

Decision Memo

Snow Course to Sno-tel Site Conversion and Special Use Permit Authorization

Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest
Logan Ranger District
Cache and Rich Counties, Utah

Decision

I have decided to approve the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) proposal to convert three existing “snow course” sites to “sno-tel” (snow telemetry) sites located up Logan Canyon on the Logan Ranger District. My decision also authorizes issuance of a special use permit for the operation of the sno-tel sites. A sno-tel site is an automated system that is capable of delivering hourly hydro-climatic data such as snow pack, precipitation, temperature, soil moisture, wind, solar radiation, and humidity. Snow course and sno-tel sites differ in the way the data is collected, recorded, and transferred.

In general, the conversion from snow course to sno-tel involves clearing of trees and tall shrubs and fencing approximately a 60-foot diameter area, installation of a 16 to 20-foot tower holding weather sensing equipment and a solar panel, and installation of a small building to hold the radio, data logger, regulator, and communications board. As necessary, trees adjacent to the fence would need to be cut to prevent them from falling on the equipment during wind events.

The total affected area would be less than 1 acre at each site. In addition to the general description above, the conversion specifically involves the following at each site:

- Tony Grove site – located near the Tony Grove Guard Station (T13N, R3E, Section 11); the fence surrounding this site will be buck and pole; and the small building will be light green (the same color as the outbuildings at the guard station); no trees will need to be cut at this site.
- Garden City Summit site – located along the old Highway 89 west of Garden City (T14 N, R4E, Section 35), this site is not visible from the new Highway 89; approximately 3-5 small aspen trees will need to be cut from the existing snow course site; the building will be brown to blend in with surroundings; the metal fence and tower will be galvanized (to reduce glare).
- Steep Hollow site – located in lower Steep Hollow near the junction with Franklin Basin road (T14 N, R3 E, Section 10); the site is within an aspen stand, so several aspen will need to be cut within the 60-foot circle; the building will be brown and the fence and tower will be galvanized steel to reduce glare and more effectively blend in with surroundings.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are included in the decision. Environmental effects are mitigated by the required design features as described in the decision above.

Scoping and Public Involvement

On August 6, 2008, information on the proposal was provided in a scoping notice mailed to 130 individuals, organizations, and agencies on the District mailing list and posted on the Forest website at

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/wcnf/projects/proposed>. A 30-day scoping period was provided. The project was also included in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) data base.

The District received 2 comment letters in response to the scoping efforts. One commented in favor of all four of the proposed projects. The other respondent had no objections to the proposed sno-tel conversions, as long as the footprint for each site was surveyed for TES species and none were found. In making my decision, I considered the comments and concerns of respondents and Forest Service interdisciplinary team members (see below).

Reason for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action

Based on public input, interdisciplinary team review, past experience, and consideration of the resource conditions listed below, I have determined the effects of implementing this action will be of limited context and intensity and will result in little or no environmental effect to either the physical or biological components of the environment. As such, this is a decision that has been categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.

The proposed action falls under 36 CFR Part 220 and Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 - Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook, Chapter 30, Section 31.2 Category 3 – Approval modification, or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land. The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action. There were no significant effects identified for the resource conditions listed below.

a. Federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species. The wildlife biologist has reviewed the proposal and has determined there will be “no effect” to any threatened and endangered wildlife species or designated critical habitat and “no impact” to any Forest Service sensitive wildlife species because there is no suitable habitat present, the species are not found on any of the sites, and/or the scope of the project is limited in scope and minor relative to wildlife effects. The fisheries biologist has determined there will be “no effect” to any threatened and endangered aquatic species or designated critical habitat and “no impact” to any Forest Service sensitive aquatic species because the species are not found in the project areas, and/or the scope of the project is limited and the activity areas are distant from any fisheries habitat (i.e., the Logan River). The forest botanist has surveyed the project areas and has determined there will be “no effect” to any threatened and endangered plant species or designated critical habitat and “no impact” to any Forest Service sensitive plant species because either suitable habitat is not provided, the plants are not found here, and/or the project is limited in scope and within previously disturbed areas. Therefore, the project will have no effect on any T,E,S species or critical habitat.

b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds. The forest soil scientist and the forest hydrologist reviewed the snow course to sno-tel conversion project areas and have determined they are not located within any flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds, and therefore, will have no effect on any of these features.

c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas. The snow course to sno-tel conversion project areas are not in a congressionally designated area and therefore, will not have any effect on any such designated area.

d. Inventoried roadless areas. These sites are not located in any roadless area, and therefore, will not have any effect on roadless area values or roadless character.

e. Research Natural Areas. The sites are not located within a Research Natural Area and therefore, will not have any effect on any RNA.

f. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites. The Forest archaeologist has visited the proposed sno-tel conversion sites and has determined that no such religious or cultural sites will be affected by this project.

g. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. The Forest archaeologist has visited the sno-tel conversion sites and has determined that no archaeological sites or historic properties or areas will be affected by this project.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the Revised Forest Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines. The project is consistent with the desired future conditions as described in the Forest Plan. The three sites are located within the Cache Box Elder Management Area (Forest Plan, pages 4-128 to 4-139).

Administrative Appeal Opportunity and Implementation

This decision pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f) is not subject to appeal and may be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Jennefer Parker, District Ranger, 1500 East Highway 89, Logan, Utah 84321, (435-755-3620).

/s /Brian Ferebee
BRIAN FEREBEE
Forest Supervisor

October 22, 2008

Date

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