	10	Group Selection	Winter
16 / 16	23	Northern Hardwood	8	Patch Cut	Fall
16 / 21	157	Northern Hardwood	5	Patch Cut A	Winter
16 / 21	157	Northern Hardwood	9	Patch Cut B	Winter
16 / 25	34	Northern Hardwood	8	Patch Cut	Winter
16 / 28	16	Northern Hardwood	16	Clearcut	Fall / Winter
16 / 30	7	Spruce-Fir	2	Group Selection	Winter
16 / 37	16	Northern Hardwood	3	Group Selection	Fall
16 / 38	12	Northern Hardwood	3	Group Selection	Fall
16 / 43	22	Northern Hardwood	5	Group Selection	Fall
16 / 44	13	Northern Hardwood	3	Group Selection	Winter
16 / 46	20	Northern Hardwood	4	Group Selection	Winter
16 / 56	10	Northern Hardwood	10	Clearcut	Winter
Total	1,122 Acres		486 Acres	3.5 MMBF	

- ◆ Indigenous, minority tree species or beech trees genetically resistant to scale complex would be encouraged in uneven-aged treatments by cutting trees around them that compete for space and resources. In even-aged regeneration treatments, these species would be protected and buffered with a group of other leaf trees; and
- ◆ Maintain a high degree of sensitivity toward the absorption of the viewshed from primary viewpoints of the Project Area through implementation of visually textured silvicultural practices.

What decisions will be made?

An environmental analysis will evaluate the site-specific issues, consider alternatives, and analyze effects of the proposed action and alternatives. Based on the needs identified for the Tintah Project, the scope of the project is limited to decisions concerning activities within the Tintah Project Area. An Environmental Assessment will provide the deciding official (John Serfass, District Ranger) with the information he needs to make the following decisions with regard to the Tintah Project:

1. Which actions, if any, will be approved (which alternative to implement) that will move the Tintah Project Area towards the desired condition per Forest Plan direction and address the needs and issues identified for this Project?
2. Is the information in this analysis sufficient to implement the proposed activities?
3. Does the proposed project have a significant impact that would trigger a need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement?
4. What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements should the Forest Service apply to these activities to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources?
5. Will a Forest Plan amendment be required to accommodate this project?

How is the public involved in this decision?

At this time the Forest Service is inviting you to make site-specific comments on our plans for the Tintah Project. We suggest you consider the following questions when looking at the activities proposed for the Tintah Project:

1. Does the proposed action move the Project Area towards the desired condition envisioned in the Forest Plan while protecting the environment?
2. Is there anything about this area that you believe the Forest Service should consider that might affect activities proposed for the Project Area?

Your comments will be used to define significant (unresolved) issues associated with this project, to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action, and to refine the analysis of effects.

The results of our analysis for the Tintah Project will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA), and a decision is expected during the spring of 2004. The regulations for notice, comment, and appeal have been revised¹. Before a decision is made on this project, you will be given an opportunity to comment (30-Day Comment Period) on that analysis. If you provide comments pertinent to the Tintah Project during the 30-Day Comment Period, you will also be eligible to file an administrative appeal of the Tintah Project Decision. You will not be eligible to appeal the decision if you only respond to the Scoping Notice you are now reading.

If you provide comments to the Scoping information now, you will receive the 30-Day Comment Report. If you do not wish to provide comments at this time, but wish to receive the 30-Day Comment Report, please let us know. Anyone who responds to the Scoping information will receive a copy of the Decision Notice when it has been signed.

How can you comment?

Written comments

Written comments must be submitted to John Serfass, District Ranger, White Mountain National Forest, at the following address:

Mail Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger Station
RFD #3, Box 15
Plymouth, NH 03264-9103
ATTN: Tintah Project/Dave Batchelder

Fax 603-536-5147

Email Electronic comments 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 to: dbatchelder@fs.fed.us

Oral comments

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours (8:00 am - 4:30 pm) via telephone (603-536-1315) or in person at the above address: ask for Dave Batchelder or Steve Wingate.

Information to include when submitting comments

1. Name and address (include in email and FAX comments also);
2. Title of the proposed project; and
3. Site-specific comments on the Proposed Action along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider reaching a decision.

Endnote:

¹(36CFR 215, published in Federal Register Vol. 68, No. 107, pages 33581-33602). For additional information on the revised appeal regulations, contact Dave Batchelder, Project Leader, 603-536-1315. For additional explanation, see the December 2003 edition of the White Mountain National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions, available on the WMNF website: www.fs.fed.us/r9/white/index.html

USDA - Forest Service

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