



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Eastern Region Winter Sports Team
Green Mountain & Finger Lakes,
White Mountain National Forests

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File Code: 1950/2720-2

Date: July 18, 2006

Dear Planning Participant,

Thank you for your interest in the management of the White Mountain National Forest. Enclosed please find documentation of my decision to implement two projects within the Waterville Valley Ski Area Special Use Permit boundary. The project is located on National Forest System land in the Town of Waterville Valley, Grafton County, New Hampshire on the Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest.

My decision is documented in the enclosed Decision Memo. Based on my review of the environmental analysis undertaken specifically for this project, the results of which are contained in the Project File, I have determined that this project may be categorically excluded from review in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment. This decision is not subject to administrative appeal, and may be implemented immediately.

Detailed records of the environmental analysis are available for public review at the Rochester Ranger District, 99 Ranger Road, Rochester, VT 05767 or at the Pemigewasset Ranger District, 1171 Route 175, Holderness, NH 03245. For more information, contact Susan Mathison at (603) 536-1315.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tom Paquette for
BETH LECLAIR
District Ranger/Team Leader



DECISION MEMO

Waterville Valley Ski Area Special Use Permit Trail Lighting and Trail Widening Projects July 18, 2006

USDA Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest
Pemigewasset Ranger District
Town of Waterville Valley, Grafton County, New Hampshire

I. Summary

As District Ranger for the Eastern Region Winter Sports Team, I am authorizing projects at the Waterville Valley Ski Area as described in the scoping report issued on June 16, 2006. These projects include 1) The Pasture Trail (Trail 35) Lighting - lighting a portion of Trail 35 in order to provide alternate evening tubing opportunities at specified days and times and 2) Upper Valley Run (Trail 9) Widening - widening a portion of Trail 9 to address safety concerns near the off-loading area of Lift B, "Quadzilla".

II. Decision

A. Background

The projects are located on National Forest System land in the Town of Waterville Valley, Grafton County, New Hampshire on the Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF). The lands within the Project Area are designated by the 2005 White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as Management Area (MA) 7.1, Alpine Ski Areas.

The Waterville Valley Ski Area (WV) is currently managed under Special Use Permit (SUP) to Booth Creek Corporation (Permittee); the projects lie entirely within the Waterville Valley alpine ski area permit boundary. Each year the Permittee submits project proposals which meet company objectives for growth, customer service, safety, and resource protection. These projects were proposed as part of the Permittee's summer operating plan.

Both projects will occur along established alpine ski trails adjacent to a northern hardwood forest stand and are in compliance with the Forest Plan standards and guides for MA 7.1. The Projects will meet the purposes and needs specified by the Permittee as well as the Goals, Objectives, and Desired Future Condition of the area as specified in the Forest Plan by:

- 1) providing a safe, ancillary snowplay opportunity for evening tubing on Trail 35, and
- 2) improving public safety through trail widening along a portion of Trail 9.

B. Purpose and Need

These projects were proposed and are advocated by the Permittee who has specified the following purposes and needs:

1) Trail 35 Lighting: Evening snow tubing occurs just below the lower section of Trail 22 from 5:30 to 9:30 PM on Saturday evenings through the snow season as well as on Wednesday and Friday evenings during the Christmas/New Years school vacation and the Presidents' Day vacation week. Although existing lighting of this area is adequate, the run-out area at the bottom of the slope does not meet safety standards for this activity in this location. Expansion of the tubing run-out area is not feasible in its current location due to its proximity to the main base lodge, ski shop and equipment rental buildings. Lighting the J-bar slope and relocating the snow tubing and run-out area to this trail will address the need for providing a complementary evening recreation opportunity on a limited schedule while meeting required safety standards.

2) Trail 9 Widening: Lift B, "Quadzilla", currently offloads mid-slope along Trail 9. The existing trail configuration immediately above the upper Lift B tower funnels skiers and boarders into a narrow area at the top of Valley Run (Trail 8) where other skiers and boarders are offloading. Trail 9 is designed for skiers and boarders of intermediate ability; Trail 8 is designed for novice skiers and boarders. Intermediate skiers are funneled into a narrow portion of a novice trail in an area where many skiers and boarders are collecting themselves, adjusting gear and clothing, and groups are assembling. The combination of higher-speed skiers and boarders from Trail 9 and off-loading congestion in an area designed for novice users poses a safety concern. The purpose of and need for this project is to improve skier and boarder safety in an area which hosts skiers and boarders of varying abilities by widening the trail and reducing congestion in the off-loading area of Lift B.

C. Description of Decision

I have decided to allow the trail maintenance and trail reconstruction projects as described in the Scoping Report signed June 16, 2006 and as outlined below:

1) The Pasture Trail (Trail 35) Lighting Install up to five utility poles, each no more than 30' tall above ground surface as measured from the base of the pole. The poles will be located immediately adjacent to the tree line and existing line of snow-making facilities along the southwest edge of Trail 35 and will service up to three light fixtures. Light fixture design and placement will minimize uplighting and glare. All light fixtures will include directional shields; no light would be directed above horizontal.

Trail 35 would be lit for snow tubing from 5:30 to 9:30 PM on Saturday evenings through the snow season as well as on Wednesday and Friday evenings during the Christmas/New Years school vacation and the Presidents' Day vacation week.

This project will include the clearing and trimming of brush, burying of conduit and electric line, siting of utility poles, and site reseeding and mulching.

- 2) Upper Valley Run (Trail 9) Widening Widen a section of Trail 35 to improve safety conditions in the off-loading area of Lift B. This project will include clearing brush and trees with hand tools and chainsaws as well as grading and stumping of the widened trail surface. This grading will be accomplished with heavy equipment, such as an excavator.

The removal of a limited number of merchantable trees will be required by the trail widening. I have decided to approve the removal of designated trees within the area of trail widening. Most trees and saplings would remain on site; some tree boles would be removed from the site for use as firewood. Upon my review of the site and the project file, it is my decision to allow the removal of these trees under administrative free use authority; their minor cumulative volume and remote location render these isolated trees of negligible commercial value. It is in the best interest of the Forest, the public, and the resource to cut and remove these trees from the site in order to facilitate this maintenance project.

A triangular section of Trail 35 just above Lift B is roped off in order to direct traffic away from the off-loading area. The widening on the south side of the trail will allow, and the permit Operating Plan will require, natural revegetation of the slope immediately above the upper most lift tower in this triangular area.

All construction work will be consistent with the Forest Service Standards and Guidelines as stated under the *Soil, Water, and Riparian Area Protection and Restoration* section (Pp. 20-22) under the revised (2005) Plan. The Forest Service will monitor all activities and provide subsequent monitoring of the trail lighting and widening to ensure that the projects are implemented and functions as designed.

Implementation would occur during summer 2006, when soil conditions are favorable for all soil disturbing activities. Currently, the project is planned for completion by mid-September 2006.

III. Reasons for Categorically Excluding This Decision

A. Category of Exclusion

This Decision is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

- 1) Trail 35 Lighting: This decision is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) because it is within a category in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) Chapter 30, Section 31.12 (5) and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal. Specifically, this is within FSH 1909.15-2004-3, Chapter 31.12-5 Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and trails.

2) Trail 9 Widening: This decision is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) because it is within a category in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) Chapter 30, Section 31.2 (1) and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal. Specifically, this is within FSH 1909.15-2004-3, Chapter 31.2 (1) Construction and reconstruction of trails.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

Under the new regulations for “Notice, Comment, and Appeal Procedures for National Forest System Projects and Activities; Final Rule (36 CFR 215, Code of Federal Regulations)” published June 4, 2003 in the Federal Register, projects that qualify for this categorical exclusion are not eligible for comment and/or appeal following publication of a Decision Memo.

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

B1. Threatened, Endangered, Proposed or Sensitive Species (TES) and/or their Critical Habitat

The activities planned for these projects will not adversely affect the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species’ designated critical habitat. Accordingly, these actions will have no effect on Threatened, Endangered, or proposed species or their critical habitats.

B2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds

Executive Order 11988 requires Federal agencies to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, “the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year.” These projects are not located in or near floodplains. These decisions will not affect floodplains.

Executive order 11990 requires Federal agencies to avoid impacts associated with destruction or modifications of wetlands. Wetlands are defined by this order as, “...areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction.” These projects are not located in or near wetlands or a municipal water supply. Accordingly this decision will not affect wetlands or any municipal water supply.

B3. Congressionally Designated Areas

The project area is not located in or near any congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National Recreation Areas, or any other congressionally designated areas. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect any Congressionally Designated Areas.

B4. Inventoried Roadless Areas

The project area is not within the boundaries of any inventoried roadless areas. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect any IRAs.

B5. Research Natural Areas

There are no Research Natural Areas in the project area. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect any Research Natural Areas.

B6. Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas

No sites have been located in the immediate project area. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, should not affect any American Indians, Alaska Native Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties. If, in the course of any project activity, 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. This project will have No Effect on Heritage Resources.

IV Public Involvement

Public involvement was conducted with a project scoping report and letter mailed to more than 190 interested individuals, agencies, groups and adjacent landowners. The scoping letters were mailed on June 16, 2006 and concurrently posted on the WMNF website. The proposed project was included in the April 1, 2006 WMNF Schedule of Proposed Actions. Forest Service personnel hosted a public field visit to the Project Area on July 5, 2006; one member of the public attended.

Eleven comments were received; comments were generally supported the proposed projects and their role in support of continued high quality recreation opportunities on National Forest System lands. Your comments were appreciated and have been incorporated into project design.

V. Findings Required By and/or Related to Other Laws and Regulations

A. Finding of Legal Compliance

My decision complies with all applicable laws and regulations; pertinent laws and regulations are summarized below:

A1. National Environmental Policy Act

This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this decision supports compliance with this Act.

A2. National Forest Management Act (Forest Plan Consistency)

The 2005 White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) provides guidance for all natural resource management activities on the Forest. This Act requires that all projects and activities be consistent with the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan has

been reviewed in consideration of this project. This decision is responsive to guiding direction and is consistent with the standards and guidelines contained in the Forest Plan.

A3. Endangered Species Act

See section III-B1 of this document.

A4. Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974

This Act requires cooperation with State, local, and other federal agencies in the management and control of NNIS. The Forest has complied with this Act by including mitigation measures to prevent the spread of NNIS.

A5. Executive Order 11312 (Non-native Invasive Species)

This Act requires all pertinent federal agencies (subject to budgetary appropriations) to prevent the introduction of NNIS;

- Detect and rapidly respond to and control populations of NNIS in a cost effective and environmentally sound manner;
- Monitor NNIS populations;
- Restore native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded;
- Conduct research and develop technologies to prevent introduction and provide for environmentally sound control measures; and
- Promote public education on NNIS.

The Forest Botanist visit the Project Area on June 1, 2006. All revegetation, including seeding and mulching and all equipment use will be specified in the permit Operating Plan, as specified in the Botanist's in order to address NNIS concerns.

A6. Executive Order 11990 (Wetlands)

See section III-B2 of this document.

A7. Executive Order 11988 (Floodplains)

See section III-B2 of this document.

A8. Sensitive Species (Forest Service Manual 2670)

The Forest Biologist has analyzed and documented the potential effects of this decision on Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS) and their habitat, see section III-B1 of this document. For plants, see section III-B1. Based on the Biological Evaluation, I have determined that this decision will have no impact on RFSS or their habitat.

A9. Clean Water Act

The White Mountain National Forest complies with the Clean Water Act through Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines and the use of Best Management Practices to ensure protection of soil and water resources. This decision incorporates Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines to ensure the protection of soil and water resources.

A10. Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

See section III-B3 of this document.

A11. National Historic Preservation Act

See section III-B6 of this document.

A12. Archaeological Resources Protection Act

See section III-B6 of this document.

A13. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

See section III-B6 of this document.

A14. Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

This Order requires consideration of whether projects would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. This decision complies with this Act. Internal scoping did not identify any adversely impacted local minority or low-income population. This decision is not expected to adversely impact minority or low-income populations.

VI. Administrative Review or Appeal

This decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal, pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f). Detailed records of the environmental analysis (Project File) documented by this Decision Memo are available for public review upon request at the White Mountain National Forest, Pemigewasset Ranger District Office, 1171 Route 175, Holderness, NH 03245, during normal business hours.

VII. Implementation Date

This decision may be implemented immediately.

VIII. Contact Person

The Responsible Official for the Prospect Mountain Nordic Ski Center is Beth LeClair, District Ranger for the Eastern Region Winter Sports Team. Beth is located at 99 Ranger Road, Rochester, VT 05767 (phone: 802-767-4261, ext. 523).

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Susan Mathison, Eastern Region Winter Sport Team (ERWST), NEPA Coordinator, Pemigewasset Ranger District, 1171 Route 175, Holderness, NH 03245 VT; phone: 603-536-1315; TTY at 603-536-3281; or e-mail: smathison@fs.fed.us.

IX. Signature and Date

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment, as it is within one of the

categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 amendment number 1909.15-2004-3, sections 31.12 or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Project Record.

DATE _____

BETH LECLAIR
Eastern Region Winter Sports Team Leader

**This document is available in large print.
Contact the Rochester Ranger District Office
1-802-767-4261
TTY 1-802-747-6765**

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