



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

White Mountain National Forest
Androscoggin and Evans Notch
Ranger Districts

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File code: 1950-1

Date: April 18, 2006

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to invite you to comment on the Wild River Shelters Removal Project. This project is being considered as a way to manage the social and ecological impacts in an area that has recently been recommended for congressional Wilderness designation. The three shelters included in the proposal are all located on lands managed by the White Mountain National Forest in the unincorporated township of Bean's Purchase, New Hampshire. A detailed description of the Proposed Action, project area maps and instructions for how you can comment are included in the enclosed Scoping Report.

This document is also posted on our White Mountain National Forest web page:
www.fs.fed.us/r9/white.

I am interested in receiving your comments about our proposal, including any information about the project area that could help us improve our plans. Please be specific to the proposal and area described in the enclosed Scoping Report. Our environmental analysis will consider your comments as well as those provided by a Forest Service interdisciplinary team. Your comments are due by May 31, 2006.

I appreciate the time you take to review and comment on our project proposal. Please also take a minute to fill out and return the attached Response Form to help us manage our mailings and to meet your needs to remain informed about this project.

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

Sincerely,

/s/ Katherine W. Stuart
KATHERINE W. STUART
District Ranger





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Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

April 2006



Wild River Shelters Removal

- ◆ Spruce Brook Shelter
- ◆ Blue Brook Shelter
- ◆ Perkins Notch Shelter

Scoping Report

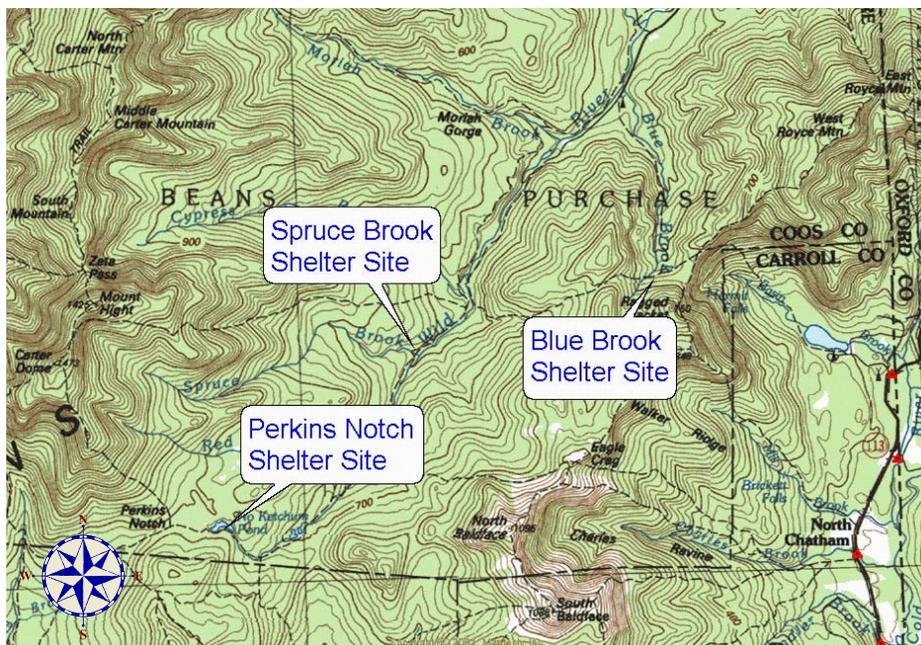
**Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest
Beans Purchase
Coos County, New Hampshire**

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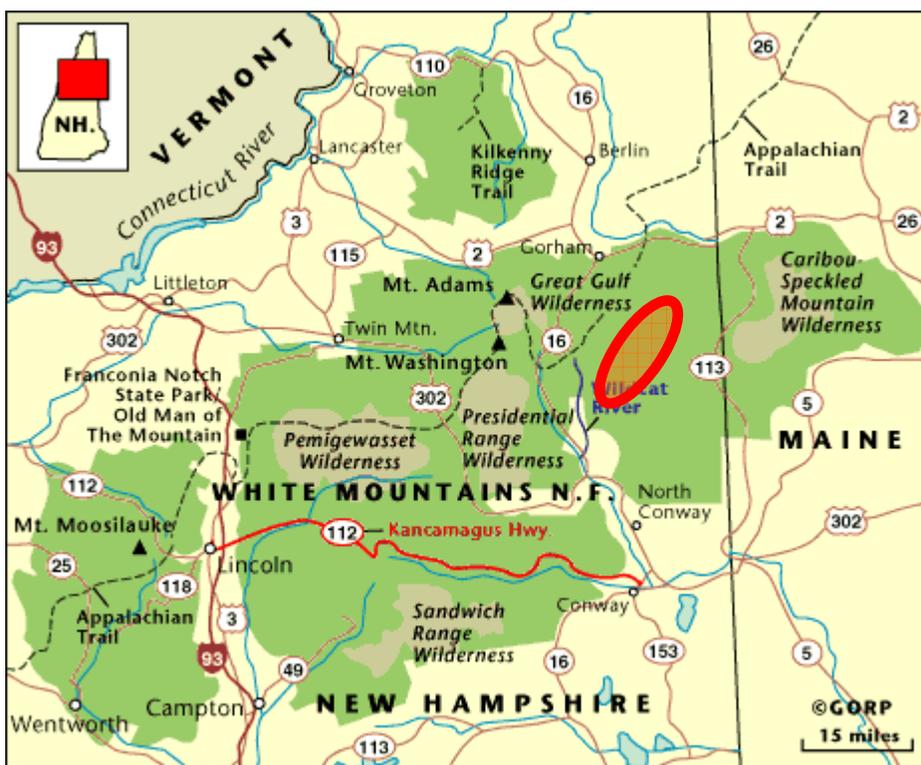
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Project Area Maps



Map 1. Upper portion of the Wild River watershed with the locations of shelters marked. Scale: 1 inch equals approximately 1 ½ miles.



Map 2. White Mountain National Forest map with location of the Wild River Valley (Map 1) marked.

What is the Forest Service Proposing?

The Androscoggin Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) is proposing to remove the three shelters and associated support structures located in the Wild River Valley. Legislation seeking designation of the Wild River Valley as Wilderness was introduced in the United States Congress in March of 2006. The three facilities located in the Valley and affected by the legislation are:

- Spruce Brook Shelter Site
- Blue Brook Shelter Site
- Perkins Notch Shelter Site

After removing all of the structures, the Forest Service would repair the sites by rehabilitating the impacted areas. Compacted soil would be aerated, young saplings would be transplanted from the forest and leaf litter would be scattered to retain moisture and naturalize the site. All metal, concrete and asphalt would be removed from the site. Wood may be removed, burned or scattered on site. Any materials that are salvageable would be recycled for use on future projects on the WMNF.

Where appropriate the Forest Service would provide less-developed camping options in the form of native soil tent pads. The type of overnight opportunity provided by tent pads would better serve to concentrate visitor impacts in acceptable areas while more accurately reflecting the primitive character of the Wild River Valley. Tent pads would likely be constructed in the general area of the Spruce Brook and Perkins Notch Shelters due to their location at destination-type natural features. Tent pads would not likely be constructed at the Blue Brook Shelter site as the shelter itself seems to be the destination. Should monitoring reveal ongoing camping impacts in this area, tent pads may be developed as a way to manage overnight use. Waste management facilities would not likely be provided at any of the sites and visitors would be expected to use suitable Leave No Trace practices for disposal of human waste. This is standard for the other Wildernesses on the WMNF and is quite effective when paired with a strong education effort.

Monitoring for future impacts and unacceptable change would utilize the Wilderness indicators, standards, and methodology dictated by the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the WMNF. Baseline data will be collected during the field season of 2006 and supplement existing data for the area.

Location and Features of the Wild River Shelter Sites

The three shelter sites are all located in the unincorporated township of Beans Purchase, Coos County, New Hampshire, in the northeast corner of the White Mountains (See Maps 1 and 2). All sites are in the upper portion of the Wild River watershed in wooded areas of mixed forest type. All structures are within an area administratively designated by the current Forest Plan as Management Area 9.1 – Recommended Wilderness.

Spruce Brook Shelter Site

Facility components.....“Adirondack style” lean-to constructed of dimensional lumber with an asphalt shingle roof. One “bin/batch style” composting outhouse constructed of lumber. Included in the composting system are two stainless steel composting bins with wooden lids, one stainless steel mixing bin, one steel/wood compost drying rack, and a wooden bark mulch storage platform. All of the wood used in the structures at the Spruce Brook site is dimensional lumber. Two double-occupancy tent platforms are also constructed of pressure-treated lumber. The site is located on the Wild River Trail approximately 3.5 miles from the trailhead at the Wild River Campground.

Capacity and use.....The site has a capacity of 18-22 people (6 in the shelter & 6-8 per tent platform). Of the three shelter sites it is the most popular due in part to its central location and easy access. It receives regular and occasionally heavy recreation use throughout the snow-free season. During the winter it receives limited use because of the difficulty in reaching primary trailhead access points due to road closures.



Figure 1. Spruce Brook Shelter

Blue Brook Shelter Site

Facility components.....“Adirondack style” lean-to constructed of horizontal logs with dimensional lumber for trim, roof sheathing and flooring. The structure is capped by a corrugated metal roof. An associated pit toilet is constructed of plywood and dimensional lumber. One double-occupancy tent platform is also constructed of dimensional pressure-treated lumber. The site is located on the Black Angel Trail approximately 2.3 miles south from the trailhead for the Basin Trail at the Wild River Campground.

Capacity and use.....The site has a capacity of 12-14 people (6 in the shelter & 6-8 on the tent platform). It receives moderate recreation use throughout the summer and light use during the spring and fall. During the winter it receives limited use because of the difficulty in reaching primary trailhead access points due to road closures.



Figure 2. Blue Brook Shelter

Perkins Notch Shelter Site

Facility components..... “Adirondack style” lean-to constructed of horizontal logs with dimensional lumber for trim, roof sheathing and flooring. The structure is capped by a corrugated metal roof. An associated pit toilet is constructed of plywood and dimensional lumber. The site is located on the Wild River Trail approximately 7 miles from the trailhead at the Wild River Campground and 4.3 miles from the trailhead parking for the Bog Brook Trail.

Capacity and use.....The shelter has a capacity of 6 people. It receives moderate recreation use throughout the summer and light use during the spring and fall. During the winter it receives limited use because of the difficulty in reaching primary trailhead access points due to road closures.



Figure 3. Perkins Notch Shelter

Background

Construction of the Perkins Notch Shelter began in 1957 on the site of a former log cabin that had deteriorated after standing for approximately twenty years. Construction closely followed the Appalachian Trail Conference’s “Plans for an Appalachian Trail Lean-To” dated 1939. The original outhouse was replaced with the current structure at some point close to 25 years ago. In January of 1995 a decision was made to relocate and reconstruct the Perkins Notch Shelter and toilet; however, a backlog of work and financial constraints never allowed the project to be implemented. The need for this project was based on facility maintenance, resource protection and sanitation concerns. Poorly drained soils around the current site cause conditions to be very muddy on a regular basis and the shelter’s close proximity to No Ketchum Pond has focused use on its boggy shores. Two double-occupancy tent platforms were also scheduled to be built as part of the new site in order to address the sprawl that had resulted from unmanaged tenting in the area. Furthermore, pit toilets were (and still are) generally considered an outdated approach to waste management and the existing pit toilet is located too close to the pond and site’s water source. All of the resource, health and safety issues raised during the 1995 project proposal still exist.

The shelter at Blue Brook was the second facility in the system to be constructed when it was completed in 1959. This structure is similar to the one at Perkins Notch with a few modifications and most closely resembles the 1935 plans from the US Forest Service titled “Forest Camp, Adirondack - Shelter.” Another shelter had occupied the site prior to construction in 1959 but little is known about its history. Various records indicate that the original structure was likely a shelter of a similar style and constructed in the 1930’s. The original privy was replaced by the current structure approximately 20 years ago.

During recent years new pits for the toilet have been dug in the area though few suitable sites remain for future relocations. In the mid 1990's one double-occupancy tent platform was constructed in between the shelter and Blue Brook to try and manage tenting in the area. The area between this platform and the brook is heavily impacted by overnight visitors that do not use the shelter or tent platform. Of the three shelter sites, Blue Brook shows the most pronounced effects of firewood browsing. In the area where visitors camp, there is no understory and most branches within arm's reach have been broken off of the live trees.

Spruce Brook Shelter and its associated facilities were the last installment in the Wild River shelter system when constructed in 1963. This shelter is quite different in terms of construction style and was based on the US Forest Service 1964 plans entitled "Adirondack Shelter - Five Man." A pit toilet originally occupied the site before the bin/batch composting system was installed in the early 1990's. One of the primary reasons for this conversion was a high water table that made relocating the pit toilet very difficult. During the field season of 1999 two tent platforms were demolished and then replaced with double-occupancy platforms in better locations. Trees were planted and other light rehabilitation work was performed in an attempt to better define the site boundaries. Due to the location of the site, topography invites rather than prevents expansion and much of the planted vegetation has been trampled by overnight guests that do not use the platforms.

General Operations

All shelters are available to the general public on a first-come, first-served basis. Overnight camping fees are not charged. Visitors must bring their own provisions and are required to pack out their own trash. Forest Service backcountry rangers visit each facility on a regular basis from May to October. While there they talk with visitors, perform any needed maintenance and monitor site impacts and condition. Spruce Brook's composting toilet requires three or four service visits a year by the seasonal crew. The shelter sites are rarely visited by staff during the winter months due to low visitation and difficult access.

Management Direction

The three Wild River shelter sites are all located in an area administratively designated by the current Forest Plan as Management Area 9.1 – Recommended Wilderness. The Forest Plan outlines the purpose of Management Area 9.1 – Recommended Wilderness is

- 1. Recognize the areas currently recommended for Wilderness.*
- 2. Manage the land to protect Wilderness values to protect eligibility for the Wilderness Preservation System (3-75)."*

In order to protect Wilderness values and character we must do so within the context of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Section 2(c) of the Act defines Wilderness as

"...an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvement or human habitation..."

Section 4(c) of the Act continues with clarification on the prohibition of structures by stating

"...except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no...structure or installation within any such area."

Permanent structures such as shelters are generally considered to be inconsistent with Wilderness objectives and are used as a management tool only when absolutely necessary. Wilderness is managed to stand in contrast to the busy and heavily developed world in which we live. The three sites addressed in this project have components of plywood, metal, concrete and dimensional lumber that stand in contrast with the wild nature of their setting. Removing these structures and repairing the sites would eliminate these inconsistencies and restore the area's wild character.

The Wilderness Act continues with its definition of Wilderness in Section 2(c) by recognizing eligible areas as having

"...outstanding opportunities for solitude..."

The location of each of the Wild River shelters is within 50 feet of a major hiking trail, with those at Spruce Brook and Perkins Notch being situated alongside the valley's main artery, the Wild River Trail. Those who come to enjoy the hiking trails of the Wild River Valley will likely pass by one of these facilities if they travel on one of the main trails or attempt an overnight trek. Though these facilities do serve to concentrate use as directed by the Forest Plan, they do so in areas that are inconsistent with management for solitude. The Forest Plan states that any new shelter site should be located a minimum of 100 feet from main trails, bodies of water and/or riparian areas. In most circumstances the desired distance would be even farther and 200 feet is the commonly accepted goal among recreation managers. None of the Wild River Valley shelter sites meet Forest Plan minimum criteria and their proximity to trails creates unwanted social impacts and impedes opportunities for solitude. Any tent pads that are constructed would be located in such a way as to shield them from the view of passing visitors, thereby increasing the sense of solitude. Two of the three shelter sites also have current capacities that are inconsistent with the WMNF's regulation for a maximum group size of the ten in Wilderness. The Forest Order creating the group size limit was created as a way to help protect opportunities for solitude and to reduce the resource and social impacts that are inherently connected to larger groups.

The Forest-wide Recreation Management Approaches outlined in the Forest Plan dictate

"Current development levels in the backcountry will be maintained or lowered where appropriate (2-17)."

The Forest Plan also goes on to address shelters and tent platforms more specifically by stating

"If not clearly needed to protect resources, maintain a desired recreation use opportunity or pattern, or conform to the Forest recreation management approaches, shelters, cabins and tent platforms must be removed (2-20)."

The shelters contribute to adverse ecological impacts on the local resources in addition to the undesirable social impacts addressed earlier. Numerous visitor-created trails and campsites accompany their official counterparts at each site due to the shelters' close proximity to hiking trails and water. These unofficial trails and tentsites have amplified visitors' impacts on the area, often leading to unacceptable erosion and damage to vegetation. Were they to be retained, all three shelters would need to be relocated with greater setbacks from water and trails in order to adequately protect resources. Removing the shelters, repairing the sites and lowering the development level of the area would be more consistent with the character and recreational opportunities desired in Wilderness.

Purpose of & Need for Proposed Action

The purpose of this action is to lower development levels and enhance the unique attributes of the Wild River Valley while simultaneously managing social and ecological impacts. Heavily impacted sites would be repaired so that Wilderness values and character may be preserved in an area that Congress is currently considering for Wilderness designation.

The need for the action is to proactively establish recreation management for these concentrated use sites that will be consistent with both Wilderness values and proper implementation of the Wilderness Act and the WMNF Forest Plan. In light of the recently introduced legislation, site planning and area management decisions must consider the likelihood of the future Wilderness designation. Components of the shelter system are in various stages of disrepair and the layout of each site has resource and social impacts that necessitate major site work in the future. Retaining the shelters and developing the sites to adequately address the social and ecological impacts would further increase the inconsistencies created by shelters in Wilderness.

Environmental Analysis

Our environmental analysis will consider your comments as well as those provided by a Forest Service interdisciplinary team.

At this time we expect this project to have no resulting individual or cumulative significant effects on the environment, and therefore the analysis can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA).

The environmental analysis will include on-site surveys for rare plants and heritage resources, and will identify any extraordinary circumstances that exist and could result in significant effects to the environment. In accordance with FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30, these specific resource conditions will be considered:

- 1) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.
- 2) Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.
- 3) Congressionally designated areas.
- 4) Inventoried Roadless Areas
- 5) Research Natural Areas
- 6) American Indians and Alaska Native Religious or Cultural Sites
- 7) Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas

Preliminary Issues

Forest visitors often develop close sense-of-place emotional attachment with recreation sites and facilities, so it is likely that any decision to remove shelters will be controversial. Large recreational parties and guided groups have often used the Wild River Valley including the shelters. The likely future Wilderness designation will affect group size limits and removal of the shelters may change use patterns.

Large groups seeking the more developed recreational experience provided by shelters would continue to have the opportunity to do so at a variety of other locations across the WMNF. Such a shift would be acceptable as it continues to concentrate use in appropriate areas.

Careful attention would need to be paid to increasing impacts in the Wild River Valley as a result of dispersed recreation use. The Forest Service has completed a comprehensive inventory of dispersed campsites in the area and this baseline data would be used for the proposed monitoring program. Incidents of improperly disposed of human waste would be monitored to determine if removal of the outhouses associated with the shelter sites would require additional mitigation.

Project implementation would likely be challenging as a result of established use patterns and the large extent of non-native material requiring removal. The impending Wilderness designation will add additional challenge should the legislation be passed swiftly. All aspects of the project would still be achievable though the tools and techniques used to accomplish the objectives may change.

During the development of the proposed action the Forest Service investigated a number of alternatives based on the retention of some of the shelters and/or their associated support structures. It is believed that the proposed action would be the best solution for managing recreation use and its associated impacts while preserving Wilderness values.

What Decision Will Be Made?

After conducting and reviewing the environmental analysis, including public involvement and resource specialists' input, the District Ranger of the Androscoggin Ranger District will determine whether additional analysis and documentation is warranted. The District Ranger will also decide whether to remove the shelters and their associated support structures, rehabilitate the sites, and construct tent pads, or to investigate another suitable management action.

How Are You Involved In The Decision?

We are seeking your comments to help identify issues or concerns associated with the proposal to remove Spruce Brook, Blue Brook, and Perkins Notch Shelters and associated structures.

The regulations governing this kind of analysis do not allow appeals of the final decision, *so we encourage you to share your comments and concerns now* so we can incorporate them into the environmental analysis.

How Can You Comment?

In order for your comments to be considered in the next stage of analysis, they should be received by May 31, 2006 and submitted in one of the following ways:

Written comments

By letter – District Ranger Katie Stuart, Androscoggin Ranger District, White Mountain National Forest, 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581

By FAX – (603) 466-2856, ATTN: Katie Stuart

By email – kstuart@fs.fed.us

Oral Comments

Oral comments must be received in person at the Androscoggin Ranger Station or via telephone (603) 466-2713 (TTY 603-466-2856), during normal business hours (8:00am – 4:30pm).

In your comments, please include the following information:

- 1) Your name, address and telephone number.
- 2) The project you are commenting on: Wild River Shelter System Removal
- 3) Site specific comments about the proposal along with supporting information you believe will help identify issues, develop alternatives, or predict environmental effects of our proposal.

Please direct questions to Pat Nasta, NEPA Coordinator, at the above address or call 603-466-2713 extension 222. Please be aware that your name, address and comments will become part of the public record and may be available for public inspection. If this is a concern, please contact us at your earliest convenience.

It is the responsibility of the interested parties to respond to this notice within the established time period. Postal delays or web server failures will not extend filing times. If a document is not available or delivered when expected, contact the Androscoggin Ranger District to arrange an alternate method of delivery.

References

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

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

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**Wild River Shelters Removal Project
Androscoggin Ranger District – White Mountain National Forest**

Let us know if you want to stay informed about this project.

Please return by May 31, 2006

If you do not return this form or contact us, you will be removed from this project mailing list (but you will remain on the master list for future projects).

**To Stay Informed as the Wild River Shelters Environmental Analysis Continues
Please Choose either **Email Notification** OR **Project Information by Mail****

A. Email notification

Send email notification when the Wild River Shelters final decision documents are available at:
www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/white_mountain/projects/projects

My email address is _____

You can request hardcopy documents after viewing them online if necessary.

B. Hardcopy Project Information by Mail.

Check the **NOTICES** you want to receive in the mail (you can request the full documents at any time):

A letter summarizing the final decision and options for viewing the documents.

OR, chose to receive the full **DOCUMENTS** in the mail:

Final decision documents. (~20 pages)

Please print clearly or affix a return address label:

Name _____

Address _____

From: _____

STAMP

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