

White Mountain National Forest



United States
Department
of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

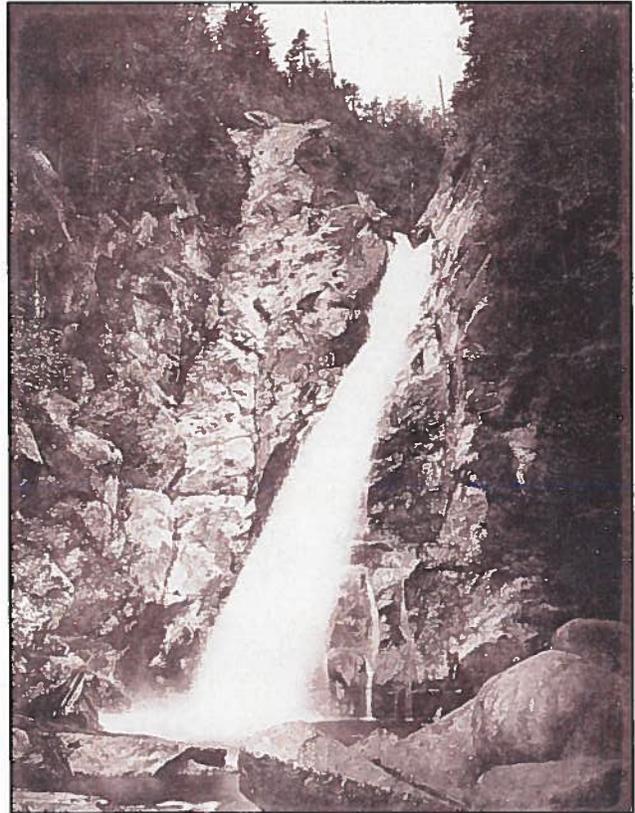


Glen Ellis Falls Site Improvement Project

Pinkham's Grant
Coos County, NH

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Androscoggin Ranger District
May 2015



For Information Contact: Erica Roberts
White Mountain National Forest
71 White Mountain Drive
Campton, NH 03223
Phone: 603 536-6230
Fax: 603 536-3685
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/whitemountain>

**This document is available in large print.
Contact the Androscoggin Ranger District
White Mountain National Forest
603-466-2713**

For TTY call 711 to be connected to a Forest Service number

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family 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).

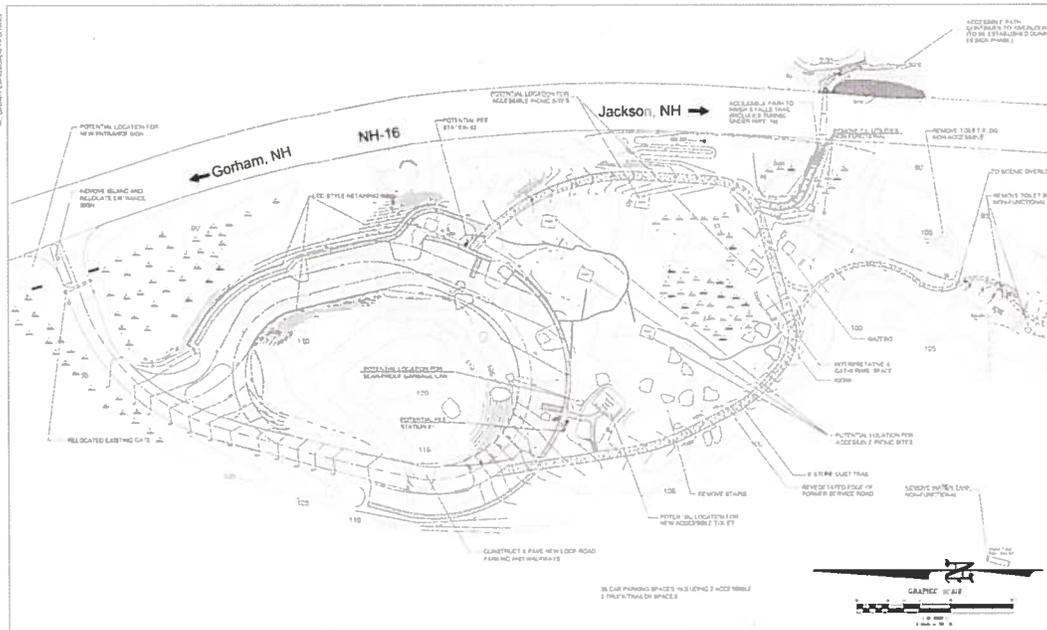
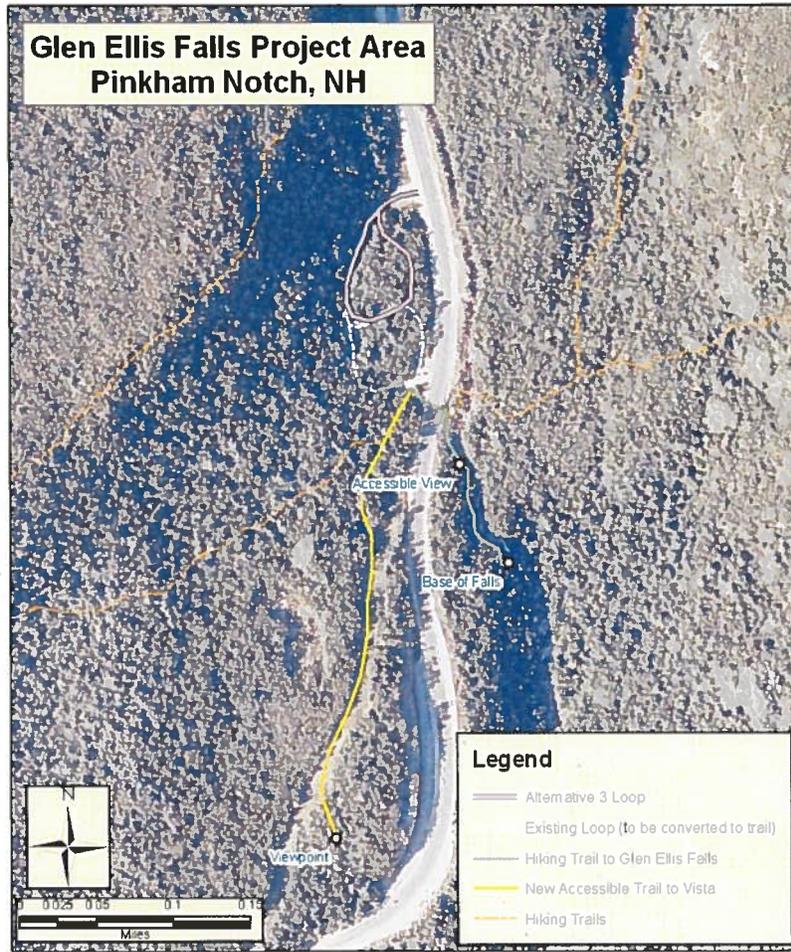
To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Printed on Recycled Paper

Table of Contents

1 Introduction.....	5
2 Purpose and Need	5
3 Decision and Rationale	6
4 Public Involvement	10
5 Findings Required By Other Laws and Regulations.....	11
6 Finding of No Significant Impact.....	14
7 Pre-Decisional Objections.....	18
8 Implementation Date and Contact.....	18



White Mountain National Forest
Androscoggin Ranger District

Glen Ellis Day Use Area

Alternative No. 3
Enhanced Recreation Experience
Scale: 1"=30' January 2015

1 Introduction

This document announces my decision regarding the Glen Ellis Falls Site Improvement Project (Glen Ellis Project) and my finding that this project will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. This Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact incorporates by reference the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Glen Ellis Project dated February 2015 and its supporting project record.

The Glen Ellis Project is located along Route 16 near the top of Pinkham Notch, in Pinkham's Grant, Coos County, NH. This day use area includes parking and other amenities along the west side of NH Route 16 and a hiking trail to Glen Ellis Falls on the east side of the highway (see map). It is one of the oldest and most popular day use areas on the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) and is steeped in history. Many Forest visitors have personal connections to this site, often going back generations.

2 Purpose and Need

Glen Ellis Falls Day Use Area is extremely popular with a broad spectrum of the visiting public. It provides unique opportunities to readily view a beautiful waterfall within the historical context of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) days. The Glen Ellis Falls Day Use Area is a Historic Property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its association with CCC public works programs in New Hampshire and the stone masonry engineering typical of that era's distinctive style of workmanship. It is a part of the Pinkham Notch Scenic Area and WMNF management direction states that it should be managed for its outstanding natural beauty, unique recreation opportunities and heritage resources. The **purpose** of this project is to provide a high quality recreation experience at this popular site according to management direction.

The unique CCC workmanship in this area and safe access to Glen Ellis Falls are at risk due to the lack of maintenance to infrastructure. If action is not taken at this area, the trail will continue to deteriorate and the overall recreation experience along the trail and in the parking area will degrade. Forest Service policy and federal law require that the Forest Service protect significant historic properties from the effects of environmental and human processes. The **need** for this action is driven by the continued deterioration of this site, and is to restore a high quality recreation experience at the Glen Ellis Falls while protecting its unique cultural values and natural resources. Because of the number of visitors to this area and the broad spectrum of values associated with Glen Ellis Falls, this area was identified by the Forest Service as a high priority for reconstruction and improvement.

Management of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) is guided by our Forest Plan, which is based on several years of collaboration with the public and extensive environmental analysis. The Forest Plan documents the agreed-upon balance of uses and activities desired to meet society's needs while protecting, restoring, and enhancing our natural resources. Chapter 1 of the Environmental Assessment provides further details on how this project fits with WMNF management direction.

3 Decision and Rationale

Decision

Having considered on-the-ground conditions in and near the project area, the historic significance of the Glen Ellis Falls Day Use Area, input from the interdisciplinary team, public comments, the Environmental Assessment, and the goals for the Pinkham Notch Scenic Area and other management areas within the project boundary, I have decided to implement Alternative 3. Implementation of this decision will include the following activities:

Decommission infrastructure associated with the water system and flush toilets: All above-ground infrastructure will be dismantled and removed, including the closed lavatory building, well, pump house, water storage cistern, and water fountain. Tanks and concrete below the ground surface will not be removed, but will be filled and buried. Water lines that are not visible and have been naturalized will remain buried; visible portions of water lines would be removed. Heavy equipment and digging will be required to remove or bury material. Equipment will access the water tank via the road to the toilet building and a section of the Glen Boulder Trail, which will be repaired and restored following completion of this project. Restoration may include revegetating areas with native plants, regrading, and soil stabilization.

Redesign the “loop road”, trailhead area and access to the falls and other trails: The drivable loop road will be reconstructed in a new location slightly northward from its existing location (see map on page 4). The location of the site’s entrance and exit off of Route 16 will remain the same, but the entrance will be modified by removing the island and bringing the entrance into compliance with established engineering standards. The loop road and parking areas will be further away from the trailheads and interpretive area. This will create more of a separation between the highway and the amenities at the Glen Ellis site. The current roadway will be converted to an accessible walking loop from the new parking area. The walking path will be approximately eight feet wide. The remaining footprint of the current loop will be revegetated to promote growth of native species. At the location where the current parking area is adjacent to Route 16, the trail will stay to the inside of the current loop to allow for a treed buffer to grow between the walking trail and the highway. In time, this will offer increased separation from the sights and sounds of Route 16. Some native species may be planted in this area to encourage the growth of vegetation. Interpretive signage and a meeting area with a small (approximately 20' x 20') gazebo-type covered structure will be located along the former driving loop near the trailhead. This area will be constructed to blend in with historic CCC-era stone and woodwork and will provide a location for visitors to sit down and view newly designed cultural and natural resource interpretive panels. Trailhead signage at this area and throughout the site will be reconfigured to more clearly direct visitors to the different trails served by the parking area. A location will be designated for a bicycle rack. The new parking layout will accommodate approximately 38 parking spaces.

Relocate vault toilets: Vault toilet facilities will be moved to a new location along the walking loop. New toilets will be located in close proximity to the parking area in a location that meets Forest Service and State of NH water quality standards and guidelines for vault toilets. The old toilet buildings will be removed and the vaults pumped and buried. Current access to the toilets does not meet Forest Service accessibility guidelines due to its steep grade. The new location will be accessible and more easily maintained.

Improve picnic opportunities: The existing picnic areas would be relocated to well-drained areas with accessible paths. The total number of picnic areas would increase from three to five. Picnic facilities, with accessible paths, will be located in and around the walking loop in areas that meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Accessible walking paths to tables will be approximately 5 feet wide with a permeable surface that meets accessibility standards. Tables will be in areas that provide a degree of separation from the parking area, but are a short distance from other amenities. If necessary, some understory vegetation will be cleared in the vicinity of picnic tables to provide for a more aesthetically pleasing visitor experience.

Repair and reconstruct the trail to Glen Ellis Falls: The trail to Glen Ellis Falls will be repaired and improved, to include repair of all deteriorating stone work, replacement of rotten railings, improvements to drainage and hardening of eroding areas. This work will be done along the entire length of the trail, according to Forest Service direction. The historic CCC stonework and woodwork materials and styles of construction will be preserved, as guided by WMNF heritage specialists in consultation with the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office.

Make a portion of the trail to Glen Ellis Falls universally accessible: From the parking area to the Ellis River, forest engineers and resource specialists determined that the hiking trail can be constructed in such a way as to provide an opportunity for a wider spectrum of the public to utilize the trail. Where feasible, this section of trail will be widened to five feet, with a hardened, smooth, barrier-free surface.

Due to terrain limitations, this accessible trail cannot provide a view of the falls, but it does provide an opportunity to hear the roar of the water and witness a beautiful upstream view of the river. There will be a widened turnaround area at the terminus of the accessible section of trail. There will be some excavation into the upslope bank between the trail and Route 16 in order to widen the trail and construct the turnaround area. Retaining walls will be constructed as necessary and will utilize materials and construction styles that blend with historic stonework.

New signs interpreting natural and cultural history will be located along the trail to the falls.

Construct an accessible trail to a southward-looking vista: A new, accessible trail approximately 0.3 miles long will be constructed southward from the parking area to a scenic vista near the top of the roadcut along Route 16. This trail will utilize the old Route 16 path behind the existing toilet building and follow the route cut by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation for a temporary detour during Route 16 construction work approximately ten years ago. The trail will be approximately five feet

wide. At the terminus of the trail will be a vista area with views southward down the Ellis River valley and beyond. Safety fencing will be erected around the vista area to discourage visitors from entering areas with cliff hazards. The trail to the vista will be constructed using crushed stone or another permeable surface and fencing materials will blend with the native environment. The view to the south will be improved by brushing trees and shrubs as necessary. Utilizing this already impacted roadcut route will minimize the need for new ground disturbance.

The fee station kiosk will be relocated in order to be more visible to the public and more integrated with the layout of the site.

A bear-proof garbage can will be installed.

The EA describes project-specific design features and mitigation measures that are incorporated into this decision, including mitigation agreed upon in a Memorandum of Agreement between the WMNF and the New Hampshire SHPO (see Section 5).

Reasons for the Decision

When you walk around the Glen Ellis Falls Day Use Area with an eye on the condition of its facilities and infrastructure, it is very clear that the site needs work. The purpose and need for the project is apparent, and the popularity of the site warrants the investment. Analysis by resource specialists shows that “doing nothing” is actually resulting in negative effects on resources: historic stonework is falling apart and sedimentation from erosion and poor drainage is continuing to affect wetland areas and water.

When we initially developed this project, our proposed action included improvements and modifications that would reasonably address these resource concerns. As project development progressed and the interdisciplinary team further evaluated the site, team members acknowledged that the recreation experience at the day use area in its current configuration would always be limited by the site’s proximity to the highway. The site is, by design and necessity, very near to the road and should remain as such. But the team was concerned that the haphazard development of this site over the years has resulted in an unnecessarily negative impact to the recreation experience and some natural resources. An interdisciplinary team issue was formulated to recognize this concern, which resulted in the development of Alternative 3.

I selected Alternative 3 because it best addresses natural resource concerns while maintaining the historic trail and it provides the most superior recreation experience of all the alternatives. Implementation of Alternative 3 will require construction of a new driving loop within the day use area, which will result in additional clearing of vegetation and grading of a slope. This will provide the opportunity to convert the old driving loop into a universally accessible trail. It will also reduce the footprint of the old road and parking area, promote more regrowth of natural vegetation in this area and create a more natural, wooded, aesthetically pleasing trail experience. I believe this design will better separate vehicle and foot traffic and provide a superior visitor experience at the gathering/kiosk area. I also think this design will better segregate the impact from Route 16 high speed traffic from the Glen Ellis visitor experience, within the

limitations of the overall Glen Ellis footprint. I also appreciated the idea from the public to add a short, universally accessible trail to a spectacular view of the valley that unfolds below Glen Ellis, which we incorporated into this alternative.

While repairs to the stone steps and walkways of the trail will restore and protect an important historic feature of the site, changes to the parking area layout and the removal of historic facilities results in alterations to features considered character-defining to the historic Glen Ellis Day Use Area. Consultation with the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office (Division of Historical Resources) resulted in the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with stipulations designed to mitigate for the adverse effect to the historic site resulting from proposed changes. Mitigation measures will protect the historic values associated with the site by documenting and preserving its history and making historical information available to the public (see Section 5).

Preliminary cost estimates for the two action alternatives I considered indicate that there is not a substantial difference in cost of one versus the other. The benefits of Alternative 3 outweigh its marginally higher cost. I believe the public will be better served in the long term with the implementation of Alternative 3.

This decision is based on my review of the Glen Ellis Falls Site Improvement Project EA and the extensive supporting documentation in the project record, including input from the public, appropriate resource specialists, and the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office. I am satisfied that the interdisciplinary team conducted a thorough analysis of the proposed action and alternatives and that we effectively involved the public and carefully considered and responded to their comments. I considered the tradeoffs of effects. Based on input from and analysis by resource specialists, I am confident that these activities will have limited environmental effects. In addition to applying standards and guidelines from the Forest Plan, the interdisciplinary team carefully considered and applied Best Management Practices developed by the State of New Hampshire, stipulations set in a Memorandum of Agreement with the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer, and project design features developed by the team. The record shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

Alternatives Considered but not Selected

The interdisciplinary team evaluated three alternatives in detail in the Environmental Assessment. These alternatives are described fully in Chapter 2 of the EA; the potential effects of each alternative are summarized in Chapter 3 of the EA and analyzed fully in resource reports in the project record. Here I summarize the alternatives I did not select and give my reasons for not choosing them.

Alternative 1

Analysis of the “no action” alternative provides a baseline for evaluating the effects of action alternatives. Under this alternative, current activities would continue but none of the activities proposed in the Glen Ellis project would occur at this time. The area would remain open for day use and would continue to provide existing services and recreation

opportunities.

I did not select Alternative 1 because it fails to address the continuing deterioration of the Glen Ellis Day Use Area. Facilities in the project area are deteriorating and will eventually become a safety issue if not either repaired or removed. The popularity of this site with Forest visitors of all ages and abilities as well as its role within the context of the Pinkham Notch Scenic Area warrants action in the near future. Furthermore, implementation of the “no action” alternative would have negative effects on cultural resources, wetlands and soils in the project area (see EA, Chapter 3).

Alternative 2

Alternative 2, the action initially proposed for this project, is similar to Alternative 3 in many ways. Both alternatives propose removal of old infrastructure, repair of the trail to Glen Ellis Falls, and upgrades to roads, parking and other facilities. The primary difference between the two alternatives is the location of the loop road. Alternative 2 proposes keeping this road generally in the same location. Based on interdisciplinary team discussion, public comment, and the environmental analysis for this project, I believe that the road alignment proposed in Alternative 3 does a far better job of improving the quality of the recreation experience at this site without environmental effects that will compromise any resource.

Alternatives Considered but Not Fully Evaluated

Public comments identified one other possible alternative for this project—reconstructing the road and parking area with a gravel surface rather than paving. A commentor was concerned that a paved surface is expensive to install and maintain. The interdisciplinary team and I considered this possible alternative, but did not evaluate it fully in the Environmental Assessment because an initial assessment of the conditions of the area determined that the long-term costs associated with a gravel surface would be substantially higher than those for a paved surface. Additionally, the area would be accessible for a shorter season if the road was gravel, due to the site-specific climate and elevation. A more detailed rationale for not analyzing this alternative is in Chapter 2 of the EA.

4 Public Involvement

This project was listed on the quarterly White Mountain National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning in July 2010, and will remain on the SOPA until after a decision is made. In December 2010, notice of this project was sent to over 800 individuals, including local historical societies, town entities, other known interested parties and stakeholders, and the Forest-wide project notification mailing list. A press release was distributed to the *Bethel Citizen*, the *Berlin Daily Sun*, the *Conway Daily Sun*, the *Coos County Democrat*, and the *Berlin Reporter*. Twelve individuals responded to the scoping report and provided comments. All comments were in support of improving the site and removing old infrastructure. Several commentors offered their expertise in updating the geologic interpretation of the area. Other commentors offered additional

suggestions for improving the site and there was some concern regarding how much vegetation would be removed with implementation of this proposal. Site-specific comments were used to refine the proposed action and develop possible alternatives.

On October 20, 2011, a legal notice for the 30-Day Comment Report was published in the *New Hampshire Union Leader*. Notification of this report was sent to the 12 commentors as well as other individuals who requested project notification but had not commented during initial scoping. Three individuals provided comments during this period. One commentor was in support of Alternative 3, another preferred Alternative 2, and the third did not support the project under either action alternative. These comments and WMNF responses are included in Appendix C of the Environmental Assessment. All public comments are located in the project record.

In September 2014, notice of the finding of adverse effect to the Glen Ellis Day Use Area historic property and a request for comment regarding proposed mitigation measures was posted on site at Glen Ellis and emailed to the project notification mailing list. Five individuals responded, with one in favor of the proposed mitigation, no comments adverse to the proposed mitigation, and no suggestions for alternative mitigation strategies.

On February 23, 2015, the Draft Decision Notice - Finding of No Significant Impact and Final Environmental Assessment were released which initiated the 45-day time period to file any objections. No objections were received during this 45 day objection period. (See Section 7 for more information.)

Issues

Early public involvement and interdisciplinary team discussions were used to determine whether there were any issues associated with this proposal. The interdisciplinary team identified one issue that would be analyzed in depth and identified any potential issues that had been covered elsewhere (40 CFR 1501.7(a)). The following issue, which is described in more detail in Chapter 2 of the EA, was used to develop an alternative:

Central issue: The proposed action does not adequately meet the project's purpose to "restore the high quality recreation experience" for the parking and trailhead area at Glen Ellis Falls.

The interdisciplinary team developed Alternative 3 to address this issue.

No additional issues were identified for this project.

5 Findings Required By Other Laws and Regulations

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

National Environmental Policy Act

This Act requires public involvement and consideration and disclosure of potential environmental effects. For this project, a strong effort was made to reach out to the public, identify interested parties, consult with them regarding the proposed action and

identify public issues and concerns. This information was used to develop proposed alternatives, improve the effects analysis, and make a well-reasoned decision.

The Glen Ellis Falls Site Improvement Project environmental analysis was conducted following the procedures and requirements contained in this Act. An interdisciplinary team fully evaluated and disclosed the environmental effects of the proposed project based upon field study, resource inventory and survey, the best available science, and their professional expertise. The entirety of documentation for this decision demonstrates compliance with this Act.

Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act)

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that all site-specific project activities be consistent with direction in the applicable Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). This project implements the WMNF Forest Plan. As required by NFMA Section 1604(i), I find this project to be consistent with the WMNF Forest Plan including goals, objectives, desired future conditions, and Forest-wide and Management Area standards and guidelines.

Endangered Species Act

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. As required by this Act, potential effects of this decision on listed and proposed species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation (BE, see project record).

Based on a review of all available information, it was the Forest Service Biologist's and Botanist's determination to complete a more detailed analysis on the following five species:

- Northern Long-eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*)- Federally Threatened
- Eastern small-footed myotis (*Myotis leibii*) - RFSS
- Little Brown Bat (*Myotis lucifugus*) - RFSS
- Tri-colored Bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*) - RFSS
- Northern Bog Lemming (*Synaptomys borealis sphagnicola*) – RFSS

In summary, Alternative 3 May Affect, but is Not Likely to Adversely Affect the northern long-eared bat. Implementation may impact individuals but would not likely cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability for eastern small-footed myotis, little brown bat, tri-colored bat, and northern bog lemming.

Clean Water Act

The beneficial uses of water in streams draining the project area would be maintained during and following the implementation of Alternative 3. As the water, and soils sections of the EA (Chapter 3) make clear, application of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, best management practices, and project design features will ensure protection of water resources.

Executive Orders 11990 (Wetlands) and 11988 (Floodplains)

As discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA, wetlands and floodplains would be protected through the use of Forest Plan standards and guidelines and best management practices. Therefore this decision is in compliance with these Executive Orders.

National Historic Preservation Act

A survey was conducted to identify Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that might be affected by this decision (project record). The historic nature of the Glen Ellis Day Use Area was recognized, and in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. § 306108) and federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regulation *Protection of Historic Properties* (36 CFR 800), the WMNF consulted with the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources/State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Through this consultation, the Glen Ellis Day Use Area was determined to be a historic property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its association with CCC public works programs in New Hampshire and the stone masonry engineering typical of that era's distinctive style of workmanship. The boundary of the historic property includes the trail and overlooks, the river, falls, pond, and day use area parking loop and buildings. Alternative 3 will have a positive effect on the historic trail by repairing the stone walkway and steps leading to the falls, but decommissioning infrastructure associated with the water system and flush toilets and redesigning the "loop road" and trailhead area are alterations that constitute an "Adverse Effect" to features considered character-defining to the historic Glen Ellis Day Use Area under 36 CFR 800.5(a)(1). In order to resolve the adverse effect, notification was sent to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and proposed mitigation measures were sent out for public review and comment. The ACHP declined to participate in the consultation to resolve the adverse effect, and no comments altering the proposed mitigation were received. Final stipulations were agreed upon in a Memorandum of Agreement between the WMNF and the SHPO executed December 9, 2014 (project record). Mitigation measures will reduce the intensity of the adverse effect by documenting the existing site and its history and significance on a New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources Individual Inventory Form (project record), incorporating construction materials and styles consistent with the historic site where feasible during project implementation, and providing information to the public about the history of the Glen Ellis Falls Day Use Area and its evolution over time through interpretive signs placed along the trail and at the trailhead kiosk, as well as on the WMNF website. Therefore I find that this decision complies with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

There are no designated Wild and Scenic Rivers within the Glen Ellis Project Area. The Wildcat River, a congressionally designated Wild and Scenic River, is a tributary of the Ellis River in Jackson, New Hampshire. The confluence of the two rivers is approximately 8.5 miles downstream of the project area. This project will have no effect

on the Wildcat River.

The 2005 Forest Plan states that the Ellis River is eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River System pursuant to the National Wild and Scenic River Act. The segment of the Ellis River located within the project area is classified as “recreational” (USDA-Forest Service, 2005). The analysis area consists solely of the section of the Ellis River that flows through the project area.

The two action alternatives would improve accessibility and widen the hiking trail along a small section of the Ellis River. These effects are entirely within the acceptable activities and improvements along a “recreational” segment of river and would not impact the eligibility of the Ellis River for future Wild and Scenic River designation.

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 (see project record).

6 Finding of No Significant Impact

Findings

Based on my review of the Glen Ellis Falls Site Improvement Project EA and documentation, I have determined that the activities included in Alternative 3 will not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the actions (40 C.F.R. § 1508.27) as explained below.

Context

The significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts and varies with the setting. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends on the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27).

This decision and the project EA are tiered to the Forest Plan Record of Decision and incorporate by reference the Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), which analyzed and disclosed effects of potential Forest management at a larger scale. The activities planned in the Glen Ellis Project are similar to others completed on the White Mountain National Forest and are within the range of effects anticipated in the Forest Plan FEIS.

The environmental effects of this project are analyzed at varying scales (e.g. the project area, watershed, or town), as summarized for each resource in Chapter 3 of the EA and

described in detail in resource reports in the project record. I have reviewed the cumulative effects of past management, combined with this project and reasonably foreseeable future actions as they are analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA, and feel that the context of this decision is limited to the land in and adjacent to the project area. The project's relatively small scale limits its effects. The analysis in Chapter 3 indicates that project design and application of Forest Plan standards and guidelines and best management practices will minimize negative impacts to all resources. Given the short-term and localized nature of impacts described in the EA, the Glen Ellis Project will have no measurable effects at the regional or national levels and consideration of significance will focus on the local setting.

This decision, and the environmental assessment and effects analysis on which it is based, applies only to this local area. After a thorough review of the effects analysis contained in the EA, I find that this project does not establish a local, regional, or national precedent, nor does it have any substantial applicability beyond the bounds of the White Mountain National Forest.

Intensity

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from Chapter 3 of the EA and the project record. I have determined that the interdisciplinary team considered the effects of this project appropriately and thoroughly with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. They took a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and their knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from numerous field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27b.

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

As described in the EA (Chapter 3), there are likely to be both beneficial and adverse effects to certain resources from taking the actions proposed in Alternative 3. In reaching my finding of no significant impact, I did not ignore or trivialize negative effects by "offsetting" them with beneficial effects. The EA demonstrates that, due to careful project design that incorporates protective measures (Forest Plan standards and guidelines, best management practices, and site-specific design features), the possible negative effects are relatively minor and of short duration, and are not directly, indirectly, or cumulatively significant.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

As discussed in the EA and project record, this project should benefit public health and safety. Improvements to the road and parking surfaces, the addition of sidewalks, repair and reconstruction of the hiking trail, and removal of deteriorating facilities should all provide a safer environment for Forest visitors.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural

resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no park lands, prime farmlands, research natural areas, or ecologically critical areas in or near the project area, and therefore none would be adversely affected by this project. The interdisciplinary team spent many days in the project area and identified areas and special features to be protected. Wetlands, seeps, vernal pools, riparian areas, the Ellis River (eligible Wild and Scenic), and qualities of the Pinkham Notch Scenic Area will be protected by the application of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, best management practices, and project design features. Mitigation measures agreed to in the MOA with the NH SHPO will protect the historic values of the Glen Ellis Day Use Area historic property. As a result, the EA clearly demonstrates there will be no significant effects to any of these resources (EA Chapter 3). The selected alternative will not violate standards set for Outstanding Resource Waters for New Hampshire.

The lower portion of the trail down to Glen Ellis Falls is within the Wild River Inventoried Roadless Area, identified as part of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR). Trail repair and maintenance in the IRA will occur within the existing trail footprint, will follow all Forest Service policy regarding RACR areas, and will not negatively affect the roadless character of the area (see Roadless report in project record).

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

In the context of the National Environmental Policy Act, controversy refers to a substantial dispute in the scientific community regarding the effects of an action, not social opposition. The interdisciplinary team for this project considered extensive scientific research, including any submitted by the public, to determine its applicability to the project and found no controversy related to the predicted effects. Based on these factors, and the analysis provided in the EA and project record, I have concluded that the effects of Alternative 3 on the quality of the human environment are not controversial.

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The White Mountain National Forest has considerable on-the-ground experience with the types of activities to be implemented in this project, under similar conditions. The range of site characteristics are similar to those taken into consideration and disclosed in the Forest Plan FEIS, Chapter 3, and the effects of this project are within the range anticipated in that FEIS and the Forest Plan Record of Decision. The effects analysis (EA Chapter 3) demonstrates that the effects of these activities are not uncertain or significant and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This is not a precedent-setting decision. Similar actions have occurred in the local area and across the Forest. The effects of implementing Alternative 3 disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA are within the range of effects of these similar actions. They also are within the range of effects disclosed in the Forest Plan FEIS, which analyzed the effects of the types of activities that will be implemented under Alternative 3 at a larger scale. The implementation of Alternative 3 does not make a commitment to do anything in other areas on the White Mountain National Forest or any other national forest. It will not set a regional or national precedent. For these reasons, I have determined this action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts. All actions are wholly consistent with the Forest Plan; therefore this is not a decision in principle.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Chapter 3 of the EA discloses the combined effects of this project with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. None of the actions included in Alternative 3 would create significant impact alone or when considered with other actions. The interdisciplinary team carefully chose cumulative effects analysis areas and timeframes, including private lands where it made sense for the resource, that would most thoroughly examine and predict effects (see Chapter 3 of the EA). Based on the analysis in the EA and project record and incorporating by reference the range of effects predicted in the Forest Plan FEIS, I have determined that implementing Alternative 3 will not result in significant cumulative effects.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

For the reasons explained in Chapter 3 of the EA and Section 5 of the Decision Notice, above, I find that although this decision will adversely affect a historic property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, mitigation measures are in place to sufficiently reduce the intensity of the adverse effect (see project record).

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Compliance with the Endangered Species Act and protection of species and their habitat are described in the Biological Evaluation (in the project file) and in the EA (Chapter 3), and summarized in Section 5 of the Decision Notice, Findings Required by Other Laws

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

and Regulations. Each of these references explains the determination that Alternative 3 will not have a significant adverse effect on any listed species.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

All applicable laws for the protection of the environment are incorporated into the standards and guidelines in the White Mountain National Forest Plan. Alternative 3 complies with the Forest Plan. A further description of the project's compliance with applicable laws occurs in Section 5 of the Decision Notice. I find that none of the actions in this decision threatens to violate applicable Federal, State, or local laws or other requirements to protect the environment.

7 Pre-Decisional Objection Opportunities

This decision is subject to the objection process pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218, Subparts A and B. A legal notice announcing the availability of the Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for this project was published on February 23, 2015 in the *New Hampshire Union Leader*. The Draft Decision Notice and FONSI were posted on the Forest's website and provided to all interested parties, including everyone who commented on the project during a designated comment period.

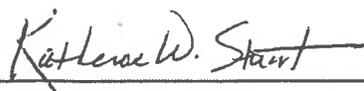
8 Implementation Date and Contact

Implementation may begin immediately.

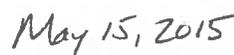
For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Erica Roberts at email: ericajroberts@fs.fed.us, or by phone at 603-536-6230, or by FAX at 603-536-3685.

Additional information about this decision also can be found on the White Mountain National Forest web page at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/whitemountain/landmanagement/projects>.



Katherine Stuart
District Ranger



Date