

White Mountain National Forest



United States
Department
of
Agriculture

Forest
Service



Tripoli Road Campsite Relocation and Roadside Hazard Tree Removal Project

Thornton, Livermore, and Waterville
Valley, Grafton County, NH

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact Pemigewasset Ranger District May 2016

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Tripoli Road Campsite Relocation and Roadside Hazard Tree Removal Project Vicinity Map

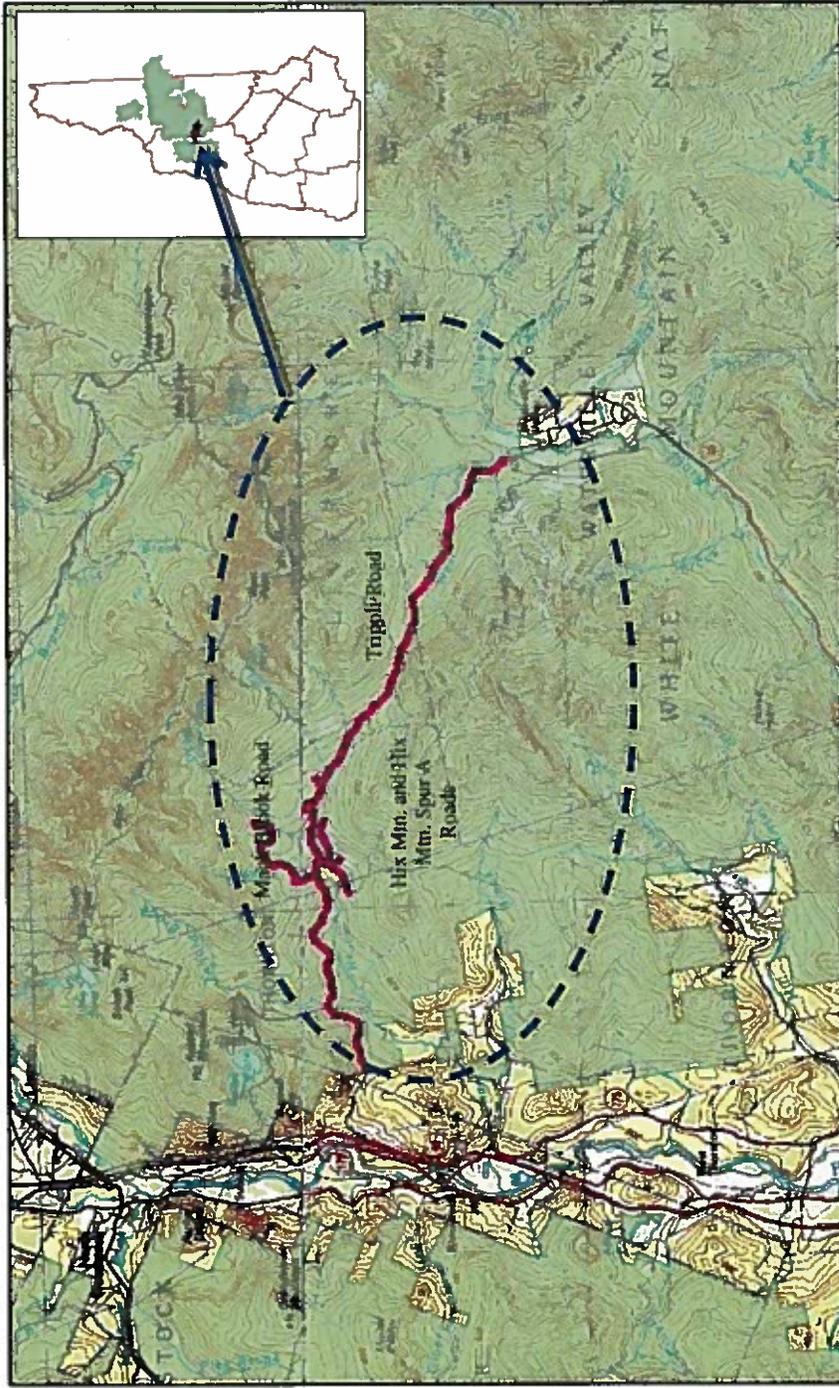


Figure 1. Tripoli Road Campground is located in the towns of Thornton, Livermore, and Waterville Valley, New Hampshire.

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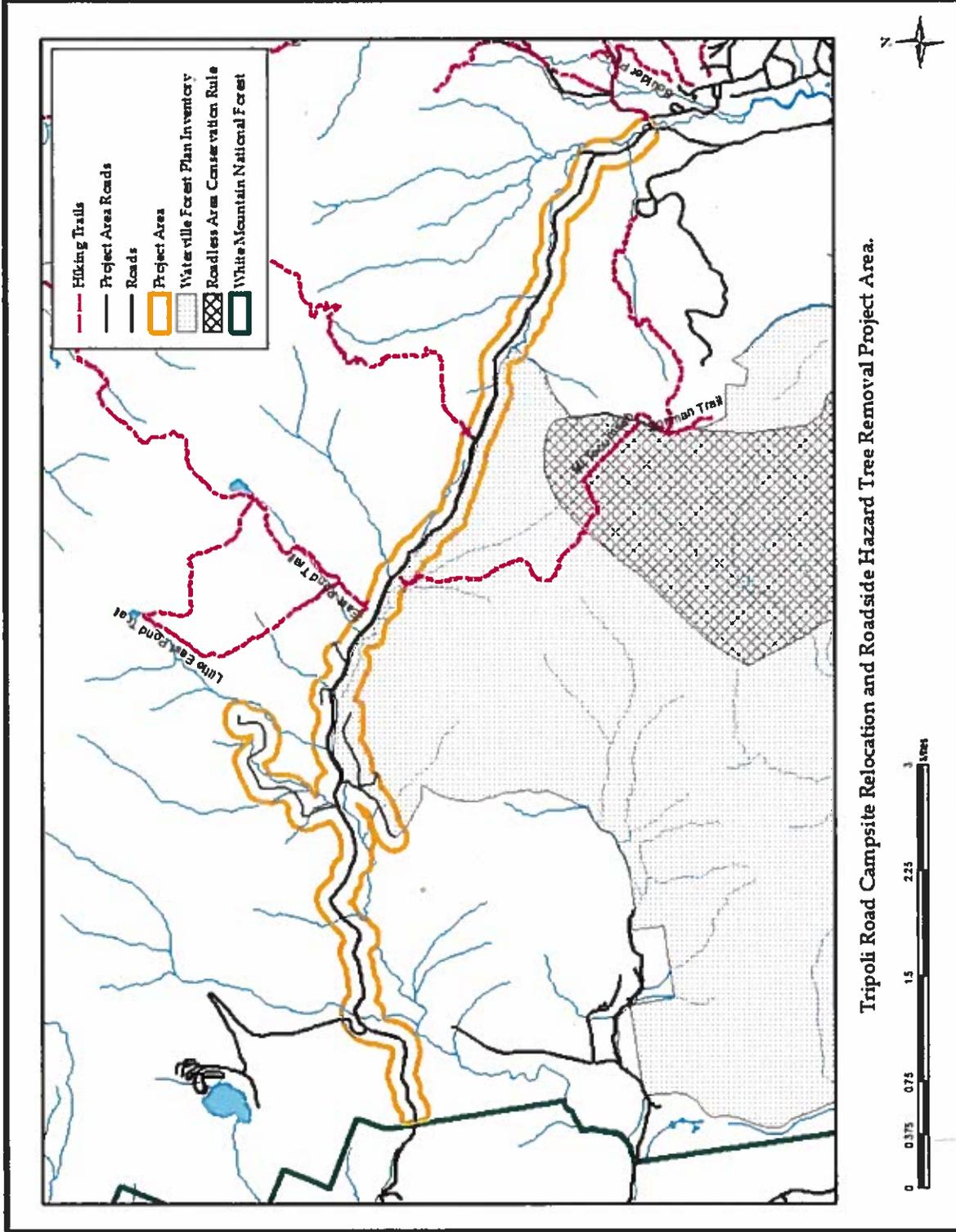


Figure 2. The Project Area includes Tripoli, Mack Brook, Hix Mountain, Hix Mountain Spur A Roads.

1. Introduction

This document announces my decision regarding the Tripoli Road Campsite Relocation and Roadside Hazard Tree Removal Project (Tripoli Road Campsite 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 incorporate by reference the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Tripoli Road Campsite Project dated April 2016 and its supporting project record.

The Tripoli Road Campsite Project is located on the Tripoli (FR 30), Mack Brook (FR 609), Hix Mountain (FR 31) and Hix Mountain Spur A (FR 31A) Roads in the towns of Livermore, Thornton and Waterville Valley, Grafton County, New Hampshire (Figure 1 and Figure 2). This decision will maintain overnight recreational opportunities in the Tripoli Road area while addressing natural and cultural resources concerns, enhancing public safety and improving management of the Tripoli Road Campground.

2. Background

Tripoli Road has been a popular roadside camping destination for decades. Initially, camping was free to the public and there was very little management. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Forest Service encouraged camping here to mitigate the social and resource impacts caused by people camping along the Kancamagus Highway and other busy thoroughfares. In the 1970s, roadside camping along many of these thoroughfares was closed, displacing many campers seeking a non-developed campground experience to Tripoli Road.

The Forest Service began managing camping along Tripoli Road under a Special Use Permit (SUP) in 1992 to reduce impacts to resources and improve service, management, and public safety along Tripoli Road. The current SUP was issued to the concessionaire in 2013 and expires at the end of 2017. The concessionaire provides oversight, maintenance, portable toilets (in two locations), trash disposal (dumpsters in one location), and information to campers. Campground amenities include: portable toilets at the Welcome Station and the Civilian Conservation Corp camp (CCC); wildlife-resistant dumpsters near the Welcome

Station; and campfire rings constructed of native materials.

There are 135 user-created campsites open for use and accessible from Tripoli Road and its spur roads (primarily Hix Mountain, or Mack Brook Roads). Campers are required to use established sites and they are prohibited from using some previously impacted areas that have been closed and restored. Campsites aren't formally designated or assigned, and most campers park along Tripoli Road. There is no reliable way to estimate the total capacity (how many campers can stay in one night) for the 135 sites. There is no set limit to the number of people who camp at each site, and, since most of these sites are accessed from roadside parking, it's impossible to base capacity on the number of parking spaces for each site.

The easy access from Interstate 93 and low-level of restrictions and development has resulted in Tripoli Road receiving high levels of use. Concessionaire data from the past few years indicates that on average 212 permits are sold on holiday weekends, 100 permits are sold on non-holiday weekends, and 14 permits are sold during weekdays. The highest use occurs during July and August when 150 or more permits are sold on weekends. During the busiest weekends 251 to 275 permits are sold. Assuming an average of 2.5 people per vehicle, there are approximately 530 people camping along Tripoli Road during holiday weekends and 250 people camping during non-holiday weekends. During the busiest weekends, upwards of 700 people could be camping along Tripoli Road. The concessionaire, local and Forest Service law enforcement officers and Forest Protection Officers patrol the area on a regular basis. They interact with the public to encourage proper food storage and garbage disposal for camping in bear country and behavior that contributes to a safe camping experience.

Tripoli Road is a two-lane, gravel road that is categorized as Forest Service maintenance level 3, suitable for passenger vehicles. Mack Brook, Hix Mountain, and Hix Mountain Spur A Roads are single-lane, gravel roads. Mack Brook and Hix Mountain Roads are maintenance level 2 road which are open for use by high clearance vehicles, it is not designed for passenger vehicles. Hix Mountain Spur A Road is a maintenance level 1 road and is closed to vehicle traffic.

Tripoli Road is one of the most problematic roads on the Pemigewasset Ranger District relative to clearing blowdowns and removing hazard trees. The Concessionaire and Forest staff are regularly called to clear the road of new

blowdowns and they make an effort to remove hazard trees adjacent to the road corridor and near campsites. However, hazard tree removal is often piecemeal, rather than a concerted effort to address the issue in a broader, more pro-active manner.

3. Purpose and Need

Management of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) is guided by the 2005 Land and Resource Management Plan (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.

The purpose of this project is to meet Forest Plan goals and objectives and desired conditions for multiple resources and recreational use within the Tripoli Road area. Specifically, the purpose of this project is to: 1) restore and protect natural and cultural resources, 2) improve management of a high-use, overnight recreational area (including nuisance bear management), 3) provide a sustainable, quality recreational experience from a resource and management perspective, and 4) address public safety concerns.

This project is needed because 1) user-created campsites are having an unacceptable impact on natural and cultural resources, 2) management of the area, including enforcement of laws and regulations such as proper food storage in bear country, is extremely difficult, 3) management and resource protection under the current campsite configuration is not sustainable, 4) two undersized culverts are impacting resources, and 5) there are a variety of safety concerns that detract from the recreational experience of area users. A full discussion of this project's purpose and need is included in Chapter 1 of the environmental assessment. The following is a summary of that discussion.

Water and Soil Resources

The WMNF strives to protect, restore, and improve riparian and aquatic habitats to benefit riparian dependent resources and values. Since surface waters on the WMNF are considered "outstanding resource waters," water quality must be maintained or improved to protect existing and designated instream water uses

(Forest Plan, p. 1-17). The Forest Plan provides guidance to consider relocating existing facilities, including roads and campsites, if they are within 100 feet of perennial streams (Forest Plan, pp. 1-15 and 2-25). It also provides guidance to ensure that all permanent new, redesigned or reconstructed stream crossings and other instream structures are designed and constructed to pass bank full flows, withstand expected flood flows, provide for the passage of sediment, bedload and woody material, and allow free movement of resident aquatic life (Forest Plan, p. 2-31).

Many of the 135 user-created campsites and access trails are negatively impacting Eastman Brook, and other streams and riparian areas and are not sustainable for the long-term. Seventy-one of the 135 campsites are within 100 feet of water and 54 are within 100 feet of a perennial stream. The campsites continue to expand and merge with one another, increasing the amount of soil compaction and other resource damage. Many of the trails accessing the sites are steep and eroding with slopes as steep as 70% and an average slope of 22%. Vegetation along Eastman Brook has been trampled and many areas are devoid of undergrowth, compacted and causing erosion of the riparian area. There is a need to close these campsites and access trails and restore these areas.

There is also a need to address sanitation and waste disposal. Substantial evidence of human waste and litter associated with the campsites has been observed near and in the brooks and water quality has been impacted by human waste. This project is needed to provide a sustainable solution for addressing the human waste and garbage disposal issues.

Two culverts, one on Mack Brook Road and one on Hix Mountain Road, do not meet the current Forest Plan Guidelines for stream crossings and one is at risk of failure. These culverts need to be replaced by properly sized and aligned structures.

Wildlife

The Forest Plan provides direction for managing recreational use to minimizing the potential for human-wildlife conflicts (Forest Plan, p. 1-22), and it provides preventive measures and educational strategies for improving proper food storage and garbage disposal to alleviate potential conflicts (Forest Plan, p. 2-34). Food storage and waste disposal issues resulting in wildlife-human conflicts at

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campsites along Tripoli Road are due in part to the challenges posed by the steep terrain leading to campsites. The steep trails make it difficult for campers to get their food and trash up to their vehicles at night for proper storage. This project is needed to reduce the potential for human-wildlife conflicts by addressing the food storage and garbage disposal issues.

Heritage Resources

It is a goal for the WMNF to identify and evaluate heritage resources at the project level and consider appropriate management of these resources, including preservation, protection, interpretation, stabilization, and when necessary, mitigation for the loss of these resources (Forest Plan, p. 1-6). Some of the Tripoli road campsites are located among historic artifacts from the former Thornton Gore farming community and there are numerous large sites located within the remains of the CCC camp. The integrity of these artifacts is being impacted by campers removing stones to create fire rings, digging holes for waste disposal, compacting and disturbing the sites through foot and vehicle traffic, and vandalism. This project is needed to address the impacts campsites and visitors are having on these historic artifacts.

Recreational Opportunities

The WMNF strives to provide a range of quality recreational activities and opportunities and to manage these in a manner that protects resources (Forest Plan, p. 1-10). The Forest Plan guides managers: 1) to concentrate use at specific locations rather than dispersing it to other areas; 2) to manage currently high use areas for high-use to meet visitor needs while mitigating the effects so that it can be sustained for the long term; and 3) not to allow use to increase indefinitely in high-use areas (Forest Plan, p. 1-13).

Tripoli Road Campground is a high-use area and it continues to be recommended to visitors as an alternative camping experience by Forest Service staff, the concessionaire, and volunteers. Many campers feel a strong connection to Tripoli Road, and some campers have been returning to the same sites with family and friends for decades. The less-developed, less-managed nature of camping along Tripoli Road fills a recreational niche unique to the Forest. Thus, Tripoli Road provides an important recreational camping opportunity between the two ends of the development spectrum (Forest Plan, p. 3-3). This project is

needed to address management of this high use area so that visitors are afforded a quality recreational opportunity and resource and management concerns are addressed.

Transportation and Public Safety

Forest Roads provide a safe, efficient, and seamless transportation and parking network that allows for current, continued, and projected management, use, and enjoyment of the Forest. Forest roads are maintained to meet Forest Service standards based on their classifications and expected use and to meet the requirements of the Highway Transportation Safety Act (Forest Plan, pp. 1-16 and 1-17).

The congestion created by roadside camper parking and pedestrian traffic, and the current maintenance level of the spur roads are safety concerns. Tripoli Road is a narrow, two-lane road without much of a shoulder. Campers parking along Tripoli Road and stopping to register at the current welcome station restrict the traffic flow by partially or completely blocking travel lanes. Neither Mack Brook Road nor Hix Mountain Road were designed or constructed for passenger cars, nor are there sufficient turnouts to allow for safe passing, yet campers use these roads to access campsites. This project is needed to address safety and resource concerns related to passenger vehicle use on these roads.

The current configuration and access to the campsites makes it difficult to monitor site conditions, enforce laws and regulations, and address issues and complaints. It is very difficult to patrol the campsites for compliance with proper food storage in bear country, payment of fees, and other laws and regulations and it is difficult to know what vehicles are associated with what sites. When issues or complaints arise, it can be impossible to locate individuals even when a vehicle description is provided. As a result, campers are able to determine the type of camping experience they desire which in many cases includes underage drinking, illegal drug use and excessive noise. Consequences include damage to resources, and adverse impacts to wildlife and other campers who may not realize they have chosen an area that is well known for all night partying. This project is needed to address safety concerns, encourage and enforce responsible stewardship of this area into the future, and improve the quality of the experience for visitors and local residents.

Trees fall across Tripoli Road and the spur roads on a regular basis and FS staff and the concessionaire must regularly clear the road for safe passage by the public and Forest staff. Currently, the removal of potentially hazardous trees along the road and adjacent to campsites is done on a case-by-case basis. This project is needed to address hazard tree removal in an efficient and systematic manner.

4. Decision and Rationale

Decision

Having considered on-the-ground conditions in and near the project area, input from the interdisciplinary team, public comments, the EA, and the goals for Management Areas 2.1, 6.1, and 6.2, I have decided to implement Alternative 2. This decision includes the following activities included in Appendix A of this Decision Notice and fully described in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Assessment for this project:

- close and naturalize all campsites along Tripoli and Hix Mountain Roads, three on Mack Brook Road and one on Hix Mountain Spur A Road;
- improve seven existing campsites and construct 12 new campsites on Mack Brook Road and improve one existing campsite and construct 18 new campsites on Hix Mountain Spur A Road;
- install up to ten vault toilets;
- install wildlife-proof trash receptacles in up to nine locations;
- close and naturalize the existing welcome station site and relocate the facility to the former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp area to include a driveway, short-term parking, registration building, an information kiosk, and a vault toilet if needed;
- improve Mack Brook and Hix Mountain Spur A roads, and a portion of Hix Mountain Road to a Forest Service (FS) maintenance level 3, single-lane, gravel roads with turnouts;
- remove potentially hazardous trees approximately 75 feet on either side of Tripoli, Mack Brook, Hix Mountain, and Hix Mountain Spur A Roads, around campsites, toilets, and the welcome station;

- replace two undersized culverts, and
- develop an access trail to Eastman Brook if needed.

Implementation will occur in phases and will involve adaptive management as described in Chapter 2 of the EA.

Reasons for the Decision

The reason I selected Alternative 2 is that it best meets the purpose and need for this project and it does the best job in implementing the goals and objectives of the WMNF Forest Plan.

I understand that camping along Tripoli Road, and especially along Eastman Brook, is a unique and special experience and that many families and groups have recreated in the area for two or more generations.

I have carefully weighed the alternatives, specialists' reports, and the environmental analysis, before making this decision. I believe it is imperative to change the management strategy on Tripoli and that now is the time to make these changes. The changes proposed in Alternative 2 will allow the public to continue camping in the Tripoli area for years to come while giving the recreating public better basic amenities, protecting water quality and other resources, and a better working environment for land managers. I acknowledge the recreation experience proposed in Alternative 2 will change and some of the Tripoli users accustomed to the current experience in the Tripoli area will be displaced.

The WMNF prides itself on providing high quality water to downstream New England communities. Compared to other WMNF water bodies, Eastman and Mack Brooks are highly contaminated from human waste and sedimentation associated with the current recreation activities. This decision improves the Eastman and Mack Brooks watersheds and brings the management of the Tripoli area into alignment with the Forest Plan. It's my honor to make this decision that protects the Tripoli area for future generations.

This decision is based on my review of the Tripoli Road Campsite Project EA and the extensive supporting documentation in the project record, including input from the public and appropriate resource specialists. I am satisfied that the interdisciplinary team conducted a thorough analysis of the proposed action and

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alternatives and that we effectively involved the public, and carefully considered and responded to their comments. 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, 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 two 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 analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Here I summarize the alternatives I did not select and give my reasons for not choosing them.

Alternative 1

Analysis of this 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 Tripoli Road Campsite project would occur at this time. Custodial resource protection, such as law enforcement, wildlife and plant surveys, and periodic road and trail maintenance, would be the only management occurring in the project area.

I did not select Alternative 1 because the No Action Alternative did not meet the project's purpose and need. In addition, opportunities to improve water quality, wildlife habitat, cultural and other resources and management and public safety in the Project Area would be deferred.

Alternatives Considered but Not Fully Evaluated

Public and internal comments identified four other possible alternatives.

- Close the Tripoli Road area to roadside camping.
- Keep a small number of sites on Tripoli Road that meet suitability criteria.
- Keep more sites along Tripoli Road.
- Reconstruct Tripoli Road.

The interdisciplinary team and I considered these possible alternatives, but did not evaluate them fully in the EA because they were infeasible, they did not meet the project's purpose and need, or were incompatible with the Forest Plan. A more detailed rationale for not analyzing each of these possible alternatives is in Chapter 2 of the EA.

5. Public Involvement

This project has been listed in the WMNF Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since January 2010. On December 15, 2010, a scoping report was published to the WMNF website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=31039>. Notification of the availability of this report (via email or postcard) was sent to over 300 individuals including local town officials, police and fire departments, historical societies, the Tripoli Road campground concessionaire, the Forest-wide project notification mailing list, and individuals who requested information as a result of the SOPA posting. Additional outreach carried out by WMNF staff included spending considerable time talking with campers at Tripoli Road about this project during routine patrols. Information describing the Proposed Action has been posted in the area since May 2011. During summer 2011, staff solicited comments from campers. The FS offered a field trip to the public on November 15, 2013, but no members of the public choose to attend.

During the public scoping effort, the Forest received over twenty comments. The comments were primarily from people who were either offering their support for the proposed action or were concerned about losing campsites along the river. All comments received in response to scoping were analyzed and used to identify the issues and environmental effects analyzed in the EA for this project.

On February 17, 2016, a legal notice initiating the 30-Day Comment period for the Tripoli Road Campsite Relocation and Roadside Hazard Tree Removal Project was published in the New Hampshire Union Leader, and the project 30 Day Comment Report was posted on the WMNF website. Notification of the comment period was sent to project commenters, as well as to the individuals who requested notification or otherwise indicated interest in the project. Adjacent land owners, Public Officials in the Towns of Thornton, Lincoln, Woodstock, and Waterville Valley, Historical Societies, the Grafton County Sheriff, NH Departments of Fish and Game and Transportation, local

snowmobile clubs, ProSports (the concessionaire), and the Central NH Chamber of Commerce were notified of the comment period.

Five individuals submitted comments during the project's 30-day comment period. None of the comments resulted in changes to the alternatives or the analysis of effects. A summary of these comments and Forest Service responses are included in Appendix B of the EA and the project record. All of the original public comments received on this project are included in the project record.

Issues

Early public involvement and interdisciplinary team discussions were used to determine the significant issues that would be analyzed in depth and to identify the issues that are not significant or have been covered elsewhere (40 CFR 1501.7(a)). The following significant issues, which are described in more detail in Chapter 1 of the EA, were used to develop alternatives:

- There would be less overall expense and impact on the land if the existing campsites were left in place and the worst offending sites were closed.
- Sites along Tripoli Road with safe, off-road parking that are away from water resources should be kept open to provide more diverse camping opportunities that are valued by the public.
- Closing and rehabilitating all of the campsites along Eastman Brook will take away a riverside recreation experience that is valued by many people who come to camp at Tripoli Road.

All other issues were addressed through minor modifications of the Proposed Action (Chapter 2 of the EA), or are addressed by the Forest Plan and its Final Environmental Impact Statement.

6. 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, identify public issues and concerns, and use that information to develop proposed alternatives, improve the effects analysis, and make a well-reasoned decision.

The Tripoli Road Campsite 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. As noted in my reason for making this decision, the selected alternative (Alternative 2) would best meet the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan and would help move us towards the desired conditions for resources in that area of the Forest

Endangered Species Act

A Biological Evaluation for the project needs to be in the project record. If concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is necessary, that letter also must be in the record. 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 species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation (see project record).

Based on known occurrence records and habitat conditions, two federally listed species has the potential to occur in the area that would be affected by this project: Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis*

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septentrionalis). For the reasons indicated in the Biological Evaluation, it was determined that this decision “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect” the Northern long-eared bat and will have “no effect” on Canada lynx. This project would have “no effect” on any other listed or proposed species or designated critical habitat because they do not occur in the project area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has reviewed and concurred with our findings on the campsite relocation portion of the project (project record). Implementation of the hazard tree removal portion of the project will not occur until we receive concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on this portion of the project

Clean Water Act

This decision will improve water quality by closing the campsites within 100 feet of perennial waters and addressing human waste and garbage disposal. Therefore, Alternative 2 would have beneficial effects to water quality in Eastman Brook and Mack Brook. The beneficial uses of water in streams draining the project area would be maintained during and following the implementation of Alternative 2. 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 during project implementation.

Executive Orders 11990 (Wetlands) and 11988 (Floodplains)

Improving riparian health is an important component of this project and Alternative 2 would have beneficial effects on floodplains along Eastman Brook and Mack Brook. As discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA, wetlands and floodplains would be protected through the use of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, project-specific design features, and best management practices. Therefore, this decision is in compliance with these Executive Orders.

National Historic Preservation Act and Archaeological Resources Protection Act

The purpose of this project includes addressing impacts to historic resources. Surveys were conducted for archaeological sites and historic properties or areas that might be affected by this decision (project record). Historic artifacts of the Thornton Gore farming community and a Civilian Conservation Corps camp are

in the project area and Alternative 2 was designed to have a beneficial effect on these resources as discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA. The findings and recommendations from the inventory and report were submitted to the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office, and they concurred with our finding that there would be no adverse impacts to any cultural resources (project record). Therefore, I find that this decision complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

This decision complies with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites that might be affected by this decision (project record). No Native American archeological sites have been documented in the project area. Consultation occurred with the State Historic Preservation Office and they concurred with our findings (project record).

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

The only river on the White Mountain National Forest that is designated under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is the Wildcat River, which about 20 miles from the project area. This decision, with impacts limited to the area of activity, will not affect the Wildcat River. A very small portion of the Project Area is within one-quarter mile of the bed and banks of the Mad River. The segment of river that is adjacent to the project area was identified in the Forest Plan as eligible for designation under this Act and was classified as “recreational”. The predicted effects of Alternative 2 on the free-flowing condition of the river, its possible “recreation” classification, and the potential outstandingly remarkable values have been analyzed (project record). Based on that analysis, I am certain that this decision will not adversely affect the eligibility of this river.

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).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

This decision is consistent with this Act and Executive Order 13186 regarding the responsibilities of Federal agencies to protect migratory birds. As required by the Memorandum of Understanding between the Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to promote the conservation of migratory birds, the EA (Chapter 3, Wildlife) evaluates the likely effects to migratory birds known to nest and breed on the WMNF. The project would improve water quality and riparian habitat, including the wildlife flyway-travel corridor that supports an array of migratory birds on the Forest. Application of Forest Plan standards and guidelines would maintain snags and cavity trees in the Project Area. Therefore most effects would be beneficial to nesting birds, and there would be no significant adverse effects.

Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice)

This order requires consideration of whether projects would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. 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 (project record). This decision is not expected to cause disproportionate effects on minority or low-income populations.

7. Finding of No Significant Impact

Findings

Based on my review of the Tripoli Road Campsite project EA and documentation, I have determined that the activities included in Alternative 2 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 Tripoli Road Campsite 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 described for each resource in Chapter 3 of the EA. 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 Tripoli Road Campsite 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 WMNF.

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

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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.

1. *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 2. 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.

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

The purpose of this project includes addressing public health and safety concerns. As discussed in the EA, there should be no significant negative effects to public health and safety from the project, but the selected alternative will have beneficial effects.

3. *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 parklands, prime farmlands, research natural areas, Congressionally-designated Wilderness or ecologically critical areas located within or near the project area, and therefore none would be adversely affected by this project. The purpose of the project includes improving water resources. The interdisciplinary team spent many days in the project area and identified

areas and special features to be protected. Riparian areas and cultural resources will be protected by the application of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, best management practices, and project design features. 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 (EA Chapter 3).

The project area includes lands within the Waterville Inventoried Roadless Area which was identified as having roadless characteristics during the 2005 Forest Plan revision process (project record). Alternative 2 will not compromise the ability of this area to continue to meet Forest Service roadless inventory criteria (project record).

The project area comes within one-quarter mile of the bed and banks of the Mad River which was determined to be eligible for designation under the Wild and Scenic River Act during 2005 Forest Plan revision. The selected alternative will not adversely affect the eligibility of this river.

4. 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. Our contacts with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game, and State Historic Preservation Office did not identify any scientific controversy regarding the direct, indirect, or cumulative effects of this project (see project record). The interdisciplinary team for this project considered extensive scientific research (see project record), 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 2 on the quality of the human environment are not controversial.

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

The WMNF has considerable on-the-ground experience with the types of activities to be implemented in this project, under similar conditions. The range

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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 body of knowledge gained through years of project-level and programmatic monitoring, wildlife surveys, and applied research (see project record) provides a basis for the effects analysis in the EA and supports my determination that there will be no highly uncertain effects or unique or unknown risks associated with this project.

6. *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 for decades in the local area and Management Areas 2.1, 6.1, and 6.2 on the Forest. The effects of implementing Alternative 2, 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 2 at a larger scale. The implementation of Alternative 2 does not make a commitment to do anything in other areas on the WMNF 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 principal.

7. *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 2 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 incorporating by reference the range of effects predicted in the Forest Plan FEIS, I have determined that implementing Alternative 2 will not result in significant cumulative effects.

8. *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 this decision will not adversely affect any cultural or historical resources. No significant scientific resources have been identified in the project area (see project record).

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.*

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 and Regulations. Each of these references explains the determination that Alternative 2 will not have a significant adverse effect on any listed species.

10. *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 2 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.

8. 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 Deci-

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sion Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for this project was published on April 4, 2016. 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. No objections to this project were submitted.

9. Implementation Date and Contact

Implementation of the campground portion of this project may begin immediately after the decision notice is signed. Implementation of the hazard tree removal portion of the project may begin as soon as we received concurrence with our findings from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on this portion of the project.

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service objection process, contact: Robert A. Colter at email: rcolter@fs.fed.us, or by phone at (603-536-6100), or by FAX (603-536-3685).

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

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

R. A. Colter

Robert A. Colter

Acting Pemigewasset District Ranger

Responsible Official

5/27/2016

Date

Appendix A: Summary of Proposed Activities

ROADS	Mack Brook Road	Hix Mountain Road Hix Mountain Spur A Road
Alternative 2	Remain single-lane gravel roads w/pullouts.	No change in length. Hix Mountain, Mack Brook, and Hix Mountain Spur A roads upgrade to maintenance Level 3
CAMPsites	Mack Brook Road	Hix Mountain Spur A Road
Alternative 2: minimum level of development	19 sites (12 new, 7 existing redesigned), delineated parking, hardened/graveled sites, fire ring built from native material	19 sites (18 new, 1 existing redesigned), delineated parking, hardened/graveled sites, fire ring built from native material
Alternative 2: full development	In addition to the minimum level of development, additional site delineation, metal fire ring	
CAMPsite	Tripoli Road	Hix Mountain and Hix Mountain Spur A Road
DECOMMISSIONING		
Alternative 2	112	3 11 and 1
WELCOME STATION		
Alternative 2: minimum level of development	Small permanent registration building, ML 3 gravel driveway with parking, food lockers, kiosk with interpretive information, food/trash storage regulations, other FS information	Small permanent registration building, ML 3 gravel driveway with parking, wildlife-resistant food lockers, kiosk with interpretive information, food/trash storage regulations, other FS information
Alternative 2: full development	In addition to the minimum level of development, 1 two-sided vault toilet	
CAMPsite TOILETS	Mack Brook Road	Hix Mountain Spur A Road
Alternative 2: minimum level of development	1 two-sided vault toilet at one location	1 two-sided vault toilet at one location
Alternative 2: intermediate level of development	1 two-sided vault toilet, portable toilets at 5 locations	1 two-sided vault toilet, portable toilets at 2 locations
Alternative 2: full development	6 two-sided vault toilets	3 two-sided vault toilets

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WILDLIFE RESISTANT TRASH RECEPTACLES	Tripoli Road	Mack Brook Road	Hix Mountain and Hix Mountain Spur A Road
Alternative 2: minimum level of development	0	One wildlife-resistant dumpster collocated with toilet, plus wildlife-resistant dumpsters at 2 additional locations	One wildlife-resistant dumpster collocated with toilet plus a wildlife-resistant dumpster at 1 additional location
Alternative 2: Full Development	0	Wildlife-resistant dumpsters at all 6 locations	Wildlife-resistant dumpsters at all 3 locations
EASTMAN BROOK ACCESS			
Proposed Action	If conditions warrant, a trail will be constructed to provide safe, sustainable access from Hix Mountain Road to Eastman Brook at the bridge crossing.		
HAZARD TREE REMOVAL			
Proposed action	Systematically identify and remove potentially hazardous trees within 75 feet of Tripoli, Mack Brook, Hix Mountain and Hix Mountain Spur A Roads, campsites, toilets, and the welcome station. This focused activity will occur in the fall and winter months (typically Oct 15 – March 15) as conditions allow, to reduce impacts to recreation. Hazard trees will be felled and tops and limbs will be left on site. Boles could be removed from site. Skid trails will not be necessary. Identification and management of hazard trees will follow guidance provided by FSH 7709.59 (USDA-FS 2009) and associated documents.		