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Connor Brook Vegetation Management Project

Scoping Report

**Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest
Coos County, NH**

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Connor Brook Vegetation Management Project

What is the Forest Service Proposing?

The Androscoggin Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest is proposing the following activities within the Connor Brook Project Area:

- Vegetation Management by Commercial Timber Harvest
- Wildlife Habitat Improvement
- Restoration of existing Forest Service Roads
- Reclassify road segments

Location and Features of the Connor Brook Analysis Area

The Connor Brook **Analysis Area** is situated in the Connor and East Brook watersheds in the town of Shelburne, Coos County, New Hampshire (Map 1). It is part of the 4,952 acres of Habitat Management Unit (HMU) 215. Sixty nine percent of the Analysis Area (3,428 acres) is assigned to Management Area (MA) 3.1, which permits vegetative management to achieve the goals and objectives of the White Mountain Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, 1986). The remaining 1,524 acres (31%) are in MAs 6.1 and 6.2, which do not allow vegetative management.

Habitat Management Units are units of land comprised of various size compartments containing a mix of habitat types. HMU 215 is defined by the national forest boundary to the north, the ridgeline formed by Mt. Winthrop, Shelburne Moriah Mtn., and Howe Peak to the west and south, and the receding high elevations to the east. Within this HMU there are three hiking trails, the Shelburne, Kenduskeag and Hastings trails, and one snowmobile trail, Corridor 19. Portions of both the Shelburne Trail and Corridor 19 utilize the Connor Brook Road.

The proposed timber harvest is mostly a northern hardwood forest type intermixed with hemlock and spruce/fir forest. It is located on moderately sloping terrain, ranging in elevations from 1,000 to 1,700 feet.

Background

Why is the Forest Service considering activities in the Connor Brook Analysis Area at this time?

The Forest Plan identifies and seeks to create a desired mix of wildlife habitats ranging from early successional to over-mature stands (Forest Plan, III-13). A review of existing forest habitats within HMU 215 found that the Analysis Area is trending toward a mature northern hardwood forest type with little early-successional habitat. Early-successional habitat is the

seedling, grassy, and shrubby habitat that generally exists during the first decade after clearing a forested area. Timber harvesting can help us provide a diverse range of habitats and move certain forest community types (i.e., paper birch, northern hardwoods, and spruce/fir) closer toward their desired future acreage levels.

At the same time, the Forest Plan permits harvesting on a sustained yield basis to provide high quality saw timber and pulpwood to area mills. Many of the stands in the proposed harvest were partially harvested over fifteen years ago and are ready for silvicultural treatment. The trees removed would not only provide commercial value, but also open up small and large openings within the stand to allow regeneration of trees and vegetation, provide additional growing space for young trees, and permit shade-intolerant species to become established in the understory.

In conjunction with analyzing opportunities to accomplish our vegetation and wildlife habitat objectives, it is also an opportune time to analyze the existing Forest transportation system and identify opportunities and priorities for managing the network of roads within this area. We are conducting a Roads Analysis for all roads within the analysis area. Our goal is to maintain a road system that is safe, affordable, and responsive to public needs, meets forest and wildlife management goals, and has minimal adverse ecological effects.

Proposed changes in our roads system resulting from the preliminary phase of the Roads Analysis are included in this Connor Brook environmental analysis and described in “Proposed Action” below.

Purpose and Need

Why does the Forest Service need to implement the Connor Brook Vegetation Management Project at this time?

The purpose of this project is to accomplish resource objectives to meet the overall management direction of the White Mountain National Forest as established in the Forest Plan (Forest Plan III 36-41). Within the Connor Brook Project Area, the Forest Plan establishes the following applicable goals for MA 3.1:

- Provide large volumes of high quality sawtimber and other forest products on a sustained yield basis through intensive timber management practices, and
- Increase wildlife habitat for the full range of wildlife species with emphasis on early-successional species,

When comparing the existing condition (EC) of HMU 215 to the desired future conditions (DFC) as outlined in the Forest Plan, there is a need to increase habitat diversity, especially within the regeneration-aged class, and to increase spruce/fir/hemlock, oak/pine, paper birch and aspen community types. An increase in the number of Permanent Wildlife Opening (PWO) acres is also needed. Based on field visits and data analysis, Table 1 shows opportunities where the DFC might be achieved through vegetative management at this time. The project record contains the full comparison of EC to DFC.

Table 1. Acres by Community Type in MA 3.1 for HMU 215

Community Type	Existing Condition	Desired Future Condition	Need
Hardwoods/mixedwoods (regeneration)	0	111	111
Spruce/Fir/Hemlock	493	686	193
Paper Birch (regeneration)	0	33	33
Oak/Pine	29	44	15

Even aged harvest methods such as clearcuts, seed tree cuts, or shelterwood cuts remove most of the existing woody vegetation from a stand, and thus promote a component of regeneration and young growth within a larger landscape of mostly mature, closed canopy forest. “Even-aged harvest” is used with species and community types that regenerate best in larger openings with little shade, such as paper birch, aspen, and red oak.

Species that regenerate best in shaded conditions are suited for “uneven-aged” harvest methods that remove individual trees or small groups of trees to open pockets of sunlight. Species and community types that regenerate best with uneven-aged harvest include spruce/fir, hemlock, and some hardwoods (sugar maple, yellow birch and beech).

Table 1 reflects a need to establish regenerating stands of paper birch and northern hardwoods, increase the amount of light and growing space for spruce-fir and hemlock in the understory, and at least perpetuate and ideally increase the amount of red oak or white pine. Commercial timber harvest can be used to achieve these objectives.

Economically, harvesting selected mature and overmature trees on a 15 to 20 year cycle would provide a sustainable yield of high quality sawtimber to area mills. At the same time, lower quality or damaged trees can be harvested to provide fiber and improve future quality and productivity.

Proposed Action

What activities is the Forest Service proposing to meet the needs identified above?

The following activities in Table 2 are proposed to achieve the Purpose and Need and move the Connor Brook Analysis Area toward the Forest Plan’s desired condition. Acres proposed are approximate.

Table 2. Proposed Activities for the Connor Brook Project

Proposed Activity	Amount
Timber Harvest	Acres
Clearcut & Patchcut	56
Seed Tree Cut	14
Shelterwood Cut	29
Group Selection Cut	156
Individual Tree and Group Selection Cut	266
Transportation	Miles
Road Reconstruction Forest Road 95	2.1

The Proposed Action is to harvest timber on about 521 acres, which represents 10 percent of the analysis area and 15 percent cent of Management Area 3.1 within the analysis area. Table 3 lists the areas, types of harvest, approximate acres, estimated volume, season of operation and objectives. Map 2 shows the locations of the proposed harvests.

Access to the harvest area would be gained through the reconstruction of 2.1 miles of FR 95 and the use of 4 existing log landings. Rehabilitation of the gravel road surface, roadside and landing mowing, culvert installation or replacement, and temporary bridge installations are necessary activities to safely use the road.

Table 3. Proposed Stands and Treatment

Table 3. Comp (Compartment), Std (Stand), Rx (Stand Prescription), Acres, Vol (Volume), SO (Season of Operation), and Treatment Objective by Stand. Stand prescription codings are: 111 (Patch Clearcut), 113 (Stand Clearcut), 121 (Shelterwood Prep), 132 (Seed Tree Cut), 152 (Group Selection), 153 (Individual Tree and Group Selection). Since Group Selection harvests only a percentage of the stand, the actual harvest acres are listed in parentheses. Volume is by MBF (Thousand Board Feet, where one board foot is equivalent to a plank 1 inch thick and 1 foot square). The Season of Operation (SO): W (Winter), S (Summer).

Comp	Std	Rx	Acres	Vol	SO	Treatment Objective
43	14a	153	11	35	S	Improve stand quality
43	14b	111	6	70	S	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
43	14c	111	4	50	W	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
43	17a	132	6	60	S	Wildlife habitat (paper birch regeneration)
43	17b	153	10	30	S	Improve stand quality
43	22 a&c	152	6 (1)	15	S	Improve stand quality
43	22b	111	7	75	S	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
43	26a	152	37 (6)	85	S	Wildlife habitat (softwood regeneration)
43	26d	153	5	15	S	Improve stand quality
43	31	111	8	95	W	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
44	4	152	36 (5)	80	S	Wildlife habitat (softwood regeneration)
44	6a	132	8	80	S	Wildlife habitat (paper birch regeneration)
44	6b	153	22	70	S	Improve stand quality
44	6c	111	4	50	W	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
44	6d	153	54	170	S	Improve stand quality

Comp	Std	Rx	Acres	Vol	SO	Treatment Objective
44	7	152	31 (5)	70	S	Wildlife habitat (softwood regeneration)
44	9	121	29	100	S	Wildlife habitat (oak perpetuation)
44	10a	153	23	75	S	Wildlife habitat (softwood regeneration)
44	11	153	62	180	S	Improve stand quality & Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood group regeneration)
44	12a	153	11	25	S	Wildlife habitat (softwood regeneration)
44	13a	113	11	130	W	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
44	17	152	6 (1)	15	W	Wildlife habitat (softwood regeneration)
44	25	152	40 (6)	90	S	Wildlife habitat (softwood regeneration)
44	26a	111	8	60	S	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
44	26b	153	42	125	S	Improve stand quality
45	4	153	14	40	W	Improve stand quality
45	9a	153	12	30	W	Wildlife habitat (softwood regeneration)
45	9b	111	8	100	W	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
Total			521	2,020		

Roads Analysis Proposals

Table 4 displays a total of five currently *unclassified* roads that would be converted to *classified* roads and several unnumbered roads (2 miles) that would be *decommissioned*.

- **Decommissioned Roads** are closed permanently and returned to a natural state.
- **Classified Roads** are maintained for long-term vehicle access, and may be opened year-round or intermittently.
- **Unclassified Roads** are generally closed and not maintained for long-term vehicle use. Our goal is to eliminate *unclassified* roads by deciding whether they should be *classified* or *decommissioned*.

Table 4. Forest Roads within Analysis Area and Proposed Action

Forest Road Name and Number	Current Classification	Miles	Proposed Action	Rationale
2027	Unclassified	0.25	Classify 0.25 miles	Access to south of Connor Brook in Compartment 45.
2258	Unclassified	0.4	Remap & Classify	Incorrectly mapped and only 0.1 miles from Clement Brook. Access to Compartment 43.
2260	Unclassified	0.9	Remap & Classify 0.3 miles	Incorrectly mapped to NF boundary. Acquired but road had not been added to road system.
2293.1	Unclassified	0.5	Remap & Classify 0.4 miles	Incorrectly mapped and end of old NF boundary. Acquired but road had not been added to road system.
2293.2	Unclassified	0.9	Classify 0.9 miles	Access to part of Compartment 43.
Unnumbered	Unclassified	2.0	Decommission	Not needed for long term use
FR 95	Classified and gated closed	1.8	Allow limited public vehicle access	NH Fish & Game has proposed opening road during portions of hunting season ¹

1. Public vehicles would be allowed on the normally gated part of Connor Brook Road for about 1.8 miles during the annual moose hunting season in October. Use will be monitored and if there are no problems (road damage, illegal ATV use, or hiker impacts) the open gate season may be expanded to include more of the fall hunting season.

Mitigation Measures

In addition to the Forest Plan Standard and Guidelines (Forest Plan Section III and VII-B) and the State of New Hampshire *Best Management Practices*, the following site specific mitigation measures would be used in implementing the proposed action or alternatives:

- Retain disease resistant beech trees as well as trees with an abundance of bear claw marks;
- Follow vernal pool protection guidelines (Carlson and Sweeny, 1992);
- Reserve 2-3 early-successional species (paper birch and aspen) and softwoods per acre in mature hardwood stands;
- Remove slash within 50 feet of the Connor Brook Road, snowmobile trail and the Shelburne hiking trail to minimize visual impacts and;
- Restore stream crossings to their original morphology and function.

What Decision Will Be Made?

An environmental assessment (EA) will evaluate site-specific issues, consider alternatives and analyze effects of the proposed action and alternatives on resources. Based on this analysis, the deciding official would make the following decisions:

1. Which alternative would best move the Connor Brook Project toward the DFC outlined in the Forest Plan, and best address the purpose and need identified for this project?
2. Which alternative best addresses relevant issues raised by the public and the interdisciplinary team?
3. What will the effects be of reclassifying roads in the project area?
4. Would the proposed project have any significant environmental impact to warrant further analysis in an environmental impact statement?
5. Does the project require a Forest Plan amendment?

How Are You Involved In The Decision?

We are soliciting your comments to help define significant issues associated with the project, to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action, and to refine the analysis of effects. The results of our analysis for the Connor Brook Vegetation Management Project will be documented in an environmental assessment and a decision is expected in the fall of 2004.

The regulations for notice, comment and appeal have been revised. Before a decision is made on this project, you will be given another opportunity to comment (30-Day Comment Period). If you provide substantive comments relevant to the project during the 30-Day Comment Period, you will be eligible to file an administrative appeal on the project's Decision Notice. You are not eligible to appeal the decision if you respond only to this scoping letter. If you wish to receive further information on this analysis, please fill out and return the enclosed form

How Can You Comment?

In order for your comments to be considered in the next stage of analysis, they should be received by July 23, 2004 and submitted in one of the following ways:

Written comments

By letter – Androscoggin Ranger District, White Mountain National Forest,
300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581, c/o Katherine W. Stuart, District
Ranger

By FAX – (603) 466-2856, ATTN: Connor Brook, c/o Katherine W. Stuart

By e-mail – kstuart@fs.fed.us

Oral Comments

Oral comments must be received in person at the Androscoggin Ranger Station or via telephone (603) 466-2713 (TTY 603-466-2856), during normal business hours (8:00am – 4:30pm).

In your comments, please include the following information:

- Your name, address and telephone number.
- The project you are commenting on: Connor Brook Vegetation Management Project.
- Site specific comments about the Connor Brook Vegetation Project, along with supporting information you believe will help me identify issues, develop alternatives, or predict environmental effects of our proposal.

Please direct questions to Pat Nasta, Public Affairs Officer, at the above address or call 603-466-2713 extension 222. Please be aware that your name, address and comments will become part of the public record and may be available for public inspection. If this is a concern, please contact us at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the White Mountain National Forest.

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