



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White Mountain National Forest
Androscoggin Ranger District

300 Glen Road
Gorham, NH 03581-1399
Comm: (603) 466-2713
TTD: (603) 466-2856

File code: 1950

Date: February 7, 2007

Dear Interested Citizen:

I am seeking your comments on the Androscoggin Ranger District's proposal to harvest timber and improve wildlife habitat diversity in the Mill Brook project area. This proposal is a revised version of the original presented in March of 2006. We are rescoping this project as a result of recent court rulings prohibiting timber harvest and road construction activities on all national forest inventoried roadless lands as of 2001, including approximately 1,500 acres of the original proposal within the 2001 Kilkenny Inventoried Roadless Area. The revised project is located in the Town of Stark, Coos County, New Hampshire and includes only those lands outside of the 2001 inventory.

A detailed description of the Proposed Action and how you can comment is included in the enclosed Scoping Report. Information about this proposal, to include project area photos, is also available on our website at: <www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain/projects/projects>.

I am interested in hearing your comments and suggestions. Please be specific to the proposals and area described in the enclosed Scoping Report. Comments are due by March 12, 2007.

We are soliciting your comments to help define key 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 Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project will be documented in an environmental assessment and a decision is expected in the summer of 2007.

Before a decision is made on this project, you will be given an opportunity to comment on the draft Environmental Assessment (30-Day Comment Period). If you provide comments or express interest in this 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.

I appreciate the time you take to review and comment on our project proposal. Please also take a minute to fill out and return the attached Response Form to help us manage our mailings and to meet your needs to remain informed about this project.

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

Sincerely,
/s/ Dave Neely
for
KATHERINE W. STUART
District Ranger





United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

February 2007



Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project

Scoping Report

Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest
Town of Stark
Coos County, NH

For Information Contact: Pat Nasta
Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest
300 Glen Road
Gorham, NH 03581
(603)466-2713, ext 222
FAX/TTY (603) 466-2856

<www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain/projects/projects>

This document is available in large print.

Contact the White Mountain National Forest Supervisor's Office

1-603-528-8712

TTY 1-603-528-8722

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Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project

Introduction and Background

The Mill Brook project was first presented for public review and comment in March of 2006 and totaled approximately 2,350 acres in Compartments 2-5 of the Mill Brook Habitat Management Unit (HMU). Comments received then were instrumental in the early stages of developing possible alternatives to the proposed project. The anticipated environmental analysis was delayed by a recent court ruling in California that affects national forests across the nation, including the White Mountain National Forest. The judge's ruling generally prohibits particular activities such as timber harvest and road construction in areas that were identified as inventoried roadless lands during a national-level analysis that concluded in 2001. The affected lands and connected road construction portions in the original Mill Brook Project were dropped from consideration as a result.

The ruling does not apply to new inventories. This is an important distinction since a new inventory of roadless areas was conducted under revised regional inventory criteria during our forest planning process. The roadless area inventory substantially increased in acreage as the newer criteria allowed a limited amount of roads and recently harvested areas to be included. Portions of this new inventory were set aside for Wilderness designation while the remaining lands were put in management prescriptions that allow activities such as timber harvest, active wildlife management, and roaded recreation. In the Mill Brook area this inventory is known as the 2005 Kilkenny Inventoried Roadless Area and includes 313 acres proposed for harvest (See Project Map).

What is the Forest Service Proposing?

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

- Vegetation Management by Commercial Timber Harvest to provide high quality sawtimber and other timber products on a sustained yield basis
- Provide a balanced mix of habitats for wildlife species
- Restoration of existing Forest Service Roads and landings
- Roads Analysis to reflect current conditions on the ground
- Watershed Restoration to protect and improve riparian habitat and ensure proper stream functioning

Location and Features of Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project

The Mill Brook Project is situated in the Upper Ammonoosuc River Watershed in the Town of Stark, Coos County, New Hampshire (See Vicinity Map). It is a portion of the Mill Brook Habitat Management Unit (HMU) and is situated with the National Forest boundary to the north, and the ridgelines formed by Mill Mountain, Roger's Ledge and the Pilot Range to the to the east, south, and west.

The Project Area is where the proposed activities would occur, including the forest stands selected for timber and habitat management. It is located in the Mill Brook drainage on moderately sloped terrain ranging from approximately 1,300 to 2,300 feet in elevation and consists of northern hardwood, mixedwood and softwoods stands. Several large parcels of private ownership within the Project Area are managed as commercial timberlands.

Fishing and hunting are the most popular recreational activities in the area and involve camp owners (seven on Forest Service lands, three on private ownership) and the general public. Snowmobile use is limited to local traffic on the Mill Brook Road. The Unknown Pond Hiking Trail is located at the southern end of the Project Area and receives low use.

Within the Project Area, approximately 4.1 miles of Mill Brook are considered eligible for Scenic classification under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and eligibility would be maintained in the project design and implementation.

Public Involvement

In addition to the March 2006 distribution of the original Mill Brook proposal to approximately 250 interested groups and individuals, the Forest Service met Selectmen from the Town of Stark to discuss the proposal. The Selectmen voiced concerns about erosion along Mill Brook and past and potential flooding of Stark Village during high water events. They also mentioned hiking and snowshoeing use of an old road adjacent to Mill Brook by students from the Stark Elementary School.

A public field tour was conducted in June 2006 to seek further input regarding the project proposal. The group visited the watershed restoration site near Stark Village, examined several of the proposed harvest areas and one of the proposed expanded Permanent Wildlife Openings (PWOs), and hiked a short distance up the Unknown Pond Trail to discuss trailside harvest options in the area of stands proposed for treatment. A second field trip occurred in July 2006 to examine views of the Project Area from Roger's Ledge.



Public field tour of Mill Brook Project proposal in June 2006.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to accomplish resource goals and objectives to meet the overall management direction of the White Mountain National Forest as established in the Forest Plan. In particular, the project was designed to move the Forest toward habitat composition and age class objectives for Management Area (MA) 2.1 (USDA-FS, 2005a, p. 1-21) and to help achieve the following goals for MA 2.1:

- Provide high quality saw timber and other timber products on a sustained yield basis.
- Provide a balanced mix of habitat for wildlife species.
- Continue to maintain and update the Forest road inventory through monitoring and field verification.
- Manage streams at proper functioning condition to dissipate stream energy associated with high water flows, thereby decreasing erosion, reducing flood damage, and improving water quality.
- Protect, restore, or improve riparian area conditions to benefit riparian dependent resource values.

The wildlife habitat goals for the White Mountain National Forest are designed to provide diverse habitats across the Forest, including various forest types, age classes, and non-forested habitats such as openings and wetlands. The goals are defined by overall habitat composition and age class objectives as described in the Forest Plan (USDA FS 2005a pp. 1-20 – 1-21). These objectives are then applied to blocks of land called Habitat Management Units (HMUs), which range in size from 6,000 - 49,000 acres. Using HMUs as the basic planning tool for wildlife habitat diversity ensures that habitats will be well-distributed across the Forest.

Part of the analysis for a vegetation management project such as this Mill Brook Project includes an examination of the existing mix of habitats and age classes in the HMU, and an assessment of the land's potential for providing the desired habitat diversity. Specific HMU objectives are developed by "land capability," defined as the inclination of the land to grow hardwoods, spruce-fir, or some other forest type given the soil type, climate, and geology of the area.

Field visits and HMU data analysis of land capabilities for the Mill Brook Project Area identified opportunities to move toward overall Forest habitat objectives by increasing regeneration age class northern hardwoods, favoring spruce/fir on suitable sites, and expanding permanent wildlife openings. The Forest goal for PWOs is to maintain or slightly increase acreage and to increase quality where possible (USDA-FS, 2005b, p 3-98; USDA-FS, 2005c, p 4).

Many of the forest stands proposed for harvest were partially harvested more than fifteen years ago and are once again ready for treatment. The silvicultural treatment would not only provide commercial value, but also create small and large openings in the forest to allow regeneration of trees and other vegetation, provide additional growing space to enhance crown and bole development, and encourage the establishment of shade-intolerant species to become established in the understory.

This project proposal includes some watershed restoration at two locations along Mill Brook. The purpose of these actions is to restore the beneficial functions of the Mill Brook floodplain within the National Forest and reduce the erosion potential of old road beds within the Mill Brook riparian area. Local concerns have been voiced regarding recent erosion of an “Old Road” (See Project Map) adjacent to Mill Brook approximately ½ mile upstream of Stark. Site investigations by Forest specialists suggested that past filling of side channels (secondary flood channels) with a rock barrier has caused high water to escape the stream bank into the “Old Road” causing erosion. There is concern that larger floods could cause Mill Brook to cut a new main channel within the road corridor, increasing the potential risk of flood damage to the residents of Stark.

A short segment of road 2204 (See Project Map and photo below) has been washed out by Mill Brook. Mill Brook is now using approximately 200’ of this roadbed as a side channel. There is concern that during high flows more of the roadbed could be eroded causing large sediment inputs to Mill Brook.



Washed out section of road 2204, Mill Brook is to the left.

In conjunction with analyzing opportunities to accomplish our vegetation, wildlife habitat and aquatic 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. Our goal is to maintain a road system that is safe, affordable, responsive to public needs, meets forest and wildlife management goals, and has minimal adverse ecological effects. Proposed changes in our road system are described in the Proposed Action and Table 3.

Proposed Action

Vegetation

The following activities are proposed to achieve the Purpose and Need and move the Mill Brook Project Area toward the Forest Plan’s desired condition (Table 1).

Table 1. Proposed Activities for the Mill Brook Project

Proposed Activity	Total Amount*
Timber Harvest	Acres
Clearcut and Patchcut	
• Northern hardwood	47
• Expand Permanent Wildlife Openings (PWOs)	9
Group Selection Cut	317
Individual Tree Selection and Group Selection Cut	341
Overstory Removal	37
Improvement Cut	315
Transportation	Miles
Miles of Road Restoration; FR 11A (Peps Landing), FR 11E (Pucci), FR 200 (Hickey Brook), 2203, U-0014, Old Road.	3.5
Permanent Wildlife Opening Maintenance	Acres
Prescribed burning, hand brushing and/or mowing of existing and expanded PWOs every 3-5 years	11

* Numbers are approximate

The Proposed Action is to harvest timber on approximately 1,066 acres, expand an existing one-acre PWO to a total of 5 acres and convert an existing one-acre landing to a 6-acre PWO (See Table 2). Stand 3-13a adjacent to the existing landing would have the stumps removed and be maintained through mowing, prescribed burning and/or hand brushing. Stand 2-29a would not have stumps removed and would be maintained through prescribed burning and/or hand brushing. Maintenance of both wildlife openings would occur every three to five years.

Seven existing and five new landings would be required for timber harvest activities. Proposed roads for restoration would require minimum road restoration (installation of temporary culverts, one temporary bridge, brushing, and shaping road surface), and upon completion of the harvesting would be waterbarred and closed, with the exception of FR 11E which would remain open to camp lessees along that road. No new road construction would occur.

Table 2. Proposed Stands and their Harvest Treatment for Mill Brook VMP

Std (Stand), **Cover Type**, **Acres**, **Vol** (Volume), **SO** (Season of Operation), **Rx** (Stand Prescription), and **Treatment Objective by Stand**. Stand prescription codings are: **111** (Patch Clearcut), **113** (Regeneration Cut), **141** (Overstory Removal), **152** (Group Selection), **153** (Individual Tree Selection and Group Selection), and **210** (Improvement Cut). 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) is: **Summer (S)**- 6/30-8/1, **Fall (F)** -8/1-10/15 and **Winter (W)**-12/15-3/20.

Std	Cover Type	Acres*	Total Vol (MBF)*	SO	Rx	Treatment Objective
Compartment 2						
10	Northern Hardwood	29	70	F/W	153	Enhance age class diversity
12	Northern Hardwood	32	80	F/W	153	Enhance age class diversity
16	Northern Hardwood	83	205	F/W	210	Improve stand quality
19	Northern Hardwood	25	125	W	153	Enhance age class diversity, perpetuate spruce/fir
24	Spruce/Fir	32	60	W	153	Perpetuate spruce-fir
29a	Northern Hardwood	4	35	S/F/W	111	Permanent Wildlife Opening expansion
30	Northern Hardwood	56	170	F/W	153	Enhance age class diversity, perpetuate spruce/fir
34b	Northern Hardwood	29	205	F/W	113	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
34d	Northern Hardwood	113	280	F/W	210	Improve stand quality
34e	Northern Hardwood	204	285	F/W	152	Enhance age class diversity
35a	Northern Hardwood	18	125	S/F/W	113	Wildlife habitat (northern hardwood regeneration)
35b	Northern Hardwood	81	40	F/W	152	Perpetuate yellow birch and spruce/fir
38	Paper Birch	32	225	W	141	Release spruce-fir understory
45	Northern Hardwood	84	250	F/W	153	Enhance age class diversity
59	Northern Hardwood	79	195	S/F/W	210	Improve stand quality
63	Northern Hardwood	21	65	F/W	153	Perpetuate northern hardwood

Std	Cover Type	Acres*	Total Vol (MBF)*	SO	Rx	Treatment Objective
Compartment 3						
13a	Northern Hardwood	5	50	F/W	111	Permanent Wildlife Opening expansion
16a	Spruce/Fir	5	60	W	141	Release spruce-fir understory
31	Mixedwood	40	120	W	210	Improve stand quality
36	Northern Hardwood	47	165	W	153	Enhance age class diversity
Compartment 4						
15	Northern Hardwood	29	100	W	153	Improve stand quality
34	Northern Hardwood	18	65	W	153	Enhance age class diversity
TOTALS		1,066	2,975			

* Numbers are approximate

Watershed Restoration

Two watershed restoration projects are proposed in the Mill Brook watershed. The first project includes obliterating or roughening approximately 500' of the Old Road to restore the floodplain. A variety of woody debris would be placed along the obliterated road bed and vegetation would be restored through planting and mulching. Side channel rock barriers would be lowered to relieve the main channel of high stream flows during flood events. This proposal includes wood being secured to this side channel to facilitate sediment deposition (build up elevation) and prevent the side channel from becoming the primary channel. Lastly, undersize box culverts and round pipes would be removed from the Old Road and replaced with waterbars to prevent potential washouts of the road.

The second watershed restoration project would involve placement of wood in a side channel which has formed on the roadbed of road 2204 (See Project Map) to ensure it does not become the main channel. Woody debris of all shapes and sizes would be obtained from the immediate area if possible and be placed with hand crews and/or machinery.

Roads Analysis Proposals

As part of meeting the Transportation System objective to decommission unneeded roads throughout the Forest (USDA-FS, 2005a, p.1-17), a Roads Analysis was performed for the Mill Brook Project Area. This analysis identified several roads not needed for present or future

management activities as well as discrepancies in length and classification between the Forest Roads database and roads as they exist on the ground.

The Forest Service has updated terminology for forest roads following new Travel Management Rule guidelines incorporated last summer. Under these guidelines, Classified Roads are now called Forest Roads and Unclassified Roads are now known as Unauthorized Roads. Table 3 presents adjustments to the database to mirror what is on the ground. No new road construction would occur. See Project Map for road locations.

- **Decommissioned Roads** are closed permanently and allowed to revegetate.
- **Forest Roads** are permanent, and may be opened year-round or intermittently as needed.
- **Unauthorized Roads** are those which exist on the ground but are not currently Forest Roads. Our objective is to eliminate *Unauthorized Roads* by deciding whether they should become a *Forest Road* or *Decommissioned*.
- **Maintenance Level (ML):**
ML1: Assigned to intermittent service roads during the time they are closed to vehicular traffic. Basic custodial maintenance is performed to protect resources to maintain the road for future use.

ML2: Assigned to roads open for use by high clearance vehicles.

ML3: Assigned to roads open and maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car.

Table 3: Roads within the Mill Brook Inventory

Forest Road (FR) Number and Name	Forest Roads Database Classification and Mileage	Proposed Actions to Existing Roads	Rationale
FR 11 Mill Brook (Stark) Road	Forest Road, ML 3 4.7 miles	None	No change
FR 11A Stark Spur A / Peps Landing	Forest Road, ML 1 1.0 miles	Designate 2.1 miles as ML 1	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management
FR 11E Stark Spur E / Pucci	Forest Road, ML 1 0.5 miles	Designate as ML 2	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management and camp owner use
FR 199 Hickory Brook	Forest Road, ML 1 1.7 miles	Designate 1.0 miles as ML 2	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management
		Decommission 0.7 miles	Not needed for long-term use

Forest Road Number and Name	Forest Roads Database Classification and Mileage	Proposed Actions to Existing Roads	Rationale
FR 200 Hickey Brook	Forest Road, ML 1 0.4 miles	Designate 0.2 miles as ML 1	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management
		Decommission 0.2 miles	Not needed for long term use
2203	Unauthorized Road 0.5 miles	Designate 0.1 miles as ML 1	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management
		Decommission 0.4 miles	Not needed for long term use
2204	Unauthorized Road 0.3 miles	Designate 0.3 miles as ML 1*	Database adjustment, camp owner use
		Decommission 0.02 miles	Not needed for long term use
2205.1	Unauthorized Road 0.6 miles	Designate as ML 1*	Possible future access to Forest Service lands
2205.2	Unauthorized Road 0.6 miles	Designate as ML 1	Access to stands for long-term vegetative management
2400	Unauthorized Road 0.4 miles	Designate 0.6 miles as ML 1	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management
U-0014	Unauthorized Road 0.6 miles	Designate 0.2 miles as ML 1	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management,
		Decommission 0.4 miles	Not needed for long term use
U-1003	Unauthorized Road 0.2 miles	Designate as ML 2	Database adjustment, camp owner use
Old Road	Unauthorized Road 1.2 miles	Designate .1 miles @ north end as ML 1	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management
		Designate .4 miles @ south end as ML 1	Database adjustment, access to stands for long-term vegetative management
		Decommission .7 miles in middle	Not needed for long term use

* Classification to occur on private ownership

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 Mill Brook Project toward the Desired Condition 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. Would the proposed project have any significant environmental impact to warrant further analysis in an environmental impact statement?
4. Does the project require a Forest Plan amendment?

How Are You Involved In The Decision?

We are soliciting your comments to help define key 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 Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project will be documented in an environmental assessment and a decision is expected in the summer of 2007.

Before a decision is made on this project, you will be given the opportunity to comment on the draft Environmental Assessment (30-Day Comment Period). If you provide comments or express interest in this 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 March 12, 2007 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: Mill Brook, c/o Katherine W. Stuart

By e-mail – comments-eastern-white-mountain-androscoggin@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: Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project.
- Site specific comments about the Mill 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, NEPA Coordinator, 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.

References

USDA-Forest Service, 2005a. White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Laconia, NH.

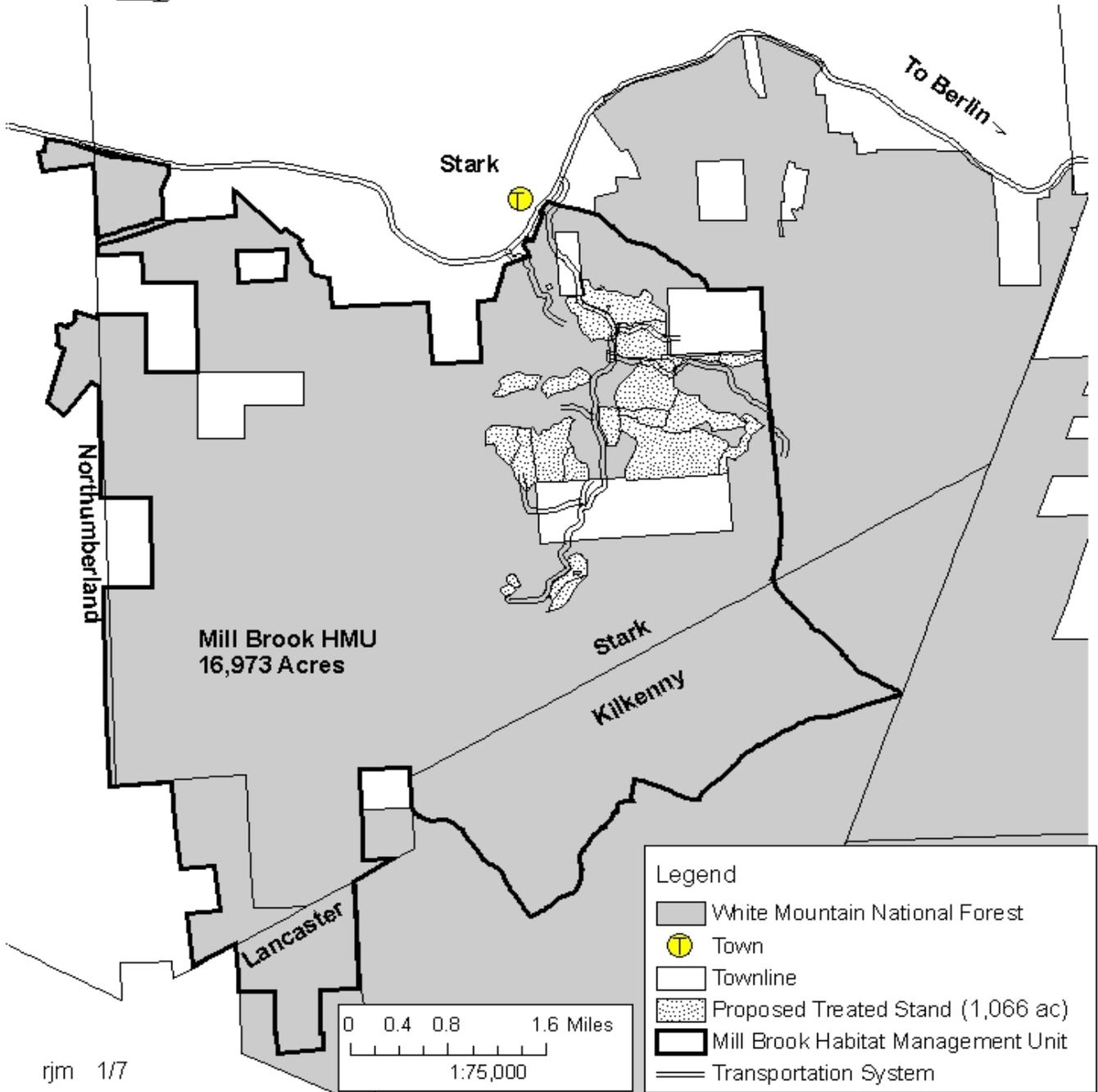
USDA-Forest Service, 2005b. Final Environmental Impact Statement for White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Laconia, NH.

USDA-Forest Service, 2005c. White Mountain National Forest, Rationale Document for Wildlife, 20pp.



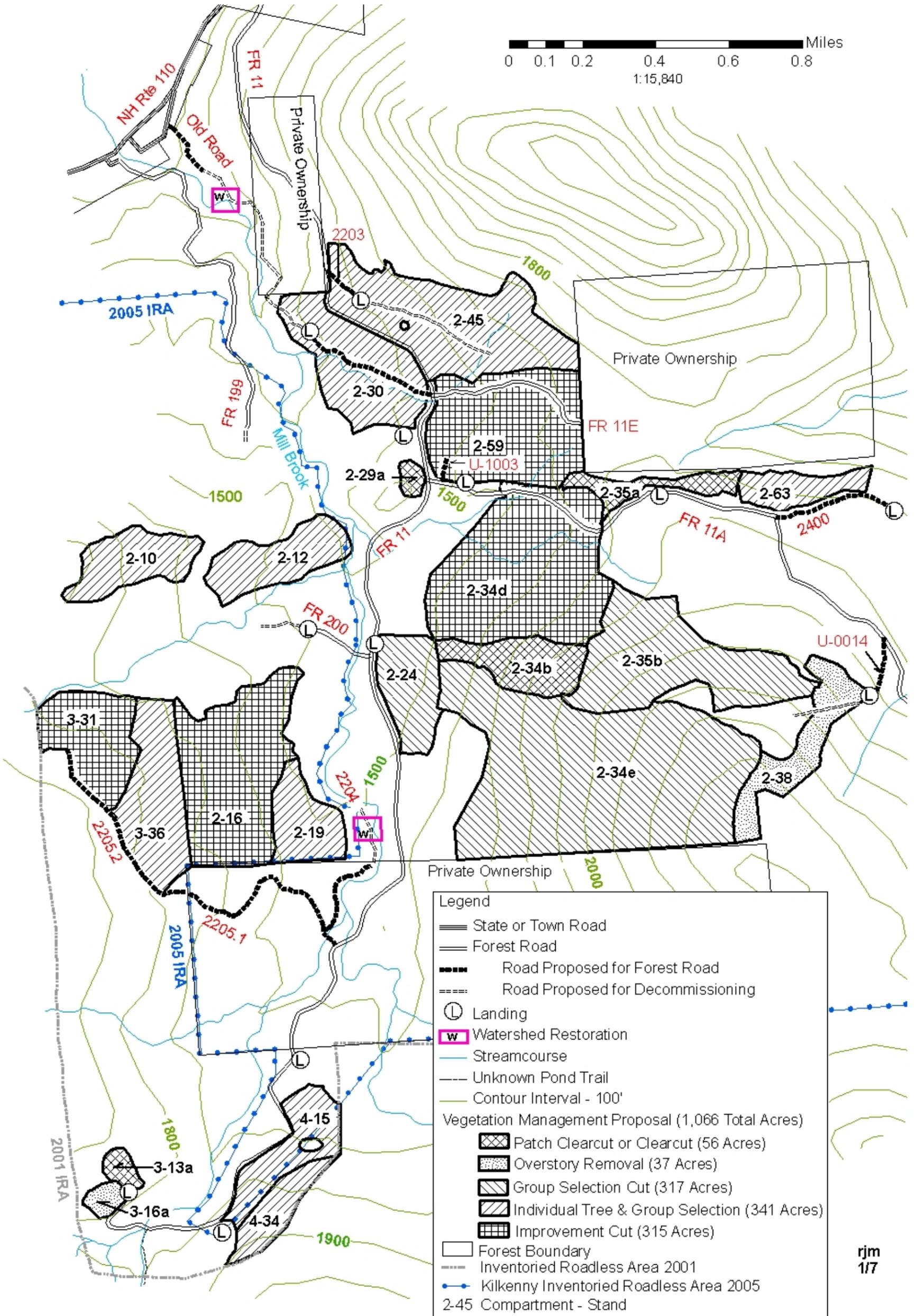
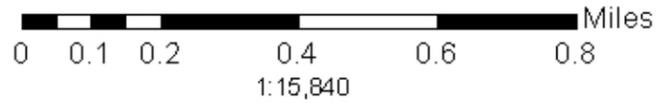
Vicinity Map

Proposed Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project
White Mountain National Forest
Androscoggin Ranger District
Towns of Kilkenny, Lancaster, Northumberland & Stark
Coos County, New Hampshire



Project Map

Proposed Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project
 White Mountain National Forest
 Androscoggin Ranger District
 Town of Stark
 Coos County, New Hampshire



Legend

- State or Town Road
- Forest Road
- Road Proposed for Forest Road
- Road Proposed for Decommissioning
- Ⓛ Landing
- Ⓜ Watershed Restoration
- Streamcourse
- Unknown Pond Trail
- Contour Interval - 100'

Vegetation Management Proposal (1,066 Total Acres)

- ▨ Patch Clearcut or Clearcut (56 Acres)
- ▩ Overstory Removal (37 Acres)
- ▧ Group Selection Cut (317 Acres)
- ▦ Individual Tree & Group Selection (341 Acres)
- ▤ Improvement Cut (315 Acres)

□ Forest Boundary
 --- Inventoried Roadless Area 2001
 ● Kilkenney Inventoried Roadless Area 2005
 2-45 Compartment - Stand

rjm
117

**Mill Brook Vegetation Management Project
Androscoggin Ranger District – White Mountain National Forest**

Let us know if you want to stay informed about this project.

Please return by March 12, 2007

If you do not return this form or contact us, you will be removed from this project mailing list (but you will remain on the master list for future projects).

To Stay Informed as the Mill Brook Environmental Analysis Continues
Please Choose either Part A -- **OR** -- Part B

A. Email notification

Send email notification when the Mill Brook draft environmental assessment (30-Day Comment Period) and final decision documents are available at:

<www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain/projects/projects>

My email address is:

You can request hardcopy documents after viewing them online if necessary.

B. Project Information by Mail.

Check the **notices** you want to receive in the mail (you can request the full documents at any time):

- A letter that the draft environmental assessment is available for review
- A letter summarizing the final decision

Or, choose to receive the full **documents** in the mail:

- Draft environmental assessment (100+ pages)
- Final environmental assessment (100+ pages)
- Final decision notice (30+ pages)

Please print clearly or affix a return address label:

Name _____

Address _____

From: _____

STAMP

Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest
300 Glen Road
Gorham, NH 03581