



File Code: 2370/1950-1

Date: May 8, 2007

Dear Interested Party,

The Marienville Ranger District of the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) is seeking public comments on Phase II of the Clarion River Dispersed Recreation (CRDR) Project. This project proposes to complement the regulation of dispersed camping along River Road implemented in Phase I by providing parking areas for designated camping sites, providing for separate day-use parking, correcting some erosion concerns associated with existing parking, and making repairs to the Irwin Run canoe launch and parking area resulting from recent high water on the Clarion River. The information in this letter is intended to provide background on dispersed recreation along River Road and past management of that use, describe the present condition, and detail the proposed action and management objectives.

The CRDR Project (See Map 1) is located on the Marienville Ranger District of the ANF in northwestern Pennsylvania. The CRDR project falls within Millstone and Spring Creek Townships in Elk County and is located immediately adjacent to the Clarion River along River Road (T 301) from the forest boundary on the west to Irwin Run on the east and follows Millstone Road (T 302) to the north. The proposed project is located within 13 warrants: 2533; 2542; 2543; 3728; 4042; 4282; 4556; E. Heath; E. Wyncoop; J. Wyncoop; Nelson Strong; North Strong; and the Raught, Wilson and Wilson. The project area is located entirely on National Forest System lands and stretches from the Clarion River to 300 feet on the other side of River Road, and from Millstone Creek to 300 feet on the other side of Millstone Road.

Background

The Clarion River corridor has been a popular place for dispersed recreation for many years (e.g., canoeing, tubing, fishing, hunting, camping, and scenic driving), but use has increased dramatically over the past 6 years to the point where resource damage is occurring. As of 1996, the segment of the Clarion River within the project boundary became part of the congressionally designated National Wild and Scenic River System. This designation was made, among other reasons, for the purpose of protecting free flow, water quality, and to enhance the outstandingly remarkable values of the river, such as scenery and recreation. To help meet these objectives, a comprehensive river management plan is currently being developed, with opportunity for public involvement and input still to come.

Phase I of the Clarion River Project was initiated in response to concerns about resource damage resulting from unrestricted use, as well concerns expressed by Millstone Township for public safety resulting from congestion, unregulated parking, and inconsistent enforcement of rules and regulations along River Road. Phase I, implemented in 2006, closed half of the 46 user-created sites, installed three information kiosks, established parking at some sites, and provided for increased patrols of the area to inform the public of the changes and of the dispersed recreation policy on the ANF. Continuous monitoring of public reaction to the changes implemented in



Phase I indicated overwhelming support based on fewer user conflicts, an improved recreation experience, and positive interaction with ANF law enforcement patrols.

Even with the success of Phase I, parking continues to be a concern, contributing to conflicts between day users and campers, congestion at certain times and locations on River Road, deterioration of the road surface and shoulder, and erosion and sedimentation where shoulder parking is adjacent to the Clarion River and its tributaries. The Phase II proposed action is intended to resolve some of these concerns within the right-of-way of River Road.

Phase II will focus on those items which can be accomplished prior to and during the upcoming summer season to mitigate safety and congestion concerns on River Road associated with both day and overnight use. One site (Campsite 12) needs to be closed because of its proximity to private land, and another site (Campsite 14) needs mitigation of erosion and potential sedimentation into a small tributary of the Clarion River resulting from erosion of a roadside embankment and shoulder parking.

Concurrent with the proposed implementation of Phase II, a more comprehensive analysis of potential improvements along the River Road-Clarion River corridor will be initiated this summer, as well. This analysis will consider proposals for a third phase of improvements related to recreation, water quality, road use, river access, and level of services along the corridor within the ANF. Such proposals will require a more in-depth look at environmental effects, and consistency with the parameters for the comprehensive river management plan that is also under development. Public scoping for Phase III proposals will likely occur in the fall of 2007.

Phase II Proposed Action

The following actions are proposed for this project:

1. Delineate and harden parking areas at designated campsites – Phase I of this project concentrated on identifying sites being used by the public and designating which sites will remain open for camping. Phase II will delineate parking areas for designated sites with boulders, and harden them with a compacted limestone surface that is stable and non-erosive. Table 1 shows the approximate size of the parking area to be hardened for each designated dispersed campsite.

Table 1. Harden and delineate parking at Camping sites

Site #	Dimensions (in feet)	Work in addition to gravel surfacing
0	85x15	None
1	30x30	None
2	40x20	Move rocks, regrade berm for better accessibility
5	30x40	Jackhammer rock in middle of parking to reduce to surrounding elevation. Provide rock barrier along stream.
6	60x15	Mark NF boundary
7	30x50	Place boulders to reduce size
8	50x30	Plants trees/shrubs to reduce size
9	50x30	Install culvert in ditch, move rocks back, cut trees within dimensions

10	40x34	Remove snags/saplings
11	20x33	Install 30' culvert
15	35x30	Place rocks at dimensions
16	30x30	Place rocks at dimensions
17	20x50	Place rocks at dimensions, place culvert in ditch along River Road
18	15x50	Place rocks at dimensions
19	60x15	Install 100' culvert
20	15x30	None
21	40x15	Place rocks at dimensions
22	40x15, 20x40	Place rocks at dimensions

2. Delineate and harden parking areas at approved day use sites – following an inventory of existing day use parking patterns, Phase II proposes surface improvements to those sites where safe parking is currently available and access to the river is possible. These sites are often used for fishing, sunning, picnicking, or other short-term recreational activities. Table 2 shows the original site assessment number and the size of parking area proposed for hardening with a compacted limestone surface. This includes repairs to the parking area for the Irwin Run canoe launch.

Table 2. Harden and delineate parking at Day Use sites

Original Inventory #	Dimensions (in feet)	Work in addition to gravel surfacing
1	10 cars	Reset railroad tie barriers and center islands at Irwin Run Boat Launch
10	20x15	None
23	30x50	Bury pipeline, remove trees within dimensions
24	80x15	none
25	60x15	none
26	60x15	none
36	12x150	none

3. Close site 12 to camping but leave open for day use.
4. Mitigate erosion at Campsite 14.

When: Implementation is expected to begin in late May 2007.

Purpose and Need

The need for the proposed CRDR Phase II project is to implement management direction given in the ANF Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) by addressing site-specific needs and

opportunities. The LRMP divides the ANF into different Management Areas (MA). This project falls within MA 8.1 and the desired condition and design criteria (standards and guidelines) are detailed on pages 142 - 147 ANF LRMP. In order to implement management direction, the following list describes specific “needs for action:”

1. **There is a need to** delineate and harden parking areas at designated campsites. Now that campsites have been designated, there is a need to delineate which parts of the site are for parking and to place a compacted limestone surfacing. Without hardening of the sites, it is likely that the practice of parking along or even on the River Road will continue.
2. **There is a need to** delineate and harden parking areas at approved day use sites. While day-use has not created the same level of congestion and safety hazard as overnight use, there are still areas and particular times when indiscriminate parking by day-users results in resource damage and public safety concerns along River Road.
3. **There is a need to** close Campsite 12 to overnight use to mitigate noise concerns from the nearby private landowner, and to eliminate a campsite located within the normal floodway of the river. This site is frequently inundated during high flow periods. Other sites of this kind were eliminated in Phase I of this project, and this, combined with complaints about noise from a nearby landowner, has prompted this proposed changed use of this site.
4. **There is a need to** mitigate erosion of loose soils into the small tributary near Campsite 14. This small stream flows directly into the Clarion River approximately 50 feet from this site, allowing no time for suspended soil particles to precipitate out. This erosion is also slowly eating into the driveway area of this former camp location and could cause damage to the road bed of River Road.

Type of Analysis

The Forest Service is planning to document the proposed items using a categorical exclusion (category 31.12(5)). This categorical exclusion allows for the repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities. The categorical exclusion is provided as a tool to improve planning efficiency (40 CFR 1500.4(p) and 1500.5(k)) where no significant adverse effects are anticipated based on past experience with this type of work. The analysis will consider whether extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action warrant further consideration in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). If there are no extraordinary circumstances, this category does not require formal documentation of the decision in a Decision Memo. Rather, it requires only internal documentation of the project decision to the project file. However, once a decision is made on this project proposal, a copy of the internal documentation will be sent to all members of the public who comment during this scoping period, as well as to state, county, and local government. This is the only opportunity for the public to comment on the proposed Phase II project. A decision using this category may not be appealed.

Resource conditions that will be considered for possible extraordinary circumstances include: federally listed threatened or endangered species, or designated critical habitat; species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat; Forest Service sensitive species; floodplains, wetlands, municipal watersheds; Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness,

wilderness study areas, wild and scenic rivers, or national recreation areas; inventoried roadless areas; research natural areas; American Indian and Alaska Native religious/cultural sites; archaeological sites; or historical properties/areas (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 30.3, Paragraph 2). The mere presence of one or more of these conditions does not preclude use of the category. Rather, it is the degree of the potential effect that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist. Currently, the ANF does not contain any designated or proposed critical habitat for federally listed species.

Comments:

We ask you to review the proposed activities and let us know if you have any comments or suggestions concerning the proposed action. Submit comments by:

- (1) Mail - "Clarion River Dispersed Recreation Project Phase II"; Marienville Ranger District; HC 2 Box 130; Marienville, PA 16239; Attn. Linda White;
- (2) Phone - 814-927-6628 ext. 133;
- (3) Fax - 814-927-2285;
- (4) E-mail comments in electronic format (pdf, txt, rtf, or documents compatible with Microsoft Office applications) addressed to: comments-eastern-allegheny-marienville@fs.fed.us. Please reference the *Clarion River Dispersed Recreation Phase II* on the subject line and include your name and mailing address with your correspondence;
or
- (5) Oral or hand-delivered comments will be accepted during normal business hours of Monday – Friday 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Marienville office.

Comments should be received or postmarked no later than May 24, 2007.

A copy of this letter and scoping map are also available on the Allegheny National Forest website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny/projects/recreation_projects/.

Thank you for your time and interest in your National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Pamela Thurston (for)
ROBERT T. FALLON
District Ranger

Enclosure