White Mountain National Forest

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

**Eastern
Region**

May, 2005

Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for the
Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project

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United States Department of Agriculture | **Forest Service** | **White Mountain National Forest**

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File Code: 2350/1950
Date: May 3, 2005

Dear Planning Participant,

I am pleased to announce that I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project and have selected Alternative 2 for implementation. This alternative will construct the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail which connects the Three Ponds and the Glover Brook Snowmobile Trails. The trail includes 4.3 miles of existing roads and skid trails, 2.8 miles of remnant portions of the long-abandoned Warren to Woodstock Carriage Road and 1.7 miles of new trail construction. Concurrent with the selection of Alternative 2, I will issue a site-specific non-significant Forest Plan amendment.

My decision and accompanying rationale is documented in this Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project.

I am sending this information to you because you have expressed interest in this project. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Susan Mathison at: Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District, White Mountain National Forest, 1171 Route 175, Holderness, NH 03265; Phone: 603-536-1315 (voice); 603-536-3281 (TTY); or E-mail: smathison@fs.fed.us.

Thank you for your participation in the management of the White Mountain National Forest.

Sincerely,

THOMAS G. WAGNER
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project
Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

I have decided to implement Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project. This project includes:

- The construction of an 8.8 mile snowmobile trail connecting the existing Three Ponds and Glover Brook Snowmobile Trails and placement of interpretive signing near the remnant portions of the historic Warren to Woodstock Carriage Road, as described in the Environmental Assessment for this project, and
- A site specific Forest Plan amendment to accommodate a non-conforming use in a corridor of Management Area (MA) 6.2 lands. The snowmobile corridor would be managed under the White Mountain National Forest Plan standards and guidelines for MA 6.3.

Background

The White Mountain National Forest is proposing to construct a snowmobile trail that would connect the existing Three Ponds and the Glover Brook Snowmobile Trails.

The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project Area is located in the Towns of Warren and Woodstock, New Hampshire, Grafton County on the Ammonoosuc/ Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest.

Members of the public have requested the Forest Service construct a snowmobile trail between the towns of Warren and Woodstock for more than ten years. Project proponents request this linking trail because of complications for snowmobile travel, including weather-related closures on the Interstate 93 railbed snowmobile trail corridor. These complications and periodic weather-related closures have precipitated a need for a supplementary route to the railbed corridor trail. Project proponents also note that increasing passenger train use in the late fall and early winter seasons may curtail snowmobile use of the railbed corridor. There is public interest in and requests for additional snowmobile trail opportunities, specifically a link between the existing Three Ponds and the Glover Brook Snowmobile Trails. Members of the community of Warren are also interested in the trail in order to attract snowmobile-related revenues to local lodging and retail businesses.

The proposed Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail would link snowmobile Corridors 5 and 11. The New Hampshire Snowmobile Association indicates a continuing demand for this trail link. The State of New Hampshire Trails Bureau has expressed support for this project; the Bureau has stated that it considers this trail a high priority for State construction and maintenance grant funds.

This decision is based on effects analyzed and documented in the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project Environmental Assessment (EA) and comments made by the public on the project.

Project implementation could begin in summer 2005. It is anticipated that Trail construction would be completed by October 2006.

How does the Project Area relate to the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)?

For planning purposes the Forest Plan designates portions of land, including the Project Area, into Management Areas (MAs). These designations assist resource managers and the decision maker to evaluate a proposal and its anticipated effects to assure that the project level planning is in concert with the Forest Plan.

The Forest Plan designates land under a range of MAs, and describes appropriate management for each MA. The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project Area traverses lands in MAs 2.1, 3.1, and 6.2 lands (EA, Map 2). The project would be implemented using standards and guidelines found in the Forest Plan for MAs 2.1 and 3.1, and as amended for MA 6.2.

The Project Area, which includes the proposed snowmobile trail corridor and surrounding areas considered for alternate trail locations, includes approximately 4,839 acres. The Project Area represents less than 0.6 of 1% of the White Mountain National Forest.

Decision to Be Made

This Decision Notice documents my decision for implementation to meet the identified purpose and need for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project. Specifically, the decisions documented are:

- Decision Point 1: Whether the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project will proceed as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all;
- Decision Point 2: What specific resource protection or mitigation measures should be implemented as part of the Project;
- Decision Point 3: Would the proposed project have significant impacts that would trigger the need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement; and
- Decision Point 4: Should the Forest approve and implement a site-specific Forest Plan amendment for an 850-foot long and 20-foot wide (0.4 acre) section of the trail corridor that would traverse MA 6.2 lands, where motorized use is otherwise limited.

My decision is based on the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project, its project record, and the Finding of No Significant Impact (*FONSI*). In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40 CFR 1500-1508) and other relevant Federal and state laws and regulations, the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project EA discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects to resources resulting from the No Action and all action alternatives.

Prior to this decision, I have:

- Reviewed the proposed action, its alternatives and the analysis presented in the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project EA;
- Considered the comments received during Scoping and in response to the Information and Notice for 30 Day Comment;
- Discussed the anticipated effects of implementing this decision with the interdisciplinary team (ID team);
- Reviewed technical specialist reports including the Biological Evaluation with (US Fish and Wildlife Service) USFWS concurrence in the project record; and .
- Personally visited the Project Area.

Purpose & Need

Why is the Forest Service proposing the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project?

The **Purpose** of the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project is to respond to public requests for the trail and to implement Forest Plan direction in the Project Area. This can be accomplished by addressing site-specific needs and opportunities to move the Project Area from its existing condition to its desired condition as described in the Forest Plan.

An interdisciplinary team analyzed this Project Area to identify site-specific **needs** for management activities that would change or enhance the current conditions of the Project Area and move it toward the desired condition for each of the MAs as described in the Forest Plan, as amended (pp. III-30-41 and III 51-56).

Management Area 2.1

The Forest Plan specifies that the purpose of recreational activities in areas designated as MA 2.1 will ,"broaden the range of recreation options, mainly those offering roaded natural opportunities," (Forest Plan, III-30). The Desired Condition for the portion of the Project Area designated as MA 2.1 includes "noticeable human activity in these areas resulting from many uses. Evidence will usually be in harmony with the natural-appearing environment and consistent with good resource management. Roads will provide access to meet land management objectives. Selected areas will be accessible for off-road motorized forms of recreation activities" (Forest Plan, III-31). Alternative 2 meets the purpose of this Management Area.

Management Area 3.1

The Forest Plan specifies that the purpose of recreational activities in areas designated as MA 3.1 will "broaden the range of recreation options, mainly those offering semiprimitive motorized experience opportunities," (Forest Plan, III-36). The Desired Condition for the portion of the Project Area designated as MA 3.1 states that the area "be accessible for off-road management activities," (Forest

Plan, III-36). Alternative 2 would meets the purpose of this Management Area.

Management Area 6.2

The proposed trail location traverses an approximately 850-foot wide section of MA 6.2 lands. The purpose of this MA is to "broaden the range of recreation options, mainly those forms of semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation opportunities" (Forest Plan III-51). The Desired Condition for the portion of the Project Area designated as MA 6.2 specifies that "Evidence of human activities will generally be unnoticeable except for trails that traverse the area and occasional recreational facilities. Recreation activities will be limited to nonmotorized dispersed use. There will be no roads " (Forest Plan, III-51).

The Proposed Action states that the section of the proposed trail within MA 6.2 lands would be located on a remnant section of the long-abandoned Warren to Woodstock Carriage Road. The MA 6.2 lands extend in a north/south corridor, crossing the Carriage Road between Warren and Woodstock (See Map 2, EA). In order to provide a snowmobile trail connection between the existing Three Ponds Trail and the Glover Brook Trail, and thereby meeting the Desired Condition of the MAs 2.1 and 3.1 lands throughout the area, the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail must cross the MA 6.2 lands. The proposed trail section crossing the MA 6.2 land, would be a non-conforming use within this approximate 850-foot long and 20-foot wide corridor totaling approximately 0.4 acres. The crossing requires a site-specific Forest Plan amendment for this 0.4 acre non-conforming use.

The proposed trail location within the MA 6.2 is coincident with the location of the Carriage Road, crosses the narrowest portion of the MA 6.2 lands for approximately 850 feet, and minimizes the amount of clearing and excavation required for trail construction.

The section of MA 6.2 through which the proposed trail would pass is also currently bisected by State Route 118, another non-conforming use of this management area. When designating management areas in the 1986 Forest Plan, site-specific accommodations were not made for obvious non-conforming uses including long and well-established travelways. State Route 118 is a permanent land feature that is a non-conforming use of MA 6.2. The proposed amendment to the Forest Plan, when viewed in overall context of the existing State Highway and geographic location, would not significantly affect the broader purposes of MA 6.2.

What is the site-specific need identified for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project Area?

The following **need** has been identified for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project Area.

Broaden the range of recreation options in MAs 2.1 and 3.1

The Desired Condition for MAs 2.1 and 3.1 specifies that activities in these areas will "broaden the range of recreation options" through roaded natural and

semiprimitive motorized opportunities, respectively (Forest Plan III 30 and 36).

Winter snowmobile use occurs on the snow-covered railbed of the railway corridor that parallels Interstate 93. The railbed corridor, serving as Corridor 11, is problematic because, frequently, there is insufficient snow depth to effectively cover the railbed ties and rails. In marginal snow years, the railbed trail is frequently closed because of insufficient snow depths. Because snowfall in a higher elevation forested setting would provide adequate coverage for snowmobile travel, the Proposed Action would alleviate this restriction to snowmobile travel.

Rail use for tourism and commerce is a continuing emphasis for New Hampshire state and local rural economic development efforts. As rail use for tourism continues to increase, it is possible that snowmobile use of the railbed could be discontinued, effectively severing a major snowmobile corridor connection between the north and south portions of the state. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the State of New Hampshire, Department of Resources and Economic Development, Bureau of Off Highway Recreation Vehicles (BOHRV) and the US Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest, specifies "The major objective on Corridor trails is to maintain uninterrupted use." The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail would provide the supplementary snowmobile route, as supported in the MOU, for railbed trail closures due to snow conditions and/or other mutually exclusive uses, including rail travel. The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail would not be intended or designed now or in the future to replace or to serve as a main snowmobile corridor trail; rather, it is intended to serve as a complementary route to existing corridor trails located elsewhere in the State's snowmobile trail network.

Local proponents also advocate for the highly localized economic effects of the proposed trail, stating that the community of Warren would benefit from the increase in snowmobile traffic accessing their small community stores and services.

Based on Forest Plan Desired Condition for MAs 2.1 and 3.1, the project would respond to a proposed need while meeting other important Forest Plan goals and objectives. The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project also responds to public requests for a direct connection between the Glover Brook and Three Ponds Snowmobile Trails.

The Proposed Action would establish a viable alternate route to the I-93 railbed corridor. The need for the alternate route is substantiated by: the above-mentioned Memorandum of Understanding; periodic poor snow conditions which preclude railbed snowmobile travel; changing levels and seasons of rail tourism and/or commerce, and positive localized economic benefits to the Town of Warren, New Hampshire.

Public Involvement and Issues

How has the public been involved in this decision?

The project was presented to the public in the late 1990's. Work on the analysis

of the project was discontinued soon thereafter due to staffing shortages. Based on continuing public requests, the project was revitalized in 2003. The project was described in the White Mountain National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning in December 2003.

The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project Scoping Report was mailed to approximately 275 individuals, agencies, and groups on January 23, 2004. Comments were used to identify issues, develop alternatives, and analyze the effects of the proposed trail project.

As a result of scoping, the Forest Service determined that the public raised the following four issues:

Issue 1. Safety concerns related to additional snowmobile crossings of State Route 118 (Public Comment);

Issue 2. Interpretation and Enhancement of the Carriage Road (Agency and Public Comment); and

Issue 3. Sound levels along the trail and in the vicinity of Dartmouth's Ravine Lodge may be disruptive (Public Comment).

Issue 4. The Proposed Action would introduce a motorized trail into an area designated as MA 6.2. (Agency and Public Comment).

Information and Notice for 30 Day Comment for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project was released on December 1, 2004. The report was mailed to interested parties, posted on the White Mountain National Forest website, and a Legal Notice announcing its availability was printed in the newspaper of record, the Union Leader. Approximately 120 responses were received within the comment period. Substantive comments were used to refine the analysis in the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail EA.

The EA considered five alternatives for the Project:

Alternative 1: No Action;

Alternative 2: Proposed Action;

Alternative 3: Modified Proposed Action;

Alternative 4: Trail south and east of Route 118; and

Alternative 5: Trail along shoulder of Route 118

Decision

• Decision Point 1: Whether the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project will proceed as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all

I have chosen to implement Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, as described in the EA. Alternative 2 meets the needs identified for the Project Area by providing a linking snowmobile trail that creates a broader range of recreation opportunities

in MA 2.1 and 3.1. This meets the Desired Condition for the Project Area as a whole, as specified in the Forest Plan (III-30 through 36).

• Decision Point 2: What specific resource protection or mitigation measures should be implemented as part of the Project

The management requirements necessary to meet the intent of current direction , regulation and law include:

Standards and Guidelines in the Forest Plan, as amended (including Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species, April 4, 2001);

Canada Lynx Conservation Agreement and Strategy (CLCAS); and

Terms and Conditions of the Biological Opinion rendered for the Forest-Wide Programmatic BA of the continued implementation of the 1986 WMNF Forest Plan.

Additional mitigation measures designed to prevent or reduce possible effects resulting from the implementation of the selected alternative are documented in the EA in Table14 "Trail Design and Construction Features, Mitigation Action and Type".

• Decision Point 3: Would the proposed project have significant impacts that would trigger the need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI):

I have reviewed the effects of implementation of Alternative 2, taking into account both the context and intensity described in 40 CFR 1508. After thorough consideration of the analysis presented in the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project EA, the Forest Plan, and comments received, I have determined that the implementation of Alternative 2 is not a major federal action, individually, or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. In a local context, the site-specific actions of Alternative 2, in both short and long terms are not significant. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination is based on the following intensity factors:

Consideration of Beneficial and Adverse Effects

Both beneficial and adverse effects of implementing Alternative 2 have been considered (See EA, Chapter 2 Comparison of Alternatives, Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects).

Effects on Public Health and Safety

Public health and safety are not adversely affected by the implementation of Alternative 2. (See EA, Chapter 1 Purpose and Need, Table 14: Mitigation Measures, and the effectiveness of mitigation measures located throughout Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects).

Unique Physical or Biological Characteristics

Although characteristic features such as cultural resources and wetlands are located within the Project Area, none are unique or exemplary communities or will be significantly adversely affected by Alternative 2 (See EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects). No parklands, prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers are found in the Project Area.

Level of Controversy

Controversy is described as a dispute among the scientific community. Based on that definition, there is no substantial dispute among the scientific community as to the size, nature, or effect of the federal action on the various biological and physical environments. Based on the involvement of Forest resource specialists and members of the public through Scoping and the Information and Notice for 30 Day Comments, the effects of the Proposed Action on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. All of the effects of Alternative 2 (See EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects) are within the scope of those considered and analyzed in the Forest Plan FEIS, Chapter IV.

Uncertain, Unique, or Unknown Effects on the Quality of the Human Environment

There are no known effects to the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. All of the effects of Alternative 2 (EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects) are within the scope of those considered and analyzed in the Forest Plan FEIS, Chapter IV. This proposal is similar to other projects that have been conducted elsewhere on the White Mountain National Forest for which the effects are known through experience, records of monitoring, inspections, and ongoing operation of facilities.

Possible Precedent for Future Actions

These actions do not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed action incorporates those practices envisioned in the Forest Plan under Management Areas 2.1 and 3.1 direction and within the standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan. The trail bisects a narrow corridor of MA 6.2. Implementation of Alternative 2 requires a site specific non-significant Forest Plan amendment for this area but does not set precedent for future amendments to the Forest Plan.

Cumulative Relationships of Actions

These actions do not individually, nor taken cumulatively with other activities within the areas affected, reach a level of significance (EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects). The EA describes the cumulative effects on soils, water quality and quantity, air quality, vegetation, terrestrial wildlife, aquatic resources, transportation, cultural resources,

visual, recreation, economics, community well being, and environmental justice. I am satisfied after review of the EA that none of the cumulative effects of the proposed action are significant. Where appropriate, mitigation measures are proposed that are known to keep activities below the threshold level of significance (See EA, Endnotes – Mitigation Measures).

Effects on Significant Scientific, Cultural, or Heritage Resources

A heritage resource survey was completed (CRRR# 04-4-2; EA Heritage Resources) for the Project Area. The White Mountain National Forest works in consultation with the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office to design projects that are determined to have no effect upon cultural sites in accordance with 36 CFR 800 and The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. The New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office concurs that the Proposed Action will have no adverse effect on heritage resources within the Project Area.

The direct effects of the proposed action include the protection of the integrity of the historic roadbed through the mitigation measures specified in Table 14 of the EA, prevention of future damage by erosion and re-growth through ongoing maintenance, restoration of the road to its historic purpose as a recreational travel way, and preservation of the location of the historic route. Alternative 2 specifies that interpretive signing will be located along the remnant portion of the Carriage Road where it crosses State Highway 118. Through the use of mitigation measures, no anticipated loss of significant scientific, historic, or cultural resources is expected.

If, in the course of any project activities, previously unknown sites or artifacts were to be located, activities would stop immediately in that location. The Forest Archaeologist would be called in to evaluate the finds and make recommendations on how to proceed (Forest Plan, p. III-10).

Degree of Affect to Endangered Species or Their Habitat per the Endangered Species Act

The District Wildlife Biologist completed a Biological Evaluation (BE) of the potential effects of the Proposed Action and alternatives of the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project to Threatened, Endangered, Proposed (TEP) and Regional Forester-listed Sensitive Species (RFSS). Based on the probability of occurrence of TEP and RFSS and/or their habitat, the BE determined that Alternative 2 would cause "no effect" on Canada lynx, and was consistent with the Standards and Guidelines outlined in the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy. The BE also determined there would be a "may affect but is not likely to adversely affect" the Indiana bat. Subsequently, the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Project BE determination for these T & E species.

The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project EA also determined the probability of occurrence of RFSS and/or their habitat within the Project Area.

The BE determined that Alternative 2 would cause "no impact" to RFSS peregrine falcon and "may impact individuals, but would not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability" of the Eastern small footed myotis, Northern bog lemming, wood turtle, or 10 species of RFSS-listed plants.

Threat or Violation of Laws or Requirements that Protect the Environment

Applicable laws were incorporated into the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines (Forest Plan, pages III-5 through III-41), and Alternative 2 complies with the Forest Plan, as amended, with the exception of the trail corridor crossing of MA 6.2. As stated above, this requires a site-specific non-significant Forest Plan amendment. The amendment is incorporated by reference to this document.

In addition to State Best Management Practices, site-specific project mitigation measures will be incorporated as described in the EA (EA, Endnotes – Mitigation Measures). The actions do not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment. See Findings Required By Other Laws and Regulations, below.

• Decision Point 4: Should the Forest approve and implement a site-specific Forest Plan amendment for an 850-foot long and 20-foot wide (0.4 acre) section of the trail corridor that would traverse MA 6.2 lands, where motorized use is otherwise prohibited.

Alternative 2 proposes a site-specific non-significant Plan amendment to allow a non-conforming use within a corridor approximately 850 feet long and 20 feet wide where the trail would cross MA 6.2 lands to the north of and parallel to State Route 118. This site specific Forest Plan amendment would retain the trail corridor designation as MA 6.2 while managing under the standards and guidelines for MA 6.3.

The activities proposed and potential effects of Alternative 2 are within those anticipated and evaluated in Chapter IV of the Forest Plan FEIS and are consistent with Forest Plan Standards and Guideline for MA 6.3 The trail corridor will retain its designation as MA6.2.

Rationale for Decision

I have chosen Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, for the following reasons:

- Alternative 2 responds favorably to long-standing requests from the public to provide a snowmobile trail in this location.
- This alternative provides adequate protection and/or maintenance of environmental quality, including site productivity, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and native plant communities.

- This decision provides suitable implementation standards for the construction of the trail, best meets the stated purpose and need, addresses the issues, and provides for environmental protection through project design features, management requirements, and mitigation measures.

- Alternative 2 is consistent with the overall goals and objectives in the Forest Plan for the preponderance of the Project Area designated as MA 2.1 and 3. Alternative 2 meets the desired condition of MA 2.1 and 3.1 by providing a linking snowmobile trail between two existing trails and provides additional opportunities for a popular recreational pursuit in the White Mountain region.

- This alternative requires a site-specific non-significant Forest Plan amendment to manage the trail corridor that crosses MA 6.2 lands to the standards for MA 6.3. Alternative 2 would construct the trail in an area that :
    - crosses the most narrow section of MA 6.2 land;
    - is located on an historic public travelway, the Carriage Road; and
    - is in close proximity to and parallel with State Route 118 corridor and would not cause a net effect to the character of the landscape.

- Alternative 2 would yield positive effects to the existing network of snowmobile trails available to snowmobile users. There is no established winter use of the Carriage Road by winter hikers or cross country skiers; these user groups would not be adversely affected by the construction and use of the trail.

- As noted in the Information and Notice for 30 Day Comment, page 14, of the 0.4 acre/850-foot section of MA 6.2, approximately 500 feet traverses a narrow extension of the Jobildunk Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) area. The area was included in 2000 Roadless Area Conservation Rule that established general limits, with some exceptions, on timber harvest, road construction and reconstruction within inventoried roadless areas on national forests and grasslands across the country. The 2000 Roadless Rule is currently stayed from implementation based on further court review.

In managing the areas identified as roadless in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, the White Mountain National Forest will follow the management direction contained in the current Forest Plan and its subsequent Revision and any Forest Service policy on roadless area management specified in the Forest Service directives. However, with regard to trail construction, as the EA indicates, this activity is not restricted by the 2000 Rule.

See also, Other Alternatives Considered and Why They Were Not Selected, below.

Consistency with the Forest Plan

In the preponderance of the Project Area, where lands are designated as MAs 2.1 and 3.1, Alternative 2 proposes design and construction that conforms to Forest Plan Desired Condition and the Standards and Guidelines for these Management Areas.

In order to provide the trail connection identified in the Purpose and Need for Action, approximately 850 feet of the trail must traverse the corridor of MA 6.2 lands which would not otherwise include motorized recreation opportunities. As stated in the Information and Notice for 30 Day Comment, page 14, 85, and 88, this section of MA 6.2 is also currently traversed by State Highway 118. In effect, this MA, where traversed by a state highway, currently has a site-specific non-conforming use of MA 6.2 in the same area.

In Alternative 2, the segment of trail which traverses MA 6.2 lands is located on a remnant of the abandoned Carriage Road. The establishment of a snowmobile trail in this location would require a site-specific non-significant amendment to the Forest Plan this corridor of MA 6.2 to allow this seasonal use. Management Direction appropriate for MA 6.3 (See Forest Plan, Chapter III, Management Direction, p. III-54-56.) would be utilized in this trail corridor which measures approximately 850 feet long and 20 feet wide, or approximately 0.4 acres. This width would include 10 feet of original Carriage Road tread surface and five foot clearing limits.

Other Alternatives Considered and Why They Were Not Selected

In developing the range of reasonable alternatives, the ID team considered alternatives that reasonably responded to the purpose and need, and addressed the Scoping comments and all significant (unresolved) issues. As required by Federal regulation [40 CFR 1502.14(d)], the ID team also analyzed the No Action alternative (Alternative 1).

Alternative 1 - No Action

Under Alternative 1, current and on-going management activities within the Project Area would continue, but no new snowmobile trail construction or heritage resource interpretation would occur and MA 6.2 lands would not be traversed by a motorized trail. Other activities in the Project Area might occur through current management direction such as road maintenance, natural processes, or other management decisions, including road construction and/or vegetation management. If Alternative 1 were selected, the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail would not be constructed at this time.

I have not selected Alternative 1 because it does not meet the purpose and need for the Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project.

Alternative 3 - Modified Proposed Action: Construct the trail adjacent to remnant portions of the historic Carriage Road

The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project Interdisciplinary Team examined this alternative in detail. This alternative would allow the tread of remnant portions of the historic Carriage Road to continue to revegetate. This revegetation would ultimately completely obscure the Carriage Road. Because the remnant Carriage Road provided a largely suitable existing tread, new construction of the segments of the snowmobile trail adjacent to the Carriage Road would require more soil disturbance, extensive cut and fill areas, and more tree harvest.

Based on my review of the EA, I have not selected Alternative 3 because, while this Alternative would meet the purpose and need for the Project, the perceived benefit of allowing revegetation to continue on remnant portions of the Carriage Road is outweighed by the additional site disturbance and vegetation removal that would be required by new construction parallel to the existing Carriage Road and negated by the ultimate obscurity of the historic Carriage Road..

Alternative 4 - Construct the Trail south and east of NH State Route 118

The Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail Project Interdisciplinary Team examined a trail location entirely south and east of State Route 118. This alternative addressed the issue regarding safety concerns for snowmobilers and motorists by eliminating any new snowmobile crossing of State Route 118 . Additionally, this trail location would be farther from private land within the WMNF boundary.

The Project Interdisciplinary Team examined this location extensively, however, steep slopes, adverse soil conditions, and the number of streams and wet areas that would be traversed precluded further development of this trail location.

Based on my review of the EA, I have not selected Alternative 4 because, while this Alternative would meet the purpose and need for the Project, trade-offs to other resource values do not seem prudent.

Alternative 5 - Construct the Trail along the shoulder of NH Route 118 to avoid road crossings

Public comment requested that an alternative be considered that would construct the snowmobile trail along the shoulder of State Route 118. This alternative would address the issue regarding safety concerns for snowmobilers and motorists by eliminating any new snowmobile crossing of State Route 118 and was intended to minimize safety concerns for motorists and snowmobile operators. This alternative would locate the non-conforming use of MA 6.2 in the area immediately adjacent to State Route 118..

A snowmobile trail along the shoulder of NH State Route 118 would pose significant safety hazards to snowmobile operators and motorists. Snowmobiles are equipped with headlights and operators often travel at night. Along this heavily traveled and serpentine route, motorists would encounter oncoming snowmobile headlights on

the right-hand side of their automobiles, causing disorientation, particularly during hazardous winter driving conditions. Highway snow removal would also pose concerns for a shoulder-based snowmobile route; snow berms and banks and plow wakes would pose hazards to snowmobile operators along the highway shoulder. Furthermore, because of steep side slopes, construction of a shoulder trail would require extensive fill along the south side of Route 118. Roadway surface width would be increased dramatically, causing significant environmental concerns due to expansive fills slopes, additional culverts, and prohibitive construction and maintenance costs.

Upon consultation with the NH Bureau of Trails as well as the NH Department of Transportation, it was determined that mitigation measures could not adequately address or resolve these safety concerns. This alternative was eliminated from detailed consideration.

Based on my review of the EA, I have not selected Alternative 5 because, while this Alternative would meet the purpose and need for the Project, outstanding safety concerns could not be adequately mitigated and resource protection and enhancement could not be assured.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Historic Preservation Act

See Effects on Significant Scientific, Cultural, or Historical Resources, above.

Executive Order 11990 (wetlands) and 11988 (floodplains)

The cumulative effect is no change in the wetland functions, as they exist.

Floodplain Management: The Warren to Woodstock snowmobile trail was designed so that it would only enter floodplains at designated stream crossings. By following Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, BMPs, and additional mitigation measures (EA, Table 14 - Mitigation Measures) the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains will be preserved.

Wetlands: No trail construction is proposed through delineated wetlands, so the natural and beneficial uses of wetlands will be preserved.

Executive Order 12898, "Environmental Justice"

The selected Alternative 2 will not have a disproportionate effect on low income or minority populations as defined by this Executive Order.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

See Degree of Affect to Endangered Species or Their Habitat per the Endangered Species Act, above.

Clean Water Act

By following Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, State BMPs, and additional mitigation measures (*EA, Table 14 – Mitigation Measures*), cumulative effects of trail construction on the water resource would be within those analyzed/ anticipated in the Forest Plan and would be within state standards. This conclusion is reached, because, as discussed in the Direct/Indirect Effects section (*EA*, Water Resources), no unacceptable effects from the activities proposed in the Project Area would occur, should the Alternative 2 be selected.

Clean Air Act

The emissions related to Alternative 2 are not of a large enough scale to exceed National Ambient Air Quality Standards and cause the area to be classified as non-attainment for criteria pollutants, even when combined with other potential activities on public and private land.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Implementation of Alternative 2 would be consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This Act was designed to forestall hunting of migratory birds and the sale of their parts. The proposed project would not have a measurable negative effect on neotropical migratory bird populations. Winter activity would avoid affecting Neotropical birds and their habitat during the breeding, nesting, and nestling seasons.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

This EA and Decision Notice have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Implementation and Appeal Rights

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215. A person has standing to file an appeal only if they submitted substantive 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 215.14. Appeals must be filed within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the Union Leader, Manchester, New Hampshire to:

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer,
WMNF, Warren to Woodstock Snowmobile Trail 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 *www.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 Union Leader is the first day of the appeal-filing period. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper 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 Union Leader, please call the Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger Station at 603-536-1315 (TTY 603-536-3281) for the published date. There will be no time extensions for appeals.

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 acknowledgement 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 the substantive comments; and

9. How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

The Environmental Assessment for this project is available for public review at the Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset Ranger District, 1171 NH Route 175, Holderness, NH 03245 and at the White Mountain National Forest Supervisor's Office, 719 N. Main Street, Laconia, New Hampshire 03246. In addition, the EA is posted on the White Mountain National Forest web page (www.fs.fed.us/r9/white). Questions regarding the EA should be directed to Susan Mathison, at 1171 NH RT 175, Holderness, NH 03245 (phone: 603-536-1315, TTY: 603-536-3281).

THOMAS G. WAGNER
Forest Supervisor

May 3, 2005

This document is available in large print

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

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