

DECISION MEMO

Snowmobile Trail Relocation North-South Trail (NH Corridor 19)

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region, White Mountain National Forest
Saco Ranger District
Town of Chatham, Carroll County, New Hampshire

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1.0 Decision

1.1 Background

The North-South Snowmobile Trail is a portion of New Hampshire Corridor 19, the primary snowmobile trail on the eastern side of the State of New Hampshire. The portion of trail to be relocated currently lies on Butter Hill Road in Chatham, NH. This road also serves a private residence. When the road is plowed to access the private residence, safety concerns exist with snowmobiles and vehicles utilizing the same narrow corridor.

The location for the proposed trail utilizes old haul roads and skid trails that connect openings that once served log landings (see Figure 1). Due to the presence of these existing travel ways and openings, minimal tree removal will be needed to construct the trail. Drainage improvements, including water bars and culverts, will be required.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The proposed action and decision are in response to a request made by the State of New Hampshire Bureau of Trails on behalf of a private landowner to address ongoing concerns with this portion of trail. Additionally, my decision is also based upon comments received from the public during scoping (see Section 3.0 below).

1.3 Description of Decision

It is my decision to relocate ½ mile of snowmobile trail from Butter Hill Road onto National Forest land. The southern ½ mile of the trail relocation proposed in the scoping letter will not be considered as part of this decision due to public comments received during the open comment period. This decision will relocate all but a 500 foot section of the North-South Trail off of Butter Hill Road.

1.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated

The original action proposed a 1 mile relocation that would have kept the North-South Trail on the west side of Butter Hill Road. However, public comments received indicated that this proposal was not the best option due to it's proximity to existing homes. Therefore, this decision refines the project to include only ½ mile of relocation that will not alter the trail's corridor on private land.

Alternative locations were also considered but eliminated because terrain would be difficult for trail construction and necessitate significantly more vegetation removal. Alternative locations would also require considerably more soil disturbance than the selected alternative.

2.0 Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the US Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances present.

2.1 Category of Exclusion

The proposed action falls within the categories of actions described in the FSH 1909.15, Amendment 1909.15-2004-3, Section 31.2.

Category 1 of Section 31.2 states: "Construction or reconstruction of trails."

2.2 Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

Permitting of these improvements involves minimal earth disturbance.

Steep slopes or highly erosive soils. Neither steep slopes nor highly erosive soils are present within the project area.

Threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat. .

The project area contains suitable habitat for two federally listed species, Indiana Bat and Canada lynx. The project is not expected to impact Indiana Bat due to the scope and type of project. Additionally, the project is consistent with the Standards and Guidelines outlined in the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy because of the

proximity of the trail relocation to the current location. The area has been determined by the District Biologist to be non-lynx habitat.

A rare plant survey was conducted in this area as well in during the fall of 2004. Rare plants were not found in the project area displayed in Figure 1.

Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

There will not be a significant impact upon flood plains, wetlands or similar areas. Current erosion problems on the existing travel way will be repaired during trail relocation.

Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas.

There are no congressionally designated areas within the project area (White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 1986). Additionally, the project is not located within any of the areas being considered for Recommended Wilderness in the ongoing Forest Plan Revision.

Inventoried roadless areas.

There are no inventoried roadless areas within the project area (White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 1986). Also, there are not any new roadless areas identified in 2003 during the ongoing White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Revision within the project area.

Research Natural Areas.

There are no research natural areas within the project area (White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 1986).

Native American religious or cultural site, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

A cultural resource survey was conducted in the fall of 2004. While there are cultural sites nearby the project area, these sites will not be affected by this project as the area has been previously disturbed by timber harvesting activity. Any additional sites located during trail construction will be protected and avoided.

Summary

No other extraordinary circumstances related to this project were identified. Based on past experience with similar activities of this type on the Saco Ranger District, I have determined that the environmental effects associated with the proposed action are not likely to exceed those associated with Category 1 actions.

3.0 Scoping

Scoping included written notification and a public comment period. Nearby private landowners, the Bureau of Trails, special use permittees, and the Town of Chatham were notified. Additionally, scoping entailed numerous site visits by District staff that

included cultural resource and rare plant surveys. Multiple site reviews have been conducted with State of New Hampshire Bureau of Trails personnel as well.

Seven comments were received during the public comment period. Table 1 provides a summary of the comments received.

Table 1. Summary of Comments Received
Support the relocation as originally proposed.
Do not support the relocation as proposed due to the proximity of the location to homes.
Do not support the relocation as proposed due to the tree removal that will be required on private land to complete the relocation.
Concern about existing drainage problems from the skid road onto private land.
Concern that the State of New Hampshire Bureau of Trails has not obtained permission for the portions of the relocation that would be on private land.

As a result of these comments, this decision is solely allowing for the northern ½ mile of the relocation which does not alter the current location of the North-South Trail on private land.

4.0 Findings Required by and/or Related to Other Laws and Regulations

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. See Section 2.2 above.

5.0 Administrative Review or Appeal

This decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8.

6.0 Implementation Date

This decision may be implemented immediately.

7.0 Contact Person

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Holly Jewkes at the Saco Ranger District:

33 Kancamagus Highway

Conway, NH 03818

Voice: 603 447-5448 Ext. 127

TTY/TDD: 603 447-3121

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8.0 Signature and Date

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is within one of the categories identified by the US Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in FSH 1909.15 sections 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the planning record.

TERRY MILLER
District Ranger

Date