

1.0
DECISION MEMO
OWLSHEAD PROJECT (61 ACRE SINGLE-TREE SELECTION)

USDA Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest
Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District
Town of Carroll, Coos County, New Hampshire

2.0 DECISION

Background

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. In accordance with the the Land and Resource Management Plan for the White Mountain National Forest, it is managed as 2.1 lands (III-30 -35). The treatment area is 61-acres of a northern hardwood stand, on the lower northwestern 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.

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 450 feet in from NH Route 115 and was also used in the previous harvest. The road to the landing will be closed following its use. The road is suitable for a tri-axle log truck and the operation would be limited to this size vehicle. A previously established skid 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.

Stocking was reduced through single tree selection in 1984 with the Mount Martha Sale. Over the last nineteen years 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. The forested canopy is now beginning to close, restricting sunlight needed by the regeneration. Additional growth will result in a reduction of understory trees and plants due to lack of sunlight.

Decision

My decision is to selectively treat 61 acres, similar to the previous treatment, leaving approximately two-thirds of the existing trees. The trees to be removed will be those that are mature or demonstrate poor form, disease, or susceptibility to secondary agents due to over-competition. The residual stand will be relatively uniform in its tree spacing. Additional sunlight reaching the forest floor will help new maple and ash seedlings to become established. The residual stand would also increase the vigor due to decreased competition for available resources. A well-stocked stand would result after harvest completion and future harvests would occur in 15-20 year intervals on a sustained basis. The harvest would release both white ash and sugar maple saplings and seedlings.

This Decision is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is within one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest

Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 section 31.2-12, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

A. Category of Exclusion

The appropriate category of exclusion for the proposed action is section 31.2-12 of the FSH 1909.15, which states, “Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. Do not use this category for even-aged regeneration harvest or vegetation type conversion. The proposed action may include incidental removal of trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing. Examples include but are not limited to:

- a. Removal of individual trees for sawlogs, specialty products or fuelwood.
- b. Commercial thinning of overstocked stands to achieve the desired stocking level to increase health and vigor.”

B. Rationale for using Category 31.2 -12

The reasons for choosing this category are straight forward:

- The proposed action proposes to selectively cut less than 70 acres;
- no temporary road construction is proposed;
- the proposed selective cut is not an even-aged regeneration harvest or a vegetation type conversion;
- the proposed action will include incidental removal of trees for landings and skid trails; and
- the selective cut prescribed will serve to achieve desired stocking levels and increase health and vigor for the stand.

No other categories of exclusion established by the Secretary of Agriculture or Chief of the Forest Service are appropriate for this proposed action.

C. Extraordinary Circumstances

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed or Sensitive Species or Designated Critical Habitat

The activities planned for this project will not adversely affect the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species’ designated critical habitat. Accordingly, this action will have ‘no effect’ on Threatened, Endangered, or proposed species or their critical habitats.

The Forest Botanist conducted a site specific survey (June 2004) and documented Squirrel corn in the project area. Squirrel corn is a plant that the Regional Forester has identified population viability as a concern for the species. Squirrel corn was the only Region 9 Sensitive Species documented in the project area. It was determined (Biological Evaluation) that winter harvest only for this project will cause “no impact” to Squirrel corn. Accordingly, this decision will have “no impact’ on R-9 sensitive species.

Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds: Executive Order 11988 requires Federal agencies to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, “the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters

including flood-prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that areas subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any one year.” The project is not located in or near floodplains. This decision will not affect floodplains.

Executive order 11990 requires Federal agencies to avoid impacts associated with destruction or modifications of wetlands. Wetlands are defined by this order as, “...areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction.” The project is not located in or near wetlands or a municipal water supply. Accordingly this decision will not affect wetlands or any municipal water supply.

Congressionally Designated Areas (Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas): The project area is not located in or near any congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National Recreation Areas, or any other congressionally designated areas. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect any Congressionally Designated Areas.

Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs): The project area is not within the boundaries of the Forest Plan Revision Inventoried Roadless Areas. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect any IRAs.

Research Natural Areas: There are no Research Natural Areas in the project area. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect any Research Natural Areas.

American Indians and Alaska Native Religious or Cultural Sites: The project area has been surveyed (June 2005) for cultural and historic resources. No sites have been located in the immediate project area. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, should not affect any American Indians, Alaska Native Religious or Cultural Sites. If, in the course of any project activity, previously unknown sites or artifacts were to be located, activities would stop immediately in that location. The Forest archaeologist would be called in to evaluate the finds and make recommendations on how to proceed.

Archaeological Sites or Historic Properties: The project area has been surveyed (June 2005) for cultural and historic resources. No sites have been located in the immediate project area. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, should not affect any Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties. If, in the course of any project activity, previously unknown sites or artifacts were to be located, activities would stop immediately in that location. The District heritage paraprofessional or Forest archaeologist would be called in to evaluate the finds and make recommendations on how to proceed.

3.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement was conducted with a project scoping report and letter that went to approximately 100 interested individuals and agencies, and 25 additional letters were sent to adjacent landowners. The scoping letters were mailed on June 13, 2005. Four comments were received. Public recommendations included placement of a rock barrier when harvested is complete to discourage unwarranted use by the public and sale administration oversight that will ensure protection of Squirrel corn documented within the project area. The comments were appreciated and have been incorporated into project design.

4.0 FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including:

National Forest Management Act: The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires specific determinations in the Record of Decision, including consistency with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the WMNF. The Forest Plan was approved in 1986. It has since been amended eight times. The amended plan provides guidance for all natural resource management activities on the Forest. The Act requires that all projects and activities be consistent with the Forest Plan. This decision is consistent with the standards and guidelines contained in the Forest Plan for Management Area 2.1 (Forest Plan III-30-35). Accordingly, this decision complies with the Forest Plan and NFMA.

National Environmental Policy Act: This Decision has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Executive Order 12898 – Environmental Justice:

This order requires consideration of whether projects would disproportionately impact minority or low income populations. The project area does not qualify as an Environmental Justice community and accordingly this decision will not adversely impact minority or low-income populations.

Clean Water Act: This Act was established to restore and maintain the integrity of waters. This decision in accordance with the Forest Plan and Best Management Practices serves to ensure protection of soil and water resources.

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented after August 26, 2005.

6.0 ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f).

7.0 CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Dave Batchelder, Project Team Leader, Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District, 1171 NH RT 175, Holderness, NH 03245. Dave can be reached at 603-536-1315; TTY at 603-536-3281; or E-mail: dbatchelder@fs.fed.us.

8.0 SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment, as it is one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 section 31.2-12 and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Planning Record.

/s/ JOHN J. SERFASS

DATE August 26, 2005

JOHN J. SERFASS
District Ranger

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