White Mountain National Forest

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

**Eastern
Region**

R9-WM-FEIS-ROD

September 2005

Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement

To accompany the
Land and Resource Management Plan

This document is available in large print.

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Land and Resource Management Plan

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Preface

This document, titled the Record of Decision, describes my decision to select Alternative 2, modified in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, as the revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the White Mountain National Forest. The Record of Decision has two purposes: first, it is a legal document detailing a formal decision from a government agency; and second, and equally important, it explains the rationale and logic I used in arriving at my decision.

In accordance with the planning regulations under which this plan revision was prepared, I am the responsible official for this decision. I do not take this responsibility lightly, and have relied heavily on many people and the information they provided to ensure the Forest Service is making the best possible decision for this important piece of public land.

Public involvement and respectful discourse has been the hallmark of this planning effort since the Notice of Intent was published March 9, 2000. It has been my observation that this is how business is conducted in New Hampshire and Maine, and I'm proud that Forest Service employees have recognized the need for citizen involvement through every step of the process.

The staff of the White Mountain National Forest worked closely with individuals, local and state government, other federal agencies, tribal governments, and many interested organizations to develop the draft environmental impact statement and proposed plan that were released about one year ago. We received more then 6,100 responses, and these were very useful in our effort to further clarify and improve the Revised Plan. I am pleased that my decision is based on solid relationships that have evolved through this planning process, and I am confident that our future cooperation will ensure sustainable conditions for use and enjoyment of the White Mountain National Forest.

Creating this revised Forest Plan has not been an easy task. Developing a plan that is supported by most members of the public is even more difficult. The complexity involved with managing almost 800,000 acres of public land for a multitude of benefits and values can be challenging. There are many Federal laws, executive orders and policies that govern National Forest management. The American people, for whom these forests are managed, often have divergent views and values when it comes to what they want the White Mountain National Forest to provide, and how it should be managed.

The revised Forest Plan helps to meet the mission of the Forest Service, which is "To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." The revised Forest Plan evolved from the work of a dedicated interdisciplinary team of Forest Service employees who fully considered the best available science in their analysis of the capability of the Forest to provide various benefits and the environmental effects likely to occur as the plan is implemented. However, science does not always provide

definitive answers to complex resource management questions, nor can any one field of science provide all of the answers. Science can, however, offer insight into the effects of management decisions and actions. In other words, good science can clear the fog, and help us reach a better decision.

I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who worked closely with Forest Service staff throughout the planning process. You helped us identify issues, identify the need for change, develop alternatives, and you contributed substantive and helpful comments on the draft documents. Your continued interest and participation will be even more important as we implement, monitor, and update the Forest Plan in the years to come.

We are very aware that the Forest does not exist in isolation, that it is part of larger state and regional landscapes, and our management actions affect surrounding communities and ecosystems. This is all the more reason we value the breadth of input we have received.

My thanks go out to the leaders in the communities within and around the Forest, to the many interest groups who advocate for the various multiple uses this Forest provides, and to the Forest Service employees who spent long hours and brought essential expertise to the revision process. My appreciation also extends to the Native American Indian Tribes in Maine, to the state and federal agencies who provided valuable input, and to the thousands of individuals who cared enough to attend meetings, read documents, and provide comments.

We now have a Revised Plan that will guide the management of your White Mountain National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. But what does that really mean? The Revised Plan focuses on outcomes, recognizing that what we leave on the landscape is vitally important. At the same time, it recognizes how important forest management is to people and their social and economic well-being. The outputs and uses of the Forest that result from achieving the desired conditions and objectives will continue to provide jobs, products, and recreational uses for the American people. These lands can help maintain a quality of life, both for the people who live and work near the Forest and those interested in visiting this American treasure. Together, I believe we have crafted a revised Forest Plan with a strong foundation for ecological, social, and economic sustainability over the long-term.

Finally, where do we go from here and how do we get there? Our work is not finished; in fact it is just beginning. This Revised Plan is more than just a collection of words and ideas written on paper. We must transfer the ideas to the ground to make the desired conditions become real. The White Mountain National Forest is part of a vast and complex social, ecologic, and economic ecosystem in the Northeast. It should not and cannot be managed without consideration and assistance from the various land managers, governments, and agencies that are part of the landscape, or the many people interested in these lands.

The challenge that remains before all of us is to work together to implement the Revised Plan. I fully understand this can sometimes be difficult to achieve. At the same time, I am confident that cooperation will unite us, because I believe we share the common bond that these lands remain

productive, ecologically healthy, and beautiful for both the current and future generations.

I thank you again for your support, participation, and patience throughout this process. I invite your continued partnership in helping implement the revised Forest Plan and in keeping it fresh and relevant.

Randy Moore

Regional Forester

Eastern Region, USDA Forest Service

Contents

Introduction

The Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the White Mountain National Forest provides the principal framework for preserving and protecting the resources of the Forest, while at the same time making those resources available to the public for a variety of uses and experiences.

A Forest Plan was originally developed in 1986 and, as required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), has now been revised. As provided in the 2005 planning rule (36 CFR 219.14), this plan revision has been completed using the planning procedures of the 1982 planning rule. In accordance with NFMA, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the 1982 Planning Rule, a range of management alternatives has been developed. Each alternative provides a different approach for meeting the need for change considered early in the planning process, and for addressing issues that were identified by the public and Forest Service personnel through scoping and comment. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) documents the potential environmental effects of several alternatives that were considered in detail. This intensive study provided me, as the deciding officer, with the information necessary to select the alternative which provides the greatest net public benefit. The alternative selected is the basis for the revised Land and Resource Management Plan, which is a companion document to this Record of Decision (ROD) and to the FEIS.

The FEIS addresses:

1. The Purpose and Need for Change — why the Forest Plan is being revised and what issues need to be considered in the revision process.
2. The Alternatives — a range of reasonable approaches for meeting the purpose and need and addressing the issues.
3. The Affected Environment — the physical, biological, and social settings within the Forest and its surrounding area.
4. The Environmental Effects — the effects of each alternative on the Forest's resources, as well as the surrounding social and economic environments, in the long- and short-term and cumulatively.

The Forest Plan states the goals and objectives to achieve desired conditions, and establishes standards and guidelines to govern management activities — both Forest-wide and in each of the Forest's management areas. A monitoring and evaluation strategy is included in the Plan, which will help determine how well management direction is being met. Monitoring provides a basis for the periodic evaluation and amending of the Forest Plan.

This Revised Plan replaces all previous resource management plans for the White Mountain National Forest. The Revised Plan may be amended or revised to respond to new information or management technologies, Congressional land designations, and changing needs and opportunities. Any action taken to amend or revise the Plan will include further public involvement.

Management practices will be implemented and outputs will be produced as the Forest Service strives to meet the desired conditions called for in the Revised Plan. The Revised Plan is implemented through site-specific projects, and annual budgets determine which and how many projects are planned and implemented during any given year.

The Revised Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement are programmatic in nature, providing a long-range strategy for the Forest. Site-specific environmental analysis will occur for each project needed to implement this strategy. Any resulting project documents will be tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

Decisions Made in the Forest Plan

Six programmatic decisions are made in the Forest Plan that will govern the landscape-scale management of the Forest. Project-level decisions are made within the framework established in the Plan.

1. Forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives (36 CFR 219.11(b)).
2. Forest-wide management standards and guidelines (36 CFR 219.13-27).
3. Management area direction (36 CFR 219.11).
4. Lands suited for timber production (36 CFR 219.14), and establishment of an allowable sale quantity (36 CFR 219.16).
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11(d)).
6. Recommendations to Congress (e.g., recommendations for Wilderness) (36 CFR 219.17)).

The Forest

The White Mountain National Forest encompasses approximately 796,700 acres in northern New Hampshire (including Coos, Carroll, and Grafton Counties) and western Maine (Oxford County). It was established under the provisions of the Weeks Law of 1911, which authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to purchase cut-over and denuded land for the National Forest System. This far-thinking law was responsible for most of the Eastern National Forests. The first land purchase for the White Mountain National Forest was in the town of Benton, New Hampshire, in 1914.

Characterized by rugged mountain peaks and the largest alpine zone in the East, the Forest has forty-eight summits of 4,000 feet and higher, including Mount Washington, the highest peak in the Northeast. A variety of species — softwoods and northern hardwoods, rare and unique plants, fish, birds, and other animals — can be found, and are part of the attraction for visitors. The dramatic landscape, so close to major metropolitan areas (Boston, Massachusetts, is only 130 miles to the south; New York City only a half-day drive; and Montreal, Quebec, less than one day's drive), has made the White Mountains a destination for people seeking a variety of recreation experiences for close to two centuries.

The USDA Forest Service administers the White Mountain National Forest, aided by partners, other agencies, individuals, and concessionaires. There are three ranger districts: the Androscoggin in the northeast, the Saco in the southeast, and the Ammonoosuc/Pemigewasset district covering the western side of the Forest. The Forest Headquarters is currently located in Laconia, New Hampshire.

A Vision of the Future

The landscape of the White Mountain National Forest is unique in New England. It provides opportunities that are not available on private or other public lands. The Forest's resources are managed to ensure that their social and economic values to the region will benefit both present and future generations.

The ecological processes necessary to maintain the Forest's biological diversity are provided across the landscape. Populations of native and desired non-native species of plants and animals thrive and offer opportunities for viewing, hunting, and fishing. Habitat management activities maintain and enhance habitat for rare species and other species valued by Forest users, and support recovery of threatened and endangered species. The Forest continues to provide some of the most natural appearing and scenic mountainous settings in New England.

The National Forest is enjoyed for a wide range of high quality recreation opportunities, mountain and forest scenery, and an extensive trail network. The management emphasis is on non-motorized and dispersed activities, such as hiking, mountain biking, and backpacking, especially in primitive and semi-primitive settings. The Forest provides opportunities for activities that can only be pursued in mountainous terrain, such as rock and ice climbing and alpine skiing. The Forest also provides opportunities for many other recreation activities, such as camping in developed and dispersed areas, driving for pleasure, winter motorized trail riding, swimming, fishing, hunting, hobby mineral collecting, and natural and cultural resource interpretation.

The Wilderness areas of the White Mountain National Forest provide opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation as populations around the Forest grow. In addition, Wilderness provides significant ecological values — filtering air pollution, sequestering carbon, providing unbroken wildlife habitat, and protecting watersheds. These lands are managed to allow natural processes to predominate, and to minimize the impacts of human intrusion. Wilderness on the White Mountain National Forest provides unique educational opportunities not found in other places. Our interpretive programs and materials allow visitors become more familiar with natural processes, recognize the evolving role of humans in affecting landscape change, and see how those same processes occur around their homes.

The Forest continues to provide high quality hardwood and softwood sawtimber, as well as other forest products, primarily for local and regional markets. Sustainable forestry activities occur on about 47 percent of the Forest

in a manner that is compatible with other resource and recreation objectives. During any one year, harvesting operations will be active on a very small part of the Forest, generally on no more than one percent of the overall landbase.

Water quality standards are met and long-term productivity of the Forest is sustained. Water resources support a variety of uses, while watersheds maintain their natural hydrologic function. Watersheds are managed in cooperation with local, state, and federal agencies so that high quality water supplies can be provided to local communities while sustaining aquatic ecosystems.

Transportation networks and facilities are provided to support the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. Road networks are managed to provide safe travel, while ensuring that environmental impacts from roads are mitigated where possible.

Stewardship of the National Forest continues to be a collaborative effort between local communities, Forest users, private sector entities, nonprofit partners, and other government agencies. Many programs, facilities, and services that contribute to local and regional economies and the quality of life are developed and implemented through partnerships, volunteer programs, cooperative agreements, and donations. Educational and interpretive programs deliver messages about natural and cultural history, land conservation, and multiple use issues to local communities and Forest users. Educational institutions, government agencies, and other entities assist in determining research activities on the Forest.

An ongoing monitoring and evaluation program is in place, focused on reviewing progress toward implementing the Forest Plan goals and objectives. Monitoring efforts identify effects to date and how they match what was anticipated, new information, and the need to change the Plan through amendments.

Public Involvement

As the largest public land area in New England, the White Mountain National Forest plays an important and unique role in people's hearts and minds. It is one of the most popular forests in the country, with upwards of 6 million visitors annually. The Forest is the recreational draw for outdoor enthusiasts with myriad interests. It is a place of refuge from the hectic pace of life on the eastern seaboard, and the backyard business to outfitter guides, tourism services, and the wood products industry. The Forest is within a day's drive of 70 million people and is home to 58 towns in New Hampshire and Maine. The Forest Plan Revision Public Involvement Plan was prepared with this diverse audience in mind.

Creating a way to involve the stakeholders of the White Mountain National Forest was essential in producing a revised Forest Plan that will be supported and understood by the public, resource professionals, and employees. Support for the Plan can only be gained if there is a widely held belief that people's concerns have been heard and addressed, where possible, in the planning process. To this end, efforts were focused on involving people in a way that fostered ownership in the Plan and its implementation.

Since 1997, the employees of the White Mountain National Forest have sought comments and provided opportunities for individuals, interest groups, tribal governments, and local, state and federal government agencies to become involved in the Plan revision. This public involvement made it possible for people to learn about resource management and the Forest Plan revision process, and to engage in open dialogue. The New England culture of relying on local collaboration to achieve solutions has guided the Forest Plan revision process.

Public Participation Opportunities

Pre-Revision Outreach - Identifying Needed Changes for the Forest Plan

In the January, 1997, outreach meetings were held in Gorham and Concord, New Hampshire, and Boston, Massachusetts. The public was asked what aspects of the current Forest Plan should be changed. Over 3,000 comments were received, ranging from broad to narrow, simple to complex, and technical to non-technical in nature. These were grouped into 31 topics of concern, and briefing papers were developed for each topic. The briefing papers summarized current Plan direction, monitoring information, any new information, and public or internal concerns. During the remainder of 1997, the public reviewed each of the briefing papers through a series of three all-day public planning meetings. The Forest then aggregated the 31 topics into 23, and used these to build a Need for Change document, which formed the basis for the formal proposal to revise the Forest Plan, the Notice of Intent (NOI).

The Notice of Intent for the White Mountain National Forest Plan Revision was published in the Federal Register on March 9, 2000, and initiated an official comment period that ended on May 23, 2000. We received 3,425 responses on the NOI, with 14,615 comments. This interest demonstrated

the profound value of public land in New England. With 55 percent of the commenters from Massachusetts, 18 percent from New Hampshire, 10 percent from New York and New Jersey, 5 percent from Connecticut and Rhode Island, 3 percent from Maine and Vermont, 2 percent from Pennsylvania, and 1 percent from Maryland, the White Mountain National Forest is truly a northeastern regional resource.

In the Fall of 1999, Local Planning Groups (LPGs) were established in four geographic areas. Meetings were held monthly at these locations over a two year period. At each meeting, LPG attendees and members of the interdisciplinary plan revision team would discuss, in depth, the 23 topics of concern. In late 2000 and early 2001, the Forest Service developed working papers to address each of the 23 topics of concern. These papers summarized public comment received during the NOI comment period. They also provided management options for how the Forest could deal with the topic during Forest Plan revision. As working papers were drafted, they were shared with federal and state agencies and LPGs. The Forest Service revised the working papers, after adding management options based on discussions at these meetings. Meetings were also held with Native American tribes, local governments, and private organizations and individuals.

Post-NOI Collaboration

From November 2001 through 2002, collaboration continued as the 23 topics of concern were screened to see if they were relevant to Forest Plan-level strategic decisions as opposed to concerns about how the existing Plan had been implemented. This review focused on whether a concern was based on a change in resource conditions or on public demands. The result was that the 23 topics of concern became six need for change issues.

In May 2002, eight public meetings were held at locations throughout New England to present the six issues and receive comment. Through public comment, the six preliminary issues were narrowed or combined into three issues or concern areas to help guide the formation of alternatives.

Forest Plan revision final resource issues and Forest Plan goals were presented to the public on June 22, 2002, at a meeting at Plymouth State University, Plymouth, NH. Approximately 100 people attended the meeting, where Forest resource specialists explained the issues and responded to questions from the audience.

Planning Team members presented and discussed conceptual alternatives at meetings throughout the month of November, 2002, in Littleton, NH; Gorham, NH; Chelmsford, MA; Plymouth, NH; and Bartlett, NH. Based on these meetings and previous public comments, four proposed alternatives for the Revised Plan were presented to an audience of several hundred at a public meeting in Plymouth, NH, on March 29, 2003. In addition to discussion and comment at that meeting, an ensuing comment period drew some 3,700 further responses. The public response indicated that the four proposed alternatives were acceptable for analysis.

Personal contacts were also made with a variety of individuals and organizations to explain the planning process and receive their input. The

Forest Supervisor routinely provided updates and briefings throughout the process with the Congressional delegation, State legislators, town and local officials, and other members of the public. Officials from 49 towns in New Hampshire and 9 towns in Maine received periodic updates and information throughout the process.

Though there are no recognized tribes or tribal lands in New Hampshire, nor tribal lands within the immediate vicinity of the National Forest in Maine, Forest officials provided updates and briefings throughout the process to the four federally recognized tribes in the state of Maine and visited with the Tribal Chairmen or Governors during the process.

In the spring of 2004, plan revision team members completed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and proposed Forest Plan for the White Mountain National Forest. Throughout April and May of 2004, meetings were held in Littleton, Bartlett, Plymouth, and Gorham, NH, and Chelmsford, MA, to provide an update about the upcoming publication of the draft EIS and proposed Forest Plan, and to help the public understand how to read, use, and comment on the DEIS.

Review and Comment on DEIS and Proposed Plan

A 3-month public comment period began September 17, 2004, upon publication of the notice in the Federal Register that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Plan were available for review and comment.

A "Reviewer's Guide" was provided along with the two documents to help readers to navigate through the documents and understand how to provide substantive comments. The documents were mailed to approximately 900 individuals, groups, agencies, and governments. They were also available at local libraries and through the Internet. One public meeting was held in central New Hampshire that coincided with the release of the draft documents. This was followed by six open houses at which the public could meet with members of the planning team and District Rangers to ask questions and gather information to assist them in preparing their response to the documents. An open house on the draft documents was also hosted by the Appalachian Mountain Club in Boston during the comment period.

Response to Comment and Preparation of Revised Forest Plan and FEIS

Over the 3-month comment period, 6,160 letters, cards, emails, and faxes were received, comprising some 18,500 separate comments. These were read, coded, entered into a database, and summarized into Public Concern Statements. A detailed description of the public involvement process and Public Concern Statements is included in Appendix A of the FEIS.

Need for Change Addressed in Plan Revision (Issues)

Management Emphasis Through Land Allocation

The 1986 White Mountain National Forest Plan emphasized non-motorized dispersed recreation experiences on approximately 54 percent of the Forest. Management of these acres provided for older forest conditions and large blocks of naturally evolving landscapes. Included within this management emphasis were 114,000 acres (14 percent of the Forest) of Congressionally-designated Wilderness. The remaining 46 percent of the National Forest was managed for more developed recreation, within a roaded landscape with active timber and wildlife management activities.

This Plan revision addressed whether changes in management emphasis are needed to meet the ecological, social, and economic demands expected of the Forest over the next 10 to 15 years. This issue also looked at whether additional areas should be recommended to Congress for Wilderness designation.

Timber Management and Wildlife Habitat

Sustainable forestry on the White Mountain National Forest accomplishes many goals. It provides a source of high quality wood products, modifies wildlife habitat, maintains a healthy forest by removing trees damaged by insects and disease, benefits the regional economy, and demonstrates science-based forest management.

The plan revision process looked at how much timber should be harvested from the Forest, where harvest may occur, and the type of harvest treatment to be used. This issue also addressed the role of the White Mountain National Forest in providing young forest wildlife habitat within the larger landscape.

There are varying opinions on the value of and need for active habitat manipulation to ensure an adequate presence of wildlife species that benefit from early successional habitat. Species such as moose, deer, ruffed grouse, and some songbirds rely on young forest habitats to meet some of their life cycle needs. Our wildlife management cooperators and researchers emphasized in their comments the need to maintain or create these habitats in key areas through the use of clearcutting and other even-age harvest treatments. Other wildlife advocates believe the Forest should be managed primarily as a refuge, with naturally evolving forest, because of habitat changes that are occurring on other ownerships within the landscape.

Recreation Management

The 1986 Forest Plan provided a broad array of recreation opportunities with an emphasis on non-motorized dispersed recreation. Millions of people visit the White Mountain National Forest each year, using facilities such as trails, shelters, roads, fishing and boat access sites, overlooks, restrooms, campgrounds, and ski areas. Recreation and tourism are very important to the local and regional economy.

Demand for many types of recreational activities and experiences has grown during the past 20 years, due to marketing and improvements in equipment. In addition to expanded use within traditional recreation activities, the Forest is being asked to accommodate a broader array of recreation experiences, including summer motorized trail vehicles and new recreational events.

Plan revision addressed concerns about how increased use may affect ecological conditions and recreational experiences. It looked closely at how changing activities and increasing use can be managed to prevent unacceptable ecological impacts and ensure high quality recreation opportunities. The 1986 Forest Plan provided little long-term guidance or management direction for addressing new uses, or existing activities such as rock and ice climbing, outfitter and guide operations, mountain biking, and group events. There was a need to have these uses addressed in the Revised Plan.

Alternatives

The interdisciplinary team developed four preliminary alternatives in response to the issues and need for change. While all four alternatives provide a range of multiple uses, goods, and services, each addressed the issues in a different way.

The preliminary alternatives were presented at a public workshop in March of 2003. Many of the comments received during and after the workshop were incorporated, and the four alternatives were brought forward for detailed analysis in the Environmental Impact Statement. Each alternative considered in detail is a management approach that could have become the revised Forest Plan. The alternatives that were considered in detail share goals and policies that all National Forests are directed to follow. They differ in the emphasis given to addressing particular issues.

One of the interdisciplinary team's most important tasks in revising the Plan was to develop a reasonable range of alternatives. Based on resource information, public comment, and experience gained under the 1986 Plan, the team crafted what I believe to be an excellent representation of alternative means to meet the purpose and need for this programmatic document. To the extent practicable, we have solicited and reviewed alternatives submitted by the public and documented that analysis in the Administrative Record. At root, the range of alternatives is driven by what is best for the land and the people that use it. Existing resource conditions and the role of the Forest (as embodied in the purpose and need statement) are the heart of the development of the alternatives. Development of a programmatic multiple use resource plan involves compromise and balancing of a host of biological, physical, and social factors. The range of alternatives reflects the trade-offs associated with this task.

Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study

No Timber Harvest

Public comment about timber management on the White Mountain National Forest concentrated around the legitimacy of timber harvesting on public land, the amount of timber that should be harvested, where on the landscape timber should be harvested, the harvest methods that should be used, and the intensity of timber management. Some members of the public proposed options to the current timber management program that would end timber harvest completely on the Forest. These options, as submitted, were eliminated from detailed consideration for several reasons.

Sustainable supplies of timber products is one of the original purposes for establishing the National Forests, as described in the Organic Administration Act and Weeks Law. Timber on the White Mountain National Forest has been actively managed for almost 90 years. The Forest is now at the point where long-term investments, such as thinning and stand improvement cuts aimed at growing high quality sawtimber, will be more fully realized with continued management. The Forest has a history of providing a sustainable supply of timber. As stated in its Ten Year Monitoring Summary, published

in 1996, the Forest supplied 80 million board feet of sawtimber and 2.5 million cubic feet of pulpwood to wood producing industries during the first ten years of implementing the 1986 Forest Plan. Overall benefits of the program, including market and non-market values, exceed costs. Monitoring also indicates that timber harvesting has proven to be the most effective method of providing vegetative diversity, and is closely tied with achieving wildlife habitat composition objectives. Another factor is the role that public land management agencies play in demonstrating how timber can be produced in a sustainable and ecologically sensitive manner. As stated in the Notice of Intent, a sustainable timber harvest program for the White Mountain National Forest is part of the purpose and need for the Plan revision.

All Inventoried Roadless Areas Recommended as Wilderness

An alternative was proposed that all 27 inventoried roadless areas on the Forest (403,144 acres) be recommended for Wilderness designation. This was considered and eliminated from detailed analysis.

To be considered for Wilderness recommendation, a roadless area must be evaluated against three criteria: availability, capability, and need. The 27 roadless areas identified in the Forest's roadless inventory were put through this evaluation but, for various reasons, not all areas met the recommendation criteria (see Appendix C of the Forest Plan).

New Wilderness recommendations reflect public interest over the last fifteen years. Public input ranged from not increasing Wilderness above current levels to recommending substantially more designated Wilderness. However, public comments have also indicated a desire for a mix of uses on the Forest, such as winter motorized trail use, developed campgrounds, mountain biking, and timber harvest, to name a few. The proposal to recommend all 27 inventoried roadless areas for Wilderness designation would not meet this balance of products, services, and experiences that the public has requested, nor the Desired Future Condition of the Forest. Under this proposal, approximately 48 percent of the total Forest land base would be placed in MA 9.1, a holding area allocation. When added to the 114,000 acres of existing Wilderness, 63 percent of the Forest land base would be allocated to management areas that limit recreation opportunities, close existing roads, and prohibit new timber harvest and road construction. Winter motorized recreation use and mountain biking would be constrained, forcing use onto private and other, non-federal, public lands.

Roadless Areas Not Recommended for Wilderness in Any Alternative or in Their Entirety

Though all 27 inventoried roadless areas meet minimum Wilderness evaluation criteria, some roadless areas were not considered for Wilderness study in any alternative. Some of these areas have nonconforming uses that diminish Wilderness values. Others currently have little or no public support as proposed Wilderness areas. New Wilderness recommendations reflect public interest over the last fifteen years, as well as how specific areas address the overall Desired Future Condition for the White Mountain National Forest.

In recommending roadless areas for Wilderness designation, portions of some roadless areas were considered for designation rather than the entire inventoried roadless area. Some inventoried roadless areas contain, or are in close proximity to, mountain bike trails, snowmobile trails, and scenic highways or other developed areas. In addition, parts of inventoried roadless areas have been actively managed for wood products. These diminish Wilderness characteristics, so boundaries for Recommended Wilderness were proposed where they would lessen human-created impacts to the overall Wilderness.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative 2 — Selected Alternative

The Selected Alternative is Alternative 2 in the FEIS. Alternative 2 was modified between the Draft and Final EIS in response to public comments and to improve the accuracy of information. Alternative 2 provides a programmatic framework for future Forest management activities and projects. This framework includes Forest-wide management direction and specific direction for 15 separate management areas.

Dispersed recreation experiences within unroaded landscapes will be emphasized on approximately 53 percent of the Forest, with the remaining 47 percent of the Forest emphasizing more developed recreation in roaded landscapes with active habitat and timber management activities. This alternative includes a recommendation to Congress an additional 34,500 acres of Wilderness — a new Wilderness in the Wild River drainage and several additions to the existing Sandwich Range Wilderness.

Alternative 2 provides for an active vegetation management program while maintaining scenic quality and minimizing conflicts with other important Forest uses. This alternative provides for a sustainable level of timber products from the Forest (allowable sale quantity of 24 million board feet), with an average harvest intensity of 3,430 acres treated per year. This harvest level is consistent with what has been occurring on the Forest over the last 15 years. It provides for a small increase of early successional habitat creation through even-aged timber harvest (940 acres per year) compared to what was accomplished over the last 15 years, but will maintain species viability and manage within the range of natural variation. This level of harvest will meet all scenic integrity objectives of the revised Forest Plan.

The selected alternative includes an overall goal of preventing increased development levels in the backcountry. The monitoring program will evaluate impacts and user experiences in both high and low use areas. Standards and guidelines have been included to assure that recreation use in all areas is sustainable. Expansion of the Forest's recreation infrastructure will be limited.

Recreation use will continue to be focused on trails and facilities, and the Forest Service will strive to maintain current development levels in the backcountry. Low use areas and facilities will be managed to meet visitor needs and resource requirements through education and management controls where necessary. High use areas and facilities will be managed for

high use to meet visitor needs, while ensuring they can be sustained over the long term.

The Forest trail system will not be open to all terrain vehicles (ATV) except on designated trails in the winter. The Forest open road system will continue to be open for ATV use where that use is legal under state law.

Alternative 2, the Selected Alternative for the Revised Plan, recognizes the influence of National Forest lands and programs on local and regional economies and communities, and strives to provide a mix of benefits that can be delivered on a consistent and reliable basis over the long term. It has the highest net present value of the four alternatives.

Alternative 1 — No Action — Continue Management Approach of the 1986 Forest Plan

Alternative 1 provides guidance for the next ten years that would generally be the same as the direction in the amended 1986 Forest Plan. Resource management activities on the Forest would be implemented through overall Forest-wide direction and specific direction provided for in 13 management areas. Dispersed recreation experiences within unroaded landscapes would be emphasized on approximately 54 percent of the Forest, with the remaining 46 percent of the Forest emphasizing more developed recreation in roaded landscapes with active habitat and timber management activities. The increased demand for Wilderness would not be met, as there are no recommendations for new or expanded Wilderness areas in this alternative.

The vegetation management program in this alternative would have an average annual allowable sale quantity of 35 million board feet per year, with 1,700 acres of early successional habitat created yearly. Harvest at this ASQ level would likely result in difficulty meeting scenic integrity objectives in some areas of the Forest. The average marketability of sales would be lower than for the Selected Alternative, due to the commercially marginal stands that would be offered for harvest. However, the sale marketability of Alternative 1 would be higher than Alternatives 3 and 4, due to generally higher volumes per acre harvested and greater amounts of sawtimber.

In this alternative, there are no desired conditions to guide recreation management. The Forest Service would respond on a case-by-case basis to important resource or social interaction concerns when they become apparent or cause a significant public concern. However, continuing in this direction would make it difficult to manage the Forest's recreation opportunities as an interrelated system, and may not adequately address increases in use. This alternative would have the second highest increase in infrastructure and facility capacity.

Summer off-highway vehicle use would be permitted on a trial basis within the General Forest Management area in up to two areas. Proposals submitted by the public would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with use limited to ATVs and two wheeled motorbikes. Up to 60 miles of summer motorized trail would be considered for designation. The Forest trail system would be open to ATVs on designated trails in the winter. The Forest open road system would continue to be open for ATV use where legal under state law.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 reflects the greatest shift in land allocation of all four alternatives. Dispersed recreation experiences within unroaded landscapes would be emphasized on approximately 59 percent of the Forest. The remaining 41 percent of the land base would emphasize more developed recreation in roaded landscapes, with active habitat and timber management activities occurring as well. This alternative proposes the largest recommendation for Congressionally-designated Wilderness of all the alternatives. Three new Wilderness areas and expansion of two existing Wilderness areas would add approximately 96,900 acres to the current Wilderness allocation. Lands allocated to the General Forest Management area would decrease by 15,500 acres, due to the Wilderness recommendations.

This alternative has the least potential of all the alternatives to provide timber products and early successional habitat. The harvest intensity is the lowest of all the alternatives at approximately 3,350 acres annually, with an average ASQ of 18 million board feet per year and 480 acres of early successional habitat created yearly. The reduced annual output indicates a more widespread distribution of harvest activity, which would be favorable to maintaining a natural-appearing forest.

Recreation management in this alternative is similar to the Selected Alternative, by establishing an overall goal of preventing increased development levels in the backcountry. However, increases in infrastructure and facilities are slightly reduced from the Selected Alternative levels. The Forest trail system would not be open to all terrain vehicles (ATVs) except on designated trails in the winter. The Forest open road system would continue to be open for ATV use where legal under state law.

From a market price standpoint, Alternative 3 has the lowest program costs and the smallest timber revenues, due to having the smallest timber program of all the alternatives. From an assigned value standpoint, it has the highest level of hiking in Wilderness when compared to the other alternatives. The low program costs are offset by the low timber revenues, which outweigh the gains in net present value from the high levels in backcountry use, resulting in the lowest net present value of all the alternatives.

Alternative 4

This alternative emphasizes dispersed recreation experiences within unroaded landscapes on approximately 52 percent of the Forest. These management areas provide for older forest conditions and large blocks of non-manipulated landscapes that are valued for both their ecological and social character. The remaining 48 percent of the Forest includes management that emphasizes more developed recreation, in roaded landscapes with active habitat and timber management activities. These management areas provide early successional habitat important for some wildlife species. Approximately 18,100 acres in the Wild River area would be recommended for Congressional designation as a Wilderness.

Alternative 4 provides for an average annual ASQ of 30 million board feet and roughly 1,120 acres of early successional habitat per year. Harvest would occur over approximately 4,470 acres annually, the most acres harvested of all the alternatives. Visual quality objectives would be met. To sustain this level of harvest, marginal stands of timber would be treated and low value sawtimber could cause sales to be less marketable than in Alternatives 2 and 1.

The recreation management approach would be similar to that in Alternatives 2 and 3. However, Alternative 4 has the highest objective for increases in campgrounds, snowmobile trails, non-motorized trails, and backcountry facility capacity. Up to 100 miles of non-motorized trail could be added to the designated Forest trail system over the next 10 to 15 years. This alternative also provides for an increase in backcountry facility capacity of up to 65 people at one time. Some current low use areas may receive additional backcountry facility capacity or more trails, bringing them into a higher use category. Summer off-highway vehicle use could be permitted on up to 30 miles of trail designated in either the Moat Mountain or Landaff area subject to further site-specific analysis.The Forest trail system would be open to ATVs on designated trails in the winter. The Forest open road system would continue to be open for ATV use where legal under state law.

Decision and Rationale

I began my decision making process by looking closely at how well the 1986 Forest Plan, was "caring for the land and serving people." While we did not complete all of the goals in that plan, I believe it did do a relatively good job of responding to the ecological, social, and economic concerns and needs we faced over the last twenty years. In revising the 1986 Forest Plan, we built on this experience in trying to select the best overall course of action for the future.

I recognize that over the last twenty years there have been many changes in our country and the world that ultimately could have an effect on the White Mountain National Forest and all of the nation's forest lands. Looking specifically at the New England landscape, I have reviewed some of the work that has been done by others to get a better understanding of the changes that are occurring in the Northeast and the Northern Forest. The recent "Northern Forest Lands Council Tenth Anniversary Forum Report," sponsored by the North East State Foresters, highlights the significant changes that are occurring across the region. This report reaffirms "the regional and national stature of the Northern Forest as a vast region that has been impacted by economic, cultural and social change. Past concerns about pattern of land ownership in relation to traditional uses have been coupled with an increased recognition of how the working landscape and conservation goals affect local communities and economies." The report, and other recent publications and forums by different organizations and agencies, has helped shape my decision on the Selected Alternative

Changes in our understanding of ecological systems and the potential management needs to address new concerns also require us to look beyond our borders to ensure we are making the best possible decisions for the future. Issues such as the spread of invasive species, air quality, acid deposition, forest fragmentation, wildlife viability, and increasing recreational demand require increased emphasis in this Plan, as well as a good understanding of how Forest Service management actions contribute to or complement what is happening on other lands within our sphere of influence.

I also fully understand that there are many, and sometimes conflicting, demands and expectations for this public land called the White Mountain National Forest. In some cases, in order to meet long-term sustainable goals, not all these demands and expectations can be met from a finite resource base. Sometimes one person's values and desires cannot be met without having an effect on another person's values and desires. However, in my decision I have looked for an alternative that best meets the demands and expectations, ensures the long-term sustainability of the National Forest, and responds to the laws and policies under which the Forest Service must work.

I have selected Alternative 2, with some modifications, as the Revised Plan for the White Mountain National Forest. I chose Alternative 2 because, in my judgment, it maximizes the net benefit to the public by:

- Maintaining or enhancing biological diversity and the long-term health of the Forest;
- Contributing to the economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities;
- Providing sustainable and predictable levels of products and services;
- Providing the best mix of benefits to address the needs for change identified in the Final Environmental Impact Statement;
- Recognizing the relationship of the White Mountain National Forest to other public and private lands in the area of influence;
- Emphasizing adaptive management over the long term; and
- Providing consistent direction at the Forest level to assist managers in making site-specific project decisions at a local level in the context of broader ecological and landscape level considerations.

My decision also considered how the Revised Plan responds to public comments, internal management concerns, and national direction and policy. My decision incorporates by reference the management direction in the Revised Plan, the analysis of effects disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, and the planning Administrative Record in its entirety. This decision applies only to National Forest System land on the White Mountain National Forest. It does not apply to any other federal, tribal, state, county, municipal, or private lands; although in making my decision, I considered the effects on those lands.

In a broad context, Alternative 2 with some modifications recognizes that in many ways the 1986 Forest Plan was responding well to the overall needs of the Forest from an ecological, social, economic standpoint. Many parts of the new Plan do not make radical departures in our overall management approach. They do, however, recognize new information, better scientific understanding, and the overall changes that have occurred over the last twenty years. I have looked at the issues described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and selected Alternative 2 with the understanding that it outlines the following approaches relative to the three issue areas.

Management Area Allocation

Alternative 2 (the revised Forest Plan) will emphasize dispersed recreation experiences within unroaded landscapes on approximately 53 percent of the Forest. These management areas will provide older forest conditions and large blocks of non-manipulated landscapes that are valued for both their ecological and social character. The remaining 47 percent of the Forest includes management emphasis that provides for timber management activities, road systems for public access, developed recreation areas, non-motorized trails, Nordic and downhill ski areas, snowmobiling, and a host of other activities. These management areas will provide young forest habitat that is important to some wildlife species. All of the management areas will provide the opportunity for people to hunt and fish on the Forest consistent with State laws.

The Revised Plan also provides for the establishment of two new management areas: Management Area 8.3 — Appalachian National Scenic Trail and Management Area 8.1 — Alpine Zone. It combines Management Areas 2.1 and 3.1 from the 1986 Plan into one Management Area 2.1 — General Forest Management, which better reflects how these areas will be managed over the next fifteen years. The Revised Plan will also add an additional 3,190 acres to the Bartlett Experimental Forest to assist in our ability to conduct broader scale research activities. Management Area 2.1A and Management Area 9.4, which were considered holding areas in the 1986 Forest Plan, were deleted from this plan, and these acres were added to other management areas to better reflect how these areas will be managed over the next 15 years.

Also, with the Revised Plan I am recommending to Congress that an additional 34,500 acres on the White Mountain National Forest be considered for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This alternative proposes the designation of a new Wilderness in the Wild River drainage, as well as additions to the existing Sandwich Range Wilderness. If these areas are designated by Congress, approximately 18 percent of the Forest would be managed for its wilderness values.

The following table outlines the proposed allocation by management area.

Management Area	Allocation (Acres)
2.1: General Forest Management	358,000
5.1: Wilderness	114,000
6.1: Semi-Primitive Recreation	86,300
6.2: Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation	105,600
6.3: Semi-Primitive Winter Motorized Recreation	15,300
7.1: Alpine Ski Areas	3,700
8.1: Alpine Zone	5,100
8.2: Experimental Forests	13,400
8.3: Appalachian National Scenic Trail	39,000
8.4: Research Natural Areas	3,200
8.5: Scenic Areas	15,200
8.6: Wildcat Wild and Scenic River	900
9.1: Recommended Wilderness	34,500
9.2: Alpine Ski Area Expansion	2,200
9.3: Candidate Research Natural Areas	2,100

The four alternatives considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement provided a range of possible management area emphasis and allocation that I considered. The majority of the comments on this issue

revolved around whether lands should be in management areas that restrict the use of roads and are managed more for a dispersed recreational experience, with less overall development, or are available for timber and wildlife management with additional roading as needed.

People tended to focus on key areas that they thought should remain in, or be taken out of, the landbase classified as "suitable for timber production." I have chosen to leave the overall allocation of lands through management areas similar to the way the Forest has been managed over the last 15 years. This mix of resource management approaches and land use values seems to have worked well in most cases, and has provided a very balanced program overall. While I could have chosen Alternative 3 and moved more of the Forest into roadless character, I did not think this was needed to provide a Plan that was responsive to all the ecological, social, and economic demands placed on the Forest. Some people suggested increasing the intensity of the forestry activities on the Forest but reduce the acres available for treatment as a way of maintaining overall commodity outputs. I believe this approach would have proven impossible to implement while meeting all the other resource expectations. I believe an approach of managing 53 percent of the Forest in a non-motorized dispersed recreation condition will provide ecological benefits and experiences people expect from the White Mountain National Forest, while at the same time allowing diverse uses such as downhill skiing, roaded access, developed campgrounds, and forestry activity on much of the remainder of Forest.

I have reviewed the Roadless Inventory completed by the White Mountain National Forest staff to ensure that the inventory and evaluation process we used is consistent with national and regional guidelines. The focus of this inventory and evaluation was to identify lands that meet the criteria for inclusion in the Forest's roadless inventory, and to evaluate these areas to determine if any areas should be recommended to Congress for Wilderness.

Some groups and individuals, in their comments on the Draft EIS, disagreed with the process that we used to inventory and evaluate roadless areas. I believe the process we followed is sound, and did result in an accurate inventory and a thorough evaluation of each inventoried roadless area. There were also questions about our determination of which roads were considered "improved" for the purpose of the roadless area inventory. The Forest Supervisor had an additional field review conducted to respond to stated concerns. This review resulted in an additional 19,617 acres being included within the roadless inventory and evaluation. I have looked again at the inventory and the evaluation of roadless areas (Appendix C), and believe that my recommendations for Wilderness designation do not need to change based on this additional information.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 and the subsequent Eastern Wilderness legislation have demonstrated the will of the people to have some land set aside that could be managed in an untrammeled state. With increasing development in the East, and the desire of people to reconnect with a place in its true wild state, it is reasonable for me to recommend additional lands be considered by Congress for Wilderness designation. The additions to the Sandwich Range Wilderness and the proposed new Wild River

Wilderness would provide unique opportunities for solitude and preserve ecological, geological, and other features of scientific, educational, scenic, and historical value. While there would be some trade-offs and effects on other outputs and experiences, I believe the long-term benefits outweigh the trade-offs in the case of the two areas recommended. I considered recommending other areas discussed in the EIS for Wilderness, but believe Wilderness designation in those areas would significantly disrupt the balance of expected experiences, outputs, and services provided on the Forest. The proposed addition of 34,500 acres to the Wilderness Preservation System would result in approximately 18 percent of the Forest being managed as Wilderness.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA) of 1968, as amended, protects rivers' free flowing condition, water quality, and outstanding remarkable values for the "benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations." In October of 1988, Congress passed legislation designating segments of the Wildcat River and its tributaries as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Management Area 8.6 of the Revised Plan includes direction for managing the National Forest Service lands within the Wildcat River corridor, and is based on the Wildcat River Comprehensive River Management Plan, 2005. The direction is in conformance with Section 3(d)(1) of the WSRA. The Forest Service is also responsible for the evaluation of water resources under Section 7(a) of the WSRA on all ownerships for designated rivers.

Management of Vegetation

The White Mountain National Forest was born out of primarily heavily cut-over lands, through the efforts of concerned citizens who lived in the area or visited the White Mountains from the growing metropolitan areas. It has been, truly, a remarkable success story over the last 90 years, and a testament to the healing power of nature, the diligence of a land management agency, and unwavering support of individuals and organizations. The Environmental Impact Statement for the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan considered alternative ways to manage the vegetation over the next 15 years.

Alternative 2, the Selected Alternative, calls for active forest management using sustainable forestry practices on about 47 percent of the Forest. In most cases, the remainder of the Forest will continue to age and will go through successional changes that will be influenced by wind, fire, and insect and disease outbreaks. In the suitable landbase where timber will be harvested, it will be accomplished according to the standards and guidelines within the Forest Plan and consistent with state Best Management Practices. Vegetation management will move the Forest toward wildlife habitat objectives for vegetative age class and species composition. These objectives consider the importance of providing a diversity of wildlife habitat for native game and non-game species on the Forest.

In any one year, it is anticipated that the Forest Service, through timber sale contractors, would be treating approximately 3,400 acres of the Forest, which accounts for less than one percent of the overall Forest land base. These

treatments are expected to provide an average annual allowable sale quantity of 24 million board feet of wood products in the form of sawtimber and pulpwood. The Forest Service will continue silvicultural treatments that favor the production of high quality sawtimber.

The White Mountain National Forest has a long history of using timber harvest to accomplish resource objectives and provide wood products to the public. These efforts have been coordinated and administered by field staff in order to address potential resource impacts and minimize effects on the recreational use of the Forest. I would like to discuss four specific areas that provide my rationale with respect to this issue for the selection of Alternative 2. They include: 1) the ability to accomplish wildlife habitat objectives; 2) the ability to provide wood products; 3) the effects on land productivity and ecological processes; and 4) the role of the Forest in furthering our understanding of sustainable forestry practices.

Wildlife Habitat Objectives

The Forest Service has analyzed our overall role within the landscape in maintaining wildlife habitat and populations. Indications are that natural disturbances, such as wind, hurricanes, and insect and disease outbreaks, have typically maintained a portion of the Forest ecosystem in a young forest seedling/sapling condition (early successional). These habitats are important to a host of wildlife species, from some bird species to larger species such as moose. Our wildlife management cooperators and researchers have emphasized in their comments the need for creating these habitats using clearcutting and other even-age harvest treatments. Some other wildlife advocates think the Forest should be managed primarily as a refuge of undisturbed forest, because of habitat changes that are occurring other places on the landscape.

I have reviewed the FEIS, available scientific information, and public comments, and I firmly believe that the White Mountain National Forest can and should provide both early successional and mature, undisturbed forest habitat components. The targeted treatments within MA 2.1, and the large portion of the Forest that is allocated to management areas that don't feature active habitat manipulation, combine well to address the Forest's important role within the larger landscape.

I believe managing a portion of the Forest using sustainable forestry practices is needed to provide many benefits that the public expects from the Forest, including maintaining the aspen-birch component on the Forest, assisting state wildlife agencies in meeting wildlife population goals, reducing the buildup of heavy fuel situations near communities adjacent to or within the Forest, and responding to invasive species outbreaks that may threaten the overall health of the forest ecosystem. We have also balanced the amount of even-aged and uneven-aged harvest to ensure vegetation and wildlife management goals can be met while still meeting our recreation and visual quality objectives.

Wood Products — Allowable Sale Quantity

One of the decisions I am required to make with this Revised Plan is to identify the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for the Forest. The ASQ is defined as the quantity of timber that may be sold from the area of suitable land covered by the Forest Plan, for a time period specified by the Plan, while meeting the requirements of multiple use management and resource protection.

I have reviewed the FEIS, the models used to project varying harvest intensities, and public comment on this issue. I have also discussed with my staff of resource specialists, and with researchers, the experience they have gained in managing our forestry program over the last 20 years. I have listened closely to those people who are familiar with on-the-ground conditions and issues. All of this information tells me that an allowable sale quantity of 24 million board feet per year is a reasonable ceiling for the program over the next 10 to 15 years.

If we were to manage the Forest solely for its wood products, timber yield models tell us that the outputs could probably double the ASQ for Alternative 2. However, this is public forest land that is managed for a multitude of benefits and uses, and as such it requires significantly more flexibility, coordination, and compromise if we hope to meet the desired conditions and goals for all resources as outlined in the Revised Plan.

Some commenters suggested that the yearly production of timber products should be higher later in the planning period, based on land acquisitions and the productivity of the suitable timber base. From my review, I don't believe we could sustain these higher production levels later in the planning period, but we will continue to monitor our objectives and outputs over the life of the Plan, and if our projections are drastically off-base we could adjust the ASQ level through a revision or amendment to the Plan.

Some commenters questioned the reliability of the FIBER and SPECTRUM models used in estimating the allowable sale quantity. We have responded to these concerns in detail in Appendix A — Response to Comments. I believe the models used provided an adequate picture of the overall potential for the Forest to produce outputs, and along with many other factors they helped me ascertain the best mix of resource outputs. The models also provided the necessary assurance that the Forest will be managed for a sustainable, non-declining flow of wood products over the long term.

Effects on Land Productivity and Ecological Processes

I have reviewed the environmental effects section of the FEIS to ensure that the program we have outlined meets the requirements of the National Forest Management Act. While all activities on the National Forest typically involve some kind of trade-offs, I believe the analysis demonstrates that the benefits of actively managing for wildlife habitat and wood production on part of the Forest outweigh any trade-offs associated with these activities.

Some commenters specifically were concerned that timber harvest could compound the existing soil and water quality impacts experienced on the Forest due to acid deposition. I asked my staff to provide additional information in the Final Environmental Impact Statement that would assist me in understanding the concerns related to this important issue. I also asked that they discuss the issue with Forest Service and other researchers to ensure we have a full understanding of the best available scientific information on this subject. While the effects of acid deposition are a concern throughout the world for both health and ecological reasons, I do not believe the body of available scientific information supports the theory that continuing timber harvest in New Hampshire and Maine will have a significant effect on overall soil productivity or water quality in Forest streams. Lands that are designated in the Revised Plan as "suitable for timber production" can be harvested, under the standards and guidelines required by the Plan, in a way that will maintain the long-term soil productivity of the land and water quality of Forest streams. Proposed timber harvest projects also undergo site-specific environmental analysis to ensure that land productivity and ecological processes are not compromised. The White Mountain National Forest is committed to continuing to work with Forest personnel, researchers, and partner groups to monitor the effects from acid deposition to ensure this issue continues to be addressed in forest management actions as necessary.

The revised Forest Plan also includes standards and guidelines to ensure that Forest managers are effectively responding to the threat of invasive species on the overall vegetation and aquatic ecosystems of the Forest.

Demonstrating Sustainable Forestry

The White Mountain National Forest is in a unique position to demonstrate and further the understanding of sustainable forestry practices for both public and private landowners. The historical creation of this Forest was the product of concerns about unsustainable cutting practices that were occurring at the turn of the 20th century. Since that time, the science of forestry has helped guide decisions on the treatment of specific areas that were made to provide long-term investments in the land. National Forest employees have a rich tradition of working with Forest Service researchers and other institutions of higher learning to better understand the complicated relationships and workings of ecosystems in the Northeast. In addition, there are two designated experimental forests within the White Mountain National Forest that continue to conduct long-term research on water quality, watershed processes, acid deposition, silviculture, wildlife relationships, carbon sequestration, and other related topics. The Forest Service has long-term relationships with many conservation organizations that support the use of forest resources from public lands and actively work to further public understanding. Finally, the Forest hosts as many as 6 million people annually, who all rely on wood products in their lives and will benefit from a better scientific understanding of the effects of forestry on the nation's forests and the global environment.

Recreation Management

Recreation use in the White Mountains predates the creation of the National Forest, and clearly played a role in its establishment. Since the early 1900s, use levels have steadily increased, and there have been many changes in the kinds of use over time. As we implement the revised Forest Plan, we will continue to work with Forest stakeholders to better understand the effects of recreation on the land and the experiences people expect when they visit the Forest. In some cases, providing desired experiences or reducing the environmental effects of recreation use may call for some levels of restrictions — on certain uses or in specific locations — to ensure that the Forest continues to be one of the unique places in the overall National Forest System.

The White Mountain National Forest has many developed recreation facilities, including campgrounds, cabins, interpretative sites, trails, and backcountry facilities. The Revised Plan calls for limited expansion of these in order to maintain the overall recreational experience. Commenters on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement generally supported this approach, but provided feedback on specific sites or locations. We expect that in some cases where demand outpaces the capability of existing facilities, the needed additional facilities will be provided on private or other public lands.

In many cases, commenters encouraged the Forest Service to maintain the existing situation on the Forest, especially within backcountry areas. Goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, and monitoring efforts within the revised Forest Plan are focused on providing for recreation use of the Forest while ensuring this use is sustainable over the long term. Included within this approach is additional direction for conservation education, concentration versus dispersal of use, maintenance of the existing recreation opportunity spectrum classes, and additional monitoring of overall effects from recreation use.

The revised Forest Plan has additional guidance on how we will better meet our management responsibilities within designated Wilderness. This includes specific Wilderness management direction (Appendix E of the Forest Plan) that outlines various zones within the existing designated White Mountain National Forest Wildernesses, and sets specific indicators and standards that will be measured to meet the overall goals of the Wilderness Act. Successful implementation of this approach will require knowledgeable Wilderness visitors and, in some cases, management actions to ensure an "enduring resource of wilderness" called for in the Wilderness Act.

I have decided to modify the approach outlined in the Proposed Plan for the management of existing travelways for mountain bike use. The Forest's designated trail system will be opened to mountain bikes unless closed for a specific resource, safety, or conflicting use concern. However, mountain bike use will not be allowed on the Appalachian Trail, cross-country, or within designated Wilderness. Use of old, non-system roads or travelways will be allowed unless specifically closed, pending a Forest-wide review of the overall mountain bike trail system. The Plan's goal is for the Forest to

have a mountain bike system that will provide opportunities for this use without causing undue impact on the environment or conflicts with other trail uses.

In the last two years, the Chief of the Forest Service has talked about the importance of managing all terrain vehicle (ATV) use on the National Forests. I have worked throughout the Eastern Region to ensure that we carefully manage ATV use consistent with national policy. Based on local conditions and their overall recreational niche, some National Forests within the Region provide ATV trail opportunities while other Forests do not.

In the case of the White Mountain National Forest, early in the public scoping process ATV riders asked that we consider developing some motorized summer trails, and the Forest Service considered providing these in Alternatives 1 and 4. I reviewed the possible effects of introducing this new use to some areas of the Forest, and have reviewed the comments that we received on this topic. This subject received more comments than any other portion of the Draft EIS, with the majority of the comments favoring the approach outlined in the proposed plan. The Selected Alternative does not provide for the creation of a summer motorized trail system, but continues to allow all terrain vehicles on designated snowmobile trails during the winter, and on open Forest roads where they meet state motor vehicle standards.

My rationale for selecting this alternative is the recognition that the White Mountain National Forest is a unique place within New England. I am not convinced at this time that summer ATV use should be added to all the other recreation uses occurring on this land. The Forest has historically featured a non-motorized trail system that attracts residents and visitors to the Forest for the unique experience it provides in a heavily populated area of the country. The existing levels of use on the Forest would make it difficult to add this new use without experiencing significant user conflicts. I believe summer motorized trail use is an appropriate use of National Forest land, and I have approved this use in other areas of the Eastern Region. But in this case, I believe this situation calls for the approach outlined in Alternative 2. I have asked the Forest Supervisor to monitor efforts to accommodate ATV use on nearby private and public land to ensure we have a good understanding of the benefits and effects of this use for future forest planning efforts.

In addition to the recreation management approaches described above, the revised Forest Plan provides direction and guidance on other activities, such as: rock and ice climbing, recreation special use permits, hobby mineral collecting, facility accessibility, ski area management, snowmobile use, trails, and other recreation activities on the White Mountain National Forest.

Other Management Actions Considered In My Decision

Alternative 2 in the Final EIS contains many other suggested management actions, in response to public input, that are not tied to the three issues discussed above. They include provisions for the management of wildland fire use, designation of communication sites, additional emphasis on

conservation education, provisions guiding consideration of wind power sites, and the recommendation for an additional Research Natural Area at Shingle Pond. These actions, along with additional information in the revised Forest Plan, will help the Forest Service meet its management responsibilities over the next fifteen years.

Changes between Draft and Final EIS and the Draft and Final Revised Plan

As stated earlier in this Record of Decision, we received well-prepared and constructive comments on the DEIS and Proposed Plan. We considered both public and internal comments in preparing the Final EIS and revised Plan.

Changes made for the final documents range from minor editing for improved clarity to changes in management direction, desired conditions, objectives, and standards and guidelines. Some changes resulted from data corrections, new survey information, and field verification. The summary below describes the most substantial changes made between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements and the proposed and revised Plan.

Changes to Mountain Biking Management Direction

We received comments about the proposed changes in mountain bike policy from various Forest stakeholders and members of the mountain bike community. Direction in the proposed Forest Plan had stated that Forest development trails would be open to mountain bike use unless signed closed, travel corridors would be closed to bike use unless signed open, and cross-country travel would be prohibited. While there was general public support for prohibiting cross-country travel, many commenters were concerned that there was not enough information at this point to restrict the use of travel corridors without further site-specific analysis.

I have decided to maintain the prohibition of cross country travel outlined in the proposed Forest Plan. In addition, Wilderness Areas, the Appalachian Trail, and any other specific Area Closure implemented through a Forest Supervisor Order will also remain closed to mountain bike use. However, all other Forest development trails and travel corridors will remain open to mountain bike use, unless signed closed. The intent is that, as the Forest Plan is implemented, eventually all trails and some additional travelways will be part of a designated non-motorized trail system on the Forest. The Forest Service will work with mountain bike organizations and other concerned stakeholders to determine, through site-specific analysis, which travel corridors will be managed and maintained as part of the designated Forest trail system.

Inventoried Roadless Process

Concerns were raised that the DEIS lacked an explanation of the roadless inventory process, that documentation of the process was insufficient, and that the inventory criteria had been inconsistently applied across the Forest. Based on these comments, additional information about the inventory process is included in the FEIS (Appendix C). Additional documentation that further outlines each step of the process is also included in the Administrative Record.

The Forest Service also invested additional resources to further review some of the specific areas of concern expressed in letters on approximately 34,000 acres of the Forest. A thorough review of decisions made on specific

boundary locations of various inventoried roadless areas was conducted, based on public comment. This review resulted in approximately 13,000 acres being added to four of the existing inventoried roadless areas, consistent with our original roadless area criteria. Forest employees also completed further field verification of improved roads near existing inventoried areas which could have a potential effect on the size of the overall inventory areas for the Forest. This review demonstrated that most roads were correctly mapped in the original inventory, but that a few roads no longer meet the improved road criteria. These have been dropped from our improved road GIS map layer. This field verification resulted in the addition of one inventoried roadless area, in the Sawyer River area, which is approximately 6,718 acres in size.

The changes between draft and final have resulted in a total of 403,144 acres of inventoried roadless areas in 27 different areas of the Forest. I have considered the additions to the original inventory, and have evaluated them relative to our overall management area allocation and proposals for Recommended Wilderness. I believe the Selected Alternative strikes a good balance in assigning these inventoried lands to various management allocations for the next fifteen years.

Wilderness Boundaries

The Selected Alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement recommends the same two areas for Wilderness consideration as the Draft EIS. Within the Sandwich Range Recommended Wilderness, however, we are making minor boundary changes in two areas to improve overall boundary management, avoid areas of active timber management, and incorporate some additional wilderness attributes. These two areas are along the southeastern and southwestern boundary of the Recommended Wilderness, in the Algonquin Trail and Ferncroft areas. This change will add an additional 900 acres to Management Area 9.1 (Recommended Wilderness). The additional acres were identified as part of the MA 2.1 (General Forest Management) area in the proposed Forest Plan. This minor change to the overall allocation has been considered in our analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, and will not affect the expected overall outputs from the General Forest Management area or overall environmental effects from Alternative 2. The Alternative 2 map in the FEIS and revised Forest Plan are updated with these boundary changes.

Changes to the Application of Prescribed Fire

Proposed standards in the proposed Forest Plan stated that prescribed fire was prohibited in MA 7.1 (Alpine Ski Areas) and MA 9.2 (Ski Area Expansion). Commenters suggested that prescribed fire should be used in these as an alternate slope management tool for vegetation control at alpine ski areas. An example would be to use fire on slopes that are too steep for wheeled or tracked equipment, and that do not pose an unacceptable risk to ski lifts or other improvements.

In reviewing these standards, I agree that the use of prescribed fire to manage vegetation in alpine ski areas is an appropriate management tool to be considered, and the revised Forest Plan reflects this decision.

Acid Deposition, Soil Productivity, and Water Quality Analysis

Some commenters raised concerns about the adequacy of our acid deposition, soil productivity, and land suitability analysis relative to timber harvest. The analysis area for soil productivity and management of outstanding resource waters was also questioned. In the FEIS, we have redefined our analysis area for soils and expanded our discussion and analysis of these soil and water concerns. Additional information provided by commenters was reviewed and discussed with subject matter experts to determine if any adjustments in the timber management approach were necessary. I have considered this additional information, along with the outlined standards and guidelines and monitoring approach, and do not see a need to change our initial determination of which lands are classified as suitable for timber production.

Additions to Species Viability Evaluation (SVE) List

Based on 2004 survey data and further peer review, six species (Brown's ameletid mayfly, third ameletid mayfly, *Arctostaphylos alpina*, *Carex exilis*, *Corallorhiza odontorhiza*, and *Epilobium anagallidifolium*) was added to the SVE list since the release of the DEIS. The potential for each alternative to impact these species is addressed in the Rare and Unique Features section and Appendix F of the FEIS.

Management Area 9.5 — Newly Acquired Lands

The DEIS stated that newly acquired lands would be placed in a holding status (MA 9.5) pending an analysis to determine the land's management area prescription. Internal review indicated that allocating a management area to new lands at the time of acquisition would be more expedient than placing them in a holding area. As stated in the revised Plan, a new land acquisition will be allocated to the same management area as the surrounding National Forest land if it has similar attributes. If the land attributes are unique, or are different from the surrounding land, the acquired tract will be evaluated by an interdisciplinary team to decide its management area prescription. This meets the intent of MA 9.5 to allocate management area designations to new land acquisitions.

Consistency with the Plans of Others

It is important that the management direction within the Revised Plan for the White Mountain National Forest be coordinated with the plans of other governments and agencies within the landscape. The following is not a complete list of local and regional plans considered in the forest planning process, but it does highlight some key plans that will be used during Forest Plan implementation.

New Hampshire Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan

Forest employees participated in broad policy discussions and detailed assessments of habitat conditions and potential threats to wildlife species during development of New Hampshire's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan (CWCP). The Forest Service worked with the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game to ensure that both the CWCP and revised White Mountain Forest Plan presented consistent information concerning habitats on the Forest and threats that may impact those habitats. Strategies identified in the revised Forest Plan to address threats and conserve habitats should be consistent with approaches proposed in the CWCP.

Northern Forest Lands Council

White Mountain National Forest employees have participated in the work sponsored by the State Foresters on the recent 10th Anniversary Forum of the Northern Forest Lands Council. This Report was recently endorsed by the governors of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. The four key recommendations of the forum report were considered in the revised Forest Plan in relation to the White Mountain National Forest's role in sustaining important social, economic, and environmental values from the Northern Forest Region.

Forest Resources Plan and Best Management Practices

The Forest Service worked with the State of New Hampshire in developing the current New Hampshire Forest Resources Plan, and serves on a Forest Advisory board that advises the State Forester in implementing that plan. The Revised Plan for the White Mountain National Forest complements the ecologic approach taken by the State of New Hampshire, and is consistent with the vision identified in the state plan. The standards and guidelines within the Forest Plan are also consistent with the Best Management Practices Guidelines for the states of Maine and New Hampshire.

Maine Comprehensive Land Use Plan

The Maine Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) serves as the planning and zoning authority for the state's plantations and unorganized areas. Portions of the White Mountain National Forest are located within three unorganized townships in Maine. The Commission's Comprehensive Land Use Plan includes policies that provide alternatives to traditional regulatory

approaches where the state has a permitting role on National Forest land. The revised Forest Plan will undergo a review by the Land Use Regulation Commission to ascertain if the Plan can meet regulatory permitting requirements during its implementation. This approach was used in Maine over the last fifteen years under the 1986 Forest Plan, and has protected important resource values while providing an efficient regulatory process between two levels of government.

Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) Comprehensive Plan for the Protection, Management, Development, and Use of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail

Throughout the revision process, Forest Service and Appalachian Trail Conservancy employees met to discuss necessary coordination issues and the standards and guidelines for the management of the Appalachian Trail. I find the revised White Mountain Forest Plan to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the Protection, Management, Development, and Use of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

Consistency with Other National Policies, Laws, and Authorities

The Forest Service manages the White Mountain National Forest in conformance with many laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies. The list provided here does not include all governing statutes that apply to the Forest Plan revision, but it highlights the primary ones guiding the preparation of this plan revision. In all cases, the Revised Plan is consistent with national law, policy, and direction.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The Forest has compiled and considered an enormous amount of information relevant to the effects of each alternative analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. I believe that the best available and relevant scientific information has been considered. The public has been involved throughout the plan revision process in a manner that is far beyond the minimum requirements of NEPA. I find that the environmental analysis and public involvement process comply with the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508). These requirements include 1) considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives; 2) disclosing cumulative effects; 3) using best scientific information; 4) consideration of long-term and short-term effects; and 5) disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects.

The decision here does not directly authorize any new activities or projects, but rather activities and projects will be subject to additional site-specific environmental analysis that will tier to the Final Environmental Impact Statement and follow applicable environmental analysis, public involvement, and administrative appeal procedures.

The Revised Plan has adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include providing ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity, and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The Revised Plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Regulations implementing NEPA also require the specification of "…the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable." (40 CFR 1505.2(b)) I have reviewed the National Environmental Policy Act to determine the criteria for identifying the environmentally preferable alternative. All six criteria in NEPA (section 101(b)) were considered.

Based on review of the NEPA criteria for identifying the environmentally preferable alternative, I believe the Selected Alternative, Alternative 2, is environmentally preferable. This alternative best addresses the protection

and stewardship aspects of the criteria, while at the same time addressing those criteria which speak toward providing a balance between population and resource uses and attaining the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation. This alternative places top priority on conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered species.

National Forest Management Act

When the White Mountain National Forest Plan revision effort began with the publication in the Federal Register of a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Plan, the Agency's 1982 planning regulations were in effect. On November 9, 2000, new planning rules were adopted. However, the 2000 planning rule allowed ongoing revisions to be completed under the 1982 rule if the revision had begun before the 2000 rule was issued. Subsequently, on January 5, 2005 a new planning rule was promulgated which replaced the 2000 rule. However, the transition provisions of the 2005 planning rule (36 CFR 219.14(e)) also allowed ongoing revisions to be completed under the rule that was in effect before November 9, 2000. Since the White Mountain National Forest had already released their Draft EIS and proposed Forest Plan before the new rule was released, I have decided they should proceed to completion of their Plan revision using the procedures of the 1982 planning rule.

The NFMA planning regulations specify a number of requirements that guide Forest Service planning. The Revised Plan complies with each of these management requirements, as explained in this Record of Decision, the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement and Appendices, and the planning Administrative Record.

The 1982 NFMA regulations require fish and wildlife habitat to be managed to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area (36 CFR 219.19). A key part of Forest Plan revision was the evaluation of 242 species for viability concern.

Using an ecological or "coarse filter" approach, broad land categories containing wildlife habitat were identified. The magnitude of change in the abundance and quality of wildlife habitats likely to occur under the revised Forest Plan in the next decade is relatively small. Some changes in the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat will occur through natural succession and disturbances. These changes are not anticipated to create any viability concerns. The Forest also used a species, or "fine filter," analysis to assure that standards and guidelines were in place to provide for the needs of species identified as threatened, endangered, or sensitive. Programmatic Forest Plan direction was developed for use in future project decision-making to conserve habitat and avoid adverse effects of future management actions. The analysis presented in the FEIS indicates that there is a high likelihood of continued representation of all species and important wildlife habitats on the Forest under all alternatives.

Management Indicator Species (MIS) were chosen that, we believe, will respond to forest management activities and assist in predicting the effects of implementing the Forest Plan over time. The choice of MIS was based

upon experience as we implemented the 1986 Forest Plan and the best available scientific information. Monitoring and management experience has shown that some species that were selected as MIS in the previous plan were not good indicators. This was because they were habitat generalists, so were not very responsive to changes in management; they occurred on only a small portion of the Forest so were of limited use in indicating overall effects; or they were difficult to find , so that regular monitoring was either impossible or unreliable.

MIS are just one part of the overall monitoring effort. Species that are not designated as MIS may still be monitored. Recognizing the discretion provided by the 1982 NFMA regulations (36 CFR 219.19(a)(1)), the Forest carefully selected MIS that will meet the intent of the NFMA regulation, but not impose an unattainable or unnecessarily burdensome monitoring requirement on the Forest.

NFMA requires that forest plans identify the proportion of harvest methods that are proposed or probable for implementation. The Forest analyzed possible harvest methods, and the revised Forest Plan includes a forecast of the methods that are likely to be chosen as the plan is implemented. The revised Forest Plan does not mandate any particular harvest method to be applied for any specific project. The choice of when, where, and how to harvest timber is appropriately reserved as a future, site-specific decision.

The 1982 Planning Rule requires identification of the alternative that maximizes the present net value (PNV) and how the Selected Alternative compares to this alternative. According to the economic analysis displayed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Alternative 2 maximizes PNV due to the mix of products and services provided and the treatments and management actions prescribed.

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act creates an affirmative obligation "…that all Federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened (and proposed) species" of fish, wildlife, and plants. This obligation is further clarified in the national Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) which states our shared mission to "…enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources."

The revised Forest Plan was developed with our responsibilities concerning conservation of listed species (section 7(a)(1) foremost in mind. Based upon consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, I have determined that the Revised Plan is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) and Forest Service Strategic Plan, 2004-2008

The procedures of the 1982 planning rule (36 CFR 219.12(f) (6)) require that at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Resources Planning Act Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest, as displayed in Regional Guides. There is no longer a

Regional Guide for the Eastern Region; this was withdrawn on November 27, 2001, as required by the 2000 planning rule (36 CFR 219.35(e)). The Forest Service Strategic Plan 2004-2008, in lieu of a Resource Planning Act Program, was completed in accordance with the Government Performance Results Act and the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. While Forest Plans should be consistent with the broad guidance provided in the Strategic Plan and should consider the information provided by the Resource Planning Act Assessment along with other available and relevant science, neither the Strategic Plan nor the Assessment contain recommended outputs to incorporate in specific Forest Plans. I find the Revised Plan to be in compliance with the Forest Service Strategic Plan, and to contribute toward its goals, which are:

Reduce the risk from catastrophic wildland fire

Fire, both prescribed and wildland, will be used as a tool to enhance ecosystem resiliency and to maintain desired fuel levels. Fire will play its natural role where appropriate and desirable, but will be actively suppressed where necessary to protect life, investments, and resources. Effects of wildland fire will be acceptable, and fire will operate within historical fire regimes appropriate to the vegetation type. Firefighter and public safety will be the first priority in every fire management activity.

Reduce the impacts from invasive species

The Forest will remain as free of non-native invasive species as reasonably possible. A weed-free user's ethic will be encouraged in all resource area programs with potential to spread invasive species. While some invasive species may occasionally be found on the Forest, occurrences will not be so widespread as to cause negative impacts to native communities. The Forest Plan contains specific standards and guidelines to minimize impacts from invasive species.

Provide outdoor recreation opportunities

Forest recreation management will provide a range of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities, protect low use developed and dispersed areas, emphasize concentrated dispersed use within high use corridors and destinations, and manage developed facilities to concentrate use within acceptable impacts and limits. The Forest Plan contains specific standards and guidelines to provide for recreation use while sustaining ecological processes and functions.

Help meet energy resource needs

The Revised Plan provides direction that allows for energy development within the capabilities and sensitivities of specific landscapes across the Forest. The Forest will protect, improve, or mitigate energy development impacts on watersheds, riparian and aquatic habitats, visual integrity, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitats.

Improve watershed condition

Forest watersheds, streams, water dependent resources, and designated uses will be protected and restored by implementing practices designed to maintain or improve conditions. Streams will be managed at proper functioning condition to dissipate stream energy associated with high water flows, thereby decreasing erosion, reducing flood damage, and improving water quality. Watersheds will continue to provide high quality water for public water supplies, recreational activities, aquatic biota such as fish, and other purposes.

Mission related work that supports Forest Service Goals

The revised Forest Plan was developed consistent with the overall laws and policies that guide the management of National Forests. It provides for human uses of the environment as well as sustaining ecological processes for future generations. It also includes standards and guidelines to protect, improve, or mitigate impacts to watersheds, riparian and aquatic habitats, visual integrity, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitats. Monitoring and evaluation are incorporated to ensure an adaptive management approach that is consistent with land capability, scientific understanding, and expected outputs.

Healthy Forest Restoration Act

In 2003, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act was signed into law. While the White Mountain National Forest is not dominated by fire-dependent ecosystems, I find the revised Plan is consistent with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act in that it provides for the protection of old growth when conducting covered projects, provides for public involvement in assessing and conducting hazardous fuels reduction projects, and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuels reduction based on condition class and fire regime. The Forest Plan also allows for appropriate responses to insect and disease concerns based on its overall land allocation process. The Revised Plan also emphasizes protection and enhancement of riparian areas and watershed health as directed under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

Executive Order 12898 (59 Federal Register 7629, 1994) directs federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations. I have determined, from the analysis disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, that the Revised Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific ground-disturbing activity. Projects undertaken in response to direction of the Revised Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The Revised Plan contains

direction for cultural resource management, including direction to integrate cultural resource management with other resource management activities.

Several other laws apply to the preservation of cultural resources on federal land. Since the Revised Plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the New Hampshire and Maine State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) under the NHPA is not required. Tribal consultation has taken place during the development of this Revised Plan.

It is my determination that the Revised Plan complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Government, 1994

These policies support the Forest Service actions in establishing mutual and beneficial partnerships with American Indians and Alaska Natives and honoring treaty obligations. The Revised Plan is consistent with Forest Service policy in Forest Service Manual section 1563.

Data Quality Act

The Data Quality Act and its federal guidelines concern the quality of information used in the work of federal agencies. The revised Forest Plan and its accompanying EIS were developed by an interdisciplinary team of agency scientists and resource specialists using the best available scientific information. Data quality was a paramount concern, as the objectivity and quality of scientific data is key to development of a realistic resource plan. The interdisciplinary team was aware of USDA information guidelines and devoted considerable effort towards ensuring that the information used in Plan development was credible and appropriate for the context. Scientific information was solicited from other federal agencies, state resource agencies, and other recognized experts and scientists. Although the USDA Data Quality Act guidelines are not intended to be legally binding regulations, they wee carefully considered during development of the revised Forest Plan and EIS.

Other Laws, Policy and Regulations

I also find that the Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Revised Plan are consistent with the following body of policy and regulation: the National Energy Policy Act (Executive Order 13212 of May 18, 2001), The National Energy Policy Act of 2005, the Transportation Rule and Policy, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Energy Requirement and Conservation Potential, Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species, Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum #1827 on Prime Farmland, Rangeland and Forestland, Executive Order 1099 on the Protection of Wetlands and Floodplains, and the existing body of national direction for managing National Forests.

Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation

Implementation Begins in 30 Days

The Revised Plan becomes effective 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement is published in the Federal Register (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1)). Implementation of the Revised Plan will be accomplished and tracked through the management direction detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Revised Plan. The desired conditions and objectives in Chapters 2 and 3 will be used to help design the Forest's annual program of work and budget requests.

Transition from 1986 Plan to Revised Plan

Revised Plan direction will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the effective date of this Record of Decision. Because this was a revision of the 1986 White Mountain Forest Plan, many aspects and much management direction from the 1986 Plan are carried forward relatively unchanged into the Revised Plan. Therefore, many existing projects and ongoing actions that were consistent with the 1986 Plan will continue to be so with the Revised Plan.

Many management actions decided prior to issuance of the Record of Decision are routine and ongoing. Those decisions are generally allowed to continue unchanged because the projected effects of the actions are part of the baseline analysis considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Biological Assessments for the revision.

The National Forest Management Act requires that "permits, contracts and other instruments for use and occupancy" of National Forest System lands be "consistent" with the Forest Plan (16 U.S.C. 1640(i)). In the context of a Revised Plan, the National Forest Management Act specifically conditions this requirement in three ways:

- These documents must be revised only "when necessary";
- These documents must be revised as "soon as practicable";
- Any revisions are "subject to valid existing rights."

I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the Revised Plan. These contracts will be executed according to their terms, and these effects and conditions were considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Existing timber contracts, in most cases, will be completed within three years. The decision is left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other use and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts, and will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan. Recent project decisions that have not yet been

implemented will be reviewed and adjusted by the decision maker, if necessary, to meet the direction found in the Revised Plan.

The decision maker has the discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to modify preexisting authorizations to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan standards and guidelines. I find that the statutory criteria of "as soon as practicable" and excepting "valid existing rights" useful in exercising that discretion.

Key Considerations in Plan Implementation

The Revised Plan provides broad, strategic, landscape-level direction for managing the White Mountain National Forest. Working toward the desired conditions and achieving the objectives in the Revised Plan will be accomplished through site-specific project decisions, using the appropriate analyses and processes to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws and regulations. The Revised Plan itself makes no project-level decisions

The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Plan considered and evaluated the total management program that likely would be necessary to implement the objectives of the Revised Plan. It also dealt with those issues and concerns relevant at a larger landscape or Forest-wide level. Therefore, in essence, the Final Environmental Impact Statement is a large cumulative effects document because it analyzes the total of activities that may be expected in the first decade (and longer term), and discloses the Forest-wide effects of those activities considered in total.

By tiering to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for this Plan revision, we will make use of this Forest-wide analysis to streamline our environmental analyses for project-level decisions. We will not revisit landscape or Forest-wide scale issues and effects, because those effects have already been considered and disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. This has applicability to a wide range of findings that are appropriately done at the Forest-wide level. Analysis and findings related to species viability and threatened species should be greatly simplified when projects are within the parameters of the Revised Plan and Final EIS. Project-level analysis will not revisit Plan decisions, but rather will determine which management techniques (if any) and mitigations (beyond those in the Revised Plan) are best suited to the site being analyzed.

Future Changes to the Plan

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is designed to answer questions regarding implementation of the revised Forest Plan. Monitoring and evaluation will focus on decisions made in this Record of Decision.

Evaluation reports will display how Forest Plan decisions have been implemented, how effective the implementation has proved to be in accomplishing desired outcomes, and what we learned along the way. This

will allow a check and review of the validity of the assumptions upon which this decision is based.

The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 ties well with the strategic nature of Forest Plans, with increasing specificity as the Plan is stepped down to specific projects. More specific monitoring methods, protocols, and analytical procedures will be included in a monitoring and evaluation implementation guide, as needed.

Amending the Forest Plan

The revision of this Forest Plan is shaped by a central idea: how we manage the Forest should adapt to changes in how we understand the ecological, social, and economic environments. In the Forest Service, we call this adaptive management. The Revised Plan is well structured for adaptive management to occur, because it does a good job of describing the desired conditions toward which we will strive as we implement the Plan. In fact, those desired conditions are the very basis for the projects we will accomplish during the life of the Plan.

In making the decision on the Revised Plan, I am also deciding that this Plan will be adaptive and subject to change as we monitor, learn, and gain new information. I hope that you choose to be partners with us in our monitoring, learning, and adapting. The revision of the White Mountain National Forest Plan has taken many years, and has incorporated much that has been learned since the 1986 Plan and even as the Revised Plan was being developed. However, as I have said before, this Plan can still be improved as we learn more about complex ecosystem functions and processes. Neither is it cast in stone to be unquestioningly adhered to for the next 10-15 years. We will track progress toward reaching the desired conditions identified in the Plan, and modify or reformulate management actions in response to that progress. If a particular management strategy, technique, or practice is applied, its results will be monitored to see if the desired effect is occurring, and if not, a modified or new strategy will be developed and implemented. That new strategy will also be subject to monitoring, evaluation, and, if needed, change.

Changes to the Plan will generally take the form of plan amendments or corrections, and will follow the appropriate procedures as specified in National Forest Management Act and its regulations.

Administrative Appeal of My Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service within 90 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Appeals must be sent to:

Regular Mail
USDA Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Mailstop Code 1104
Washington DC, 20250-1104

Express Mail
USDA Forest Service
Ecosystem Management Coordination
201 14th Street, SW, 3rd Floor, Central Wing
Washington DC 20024
Phone: (202) 205-0895

A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:

Regional Forester of the Eastern Region
USDA Forest Service
Eastern Region
626 East Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

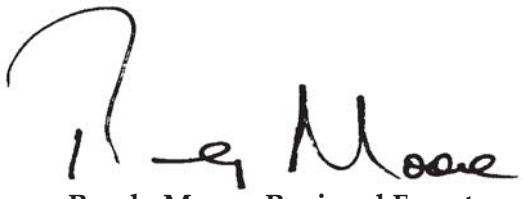
- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject.
- Date of the decision, and name and title of the deciding officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.
- The reason for the appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Contacts

More information on this decision, the revised White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and the White Mountain National Forest Final Environmental Impact Statement can be obtained by contacting:

Thomas G. Wagner or Forest Supervisor (603) 528-8774	Barbara Levesque or Forest Planner (603) 528-8743 719 Main Street Laconia, NH 03264	Alexis Jackson Public Affairs Officer (603) 528-8724

Electronic copies of the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the Executive Summary, the Revised Plan, and the Record of Decision can be obtained at: www.fs.fed.us/r9/white



Randy Moore, Regional Forester **9/13/05**

Date