



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White Mountain National Forest
Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset
Ranger District

1171 NH Route
Holderness, NH 03245
Comm: (603) 536-1315
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File Code: 1950

Date: June 13, 2005

Dear Planning Participant,

The Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest is initiating an environmental analysis process for a proposed action to address stocking and regeneration conditions in a 65-acre stand of northern hardwoods located off of NH Route 115 in the Town of Carroll, Coos County, New Hampshire.

Project Area

The Owlshead Project Area is located in the Town of Carroll, Coos County New Hampshire. It is located on the east side of NH Route 115. The Project Area is within Compartment 11, Stand 1 in Habitat Management Unit 105. It is within Management Area 2.1. The treatment area is a 65-acre, northern hardwood stand, on the lower north slope of Cherry Mountain. Sugar maple and white ash are the primary tree species present. Co-dominant trees range from fourteen to sixteen inches on average, with larger white ash and sugar maple present. Soils on the site are naturally enriched with calcium. This creates a condition that is ideal for growing sugar maple and white ash under uneven aged conditions. That is high risk; poor quality and mature trees are periodically harvested, providing space and light to grow replacement trees.

Stocking was reduced through single tree selection in 1984 with the Mount Martha Sale. New tree regeneration has become established. Stand density and canopy closure have increased through growth over time. Past reduction in stocking allowed the residual stand to grow rapidly, increasing the size of tree crowns. At the same time new tree regeneration developed utilizing light provided through space created by harvesting trees. The forested canopy is now beginning to close, restricting sunlight needed by the regeneration. Herbaceous plants are limited to a few hardy shade tolerant plants species. A balance has been reached where additional growth will result in a reduction of understory trees and plants due to lack of sunlight.

Reducing stand density by selectively harvesting high risk, low quality, and mature trees would promote future growth and health of existing seedling and sapling trees in the understory. The future stand will appear very similar to its current condition, except that it will be more open and regeneration will be more vigorous. Additional sunlight reaching the forest floor will help new maple and ash seedlings to become established.



Purpose and Need

The purpose of this proposed project is to implement Forest Plan direction in the Owlshead Project Area by addressing site-specific needs and opportunities to move the area from the existing condition towards the desired condition. This can be accomplished by implementing activities approved in the Forest Plan (vegetation management).

An interdisciplinary team has identified site-specific needs for natural resource management that would change or enhance the present conditions and move the Project Area toward the desired condition described in the Forest Plan, as amended (pp. III-30 through III-41).

The need for change is determined by comparing desired conditions in the Forest Plan with the existing conditions in the Project Area. The Forest Plan provides desired conditions for even and uneven-aged management systems for management areas 2.1 and 3.1 and for Habitat Management Unit by even- and uneven-aged management systems. The even-aged and uneven-aged desired conditions apply to the Forest as a whole and are not prorated for each Project Area (Forest Plan, pp. III-32 & III-38).

Existing resource conditions in the Owlshead Project Area were evaluated against the Forest Plan desired condition. Based on Forest Plan goals and objectives and the differences between existing conditions and desired conditions, several needs and opportunities for the Project Area have been identified. The following list describes the “needs for change” identified for the Owlshead Project Area that would meet the project’s purpose of implementing the Forest Plan. Protecting riparian values, maintaining and protecting habitat for proposed, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, and maintaining healthy and resilient watershed into the future have been and will continue to be primary considerations in management of the Owlshead Project Area.

- Within the project area, overstory tree stocking is approaching a level that will retard or reduce stocking of understory vegetation.
- Congress annually funds the Forest Service to provide commercial timber within the capability of the lands and individual Forest Plans. The White Mountain National Forest Plan allocates land for sustainable wood production (MAs 2.1 and 3.1). People’s demand for hardwood and other wood products continues to be high, which supports the need to supply this renewable resource. Projects such as this, which supply wood products, provide a means to satisfy people’s demand for wood and contribute to the economic viability of local communities (Forest Plan, III-3 and III-30).

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to selectively harvest individual trees based on their condition to a specified stand density. This would still be a well-stocked stand and future harvests would occur in 10-15 year intervals on a sustained basis. The harvest would release both white ash and sugar maple saplings and seedlings. The residual stand would also increase the vigor due to decreased competition for available resources.

Access is from NH Route 115 near the Town borders of Jefferson and Carroll on an existing truck road that was used in the 1984 Mount Martha Sale. A suitable landing is located approximately 400 feet in from NH Route 115 and was also used in the previous harvest. The road is suitable for a tri-axle log truck and the operation would be limited to this size vehicle. A

previously used road system would be used to access the interior of the stand. The project would be completed within one normal winter harvest season unless unusual weather conditions prevented this.

Based on your input, on the recommendations of an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists, and on the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as the Responsible Official, I will decide:

- 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);
- Whether there is sufficient information and analysis to make a decision to implement the proposed project;
- What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements will help assure the proposed project meets 1986 Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources; and
- Whether a Forest Plan amendment will be required to accommodate this project.

All or part of this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement under FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.2-12, Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. Under the new regulations for Notice, Comment and Appeal Procedures for National Forest System Projects and Activities; Final Rule (36 CFR 215), projects that qualify for this categorical exclusion are not eligible for comment or appeal following publication of a Decision Memo. Accordingly, this may represent your only opportunity to provide formal comment on this project. Once the level of documentation is determined and the analysis completed, copies will be mailed to people who submit comments before or during this scoping period and to people who request copies.

How You Can Submit Comments

Comments should be directed to Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset District Ranger John Serfass as follows:

- Letters should be submitted to John Serfass, District Ranger, Attn: Owlshead Project – 1171 NH Route 175, Holderness NH 03245. Hand delivered letters should be submitted during these office hours: Monday through Friday, 8:00am-4:30pm, excluding holidays;
- FAX comments should be sent to 603-536-5147
- E-mail comments should include an identifiable name and be sent to: dbatchelder@fs.fed.us. Comments submitted as electronic documents must be in plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rft) or Word (.doc) format.
- Oral comments may be submitted Monday through Friday 8:00am to 4:30pm, either by phone (603-536-1315) or in person.
- The scoping comment period closes July 15, 2005. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by this date.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this process. You have received this mailing because of your past interest in this type of project on the White Mountain National Forest. You may have also received it because you own property near the Project Area. Your comments and involvement are important to me. If you have any questions please contact Dave Batchelder at 603-536-1315. I look forward to hearing from you.

This information document will be available on the White Mountain National Forest web site (www.fs.fed.us/r9/white).

Sincerely,

JOHN J. SERFASS
District Ranger

Encl.