

## **DECISION MEMO**

### **Rocky Pond Snowmobile Trail**

USDA Forest Service  
Androscoggin Ranger District, White Mountain National Forest  
Coos County, New Hampshire  
Towns of Stark and Milan  
44° 35' 28"N, 71° 20' 03"W - WEST MILAN quad

#### **Background**

The purpose for the trail is to provide motorized winter recreation opportunities consistent with the direction found in the White Mountain National Forest Land Management Plan (III-6). It would also meet objectives identified in the South Pond Opportunity Area (OA) analysis and the Kilkenny Unit Plan and Environmental Statement (II-63/G-10).

The need for this trail is to safely link the West Milan Trail and the City of Berlin (Corridor Trail NH19) to the Bell Hill Road Snowmobile Trail and the City of Groveton (Corridor Trail NH5). The trail will provide a key day loop route for the communities of Twin Mountain, Jefferson, Randolph, Gorham, Berlin, Milan, Stark, Groveton, Northumberland, and Lancaster. This route provides a one-day loop trail with the amenities of community services such as food, fuel, and lodging that would benefit from snowmobile recreation use.

The Bureau of Trails has been working on this connector route since 1982 when it successfully applied for a Highway Route 110 crossing permit from the Department of Transportation. The White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (VII-A-55) identified the need to study this route and listed 1987 as the target year to begin that analysis. All of the area snowmobile clubs and many North Pond and surrounding community residents have actively pursued this trail designation. This request developed based on historical use, community inquiry, and the Bureau of Trails active interest.

#### **Decision**

I have decided to approve the designation of approximately 5 miles of snowmobile trail on National Forest System land in the towns of Stark and Milan, Coos County, New Hampshire. Most of the trail will follow existing roads and trails requiring some reconstruction, with approximately 0.5 miles of new construction. See attached map.

This trail project is a cooperative effort between local snowmobile clubs, the State of New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development – Bureau of Trails, and the White Mountain National Forest. The Bureau of Trails will install drainage structures and complete brushing needed to establish a snowmobile trail

extending northwest from the current West Milan Trail onto Rocky Pond Road (Forest Development Road 460). The trail will utilize the already established roadbed for approximately 3 miles and then follow existing skid trails, contouring to the north near Location Hill before connecting with an existing power line. The trail follows the power line to the northwest for approximately 1500 feet where it intersects with South Pond Road (Forest Road 765). After crossing the road, the route will continue on an old road and skid trail that follows the contours to the west before turning north toward Route 110. At State Route 110 the trail leaves the National Forest.

The trail is located on terrain suitable for snowmobiling. Most of the work needed to establish and maintain the trail corridor will consist of brushing the trail and some tree removal to bring the trail width to prescribed specifications. There are several short sections that will require some excavation for the purpose of providing a level riding surface and improving drainage. On the descent toward Route 110, tree removal and grading will be required to widen switchback curves to accommodate grooming equipment and make riding easier for novice snowmobile operators.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment because this activity falls within a category of actions established by the USDA Forest Service that normally do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment. This category of actions is identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2, Category 1: construction and reconstruction of trails.

The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with the following resource conditions that may significantly affect the environment.

Resource Conditions:

- Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species; refer to the Biological Evaluation in the Project File.
- This project is not in and will not affect:
  - Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds
  - Congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas
  - Inventoried roadless areas
  - Research Natural Areas
- American Indian religious or cultural sites; archeological sites or historic properties or areas; no resources were identified; refer to the Cultural Resource Reconnaissance Report (#01-2-9) in the Project File.

### Mitigation Measures:

- A plant survey was completed in October 2001 and again in June 2003 during the spring flowering period. No plants of concern were identified.
- Any trees to be cut must be implemented between August 31 and May 15.
- Tracked equipment must stay on designated trails to minimize potential for disturbance of rare plants and habitat that might be occupied by northern bog lemming.
- Snags (ten-inch size class or above) or wildlife trees shall not be cut within 300 feet of permanent openings, ponds, lakes, beaver ponds, and wetlands greater than five acres unless they pose a safety hazard to trail users.
- If any architectural, historical, archaeological, engineering, or culturally significant resources are discovered during project implementation, the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources must be consulted for appropriate action.
- Gates shall be installed to control off-season access.
- The access trail that parallels Rocky Pond Brook (commonly called the Pearly-Lang Trail) must be permanently closed. This closure is required due to its' location adjacent to an identified deeryard that cannot support travel along both the north and west boundaries.

### **Public Involvement**

This proposal to reconstruct existing trails and old logging roads to link State snowmobile trails was listed in the White Mountain National Forest Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions on July 1, 2001. It has been listed in all subsequent editions. A public involvement (scoping) letter was mailed from the Androscoggin Ranger District to over 200 individuals on August 17, 2001. A list of those contacted through the scoping process can be found in the Project File. The letter described the proposed trail designation and requested comments and concerns from the public. The list included individuals and groups who are interested in recreation activities on the Androscoggin Ranger District and/or the White Mountain National Forest.

Thirty-nine responses were received through the scoping process. Thirty-six were strongly in favor of the trail proposal. Support for the project was received from the NH Trails Bureau, the South Pond Association, the Town of Shelburne, the Wausau Mosinee Paper Corporation, Berlin and Groveton Snowmobile Club members, area business owners, local citizens, and interested public from the New Hampshire communities of Conway, Franklin, Littleton, Laconia, Seabrook, Claremont, Dalton, Thornton, and Walpole. Comments were also received from individuals in the states of Massachusetts, Maine, and Connecticut.

The majority of opinions expressed reflected an enthusiasm for this important link geographically and economically, noting minimal environmental impact due to existing trail conditions and a limited amount of new trail construction required. There were

requests to make the trail available to cross-country skiers, but reservations expressed about access for non-winter ATV travel.

Three responses centered around a general opposition to motorized recreation on the National Forest. The concerns outlined included: law enforcement patrol capabilities to protect resources and ensure appropriate use of the trail, ability to control motorized access to frozen-ground and snow-covered trail conditions, soil stability on steep sections, proper trail maintenance, deer yard disturbance, Canada lynx habitat protection, new road construction or re-construction, sensitive plant species, negative effects on the forest ecosystem, engine noise, and increased traffic. Refer to the Scoping Response Table attached to this decision for a detailed reply to each concern. More detail can be found from the original letters in the project file.

Any trail construction will be done in accordance with snowmobile trail design standards in Forest Service Handbook 2309.18 and the Memorandum of Understanding currently in effect between the Forest Service and the State of New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED). The Forest Service and a representative from DRED will work together on the project to ensure maximum resource protection and safety. A local snowmobile club, or DRED, or a combination of both will groom and maintain the trail. The trail will be patrolled by the Forest Service.

Concerns regarding threatened, endangered, proposed, and sensitive species have been thoroughly researched and are addressed in the Biological Evaluation in the Project File. Concurrence with its' findings was obtained from both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department.

## **Findings Required by Other Laws**

### Forest Plan Direction

This decision is consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the White Mountain National Forest as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for Management Areas 2.1 and 3.1 (Forest Plan, pages III-30 to III-41) that states in part to “broaden the range of recreation options, mainly those offering roaded natural opportunities” and to “broaden the range of recreation options, mainly those offering semiprimitive motorized experience opportunities”.

### Endangered Species Act 1966

A biological review of the area was completed for this action and it was determined that no listed threatened or endangered species will be affected by this activity.

### National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

The Forest Service program for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act includes locating, inventorying, and nominating all cultural sites that may indirectly be affected by schedule activities. A cultural resource reconnaissance survey (#01-2-9) was conducted in the permit area and no cultural resources were identified.

**Implementation Date**

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately.

**Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is not subject to administrative review/appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215.8 (a) (4).

**Contact Person**

For further information regarding the actions of this decision, contact Don Muise, project leader at (603) 466-2713 ext. 214.

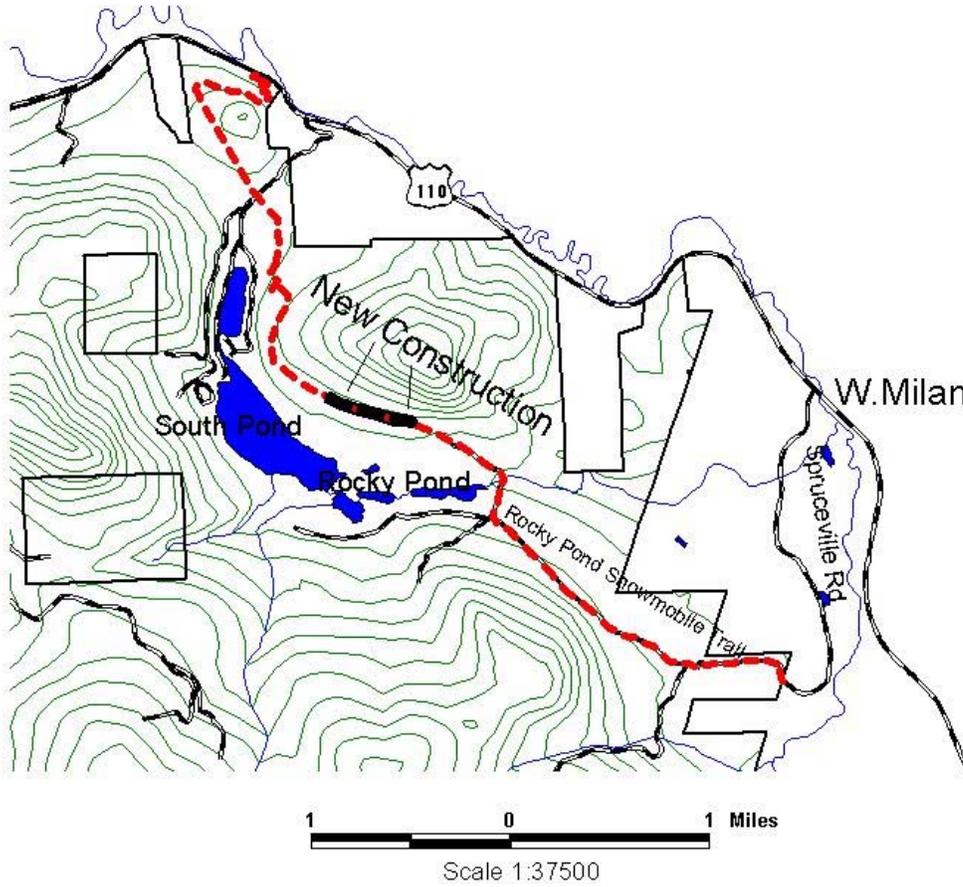
/s/ George R. Pozzuto  
GEORGE R. POZZUTO  
District Ranger

6/27/03  
DATE

Androscoggin Ranger District  
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# Rocky Pond Snowmobile Trail



-  New Construction Zone
-  Rocky Pond Snowmobile Trail
-  Roads
-  WMNF Boundary
-  Water Bodies
-  Streams
-  Contours 100ft

