



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White Mountain
National Forest

719 N. Main Street
Laconia, NH 03246
Comm: (603) 528-8721
TTY: (603) 528-8722

File Code: 1950

Date: August 6, 2007

To Interested Persons and Organizations:

I am issuing a Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on the Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project. Based on work done by resource specialists and comments provided by the public, I have decided to implement Alternative 2. The reasons for my decision are outlined in the enclosed Decision Notice.

This project will result in a fiber optic cable link between Verizon's Gorham switching office and its Jackson switching office through Pinkham Notch adjacent to New Hampshire (NH) Highway #16. This cable will provide a critical link through North Conway for more than 36,000 "North Country" subscribers, thereby improving communications reliability. Installation of the fiber optic cable would be by two methods: aerial on existing pole lines and underground.

The Decision Notice/FONSI and Environmental Assessment for this project can be viewed on the National Forest web site at:

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

Thank you for your comments on this project and your interest in the management of the White Mountain National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Thomas G. Wagner
THOMAS G. WAGNER
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure





United States
Department of
Agriculture

Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

USDA Forest Service
White Mountain National Forest
Androscoggin and Saco Ranger Districts

August 2007

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Environmental Assessment

Forest Service



For Information Contact: Dave Neely
Assistant District Ranger
Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest
300 Glen Road
Gorham, NH 03581
603-466-2713

This document is available in large print

Contact the Androscoggin Ranger District Office

1-603-466-2713

TTY 1-603-466-2856

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication or program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA's TARGET Center at (202)720-2600 (voice and TDD)

To file a complaint of discrimination, write the USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202)720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

Introduction

This Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact document describes the rationale for my decision to select Alternative 2 for the Verizon Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project. It also documents my finding that this project will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment.

In Accordance with Forest Service regulations and delegations of authority, as the Forest Supervisor I am the responsible official for this decision. During my 27 year career with the Forest Service, and my 6-plus year tenure on the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF), I have personally been involved in planning, designing and making decisions on many projects with impacts similar to this one. I have drawn on this experience as I reviewed the planned activities, read the Environmental Assessment (EA) documenting the project analysis and public comments and reached my decision. In addition to personal knowledge and experience, I have relied heavily on the expertise of Forest Service specialists who have reviewed critical resource aspects of this project and have visited the project area on numerous occasions.

Verizon Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project Description

Verizon is proposing to install a fiber optic cable from its switching center in Gorham, New Hampshire to its switching center in Jackson, New Hampshire. Verizon has determined that this project is necessary for the integrity of the communications network in the northern portion of the state. Geographical and technical alternatives have been considered, and it has been determined that the best route for the new fiber cable would be along NH Highway #16 through Pinkham Notch, a portion of which would be on National Forest System (NFS) lands in the WMNF. The proposed fiber optic cable would be installed using a combination of aerial construction on existing poles where existing poles are easily accessible and underground construction where pole lines are inaccessible or non-existent (Figures 1a-1d).

Background

Communication facilities have evolved over the past one hundred years into complicated, sophisticated, and sometimes confusing combinations of high and low technology components. In early years, metallic, voice-grade communications paths took the form of “open wire”, or individual, un-insulated conductors, strung from pole to pole. Local networks were designed in a snowflake-like pattern, with the conductors originating at a central point and extending outward through cities and towns to terminate at “subscriber’s” homes and businesses. An operator located at the center of the “snowflake” accomplished switching. The operator made manual connections to complete a path from one subscriber to another. Additionally, the operator could connect subscribers in the local network to networks serving other towns where another operator worked. Over time the local networks were referred to as “exchanges”, digital switches replaced operators, and the connection between exchanges became the telephone company’s interoffice facility (IOF), or toll network. With digital switching and greater

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

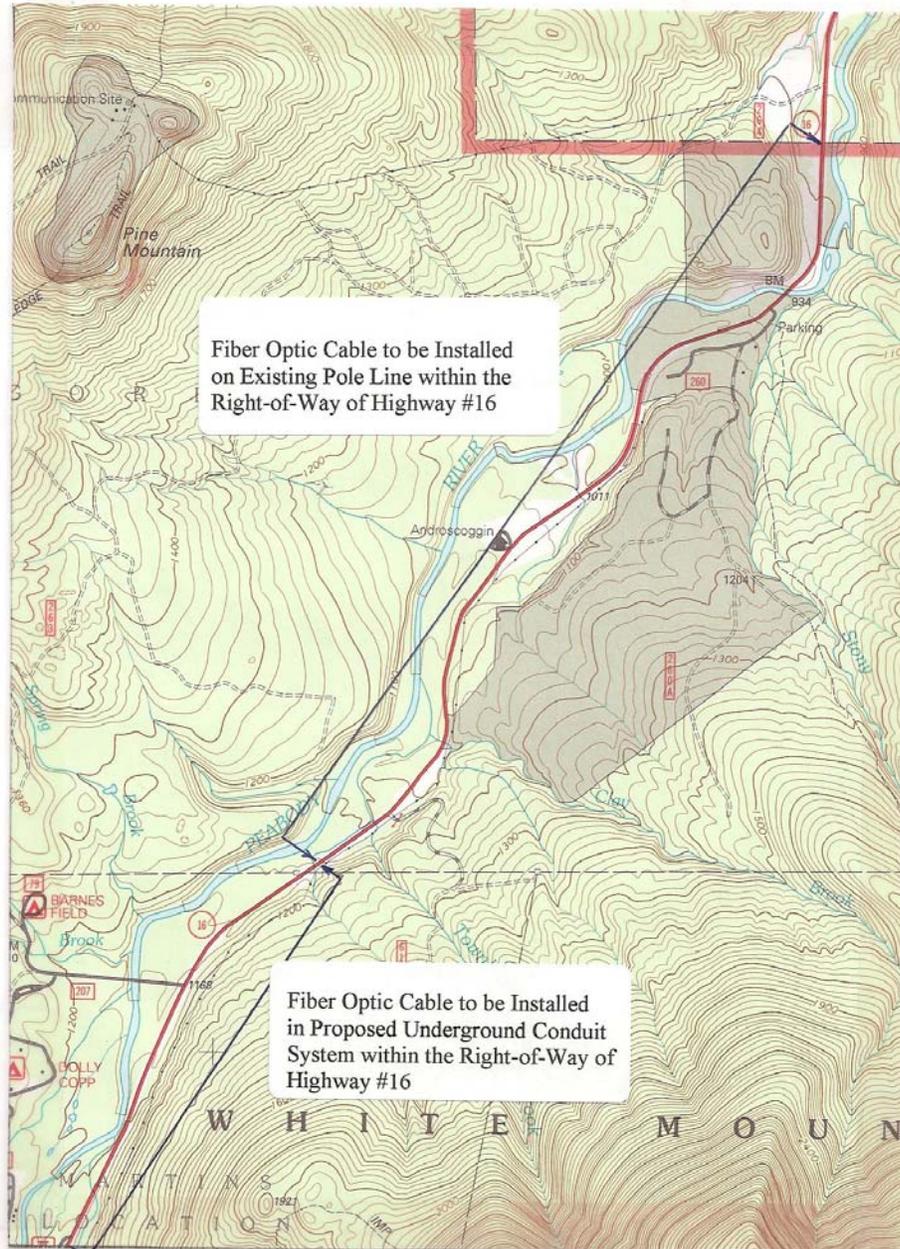


Figure 1a – Alternative 2: Proposed Action; North Section

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

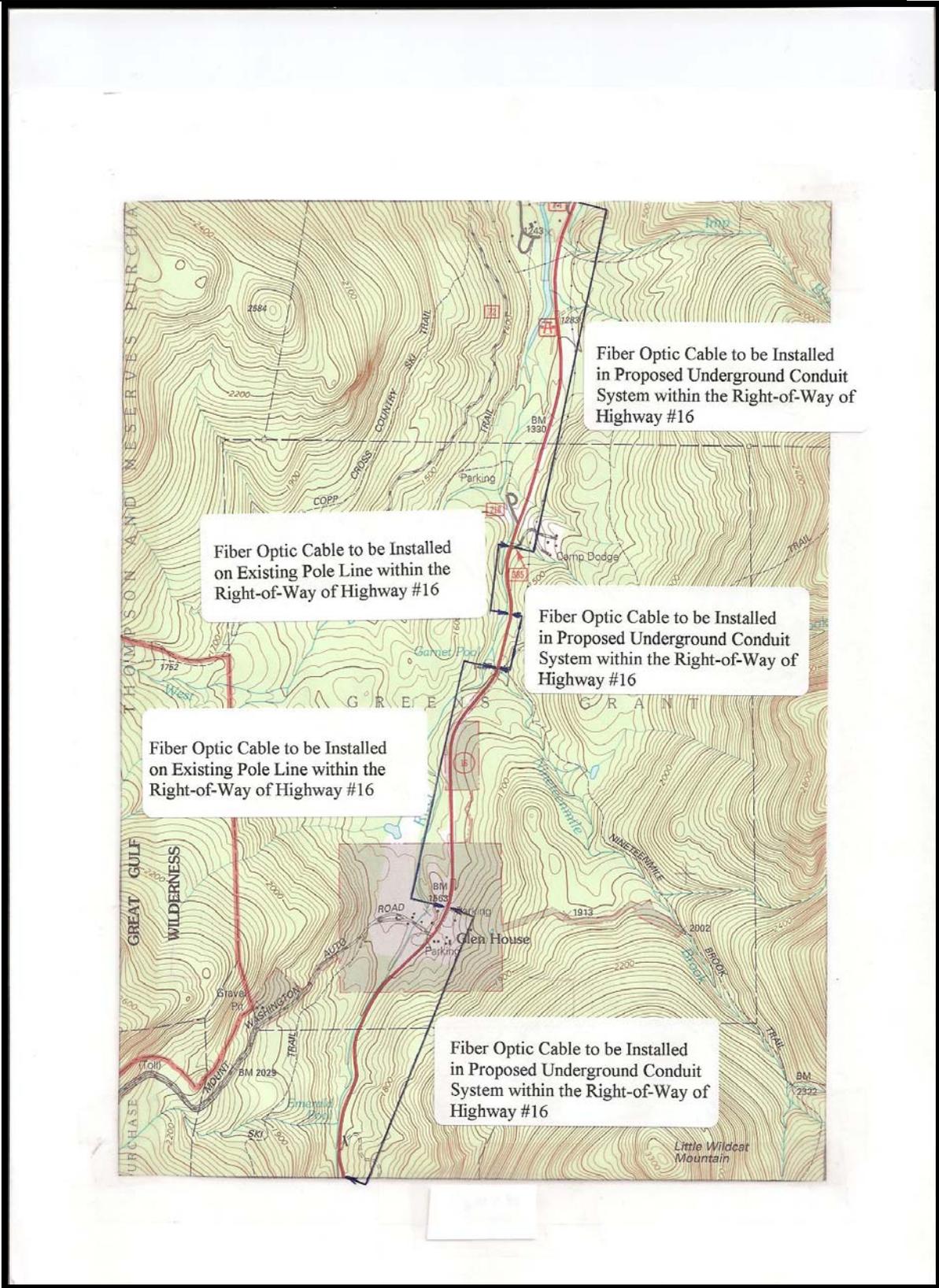


Figure 1b – Alternative 2: Proposed Action; North Central Section

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

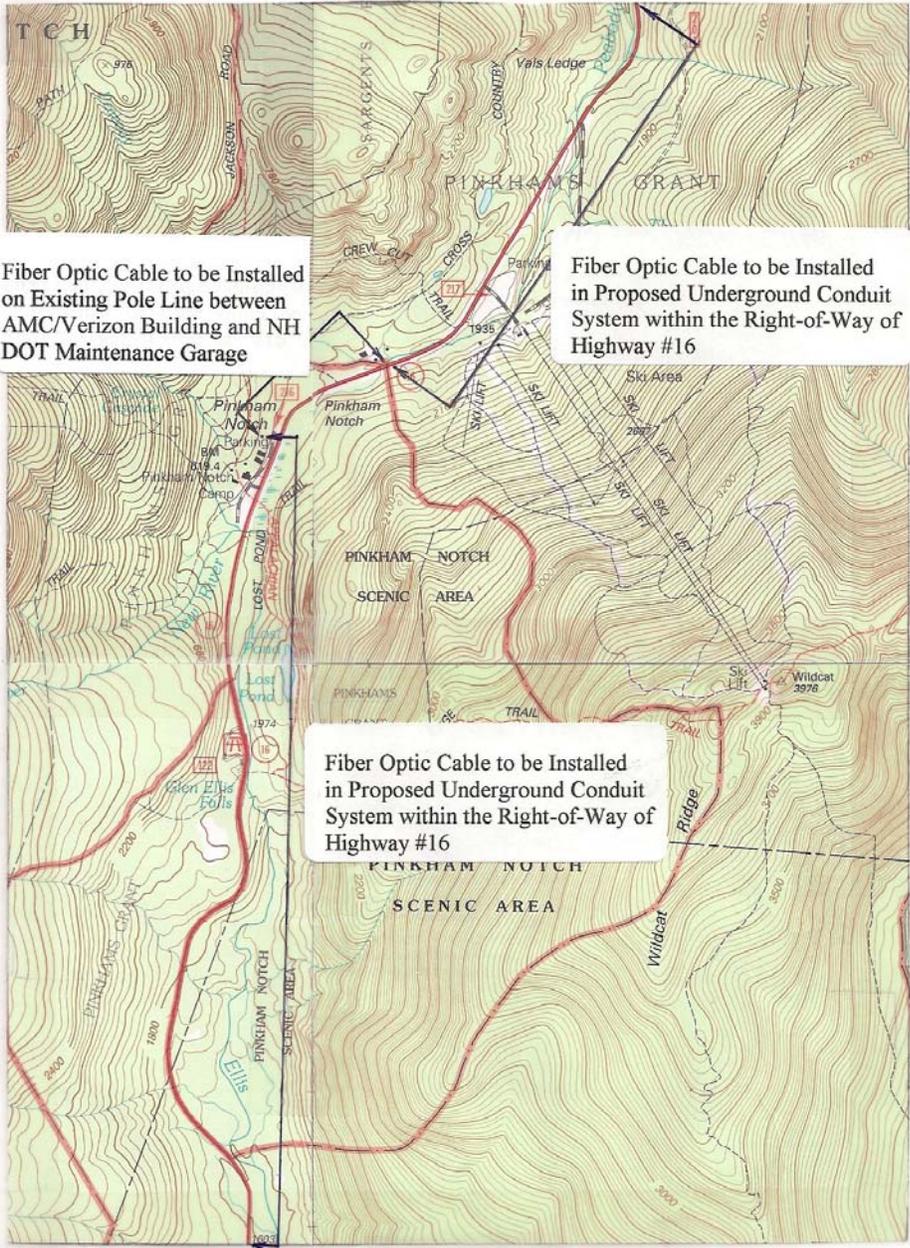


Figure 1c – Alternative 2: Proposed Action; South Central Section

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

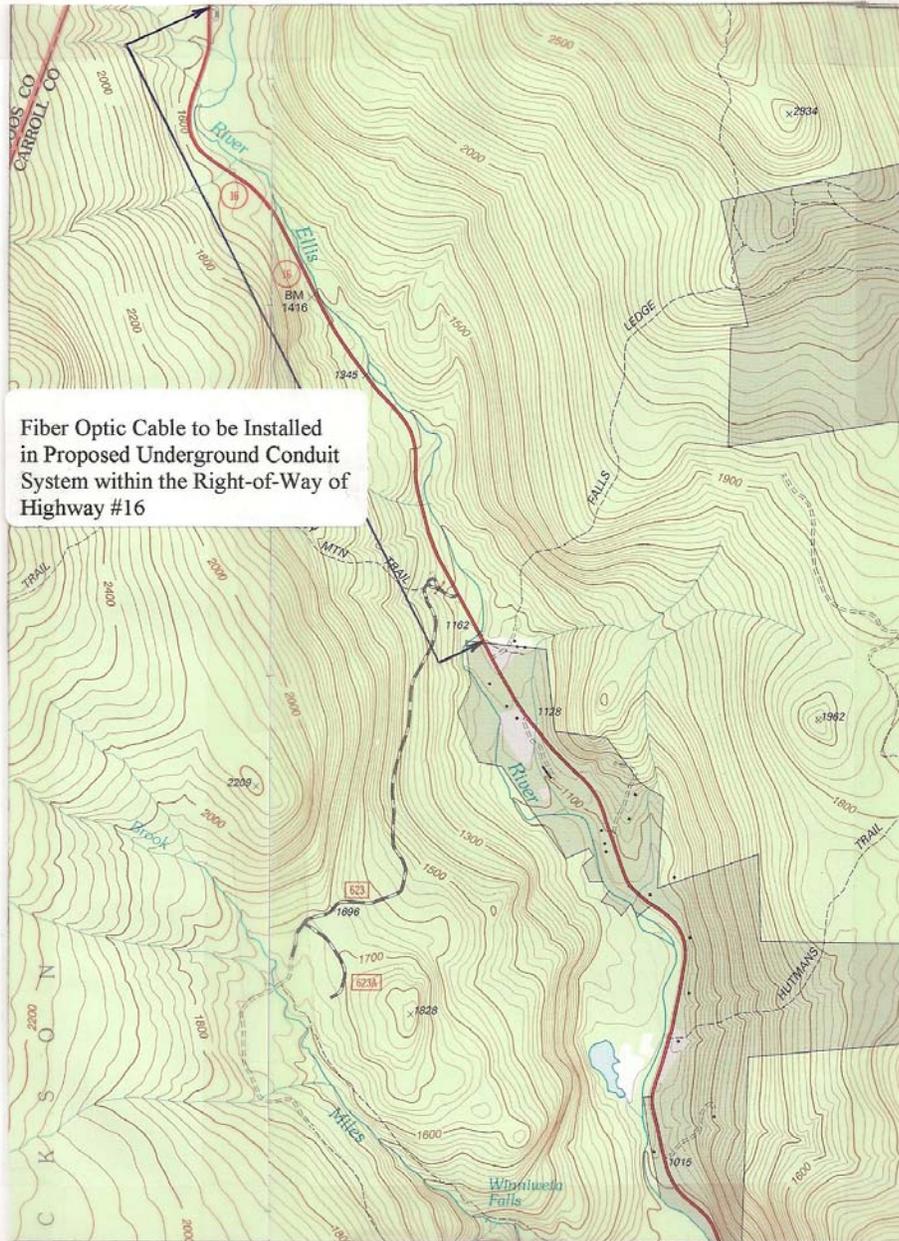


Figure 1d – Alternative 2: Proposed Action; South Section

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

volumes of “traffic” came remote switching modules (RSMs), which contain one exchange. and the large, centrally-located “host” switches that the RSMs depend on for access to the IOF network. The media to carry voice traffic also evolved into the bundled copper conductor intra-exchange cables found in today’s aerial and underground communications systems and the fiber optic inter-exchange IOF cable connecting exchanges together.

Along with the technological evolution of communications came its social evolution. The telephone is no longer a luxury. Instead, it has become the very foundation for everything from keeping families in touch, to providing an essential means of communication for matters of public health and safety, business, and even national security. It is the large and complex geographic footprint of the IOF network that supports our social dependence on communications.

As the societal importance of the network increases, the consequences of its occasional failure are more cataclysmic, both perceived and potentially in fact. Failure can result from mechanical damage inflicted by vehicles, ice storms, fires, tree falls, dig-ups, electronic malfunction, etc. The large communication carriers of modern systems have recognized the need to provide alternative IOF and RSM to host routing from exchanges so that the failure of a single IOF route will not have the effect of isolating large areas from the rest of the telephone world. “Ring architecture”, a survivability design strategy, was born of the need to accommodate alternate routing in the event of a failure. Unlike the interoffice designs of the past that incorporated a central IOF switching location with a single spoke-like toll cable to each of the exchanges it served, today’s ring architecture employs the principle of multiple access to every local exchange. In a sense, ring architecture resembles the outside of a spoke wheel and each exchange occupies a place along the rim. In its location on the ring, an exchange can forward traffic in either direction onto the ring, and traffic will still arrive at the host office for switching to other points on the ring. Severing the ring at any one place would not impede the flow of traffic as the ring is designed to carry all or part of the traffic in either direction around its perimeter. Multiple failures of the ring diminish the ability to carry traffic, but limited inter-exchange communication is still possible and intra-exchange communications remains unaffected. Finally, these small rings of a dozen or so RSM exchanges are made part of larger rings by connecting host offices into their own rings.

There are two inter-office communication risk issues in northern New Hampshire’s communications network today. The first relates to the ability of a host office in northern New Hampshire (Littleton) to communicate with host offices in southern New Hampshire (Laconia) and beyond in the event of failure of a primary IOF route. The second risk issue is inter-office communication between remote switching modules serving individual exchanges (RSMs) and their hosts. Added to these communication risks is a socioeconomic issue caused by New Hampshire’s “digital divide”, an imaginary line formed by contrasting levels of communication technology available to the public in the northern and southern parts of the state. So great is the economic impact of this digital divide that former Governor Jeanne Shaheen, with the approval of the Executive Council,

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

earmarked \$250,000 from the state's economic development fund to study remedies to the problem of high speed telecommunications product availability.

From a communications network standpoint, New Hampshire is somewhat divided in half by the mountains and notches traversing the state. The area to the south of the mountains is more populated than that of the north and the communications network in the south has a greater volume of traffic. Most of the south's network has already been safeguarded by ring architecture. However, the topography of the "North Country" has made construction of a similar system difficult. The rugged mountains and notches that stand in the path of IOF facilities have been circumvented with two intrastate interoffice paths. The first is along the Connecticut River Valley on the western border of New Hampshire and the second, and most recent, is through Kinsman Notch. Together these two routes address the first risk factor by providing assurance that a single catastrophic IOF network failure will not interrupt communications traffic between Littleton and Laconia host offices. However, with the exception of the Franconia and North Woodstock RSMs, these interoffice paths do not address the second risk factor, inter-office communication survivability, for most RSMs north and several RSMs south of the White Mountains.

Project Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to address the second risk factor, providing survivability to certain vulnerable remote switching modules, totaling more than 36,000 telephone lines, at or near the perimeter of the Laconia and Littleton host serving areas. There would be the added effect of providing alternative routing between the hosts themselves. The project described in this environmental assessment also would address many of the communication and "digital divide" needs of northern New Hampshire.

All traffic out of and between the Pittsburg, West Stewartstown, Colebrook, North Stratford, Groveton, Lancaster, Jefferson, Errol, Milan, Berlin, Gorham, Twin Mountain, Bethlehem, Franconia, Littleton and Whitefield RSM switching centers, and the independent company switches in Bretton Woods and Dixville Notch, must go through the Littleton host office to be connected to interoffice routes in southern New Hampshire. Likewise, traffic out of Jackson, North Conway, Madison, North Woodstock, Campton Waterville Valley, and others south of the mountains must go through the Laconia host switching office to be connected to the wider interoffice network. If the link to their respective host offices is lost, the local (RSM) offices become isolated and their only phone line communication would be within the individual RSM.

"End Offices", or those RSM exchange switches near the perimeter of the host office's serving area, are the most vulnerable to isolation in the event of intra-host area IOF failure. This is true because the position they occupy within the host operating area implies longer cable lengths to their host. They are also subject to the technically necessary issue of routing their IOF link through other RSMs on its path to the host. Consequently, even under the best of circumstances, they become the most geographically difficult to gather into a ring. North Conway, Conway, Madison, Bartlett and Jackson are such offices within the Laconia host's serving area because they occupy a position near the geographic perimeter of the host's area. Similarly, Gorham, Jefferson,

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

Berlin, Milan, Errol, Lancaster and Whitefield are among those that are physically beyond the reach of any present survivability ring.

Loss of an IOF facility south of Madison would isolate the Madison (1,850 lines), Conway (5,100 lines), North Conway (7,500 lines), Bartlett (1,250 lines) and Jackson (3,100 lines) exchanges from their Laconia host. Loss of an IOF facility between (not necessarily south of) any of these RSMs would have similar but less widespread consequences. In total, as many as 18,800 lines in the Laconia host area could be subject to isolation if the IOF facility was severed at a single location. Indeed, in July of 2003, the entire Mount Washington Valley area was isolated from the telephone communications world, including E-911, for several hours when a truck struck a pole in Conway and caused an IOF facility failure.

The consequences of an IOF failure between Lancaster and Littleton would be similar where most of the RSMs to the north and east of the Littleton host would be lost in the event of an intra-host failure. Included in the list of vulnerable exchanges are Whitefield (2,200 lines), Lancaster (3,050 lines), Jefferson (750 lines), Berlin (7,000 lines), Milan (1,150 lines), Errol (650 lines) and Gorham (2,650 lines). The loss of an IOF cable between these exchanges could result in the interrupted communications, including E-911, to as many as 17,450 lines.

Decision

Based on my review of the EA, public comments, the project record and input from Forest Service specialists and staff, I selected Alternative 2 of the Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project, including the mitigation measures noted in the EA and further described below. My decision also incorporates the relevant standards and guidelines listed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the WMNF.

The Proposed Action (Alternative 2) and the other alternative (Alternative 1, No Action) for the Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project, as well as the analysis of their effects described in the EA, are confined in scope to the area of the WMNF encompassing the project area. Neither this Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact, nor the EA on which it is based, have application to any area outside the WMNF, unless as stated in the EA. The analysis and all documentation for the project are tiered to the Forest Plan.

Why I Selected Alternative 2

I chose Alternative 2 because it allows Verizon to improve the integrity of the communications network in the northern portion of the state of New Hampshire, thereby benefiting tens of thousands of people and hundreds of businesses in the North Country while having minimal impact to resources on National Forest lands. This alternative will improve public health, safety and welfare by improving the reliability of telecommunications in a large area where telecommunications are presently at risk.

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

Selection of Alternative 2 best meets the project's purpose and need. Furthermore, Alternative 2 is consistent with the Forest Plan and assists in meeting the Desired Future Conditions expressed in the Forest Plan by putting the majority of new utility cable in the WMNF underground and eliminating several miles of existing aerial utility lines from the WMNF. Although some sections of new Verizon fiber optic cable will still be aerial on existing pole lines, I have determined that the impact of burying these lines would be greater than the negligible visual impact of some short sections remaining aerial.

Lastly, my decision to select Alternative 2 is based on my determination that there is no other reasonably feasible alternative that meets the purpose and need for the project that does not involve National Forest System lands. An alternative cable route through Crawford Notch (which would also involve some National Forest System lands) would provide redundancy for the Conway/North Conway area, but would do nothing to improve telecommunications reliability in the Berlin/Gorham area. An alternative cable route through the North Country would service the Berlin/Gorham area but would provide no communication improvements to the Conway/North Conway area. Installing fiber optic cable through Pinkham Notch, as proposed in Alternative 2, is the only reasonably feasible option for this project.

Other Alternatives Considered

One other alternative was considered in detail for this project. This alternative was Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative. I did not select Alternative 1 because it did not meet the purpose and need of the project. Under Alternative 1, more than 36,000 North Country telecommunication users would continue to have service that is compromised relative to the telecommunication service available to most users elsewhere in New Hampshire. This unreliability of service jeopardizes public health, safety, welfare and the general economy of the North Country.

Mitigation Measures

All actions on National Forest System lands related to the implementation of Alternative 2 will be required to comply with the standards and guidelines in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Forest Plan. The EA for this project determined that additional mitigation measures are necessary to ensure that environmental impacts are within acceptable levels. These added measures are:

1. Prior to any construction, Verizon will submit an erosion control plan to the Forest Service for review and approval. This plan will detail the short and long term measures to be taken to prevent erosion and minimize downstream water quality impacts. In addition, a copy of all required permits will be provided to the Forest Service. This may include an alteration of terrain permit and wetlands permit.
2. Impacts to wetlands will be avoided to the maximum extent possible. Where temporary impacts are unavoidable, Verizon and its contractors will adhere to guidance provided by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

- or the Army Corps of Engineers, as applicable, regarding how best to operate in and restore impacted wetlands.
3. Actions consistent with the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the White Mountain National Forest Forest-wide Invasive Plant Control Project will be taken to control invasive plant populations. Verizon must consult with the WMNF Botanist or representative prior to construction to identify areas of special concern and appropriate techniques to prevent spread of any known, established non-native invasive species populations in the project area.
 4. Verizon and its contractors must contact the Forest Archeologist immediately should cultural resources be discovered during the construction process.
 5. Verizon must remove all abandoned communication lines and poles immediately upon project completion by methods acceptable to the Forest Service.
 6. Verizon and its contractors must maintain access to all recreation areas and trails during construction by appropriate construction sequencing, temporary re-routing, signage, etc. Construction activities in the vicinity of the Pinkham Notch Visitors Center will be restricted to hours between 8 AM and 5 PM and would avoid prime summer/fall high use periods to the extent possible. Tree clearing through the forested buffer between NH Highway #16 and the Pinkham Notch Visitor's Center will be kept to the smallest width possible. Construction staging areas will avoid recreation areas.
 7. Verizon will not be allowed to place above-ground pedestals or utility locator signs within sight of the Appalachian Trail.

These mitigation measures will be applied on all National Forest lands in the project area. Similar measures, if applicable, could be adopted on lands outside Forest Service jurisdiction. Local and state regulators may require additional mitigation measures as conditions of their own permits on private or State lands. Any such measures would be automatically incorporated as required measures.

Public Involvement

On March 23, 2006, a scoping letter and report was sent to more than 180 interested individuals, organizations and government agencies and posted on the WMNF web page (www.fs.fed.us/r9/white). Legal notice was published in the Manchester Union Leader on March 27, 2006 and a 30-day scoping period ended on April 26, 2006. This project was also listed in the quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions for the WMNF.

Fourteen comments were received during the scoping process. Substantive issues raised by these comments or by the Forest Service interdisciplinary team were addressed in the EA, some of which influenced the development of the alternatives evaluated in EA. A summary of these substantive issues may be found on EA page 9.

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

The EA was released for public comment on May 30, 2007. Copies of the EA were sent to all commentors and others who expressed an interest. Legal notice of availability was published in the Manchester Union Leader on May 30, 2007. The EA was also posted on our WMNF web page. Two written comments were received during the official comment period that ended on June 29, 2007. Both comments received were in favor of the Proposed Action. No substantive issues were raised that required response or revision of the EA. Both comments were placed in an appendix (Appendix A, Comments Received) to the EA. Appendix A will be posted on our web page with this Decision Notice.

Other Applicable Laws, Regulations and Policies; NFMA Consistency

Numerous laws, regulations and agency directives require that my decision be consistent with their provisions. I have determined that my decision meets this requirement. The following summarizes my findings that are required by major environmental laws:

National Forest Management Act

My decision is consistent with the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan (see EA pages 7-8) and management direction for the associated Management Areas. No Forest Plan amendments are necessary to implement this project. The Forest Plan and this project comply with NFMA.

Endangered Species Act

A Biological Evaluation of the potential effects to threatened, endangered, proposed and sensitive species was completed for this project and is available in the project record. No federally-listed species would be affected by this project. For four Regional Forester sensitive species (Eastern Small-footed Bat, Northern Bog Lemming, Brown's Ameletid Mayfly and Third Ameletid Mayfly), the project may impact individuals but would not likely cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability. For all other sensitive species, the project would have no impact because there is no potential for these species to occur in the project area or to be affected by the proposed action.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Implementation of Alternative 2 complies with Executive Order 13186, dated January 10, 2001, which governs the responsibilities of Federal agencies to protect migratory birds.

National Environmental Policy Act

This act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects for proposed actions and alternatives. The Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project environmental analysis was conducted following the procedures and requirements of this act and documents compliance with this act.

Executive Order 11990 (wetlands) and 11988 (floodplains)

Alternative 2 is in compliance with these orders. All practicable efforts have been made to avoid impacts to wetlands and floodplains. While minor short-term impacts to both

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

roadside wetlands and intermittent streams are unavoidable, all impacts are temporary. Wetlands and intermittent streams channels are expected to return to existing conditions (EA pages 23-25).

Executive Order 12898 (environmental justice)

Implementation of Alternative 2 will not cause disproportionate human health or environmental effects to any segment of the population. In fact, this project would improve public health, safety, and welfare by improving the reliability of telecommunications in a large area where telecommunications are presently at risk.

Clean Water Act

The mitigation measures specified in this Decision Notice will insure that implementation of the Alternative 2 will comply with relevant sections of this Act.

Clean Air Act

The Air Resources section of the Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project EA (pages 27-28) provides the analysis of potential project impacts on air resources. This analysis found that National Ambient Air Quality Standards are not likely to be exceeded by implementation of Alternative 2.

National Historic Preservation Act

A Cultural Resource Reconnaissance Report (CRRR) was completed for the project area based on field surveys and a review of historic maps and literature. No Heritage Resources are known or expected to occur within the already highly disturbed highway shoulder/cleared right-of-way that defines the extent of the ground disturbing portion of the project area. The CRRR and its protective measures were reviewed and approved by the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office. Implementation of Alternative 2 complies with this Act.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

This project parallels the Ellis (to the south) and the Peabody (to the north) Rivers; segments of both rivers are listed in the Forest Plan as being eligible for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Implementation of Alternative 2 will not affect the eligibility of either river for designation (EA page 19).

Project Appeal Rights and Implementation

The 30-day comment period for this project ended on June 29, 2007. Since only supportive comments were received during the official comment period, this decision is not subject to appeal (36 CFR 215.12). Implementation may begin immediately.

The EA for this project is available for public review at the Androscoggin Ranger Station, 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581 and at the Saco Ranger District, 33 Kancamagus Highway, Conway, NH 03818. It is also posted on the WMNF web page (www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white). Questions regarding the EA or this decision should be directed to Dave Neely at the Androscoggin Ranger Station (phone: 603-466-2713). My

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

office is located at White Mountain National Forest, 719 N. Main St., Laconia, NH 03246; phone: 603-528-8721.

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have determined, based on my review of the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for significance criteria of both context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27), and on my experience with similar practices and projects, that this action is not a major federal action which would, individually or in combination with other projects on nearby NFS lands and/or neighboring private lands, significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The physical effects are limited to the project and adjacent areas. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the actions explained as follows:

1. **Context:** Activities conducted as part of Alternative 2, the selected course of action, would not have significant effects when considered in the context of similar projects on the WMNF. Activities associated with my decision would be confined to the 23 linear miles of the project area. I have reviewed the cumulative effects of past management, combined with this project and reasonably foreseeable future actions as they are analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA, and feel that the context of this decision is localized. It will not set a regional or national precedent. My decision to select Alternative 2 is consistent with the direction contained in the Forest Plan.
2. **Intensity:** Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent or quantity of effects, and is based on information from Chapter 3 of the EA and a determination using the following ten factors:
 - a. *Consideration of both beneficial and adverse impacts.* Both beneficial and adverse impacts from implementing Alternative 2 are considered. My finding of no significant impact is not biased or weighted by the beneficial effects of the alternative. In other words, I did not ignore or trivialize negative effects by “offsetting” them with beneficial effects. The EA demonstrates that the adverse effects are not directly, indirectly or cumulatively significant.
 - b. *Consideration of effects on public health or safety.* Alternative 2 does not contain actions that would be expected to create public health or safety risks. This project does not involve national defense or security. This project would improve public health, safety, and welfare by improving the reliability of telecommunications in a large area where telecommunications are presently at risk. During implementation, traffic flow will be affected in the immediate construction area. Standard construction practices in highway settings using signage, flag persons, reduced speed limits, etc. will be employed. These measures will reduce potential effects on public health and safety to acceptable levels.
 - c. *Consideration of unique physical or biological characteristics of the geographic area.* No historical or cultural resources would be adversely affected by Alternative 2 (EA page 36). The actions will have no effect on parklands, prime

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

- farmland, rangeland, wilderness or ecologically critical areas and no significant effects to wild and scenic rivers, wetlands or floodplains (EA pages 19, 23-25, 28-31). There are no unique characteristics of the geographical area that will be significantly affected by the actions of this project. The selected alternative will not violate standards set for Outstanding Resource Waters for New Hampshire nor is it expected to adversely affect threatened, endangered, proposed or sensitive species (EA pages 29-31).
- d. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.* Controversy in this circumstance refers to situations where there is substantial dispute within the scientific community with regard to the effects of a federal action. Our public involvement efforts and the findings of the Forest Service resource specialists indicate that the impacts of these actions on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial (EA, Ch. 3).
 - e. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* We have considerable experience on the WMNF with ground-disturbing projects such as would occur with the implementation of Alternative 2. Based on consultation with Forest Service resource specialists and the analysis contained in the EA, the impacts of these actions are not highly uncertain, nor do they involve unique or unknown risks.
 - f. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principal about a future consideration.* This is not a precedent-setting decision. Similar actions have occurred previously in and around the local area as well as in other areas of the WMNF. The effects of Alternative 2 are within the range of effects of these other similar actions and within the range of effects disclosed in the Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement. This action is consistent with the Forest Plan and therefore this is not a decision in principal. This decision does not commit me to actions that may have significant effects on lands outside the project area. I have thus determined that this action does not establish precedence for future actions with significant or unknown effects on lands outside the project area.
 - g. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant effects.* The EA analyzes the combined effects of this project with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions. None of the actions included in Alternative 2 would have a significant impact alone or when considered with other actions. Based on the analysis in Chapter 3 of the EA, I have determined that there will not be any individually or cumulatively significant impacts.
 - h. *Consideration of effects to sites listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or loss of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.* A cultural resource inventory of the project area was completed and no listed or eligible, cultural or archeological sites were found. The findings and

Decision Notice for Verizon-Pinkham Notch Fiber Optic Cable Project

recommendations from the inventory were submitted to the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office and we received their concurrence. I have determined that no adverse impacts to any sites or resources listed in this category will occur as a result of implementation of Alternative 2.

- i. *The degree to which the action may affect an endangered species or their critical habitat.* Compliance with the Endangered Species Act and protection of species and their habitats are described in the Biological Evaluation and Chapter 3 for this project and also summarized in the section of this Decision Notice titled Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations – Endangered Species Act. Each of these references documents the determination that Alternative 2 will have no effect on any federally-listed endangered, threatened or proposed species. No critical habitat is designated or proposed on the WMNF for any of these species.

- j. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.* This action does not violate any Federal, State or local law requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. My decision does not eliminate the need for Verizon to obtain other Federal, State or local permits, if applicable, to implement the project.

Responsible Official's Signature

/S/ Thomas G. Wagner

Thomas G. Wagner
Forest Supervisor

6 August 2007

Date