

ISLAND CAMPGROUND RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

USDA Forest Service
Monongahela National Forest
Greenbrier Ranger District
February 13, 2012

INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSED ACTION

In 2002, the two bridges that access campsite units two through six at Island Campground failed inspection for vehicular traffic (Barger 2009). Due to the popularity of the campground, the bridges remained open until April 2010, when they were closed to all but foot traffic, making campsites two through six walk-in only units. To accommodate these new traffic patterns, campsite one was converted into a parking lot, leaving only five usable walk-in campsite units.

In addition to no longer being accessible for drive-in camping, the five remaining campsite units are also located in the 100-year floodplain of the two converging waterways on the site, posing a major safety hazard to visitors in the event of flooding. Following the bridge closure, an extensive petition and a large volume of comments were received by the Greenbrier Ranger District office expressing a strong desire for the reopening of the campground to vehicular traffic.

In response to the need to reopen Island Campground, the Forest utilized the skills of a landscape architect to design a new campground and proposed the Island Campground Reconstruction Project. The purpose of this project is to reconstruct Island Campground and relocate the campsites and toilet outside of the 100-year floodplain, widen Forest Road 36, and remove the existing campsites and vault toilet buildings, including any rehabilitation needed to return the existing campground to a natural state. The project will also provide a safe, fully accessible, campground for the recreating public. Day use opportunities associated with trails and fishing will also be enhanced.

The Monongahela National Forest prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508 and 36 CFR 220, other relevant Federal laws, regulations, policies, and the 2006 Monongahela National Forest Land & Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). This EA provides sufficient evidence and analysis about the estimated environmental effects of the Island Campground Reconstruction Project to determine whether or not to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement or Finding of No Significant Impact. The EA documents the analysis and discloses the environmental effects of two alternatives: the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) and the Proposed Action (Alternative 2). It is

available for review at the Monongahela National Forest, Forest Supervisor's Office, 200 Sycamore Street, Elkins, WV 26241, or on the Forest website at: <http://fs.usda.gov/mnf>. The EA effects analysis reports and other supporting documents are available upon request.

The Island Campground Reconstruction Project is located along Forest Road 36, off of State Route 28 approximately 5 miles north and east of Bartow, West Virginia at an elevation of approximately 3,000 feet. The project is located in Pocahontas County on the Greenbrier Ranger District, in the Thornwood Northwest 7.5 Min. quadrangle (EA Figure 1). The project area is located in Forest Plan Management Prescription 3.0.

MY DECISION

Based on the effects analyses (EA, Chapter 3), the supporting information in the Project File, and public comments, I have decided to implement Alternative 2, the Proposed Action. The Selected Alternative includes activities described in detail for Alternative 2 in Chapter 2 of the EA, and summarized below:

- Widening and improving Forest Road 36 (FR-36) within the existing foot print of the road.
- Construction of a new turn around at the end of FR-36 with a radius no less than 50' to accommodate trailers up to 45'.
- Construction of up to 11 campsites including needed culverts and drainage work and adding crusher run gravel to create campsite pads. Nine sites would have a parking spur adjacent to the site, while 2 sites are "walk-in" sites with parking available within a short walk of the campsite.
- Construction of 9 parking spurs with crusher run gravel. This includes installing culverts off of FR-36 to allow parking for newly constructed campsites, The typical size of the spurs would measure approximately 20' x 35'.
- Construction of two road-side parking areas with crusher run gravel, to accommodate parking for two walk-in campsites.
- Each newly constructed campsite would be furnished with a table, fire ring, lantern post, and tent pad.
- Installation of a fee station and kiosk near the entrance of the campground.
- Installation of 1 single-unit vault toilet building.
- Installation of bear-resistant trash cans, campsite number posts, and new traffic control, directional, and site identification signing.
- Removal of existing restroom facilities and rehabilitation of existing campsites.
- Selected mitigation measures from Tables 1 and 2, Chapter 2 of the EA and listed in Table 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Mitigation Measures for Selected Alternative, Construction of New Sites

Primary Resource	Mitigation Measure
Soil	To level the new sites, add soil material and gravel from the existing sites that are proposed for decommissioning.
Soil/Aquatics	Limit as much as possible any excavation into the soil profile in new site locations while building stable pads. Specifically sites 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, and 10 should have limited excavation and pads located adjacent to the spur when possible.. For sites 3 and 5, limit the long access .
Soil/Aquatics	Provide adequate drainage around each new hardened site so that water flows away from each site and into the receiving drainage ditch. Specifically sites 1, 2, 3, and 5 will need additional drainage.
Soil	Site 11 construction will need fill elevating the site to the height of the railroad grade. The material used to fill the site should be coarse, with finer material used to fill at the top to allow for drainage and prevent the water table from wicking upward toward the pad surface.
Soil	There are several ephemeral stream channels and springs located along the road on the upslope position. Avoid disturbing soils within these features and do not install any sites on these soils or adjacent to the channels. If construction disturbance results in unmitigatable impacts to soil/water resources or potential long-term maintenance issues, affected sites will be closed to camping and rehabilitated to a stabilized condition. Also avoid locating the toilets on soils where the springs pop out of the ground. If the pits for the toilets need to be deeper than the elevation of the seasonal high water table (identified in the soil profile by red and gray redoxamorphic features), material should be added and mounded (such as topsoil or gravel) so that the toilet pits do not sit in water, and the site is well-drained around the toilet houses, but beneath the elevation of the newly constructed site 7 and 8 recreation pads.
Soil/Aquatics	During reconstruction of Forest Road 36, to accommodate potential increased flow and sediment load, the ditch line will be larger, may need to be rip rapped, and have larger culverts installed. The newly redesigned road will be rocked and hardened. The cut bank and fill added on the left side of the road will be vegetated according to the botany report specifications.
Soil	During construction of the turn-around at the end of Forest Road 36, the area will need to be rocked and hardened, with the cut banks and fill slopes vegetated according to the botany report specifications; and culverts will be placed to move water into the drainage ditches. Outflows of culverts will be shaped and armored with large rocks or boulders.
Soil	Burning on soils that are designated as hydric or have thick O horizons should be prohibited to protect carbon stores that may exist in these areas.
Wildlife – Indiana	Tree or snag felling must be conducted during the hibernation period for the Indiana bat (November 15 to March 31) to minimize potential impacts

Primary Resource	Mitigation Measure
bat	to this species.
NNIS	All construction and maintenance equipment and materials must be free of soil, seeds, plant parts, and other material that could contain or hold seeds when such equipment and materials arrive on National Forest land. Contractor and cooperator equipment and materials may not be cleaned on National Forest land. Forest Service equipment must be cleaned in a manner and location that does not spread invasive species to unimpacted sites and does not contaminate soil or water.
NNIS	Do not bring hay onto National Forest land. If mulch is necessary, use clean straw, coconut fiber, wood fiber, synthetic material, or other Forest Service-approved material that is not likely to contain invasive species. Do not use hay bales for erosion barriers. Substitute silt fencing, clean straw bales, or other Forest Service-approved material that is not likely to contain invasive species.
NNIS	If seeding is necessary, use a native-based seed mix. A non-native, non-invasive cover crop may be used for quick stabilization, but all persistent components of the mix must be native. Seed mixes proposed by contractors and cooperators must be submitted to the Forest Service for approval prior to use.
Heritage	Should potential heritage sites be located during the course of project implementation, the Forest Archaeologist should be notified and activity in that area should cease until the size and nature of the resource can be determined and mitigation measures, if needed, are identified.

Table 2. Mitigation Measures for Selected Alternative, Restoration of Selected Sites

Primary Resource	Mitigation Measure
Soil	Decommissioning will be done during low flows.
Soil	At selected hardened sites – remove gravel from site and decompact soil to deepest depth of compaction using a ripping device whether it be a back hoe or some other toothed equipment. Due to the nature of the road and the need to elevate the roads and pads above the subsurface water tables; decompaction may be as deep as 2 feet; however, site is naturally rocky as observed in the undeveloped areas located adjacent to the sites and road. The intent of the decompaction is to restore hydrologic connectivity of the floodplain from the toeslope of the colluvium to the alluvial floodplain to the river and tributary creeks, allow for the reestablishment of vegetation, and remove the road and site pad prisms.
Soil	If the road to sites 2-6 is rehabilitated, remove material used to elevate sites and roads to the elevation of the natural floodplain as seen around the existing campground. Stock pile material to be used at the

Primary Resource	Mitigation Measure
	construction of the new turn around and new pads.
Soil	Backfill areas to match the approximate original contour .
Soil	Use on-site large boulders as necessary and rip rap to stabilize site near stream banks.
Soil	Pull back banks as necessary, following design procedures from watershed staff.
Soil	If bridges are removed, pull back banks to mimic streambank morphology.
Soil	Plant stream banks with riparian vegetation to help stabilize banks – use any existing large rock from the sites to stabilize as needed.
Soil	Plant existing sites with riparian vegetation as needed and seed a stabilizing riparian seed mix suitable for the ecology of the site and to control any potential erosion as needed.

RATIONALE FOR MY DECISION

I have chosen the Selected Alternative for the following reasons:

- 1) I believe the Selected Alternative will meet the purpose of and need for action (EA, p. 1, and listed above), while the No Action Alternative would not.
- 2) The Selected Alternative is consistent with the 2006 Monongahela National Forest Land & Resource Management Plan, specifically Forest-wide management direction for recreation resources on page II-33.
- 3) Action is needed now. The existing campground is within the 100-year flood plain, which poses health and safety concerns for campers. The public has stated a desire to reopen this campground, which has been closed to motor vehicle use for 2 years.
- 4) I feel that the impacts associated with the project are low risk and intensity (EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Effects). I have reviewed the implementation strategies and mitigation measures for this project, and I believe the strategies and measures I have selected will be adequate to protect Forest resources.
- 5) Overall, I feel that the potential long-term resource and public benefits from implementing the Selected Alternative outweigh the low potential short-term risks to the environment.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES

Public Involvement

Public involvement related to the proposed action began in the summer of 2010 after the

campground was closed to vehicular traffic in April. A few weeks prior to the closure, a news release was sent to many local newspapers and signs were placed in the campground notifying the public why the campground was closed to vehicular traffic. The signs also requested the public to contact either the Zone Recreation Manager or the Greenbrier District Office to provide input regarding the closure and a potential fee at the site (Fosbender 2010). Numerous calls, letters, and emails were received expressing support for reopening the campground.

In December 2010, the Greenbrier District Ranger received a petition with 450 signatures requesting the Forest reopen Island Campground. The Forest sent a letter in February 2011 to all 450 petitioners and others who had called or written about Island Campground, requesting input about the construction of a new Island Campground in essentially the same location but outside of the 100-year floodplain (Dunk 2011). Again, numerous calls, letters, and emails were received expressing support of the new campground.

The Island Campground Reconstruction Project was listed on the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions starting on October 1, 2011. The Schedule of Proposed Actions is available on the Forest website and distributed to 140 interested parties.

On December 14, 2011, a detailed description of the proposed activities was distributed to approximately 100 individuals on the interested parties mailing list as well as the 450 petitioners, for a public scoping period (Tribble 2011). All materials distributed in the mailings were also made available on the Forest website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/mnf>.

The EA was then released and distributed for a 30-day notice and comment period in accordance with 36 CFR 215.6, with the legal notice that begins the comment period published in the *Pocahontas Times* on January 12, 2012. The EA and accompanying legal notice were also posted on the Forest website. Only three comment letters were received during the 30-day period and they all expressed support for the project. The Decision Notice/FONSI will be posted on the Forest website and distributed to those people, organization, or agencies who received the EA.

Issues

During internal scoping, the interdisciplinary team identified possible concerns related to the amount of soil disturbance with the proposed activities. Excessive excavation could affect the ephemeral and intermittent water flows from the base of the slope, which could destabilize the slope over time. Also, the water table in the project area is close to the surface and excavation without proper drainage design could cause ponding in campsites, as well as possibly destabilizing the slope. To resolve concerns regarding water flow through the soils, some sites were dropped from consideration and the design limits the depth of excavation for developing the spurs and camping pads. Excavation will also be limited when installing the vault for the toilet building.

Issues raised in responses from the public were addressed by specialists in the EA. No new issues were identified from the public.

After considering all public comments received throughout the planning process, together with input from agency resource specialists, I found no additional unresolved or significant issues [36 CFR 220.7 (b)(2)(i)]. Public comment letters and documents that consider and respond to public comments are available in the project record.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail

Following the closure of the bridges in April 2010, many people requested that Island Campground be rebuilt in the current location, including replacement of the bridges. Forest Recreation staff and the previous District Ranger for the Greenbrier Ranger District considered this alternative. In June 2010, as the Forest was considering options to replace the bridges at Island Campground, a devastating flash flood destroyed the Albert Pike Campground on the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas, killing 20 campers as they slept and stranding many more until rescued. As a result of this tragedy, the Forest Service made it clear that all new campground construction must be located out of the 100-year floodplain. In accordance with Forest Service Manual 2330, Public Managed Recreation Opportunities (USDA 2011b) and Forest Service Manual 2527.02 (USDA 2004), Floodplain Management and Wetland Protection, this alternative was dropped from consideration.

Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

Only two alternatives were considered and analyzed in detail, Alternative 1 (No Action) and Alternative 2 (Proposed Action). Alternative 2 is the Selected Alternative described above in this Decision Notice and in Chapter 2 of the EA. Alternative 1 (No Action) is described below, along with the reasons I did not select it for implementation.

The No Action alternative (Alternative 1) was developed as a baseline for comparison with the Proposed Action. This alternative provides the decision-maker with a clear basis for a reasoned choice among the alternatives studied in detail. Under this alternative, the reconstruction of Island Campground would not be implemented. This does not meet the purpose and need for action described in Chapter 1 of the EA. This alternative represents the "status quo". It allows current management activities and policies to continue unchanged, but does not implement any new activities.

As I noted above in the rationale for my decision, I believe that the potential benefits from implementing Alternative 2 outweigh its potential risks to the environment. I also feel that the potential benefits from Alternative 2 would outweigh the risks to current and future resource conditions due to no action. Continuing with the status quo in the project area would put campers at risk, provide a poor recreation opportunity, fail to provide opportunities for people with disabilities, limit streamside vegetation growth, and contribute to sedimentation in the streams.

FOREST PLAN CONSISTENCY AND BEST AVAILABLE SCIENCE

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) implementing regulations require that projects designed to implement land management plans and plan amendments must be developed considering the best available science in accordance with 219.35(a) and must be consistent with the provisions of the governing plan.

As noted in the "Rationale for My Decision" section above, I have found the Selected Alternative to be consistent with the 2006 Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), specifically Forest-wide management direction for recreation resources on page II-33.

I also believe that this project used the best available science in analyzing and disclosing potential effects. The need to employ the best science is not new, as Agency decisions have always required a sound technical basis. What constitutes best available science can vary over time and across scientific disciplines. My conclusion that this project analysis used the best available science is based on my review of the EA and Project File that shows a thorough assessment of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible views, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Therefore I believe that my decision meets these NFMA requirements.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the EA and Project File, I have determined that the activities and protocols associated with the Island Campground Reconstruction Project EA do not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Thus, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. My determination was made considering the following factors:

Context

The physical and biological effects of this action are limited primarily to the relatively small project area where proposed activities would be implemented. I am familiar with these types of activities and they have been successfully implemented and managed on the Forest in the past with no significant impacts.

Intensity/Severity

- 1) **Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.** Both beneficial and adverse impacts of this project have been considered. These actions will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment (EA, Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Effects) because (1) the mitigation measures I selected, identified in Tables 1 and 2 above, will be implemented to reduce potential effects; (2) the physical and biological effects are limited mainly to the project area; and (3) based on the analysis results, there are no known significant unavoidable adverse

impacts or irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources (EA, Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Effects).

- 2) **Public health and safety.** There are no anticipated significant effects to public health and safety by this action. Public health and safety will be improved by this action through the improvement and addition of accessible sites and facilities.
- 3) **Unique characteristics of the geographic area.** There are no unique characteristics of the project area. It does not lie within a roadless area or within or adjacent to any wilderness, ecological, or congressionally designated areas, and there are no major wetlands or floodplains, or prime farmland, timberland, or rangeland within the project area. Effects to vegetation, soils, and water are described in Chapter 3 of the EA, and no significant impacts are expected.
- 4) **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** Based on public involvement and support of the Proposed Action, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be controversial. All potential environmental impacts have been carefully considered (EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Effects). Given the nature and scope of this project, there is no indication that the Selected Alternative would disproportionately or adversely affect racial minorities or low-income groups.
- 5) **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Selected Alternative poses no known significant effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Similar reconstruction projects have been conducted with successful results on the Forest and elsewhere within the National Forest System.
- 6) **The degree to which this action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** Implementation of the Selected Alternative does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The Forest Service has implemented actions and mitigations similar to those described in the EA without causing significant impacts; i.e., the proposed activities are not new or precedent-setting.
- 7) **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** There are no significant cumulative effects between the Selected Alternative and other projects that have been implemented or are planned in the project or analysis areas (EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Effects, cumulative effects analyses).
- 8) **The degree to which 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. This project has been reviewed by the Forest Archeologist, and he has determined that the proposed action would result in no significant effects to heritage or cultural resources (EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Effects, Heritage Resource section).

- 9) **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.** The Selected Alternative will not result in adverse effects to any endangered or threatened species or their habitats (EA, Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Effects, TES Plant Species and T&E Terrestrial Wildlife Species sections). The likelihood of occurrence of any listed species on the Forest being present in the project area, or being affected by project activities, is very low.
- 10) **Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The Selected Alternative is consistent with direction in the Forest Plan and other applicable local, state and federal laws or policy (EA, Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Effects).

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND APPEAL RIGHTS

Federal appeal regulations under 36 CFR 215.12(e)(1) allow an exception to the appeal process for: "Projects or activities for which notice of the proposed action and opportunity to comment is published (215.5) and no substantive comments expressing concerns or only supportive comments are received during the comment period for a proposed action analyzed and documented in an EA (215.6)". The Island Campground Reconstruction Project EA underwent a 30-day notice and comment period and the only comments received on the project were supportive (see Project File, Part Q). Therefore, this project is excluded from appeal under 36 CFR 215.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Because there is no appeal period for this project, implementation of this decision may occur immediately.

CONTACT PERSON

Detailed records of the Island Campground Reconstruction Project are available for public review at the Monongahela National Forest Supervisor' Office, 200 Sycamore St., Elkins, West Virginia, from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday. A copy of the EA can be obtained by writing to Eric Sandeno at the address listed above, or by calling (304) 636-1800. Questions regarding the EA or this decision should be directed to me at (304) 456-3335, or to Eric Sandeno at the above address and phone number.



Jack Tribble
Greenbrier District Ranger
Monongahela National Forest

2/13/2012
Date

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