



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Huron-Manistee National Forests
Mio Ranger District
107 McKinley Road
Mio, MI 48647

989-826-3252 (Voice)
989-826-6073(Fax)
989-826-3592(TTY)

File Code: 1950

Date: August 2, 2010

Dear Concerned Citizen,

The US Forest Service is proposing to implement the *Au Sable Non-Motorized Trails Project* on the Mio Ranger District of the Huron-Manistee National Forests. The purpose of this letter is to provide you the opportunity to comment on this project.

Proposed Project Location

The project area is located in Township 26 N, Range 3 E, Sections 7 and 8 in Oscoda County, Michigan. A proposed project map is enclosed or may be viewed at <http://fs.usda.gov/hmnf>

Purpose and Need of Proposed Project

The purpose of the proposed activities is to implement goals and objectives established in the Huron-Manistee National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (Forests' Plan) and the Au Sable National Scenic River Plan (River Plan).

The need for this project is to provide designated non-motorized trail opportunities within the Au Sable River corridor. The proposed project will meet this need by creating and re-establishing non-motorized trail loop systems suitable for walking, hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, and snowshoing. The proposed project will be consistent with the Management Direction set forward in the River Plan, specifically, the project design will "retain the existing natural, undeveloped appearance of the river's shoreline" and it will "provide users of the river corridor with opportunities for a semiprimitive experience." (River Plan, p.12)

Proposed Actions

The following activities comprise the proposed action for the Au Sable Non-Motorized Trails project.

In Area 1, this project would develop a nature trail loop system and a pedestrian access trail; provide access from a designated parking area to a proposed trail route that would connect to the Mio Tailwater North proposed project; provide Forest users with an opportunity to enjoy recreational hiking, fishing, and observing wildlife; provide scenic vista points to view the surrounding countryside, including a portion of the Au Sable National Scenic River.

In Area 2, the project would reopen a former trail system, develop a new section of trail to provide access to the trail system; establish a new winter parking area; and provide Forest users with opportunities to enjoy recreational hiking and to view wildlife and scenery; including a portion of the Au Sable National Scenic River.

These non-motorized trail projects would complement educational and interpretive values by providing access for a greater user diversity to experience the plants and animals that inhabit this local ecosystem. The trails would be constructed incrementally over a period not to exceed 5 years.

Specifically, the Mio Ranger District proposes to:

Area 1- North of the Au Sable River (Mio Nature Trail)

- Construct new trail segments and reconstruct or maintain the existing user-created routes that comprise the approximate 1.0-mile long nature trail loop system.



- If the Mio North Tailwater proposal is completed, a .18 mile connecting trail from the Nature Trail system to the M-33 bridge area would also be constructed.
- Develop and install signage along the nature trail and at trailheads. Regulatory, directional, interpretive signs would provide necessary information for trail user convenience, safety, and river preservation.
- Install a pedestrian friendly walking path, including hardened trail tread or boardwalk where the trail system may encounter moist soils.
- Develop wildlife and scenic viewing areas/vistas. Install rustic fencing to discourage erosion in fragile riverbank areas. Install rustic benches along the nature trail.
- Develop durable fishing access points from the proposed trail to the riverbank where user-created routes exist or may exist.

Area 2- South of the Au Sable River (Wolf Creek Trail System)

- Perform general trail maintenance activities necessary to reopen the trail system including the removal of hazard trees, removal of encroaching brush, and erosion mitigation.
- Construction of approximately .5 mile of new trail to connect from existing parking area at the M-33/MDNRE boat launch to access the trail system. New construction would include a rustic log bridge crossing over Wolf Creek.
- Develop and install trailhead signage and directional signage to help users navigate the system. Opportunities for interpretive signage consistent with the National Scenic designation of this section of the Au Sable River exist at several points along the trail system and would further enhance the visitor experience.
- Develop wildlife and scenic viewing areas/vistas. Install rustic fencing to discourage erosion in fragile riverbank areas. Install rustic benches along the nature trail.
- Construction of a small gated parking area/ trailhead off South River Road to accommodate non-motorized trail system users in the winter months only. Vehicle capacity of the parking area would be approximately 6 vehicles.

Design Criteria for Area 1 and Area 2:

- Trail tread would consist of on-site native material, imported limestone, or boardwalk segments. To minimize soil erosion of the trail tread and to minimize diversions to the natural hydrological flow within the terrain of the trail corridor, construction would adhere to the design standards established in Forest Service Handbook 2309.18 and Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG).
- The trail tread would be cleared and developed to a width of 36 inches by crews using hand or power equipment, including chainsaws for vegetation clearing and weed eaters or lawn mowers to remove grasses or small shrubs, and tractors to transport materials. Maximum trail tread grades would be limited to 8% for very short distances (<30 feet), with the predominant trail grade being 2% to 5%.
- In this predominantly hardwood and pine cover type; removal of some vegetation would be necessary. Trail corridor vegetation clearing would be permitted to a 6 feet wide (3 feet from trail tread center) and 8 feet high clearing limits. The trail would be routed around the majority of mature trees to protect their root systems, but still obtain the required 3 feet wide trail tread. Mature trees would be pruned for this project, and lesser sized trees or brush species would be removed during trail construction.
- The Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) has indicated that the trail tread design standards require 100% of the trail loop system tread be in compliance for new trail construction or reconstruction. All tread would be constructed to 36 inches wide, and some trail tread segments would require hardening or a boardwalk constructed to reach the scenic viewing platform.

- The motorized vehicle use of the proposed trailhead parking areas would meet requirements stated in the Forest Service 7100 Engineering Manual and Forest Service Travel Management Rule (2005) for designated motorized vehicle areas (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295).

The proposed actions of this project fall into the categories described in Forest Service Handbook (FSH)1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2 - Category of Action for Which a Project or Case File and Decision Memo Are Required, Category 1. Category 1: Construction and reconstruction of trails.

A proposed action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment if there are no extraordinary circumstances in accordance with Chapter 30 of FSH 1909.15 and if the actions are within one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, Sections 31.1 or 31.2. Preliminary review of the proposed action indicates it will not adversely impact wetlands or floodplains, congressionally designated areas, Research Natural Areas, threatened, sensitive or endangered species, designated critical habitat, or religious or cultural sites. This will be verified during field surveys and reviews by District specialists and documented in their reports. This project is similar to previous non-motorized trail improvement projects on the Huron-Manistee National Forests where no adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects are known to have occurred.

For additional and more specific information regarding this proposed action, contact Carrie Scott, U.S. Forest Service, 107 McKinley Rd., Mio, MI 48647, (989) 826-3252 ext. 3305.

Comments

We would like your input concerning the proposed actions listed above. The input you provide will be factored into the analysis as we look to identify issues and/or concerns. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the *Oscoda County Herald*. Written comments may be submitted to: U.S. Forest Service, Mio Ranger District, 107 McKinley Road, Mio, MI 48647, or by fax (989) 826-6073. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., M-F, excluding holidays. E-comments may be sent to comments-eastern-huron-manistee-mio@fs.fed.us. Verbal comments may be provided during normal business hours via telephone to Carrie Scott, (989) 826-3252, or in person at the Mio Ranger District office.

A public meeting to discuss this proposed project will be held on Tuesday August 17, 2010 from 4:00 PM to 6:30 PM at the Big Creek Township Hall, 1175 West Ryno Road (M-72) in Luzerne, Michigan. Formal presentations will be offered at 4:30 PM and 5:30 PM. Comments will be accepted at the meeting and Forest Service staff will be available to answer questions.

This action will not be subject to appeal FSH 1909.15 31.2 (1). Comments received in response to this project will become a matter of public record. Copies of the final decision will be mailed to people who request a copy of these documents.

Sincerely,

s/s Steven A. Goldman

STEVEN A. GOLDMAN
District Ranger

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