



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Green Mountain &
Finger Lakes National
Forests
Tel -(802) 362-2307

Manchester Ranger District
2538 Depot Street
Manchester Center, VT 05255
FAX - (802) 362-1251

File Code: 1950-1

Date: August 19, 2008

Invitation for Comments Dover C-100 Snowmobile Trail Relocation Project

Dear Interested Parties:

I am writing to seek your comments on management activities proposed by the USDA Forest Service (USFS) on the Manchester Ranger District of the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF). Enclosed is the Preliminary Decision Memo for 30-Day Notice and Comment for the Dover C-100 Snowmobile Trail Relocation Project. This unsigned Preliminary Decision Memo represents my thinking in regards to a decision for the Dover C-100 project, and as such is not an appealable document at this time. All comments received during this required 30-day notice and comment period will be considered in making a final decision. The final signed appealable Decision Memo is expected to be issued in mid-September.

This proposal falls in a category of actions excluded from analysis in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement, as proposals of this type individually and cumulatively do not have a significant effect on the human environment (see 40 CFR 1508.4). Forest Service categorical exclusions are defined in 36 CFR 220.6. This proposal falls under category 220.6(e)(1): Construction and reconstruction of trails.

A 2005 court ruling (*Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*, CIV F-03-6386 JKS) requires that categorically excluded actions that include upgrading, widening, or modification of OHV routes to increase either the levels or types of use by OHVs (including snowmobiles), provide for public notice and comment, and opportunity for administrative appeal. Only those individuals or organizations who submit comments or otherwise express interest during this formal 30-day notice and comment period may appeal the final decision.

Additional information regarding this proposal can be obtained from: Doug Reeves, Manchester Ranger District, 2538 Depot St., Manchester Center, VT 05255, (802) 362-2307 ext. 224 or email at dreeves01@fs.fed.us.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Comments will be accepted for a 30-day period following publication of the Dover C-100 Snowmobile Trail Relocation Project legal notice in the *Rutland Herald*, our newspaper of record. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. Do not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period (36 CFR 215.6).



Postal, hand-delivered, oral, electronic and facsimile (FAX) comments on the proposal will be accepted. Postal or hand-delivered comments must be submitted to me at the Manchester Ranger Station (see letterhead for address). Oral comments may be submitted by phone to (802) 362-2307, or in person at the Ranger Station. The office hours for those submitting oral or hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Comments may also be submitted to me by FAX to (802) 362-1251, ATTN: Doug Reeves, Mt. Tabor Project.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), Word (.doc) or Portable Document Format (.pdf), to comments-eastern-green-mt-finger-lakes-manchester@fs.fed.us. Please include the subject header "Dover C-100 Project" in your email. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Comments received in response to this invitation, including name and address of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public review. If you provide comments, you will automatically receive a copy of the Decision Memo for this proposed action.

The purpose of inviting your comments during this 30-day comment period is to collect additional information and to identify any unresolved issues regarding the proposal. Your comments can help me make a better informed final decision regarding the proposed project. In your comments, please include the following information:

1. Your name, address and telephone number or email address.
2. The project you are commenting on: Dover C-100 Project.
3. Site specific comments about the proposal along with supporting information and rationale you believe will help identify issues.
4. Concerns about environmental effects associated with the proposal.

Thank you for your interest in the Green Mountain National Forest. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/S/ Alex Sienkiewicz
Alex Sienkiewicz
District Ranger,
Manchester Ranger District

Enclosures: Preliminary Decision Memo w/ Map

**PRELIMINARY DECISION MEMO
FOR 30-DAY NOTICE AND COMMENT
Corridor 100 Snowmobile Trail Relocation Project
August 2008**

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region, Green Mountain National Forest
Manchester Ranger District
Town of Dover, Windham County, Vermont

I. SUMMARY

As District Ranger for the Manchester Ranger District of the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF), I am authorizing the implementation of the re-routing of a portion of the snowmobile trail that is designated as FT 395 Dover Hills by the Forest Service, and on the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) Maps as Corridor Trail 100 (C-100). This project involves the construction of approximately 1430 feet of new snowmobile trail to replace approximately 1780 feet of existing trail on National Forest System (NFS) lands. This project will result in a safer trail for the public, will minimize soil erosion problems, and protect water quality. The project is located on NFS land in the Town of Dover, Windham County, Vermont, on the Manchester Ranger District of the GMNF (see attached map).

II. DECISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED

A. Background and Project Area

The project area is located in the Town of Dover, Windham County, on the Manchester Ranger District of the GMNF (see attached map). The FT 395 Dover Hill (C-100) serves as a major Class 1 corridor trail for snowmobiles and is maintained by the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST). The FT 395 Dover Hill has been in use for approximately 20 years and is a well established snowmobile trail in the local community.

The section of FT 395 that requires a re-route sharply descends to an acute corner by a stream, then quickly ascends back to its original elevation. In the winter, water collects at the corner by the stream and forms an ice pocket that is treacherous for snowmobilers. The rest of the year, water running down the trail into the stream, from both directions, is causing soil erosion with the sediment entering the stream. The topography combined with historical stone foundations on both sides of the trail prevents diverting the water off of the trail with waterbars or other erosion control devices.

There are also two sharp 90 degree corners on this trail that are safety hazards due to their unexpected sharpness. This proposal also includes modifying these corners to a gentler angle that conforms to FSH 2309.18 Trails Management handbook guidelines of a minimum turn radii of 25' with a 125' line-of-sight. This work will impact approximately 100 feet of forest for each curve. The tread width that will be cleared by the excavator for a Class 1 trail is a minimum of 12 feet wide. Hazard trees and other vegetation that snow may force down into the trail will be removed.

B. Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for re-routing this portion of FT 395 and for the modification of the two sharp curves is to provide a safer trail for trail users, and to minimize the trail's impacts to soil and water resources. If action is not taken, there will be a continuation of unacceptable impacts to the soil and water resource from existing erosion along some sections of the trail, and safety hazards associated with the current trail location will not be addressed.

The project meets Forest Plan Goal 12 which is to "provide a diverse range of high-quality, sustainable recreation opportunities that complement those provided off National Forest System lands" (Forest Plan, page 15). The proposed trail relocation is within the Diverse Forest Use (MA 3.1), which emphasizes a variety of forest uses including both motorized and non-motorized recreation (Forest Plan, page 47).

Maintenance of this trail is consistent with our recreation niche of focusing on the fact that the GMNF's large, contiguous blocks of land are well suited to trail-based activities in backcountry settings.... Working in partnership with many organizations will continue to be a hallmark of how the Forest Service provides recreation opportunities to the public. (Forest Plan, page 9).

This project is also consistent with Forest Plan guidance that trail maintenance and improvement activities should focus on the reduction of deferred maintenance needs on existing trails before the development of new trails. (Forest Plan, page 35).

C. Description of Decision

To meet the Purpose and Need, my decision is to approve the FT 395 Dover Hill snowmobile trail re-route and corner modification. The Forest Service will work cooperatively with the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) to perform this necessary trail construction and maintenance activities on the 1430 feet of trail that will replace the 1780 feet of existing trail.

The re-route straightens the trail and relocates it to higher ground that is less susceptible to soil erosion. About 990 feet of the new location utilizes old roads and the other 440 feet is new trail going through as dense section of conifers/birch. The densely wooded section will require the cutting of suppressed conifers. The section of the re-route utilizing old roads will need one sharp corner reshaped at an intersection of old skid roads. There will be one culvert installed for general hill side drainage (not a stream) and a waterbar to divert water off of the road into the forest. All of this work will be done with an excavator for establishing the tread suitable for a Class 1 motorized winter trail.

On Class I trails, all trees, saplings, shrubs, blow downs, vines, stumps, rocks, and roots which protrude more than 4" above the overall trail tread will be removed over the entire width of the trail-tread surface.

All trail work will comply with FSH 2309.19 – Trails management handbook, as well as the standards found in the *Guide for Development of Snowmobile Trails* that was prepared by the International Association of Snowmobile Administrators, and the Green and White Mountain National Forest.

This decision includes implementation of the following Mitigation Measures: All disturbed areas with bare soil will be seeded with a Forest Service approved seed mix. All motorized equipment will be washed to remove potential undesirable seeds before and after entering the National

Forest. Slash from the new trail construction will be pulled onto the old trail to discourage further use and promote natural revegetation.

Any necessary culverts and waterbars will be constructed and installed according to guidelines developed by the Forest's soil and water resource specialists. All historical sites will be left undisturbed by this project and protected from future trails impacts.

This decision is based upon an environmental analysis conducted by Forest Service personnel, and responses to public scoping. This information is located in the project planning record located at the GMNF Manchester Ranger District Office in Manchester Center, VT.

III. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories found at 36 CFR 220.6(d) and (e), and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

A. Category of Exclusion

Based upon the environmental analysis contained in the project file and on experience with similar activities on the GMNF, I have concluded that this decision can be appropriately categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. I have determined that the selected action is a routine activity within the following category of exclusion found at 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1): ***Construction and reconstruction of trails.***

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

The list of seven extraordinary circumstances that were examined for this analysis may be found at 36 CFR 220.6(b). The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the degree of the potential effects of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist. I have concluded that there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the record. A summary of the project's potential effects on each resource condition is as follows:

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 –

It was determined that this decision will have 'no effect' on federally listed animal or plant species or their critical habitats as a result from this project (Wildlife Biological Evaluation, 8/28/06, Plant Biological Evaluation, 7/20/06).

This project will have 'no effect' on any of the Regional Foresters Sensitive Species (RFSS) or their preferred habitats, and thus is not likely to lead to loss of viability or trend toward federal listing for any animal or plant on the RFSS list (Wildlife Biological Evaluation, 8/28/06; Plant Biological Evaluation, 7/20/06).

2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds –

The project is not located in or near floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds. This has been validated by map and site-review. No significant impacts to floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds are expected to result from this project. (Communication with staff Soil and Water Technician, 9/06).

To further ensure that floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watershed impacts are minimized, Acceptable Management Practices are incorporated into this decision.

3. Congressionally Designated Areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas –

Wilderness:

This decision does not affect Wilderness. The project is not in or near Wilderness. Wilderness is identified on the Forest as Management Area 5.1 (Forest Plan, p. 49). The closest Wilderness to the project area is the Glastenbury Wilderness Area, which is 8.2 miles west of the project. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect the Wilderness Area (communication with Recreation Planner, 9/06).

Wilderness Study Areas:

There are no Wilderness Study Areas within the project area. This decision will not affect Wilderness Study Areas (communication with Recreation Planner, 9/06).

National Recreation Areas:

The GMNF contains two National Recreation Areas: the *Moosalamoo National Recreation Area* and the *Robert T. Stafford White Rocks National Recreation Area*. The project is not located in or near these areas. This has been validated by map and site-review. This decision will not affect the National Recreation Areas (communication with Recreation Planner, 9/06).

Wild and Scenic Rivers:

Although the GMNF does not contain any Congressionally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, there are many river segments that are eligible to be further considered for addition to the National Wild and Scenic River System. These river segments and their associated corridors are within the Eligible Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Management Area (MA 9.4). The project is not located in or near these eligible river segments. This has been validated by map and site-review. This decision will not affect the outstandingly remarkable values identified for any eligible Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers (communication with Recreation Planner, 9/06).

4. Inventoried Roadless Areas or Potential Wilderness Areas –

There are no inventoried roadless areas (Roadless Area Conservation Rule or Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Areas) in the project area. This decision will not affect inventoried roadless areas (communication with Forest Planner and/or Recreation Planner, 9/06).

5. Existing and Candidate Research Natural Areas –

There are no Research Natural Areas in the project area or on the Manchester Ranger District. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect Research Natural Areas (communication with staff ecologist, 9/12/06).

6. American Indian and Alaska Native Religious or Cultural Sites –

See Item 7 below.

7. Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas –

This decision complies with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. There will be no adverse effects to any cultural or historical resources as a result of this decision (concurrence from Forest Archaeologist, 1/23/06).

8. Other Resources –

In addition to resource conditions that could lead to extraordinary circumstances, I also have considered the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to other resources such as soil/water, fisheries, visuals, recreation, and non-native invasive species. The project will not result in significant impacts to these resources, particularly because all applicable Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines will be implemented.

IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This project was listed in the quarterly *Green Mountain National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions* (SOPA) beginning in October, 2006 (listed as the “Deerfield Valley VAST Trail Reroute” project), and will remain in the SOPA until the project is authorized for implementation.

Public involvement included several field trips in 2005, 2006, and 2008 with members of the Deerfield Valley Stumpers who are associated with VAST. The project was also reviewed on-the-ground on June 26, 2008, by a representative of the Center for Biological Diversity, Dick Andrews, for possible conflicts with their organizations goals, and none were noted.

The desired decision is also being made available for the required 30-day public notice and comment period.

V. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below.

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.

Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act) –The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires the development of long-range land and resource management plans, and that all site-specific project activities be consistent with direction in the plans. The GMNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) was completed and approved in 2006 as required by NFMA. The Forest Plan provides direction for all management activities on the

GMNF. The Corridor 100 Trail Re-route Project implements the Forest Plan.

The project area is within the Diverse Forest Use (3.1) Management Area (MA) as described in the 2006 Forest Plan. As required by NFMA Section 1604(i), I find this project to be consistent with the Forest Plan including goals, objectives, desired future conditions, and Forest-wide and Management Area Standards and Guidelines.

Maintenance of this trail is consistent with our recreation niche of focusing on the fact that the GMNF's large, contiguous blocks of land are well suited to trail-based activities in backcountry settings.... Working in partnership with many organizations will continue to be a hallmark of how the Forest Service provides recreation opportunities to the public. (Forest Plan, page 9).

This project is also consistent with Forest Plan guidance that trail maintenance and improvement activities should focus on the reduction of deferred maintenance needs on existing trails before the development of new trails. (Forest Plan, page 35).

Endangered Species Act - The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize 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. In accordance with Section 7(c) of this Act, a report of the listed and proposed, threatened, or endangered species that may be present in the project area was reviewed. See Section III, Item B.1 of this document.

Clean Water Act – The intent of the Act is to restore and maintain the integrity of waters. The Forest Service complies with this Act through the use of Acceptable Management Practices. This decision incorporates Acceptable Management Practices where applicable to ensure protection of soil and water resources.

Wetlands (Executive Order 11990) - Executive Order 11990 directs the agency to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. See Section III, Item B.2 of this document.

Floodplains (Executive Order 11988) - Executive Order 11988 directs the agency to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. See Section III, Item B.2 of this document.

National Historic Preservation Act - Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. It also requires federal agencies to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. See Section III, Item B.7 of this document.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act - The Archaeological Resources Protection Act covers the discovery and protection of historic properties (prehistoric and historic) that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It affords lawful protection of archaeological resources and sites that are on public and Indian lands. See Section III, Item B.7 of this document.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act - The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act covers the discovery and protection of Native American human remains and objects that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It encourages avoidance of archaeological sites that contain burials or portions of sites that contain graves through "in situ" preservation, but may encompass other actions to preserve these remains and items. See Section III, Item B.6 of this document.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act - See Section III, Item B.3 of this document.

Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974 and Executive Order 11312 (Non-Native Invasive Species) – The Federal Noxious Weed Act requires cooperation with State, local, and other federal agencies in the management and control of non-native invasive species (NNIS); Executive Order (EO) 11312 requires all pertinent federal agencies (subject to budgetary appropriations) to prevent the introduction of NNIS. This project's decision meets the intent of this law and EO by incorporating all pertinent Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines to ensure the management and control of NNIS.

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 order. Public involvement occurred for this project, the results of which I have considered in this decision-making. Public involvement did not identify any adversely impacted local minority or low-income populations. This decision is not expected to adversely impact minority or low-income populations.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

PLEASE NOTE: the following section on Administrative Review and Appeal opportunities reflects what **will be** applicable to the signed decision. At this time, this **preliminary** decision document is being released for a required 30-day Public Notice and Comment period according to the 2005 *Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck* ruling, and as such, is not subject to appeal at this time.

A 2005 court ruling (*Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*, CIV F-03-6386 JKS) requires that categorically-excluded actions that include off-highway vehicle (including snowmobiles) trail activities need to provide for public notice, comment, and opportunity for administrative appeal. Only those individuals or organizations who submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest during the 30-day notice and comment period may appeal this decision.

A written Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date of publication of this decision in the *Rutland Herald* at the following address:

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer
626 E. Wisconsin Ave, Suite 700
Milwaukee, WI 53202-4616

or **Email:** appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us **Subject:** C-100 Corridor Trail Re-route or Fax; 414-944-3963 ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer, USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region

Normal business hours (for hand-delivered appeals) are 7:30 am – 4:00 pm, Mon-Fri. Electronic appeals should be in TXT, RTF, DOC, PDF or other Microsoft Office-compatible formats. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

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

Implementation is scheduled to begin in October 2008.

VIII. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Doug Reeves during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at the Manchester Ranger District office at 2538 Depot Street, Manchester Center, VT 05255, Phone: (802) 362 – 2307 ext. 224; Fax: (802) 362-1251 or e-mail: dreeves01@fs.fed.us

Additional information about this decision can be found on the Internet at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/greenmountain/htm/greenmountain/links/projects/projects_currentandcomplete.htm]

IX. SIGNATURE AND DATE

Date: _____

ALEX SEINKIEWICZ
District Ranger
Responsible Official

Attachment

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's target center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

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