

# White Mountain National Forest



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Eastern  
Region

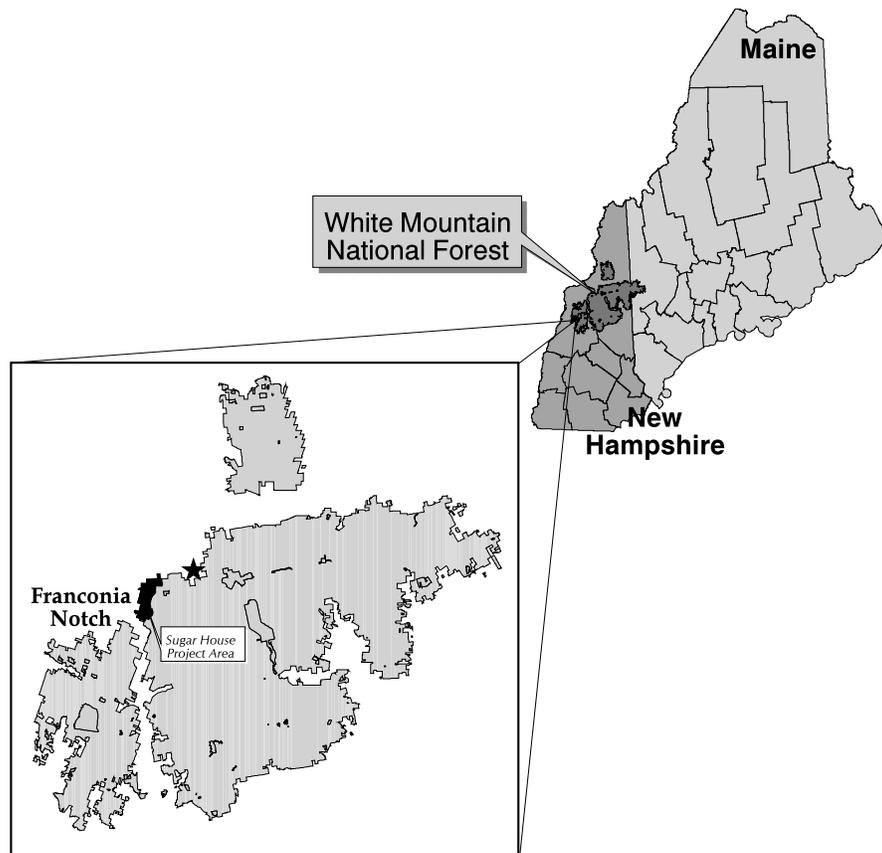
April  
2004



## Sugarhouse Project

Ammonoosuc/Pemigewasset Ranger District  
White Mountain National Forest  
Grafton County, New Hampshire

Information for  
Scoping



For Information Contact: Dave Govatski  
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White Mountain National Forest  
660 Trudeau Road  
Bethlehem, NH 03254  
603-869-2626  
[www.fs.fed.us/r9/white](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/white)

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Contact the White Mountain National Forest  
Supervisor's Office  
1-603-528-8721  
TTY 1-603-528-8722**

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## Table of Contents

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<b><i>Where is this project in the Forest Service NEPA process?</i></b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What is the Forest Service proposing?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Where is the proposed Sugarhouse Project located?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>5</b>
Why is the Forest Service considering activities in the Sugarhouse Project Area at this time?	5
What is the proposed Project Area like?	6
<b>Purpose &amp; Need</b>	<b>7</b>
Why does the Forest Service need to implement the Sugarhouse project at this time?	7
<b><i>Project Area Map</i></b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Proposed Action</b>	<b>10</b>
What activities is the Forest Service proposing to meet the needs identified above?	10
Mitigation Measures	11
<b>What decisions will be made?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>How is the public involved in this decision?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>How can you comment?</b>	<b>14</b>
Written comments.	14
Oral comments	15
Information to include when submitting comments	15

## **Where this project is in the Forest Service NEPA process?**

NEPA is the Forest Service decision-making process. An acronym for the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, NEPA provides opportunities for interested parties to give their ideas and opinions about resource management. This input is important in helping us identify resource needs, which will shape the alternatives evaluated and lead to the formation of a decision.

This form shows the steps of the NEPA process, and where the attached proposal is in that process.

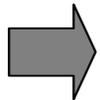
----- **Step One - Need for a Project**

The Forest Service or some other entity may identify the need for a project.  
*YOU may bring the need for a project to the attention of the Forest Service.*

----- **Step Two - Develop Project Proposal**

The Forest Service or a project proponent develops detailed, site-specific proposal  
*YOU may be a proponent who develops proposal or YOU can share input and ideas*

**Step Three - Scoping (Public Input)**



The Forest Service solicits public input on the site-specific proposal to define the scope of environmental analysis and range of alternatives to be considered  
*YOU provide site-specific input: suggest issues, alternatives, mitigation*

----- **Step Four - Develop Range of Reasonable Alternatives**

If proposal fits categorical exclusion: Forest Service makes & documents decision  
If Scoping determines need for EA or EIS: Forest Service develops alternatives  
*YOU suggest alternatives to the proposed action during the scoping process*

----- **Step Five - Environmental Analysis (Formal Public Comment Period)**

Forest Service performs analysis of environmental effects, identifies preferred alternative, solicits formal public comment (30-Day Comment Period)  
*YOU provide timely & substantive comments on the analysis during Comment period*

----- **Step Six - Decision**

Forest Service makes decision to implement one of the alternatives  
*YOU can review decision; you can appeal if you disagree and you have standing”  
Standing: You provided substantive comments during formal period (Step 5)*

----- **Step Seven - Appeal**

Forest Service allows public 45 days following legal notice of decision to appeal  
*YOU may file formal Notice of Appeal*

----- **Step Eight - Implementation**

Forest Service implements the project  
*YOU may contribute labor, equipment or funding to implement the project*

----- **Step Nine - Monitor and Evaluate**

Forest Service monitors and evaluates project results  
*YOU provide feedback on the project to the Forest Service*

## **What is the Forest Service proposing?**

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The Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest is proposing the following activities within the Sugarhouse Project Area:

- Vegetation Management;
- Maintenance of the existing road system.

The Sugarhouse Project is named after the remains of a sugarhouse, that was found in the project area. It was used to boil down maple sap to make sugar in the 1800s.

## **Where is the proposed Sugarhouse Project located?**

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The Sugarhouse Project is located in the towns of Bethlehem and Franconia, Grafton County, New Hampshire, on the Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District (Sugarhouse Project Map, pp. 8-9). The Project Area of approximately 3,000 acres is all located on National Forest system lands. A portion of the southwestern corner of the Project Area is bordered by private land that is owned by Profile Country Club. The Project Area is located in the Gale River watershed. The Gale River drains an area of approximately 20 square miles and flows into the Ammonoosuc River near Lisbon, New Hampshire. The federal lands within the Project Area include Management Area (MA) 2.1 and 3.1 lands within Compartments 25, 26, and 27. In addition, the Project Area is part of the larger Habitat Management Units (HMUs) 112 and 113 (approximately 14,600 acres).

## **Background**

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### **Why is the Forest Service considering activities in the Sugarhouse Project Area at this time?**

When forested areas are managed to produce wildlife habitats and wood products, growth in the size and density of trees is important. Over time, forest management stands that have been previously clearcut have become restocked with tree seedlings. When these stands reach sapling size, they no longer provide early-successional habitat. In stands that were partially cut to reduce stocking levels (area occupied by trees), tree growth has increased stocking levels to the point where competition for light, moisture, and soil resources result in reduced growth and stress for individual trees. Over time, stands age to the point where they are considered mature.

## ***Ammonoosuc/Pemigewasset Ranger District, White Mountain NF***

Analysis of an area every 15-20 years is used to assess habitat diversity and the potential need to harvest growth and regenerate stands to maintain a sustainable forest. The last vegetation management occurred in the Project Area between the mid 1980s and early 1990s. Surveys were conducted in 2003 to assess the current vegetation conditions in the Project Area.

Recent assessment of MA 2.1 and 3.1 lands in HMUs 112 and 113 show that these HMUs are weighted towards mature and over-mature forests and there is little regenerating habitat. Forest Plan direction seeks to provide a balanced mix of habitats for all wildlife species and to increase wildlife habitat diversity for the full range of wildlife species with emphasis on early-successional species. Based on Forest Plan desired composition (pp. III- 13, VII B-4, & VII-B-5) there is a need for increased regenerating forest age class. Opportunities exist, through timber harvesting, reforestation treatments, and wildlife maintenance strategies to improve the growth and vigor of forested stands and diversify stand age class. At this time these improvements can be accomplished by harvesting mature and poor quality trees and regenerating new trees (Forest Plan, pp. III-3, III-30, III-36), resulting in a variety of wildlife habitat types and conditions.

The southern portion of the project area is within the inventoried roadless area being considered in forest plan revision. It includes treatments in compartment 26 stands 23, 24, 28, 29, and 41. It also includes small portions of stands 25, 27, 50, and 53. The analysis for this project will include an alternative that excludes management activities for stands located within the inventoried roadless area.

### **What is the proposed Project Area like?**

The Project Area is located on moderately sloped terrain ranging from approximately 1,500 to 2,400 feet above sea level. The Project Area contains predominantly the northern hardwood, paper birch, and spruce/fir forest types. These forest types typically provides habitat for wildlife species common to the White Mountain National Forest. The annual growth of the trees and shrubs within portions of the Project Area typically provide browse or mast at various times of the year, including buds and flowers of woody plants such as aspen catkins and hobble bush in the spring, soft raspberry fruit in the summer, and hard beechnuts in the fall.

The Project Area has had a history of vegetation management. The first timber harvesting occurred in the 1890s when the land was in private ownership. A forest fire in 1903 burned over much of the project area creating conditions for a large amount of paper birch regeneration. Timber harvesting under National Forest ownership began in the 1970s and has been conducted on the average of every 15 years in the project area.

Today the Project Area receives a moderate amount of recreational use by the visiting public. The various activities in the area experienced by the public are hiking, scenic and fall foliage viewing, cross-country skiing,

snowmobiling, snow-shoeing, wildlife watching, hunting, fishing, and various other recreational pursuits. There are three trails in the Project Area: the Franconia Bike Path (connecting Lincoln and Franconia), Skookumchuck hiking trail (Route 3 to the Garfield Ridge Trail), and the Heritage snowmobile trail (connecting Bethlehem and Franconia Notch). A Bike Path extension has been recently proposed that would connect Franconia and Twin Mountain using either Route 3 or Forest Roads 180, 181, and 182. More preliminary information is needed before this potential Bike Path Extension project is considered for further analysis. The potential bike path will not be considered in this project.

## **Purpose & Need**

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### **Why does the Forest Service need to implement the Sugarhouse project at this time?**

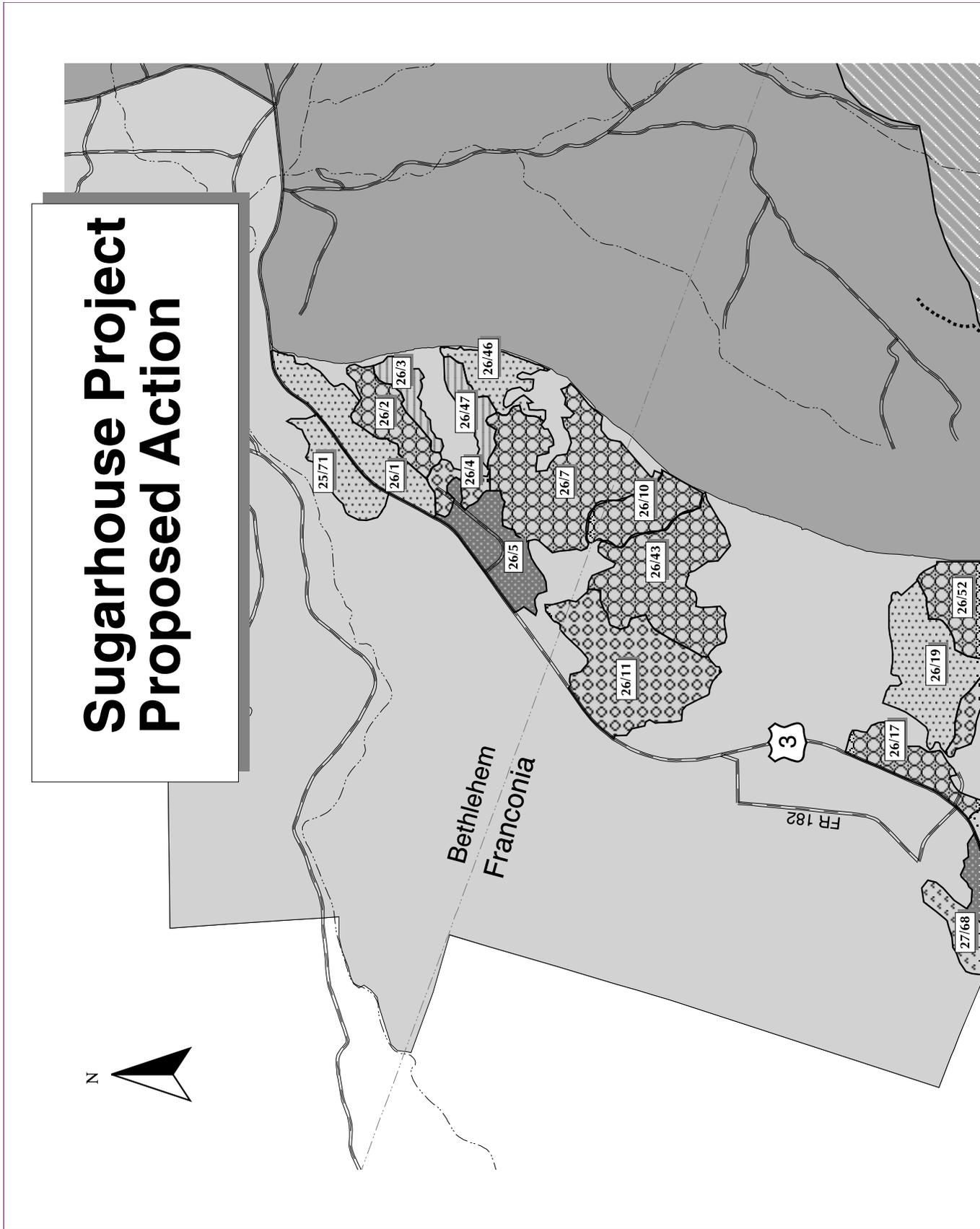
The purpose of this proposed project is to implement Forest Plan direction in the Sugarhouse Project Area by addressing site-specific needs and opportunities to move the area from the existing condition towards the desired condition. This can be accomplished by implementing activities approved in the Forest Plan (vegetation management).

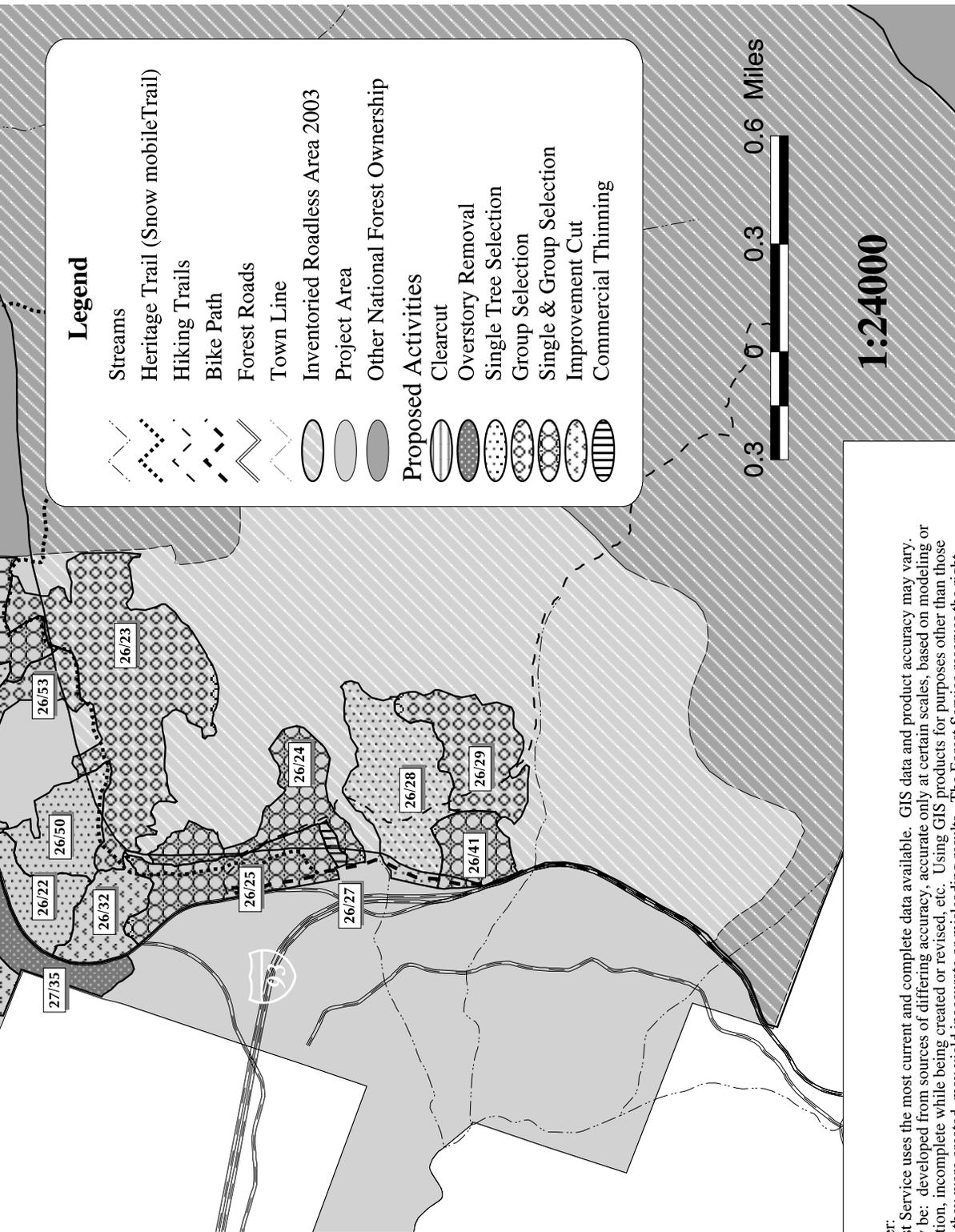
An interdisciplinary team has identified site-specific needs for natural resource management that would change or enhance the present conditions and move the project area toward the desired condition described in the Forest Plan, as amended (pp. III-30 through III-41).

There are approximately 14,614 acres of federal land in HMUs 112 and 113 including 8,615 acres of MA 2.1 and 3.1 lands. The proposed Sugarhouse Project Area is located within the MA 2.1 and 3.1 lands of compartments 25, 26, and 27, which comprise approximately 59 percent of HMUs 112 and 113. These HMUs also contain areas that are not subject to vegetation management including MA 6.2.

Existing resource conditions in the Sugarhouse Project Area were evaluated against the Forest Plan desired condition. Based on Forest Plan goals and objectives and the differences between existing conditions and desired conditions, several needs and opportunities for the Project Area have been identified. The following list describes the “needs for change” identified for the Sugarhouse Project Area that would meet the project’s purpose of implementing the Forest Plan. It should be noted that protecting riparian values, maintaining and protecting habitat for proposed, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, and maintaining healthy and resilient watershed into the future have been and will continue to be primary considerations in management of the Sugarhouse Project Area.

1. At the landscape level, there is little diversity of age classes. Regeneration habitat (trees 0-9 years old) makes up <1% of Habitat Management Units 112 and 113. There is a need to increase the amount of the 0-9 year old





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forest type to improve wildlife habitat diversity for species that use early-successional habitat (Forest Plan, pp. III-13, VII-B-4 & VII-B-5). Opportunities exist, through commercial timber harvesting and reforestation treatments, to improve the growth, vigor, and health of forested stands by harvesting mature or poor quality trees and regenerating new trees, and thus to provide a variety of wildlife habitat types and conditions. Stands would be harvested in accordance with the appropriate silvicultural guidelines and Forest Plan direction. Activities could include the following silvicultural treatments: improvement cuts; single-tree, group, and single-tree/group selection; thinning, overstory removals, and clearcuts.

- 2 Congress annually funds the Forest Service to provide commercial timber within the capability of the lands and individual Forest Plans. The White Mountain National Forest Plan allocates land for sustainable wood production (MAs 2.1 and 3.1). People's demand for hardwood and other wood products continues to be high, which supports the need to supply this renewable resource. Projects such as this, which supply wood products, provide a means to satisfy people's demand for wood and contribute to the economic viability of local communities (Forest Plan, III-3 and III-30).
- 3 Production of forest products in the plan is based on harvesting growth on a sustained yield basis. The Sugarhouse Project Area received treatments in the 1980s to promote new growth. Fully stocked and mature stands in the Project Area need to be treated to harvest past growth and restore the conditions that encourage new growth for future harvests.
4. In both the short- and long-term, an adequate transportation system to access the Project Area is needed for the management of National Forest lands and to provide motorized recreation opportunities (Forest Plan, III-31, III-34).

## **Proposed Action**

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### **What activities is the Forest Service proposing to meet the needs identified above?**

The Forest Service is proposing the following activities to move the Sugarhouse Project Area towards the Forest Plan desired condition. As the project is fully developed and analyzed, actual amounts of activities accomplished on the ground (measured in acres, miles, feet, MMBF, user days, number of facilities, and signs) may vary slightly. Table 1 displays the actions proposed to meet the needs for change identified in the Sugarhouse Project Area.

Table 1: Activities Proposed for the Sugarhouse Project Area

Activity	Stand Acres	Treatment/ Amount
<b>VEGETATION MANAGEMENT:</b>		
<b>Even-Aged Management</b>		
Clearcutting (Northern Hardwood, paper birch)	26 Acres	26 Acres
Overstory Removal (softwoods)	58 Acres	52 Acres
Thinning	3 Acres	3 Acres
<b>Uneven-Aged Management</b>		
Group Selection (groups range in size from 1/10 to 2 acres in size; ½ acre average) *	163 Acres	36 Acres
Single-Tree Selection	398 Acres	398 Acres
Single-Tree and Group selection combined	380 Acres	380 Acres
Improvement Cutting	31 Acres	31 Acres
<b>ESTIMATED HARVEST VOLUME</b>		<b>4.6 MMBF</b>
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>		
Road Maintenance (Forest Roads FR 180, FR 181, and FR 182)		4.0 Miles

\* = Groups harvested represent approximately 20% of stand acres

The proposed Sugarhouse Project affects 28 stands within Compartments 25, 26, and 27, totaling approximately 926 treated acres out of 1,059 stand acres. Table 2, p. 12, displays the proposed stand treatments.

### Mitigation Measures

In addition to the generally applicable Forest and Management area-wide Standards and Guidelines (Forest Plan Section III & VII-B) and the State of New Hampshire’s *Best Management Practices*, the following specific mitigation or coordination measures would be used in implementing the proposed action or alternatives:

1. Minimize the number of skid trail crossings of all existing designated Hiking Trails and the Snowmobile Trails to lessen the impact to the trails and users.
2. Seasonal restrictions to reduce potential soil or recreation impacts.
3. A signing plan would be developed that lists the conditions which require signs to be posted and shows the location where signs are to be posted. The plan will be covered in the pre-work meeting with the purchaser. The sale administrator will obtain the required signs and have them available for the purchaser to post as needed.
4. Retain mast producing beech trees heavily used by black bear unless the trees pose a safety hazard or are located in regeneration units.

*Ammonoosuc/Pemigewasset Ranger District, White Mountain NF*

**Table 2: Proposed Stand Treatments for the Sugarhouse Project**

COMPARTMENT / STAND	STAND ACRES	FOREST TYPE	TREATMENT ACRES	PROPOSED TREATMENT	SEASON OF HARVEST
<b>COMPARTMENT 25</b>					
71	21	Northern Hardwood	21	Single-Tree Selection	Winter
<b>COMPARTMENT 26</b>					
1	41	Northern Hardwood	41	Single-Tree Selection	Winter
2	26	Northern Hardwood	24 & 2	Single-Tree Selection & Group Selection	Winter
3	13	Aspen and Red Maple	13	Clearcut	Summer
4	11	Hemlock and Spruce	2	Group Selection	Winter
5	34	Spruce and Fir	28	Overstory removal	Winter
7	90	Northern Hardwood	85 & 5	Single-Tree Selection & Group Selection	Fall-Winter
10	28	Northern Hardwood	24 & 4	Single-Tree Selection & Group Selection	Fall-Winter
11	81	Northern Hardwood	20	Group Selection	Fall-Winter
17	23	Northern Hardwood	21 & 2	Single-Tree Selection & Group Selection	Winter
19	54	Northern Hardwood	54	Single-Tree Selection	Fall-Winter
22	25	Northern Hardwood	25	Single-Tree Selection	Winter
23	140	Northern Hardwood	140	Single-Tree Selection	Winter
24	41	Northern Hardwood	37 & 4	Single-Tree Selection & Group Selection	Fall-Winter
25	39	Northern Hardwood	33 & 6	Single-Tree Selection & Group Selection	Fall-Winter
27	3	Red Pine	3	Thinning	Fall-Winter
28	64	Northern hardwood	64	Single-Tree Selection	Winter
29	49	Paper Birch	10	Group Selection	Winter
32	17	Northern Hardwood	17	Improvement Cut	Fall-Winter
41	22	Northern Hardwood	18 & 4	Single-Tree Selection & Group Selection	Winter
43	73	Northern Hardwood	70 & 3	Single-Tree Selection & Group Selection	Fall-Winter
46	20	Northern Hardwood	20	Single-Tree Selection	Fall-Winter
47	13	Red Maple	13	Clearcut	Winter
50	33	Northern hardwood	33	Single-Tree Selection	Fall-Winter
52	38	Northern Hardwood	31 & 7	Single-Tree Selection Group Selection	Fall-Winter
53	22	Northern Hardwood	4	Group Selection	Winter
<b>COMPARTMENT 27</b>					
68	14	Northern Hardwood	14	Improvement Cut	Winter
35	24	Northern Hardwood	24	Overstory removal	Winter
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>1059 Acres</b>		<b>926 Acres</b>	<b>4.6 MMBF</b>	

5. Indigenous, minority tree species or beech trees genetically resistant to scale complex would be encouraged in uneven-aged treatments by cutting trees around them that compete for space and resources. In even-aged regeneration treatments, these species would be protected and buffered with a group of other leaf trees.
6. Maintain a high degree of sensitivity toward the visual appearance of the project area as seen from Rt. 93, recreational trails, Artist Bluff, and the Cannon Mountain Ski Area.
7. Post an informative and educational explanation of the management activities that visitors are likely to see. Post these displays at trailhead kiosks, Mount Cleveland Picnic site and at trail locations where hikers are likely to pause and observe.
8. Where bare ground is created, reestablish vegetation (consistent with project objectives) to prevent conditions to establish weeds. Use native seed where appropriate and feasible, and use certified weed-free or weed-seed free hay or straw if certified materials are reasonably available.
9. Heavy equipment must be visibly free of mud, dirt, seeds, and plant parts prior to entering the project area. Cleaning should take place off-Forest unless an on-Forest cleaning site has been approved by a Forest Officer in advance.

## **What decisions will be made?**

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An environmental analysis will evaluate the site-specific issues, consider alternatives, and analyze effects of the proposed action and alternatives. Based on the needs identified for the Sugarhouse Project, the scope of the project is limited to decisions concerning activities within the Sugarhouse Project Area. An Environmental Assessment will provide the deciding official (John Serfass, District Ranger) with the information he needs to make the following decisions with regard to the Sugarhouse Project:

1. Which actions, if any, will be approved (which alternative to implement) that will move the Sugarhouse Project Area towards the desired condition per Forest Plan direction and address the needs and issues identified for this Project?
2. Is the information in this analysis sufficient to implement the proposed activities?
3. Does the proposed project have a significant impact that would trigger a need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement?
4. What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements should the Forest Service apply to these activities to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources?
5. Will a Forest Plan amendment be required to accommodate this project?

## **How is the public involved in this decision?**

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At this time the Forest Service is inviting you to make site-specific comments on our plans for the Sugarhouse Project. We suggest you consider the following questions when looking at the activities proposed for the Sugarhouse Project:

1. Does the proposed action move the Project Area towards the desired condition envisioned in the Forest Plan while protecting the environment?
2. Is there anything about this area that the Forest Service may not know, which might affect activities proposed for the Project Area?

Your comments will be used to define significant (unresolved) issues associated with this project, to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action, and to refine the analysis of effects.

The results of our analysis for the Sugarhouse Project will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA), and a decision is expected during the summer of 2004. The regulations for notice, comment, and appeal, have been revised. Before a decision is made on this project, you will be given an opportunity to comment (30 day Comment Period) on that analysis. If you provide comments pertinent to the Sugarhouse Project during the 30-Day Comment Period, you will also be eligible to file an administrative appeal of the Sugarhouse Project Decision. You will not be eligible to appeal the decision if you only respond to the Scoping Notice you are now reading.

If you provide comments to the Sugarhouse Scoping document now, you will receive the 30-Day Comment Document. If you do not wish to provide comments at this time, but wish to receive the 30-Day Comment document, please let us know. Anyone who responds to the Sugarhouse Scoping document will receive a copy of the Decision Notice when it has been signed.

## **How can you comment?**

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### **Written comments.**

Written comments must be submitted to John Serfass, District Ranger, White Mountain National Forest, at the following address:

Ammonoosuc Ranger Station  
660 Trudeau Road  
Bethlehem, NH 03574  
ATTN: Sugarhouse Project/David Govatski

Electronic comments 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 to: [dgovatski@fs.fed.us](mailto:dgovatski@fs.fed.us)

## **Oral comments**

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours (08:00 am - 4:30 pm) via telephone (603-869-2626) or in person at the above address: ask for Dave Govatski .

## **Information to include when submitting comments**

1. Name and address (include in email and FAX comments also);
2. Title of the proposed project; and
3. Site-specific comments on the Proposed Action along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider reaching a decision.



Ammonoosuc/Pemigewasset Ranger District  
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660 Trudeau Road  
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