



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White Mountain National Forest
Androscoggin Ranger District

300 Glen Road
Gorham, NH 03581
(603) 466-2713
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File Code: 1950

Date: August 1, 2006

Dear Interested Citizen:

I am seeking your comments on the Androscoggin Ranger District's proposal to remove hazard trees and improve stand conditions within and adjacent to the Dolly Copp and Hastings campgrounds. The project areas are located in the townships of Martins Location, Coos County, New Hampshire and Batchelders Grant, Oxford County Maine.

A detailed description of the proposal and how you can comment is included in the enclosed Settler's Vegetation Management Proposed Decision Memo (this information is also available on our website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/white_mountain/projects/projects). I will make my final decision based on public comments and analysis by resource specialists. Because the predicted environmental effects of the proposed activities are known and limited, this project is categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement as stated in Forest Service Handbook (FSH)1909.15 Section 31.12 (5): Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities; and Section 31.2 (6): Timber stand and/or wildlife improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction (Service level D, FSH 7709.56).

Given the limited scope of the proposal and the need for hazard tree removal in a timely manner, we are combining scoping and the formal 30-day comment period. Regulations (36 CFR 215) issued on June 4, 2003 allows the Forest Service to do this when a sufficiently detailed project proposal can be presented to the public which allows identification of potential issues or ideas. The Settler's Vegetation Management Proposed Decision Memo provides sufficient information to provide site specific comments.

This letter is your notice of the 30-day public comment period, which begins the day after legal notification is published in the *Manchester Union Leader* and *Lewiston Sun Journal* newspapers. More information about this public comment period and administrative appeal rights is in the enclosed Proposed Decision Memo.

Your comments and involvement are important to me. If you have any questions, please contact Pat Nasta at 603-466-2713, ext. 222. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Katherine W. Stuart

Katherine W. Stuart
District Ranger





United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

August 2006

Proposed Decision Memo

Settler's Vegetation Management Project

**Martins Location, Coos County, New Hampshire
and Batchelders Grant, Oxford County, Maine**



Prepared By
The Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest

For More Information Contact:

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This document is available in large print.

Contact the Androscoggin Ranger District Office

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**Settler’s Vegetation Management Project
Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest**

Proposed Decision Memo

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1.0 – Introduction

Dolly Copp and Hastings Campgrounds are two popular and important recreation sites on the Androscoggin Ranger District. In both the campgrounds and surrounding areas, public safety, aesthetics and forest health can be improved through the use of vegetation management which would remove hazard trees, maintain and/or increase paper birch, and promote development and growth of native midstory and understory trees in planted stands. Within this document, Section 2.0 describes our proposal for improving the current condition of the campgrounds and surrounding areas, and Section 2.1 discusses the reasons why we feel the proposed action is necessary.

2.0 Proposed Decision

I am considering approving a Decision Memo to harvest hazard trees and improve stand conditions within; (1) the Dolly Copp Campground, and (2) the Hastings Campground and an adjacent red pine stand. The Dolly Copp Campground project would harvest approximately 150,000 board feet of timber from approximately 90 acres and the Hastings Campground project would harvest approximately 60,000 board feet of timber from approximately 40 acres (See Maps 1 and 2).

The harvest would occur in the fall and winter of 2006 and/or 2007 after closure of the campgrounds. Only existing roads would be used and no additional roadwork would be required. Harvesting within the Dolly Copp Campground would occur in the fall and winter, and harvesting within and adjacent to the Hastings Campground would occur during frozen ground conditions to protect cultural resource sites.

The Dolly Copp Campground has 177 sites and is spread throughout several mixed wood stands. The silvicultural treatment for stands within this area would be to harvest groups and individual trees; individual tree selection would remove damaged and hazard trees, harvesting small groups (1/10th acre) would promote softwood regeneration, and harvesting larger groups (1/2 to 1 acre) would promote paper birch regeneration.

The Hastings Campground has 24 sites and is located within a mature white spruce stand. The silvicultural treatment for this stand would be to remove trees that currently or potentially pose a safety hazard to campers and vehicles on Route 113, as well as remove additional trees to open up the canopy and improve growing conditions for midstory and understory trees. A sufficient number of healthy white spruce trees would be retained to maintain privacy between campsites.

An eight-acre commercial thinning would occur in an overstocked red pine stand located to the west of the Wild River road (FR 12). This treatment would reduce stand density, increase growth on residual trees and provide additional sunlight to promote understory vegetation.

The harvest would be implemented with design features applied as needed to address site-specific safety or resource needs; see Appendix A.

2.1 -- Rationale for the Decision

It is the Forest Service's goal to provide a quality camping opportunity where the natural forest setting is an important part of the visitor's experience (USDA, 2005a, p. 1-13). We strive to achieve this objective by providing lower site densities with ample screening between sites. Within both campgrounds, many of the trees adjacent to campsites have reached maturity and are potential hazards to visiting campers and their property, as well as Forest Service infrastructure. Last year a significant number of hazard trees were removed within the Dolly Copp and Hastings Campground and the trees either remained on the ground or were collected for firewood. This project proposes the removal and selling of weakened, dying, and other potential hazard trees since they still contain commercial value (ie. sawlogs, pulpwood, firewood) that can be marketed.



Photo 1 Dolly Copp Campground: Damaged paper birch trees that pose a safety hazard to campers

One of the features of the Dolly Copp Campground is the diversity of vegetation. A mix of hardwoods and softwoods offers a variety of colors and texture that many visitors find aesthetically pleasing. Harvesting activities within the Dolly Copp Campground would move stands toward their natural future condition while simultaneously improving stand quality and maintaining diversity. The ecological land type (ELT) indicates that over time stands within Dolly Copp will move toward a softwood community type consisting of spruce, fir and hemlock and a component of northern hardwoods. This community type provides good screening and also provides a varied habitat for wildlife. To achieve this future condition, we are proposing small groups (1/10 acre) to regenerate softwood species.

Another reason for vegetation management in the Dolly Copp Campground is to maintain paper birch within stands. Paper birch is an early successional species that is created through disturbance such as fire, logging and agricultural practices. Dolly Copp currently has a high

amount of paper birch due to the conversion of farm fields to forest. Paper birch is a shade intolerant species and is typically maintained under even-aged management techniques. For this project we are proposing small patches (half to one acre) to mimic small scale disturbance with the intention of maintaining the aesthetic character of the forest since many people favor paper birch due to its distinct white bark and different texture. If we continue to harvest only individual trees as they become hazard trees, paper birch will eventually disappear from stands and the aesthetic component will be lost. The location of groups would be behind campsites along the western boundary of the project area and would not compromise screening and visual quality between campsites.

The area around Hastings Campground was agricultural land in the early 1900's and then converted to white spruce and red pine stands in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The white spruce is approaching over-maturity (90+ years) and is dying out at a significant rate due to being planted on a site that does not naturally favor this species. This has resulted in a high number of hazard trees in the campground each season. Because the white spruce is so dense, the existing native tree species such as sugar maple, ash, hemlock, red spruce and fir are confined to the mid and lower canopy. By removing less vigorous white spruce trees, the canopy would be opened allowing mid and understory trees to quickly move into the overstory. Over the long term, as the residual white spruce dies out an established forest will be in place and the campground can be maintained in a mature forest type. This will result in a healthier stand with good screening between campsites.



Photo 2 Hastings Campground: Planted mature white spruce with young maple and ash in the understory

A mature eight-acre red pine stand adjacent to the campground is over stocked with little to no understory vegetation. A single species stand is not a natural composition and it is desirable to move the stand toward a more natural condition of mixed softwoods and hardwoods for improved forest health. To accomplish this, we are proposing to reduce stand density which will allow sunlight to penetrate the understory, promoting a diversity of species regeneration.

We are choosing to include this stand in this project because its close proximity makes it efficient to treat this stand at the same time as the campground harvest.



Photo 3 Red Pine Stand: Mature red pine with limited understory vegetation.

The project is in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) (USDA 2005a). Internal involvement from resource specialists revealed no issues that would require further analysis or deferral of this timber harvest.

3.0 -- Location, Features, and Background

Dolly Copp Campground is located in the township of Martins Location, Coos County, New Hampshire and is within the Peabody River watershed. The area within and around the Hastings Campground is located in the township of Batchelders Grant, Oxford County, Maine, and is within the Wild River watershed. These areas are located on gently sloped ground with well drained soils. Culhane Brook flows through the Dolly Copp Campground along with several other smaller perennial and intermittent streams. Protection to Culhane Brook would follow Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for Riparian and Aquatic Habitats (Forest Plan, pages 2-24 through 2-26) which includes a minimum 25 foot “no cut” buffer along the stream bank. For intermittent streams, trees that directly provide structure to the stream banks and channels will be retained.

The harvest area around and within the Hastings Campground does not have any perennial or intermittent streams running through it. However Evans Brook and Wild River, perennial waterways, are located near the project boundaries and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for Riparian and Aquatic Habitats would be met. Protection measures include a minimum 25 foot

“no cut” buffer along both Evans Brook and Wild River. These areas are also located within the Evans Brook floodplain.

Both campgrounds are administratively designated within Management Area 2.1 – General Forest Management which allows for high-use or highly developed recreation areas and vegetation management.

Recreation trails within the Dolly Copp Campground project area include approximately 150 feet of the Daniel Webster trail (which goes up to Mount Madison) and 975 feet of the Hayes Copp ski trail (the Dolly Copp campground road in winter). There is one recreation trail within the Hastings Campground project area, the Hastings Trail is a hiking trail in summer and a snowmobile trail in winter.

4.0 – Categories of Actions Excluded from Documentation

This project falls within the categories of exclusion FSH 1909.15 Chapter 31.12 (5): Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities and 31.2 (6): Timber stand and/or wildlife improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction (Service level D, FSH 7709.56).

I find that the above categories are appropriate for this project and decision because the planned timber harvest is a small commercial timber sale that meets all of the criteria for the category and will reduce the need to harvest hazard trees in the campgrounds on a yearly basis. I have made a preliminary determination that there will be no resulting significant effects on the environment, and therefore the proposed action requires no further analysis in an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS).

4.1 -- Resource Conditions and Extraordinary Circumstances

Prior to making a final decision, analysis for this project will include on-site surveys for rare plants and heritage resources, and also determine if any extraordinary circumstances exist that could result in significant effects to the environment. In accordance with FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30, the following specific resource conditions will or have been examined:

4.1a -- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species

A Biological Evaluation (BE) of the project areas will be conducted during the 2006 field season to analyze and document the potential effects from this project on listed species and their habitat. An analysis of additional species of concern in the White Mountain National Forest will also be conducted.

Concurrence with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the BE will be conducted prior to making a final decision if the BE indicates it is necessary.

4.1b -- Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

There are no inventoried wetlands in the project areas as shown on Forest GIS database. The Hastings Campground is within the Evans Brook 100 year floodplain, but proposed activities should not affect the beneficial properties and qualities of the floodplain. Tree removal will focus on current and potential hazard trees and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines related to floodplains and riparian areas would be implemented on a project level.

None of the Settler's project areas are located within a municipal watershed.

4.1c -- Congressionally Designated Areas

The project areas are not in or near any Congressionally designated areas. The closest designated area to Dolly Copp is the Great Gulf Wilderness, located approximately 1.7 miles west of the campground. The Caribou-Speckled Mountain Wilderness is located approximately 1.3 miles east of the Hastings Campground. The proposed Wild River Wilderness Area is located approximately 4.6 miles to the west of the Hastings Campground. None of these areas would be affected by this project.

4.1d -- Inventoried Roadless Areas

The project area is not located within an Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) as identified in the Forest Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (USDA 2005a and USDA 2005b). The closest IRA to Dolly Copp Campground is the Great Gulf IRA which is located approximately 180 feet to the west. The Caribou-1 IRA is located approximately 0.4 miles east of Hastings Campground and the Wild River IRA is located approximately 250 feet west of the red pine stand. This project would not affect the roadless character of the neighboring Inventoried Roadless Areas nor would it preclude possible future Wilderness designation.

4.1e -- Research Natural Areas (RNAs)

The Forest currently has three designated Research Natural Areas – The Bowl, Alpine Garden, and Nancy Brook. None of the RNAs are near the project areas so they would not be affected.

4.1 f -- American Indians and Alaska Native Religious or Cultural Sites/Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas

Examination of cultural resources data has occurred in the spring and summer of 2006. It included field surveys, and reviews of historic maps, photographs and literature. Concurrence with both New Hampshire and Maine Historic Preservation Offices on the findings from the archeological survey on our proposed action will be required prior to making a final decision.

Design features listed in Appendix A would be employed to eliminate or lessen any impacts to undiscovered artifacts caused by the proposed activities.

5.0 -- Public Involvement

The White Mountain National Forest first listed this project in the April 2006 Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). In addition, the Proposed Decision Memo was mailed to interested and affected people and organizations and is posted on the White Mountain National Forest website for public review and comment.

6.0 -- Consistency with the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and other Applicable Laws

The proposed decision to implement the Settler's Vegetation Management Project is consistent with the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines in the Forest Plan which were designed to address specific on-the-ground activities, and all applicable regulations, laws and executive orders.

6.1 – Forest Plan

The project area is in Management Area (MA) 2.1 in the 2005 Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 2005a). The proposed on-the-ground activities comply with Forest-wide management direction as well as Management Area direction established in the Forest Plan (USDA 2005a, Ch. 2, Ch. 3 p. 3-5 through 3-8).

The Settler's vegetation project accomplishes the following recreation objectives; provide quality recreation activities and opportunities (Forest Plan, p.1-10), and provide campgrounds with ample screening between sites (Forest Plan p.1-13). It also meets the vegetation and wildlife objectives of managing vegetation using an ecological approach to provide healthy ecosystems (p 1-17) and using sustainable management practices to provide a diversity of habitats (1-20).

This project complies with Forest Service Manual direction 2300.3 which establishes public health and safety as a high priority for management of recreational sites.

7.0 -- Implementation Date

Harvest of timber will proceed after closure of the campgrounds, and timber sale preparations and contracting are complete. The timber will be offered for sale in the fall of 2006 and harvesting will likely occur in the fall and winter of 2006 and/or 2007.

8.0 – Notice, Comment, and Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

Forest Service regulation 36 CFR 215 requires that this project proposal be available for a formal 30-day comment period to enable the public to contribute comments to the project prior to a final decision.

The regulations also allow for administrative appeal of my final decision. Only individuals and organizations who submit comments or otherwise express interest in this project during this

formal 30-day comment period have standing to appeal my final decision. Comments must be received or postmarked by the end of the 30th calendar day (or the next federal business day if day 30 is a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday) following publication of the Settler's Project legal ad in the Manchester Union Leader and Lewiston Sun Journal newspapers. It is the responsibility of interested parties to respond to this notice within the established time period. Since no means of communication is perfect, please contact our '*for more information*' address if a document is not available nor delivered at the expected time, to ascertain its availability, and if necessary, arrange an alternate delivery method.

How to Comment

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information:

- 1) Name and address;
- 2) Title of the proposed action ("Settler's Vegetation Management Project")
- 3) Specific comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision and;
- 4) Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility.

For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility. Individual members of organizations must submit their own substantive comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments should be directed to the Androscoggin Ranger District, Katherine Stuart 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.
 - Letters should be submitted to Katherine Stuart, District Ranger, 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581. Office hours for those submitting hand delivered letters are Monday through Saturday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm;
 - FAX comments should be sent to 603-466-2856
 - E-mail comments should include an identifiable name and be sent to: comments-eastern-white-mountain-androscoggin@fs.fed.us
Comments submitted as electronic documents must be in plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rft) or Word (.doc) format. When you submit your comments to this e-mail address, you should receive an automated electronic acknowledgement as confirmation of receipt. If you do not receive acknowledgement, it is your responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

- Oral comments either by phone (603-466-2713 ext. 222) or in person may be submitted Monday through Friday 8:00am to 4:30pm and must be received by the close of business on the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice.

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.

9.0 -- Contact Persons

For more information, contact Katherine W. Stuart, District Ranger, or Pat Nasta, NEPA Coordinator, at 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581; (603) 466-2713 (TTY 603-466-2856); email kstuart@fs.fed.us, or pnasta@fs.fed.us.

References

USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service). 2005a. Land and Resource Management Plan. Laconia, NH: USDA-FS, Eastern Region, White Mountain National Forest.

USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service). 2005b. Final Environmental Impact Statement: White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Laconia, NH: USDA-FS, Eastern Region, White Mountain National Forest.

Appendix A -- Design Features – Settler’s Vegetation Management Project

In addition to the Standards and Guidelines in the Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 2005a Chapters 2 and 3), the following site specific **Design Features** would be used in implementing the Proposed Action. Design Features identify how particular Standards and Guidelines are applied in the project proposal. They also may be features that are not directly associated with Standards and Guidelines but will be implemented on the ground to address site-specific safety or resource needs. Design Features for the Settler’s project include:

Visuals

1. To minimize visual impacts along the Daniel Webster and Hastings hiking trails, Hastings campground road (FR 42), Route 113, the Dolly Copp campground road (FR 71)/ Hayes Copp ski trail, campsites and facilities:
 - Slash within 50 feet of these roads, trails and facilities will be lopped to a maximum 3’ height and scattered an additional 50 feet along the road and trail.
 - Stumps will be no taller than 14".

Cultural Resources

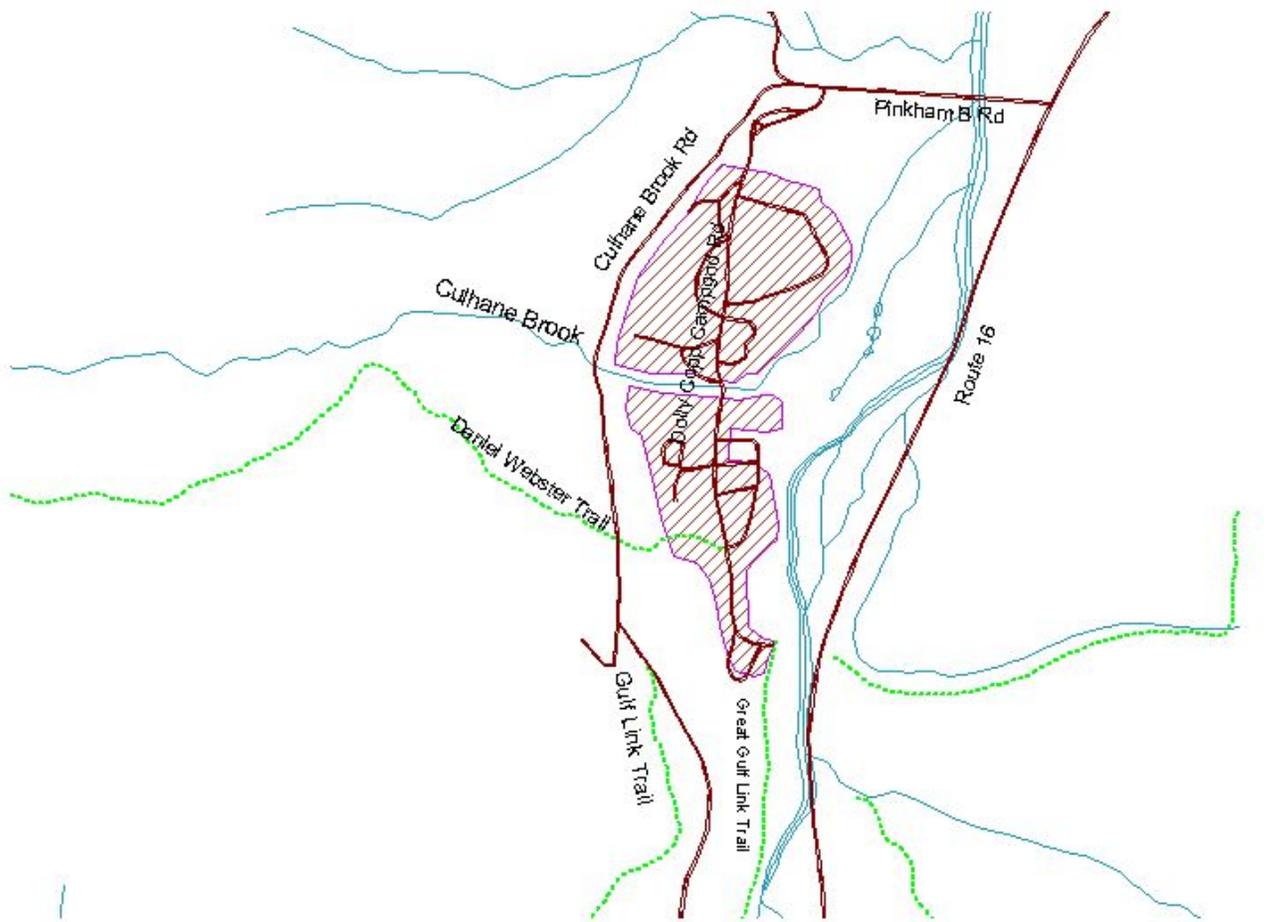
1. Sale administrator, cultural resource paraprofessional/ Forest archeologist, and contractor will meet prior to operating in Dolly Copp and Hastings campgrounds to identify heritage sites and agree on a work plan to protect cultural resources.
2. Skid trails will be laid out in collaboration with the district cultural resource specialist.
3. No machinery will be permitted in culturally sensitive areas, trees may be removed using cables run from the machinery.
4. Operation within the Hastings Campground and adjacent red pine stand would occur during frozen ground conditions to protect cultural resources.
5. Hazard trees will remain on the ground if removal could potentially damage cultural resources.

Safety

1. To provide safeguards for hikers, skiers and loggers using Route 113 and the Dolly Copp campground road:
 - Safety hazard signs would be erected to warn about logging traffic.
 - Speed limit signs would be posted
 - Gates will be closed nightly

2. Skid trails crossings on the snowmobile trail will be limited to reduce dual use between snowmobilers and logging equipment.

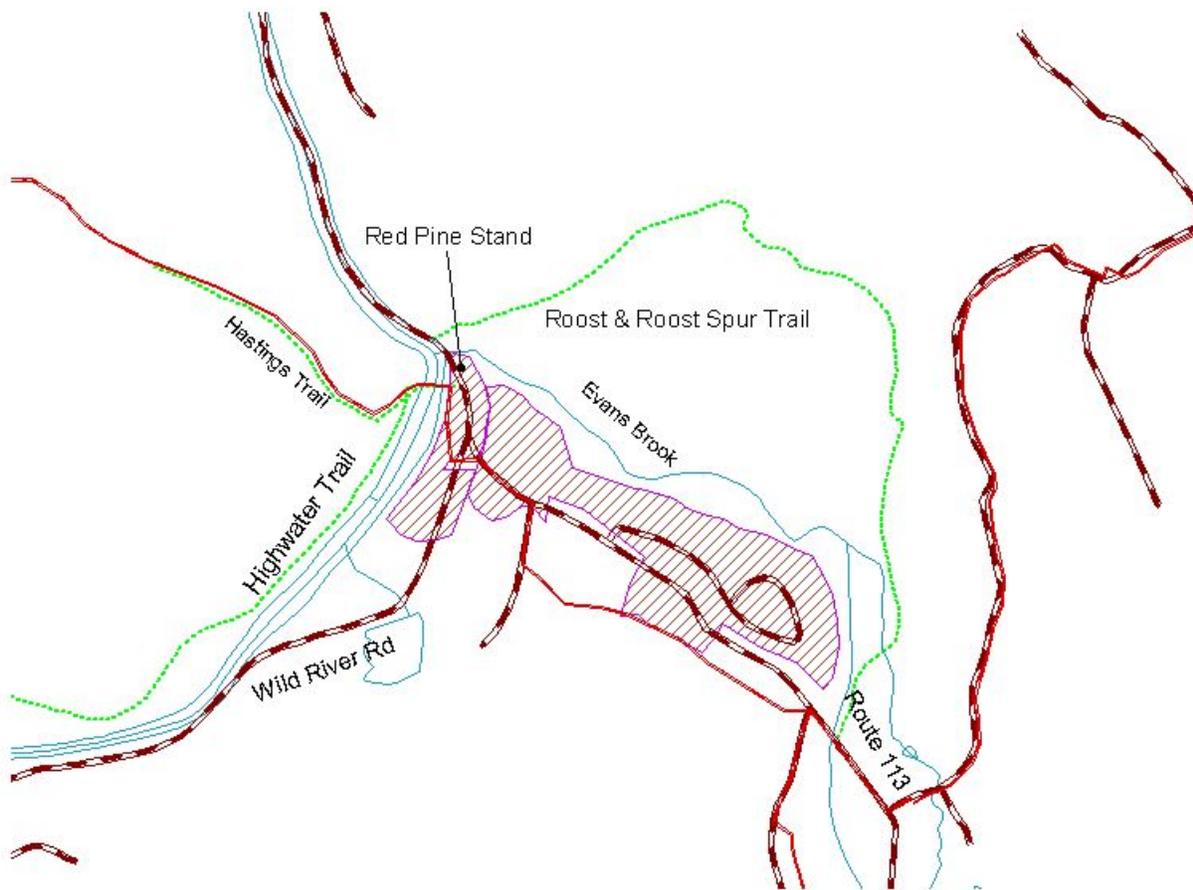
Map 1: Dolly Copp Campground Martins Location Coos County, NH Approximately 90 acres



-  Snowmobile Trail
-  Roads
-  Snowmo.shp
-  Stream
-  Trails
-  Harvest Area

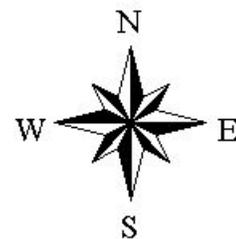


Map 2: Hastings Campground Batchelders Grant Oxford County, Maine Approximately 40 acres



0.2 0 0.2 0.4 Miles

- Snowmobile Trail
- Roads
- Snowmo.shp
- Stream
- Trails
- Harvest Area



Androscoggin Ranger Station
300 Glen Road
Gorham, NH 03581

Phone: (603) 466-2713
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**Settler's 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 September 15, 2006**

To stay informed as this project continues, choose one:

<input type="checkbox"/> I wish to receive the Settler's Vegetation Management Final Decision Memo
<input type="checkbox"/> Send me a note summarizing your final decision.

I wish to receive Settler's Vegetation Management Project information in the following format (choose one):

- View on the White Mountain National Forest website**
www.fs.fed.us/r9/white_mountain/projects/projects

If you wish to receive an e-mail when the documents are posted, please write
your email address clearly: _____

- By post** (print name and address or attach return address label):

From: _____

STAMP

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