



File Code: 1950, 2300

Date: June 20, 2008

Subject: Scoping Letter for West Fork Rail Trail Project

To: Interested Parties

Scoping - Opportunity to Comment

West Fork Rail Trail Maintenance and Improvement Project

The Greenbrier Ranger District is proposing to maintain and improve the West Fork Rail Trail and associated access trails and camping spots.

Please take a few minutes to review the following information and provide your comments about proposed activities.

Your comments will be used to identify relevant issues. They will help guide the environmental analysis and documentation. Please be as specific as possible when responding. If you provide data or research results, please identify why the information is pertinent to the West Fork Rail Trail Project, and provide a copy of the information.

For additional information about this proposed project, or to provide comments, please contact Kristine Vollmer, the NEPA Coordinator for the project. You can reach her at Monongahela National Forest, Cheat Potomac Ranger District, HC 59, Box 240, Petersburg, West Virginia, 26847; or by phone at 304-257-4488, extension 24. You may also email comments to comments-eastern-monongahela-greenbrier@fs.fed.us. Please include the activity name in the subject line of the e-mail.

To best use your comments, please provide them within 30 days of the date of this letter. If you do not wish to comment at this time, but would like to continue receiving information about this project, please let us know. Additional information about this project will be mailed to those people who have submitted comments during the analysis process and to those who request additional information.

Also let us know what format you prefer to receive information in: hard copy; e-mail; or CD. It is the responsibility of interested parties to respond to this notice within the established time period. No means of communication is perfect. Please contact our 'for additional information' address above if a document is not available or delivered at the expected time, to ascertain its availability, and if necessary, to arrange an alternate delivery method.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed project and will be available for public inspection.

Location

The West Fork Rail Trail follows the West Fork of the Greenbrier River and Forest Road 44 in Pocahontas and Randolph Counties. It runs from Durbin, WV through Glady, WV and onto the Greenbrier Junction along the Shavers Fork River. The rail trail is actively managed between Durbin and Glady, WV. The tunnel located just north and west of Glady has been closed for many years and the tunnel and trail north and west of Glady have not been maintained.

Maps are not included with this letter because the proposed project covers such a large area – approximately 22 miles of trail, and because the mailing list for this project is so large – about 250 people. Maps will be posted on the Monongahela National Forest internet site at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf/> under “Forest Planning”, or you can obtain paper maps or have maps sent to you electronically by contacting Kristine Vollmer at the address, phone number, or e-mail address on the first page of this letter.

Purpose and Need for Action

The West Fork Rail Trail is one of the most important trails on the Greenbrier Ranger District. It offers non-motorized recreation in the form of hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing. It serves as access to fishing and swimming opportunities, wildflower and wildlife viewing, camping, and private property. It has been a place where recreational events and outfitter/guides bring the public to visit and enjoy.

The West Fork Rail Trail is located in Management Prescriptions (MPs) 3.0, 4.1, and 6.2. MP 3.0 calls for general motorized use; MPs 4.1 and 6.2 generally call for non-motorized recreational use. Recreational facilities are generally rustic in appearance. High scenic integrity is maintained along visually sensitive viewpoints and travel ways in all three MP areas. The trail is managed as a non-motorized recreational trail; however, administrative motorized vehicle use does occur. Limited motorized vehicle use to access private property does occur based on legal right of ways and special use permits.

The rail trail has surface problems and some failing culverts. These need to be repaired as well as other surface issues. Some places along the trail are muddy and need drainage of surface water or need to be hardened. Parking and access areas are also in need of improvements. In addition, general directional, interpretative signing and mile post markers need improvement.

Proposed Action

The West Fork Rail Trail is an important trail for Pocahontas and Randolph Counties of West Virginia. Opportunities exist to repair and improve various aspects of the trail as discussed below.

- Repair surface issues by ditch cleaning and brushing of approximately 1,907 feet of trail;

- Replace 6 culverts and install 5 new culverts to keep surface water off of the trail;
- Harden surface conditions of the tread where water does not drain at various places along grade by placing surface stone on grade;
- Install a 20 foot French drain;
- Repair 3 eroded side slopes with riprap to stabilize trail tread;
- Inspect and possibly repair one railroad tunnel to allow public use;
- Remove unnecessary vehicle gates where possible;
- Convert approximately 10 gates to fold down bollards and replace approximately 3 bollards with new bollards to allow better passage by non-motorized trail users and to allow access to people with disabilities. Fold down bollards would let all hikers, mountain bikers, and pedestrian traffic through, but limit motorized use to authorized key holders of the locks on the fold down bollards;
- Remove rocks on trail surface from rock slides;
- Repair/improve access point parking and trails;
- Provide a small foot bridge at the Iron Bridge access point;
- Maintain access trails;
- Replace/improve directional and interpretive signing where needed;
- Add mile marker posts along the West Fork Rail Trail from Durbin to Gladys;
- Improve dispersed camping along the rail trail and Forest Road 44. Existing dispersed campsites would be improved by grading and graveling the surface. Three large log landings would be improved by hardening access roads and providing spurs for campers. Large boulders would be utilized to control unwanted vehicle access near the stream's edge. Drainage would be improved as needed;
- Day use parking areas along FR 44 and in Durbin would be leveled and graveled. Eroded areas would be seeded/planted with native vegetation to establish a suitable ground cover following disturbance. No trees would be removed.

Public Involvement

This project will be listed in the 2008 3rd quarterly issue (July 1 to September 30) of the Monongahela National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the first time, and will continue to be listed each quarter until after a decision is made. The SOPA is available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf/> under "Forest Planning".

Scoping (early public involvement) for this project is being initiated with this letter and with the submission of a legal notice in the *Pocahontas Times*, the newspaper of record for this project.

We expect to complete our environmental analysis and make a decision by September, 2008. When this information is available, a formal public notice will be given in the form of a legal notice which will be published in the *Pocahontas Times*. Individuals or organizations who previously provided comments on this project or indicated that they would like additional information on this project will also be notified.

I look forward to your participation in the management of the Monongahela National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Lauren Turner

LAUREN TURNER
Greenbrier District Ranger



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