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Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

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Androscoggin and  
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Ranger Districts

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Dear Interested Citizen,

The Androscoggin Ranger District is initiating an environmental analysis for proposed trail reconstruction on a segment of the Huntington Ravine Winter Access Trail (HRWAT), located in Sargents Purchase on the eastern flank of Mount Washington, as shown on Map 1. We are seeking your comments on the proposal described below, and also invite you to join us on a field trip to the site on May 3, 2003.

## Background

The Huntington Ravine Winter Access Trail is 1.3 miles long, connecting the Tuckerman Ravine Trail with the base of Huntington Ravine. Although hikers often use the trail as an alternative to the Huntington Ravine hiking trail, the primary purpose of the Winter Access Trail is to provide safe motorized access for Forest Service snow rangers as they conduct public safety duties in Huntington Ravine from December through April each year. The Winter Access Trail also is the primary route for hikers and climbers heading to Huntington Ravine in the winter. Motorized access to the ravine is permitted for US Forest Service winter administrative use only. No public motorized use is permitted.

The HRWAT was built in 1966 and has undergone regular maintenance and reconstruction since then, including brushing, bridge repair, grading, and rock removal.

The trail reconstruction work described below was proposed and analyzed in the 1990s as part of a broader proposal that included a variety of work in the vicinity. Letters seeking comments on the work were mailed to hundreds of interested citizens and organizations in April 1993 and May 1995. The project was partially completed (four unsafe bridges on the trail were replaced) but the remaining work was deferred. Litigation challenging the project planning process was filed, but ultimately deemed not ready for a decision by the court.

An outreach letter was mailed in July 1998 requesting comments and inviting any interested parties to a field trip to view the site. We received two replies: one person favored the project and one opposed it.

The project proposal today focuses only on the following trail reconstruction needs:

- Reduction of boulders within the existing trail corridor (approximately 20 rocks), and
- Replacing the remaining unsafe trail bridge, and realigning the trail approach to the bridge.



## **Purpose and Need for the Project**

US Forest Service Snow Rangers require motorized winter access to Huntington Ravine to expedite their public safety duties, which include:

- Avalanche forecasting,
- Providing daily visitor information regarding conditions and hazards in the ravines, and
- Leading search and rescue missions.

Assessing conditions and developing the daily avalanche forecast must be done and made available to the public early in the morning so that winter enthusiasts can use the information to make informed choices about entering the ravines each day. In times of low snow cover such as early and late winter, forecasting and distribution is delayed because motorized travel to Huntington Ravine is impeded by large boulders in the trail corridor that the snowcat cannot maneuver around or over. Snowcat travel requires that rocks protrude no more than 13 inches from the snow surface after 24 inches of snow is accumulated.

In addition, rather than cross the unsafe bridge, snow rangers must wait until later in the season for enough snow to accumulate to allow them to build a snow bridge.

The purpose of the proposed rock reduction and bridge replacement is to improve safety and extend the motorized travel season to include times of lower snow cover. Minimizing travel time to and from the ravines is needed to quickly gather and distribute safety information and to transport rescuers and victims when search and rescue needs arise.

The need is to reduce the size of about 20 particular boulders that form obstacles to snowcat travel in times of low snow cover, and to replace the remaining unsafe bridge.

## **Forest Plan Direction**

The Huntington Ravine Winter Access Trail is located in the Pinkham Notch Scenic Area, Management Area 8.1, as designated in the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan pp III 60-61, 64-65). Track-type snow vehicles are permitted in this area for administrative use only. Management guidelines for recreation in this area include providing facilities to prevent site deterioration and protect the user from health and safety hazards (III-65) and maintaining trails to the proper standards (III-5). Minimum trail specifications for the snowcat include a 12-foot width and 13 inches of clearance above 2 feet of snow.

## **Proposed Action -- See Map 2**

**Rock Reduction:** The proposal is to reconstruct .32 miles of the Huntington Ravine Winter Access Trail. Reconstruction work would occur within the existing trail bed. Trail work would stop below the floor of Huntington Ravine, and below tree line. The size of particular rocks would be reduced using methods and timing that are the least intrusive to visitors, wildlife, and the scenic values of the trail. The methods will likely include drilling and cracking the rocks to the desired level. The rock reduction would be done with hand crews using rock drills and then

splitting off the rock with feathers and wedges or inserting expanding materials into the holes to crack the rock. This broken rock may be used to fill in holes and help level the trail. An excavator would be used to move the broken rock pieces into place. The trail would be leveled only where necessary with the minimum of ground disturbance. A safety plan would be implemented to ensure safety for hikers and trail workers.

**Bridge Replacement and Trail Realignment:** The new bridge would be located at a more approachable angle at a site next to the existing bridge. The bridge would be constructed of wood and steel and be approximately 12 feet wide and 40 feet long. Approximately 50 feet of the trail would be relocated to the new bridge approach and would require some clearing of vegetation and grading. An excavator would be used in this phase of trail reconstruction also.

## **Environmental Analysis**

We will examine any of the following resource conditions present in the project area to determine if extraordinary circumstances exist that warrant further analysis:

- Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species;
- Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds;
- Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas;
- Inventoried roadless areas;
- Research Natural Areas;
- American Indian religious or cultural sites;
- Archeological sites or historic properties or areas.

Our analysis will examine any potential effects on these resources. I will use your comments and reports from natural resource professionals to determine if there is a potential for significant environmental effects resulting from this trail work.

When this phase of the environmental analysis is complete, I will decide whether to continue with further analysis or proceed with implementing the proposed action. Pursuant to 36 CFR 215, my decision to implement the project would not be appealable so it is important that I hear from you soon.

## **Field Trip – May 3, 2003**

You are invited to join us on a field trip to the Huntington Ravine Winter Access Trail on Saturday, May 3, 2003. We will view and discuss the segment of the trail requiring rock reduction, and visit the bridge replacement site. The hike is about 5.5 miles round trip. Be prepared for a moderately difficult hike -- sturdy footgear, clothing appropriate for the weather, lunch, and water. We will meet on the porch at Pinkham Notch Visitor Center (11 miles south of Gorham on Route 16) at 9:00 am.

## **Comment Period – Ends May 12, 2003**

I will accept your comments throughout the environmental analysis process, although to ensure that I have an opportunity to consider your comments before I make a final decision about this project, I will need to hear from you by May 12, 2003. Please be sure to include the following information:

- (1) Your name, address, telephone number, organization represented and title if applicable.
- (2) Project you are commenting on: Huntington Ravine Winter Access Trail Reconstruction.
- (3) Specific environmental concerns related to the proposed action described above.
- (4) Indicate if you wish to remain informed about this project by returning the attached form. If we do not hear from you, you will receive no further mailings about this particular project.

I will accept your comments via mail, phone, fax, email ([gpozzuto@fs.fed.us](mailto:gpozzuto@fs.fed.us)).

I encourage you to review this proposal and share your concerns and suggestions with us. 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 to you please contact me at your earliest convenience.

For more information about the proposal, please contact Pat Nasta at the address above or call 603-466-2713 ext 222 (TTY 603-466-2856).

Visit our website [www.fs.fed.us/r9/white](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/white) to view photos of the project area.

I realize your time is valuable and want you to know I appreciate the time you spend reviewing and commenting on this project.

/s/ GEORGE R. POZZUTO  
District Ranger

Enclosures

USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.