



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

White Mountain  
National Forest  
Androscoggin and  
Evans Notch  
Ranger Districts

300 Glen Road  
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File Code: 1950-1

Date: December 5, 2006

Dear Interested Citizen:

As Ranger of the Androscoggin District of the White Mountain National Forest, I am issuing a Decision Memo on the Settler's Vegetation Management Project located in the townships of Martins Location, Coos County, New Hampshire and Batchelders Grant, Oxford County, Maine.

The project would 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 will harvest approximately 150,000 board feet of timber from approximately 90 acres and the Hastings Campground project will harvest approximately 60,000 board feet of timber from approximately 40 acres.

The Decision Memo which describes my reasons and conclusions for implementing this project can be viewed on the National Forest web site at:  
[http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white\\_mountain/projects/projects/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain/projects/projects/).

I would be glad to talk with you if you have any concerns or issues regarding my decision. You may phone me at 603-466-2713 ext. 210, or e-mail me at [kstuart@fs.fed.us](mailto:kstuart@fs.fed.us). If you have any other questions regarding this project, you may contact either Pat Nasta ([pnasta@fs.fed.us](mailto:pnasta@fs.fed.us)) at (603) 466-2713 ext. 222, or Gail Wigler ([gwigler@fs.fed.us](mailto:gwigler@fs.fed.us)) at 603-466-2713 ext. 230.

Thank you for your participation in this project, and your interest in the White Mountain National Forest. Your comments contributed to my understanding of public issues and concerns regarding this project, and enabled me to make a more informed decision.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Katherine W. Stuart*

Katherine W. Stuart  
District Ranger





United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service

December 2006

# Decision Memo

# Settler's Vegetation Management Project

Coos County, New Hampshire  
Oxford County, Maine

and

## Appendix A- Design Features

## Appendix B - Forest Service Response to 30-Day Comments



Prepared by: Androscoggin Ranger District  
White Mountain National Forest

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[http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white\\_mountain/projects/projects/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain/projects/projects/)

**This document is available in large print.**

**Contact the Androscoggin Ranger District Office**

**1-603-466-2713**

**TTY 1-603-466-2856**

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

**DECISION MEMO**

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# Decision Memo

## Settler's Vegetation Management Project

### 1.0 Introduction

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. 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.

### 2.0 Decision

I am 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 will harvest approximately 150,000 board feet of timber from approximately 90 acres and the Hastings Campground project will harvest approximately 60,000 board feet of timber from approximately 40 acres (See Maps 1 and 2).

The harvest will occur in the late fall and winter of 2007 and/or 2008 after closure of the campgrounds. Only existing roads will be used and no additional roadwork will be required. Harvesting within the Dolly Copp Campground will occur in the fall and winter, and harvesting within and adjacent to the Hastings Campground will occur during frozen ground conditions to protect cultural resource sites.

The silvicultural treatment for stands within Dolly Copp Campground will be the harvest of groups and individual trees. Individual tree selection will remove damaged and hazard trees, harvesting small groups (1/10<sup>th</sup> acre) will promote softwood regeneration, and harvesting larger groups (1/2 to 1 acre) will promote paper birch regeneration.

The silvicultural treatment for the Hastings Campground will 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 will 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 will be implemented with design features applied as needed to address site-specific safety or resource concerns; see Appendix A.

### 2.1 -- Rationale for the Decision

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.

This project will harvest and sell weakened, dying, and other potential hazard trees since they still contain commercial value (ie. sawlogs, pulpwood, firewood) that can be marketed.

Harvesting activities within the Dolly Copp Campground will accelerate the development of 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 will harvest small groups of trees (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 a shade intolerant species and is typically maintained under even-aged management techniques. For this project we will harvest small patches (half to one acre) of trees 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 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). Due to the high stocking density of the white spruce, many are dying and highly susceptible to windthrow. This creates a safety hazard to campers and facilities should trees fall into campsites or roadways. By salvaging the white spruce in repeated entries and opening up the stand canopy, the growth of native species (ie. sugar maple, ash, hemlock, red spruce and fir) within the mid and understory will be accelerated. Over time as the residual white spruce is removed, an established forest will be in place, and the campground can be maintained in a mature forest type. This will result in a healthier, more windfirm stand with good screening between campsites.

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 here 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 will reduce stand density to allow sunlight to penetrate the overstory, promoting a diversity of species regeneration in the understory. We are including this stand in this project because its close proximity makes it efficient to treat this stand at the same time as the campground harvest.

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

### **3.0 – Categories of Actions Excluded from Documentation**

This project falls within the categories of exclusion Forest Service Handbook (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 meets all of the criteria for the category and will reduce the need to harvest a large number of hazard trees in the campgrounds on a yearly basis. I have made a determination that there will be no resulting significant effects on the environment, and therefore the action requires no further analysis in an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS).

### **3.1 -- Resource Conditions and Extraordinary Circumstances**

The environmental analysis for this project included on-site surveys for rare plants and heritage resources, and also determined 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 were examined:

#### **3.1a -- 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 was conducted during the 2006 field season to analyze and document if suitable habitat exists and what potential effects could occur as a result of this decision. Field reconnaissance closely examined habitat and potential populations, and determined that this project:

- will have no effect for any federally-listed species since individuals are not present in the project area;
- may impact individuals but will not likely cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability for the following Regional Foresters Sensitive Species: eastern small-footed myotis, northern bog lemming, Bailey's sedge, and autumn coralroot and;
- will have no impact to any other Regional Foresters Sensitive Species because either they or their habitat are not present in the project area.

#### **3.1b -- 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 and Wild River 100 year floodplain, but activities would 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 will be followed.

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

#### **3.1c -- 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.

### **3.1d -- 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 Forest Plan, 2005a. and USDA Environmental Impact Statement, 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.

### **3.1e -- 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.

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

Cultural resource reports (CRRR #06-2-2 and CRRR #06-2-4) were completed for the Project Area. Based on field surveys and a review of historic maps and literature there is no anticipated loss of significant historic or cultural resources. The Maine and New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) concurred with the findings of our archeological survey and are in agreement with our actions and design features.

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

### **4.0 -- 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.

### **5.0 -- Consistency with the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and other Applicable Laws**

My 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.

### **5.1 – Forest Plan**

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

The Settler's vegetation project accomplishes the following recreation objectives; provide quality recreation activities and opportunities (USDA Forest Plan, 2005a, p.1-10), and provide campgrounds with ample screening between sites (USDA Forest Plan, 2005a, p.1-13). It also meets the vegetation and wildlife objectives of managing vegetation using an ecological approach to provide healthy ecosystems (USDA Forest Plan, 2005a, p. 1-17) and using sustainable management practices to provide a diversity of habitats (USDA Forest Plan, 2005a, p.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.

## **6.0 -- Implementation Date**

Harvest of timber will occur in the late fall and winter of 2007/2008 after closure of the campgrounds.

## **7.0 Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.7. A person has standing to file an appeal if they submitted comments during the 30-day Comment Period. A Notice of Appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. Appeals must be filed within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the Manchester Union Leader and Lewiston Sun Journal. Send to:

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region  
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, Settler's Vegetation Management Project  
626 East Wisconsin Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 8am-4:30pm (Central Time), Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. The Notice of Appeal may also be faxed to 414-944-3963, Attn: Appeals Deciding Officer, USDA Forest Service, Eastern Regional Office; or it may be electronically mailed to [appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us). Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or any software supported by Microsoft applications.

It is the responsibility of appellants to ensure that their appeal is received in a timely manner. The 45-day time period is computed using calendar days, including Saturdays, Sundays, and Federal holidays. When the time period expires on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, the time is extended to the end of the next Federal working day. The day after the publication of the legal notice of the decision in the Manchester Union Leader and Lewiston Sun Journal is the first day of the appeal-filing period. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in those newspapers of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. If you do not have access to the Manchester Union Leader or the Lewiston Sun Journal, please call the Androscoggin Ranger Station at 603-466-2713, ext. 222 (TTY 603-466-2856) for the published date. There will be no time extensions for appeals.

When there is a question about timely filing of an appeal, timeliness shall be determined by:

1. The date of the postmark, e-mail, fax, or other means of filing (for example, express delivery service) an appeal and any attachment;
2. The time and date imprint at the correct Appeal Deciding Officer's office on a hand-delivered appeal and any attachments; or
3. When an appeal is electronically mailed, the appellant should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgment from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the appellant does not receive an automated acknowledgment of the receipt of the appeal, it is the appellant's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. At a minimum, an appeal must include the following:

1. Appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
2. Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
3. When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant (§215.2) and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
4. The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
5. The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either this part or part 251, subpart C (§215.11(d));
6. Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
7. Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
8. Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider comments; and;
9. How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

The Decision Memo for this project is available for public review at the Androscoggin Ranger District, 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581. In addition, it is posted on the White Mountain National Forest web page ([http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white\\_mountain/projects/projects/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain/projects/projects/)). Questions regarding the Decision Memo should be directed to Gail Wigler at 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581 (phone: 603-466-2713 ext. 230, FAX and TTY: 603-466-2856).

## **8.0 Responsible Official and Contacts**

The Responsible Official for the Settler's Vegetation Management Project is Katherine Stuart, Ranger of the Androscoggin District of the White Mountain National Forest.

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact: Pat Nasta at 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581, or by phone (603-466-2713 ext. 222), or by FAX and TTY (603-466-2856) or by e-mail [pnasta@fs.fed.us](mailto:pnasta@fs.fed.us).

*/s/ Katherine W. Stuart*

*12/4/2006*

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KATHERINE W. STUART  
District Ranger

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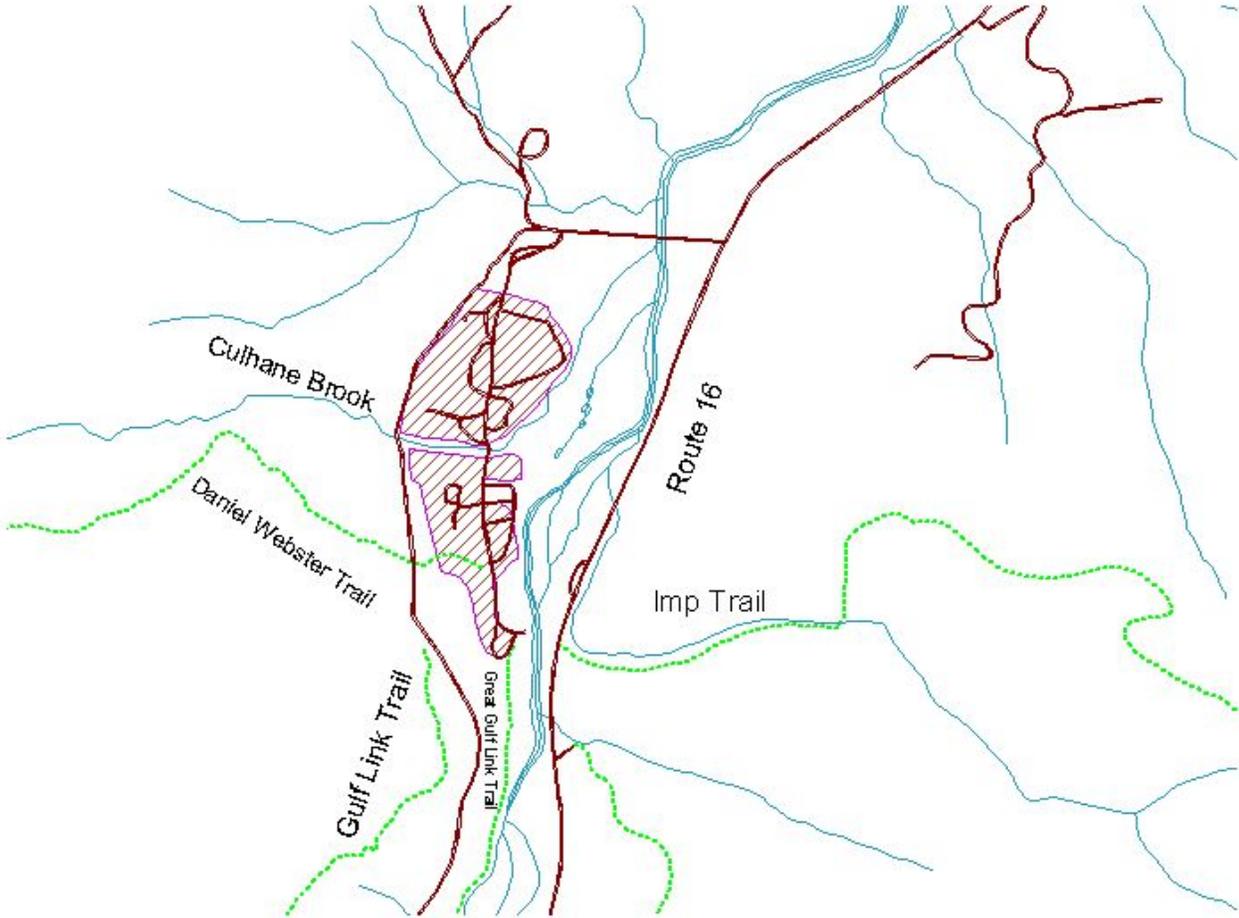
Date

## **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.

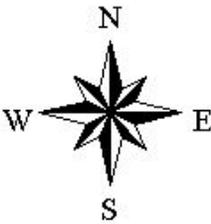
USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service). 2005b. Final Environmental Impact Statement: White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Laconia, NH: USDA-FS, Eastern Region, White Mountain National Forest.

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

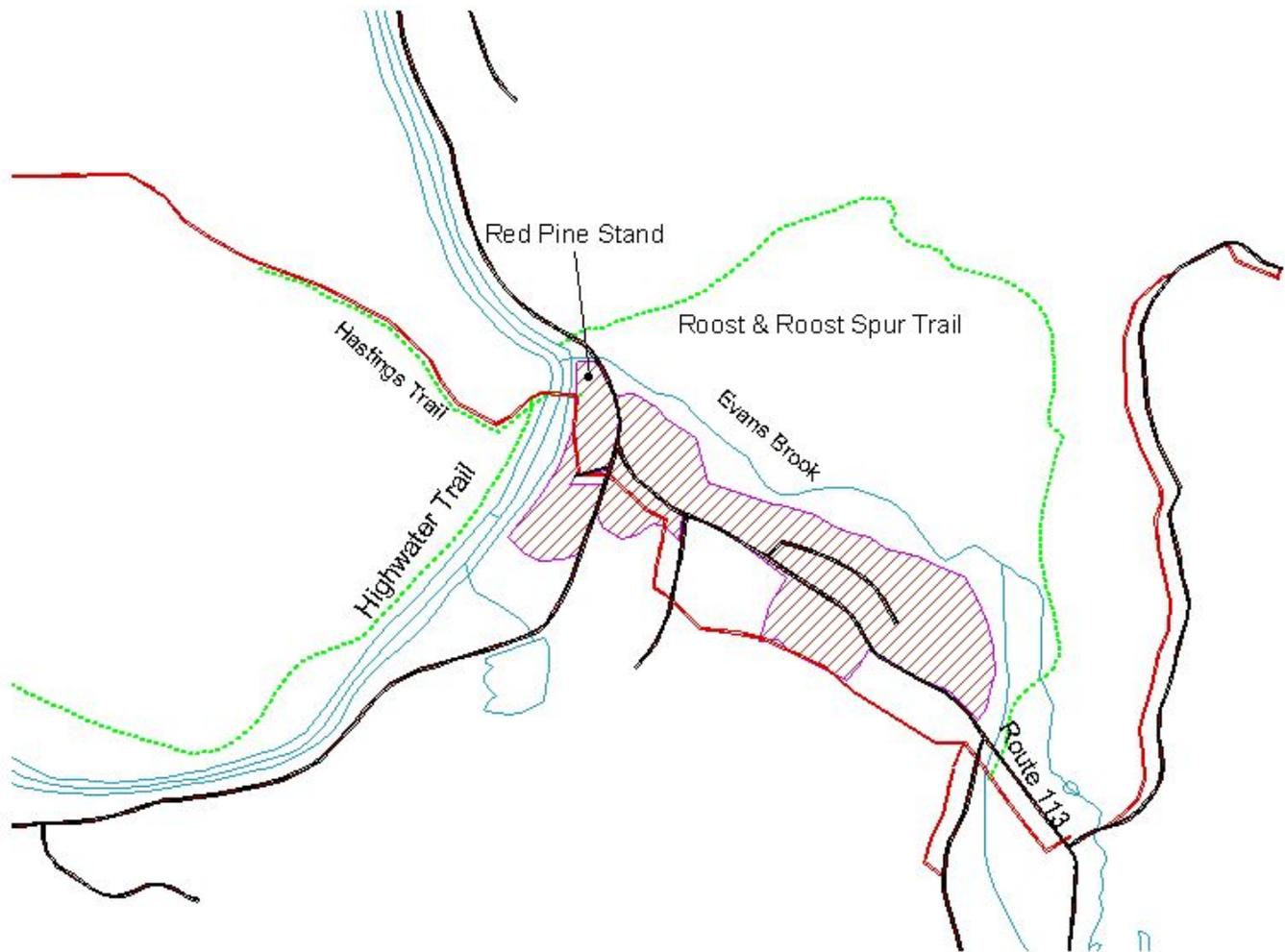


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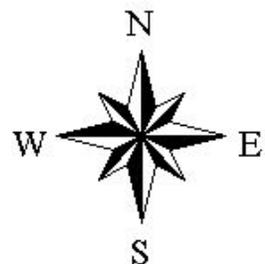
-  Roads
-  Stream
-  Trails
-  Harvest Area



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



- Roads
- Snowmobile Trail
- Stream
- Trails
- Harvest Area



## **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 concerns. 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:

- Stumps will be no taller than 14".
- tops and limbs retained on-site will be chipped and spread throughout the area.

### **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 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.

### **Recreation**

1. To provide safeguards for snowmobilers and loggers using Route 113 during harvesting:

- if possible harvesting will occur under frozen ground conditions prior to snowmobile season (November and/or early December);
- where possible, Route 113 would be plowed at a width that allows dual use by snowmobilers and logging trucks;
- where dual use can not be avoided, logging operations would not be allowed on holidays and week-ends;
- safety hazard signs would be posted on the snowmobile trail to warn about logging traffic and;
- coordination with local snowmobile clubs on posting speed limit signs on Route 113.

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

## **Safety**

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

## **Appendix B Responses to Public Comments**

The Settler's Vegetation Management Proposed Decision Memo was offered for public review and comment for 30 days from August 25 through September 25, 2006. The invitation to comment was promoted through mailings, Legal Ads in the Manchester Union Leader and Lewiston Sun Journal, and posting the document on the White Mountain National Forest website.

We appreciate the time respondents spent reviewing Proposed Decision Memo and thank you for your thoughtful comments. We received one phone comment and thirteen written comments (letters or e-mails).

All correspondence is filed in the Settler's Environmental Analysis Project File located at the Androscoggin Ranger Station in Gorham, NH, and is available for public inspection.

### **1.0 Support of Project**

**1.1 Comment:** "Removing hazard trees from established public campgrounds as well as preserving the aesthetic values and individual campsite privacy seems to me to be routine maintenance that should be conducted under the supervision of the local District Ranger without needing to incur the delay and cost of conducting a public survey....Additionally it is appropriate to include in this project the red pine thinning on the eight acres at Hastings. This is a small addition... and makes good sense to accomplish this thinning when the machinery, tools and manpower are already at hand in the Hasting campground site. I support the project fully."

**1.2 Comment:** "Sounds like a sensible project to me."

**1.3 Comment:** "Over the years it seems that the concept of "clear cutting" for timber harvesting hasn't produced the desired results. Newer technology and environmental education now propose small openings throughout the forested area to enhance ornithology, wildlife, and stand conditions. It is assumed that White Mountain mature timbering operations adhere to more or less a selective removal system upsetting the status quo minimally. Certainly any hazardous or other storm damaged trees should be a district priority at any time. I have every confidence in this instance, you need not have any qualms regarding your ultimate decision."

**1.4 Comment:** "This project as you have outlined, looks okay to me and I think you should proceed."

**1.5 Comment:** “Proposed action looks necessary and desirable.”

**1.6 Comment:** “We recognize that there is considerable value in allowing some fraction of the WMNF to be in natural condition. Thus we will always favor natural conditions and disfavor actions leading to less natural conditions on this land... we would usually oppose vegetation management, however there are several factors that make the particular work of the Settler’s project less objectionable. Those factors are that the areas around campgrounds, roads, snowmobile corridors, suspension bridges and parking lots are not natural to begin with. Consequently we will not oppose vegetation management in this case.”

**1.7 Comment:** “Safety is obviously the highest priority in the management of the campground, and if the professional opinion of the Forest Service is that certain trees are a hazard then generally they should be removed.”

**1.8 Comment:** “We, the Friends of Wild River, support the removal of hazard trees and preservation of the IRA, wilderness potential, and rare species. We accept the thinning of the red pine stand, even if we do not view it as necessary.”

**1.9 Comment:** “NHTOA supports the Settler’s Project. It is an excellent example of the use of timber harvesting to accomplish other resource objectives such as public safety and the improvement of vegetation in campgrounds. At the same time it will provide raw material and employment for the New Hampshire economy.”

**2.0 Comment:** “This is to inform you that I support the Proposed Decision Memo for the Settler's Vegetation Management Project" for Dolly Copp Campground and Hastings Campground, as a well-researched and designed action plan.”

**Response:** We appreciate your support for this project.

## **2.0 Opposition to the Project**

**2.1 Comment:** Against the proposed decision to log in the campground and against the decision to include the mature red pine stand in close proximity to the campground. Doesn’t see the need to include this stand at all in the project...it is totally unnecessary. The mature trees are healthy and there is not a reason to do any type of logging.

**Response:** We appreciate your comment. Our need for this project is based on improving visitor safety and improving stand growth and diversity. The rationale for harvesting the red pine is described in response 3.1 and 3.2.

## **3.0 Vegetation**

**3.1 Comment:** “We agree that red pine is naturally present in this region as scattered trees, not large stands, thus the current stand condition is particularly unnatural...this immediate area is certainly focused on visitor recreation and the red pine stand with its little to no understory vegetation is pleasant to many people. Therefore we fail to see the need to spend FS funding to reduce the stand diversity. Our point of view is that over the coming years, nature will accomplish the work of improving the forest health through natural processes at no cost to the tax payers while visitors can enjoy the pleasant open spaces between trees.”

**Response:** The purpose of thinning the red pine stand is to promote a more natural forest stand with a greater diversity of herbaceous and tree species. This will benefit wildlife species and perhaps lead to increase animal and bird viewing opportunities. Usually harvesting an isolated, small stand is not economical due to the high “move-in” cost of logging equipment. Since we are proposing harvesting within close vicinity, now is an opportune time to harvest the stand with minimum cost to the taxpayer. In monetary terms, we will be generating revenue from this stand rather than losing money as we let trees die and remain on site.

**3.2 Comment:** “The project motives of improving public safety, aesthetics, and forest health are valid and worthy of pursuit. And the intention to pursue on-site surveys to discover special or potentially negative impacts... is in the spirit of the best Forest Service traditions. However some of the proposed practices described in section 2.0 should be reconsidered.

Over time the data suggest that tampering with the Forest -particularly in areas of several acres or more- is not in the best interest of the Forest or the people that use it.” In regard to the red pine stand “I know that promoting the development of understory vegetation is considered to be sound forest management practices. However, no one is going to get rich off the lumber removed from those eight acres, and –more important- the Forest seems to have a very different set of “intentions” that are being ignored.

And so I hope you will be more conservative in your Forest improvement practices.

**Response:** The proposed actions described in section 2.0 were developed by an Interdisciplinary team that consisted of a wildlife biologist, a soil scientist, an archeologist, a cultural resource paraprofessional, foresters, recreation specialists, a botanist, a hydrologist and the District Ranger. Together we looked at the current stand conditions and compared that to the desired future conditions which are based on ecological land type conditions. Once we determined the kinds of tree species that naturally grow on these lands, we developed silvicultural prescriptions to achieve the desired future condition. The intent of this project is to perpetuate a healthy diverse forest that provides a safe environment for recreationists and improves wildlife habitat, while producing forest products.

Paper birch is an early successional species that requires open growing conditions to regenerate. To successfully regenerate this species, studies show that groups need to be at least an acre in size to mimic natural disturbance. However, because of the location of the paper birch in the campground, we are limiting group sizes to .5 to 1 acre to best perpetuate paper birch within hardwood stands and maintain the aesthetic quality of the campground.

The intent for harvesting within the red pine stand is to create a more natural stand with varying age classes and species diversity. The red pine stand was planted at such a high density that it does not allow sufficient sunlight to penetrate the ground to allow understory development. By reducing tree density, over time the mid and understory vegetation can develop and be in place as the remaining red pine die out.

#### **4.0 Recreation**

**4.1 Comment:** “What effect would this project have on the use of snowmobile trail ITS -80?”

**4.2 Comment:** “From your letter it appears that the North-South snowmobile trail along Route 113 will remain open, but this is not clear. We support keeping the trail open during winter harvestings as an important accommodation to a significant stake holder group.”

**Response:** The hazard tree removal around Hastings Campground is a small scale project (40 acres) and probably won't take more than a couple weeks. It will occur when frozen ground conditions develop, hopefully in November or early December. If it becomes necessary for the harvesting to occur after ITS 80 is open for the season, the dual use distance would be minimal and short-term. We would also stipulate that no work occur on weekends to alleviate high use conflicts. The only temporary loss would be the 113 access route in from the north gate, if plowing the road was necessary. Logging operation signs will be posted and the standard "work zone" practices would apply. Trail travel should continue without too much disruption.

## **5.0 Wildlife**

**5.1 Comment:** “ We appreciate your insistence on a Biological Evaluation in concurrence with the US Fish and Wildlife Service...15 years ago, a NH Heritage Inventory was performed which identified 29 species of rare plants, mammals, birds and communities in Wild River. We would not want any interference with these species.”

**Response:** Thank you for supporting our approach. Biological Evaluations must be conducted for all Forest Service projects to ensure that federally-listed endangered and threatened species and Regional Forester's sensitive species are conserved. The Biological Evaluation for the Settler's VMP resulted in a determination of "no effect" for all federally-listed endangered and threatened species. Therefore consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was not necessary. The Decision Memo for this project was updated to reflect the findings of the Biological Evaluation and the Biological Evaluation is available in the project record.

## **6.0 Soils**

**6.1 Comment:** “Have you considered whole-tree harvesting as a way to control slash in the project area? Slash is the residual evidence of harvesting that recreationists object to most strongly. It will be visually evident and is a tripping hazard even if it is lopped and scattered. Whole-tree harvesting is mentioned in the Forest Plan as a mitigation for slash control near recreation facilities.”

**Response:** We did consider whole tree harvesting, but the majority of the soils within the project area have an Ecological Land Type classification of 11 (parts of Dolly Copp Campground and the red pine stand) or 311 (Hastings Campground) which are considered outwash. In accordance with the Forest Plan Standard and Guidelines (Chapter 2-29), when harvesting on outwash soils, all tops and limbs from harvested trees must be scattered and left on site. To reduce visual impacts and tripping hazards within the campgrounds, tops and limbs retained on-site will be chipped and spread throughout the area.

## **7.0 IRA and Wilderness**

**7.1 Comment:** "We appreciate that “this project would not affect the roadless character of the neighboring IRAs, nor would it preclude possible future Wilderness designation.”

**Response:** We appreciate your comment.

## **8.0 NEPA Process**

**8.1 Comment:** “This sounds like routine maintenance to me. Wish the “powers that be” understand that “incidentals” like this should not require this kind of effort on your part.”

**8.2 Comment:** “We also agree that this is the kind of project that is suited for a categorical exclusion. The effects of the proposed action are minor and well researched. They fall within established guidelines for this kind of analysis.”

**Response:** We appreciate your comment.

## **9.0 Education**

**9.1 Comment:** “This project seems like an excellent opportunity for interpretation of timber harvesting activities. The camping public will notice that some form of harvesting has occurred and may form their own, inaccurate interpretation of what was done and why. This would be a good place to explain how harvesting can be used to improve resources while benefiting local and regional economies.”

**Response:** Yes, we agree that this project serves as an excellent opportunity to inform the public of how vegetation management can be used to improve recreational safety and increase stand diversity. This was discussed on Interdisciplinary Team field trip and we intend to continue this discussion with resource and conservation education specialists.

## **10. Heritage Resources**

**10.1 Comment:** “I seem to remember that the old lumbering town of Hastings was in that area. There used to be piles of bricks and other things around that town's section of land. I do not know if there is still something there since it has been many years since I visited it. My only concern is if the old town was in the area of the clearing would it be effected?”

**Response:** The town of Hastings is indeed within the area of the proposed vegetation management project. The archaeological survey for the area identified cultural material consistent with the remains of what was a bustling mill town until 1916. A cultural resource report provided several design features that will be followed to protect these cultural resources: (1) cutting will be done only in frozen ground conditions, (2) a pre-work meeting including the contractor, the timber sale administrator and cultural resource specialist will be conducted on site to identify areas of sensitivity and address skid routes and areas where no machinery will be allowed. The contractor will be expected to "pull his cable out" rather than backing his skidder up to every tree in certain areas and in areas of particular sensitivity and (3) hazard trees may be dropped and left where they lie. This report and the design features outlined within was submitted to the Forest Archaeologist, the District Ranger and the Maine State Historic Preservation Officer, all of whom were satisfied with the measures outlined in it to protect the sites in the project area.

## **11.0 Water Resources**

**11.1 Comment:** “The 25 foot (*buffer*) figure seems arbitrary and inappropriate; in a camping area a hazard tree should be removed no matter where located and outside the camping area 25 feet in inadequate.”

**Response:** A 25 foot buffer for protection of perennial streams is a Forest Plan Guideline that states “tree cutting and harvest should not occur within 25 feet of the bank of mapped perennial streams” (page 2-24, G-1). This is a minimum stream buffer width and it may be widened depending on the location of hazard trees. We don’t anticipate removing a large amount of trees along side the 25 foot buffer since most of the hazard trees are directly around campsites which are typically located greater than 25 feet from perennial streams.

**11.2 Comment:** “The WMNF has sometimes had to try to restore proper functioning of streams where there has been inadequate large wood- 25 foot protection could perpetuate this problem.”

**Response:** There are several on-going stream restoration projects on the forest that are adding woody debris into stream channels to improve riparian habitats. The reason for lack of wood in streams varies from past logging practices to natural causes. However, maintaining a minimum 25 foot buffer along perennial streams is not perpetuating this problem. According to research within hardwood forests, 80 % of the wood inputted into stream channels occurs within 30 feet of the stream (McDade, M.H., F.J. Swanson, W.A. McKee, J.F. Franklin, and J. Van Sickle. 1990). Thus this buffer width is adequate in promoting woody debris recruitment into streams

## **12.0 General Comment**

**12.1 Comment:** “What is a hazard tree in a camping area can in the forest be valuable as a defective tree, snag or down wood for wildlife and to maintain organic matter.”

**Response:** We agree, a defective tree in the forest is very valuable for the reasons you mentioned. However, the purpose of this project is to provide a safe environment for people that recreate within our campgrounds. Forest Service Manual direction 2300.3 establishes public health and safety as a high priority for managing recreational sites which includes removal of hazard trees.

## **References**

McDade, M.H., F.J. Swanson, W.A. McKee, J.F. Franklin, and J. Van Sickle. 1990. Sources distances for coarse woody debris entering small streams in western Oregon and Washington. Canadian Journal of Forestry v. 74: 90-93.