

White Mountain National Forest



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Eastern
Region



Wanosha Integrated Resource Project Campton, Thornton, Waterville Valley, Sandwich, Woodstock, and Livermore Townships Grafton County, NH Scoping Proposal

Prepared by the
Pemigewasset Ranger District
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Introduction

The Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF, or Forest) is seeking your input on the Wanosh Integrated Resource Project (Wanosh IRP, or Project). The Project is in the townships of Thornton, Campton, Waterville Valley, Sandwich, and Woodstock, in Grafton County, New Hampshire. This scoping proposal includes the Project background, purpose of and need for action, a description of the Proposed Action, and information on how you can submit your comments on this project to the Forest Service. At this time, it is anticipated that the environmental analysis for this project will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA).

White Mountain National Forest Management Plan

The 2005 WMNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) provides management direction for the WMNF. The Wanosh IRP would help achieve the desired future conditions described in Chapter 1 of the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan delineates a variety of Management Areas (MA), each of which emphasizes particular goals, objectives, and desired conditions. Each MA also has a set of standards and guidelines that set parameters on activities to ensure protection of the character and resources of the land. Applicable Forest Plan goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines were used to develop the Wanosh IRP proposal.

Project Area Description

The Analysis Area comprises about 52,000 acres in the southwestern part of the WMNF, east of Interstate 93, in portions of the Eastman Brook, Hubbard Brook, and Mad River Watersheds (Figure 1). The Analysis Area is bounded in the southeast by Black Mountain, Sandwich Mountain, and Lost Pass. The northern edge runs between North Peak, East Peak, and Mount Kancamagus, approximately a mile and a half south of the Kancamagus Highway. Forest lands in the Analysis Area are allocated to nine different Management Areas (Table 1; MA). These MAs are described in detail in the Forest Plan. The Project Area comprises about 20,000 acres within the Analysis Area.

The Analysis Area includes many recreational opportunities. These include the Campton, Waterville Valley, and Tripoli Road campgrounds, the Greeley Ponds Scenic Area and Waterville Valley Resort. Other recreational resources include the Eddy day use area, numerous hiking trails including Welch-Dickey and Smarts Brook, snowmobile trails, and Nordic ski trails including the Livermore Trail.

Table 1. Management Area allocation in the Analysis Area.

Management Area	Acres (approximate) ¹
2.1 General Forest Management	24,100
5.1 Wilderness	8,780
6.1 Semi-Primitive Recreation	3,780
6.2 Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation	12,520
6.3 Semi-Primitive Winter Motorized Recreation	600
7.1 Alpine Ski Area	870
8.5 Scenic Area	810
9.2 Alpine Ski Area Expansion	390
9.3 Candidate Research Natural Area	150
Inholding	150

1 – Estimated acres; project activities are proposed in a subset of these acres..

The Analysis Area encompasses the Sandwich Wilderness and the Cone Mountain Candidate Research Natural Area as well as approximately 20,000 acres of land included in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule; no activities are proposed within any of these areas. During the Forest Plan revision process, about 27,700 acres across the Forest were identified as having roadless characteristics. These lands were assessed and some were recommended for special designation. The remaining lands were allocated to MAs as part of the Forest Plan revision process; project activities are proposed in about 2,600 acres of these lands.

The Analysis Area does not include any federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers. It does include segments of Mill Brook (classified as scenic) and Mad River (classified as recreation), both of which were determined to be eligible for listing under the Wild and Scenic River Act during the 2005 Forest Plan revision process. The Project Area encompasses about 200 acres of lands within the ¼-mile corridor on either side of Mill Brook, and about 600 acres of lands within the ¼-mile corridor on either side of Mad River.

The Analysis Area includes the Tripoli West and Cone Mountain Habitat Management Units (HMUs). The existing conditions in the Tripoli West and Cone Mountain HMUs were analyzed and compared to the desired future conditions outlined in the Forest Plan. The results of these analyses were used to help develop the proposed vegetation and wildlife habitat management activities.

Purpose and Need for Action

The primary focus of the Wanosha IRP is to implement the management direction identified in the Forest Plan by comparing the existing conditions in the Analysis Area with the desired conditions as established in the Forest Plan. Project objectives include changing forest vegetation to improve landscape resiliency; maintaining or enhancing the existing Forest character and user experience; reducing the adverse impacts of recreational activities on resource values and facilities; and providing a safe and sustainable public recreation experience.

The following sections highlight the specific objectives for each Project component and why they are necessary.

Recreation

Smarts Brook Mountain Bike Trail System

The purpose of this component is to establish a mountain biking trail network and associated parking at Smarts Brook that is safe and sustainable, and that provides adequate trail volume and range of difficulty to support a variety of user experiences. This component also presents an opportunity to provide improved management of existing routes used by mountain bikes through incorporation of those routes into the Forest Trail System.

Currently, incidental user-created mountain biking trail systems are not regularly maintained by Forest staff or established partners; do not meet Forest design and safety standards for mountain biking use; are subject to resource damage due to erosion; and present a level of difficulty which does not accommodate a wide range of user abilities and experiences.

Many routes in the WMNF were laid out and constructed according to design standards that never considered uses other than hiking. Due to the limited infrastructure of trails suitable for mountain biking, mountain bikers sought out existing logging roads and travelways on which to ride. Under the prior 1986 Forest Plan, which allowed cross-country mountain bike use, repeated use of some cross-country routes evolved over time into incidental user-created trails. The combined effects of trail age, layout and design, use levels, and the naturally rough and rugged terrain have resulted in a trail system that is steep, rocky, and eroded, and requires heavily reinforced and constructed erosion control features for sustainability. Such a system is largely unsuitable for mountain biking. The existence and use of these routes in the Smarts Brook area has generated a need for management action.

Campton and Waterville Valley Campground Improvements

The purpose of this component is to 1) protect facilities, enhance user experience, and improve site safety and aesthetics at the Campton and Waterville Valley Campgrounds; and 2) to provide high-quality developed camping opportunities and accommodate modern-day larger recreational vehicles (RVs) in proximity to developed and dispersed recreational opportunities at Waterville Valley Campground.

Currently, a mature forest canopy, consisting of primarily white pine trees, dominates at both campgrounds. Many of these trees are declining in health, and mature trees present potentially hazardous conditions due to dead limbs overhanging roads and campsites, creating a need for management action. In addition, the closed canopy reduces light penetration, hindering understory development, resulting in inadequate screening between campsites, as well as between campsites and public access and roads. More screening for privacy would enhance the user experience and better meet the Forest Plan's desired condition for campgrounds.

The Waterville Valley Campground is located in a naturally wooded setting close to development in Waterville Valley, but separate enough to maintain a more natural setting.

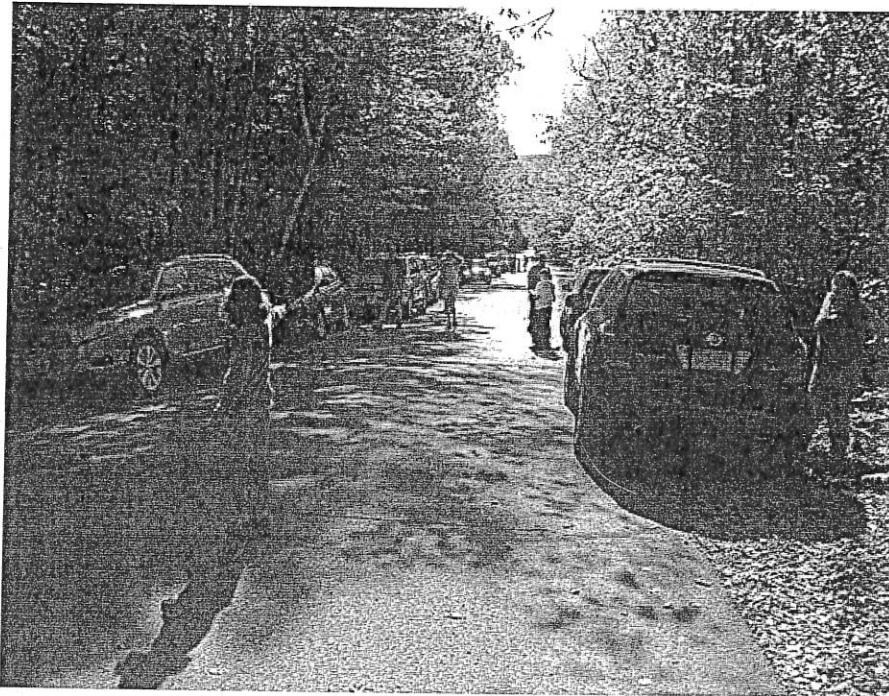
Currently, the campground has 27 sites, 19 of which are suitable for RVs. The interior campground roads are paved but the road design does not accommodate modern, larger RVs. Recreational trends indicate a steadily increasing demand for electricity and water hookups as visitor preference continues to transition from tent to RV camping. Revenue from this campground suggest that it is averaging about 25 percent occupancy. The low level of amenities and lack of access for larger RVs is thought to be influencing the low occupancy rate. There are no RV campsites with full hookups available to the public on the Pemigewasset Ranger District and the closest private campground with hookups is about seven miles away in Thornton, New Hampshire.

The Waterville Valley Campground has hand-pump water sources, vault toilets, and a combination of paved and gravel interior paths, one host site, and no utility hookups. The lack of amenities also affects the Forest's ability to find hosts for this campground. This affects the ability of the Forest to maintain the campground to a high standard and likely further contributes to the low occupancy rates. This component is needed to provide a higher quality campground experience, consistent with the Forest Plan and assessments of recreation opportunities across the Forest.

Welch-Dickey Trailhead Overflow Parking Lot

The purpose of this component is to improve public safety, mitigate resource damage, and meet demand for public use at the Welch-Dickey Trailhead. The Forest Service evaluated a proposed expansion to the Welch-Dickey trailhead parking lot in 2003 (Welch-Dickey Parking Expansion Project EA and Decision Memo); however, because of changes in the scope of the proposal and the age of the previous analysis, the proposed activities are being re-evaluated.

The Welch-Dickey Trailhead is located on Orris Road in Thornton, New Hampshire. The existing parking lot does not accommodate the level of public use. Visitors unable to find parking in the lot wind up parking on both sides of Orris Road. On extremely busy weekends, visitors park as far away as Upper Mad River Road. As a result, access by emergency vehicles is impeded and visitors walking along the road are at risk of being struck by vehicles. Access to residents and town facilities beyond the trailhead parking lot are also impeded and parking along the edge of the road causes resource damage, including damage to private property. This component is needed to address visitor safety and capacity, and ongoing resource and property damage.



Visitors are seen parking along both sides of Orris Road, south of the Welch-Dickey Trailhead parking lot.

Transportation System

The purpose of this component is 1) to assess and evaluate existing roads within the Project Area including Forest System roads and unauthorized roads; 2) to maintain, reconstruct, or decommission those roads; 3) construct new permanent and temporary roads, in accordance with Forest standards and requirements in order to accomplish Project objectives, as well as meet long-term Forest management objectives, and 4) integrate the recommendations developed through the 2015 Transportation Analysis Process. This component is needed to plan and manage for current and future public and Forest Service access to the Project Area, to meet Forest standards for desired road maintenance levels, and to meet requirements of the Highway Transportation Safety Act.

Vegetation and Wildlife Habitat Management

The purpose of and need for this component is to maintain and improve landscape resiliency, promote resistance of Forest lands to disturbances and other stressors, and diversify wildlife habitat. More specifically, resource objectives for the Project Area include the following:

- Reduce hazard fuel loads.
- Provide sustainable forest products to benefit local economies and communities.
- Meet wildlife habitat diversity objectives:

- Gradually convert stands situated on non-compatible Ecological Lands Types (ELT) to forest types consistent with land capability. ELTs are determined based on underlying soil types and other ecological factors.
- In the long-term, increase spruce-fir habitat.
- Increase age-class diversity and provide regeneration of stands.
- Maintain or increase aspen-birch habitat.
- Maintain current levels of oak, pine and hemlock within stands.
- Maintain historic orchards as permanent wildlife openings.

Proposed Action

WMNF is proposing a variety of activities, or components, to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Wanoshah IRP (Figures 2 and 3). Applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines and Forest Service National and New Hampshire Best Management Practices would be incorporated into project design. The Project is expected to be initiated in late 2019.

Recreation

Smarts Brook Mountain Bike Trail System

WMNF proposes to designate up to 16 miles of undesignated mountain bike trail system in the Smarts Brook area as part of the WMNF Trail System for mountain bike use. Other portions of the existing user-created trail system at Smarts Brook would be re-routed or decommissioned as needed to address safety and resource concerns. The WMNF also proposes to improve existing incidental parking areas or pullouts for established use, or construct a new developed trailhead parking area, within the Smarts Brook area to meet existing levels of mountain biking trail use. Parking areas would accommodate up to about 30 parking spaces with amenities that may include a toilet building, trash receptacles and information kiosk; locations will continue to be evaluated during project development.

Campton and Waterville Valley Campground Overstory Thinning

WMNF proposes to conduct overstory thinning, primarily mature white pine around campsites, common areas, and roads. Overstory thinning would be designed to 1) remove potentially hazardous vegetation, and 2) create canopy gaps to promote a growth response to the forest floor and understory, thereby improving screening for privacy between campsites and roads. Activities would include stumping, removal of tree boles, and chipping of tree limbs and tops.

Waterville Valley Campground Redesign

WMNF proposes to redesign the Waterville Valley Campground to accommodate 25 RVs of variable lengths. The redesign would be limited to the existing campground footprint, and would include the following activities:

- Installation of underground electrical power and pressurized water utilities to serve RV sites, the host site, and other campground facilities.
- Installation of two upgraded toilet buildings and one upgraded combined shower-and-toilet building.
- Redesign of interior campground roads to accommodate large RVs. Existing access roads and interior roads would remain paved.
- Incorporation of design standards to meet accessibility requirements.

Additional design features would be incorporated within the campground footprint at Waterville Valley Campground, as appropriate, to promote the overall range of experiences on the Forest.

Welch-Dickey Trailhead Parking Lot

WMNF proposes to reconstruct and expand the existing trailhead parking lot to accommodate about 75 passenger vehicles. Activities would include the following:

- Repainting parking lines on the existing paved parking area.
- Recontouring and revegetating portions of the site.
- Paving and striping a disturbed dirt area south of the existing paved lot to accommodate additional parking.

Transportation System

WMNF proposes to construct about 0.25 mile of new road to access portions of the Project Area for proposed vegetation management activities as well as for long-term forest management. Maintenance and reconstruction is proposed on approximately 9.5 miles of existing Forest Road and on a private easement needed for forest management. Reconstruction and maintenance activities would include techniques such as recontouring, resurfacing and widening road surfaces; installing drainage dips, waterbars, and/or temporary bridges; replacing culverts; cleaning ditches and culverts; and clearing roadside vegetation. Roads which do not meet management objectives may be decommissioned or reclassified consistent with desired maintenance levels.

In addition, the location of a gate on Gore Road currently restricts access to private homes and requires a lock and key for passage. This gate would be relocated to the Forest boundary to provide open access to private homes beyond the gate's current location.

Forest roads, temporary roads, and log landings would be constructed, maintained or reconstructed to provide safe access to treatment areas and meet modern design standards. About 13 new log landings would be constructed. Log landings are typically about one acre in size, but are often smaller. Upon completion of timber harvest, roads that were previously closed (barricaded) or were not drivable would remain closed to the public. Temporary culverts and bridges would be removed and waterbars would be installed. Roadbeds and landings would be revegetated with native grasses.

Vegetation and Wildlife Habitat Management

WMNF proposes to conduct commercial and non-commercial treatments within about 5,000 gross acres of forest stands in the Project boundary; about 3,400 acres within those stands are proposed for silvicultural treatment. Additional field reconnaissance would be conducted prior to finalizing the stand acres and boundaries and modifications would be made to account for specific ground conditions (e.g., wet areas, steep or rocky slopes, and forest type changes). In addition, the stand acres may be modified to meet visual and water quality objectives, to account for the incorporation of reserve patches of uncut trees in final-harvest stands, and to include protective buffers around features such as vernal pools, cultural resources, nest trees, and riparian zones.

A range of silvicultural treatments from shelterwood to group harvests to clearcutting would provide wood products of commercial value; create small and large openings in the forest to allow regeneration of trees and other vegetation; provide additional growing space to enhance crown and bole development; and encourage the establishment of shade-intolerant species in the understory. A variety of authorities would be used to accomplish our project objectives including, but not limited to stewardship authorities, traditional timber sales, and appropriated funds.

Table 2. Proposed silvicultural treatment acres

Silvicultural Treatment	Harvest Method	Estimated Treatment Acres ¹ (Gross Stand Acres)
Even-Aged Regeneration	Clearcut with Reserves	480
	Patch Clearcut	200 (440)
	Overstory Removal	140
	Shelterwood	250
Uneven-Aged Regeneration	Group Selection	340 (1,680)
	Single Tree Selection/Group Selection Combined	450
Intermediate	Thinning	700 (760)
	Improvement Cut	120
Site Preparation (Mechanical) ²	N/A	1,170
Timber Stand Improvement	N/A	600
Wildlife Opening Expansion	N/A	10

1 - Estimated treatment acres are approximate and include reserve patches of uncut trees, as well as protective buffers for sensitive resources as needed.

2 – Site preparation would only be conducted on lands proposed for harvesting and would not result in additional acres of treatment.

Measures Designed to Avoid, Minimize, or Mitigate Adverse Effects

Resource protection measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate known or potential adverse effects from the proposed activities would be developed during the environmental

analysis process. These protection measures would be refined once the Proposed Action is finalized and alternatives are developed.

Public Involvement

Public involvement is a critical component of project development and our environmental analysis process. It is through conversations with and feedback from you, members of the public, that we are able to add value to our proposal by gleaning local knowledge, concerns, suggestions, and ultimately make a more informed decision.

How can you provide input on this project?

We are soliciting your comments on all aspects of this proposal. Your input on the proposed activities will help us refine our proposal, define key issues associated with the project, develop alternatives to the proposed action, evaluate impacts to resources, and determine the appropriate level of analysis.

We anticipate releasing the draft EA in the spring of 2019 for 30-day public comment. The draft EA will include a summary of the issues raised during the scoping process, any alternatives to the Proposed Action generated by the issues, and the anticipated environmental effects of the Project. If you provide comments on the Wanoshah IRP now, you will be notified when the analysis is published and available for review and public comment.

This project is subject to the provisions of 36 CFR Part 218, Subparts A and B. This rule provides a pre-decisional objection process to address public concerns that remain unresolved after the environmental analysis is complete and the draft decision has been released. The scoping period is a designated opportunity for public participation. Only individuals or entities (as defined by 36 CFR 218.2) who submit timely and specific written comments about this proposed project during this or other public participation periods established by the responsible official will be eligible to file an objection. For the purposes of this rule, "specific written comments" are within the scope of the Proposed Action, have a direct relationship to the Proposed Action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider (36 CFR 218.2). Other eligibility requirements are identified at 36 CFR 218.25(a)(3) and include name, postal address, title of the project, identity of the individual or entity who authored the comments, and signature or other verification of identity upon request.

If you provide comments on this project now, we will notify you when the draft EA for this project is available. If you do not wish to provide comments at this time, but wish to be notified when the draft EA is released, please inform the project contact listed below.

How can you comment?

In your comments, please include the following information:

- Your name, address, and telephone number.
- The project you are commenting on: **Wanosha IRP**
- Site-specific comments about the Project, along with supporting information you believe will help the Forest Service identify any issues, develop alternatives, or refine the environmental effects analysis of our proposal.

In order for your comments to be considered in the next stage of analysis, please submit them by March 26, 2018, in one of the following ways:

Written comments:

By Letter: Brooke Brown, District Ranger

White Mountain National Forest
Pemigewasset Ranger District
71 White Mountain Drive
Campton, NH 03223

By FAX: (603) 536-3685

ATTN: Wanosha Integrated Resource Project (or Wanosha IRP), c/o Brooke Brown

By email: Electronic comments should include an identifiable name and must be submitted as an email message or plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), Word (.doc/.docx) or portable document format (.pdf) document to comments-eastern-white-mountain-pemigewasset@fs.fed.us.

Oral Comments:

Oral comments must be received in person at the Pemigewasset Ranger Station, during one of the open houses (below), or via telephone at 603-536-6100 (TTY 603-536-3665), during normal business hours (8:00 AM – 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday). Please direct questions to Brooke Brown, Pemigewasset District Ranger, by calling (603) 536-6101.

Open Houses:

WMNF will host two public open house meetings to allow the public and interested parties an opportunity to learn about the proposed project, ask questions, and provide comments. The meetings will be held at the following dates, times, and locations:

Focus on Smarts Brook Mountain Biking Trails

Thursday, March 1, 2018, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Project presentation at 6:15 p.m.

White Mountain National Forest
71 White Mountain Drive
Campton, NH 03223

Wanousha IRP Open House

Thursday, March 8, 2018, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Project presentation at 6:15 p.m.

White Mountain National Forest

71 White Mountain Drive

Campton, NH 03223

Please note that, if you are unable to attend the "Focus on Smarts Brook Mountain Biking Trails" open house, duplicate information will be provided at the open house on March 8.

Please be aware that your name, address, and comments will become part of the public record and are available for public inspection. If this is a concern, please contact us at your earliest convenience.

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

Wanosha Integrated Resource Project
Scoping Proposal

