



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White Mountain National Forest
Pemigewasset Ranger District

1171 NH Route 175
Holderness, NH 03245-5031
Comm: (603) 536-1315
TTY: (603) 536-3281

File Code: 1950-1

Date: September 10, 2008

Dear Planning Participant:

This letter is to invite you to provide written comments on proposed actions described in the attached Pipeline/Haystack Snowmobile Connector Project 30-Day Comment Report. The project proposes construction of an approximately 1.2 mile snowmobile connector trail on White Mountain National Forest land in the Haystack Road area in the town of Bethlehem, NH. This trail will connect the Corridor 11 trail to a deeded snowmobile right of way trail on private land, ensuring long-term snowmobile access to the community of Twin Mountain.

This comment period gives the public the opportunity to provide meaningful input on this environmental analysis before I make a final decision.

A Legal Notice of the 30-day comment period for this Report is being published in the *Manchester Union Leader*. The 30-Day Comment Report is also posted on the White Mountain National Forest web page:

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

The 30-day comment period begins on the day of publication in the newspaper of record, the *Manchester Union Leader*. If you file comments during this 30-day comment period, you will be eligible to file an administrative appeal of the Pipeline/Haystack Snowmobile Connector Project.

If you wish to submit comments regarding the Pipeline/Haystack Snowmobile Connector Project, please follow the guidelines at the end of the comment report. Comments received during this 30-day comment period will be considered by the Responsible Official and need to be specific to the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider (36 CFR 215.2). For more information, you may contact Kori Marchowsky or me at the address and phone number listed in the letterhead.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

MOLLY FULLER
District Ranger



White Mountain National Forest



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

**Eastern
Region**



Pipeline/Haystack Snowmobile Connector

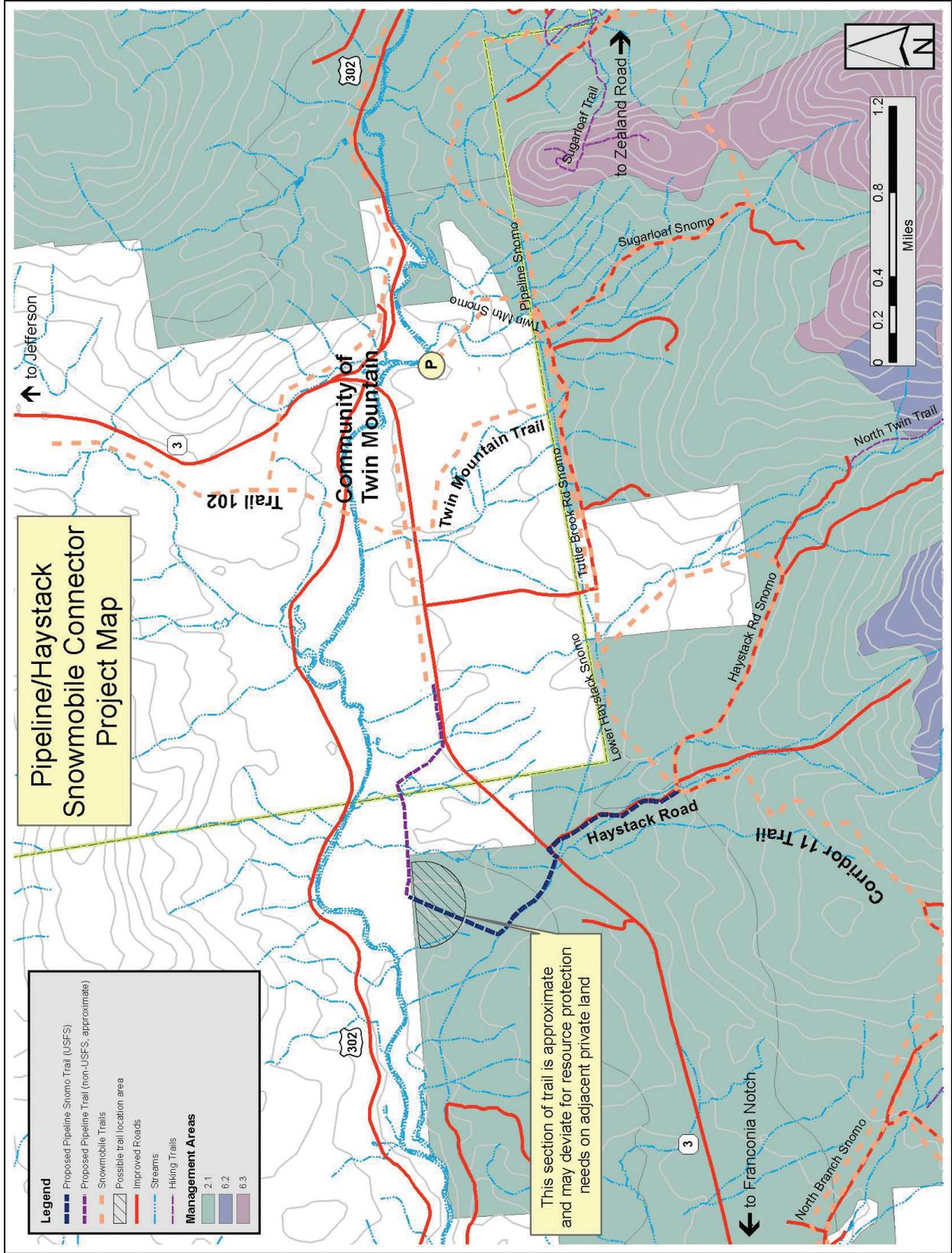
30-Day Comment Report

Town of Bethlehem
Grafton County, NH

Pemigewasset Ranger District
September 2008



For Information Contact: Kori Marchowsky
Pemigewasset Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest
1171 Route 175
Holderness, NH 03245
(603) 536-1315, ext. 4014
FAX (603) 536-5147



Introduction

The Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) is initiating a public 30-day comment period for the construction of a snowmobile trail connector on WMNF land in the town of Bethlehem, New Hampshire. This report includes the purpose and need for the project, a description of the proposed action, the decision to be made, and information on how you can submit comments to the Forest Service. The enclosed map displays the proposed relocation area.

Background

Currently, there are about 400 miles of snowmobile trail on the WMNF in New Hampshire and Maine. They form a network of trails that connect to and include the major corridor routes of the two states. Although the snowmobile trails on the National Forest are only a small part of the state-wide and region-wide systems (New Hampshire has almost 7,000 miles of snowmobile trails; Maine has 13,000 miles), the location of the Forest, covering a large portion of central New Hampshire, makes trails on National Forest critical links in the larger network. The states of Maine and New Hampshire are major partners in providing snowmobile opportunities on the Forest. Local snowmobile clubs and the respective state agencies maintain many of the trails.

Snowmobiling is a vital component of the winter economy of the small community of Twin Mountain and much of the north country of New Hampshire. Accessibility to snowmobile trails from the community center and local establishments is important to many townspeople, recreationists and business owners. This trail project was initially proposed to District staff by the Twin Mountain Snowmobile Club. The club is committed to maintaining a connected network of snowmobile trails in the area accessible from “downtown” Twin Mountain. This proposed trail will help ensure that this connectivity is preserved.

Purpose and Need

In the Twin Mountain area, the State of NH Corridor 11 snowmobile route travels from Franconia Notch to the Zealand Road, all on the south side of US Route 3 (please refer to map). There is only one connecting trail from the Corridor 11 trail to the community of Twin Mountain (the Twin Mountain Trail), which also links Corridor 11 to Trail 102, the main snowmobile route heading north of town toward Jefferson and Whitefield, paralleling US Route 3. The existing Twin Mountain Trail link crosses several private land parcels on which the trail corridor is not permanently protected. This trail does not ensure long-term access to town. The proposed connector trail would join Corridor 11 with a permanent trail easement deeded to the State of New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development on the north side of US Route 3. This easement is for the purposes of non-motorized use and motorized “winter snow traveling” use and this resulting trail connection would mitigate any potential future access issues and ensure an important connection for the town.

The Project will meet the purpose and need specified by the Twin Mountain Snowmobile Club as well as the goals, objectives, and desired future condition of the area as specified in the WMNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) by:

- managing and maintaining snowmobile trails consistent with the Memorandum of Understanding between the State of NH and the WMNF;
- providing winter motorized recreation opportunities; and
- maintaining the White Mountain National Forest's role as part of the statewide and regional snowmobile trail network (USDA—Forest Service, 2005, p. 1-13).

The project will occur on land designated by the Forest Plan as Management Area (MA) 2.1, General Forest Management. The recreational purpose of this MA is to provide “a full mix of recreation opportunities,” including snowmobiling, as described in the Forest Plan. One objective in the Forest Plan is to “allow for a net increase of up to 20 miles of new snowmobile trails” on the WMNF. This 1.2 mile connector trail will “count” toward these 20 miles.

As is the case with other snowmobile trails in the area, the Twin Mountain Snowmobile Club will be responsible for the construction and maintenance of this connecting trail. The Forest Service will provide oversight for this project and Forest Service personnel will monitor construction and maintenance of this trail to ensure that the project is implemented and functioning to Forest standards.

Proposed Action

The proposed snowmobile trail is 1.2 miles long and begins where the Haystack Snowmobile Trail meets the Haystack Road and terminates north of US Route 3 at the Forest boundary. At this point, the trail continues on private land along a deeded right-of-way, ultimately returning to parallel Route 3 into Twin Mountain. The WMNF portion of the trail includes:

- 0.5 miles of trail along the existing Haystack Road.
- a crossing of US Route 3 at the Haystack Road/Route 3 junction.
- 0.5 miles of trail along the existing cleared pipeline right-of-way north of US Route 3.
- 0.2 miles of new trail construction to connect the pipeline with a snowmobile trail right-of-way on private land north of the Forest boundary. The exact location of this segment is approximate, pending determination of the route of least impact to the land, both on WMNF and on the right-of-way adjacent to the Forest.

The cleared water pipeline pathway over which 0.5 miles of this proposed trail would travel is operated under a Forest Service special use permit with the Bethlehem Village District (BVD). The BVD has agreed in writing to permit this use of the pipeline corridor.

Implementation would likely occur before the 2008-2009 snowmobile season, when conditions are favorable for any incidental soil disturbance.

Decisions To Be Made

After receiving your input, other public input, and recommendations from Forest resource specialists, Pemigewasset District Ranger Molly Fuller 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 Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources.

If no significant issues or extraordinary circumstances are identified, it is possible that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or environmental Impact Statement under FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.2-1, Construction and reconstruction of trails. 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, Endangered, Proposed or Sensitive Species (TEPS) and/or their Habitat

A plant survey was conducted for this project and is available in the project file. A biological evaluation by the District Biologist is in progress and will be completed for this project prior to a decision by the District Ranger. Based on preliminary assessment, it is anticipated that this project will not adversely affect any TEPSr their habitat. If the District Biologist concludes that this project will have an adverse effect on the continued existence of any TEPS, or result in adverse modification to such species' habitat, the project will be re-evaluated and either modified to eliminate any adverse effect or not implemented.

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 area subject to a one percent

or greater chance of flooding in any given year.” The Forest hydrologist is in the process of evaluating any potential effects that this decision would have on floodplains. Based on preliminary research, it is anticipated that there are not any floodplain concerns related to this project.

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.” A small portion of this project is located in a wetland adjacent to US Route 3. In accordance with Forest standards and guidelines and in coordination with the Forest Hydrologist, trail bridges will be constructed when necessary to mitigate impacts to this small wetland.

On the private land north of the Forest boundary, in the general area of the deeded right-of-way segment of this trail, numerous wetlands exist. We have intentionally allowed for some deviation in our trail alignment while a route is designated in this right-of-way. This will allow the private landowner, working with the State of NH, to have more flexibility to locate the trail out of wetland areas on his property while still aligning the trail with a proper, non-wetland location on the Forest.

Congressionally Designated Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), Research Natural Areas (RNAs)

The project area is not located in or near any congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National Recreation Areas, and is not located in or adjacent to any IRAs or RNAs. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect any of these areas (maps in project file).

Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas

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, 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 Forest archaeologist would be called in to evaluate the finds and make recommendations on how to proceed.

How to Submit Comments

Comments should be addressed to Pemigewasset District Ranger Molly Fuller as follows:

- Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, Faxed or otherwise submitted by 11:59 pm ET on the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice in the Manchester Union Leader. When the comment period ends on a Saturday, Sunday or Federal holiday, comments will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day. The publication date in the Manchester Union Leader is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. Do not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.
- Mail: Send to Kori Marchowsky, Project Team Leader, Pemigewasset Ranger Station, 1171 NH Route 175, Holderness, NH, 03245. Letters can be hand delivered Monday 9:00am-4:30pm and Tuesday through Sunday, 8:00am-4:30pm.
- FAX: Send to Attn: Kori Marchowsky at 603-536-5147.
- E-mail: Send to (comments-eastern-white-mountain-ammo-pemi@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 (603-536-1315 x4011) or in person; and must be received by close of business on the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice.

Comments should include the following information:

1. Your name, address, and, if possible, your phone number and e-mail address.
2. The title of the project you are commenting on.
3. 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.

Pursuant to a 2005 court ruling (*Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*, CIV F-03-6386 JKS), construction/reconstruction of OHV trails is subject to notice, comment, and appeal under the 36 CFR 215 rules.

In the past we offered you the opportunity to give us input on projects like this (activities qualifying for a categorical exclusion from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Impact Statement) during project development, called the scoping period. There was no additional requirement for a 30-day comment period, and decisions for these types of projects could not be administratively appealed. However a 2005 court ruling (*Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*, CIV F-03-6386 JKS) extended the requirement for formal notice, comment, and appeal to Forest Service decisions using certain categorical exclusions, including the one proposed for this project. To gather the most effective input possible on this project, we have combined the scoping period with the 30 day comment period. This single comment period is occurring at the point in the process when we have enough information to enable you to provide site specific comments. Those who submit timely comments during this 30 day comment period will be eligible to appeal the decision for the Pipeline/Haystack Snowmobile Trail Relocation project.

This document is available in large print.

Contact the

Pemigewasset Ranger District

1-603-536-1315

TTY 1-603-536-3281

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