



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

White Mountain National Forest  
Saco Ranger District

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Conway, NH 03818  
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File Code: 1950

Date: December 7, 2007

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to invite you to comment on the Lower Falls Site Improvement Project. This project is being proposed to implement the 2007 Lower Falls Site Management Plan, which examined the Lower Falls Recreation Site and addressed how to best manage the site to provide high quality visitor experience in an ecologically sustainable manner.

The enclosed Scoping Report provides additional detail about this project, instructions on how to comment, as well as a map for your reference. This document is also posted on our WMNF web page: [www.fs.fed.us/r9/white](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/white).

You have received this letter because you own property in close proximity to the project area or have expressed interest in similar projects. I am interested in receiving your comments about our proposal, including any information about the project area that could help us improve our plans.

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

Sincerely,

*//TERRY MILLER//*

TERRY MILLER  
District Ranger





# Lower Falls Site Improvement Project

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December 2007

## Scoping Notice

### Saco Ranger District



For Information Contact:  
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**Lower Falls  
Site Improvement Project  
Table of Contents  
White Mountain National Forest  
Saco Ranger District**

Introduction ..... 3  
Background ..... 3  
Purpose and Need ..... 3  
Proposed Action ..... 3  
Decisions to be Made ..... 4  
Findings of Preliminary Analysis ..... 5  
    1. Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat ..... 5  
    2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds ..... 5  
    3. Congressionally Designated Areas ..... 5  
    4. Inventoried Roadless Areas ..... 5  
    5. Research Natural Areas ..... 5  
    6. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites & Archaeological  
    Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas ..... 5  
How to Submit Comments ..... 5

**Lower Falls  
Site Improvement Project  
White Mountain National Forest  
Saco Ranger District**

## **Introduction**

The Saco Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) is initiating a public scoping period for the Lower Falls Site Improvement Project on WMNF land in the Town of Albany, New Hampshire.

This Report includes the Purpose and Need for the project, a description of the Proposed Action, the Decisions to be Made, and information on How You Can Submit Comments to the Forest Service. The enclosed map displays the proposed project area.

## **Background**

The Lower Falls Recreation Site is a frequently used picnic area and swimming recreation site that is found between the Kancamagus Scenic Byway and the Swift River. This site is a popular destination for visitors looking for scenic viewing opportunities, picnicking and water based recreation activities, including wading, swimming and to a much lesser degree boating during high spring runoff. Facilities at the site include a toilet facility, picnic tables, pavilion, parking area and grills. The site currently has no defined trails, or designated viewing areas and heavy pedestrian traffic has caused severe compaction throughout this site. Elimination of ground vegetation and tree mortality are occurring throughout the Lower Falls area.

## **Purpose and Need**

In 2007, the Saco Ranger District completed the Lower Falls Site Management Plan to examine the site and determine how to best manage it to provide a high quality visitor experience in an ecologically sustainable manner. This Management Plan made recommendations for specific site improvement work.

This project was designed to implement the recommendations in the Management Plan to address past and ongoing resource concerns, including damage to riparian vegetation, erosion, and high levels of tree mortality due to soil compaction. The goal is to rehabilitate the Lower Falls Scenic Area to resemble less trampled areas along the Swift River and the Kancamagus Scenic Highway, while providing for high quality visitor experience. The project also would implement the 2007 White Mountain National Forest Water Safety Action Plan.

The Lower Falls Site Improvement Project will:

- Manage the site to meet recreation management goals and public need.
- Provide effective accessible travel routes and viewing areas.
- Sign the site appropriately to address safety concerns, administrative issues, and visitor information needs.

The project area is primarily in Management Area 2.1 (MA 2.1; General Forest Area). The proposed improvements are compatible with the Forest-wide and MA 2.1 standards and objectives identified in the 2005 Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA-

Forest Service, 2005). The Forest Plan directs that the White Mountain National Forest should manage high use areas and facilities to meet visitor needs, while providing for long-term sustainability. The Forest Plan also directs that existing day use areas may be improved; however use should not be allowed to increase indefinitely at high use sites. The proposed improvements will also be consistent with the Built Environment Image Guide (USDA Forest Service, FS-710, September 2001), intended to maintain a consistent architectural character for facilities and signs.

## **Proposed Action**

The proposed action includes three components;

1. The definition of a designated travel route, with distinct river entry points and accessible viewing areas. The travel route will be designed using universal design standards and further defined using split rail fencing.
2. The aeration of soil, and the introduction of organic matter, to prepare the site for the subsequent establishment of vegetation. The reclamation areas will be posted as closed to foot travel, to avoid soil compaction. The benefits of aerating the soil will include; increasing the availability of water and nutrients, increased oxygen levels in the soil, stimulating root growth, and reducing water runoff.
3. The establishment of vegetation in rehabilitated areas. Specific area plant layout and plant choices will be determined in collaboration with a Landscape Architect and Forest Botanist.

Project components one and two will be completed prior to the coordinated planting efforts. The trail establishment, fencing, soil aeration and organic matter addition would be implemented within one season. Plantings would occur after the completion of the first two components. This project will be implemented between the years 2008-2011.

## **Decisions to be Made**

After receiving your input, other public comments, and recommendations from an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists, Saco District Ranger Terry Miller, as the Responsible Official, will decide:

1. The level of analysis necessary to assess and document the environmental effects of this proposed project. This includes determining whether this project meets criteria for categorical exclusion from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment, including an assessment of any extraordinary circumstances (as defined in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3), and whether there is sufficient information and analysis to make a decision to implement the proposed project.
2. What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements will help assure the proposed project meets LRMP standards and guidelines for all resources.

3. Whether a Forest Plan amendment will be required to accommodate this project.

If no significant issues or extraordinary circumstances are identified, it is possible that the project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement under FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.12(5), *Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities*. Once the level of documentation is determined and the analysis is completed, copies of the environmental and decision documents will be mailed to people who submit comments during this scoping period, and to people who request copies.

### **Findings of Preliminary Analysis**

Preliminary reviews and surveys of the project areas by resource specialists indicate that the following resource conditions exist:

#### **Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat**

To date, no Federally Listed Threatened or Endangered Species or Designated Critical Habitat, Species Proposed for Federal Listing or Proposed Critical Habitat, or Regional Forester Sensitive Species have been observed or are known to be present.

A complete Biological Evaluation will be conducted during the environmental analysis process.

#### **Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds**

The project will not result in an adverse effect to any floodplains, wetlands, or any municipal water supply.

#### **Congressionally Designated Areas**

The project area does not occur in any Congressionally Designated Areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas.

#### **Inventoried Roadless Areas**

The project area does not occur in any Inventoried Roadless Areas.

#### **Research Natural Areas**

The proposed project area is not located within or adjacent to a Research Natural Area (RNA) or a candidate RNA (CRNA).

#### **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites & Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas.**

The WMNF Cultural Resources Atlas shows no known cultural sites in the project area. Prior to implementation, additional site specific surveys will be completed and an Archaeological Resource Report will be prepared for review by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

#### **How to Submit Comments**

Comments should be addressed to Saco District Ranger Terry Miller as follows:

Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed or otherwise submitted by 11:59 pm ET on **January 15, 2008**.

**Mail:** Send to Lauren Oswald, Project Team Leader, Saco Ranger Station, 33 Kancamagus Highway, Conway, NH 03818. Letters can be hand delivered Monday 9:00am-4:30pm and Tuesday through Sunday, 8:00am-4:30pm.

**FAX:** Send to Attn: Lauren Oswald @ 603-447-8405.

**E-mail:** Send to ([comments-eastern-white-mountain-saco@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-eastern-white-mountain-saco@fs.fed.us)), and must include an identifiable name. Comments submitted as electronic documents must be in plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rft) or Word (.doc) format. You should receive an automated electronic acknowledgement as confirmation of receipt of your comments. If you do not receive acknowledgement, it is your responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

**Oral comments** may be submitted Monday through Friday, 8:00am-4:30pm, by phone (603-447-5448 x109) or in person; and must be received by close of business on **January 15, 2008**.

Comments should include the following information:

Your name, address, and if possible, your phone number and e-mail address.

The title of the project you are commenting on.

Your specific concern and reasons the concern may lead to environmental effects.

The purpose of soliciting your comments during this scoping period is to collect additional information and to identify any unresolved issues regarding the proposal. To make your comments substantive they should be specific to the proposed action. Be sure to provide supporting rationale for your comments, including concerns about environmental effects of the proposed project. Please be aware that your name, address and comments will become part of the public record and may be available for public inspection.

