



United States
Department of
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Forest
Service

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North Zone Flood Repair Projects

Decision Memo

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
Green Mountain National Forest
Rochester and Middlebury Ranger Districts

Towns of Hancock and Ripton

Addison County, Vermont

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I. SUMMARY

As District Ranger for the Rochester and Middlebury Ranger Districts of the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF), I am authorizing the implementation of the North Zone Flood Repair Projects. This decision encompasses several projects as detailed in Table 1 in this document. Activities authorized as part of this decision include replacement of a footbridge at Texas Falls Observation Area that was lost in the flood and upgrade of the site to allow for universal access, including wheelchairs (see Attachment 1: photo of missing bridge and Attachment 2: map). This decision also authorizes the removal of damaged bridges and culverts along the Hancock Branch Trail (see Attachment 2: map) and authorizes the replacement of a bridge, repair of trail tread, and construction of 70 feet of boardwalk and 0.2 miles of trail on the Robert Frost Interpretive Trail (see Attachments 3-8: photos of trail and bridge damage and area map). The project is located on National Forest System land in the Towns of Hancock and Ripton, Addison County, VT on the Rochester and Middlebury Ranger Districts of the GMNF.

II. DECISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED

A. Background and Project Area

Record rainfall on August 6, 2008 produced some of the most severe storm damage seen on the GMNF in many years. Many roads, bridges, trails, recreation sites, and watersheds were damaged. The heaviest amount of damage occurred on the north half of the forest, primarily in the towns of Goshen, Ripton, Rochester, and Hancock on the Rochester and Middlebury Ranger Districts. The slow moving storm produced between five and seven inches of rain in a short time period, resulting in widespread damage to public and private infrastructure. Many flood-impacted areas and Forest Trails (FT) are unsafe for public travel and access to many popular areas is restricted or closed. The projects encompassed in this decision fall within the Diverse Forest Use and Ecological Special Area Management Areas (MA) and Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area as identified in Table 1.

Table 1. Project Descriptions and Locations

Project Location	Town/ County	Management Area	Flood Damage and Current Status	Needs
Texas Falls Observation site/Nature Trail (FT 703)	Hancock/ Addison	Ecological Special Area	Footbridge at observation site washed away. Trail closed to public.	1. Replace footbridge 2. Update site to allow universal access (see Attachments 9 and 10: site plans)
Hancock Branch Trail (FT 712)	Hancock/ Addison	Diverse Forest Use	Damaged and washed out bridges, culverts, and trail tread. Trail closed to public.	1. Remove damaged bridges and culverts except first bridge after parking area
Robert Frost Interpretive Trail (FT 286)	Ripton/ Addison	Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area	Damaged and washed out trail and trail bridge abutments over Middlebury River. Trail closed to public.	1. Remove and replace damaged bridge with a new bridge in a new location 2. Construct 70' of boardwalk and 0.2 miles of trail 3. Repair trail tread 4. Relocate a portion (approximately 75') of trail.

B. Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for these actions is to: repair areas damaged by the August 2008 flood incident; restore and improve accessibility to popular recreation areas, including the Robert Frost National Recreation Trail; remove features that may pose a public health and safety risk by eliminating dangerous bridge crossings and removing damaged culverts; and reduce deferred maintenance on a Class 5 (fully developed) trail by replacing the bridge on the Robert Frost Interpretive Trail. This action will contribute to the GMNF Forest Plan:

- a. Goal 12: "Provide a diverse range of high-quality, sustainable recreation opportunities that complement those provided off National Forest System lands."
- b. Goal 12, Objective 8: "Reduce the total deferred maintenance on the GMNF trail system."
- c. Goal 14: "Provide a safe, efficient, and effective Forest transportation system that meets both the needs of the Forest Service and the public."
- d. Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area Desired Future Condition of providing diverse recreation and trail opportunities and maintaining the trail system to provide a range of trail experiences.
- e. Ecological Special Areas Desired Future Condition to provide for opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation experiences.

C. Alternative Actions Considered but Dismissed

An alternative to reroute the Hancock Branch Trail was considered for inclusion in this project. Several members of the public have brought forward alternative routes for this trail in order to reduce future deferred maintenance by relocating the trail out of the floodplain. Due to the ongoing public involvement in the Upper White River Integrated Resource Project and the overlap of that project area with the Hancock Branch Trail, the reroute alternative is not addressed in this decision. Public proposals for potential reroutes will be considered during collaborative efforts in the Upper White River Project and analyzed under a separate decision document. The Hancock Branch Trail is currently closed to public use. The primary objective of the new Hancock Branch Trail will be to construct in a location outside of the floodplain to withstand future flood events.

D. Description of Decision

My decision is to implement the North Zone Flood Repair Projects as identified in Table 1. My decision includes the following activities as identified by each project area.

Texas Falls Observation Site and Nature Trail (FT 703):

- Replace the footbridge that was washed away at the Texas Falls Observation Area. The new bridge will be universally accessible and will be located at a higher elevation in the ravine than the previous bridge in order to minimize damage from future flood events.
- Upgrade the Texas Falls Observation Area to provide for universal access, including wheelchairs. This will include construction of a wheelchair accessible observation area and a reconfiguration of the entrance to the Texas Falls Nature Trail and Observation Site. A Texas Falls Master Plan was completed in 1994, including designs for the universally accessible entrance and bridge (see Attachments 9 & 10).

Hancock Branch Trail (FT 712):

- Remove a total of six wooden bridges (ranging in length from 10 feet to 39 feet) and eleven culverts in order to allow the trail to naturally revegetate and to discourage illegal use in the future. An excavator will be used to remove the bridges and culverts.

Robert Frost Interpretive Trail (FT 286):

- Remove the existing bridge and replace it with a new bridge in a new location. The new 70 foot span bridge will be located approximately 100 feet downstream from the existing bridge location.
- Construct approximately 70 feet of boardwalk from an existing trail intersection to the new 70 foot bridge.
- Construct approximately 0.2 miles of foot trail from the new bridge location to the existing trail system on the north side of the Middlebury River.
- Relocate a portion (approximately 75') of trail on the south side of the Middlebury River. A new trail tread will be established, including a universally accessible turn around area, to replace the portion of the loop trail that was washed away by the flood. The washed out trail portion will be closed and brought back to a natural appearing landscape.
- Relocate two signs (currently on the northern and southern sides of the damaged bridge) to the relocated trail.
- Repair damaged trail tread by:
 - Replacing the surfacing with hard pack material on the barrier free trail loop.
 - Raising and re-setting the existing boardwalk that settled into the trail during the flood event.
 - Replacing culverts and/or enlarging culvert size where necessary to prevent constriction of stream flow..

This decision includes implementation of mitigation measures and monitoring requirements identified in Appendix A of this Decision Memo. 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 Rochester and Middlebury Ranger District Offices in Vermont.

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 –

The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities 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.

A Biological Evaluation was prepared in April 2009 to assess the likelihood of occurrence, habitat needs, and determination of findings regarding Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive (TES) wildlife species in the project area (Hoelscher April 16, 2009). Based on the analysis in the BE, the likelihood for occurrence of any threatened and endangered (T&E) species in the project area is low. The GMNF has historic occurrence records of three T&E species (eastern cougar, gray wolf, and Canada lynx), and current occurrence records for one species (Indiana bat). There are no known T&E wildlife species occurrences currently in any of the areas; however, there is a very slight

possibility for roosting Indiana bats to occur at the lower elevation projects (projects below 800 feet). A mitigation measure has been included in Appendix A to address potential Indiana bat roosting habitat. There is no potential or critical habitat within the project area, and as a result there would be "no adverse effect on species or critical habitat".

This project site has not been surveyed for Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS) animals although Forest Service biologists are familiar with the project area and have visited project sites in the recent past. No RFSS animals are known to occur within the project area. The habitats affected by this project have been previously impacted, and proposed activities will have little impact on the existing habitats in the areas. These projects would have "no impact" on any of the RFSS or their preferred habitats.

A Biological Evaluation was prepared in March 2009 to assess the likelihood of occurrence, habitat needs, and determination of findings regarding Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive (TES) plant species in the project area (Deller March 24, 2009). Based on the analysis in the BE, the authorization of the North Zone Flood Repair Projects would have "no adverse effect on species or critical habitat" for Threatened and Endangered Species; since there are no federally listed plant species on the GMNF. In addition, no Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS) are known from the project area; authorization of this project would have "no impact" on any of the plant RFSS or their preferred habitats. Although several RFSS species have potential habitat in the project area, none have ever been documented to occur there and the project will not change habitat suitability. Implementation of the North Zone Flood Repair Projects is not likely to lead to loss of viability or trend toward federal listing for any rare plants on the RFSS list (Deller March 24, 2009).

A rare plant is known to occur in the vicinity of the Texas Falls Observation Site and Nature Trail. *Sisyrinchium atlanticum* is known from a gravel road off the west side of Texas Falls Road, just north of the Texas Falls picnic area parking. A mitigation measure has been identified in Appendix A to address this rare plant population.

2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds –

Texas Falls Observation Site and Nature Trail (FT 703):

There are no wetlands, floodplains or municipal watershed in the project area. Given the proximity to the stream course, mitigation measures have been identified in Appendix A in addition to implementation of Forest-wide Guidelines G6 and G7 for Soil, Water, and Riparian Area Protection and Restoration stating:

G-6: Revegetation of critical bare soil areas should be completed on all projects as soon as practical. Mulching may be used alone outside the growing season, with seeding to follow at the start of the next growing season. Critical bare soils areas are soils largely devoid of vegetation:

- Within 25 feet of water sources (ponds, streams, wetlands, or vernal pools)
- On skid roads having a grade over 20 percent
- Where dips or ditches empty close to water sources
- At other locations as identified by a Forest Officer

G-7: As a general rule, temporary seeding and/or mulching of critical bare soil areas should be done when soil-disturbing activities are anticipated to be inactive for more than approximately one month. (Communication with staff hydrologist, February 27, 2009).

Hancock Branch Trail (FT 712):

The bridges being removed in this project cross small intermittent or permanent streams. The streams are not in a municipal watershed and the bridges are not in wetlands, although some of the bridges are in floodplains. Removal of the bridges from the floodplain will be beneficial, allowing for the free-flow of water during peak stream flows. Mitigation measures have been identified in Appendix A in addition to implementation of Forest-wide Guidelines G6 and G7 for Soil, Water, and Riparian Area Protection and Restoration (Communication with staff hydrologist, February 27, 2009).

Robert Frost Interpretive Trail (FT 286):

This project is in the floodplain of the Middlebury River; however, since it involves replacement of previously existing/existing structures, the effects on the floodplain will be immeasurable and no different than before the 2008 storm. The project area is also within a wetland, as mapped in the National Wetlands Inventory. After consultation with soil scientists however, the exact location of the new bridge and trails are not in poorly drained soils, which strongly correlate to wetlands. No wetlands will be impacted by this project. Mitigation measures have been identified in Appendix A in addition to implementation of Forest-wide Guidelines G6 and G7 for Soil, Water, and Riparian Area Protection and Restoration (Communication with staff hydrologist, February 27, 2009).

The appropriate permits have been obtained for the activity within the floodplains.

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

This decision does not include activities located within Wilderness areas. Wilderness is identified on the GMNF as Management Area 5.1 (Forest Plan, p. 49). The closest Wilderness to the project area is the Breadloaf Wilderness Area, which lies approximately 300 feet north of the Hancock Branch Trail, which it parallels. Texas Falls Observation Site is located 3,000 feet east of the Breadloaf Wilderness boundary and 4,500 feet north of the Battell Wilderness. Joseph Battell Wilderness and Breadloaf Wilderness are approximately two miles from the Robert Frost Trail. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect the Wilderness Area (communication with Recreation Planner, 4/1/09).

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, 4/1/09).

National Recreation Areas:

This decision includes activity within the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area. The activity within this area is consistent with direction for management of the National Recreation Area and its emphasis on providing for outstanding recreation opportunities. This decision will not result in significant impacts on the National Recreation Area (communication with Recreation Planner, 4/1/09).

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 projects contained within this decision document are not located in or near the 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, 4/1/09).

4. Inventoried Roadless Areas or Potential Wilderness Areas –

The Hancock Branch Trail project is located partially within the Breadloaf Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) inventoried roadless area and totally within the Texas Gap 2006 Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). Removal of bridges and culverts will allow the trail to naturally revegetate and better meet roadless area values in the future. Similar past projects in this area were determined to have no significant impacts on inventoried roadless areas. The Texas Falls and Robert Frost Trail projects are located outside of inventoried roadless areas. This decision will not result in significant impacts on inventoried roadless areas (communication with Recreation Planner, 4/1/09).

5. Existing and Candidate 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 Research Natural Areas (communication with staff ecologist, March 3, 2009).

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. A 'no properties affected' determination was made for properties within the project area (concurrence from Forest Archaeologist October 24, 2008 and April 19, 2009).

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 in addition to mitigation measures identified in Appendix A (communications with staff ecologist, fisheries biologist, and landscape architect 2009).

IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This project was listed in the quarterly *Green Mountain National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions* (SOPA) beginning in January, 2009, and will remain in the SOPA until the project is authorized for implementation. Public involvement has included communication through the Upper White River Integrated Resource Project, including several public meetings and correspondence with individuals. In addition, media releases on August 6 and August 27 highlighted trail closures and damaged areas.

Several phone calls have been received by District Office staff members regarding the temporary closure of the Robert Frost Interpretive Trail and Texas Falls Observation Site and Nature Trail. Desires have been expressed to re-open these popular trails as soon as possible. Ongoing interest in the Hancock Branch Trail requires more analysis to determine the future of this trail and to explore potential reroutes identified by the public. Several field reviews of the Hancock Branch Trail were conducted with Forest Service staff and members of the public who had expressed an interest in the future of this trail.

Comments were used to refine the project and analysis. Comments were also used to consider the possibility of extraordinary circumstances and potential effects to those resources. This project was also internally scoped with Forest Service staff in January and February, 2009 and mitigation measures were identified (Appendix A) to address any potential concerns.

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 North Zone Flood Repair Projects implement the Forest Plan.

The project area is within the Diverse Forest Use, Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area, and Ecological Special Areas Management Areas as described in the 2006 Forest Plan and subsequent legislation (Public Law 109-382, December 1, 2006). 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.

The Diverse Forest Use MA has an emphasis on providing a variety of forest uses, including a full range of recreation opportunities such as motorized and non-motorized trails. There are no specific management area standards or guidelines for recreation or trails. This use is consistent with management area direction (GMNF Forest Plan, pp. 47-48).

The Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area emphasizes providing an outstanding combination of outdoor recreation opportunities and aesthetic attractions. Management emphasizes public use, interpretation, and education, and the protection of the special values and attributes of the area that contribute to public enjoyment. One general objective of the NRA includes providing for public enjoyment of the area for outdoor recreation and other benefits. Implementation of the projects identified in this decision document is consistent with management area direction and the desire for the Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area to exemplify outstanding recreation opportunities (GMNF Forest Plan, pp. 100-102).

Ecological Special Areas (SAs) are characterized by physical or biological features of Forest-wide or regional significance. Management emphasizes the protection of these values and opportunities for public use and interpretation. The outstanding characteristics of the Texas Falls Ecological Special are the “series of low falls and cascades flowing through a small gorge that was scoured primarily by sediment-laden glacial meltwater” (Forest Plan, p. 95). The desired future condition for this area includes providing a high level of ecological integrity while providing opportunities for public use and awareness (Forest Plan, p. 94). There are specific MA guidelines addressing recreational facilities and trails that are applicable to this project. Recreation Guideline (G)3 states “Existing facilities may be maintained, replaced, or reconstructed as long as they complement the values for which the Ecological SA was designated, are needed for public health and safety, are significant historic properties, or are needed for resource protection purposes.” Trails G1 states: “Development of new trails or trail systems, and relocation of existing trails may occur only for visitor safety, resource protection, or for education and interpretation enhancements” (Forest Plan, p. 96). To address these MA guidelines, mitigation measures are identified in Appendix A.

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 – Clean Water Act – The intent of the Clean Water Act is to restore and maintain the integrity of waters. The Forest Service complies with this Act through Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, specific project design criteria, and/or mitigation measures to ensure protection of soil and water resources.

Wetlands (Executive Order 11990) - Executive Order 11990 directs the agency to avoid to the extent possible the adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands, and to avoid support of new construction in wetlands wherever there is a practical alternative. See Section III, Item B.2 of this document.

Floodplains (Executive Order 11988) - Executive Order 11988 directs the agency to avoid to the extent possible the adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains, and to avoid support of floodplain development wherever there is a practical alternative. 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 in addition to mitigation measures identified in Appendix A.

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

This decision is not subject to an administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215 and the Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck Ruling of October 19, 2005.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately.

VIII. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Holly Knox during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at the Rochester Ranger District office, 99 Ranger Rd. Rochester, VT 05767; Phone: (802) 767-4261 x 530; *or* e-mail: hknnox@fs.fed.us.

Additional information about this decision can be found on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl/>

IX. SIGNATURE AND DATE

/s/ Gregory D. Smith

Date: May 1, 2009

Greg D. Smith
Rochester and Middlebury District Ranger
Responsible Official

Attachment(s): Photographs of flood damage and map of project area

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APPENDIX A – Mitigation Measures

All pertinent Forest-wide, and Diverse Forest Use, Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area, and Ecological Special Area Management Area Standards and Guidelines will be adhered to during project implementation. The following additional mitigation measures will also be adhered to during project implementation:

1. In order to prevent the infestation of non-native invasive plants, any equipment used to access project sites must be clean when it arrives at the site. Because of the potential for NNIS to spread within the Robert Frost area and from this area to other sites, equipment should be cleaned prior to leaving this work site. One possible method would be to use a stiff broom to remove mud and plant debris.
2. Prior to project implementation, coordination with the Forest archaeologist/heritage specialist will occur in order to adequately protect heritage resources.
3. Prior to tree removal, coordination with a Forest Service biologist or biological technician will occur to review all trees to be removed below an elevation of 800 feet. This review would be required to assure that no habitats providing roosting structure for forest bats, including Indiana bats, would be impacted as a result of project implementation.
4. Work conducted in the stream channel or along the stream bank should be done during the summer low flow period (generally June through August annually).
5. Obtain all appropriate permits prior to conducting activity within floodplains.

Texas Falls Observation Site and Nature Trail (FT 703):

1. Shallow soils subjected to new disturbance will need surveyed by the Forest archaeologist/heritage specialist to identify the possibility of any prehistoric remains in the area.
2. In order to protect the water quality of Texas Falls Brook, rigorously apply applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines for soil and water protection, as recommended by the Forest's soil scientist, to minimize sedimentation and other water quality changes during and after construction.
3. Consult with the Forest Service Soil Scientist to review the erosion and sediment control measures once the project design is complete and prior to final approval to ensure that erosion and sedimentation is minimized.
4. Remove the fewest number of trees necessary to install and construct the new bridge.
5. After construction, seeding bare soils should utilize local seed sources as possible, using only species native to the area and habitat.
6. Natural building materials should be emphasized over steel and concrete where feasible.
7. The final draft of the bridge and observation area design should be reviewed by the GMNF soil scientist and ecologist prior to final approval.
8. Avoid the site containing *Sisyrinchium atlanticum* during project implementation. *Sisyrinchium atlanticum* is known from a gravel road off the west side of Texas Falls Road, just north of the Texas Falls picnic area parking. The plants are located about 10 meters beyond the gate on that gravel road (see Attachment 11).
9. The stone and railing stream-side fencing should be reviewed by the Forest Landscape Architect to determine if it should be retained or not.

Robert Frost Interpretive Trail (FT 286):

1. Prior to project implementation, coordination with the Forest archaeologist/heritage specialist will occur to identify prehistoric sites, particularly on the south side of the Middlebury River. Discovery of sites may require an alteration of the project design (such as an alteration of the bridge location).
2. Following bridge removal, slope the stream banks back to their original configuration.
3. Mulching to revegetate bare soils (Forest-wide SWA G6) should include mulch anchored within approximately 20 feet of the stream to minimize any sedimentation (such as through use of erosion control matting). Stabilize and revegetate the river banks at the new bridge site in a similar way.
4. Location of poem signage should be coordinated with the Forest Landscape Architect prior to moving their location to the re-routed trail.
5. The trail section being closed should be brought back to a natural appearing landscape. Considerations such as contouring the ground and revegetating the closed trail portion with plants found in the surrounding area should be given.

Hancock Branch Trail (FT 712):

1. Following bridge removal, slope the stream banks back to their original configuration.