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Department of
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Forest
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IRON MAPLE 2 VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Towns of Bartlett and Jackson
Carroll County, New Hampshire

Decision Notice, and Finding Of No Significant Impact,

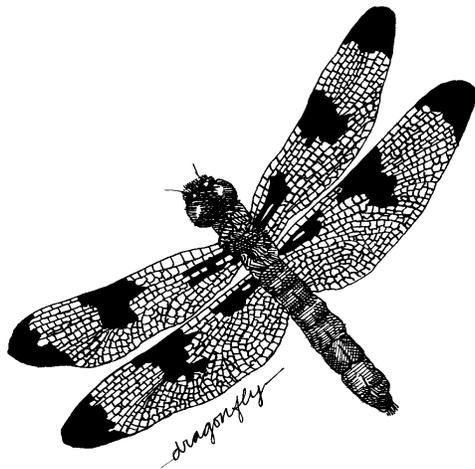
**Appendix H – Comments on the Iron Maple 2
Environmental Assessment And Forest Service
Responses,**

for the

Iron Maple 2 Environmental Assessment

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**Iron Maple 2 Vegetation Management Project
DECISION NOTICE and FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

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DECISION NOTICE and FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Iron Maple 2 Vegetation Management Project

This Decision Notice outlines my decision to implement Alternative 3 of the Iron Maple 2 environmental assessment based on site-specific interdisciplinary analysis and public involvement.

This project includes:

- Timber management on 492 acres, resulting in the removal of 2.7 million board feet of timber from 12 treatment units
- Reconstruction on 5,150 feet (0.98 mile) of existing Forest Service roads

BACKGROUND

This Decision Notice outlines my decision to implement Alternative 3 of the Iron Maple 2 environmental assessment based on site-specific interdisciplinary analysis and public involvement. Iron Maple 2 Analysis Area is located on the Saco Ranger District, White Mountain National Forest (WMNF), and includes all of HMUs (Habitat Management Units) 506 and 509.

The 8,750-acre analysis area is located in the Towns of Bartlett and Jackson in Carroll County, New Hampshire. Rocky Branch River flows through the middle of the analysis area. Jericho Road, FR (Forest Road) 27, runs along Rocky Branch River. Maple Mountain is the northernmost point within the analysis area, which extends east to Iron Mountain, south to the WMNF boundary near the Saco River, and west to the Presidential Range-Dry River Wilderness Area boundary.

Rocky Branch River is the primary drainage for the analysis area; Lower Stairs Brook and Otis Brook and other unnamed tributaries flow into Rocky Branch and then into the Saco River. Activities are proposed within MA (Management Area) 3.1. The terrain is relatively moderate. The vegetation is primarily made up of northern hardwoods with some softwood in the drainages and at higher elevations.

PURPOSE and NEED

The Proposed Action is intended to meet objectives outlined in the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for Management Areas 2.1 and 3.1. This action accomplishes these objectives, including Forest Plan goals designed to protect and enhance visual quality, water quality, recreation opportunities, provide moderate amounts of timber products, and provide a balanced mix of habitats for all wildlife species.

Habitat Management Units (HMUs) 506 and 509 do not meet these desired HMU conditions. The proposed actions are designed to improve vegetative conditions for these HMUs to better match the desired future condition described in the Forest Plan. Specifically lacking in this area are: (a) **early-successional habitat** (hardwood regeneration), (b) **stands with moderate to high softwood component**, and (c) **red oak and oak-pine communities**.

a. Early-Successional Habitat

Based on soil capabilities the desired amount of even-aged northern hardwood regeneration stands in these HMUs is about 287 acres. HMUs 506 and 509 currently contain 61 acres of regenerating northern hardwood forest stands 0-9 years old, a shortage of 226 acres from the desired condition. In addition, 48 acres of paper birch, 34 acres of aspen, and 46 acres of oak/pine are needed to meet the total desired regeneration-age condition for these HMUs.

b. Stands with a moderate to high softwood (conifer) component

As described in this EA, the analysis area is predominantly made up of northern hardwood forest, with a small component of softwoods scattered within hardwood stands. Many wildlife species including broad-winged hawk, neotropical migrant birds, snowshoe hare, and white-tailed deer would benefit from an increase in the softwood component of these stands. This could be achieved through the proposed silvicultural treatments.

c. Red oak and oak-pine communities.

Red oak stands produce an acorn crop that a number of wildlife species use. However, few red oak seedlings are surviving to maintain the oak component in one stand proposed for treatment. Beech seedlings are establishing themselves and would eventually dominate the stand and cause the reduction of red oak in the stand. The proposed treatment would maintain the existing oak and oak-pine community type in one stand over the long term.

Silvicultural treatments are prescribed in the proposed action and alternatives to create a more desirable stocking of species, size, and quality hardwood trees. These treatments would increase residual stand growth and vigor, produce forest products, and improve future sawtimber quality (see Forest Plan Appendices C1 and C3).

DECISION FRAMEWORK

Considering the purpose and need for action, the deciding official, Saco District Ranger Terry Miller reviews the proposed action and alternatives, and environmental effects in order to make decisions based on the following questions:

- Which alternative best meets the Purpose and Need and whether to implement that action?
- Is the information presented in this analysis sufficient to provide a basis for implementing those actions?
- Do the proposed actions pose significant impacts on the human environment and would an Environmental Impact Statement be required prior to implementation?
- Is a Forest Plan amendment required prior to implementation of this project?
- Does the decision and alternatives considered meet applicable federal, state, and local laws and policies, including consistency with the Forest Plan?
- Are the proposed mitigation measures and monitoring requirements sufficient to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources?

THE DECISION

Based upon my review of the analysis of this project, it is my decision to select **Alternative 3**. This alternative is described in the EA (Environmental Assessment) in Section 2.D, pages 2-8 through 2-10. Alternative 3 will treat a total of **482 acres** using the **Single-Tree Selection** method (184 acres), **Clearcutting** (40 acres), **Shelterwood** (15 acres), and **Commercial Thinning** (243 acres). This represents just 5.5 percent of the total HMU analysis area. An estimated 2.7 million board feet of timber will be removed from 12 treatment units. Both uneven-aged and even-aged harvest methods will be used. Harvest operations will occur in the summer, fall, or winter seasons (see the attached Map of the Selected Alternative).

Alternative 3 will utilize Forest Road 27 (“Jericho Road”) and existing spur roads off Jericho Road that have been historically used for timber hauling. Approximately 2.1 miles of FR 27 will receive pre-haul maintenance. Pre-haul maintenance is work to be done by the purchaser of a timber sale that would be needed to start hauling over an existing road. Pre-haul maintenance includes grading roadways, cleaning culverts, and removing downed trees and limbs.

Alternative 3 includes 5150 feet of road reconstruction on existing spur roads. Reconstruction is the work needed to bring a road back to its designed standard level, blading and shaping roadways, cleaning ditches, and installing or replacing drainage structures. Reconstructed roads would be designed for use on dry ground and frozen ground conditions. When harvest operations are completed on these roads, drainage structures would be removed, the road seeded, and access again closed to vehicular traffic.

I am also deciding to implement the thirty site-specific mitigation measures outlined in the EA at Section 2.E (pages 2-17 through 2-19). These measures respond to Forest Plan standards and guidelines as well as resource issues identified during public involvement and project development. These measures will be adopted into the timber sale contract implementing the project.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

After much consideration, **I have decided to implement Alternative 3** (Management without New Road Construction) as described in the Iron Maple 2 Project EA.

Alternative 3 is chosen over the other alternatives for reasons enumerated below. While Alternative 5 was chosen in my October 5, 2001 decision, I am now choosing Alternative 3 because road access questions have been resolved through the preparation of a project-specific roads analysis contained in the Project File. This and other information relative to the environmental effects of this project are now available and have been analyzed and documented in the Iron Maple 2 EA.

1. A Thorough Analysis of Effects

The EA provides a strengthened analysis of the expected environmental effects for the Iron Maple project area. This effects analysis includes a detailed disclosure of likely effects to Management Indicator Species (MIS) based on monitoring results and known population trend information for the White Mountain National Forest. The environmental assessment also provides a strengthened cumulative effects analysis, and a detailed roads analysis for the Iron Maple project area. The original Iron Maple decision notice withdrawn in July, 2002 did not contain the depth of detail that this analysis now contains.

2. A Good Range of Reasonable Alternatives

I am pleased with the range of alternatives evaluated by the InterDisciplinary (ID) Team. The EA evaluated five reasonable alternatives including the no-action alternative. Ultimately I have concluded that Alternative 3 does the best job of meeting ecosystem needs for the Iron Maple area, while also addressing issues received during public involvement.

3. Fulfills the Purpose and Need for Action

I have determined that Alternative 3 is the best one to fulfill the Purpose and Need for Action in the Iron Maple Project area, as described on pages 1-3 through 1-5 of the EA. The Purpose and Need statement in the EA describes the following ecosystem needs for the Iron Maple project area:

- (1) the “scarcity of northern hardwood stands in the 0-9 year age class” (a need for early successional habitat). Regeneration harvests in units 7, 8, 9, and 10 will provide needed early successional habitat.
- (2) a need for mature well-developed softwood stands providing wildlife habitat cover component of the ecosystem. Single-tree selection and thinnings in Units 1-6, 11, and 12 are designed to promote the softwood components which currently reside in the understories of these stands.
- (3) the need to “increase the oak and oak-pine communities where possible”. This project would meet those needs in the following manner. Treatment in Unit 10 is intended to promote its oak component.

Additional reasons I am selecting Alternative 3 are:

1. it complies with on the White Mountain National Forest;
2. it satisfactorily addresses issues identified during public involvement for this project;
3. it meets wildlife habitat and timber management goals for the Iron Maple analysis area, as described for Management Areas 2.1 and 3.1 in the Forest Plan;
4. potential direct and cumulative impacts are minimized, and are within levels anticipated in the Forest Plan standards and guides, while maximizing benefits to wildlife habitat and forest health;
5. it would produce approximately 55 acres of early successional habitat and promote softwood development on 184 acres, and enhance timber values on 243 acres;
6. it would produce approximately 2.7 million board feet of wood products while also improving the health and age-class diversity of the treated acres and contribute to it in the analysis area;
7. as described in the Roads Analysis completed for the Iron Maple project, I believe the issues regarding access to the units across Otis Brook have been resolved.
8. no new road construction or corridor clearing would occur;
9. it fully complies with the Fish & Wildlife Service’ Biological Opinion for Threatened and Endangered Species on the White Mountain National Forest and the 2001 Forest Plan amendment decision addressing threatened, endangered, and sensitive species on the White Mountain National Forest;
10. it best responds to the “Issues used to formulate Alternatives” on pages 1-12 to 1-14 of the EA;

11. it protects valuable or unique natural sites in the project area, including the beaver ponds along Otis Brook.

Finally, this decision takes into account documented public issues raised during scoping and the EA public comment period regarding resource and ecosystem issues. The decision considers the stated purpose and need for this project, the affected environment, and the environmental effects of the alternatives. The decision tiers to the White Mountain National Forest Plan and Forest Plan standards and guidelines, including those protecting soils, water quality, water quantity, visual quality, and other resources.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The alternatives considered in detail for the Iron Maple 2 Project are briefly summarized below. These alternatives are described in greater detail in the EA, section 2.5, Description of the Alternatives.

Alternative 1 – No Action would defer any new or additional harvesting and connected activities at this time. However, ongoing projects authorized under the Forest Plan or through prior NEPA decisions will continue to occur. These would include road maintenance on Forest Road 27, trail maintenance on Rocky Branch Trail, and completion of activities in the adjoining “Back-A-Pickering” project. This alternative was not selected because it fails to achieve the purpose and need for this project as stated in Chapter 1.D regarding habitat management goals identified in the Forest Plan for the White Mountain National Forest.

Alternative 2, the Initial Proposed Action would move toward attaining the wildlife habitat goals in terms of successional communities and softwood development, treating approximately 482 acres of National Forest lands. Harvest methods include 40 acres of clearcutting, 243 acres of commercial thinning, 15 acres of seed tree, and 184 acres of single-tree selection. Alternative 2 would use about 2.1 miles of existing system road (Forest Road 27, the Jericho Road) that has been historically used for timber hauling. In addition, nine hundred feet of new road would be constructed at the end of the maintained portion of FR 27 to reach the landing located within unit 5. The new road was proposed to tie in with the existing road on the other side of Otis Brook and eliminate the need for a temporary bridge over Otis Brook. In addition, an estimated 1000 feet on a separate non-system road leading to a landing just north of unit 11 would also be reconstructed.

Alternative 2 would have produced an estimated 2.8 million board feet of timber, about 55 acres of early successional habitat, and approximately 184 acres of softwood development. However, this alternative was not selected because the 900 feet of proposed road construction into unit 5 has more potential to cause erosion related water quality impacts than the road re-construction and temporary bridge proposed in Alternative 3. In addition, constructing this road would have created an additional road parallel to the existing road that serves this area proposed for use in Alternative 3.

Alternative 4, Uneven-aged Management was developed primarily to address public concerns regarding even-aged clearcutting, and thinning designed to prepare a unit for a future clearcut. Alternative 4 proposes to manage these units with uneven-aged prescriptions including single tree selection and group selection (smaller openings than those created with clearcuts).

Alternative 4 would harvest 388 acres of hardwood and mixedwood stands using 333 acres single-tree selection and 55 acres of group selection. It would harvest 1.9 million board feet of timber and produce 11 acres of early successional habitat in small openings.

This alternative was not selected primarily because it would marginally meet the purpose and need of the proposed action. Alternative 4 does not address the need to create stands of early successional wildlife habitat because it would have created only small pockets of regeneration within stands.

Alternative 5 (Defers Harvest along Rocky Branch River and West of Otis Brook) was developed to address public concerns regarding timber harvest and use of existing logging roads west of Otis Brook by omitting units 1-5 and the associated road reconstruction. Alternative 5 proposed treatments on 137 acres of hardwood and mixedwood stands including 39 acres of thinning, 40 acres of clearcut, 15 acres of seed tree, and 43 acres of single-tree selection.

Alternative 5 would have harvested an estimated 0.9 million board feet of timber, produced 55 acres of regeneration age habitat, promoted softwood development on approximately 43 acres, and provided for quality hardwood in the future on approximately 39 acres proposed for thinning.

This alternative was not selected primarily because, while it would meet the “Purpose and Need for Action”, and it would help meet Forest Plan objectives, it does so only on a portion of the project area. Although Alternative 5 was formerly selected in the October 5, 2001 Decision Notice, the reasons for the withdrawal of that decision have been satisfied. This new decision is supported by the “Reasons for the Decision” stated above and by the “Finding of No Significant Impact”.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement efforts for the Iron Maple Project began with a letter sent to interested publics on April 20, 1998 describing the Proposed Action and requesting comments. The initial Proposed Action was also advertised in the Manchester Union Leader and the Conway Daily Sun in April 22, 1998, and the Mountain Ear on April 23, 1998. Public comments are summarized in the EA in section *I. Issues Used to Formulate Alternatives* and section *J. Other Issues Brought Forward During Public Involvement*.

A notice of availability of the Iron Maple EA for public review was published in the Manchester Union Leader, the Conway Daily Sun, and the Mountain Ear, on February 12, 2001. Copies of the Iron Maple EA were mailed to 34 individuals and organizations who had commented during scoping. In addition, all others on the Iron Maple Project mailing list were notified that the EA was available for review.

On October 5, 2001 a decision to implement Alternative 5 of the Iron Maple EA was made by the Deciding Official. This decision was withdrawn after it was appealed and challenged in court. The reasons for the withdrawal were to allow for incorporation and analysis of additional available information relative to the environmental effects of the project. The court accepted the withdrawal on December 18, 2002 and dismissed the lawsuit.

The additional time since October 2001 has provided the planning team the opportunity to collect and analyze additional information relative to wildlife population trends, proposed road access across Otis Brook, and to complete a fresh analysis of the environmental effects of the project.

On April 11, 2003, notice for a 30-day comment period for the **Iron Maple 2** EA was published in the Manchester Union Leader, Conway Daily Sun, and the Mountain Ear, and letters were sent to those individuals who had received EAs in February of 2001. Five responses to the EA were received, and are summarized along with the Forest Service Response to Comments, in the attached Appendix H.

ISSUES USED TO FORMULATE ALTERNATIVES

The Forest Service separated issues into two groups: “Issues Used to Formulate Alternatives” and “Other Issues Brought Forward During Public Involvement.” Other Issues Brought Forward During Public Involvement are either 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. Following CEQ § 1500.4(c)(d), Other Issues Brought Forward During Public Involvement are incorporated into discussions in Chapter 3 of the EA under the related resource.

The IDT (interdisciplinary team) identified four Issues Used to Formulate Alternatives:

1. *Effects on forest vegetation in relation to the wildlife habitat management strategy and goals*
2. *Effects on wildlife habitat diversity, management indicator species, and species viability*
3. *Effects on water quality*
4. *Effects on forest visitors hiking Rocky Branch trail or participating in dispersed recreation opportunities, visual quality, and adjacent landowners.*

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

The purpose of the “FONSI” is to present the reasons that management actions proposed in the Iron Maple 2 Project will not have a significant effect on the human environment. This finding is based on my review of the environmental effects of the alternatives considered in detail in the Iron Maple 2 EA, including the associated mitigation measures, and including public comments on the EA (Appendix H), and the project file.

Based on the summary of effects discussed in the EA, I have determined that Alternative 3 will not have a significant effect on the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). For this reason, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

- (1) **My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.**
- (2) **There will be no significant effects on public health and safety concerns because they are effectively mitigated in Alternative 3.** The streams in this analysis area are not part of a designated municipal watershed. Public issues for the project were considered under all alternatives, and the effects displayed in the EA. Implementation of the mitigation measures and Forest Plan standards and guidelines during implementation of Alternative 3 will ensure that public safety and the natural environment are not compromised. Public safety can be adequately assured through: (1) signing the

roads to alert the public to the logging activity and (2) cautioning loggers and the public to drive slowly and carefully on Jericho Road (EA section 2.E). The Bartlett Board of Selectmen responded favorably to this project during the EA comment period. The District will continue to work closely with the Town of Bartlett to ensure that all town ordinances are met by Forest Service personnel and contractors engaged in implementing the project.

(3) There will be no significant effects on unique physical or biological characteristics within the analysis area. There are no designated Wild or Scenic Rivers located within or adjacent to the analysis area. No prime farmlands or parklands are within the analysis area. A 1999 Cultural Resource survey was completed for the analysis area. The identified heritage resource sites would be protected during implementation (see EA section 3.10). No prehistoric sites were located. No harvest activity is planned within wetlands. The two exemplary sites in the analysis area that were identified by NHNHI (New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory) are outside of treatment areas and would not be impacted (see EA, Figure 12).

(4) The direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. The estimated effects of Alternative 3 are within the scope of effects described in the White Mountain National Forest Final Environmental Impact Statement (1986). There is no known scientific controversy among experts regarding the physical or biological effects of this action. Public involvement efforts have not produced credible conflicting data or conclusions. Internal discussion and public comments did not produce any issues within the scope of this decision that rose to this level of controversy, or that could not be resolved with mitigations and project design. (See EA Chapter 1, sections I and J, all of Chapter 3, and Appendix H - Comments on the Proposed Action and Forest Service Responses). There is no known scientific controversy regarding the likely effects of actions proposed and planned for in this analysis area. Forest Plan monitoring continues to affirm the validity of forest and wildlife management practices promoted in the White Mountain Forest Plan and employed on this project. Ongoing research at nearby Bartlett Experimental Forest also reinforces the scientific validity of activities prescribed in the Forest Plan and proposed in this project.

(5) None of the effects of the Preferred Alternative are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks on the quality of the human environment. The predicted effects of the Preferred Alternative are consistent with similar classes of effects already disclosed in Chapter IV of the White Mountain National Forest Final Environmental Impact Statement (1986). The effects of the Iron Maple 2 Project proposals are discussed in the EA Chapter 3 (Environmental Consequences). Alternative 3 is similar to many other projects that have been conducted on the White Mountain National Forest and for which the agency has considerable experience implementing. The predicted effects of this and other similar projects fall into either of two categories: (a) The effects are reasonably known through prior research, experience, operational inspections or inventories; or (b) The effects are consistent in scope to those found through ongoing forestwide monitoring and evaluation (See Forest Monitoring Reports, 1993-98).

(6) The Preferred Alternative does not represent a precedent for future actions with significant effects. No undisclosed future projects are being contemplated whose feasibility, success, or scope of effects are contingent on implementation of any of the Iron Maple 2 Project alternatives. Any future proposed actions would require its own effects analysis. This Decision and FONSI does not approve or require that any future actions occur.

(7) The cumulative impacts of this project in combination with other ongoing activities within the analysis area are not significant. No significant adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects have been identified for any of the alternatives for the Iron Maple 2 Project.

Chapter 3 (Environmental Consequences) and Chapter 2, section F (Comparison of Alternatives) of the EA describe direct, indirect and cumulative effects on forest vegetation, wildlife and wildlife habitat diversity, including threatened, endangered and sensitive species, management indicator species, species viability, water quality, soil resources, soil calcium, visual quality, dispersed recreation and hiking opportunities, heritage resources, economics, and environmental justice. Appendix A, the biological evaluation, and Appendix C, a table summarizing the effects of the project on management indicator species (MIS), do not show direct or cumulative adverse impacts that are in themselves significant, or would lead to significance. There are no undisclosed related actions that would produce cumulative significant effects on the physical or human environment. Cumulatively, the trend in the watershed has been toward a greater dominance of older and denser forest cover. Hence, this project's treatment of 3.3% of the National Forest land in the 14,450 acre Rocky Branch watershed will have very minor direct and cumulative effects on the vegetation, water quality, esthetics, and habitat condition of this area.

(8) This action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites highways structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. An archaeological survey was conducted on all proposed treatment areas and proposed road locations. No heritage resource sites would be affected by the proposed harvesting or by the connected actions. No loss of potentially significant cultural or historical resources is anticipated (see EA, section 3.10).

(9) This action will not adversely affect any threatened or endangered species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. This is documented in the EA, Appendix A, Biological Evaluation (BE). Determination through the BE dated April 4, 2003 is that peregrine falcons, northern goshawks, eastern small-footed bats, Indiana bats, Canada lynx and northern bog lemmings could find suitable habitat or utilize the analysis area. The BE also determined that none of the alternatives considered in detail for this project would have an adverse effect on these species. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the project and stated that preparation of a Biological Assessment or further consultation with them under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is not required for this project as it is proposed (Letter, May 7, 2003). No Federally designated critical habitats are present in the analysis area.

(10) This action will not violate Federal, State or local laws, or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA, Chapter 1, section K, Applicable Regulatory Requirements and Required Coordination. This action is consistent with the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (see EA Chapter 1, section C) and is therefore in compliance with its underlying laws and regulations.

FINDING ON THE CLASS OF ACTION

The Forest Service's National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (FSH 1909.15), Chapter 20.6 outlines four classes of actions where Environmental Impact Statements (EIS's) are required. Based on my review of the environmental analysis documents and the FSH 1909.12 standards, I find that Iron Maple 2 Project preferred alternative (Alternative 3) does not fit into any of the classes of actions requiring Environmental Impact Statements in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 20.6.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision to implement Alternative 3, Management without New Road Construction, is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plans long term goals and objectives listed in the EA Chapter 1, section D, Purpose and Need on page 1-3. The project was designed in conformance with the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan standards and incorporates appropriate Land and Resource Management Plan guidelines for implementation (also see Chapter 2, section E, Mitigations)

(A) Consistency with Forest Plan Goals and Objectives - I find that Alternative 3 is consistent with the Forest Plan goals, objectives, desired conditions, and standards and guidelines for Management Areas 2.1, 3.1, 6.1 and 6.2 (Forest Plan, pages III-30 to III-35, III-36 to III-41, III-47 to III-50, and III-51 to III-53). The project also makes appropriate use of forestwide standards and guidelines for resource use and protection (Forest Plan, pages III-5 to III-29).

(B) Statutory Requirements for Harvesting - Proposals of harvesting in Alternative 3 is consistent with the requirements in Section 6 (g)(3)(E)(I-iv) of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-378) as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-588). I find that these statutory requirements are fulfilled as follows:

- (1) Harvesting in Alternative 3 is proposed on lands that are administratively available and environmentally suitable for timber harvesting where soils are not prone to irreversible damage from operations;
- (2) Experience and research has shown that these lands can be adequately restocked well within five years of harvest;
- (3) Protection is provided around bodies of water where the potential exists that harvesting may adversely affect water quality or fish habitat; and
- (4) Silvicultural systems and harvest methods were prescribed to meet a number of land management objectives and were not selected with the sole objective of maximizing dollar returns or outputs of timber.

(C) Statutory Requirements for Clearcutting - Proposals of clearcutting in Alternative 3 are consistent with the requirements in Section 6 (g)(3)(F)(i-v) of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-378) as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-588). I find that these statutory requirements are fulfilled as follows:

- (1) Clearcutting is the optimal method to address certain goals and requirements of the Forest Plan (see (D)...(5), below)
- (2) Project-level interdisciplinary review has been carried out
- (3) Harvest areas were determined in consultation with a Landscape Architect to insure consistency with Visual Quality Objectives
- (4) Harvests are planned in forest types where maximum opening size limits have been established (30 acres under the Forest Plan) and
- (5) Protection of other resource values has been considered in the interdisciplinary review.

(D) Requirements of the Chief of the Forest Service on Clearcutting - Proposals for clearcutting in Alternative 3 are also consistent with the Chief's direction on clearcutting (Chief's FSM 1330 letter of June 4, 1992). Clearcutting in this alternative meets the Chief's primary criteria, which is to limit clearcutting "... to areas where it is essential to meet forest plan objectives and involve(s) one or more of the following circumstances:" Proposed clearcutting is consistent with the following circumstances outlined by the Chief:

- ...(2) "To enhance wildlife habitat ... values ..."; and
- ...(5) "To provide for the establishment and growth of desired trees or other vegetative species that are shade intolerant."

I find that clearcutting, as applied in Alternative 3 is consistent with the Chief's criteria numbers two and five.

(E) Optimality of Clearcutting to Meet Land Management Goals and Objectives - I find that clearcutting, as applied in Alternative 3 is the optimum method of harvest to establish the growth of desired shade-intolerant tree species, and to create early-successional vegetation to enhance and maintain the diversity of wildlife habitats. Supporting references are listed below.

From the *White Mountain National Forest Final Environmental Impact Statement* (1986) - On the subject of wildlife habitat management: See page I-9 (Issues); pages II-6, II-50, II-51 and II-102 to II-104 (Alternatives); pages III-9 to III-12 (Affected Environment); and pages IV-42 to IV-47, and IV-62 to IV-64 (Environmental Consequences).

From the *White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (1986) - On the subject of wildlife habitat management: See page II-8 (Issues and Concerns); page III-3 (Forest Management Goals and Objectives); pages III-11 to III-17 (Forestwide Standards and Guidelines); pages III-30, III-31 and III-36 (Management Area Goals and Objectives); pages III-33 and III-39 (Management Area Standards and Guidelines); pages VII-B-1 to VII-B-28 (Appendix B - Wildlife Management Strategy); and pages VII-C-6 to VII-C-14 (Appendices C2 & C4 - Wildlife Opening Standards).

On the subject of managing tree species composition: See page III-3 (Forest Management Goals and Objectives); pages III-30, III-31 and III-36 (Management Area Goals and Objectives); and page VII-C-20 (Appendix C7 - Species Composition Trends by Habitat Type).

From the *White Mountain National Forest Monitoring Reports* (1993-2001) - On the subject of wildlife habitat management, See pages 71-104 of the 1993 Report (Management Indicator Species and Monitoring Needs); pages 6-17 of the 1994 Report (Terrestrial Ecosystems); and pages 2-9 of the 1995 Report (Terrestrial Ecosystems).

(F) Effectiveness of Proposed Mitigation Actions for Aquatic, Riparian and Soil Resources - I find that the harvesting, road maintenance and mitigation actions outlined in Alternative 3 have been effectively designed to protect soil and water resources, and are consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines. This project is representative of others that have been previously implemented using similar prescribed practices and protective measures. Forestwide monitoring has not revealed any unacceptable effects, as documented in the 1993-2001 Monitoring Reports.

PUBLISHED NOTICE OF THIS DECISION

A notice of this decision will be published in the legal notices section of *The Union Leader* (Manchester, NH). All administrative due dates related to appeals and project implementation are determined using the publication date of that notice as a starting point.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36, Part 215.7. A notice of appeal must be submitted in writing (36 CFR 215.2) and must clearly state that it is a

Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. Appeal documents must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer, or postmarked, or FAX-dated within 45 days. The 45-day appeal period begins the day following the date of publication of the notice of this Decision. For this project, the Appeal Deciding Officer is the Regional Forester, USDA - Forest Service, Eastern Region, 310 West Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53203. Appeals must meet content requirements outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36, Part 215.14.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

The date when implementation of this project may proceed depends on whether an appeal is filed. If no appeal is filed, implementation may proceed on, but not before, five (5) business days after the close of the appeal filing period described above. If an appeal is filed, implementation may not occur for fifteen (15) days following the date of appeal disposition, provided the Appeal Deciding Officer upholds the decision.

INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

For questions about this decision contact the District Ranger, USDA - Forest Service, Saco Ranger District, 33 Kancamagus Highway, Conway, NH 03818. The telephone number is (603) 447-5448. If you need additional information or details about this project, contact Rod Wilson at the same address and phone number (ext 120).

/s/ Terry Miller

6/6/2003

TERRY MILLER
District Ranger

Date

Saco Ranger Station
33 Kancamagus Hwy
Conway, NH 03818
Phone: (603) 447-5448

FIGURE 1: Selected Alternative Map

Alternative 3

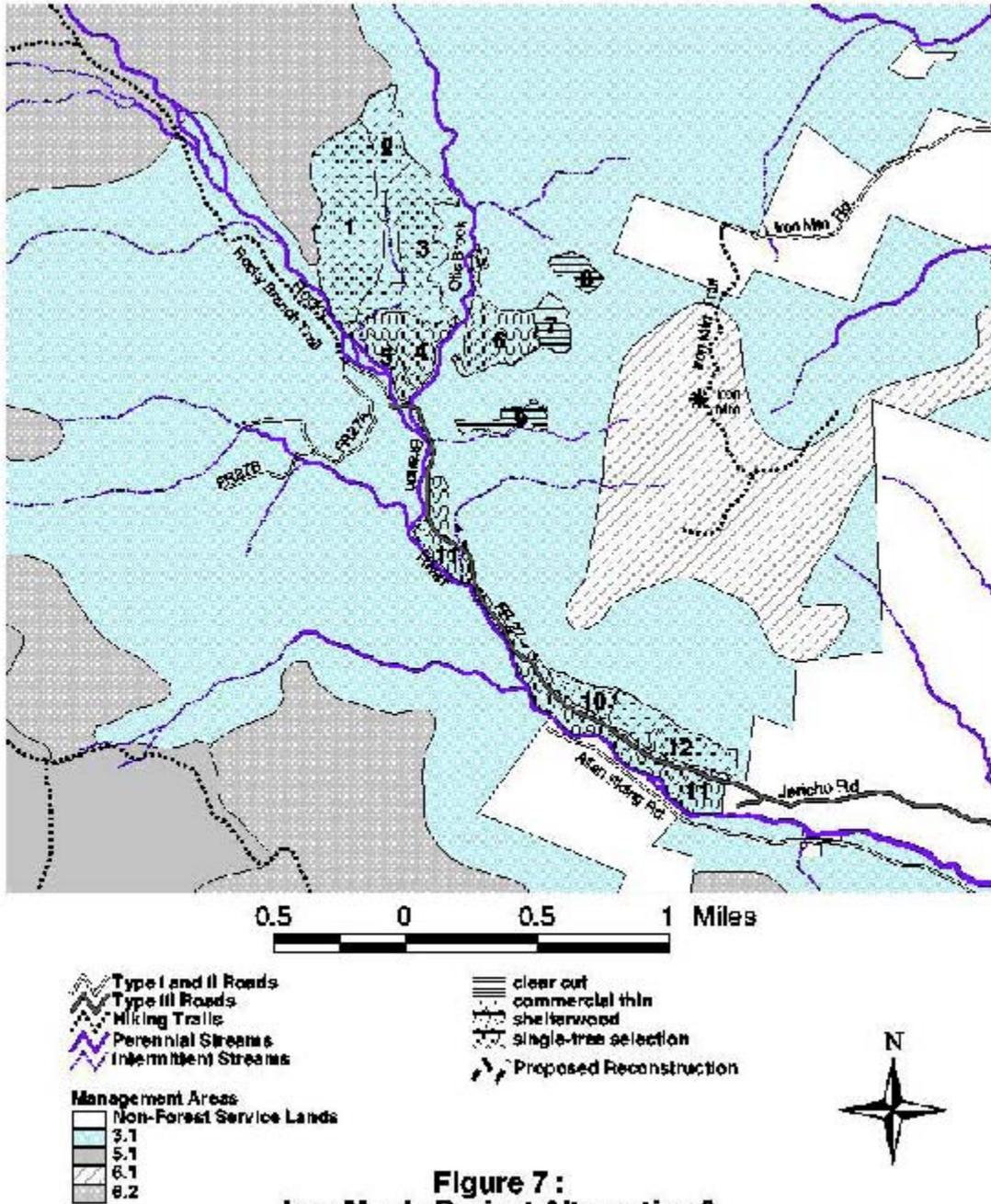


Figure 7 :
Iron Maple Project Alternative 3

Summary of Effects – Iron Maple 2 Project

This table compares the alternatives by measurement indicator (acres, percent, feet and effects). The environmental effects are discussed in detail in the EA, Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences.

Measurement Indicators	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
<i>Issue 1. Effects on forest vegetation in relation to wildlife habitat management strategy and goals</i>					
<i>Acres of thinning</i>	None	243	243	None	39
<i>Ac clearcut, SW, seed tree, group selection</i>	None	55	55	55	55
<i>Acres of single tree</i>	None	184	184	333	43
<i>MA 2.1 and 3.1 within the HMUs to be treated and cumulatively</i>	None	8.6 percent / 9.9 percent	8.6 percent / 9.9 percent	6.9 percent / 8.2 percent	2.4 percent / 3.7 percent
<i>Issue 2. Effects on wildlife habitat diversity, management indicator species and species viability.</i>					
<i>Acres of softwood developed</i>	None	184	184	90	43
<i>Acres of regeneration created</i>	None	55	55	11	55
<i>Effects on MIS common to the area</i>	Loss of habitat in young age classes affects several species	Benefits Most MIS Species	Benefits Most MIS Species	Benefits Some MIS Species	Benefits Most MIS Species
<i>Viability of MIS</i>	All MIS remain viable	All MIS remain viable	All MIS remain viable	All MIS remain viable	All MIS remain viable
<i>Issue 3. Effects on water quality</i>					
<i>Road reconstruction</i>	None	3500 feet	5150 feet	5150 feet	1000 feet
<i>Acres in skidtrails and cumulatively</i>	None / 130	54 / 184	59 / 189	46 / 176	17 / 147
<i>Issue 4. Effects to Forest visitors, visual quality, and adjacent landowners</i>					
<i>Acres treated</i>	0	482	482	388	137
<i>Road reconstruction</i>	None	3500 feet	5150 feet	5150 feet	1000 feet
<i>Acres of openings affecting Visual Quality</i>	No Change	55	55	11	55
<i>Noise for units 6-8; and on Jericho Rd. as a function of volume or trips</i>	None/None	527 MBF in units; 700 trips on Jericho Road	527 MBF in units; 675 trips on Jericho Road	287 MBF in units; 475 trips on Jericho Road	527 MBF in units; 300 trips on Jericho Road

Notes that apply to the table above:

- *Ac clearcut, SW, seed tree, group selection.* Units treated with any of these prescriptions would appear open or fairly open following treatment. *SW* means shelterwood, proposed only for unit 10, only in Alternative 3. This shelterwood would have a leave basal area of 20-30, or about one fifth the density of this stand. Shelterwood trees are normally mature vigorous trees with healthy crowns. Retaining a diversity of tree species is important, as is retaining species that are well suited to the soil type, soil moisture and other site conditions and project objectives.
- *Group selection* units 7-10 in Alternative 4 are expected to establish regeneration on 11 acres. However, the species regenerated and the growth rates will be effected by the smaller size of openings. This is due to the increased percentage of shade relative to the size of the opening. Species regenerating and thriving in shaded areas (the perimeters of openings) are often different species than those found in the center of the openings. Shade tolerant species occupy a larger percentage of openings when they are small and shade is more prevalent.
- *Percent of MA 2.1 and 3.1 within the HMU to be treated now, and cumulatively* – These are acres proposed for treatment in each alternative expressed as a percent of the total number of acres in those Management Areas within the two HMU's. To achieve a sustained yield of products from manageable National Forest lands in an HMU, a relatively constant percent of the manageable landbase could theoretically be treated each decade. For example, for a hundred year rotation, ten percent of the manageable landbase could be treated each decade. The cumulative figure includes all the treatment acres under that alternative plus 71 acres of regeneration units in the 0-9 year age class created since 1992 in these HMU's.
- *Effects on MIS common to the area* is a summary statement for the analysis of Management Indicator Species. There are over 20 Management Indicator Species, so the table is very general in its representation of effects. However, the wildlife section of Chapter 3 discusses effects to Management Indicator Species that are known to inhabit the project area.
- *Road Reconstruction in the table includes* road reconstruction, placement of a temporary bridge over Otis Brook, and 1250 feet of new road construction as proposed under each Alternative.
- *Acres in skidtrails and cumulatively* – are total acres in skid trails for the units, landings, and proposed (re)constructed roads, plus a calculated 130 acres in skid trails for previous actions since 1986 (see Figure 11 and table 3-5) within the 14,450 acre cumulative effects analysis area.
- *Noise generated from units 6-8.* All alternatives allow for summer, fall and winter logging of units 7 and 8, and unit 6 is fall/winter logging. All alternatives have the same prescriptions for unit 6. Only Alternative 4 differs in its prescription for units 7 and 8, from clearcut to group selection. The acre differences for unit 7 and 8 in the alternatives are from 26 acres clearcut, to a total estimated 6 acres of group selection openings under Alternative 4. Therefore, implementation of units 7 and 8 under Alternative 4 would be likely to take less time. The duration of activities and the amount of noise generated is linked to the volume for these units.
- *Noise generated on Jericho Road.* The duration of noise on Jericho Road can be determined by estimating the relative number of truck trips for each alternative. This was estimated using 4000 board feet per truckload divided into the estimated volume for each alternative.