

**WHITE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST  
SCOPING REPORT**

**Project Proposal for 5-Year Forest-wide Program to Maintain Wildlife Openings and  
Scenic Vistas, Reduce Hazardous Fuels, and Restore Ecosystems**

## **Introduction**

The White Mountain National Forest is initiating an environmental analysis process for a proposed Forest-wide project to maintain wildlife openings, maintain vistas, reduce hazardous fuels and promote under-represented vegetative communities (ecosystem restoration). This project would establish a 5-year program for wildlife opening and vista maintenance, and prescribed fire across the National Forest. This project also proposes activities to reduce potential wildfire fuels in some locations; and promote, enhance or maintain under-represented vegetative communities in other locations (ecosystem restoration). This project proposes to perform work within a 5-year period on 258 specific sites totaling approximately 1,597 acres across the National Forest.

This Report includes the Purpose and Need for the project, the Proposed Action, the Decisions to be Made, and How You Can Submit Comments to the Forest Service.

This Report contains summary tables categorizing the locations, treatments and objectives for the 258 sites. Four general location maps are also attached. Map 1 displays the general distribution of the sites across the White Mountain National Forest, and includes outlines and map numbers for 17 smaller-scale maps that are available on our web site or by request. Maps 2, 3 and 4 display the distribution of the 258 sites within the three Ranger Districts of the National Forest.

To get more specific information on individual sites, you have two options:

- 1) You may access the White Mountain National Forest web site @ <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/white/>. Here you will find a table listing each of the 258 sites, and 17 smaller-scale maps. Each site has a reference number that correlates with a more specific site displayed on one of the 17 smaller-scale maps. This will give you a better idea of location; but if you need more specific information or you do not have access to the internet – go to option 2
- 2) You may contact us directly for more information and to request copies of the site-specific table and any of the 17 smaller-scale maps. If you have questions regarding particular sites, you should direct your inquiry to the District where the site or sites of interest are located. Otherwise, you may contact any of these individuals to request copies of the table or maps.
  - **Ammonoosuc/Pemigewasset District:** 603-869-2626  
John Neely ([jneely@fs.fed.us](mailto:jneely@fs.fed.us)) or Dave Govatski ([dgovatski@fs.fed.us](mailto:dgovatski@fs.fed.us))
  - **Androscoggin District:**  
Craig Young @ 603-466-2713, ext 224 ([cdyoung@fs.fed.us](mailto:cdyoung@fs.fed.us))

- **Saco District:** 603-447-5448  
Ron Shorey (ext 111, [rshorey@fs.fed.us](mailto:rshorey@fs.fed.us)) or  
Kori Marchowsky (ext 119, [kmarchowsky@fs.fed.us](mailto:kmarchowsky@fs.fed.us))
- **Supervisor's Office:** Tom Brady @ 603-528-8746 ([tbrady@fs.fed.us](mailto:tbrady@fs.fed.us))

As you review this project proposal, you may find that you have information about specific sites in the proposed project that you believe has been unavailable or overlooked by the Forest Service, and which may be important to consider in arriving at a decision. If you choose to comment on this proposal, we will need you to submit this information, and any other thoughts you may have specific to the project, to us no later than Friday, July 18, 2003. You will find details on how to comment at the end of this report.

### **Background – What is Prescribed Fire?**

The White Mountain National Forest has successfully conducted prescribed burning on over 770 acres since 1989. These prescribed fires have helped to create and maintain wildlife habitat, promote or maintain vegetative communities (such as red pine and jack pine), and reduce heavy fuel loadings in certain areas to reduce the risk of future wildfires.

While prescribed fire is only one of the management tools proposed to implement the site-specific objectives of this project, it may require a little more in the way of explanation.

Prescribed fire is a treatment or “tool” used to achieve certain resource management goals. A prescribed fire is typically “broadcast”, or intentionally ignited and designed to spread at a set rate within a predetermined area, with boundaries established and maintained by a combination of mechanical equipment and hand crews.

**Figure 1: Typical prescribed broadcast burn in grass and light brush fuels on the White Mountain National Forest**



A broadcast burn may be used to clear brush or small trees from a field to maintain an open, grassy condition; or it may be used to remove the understory from a stand of timber to reduce competition among the regenerating trees. This is referred to as an “underburn”. In either case, the removal of brush or understory also reduces potential wildfire fuels.

The first priority of any prescribed burn is the safety of firefighting personnel and the public. Personnel who have met strict training and experience standards ignite and manage the burns under “prescribed” conditions. These conditions are site specific and are analyzed and documented in a separate prescribed burn plan for each area to be burned. The plan details certain ranges of temperature, relative humidity, fuel conditions, and wind speed under which a burn can be safely conducted. It also describes the number of personnel and types of equipment needed to complete the work. If the correct weather conditions do not fall within the prescribed parameters, the burn will not be ignited. If the right conditions do exist for a burn, then the unit is ignited, usually in narrow strips. Crews hold the fire within the unit boundary by means of a barrier (or fuel break) that could include a road, trail, stream or dug fire line (scraped to mineral soil). It may also include snow still remaining under the forest canopy. Crew resources include various types of pumps to deliver water, and hand tools such as pulaskis, shovels, and fire rakes.

**Figure 2: The same wildlife opening in Figure 1, following the prescribed broadcast burn. Note proximity of nearby residence.**



Prescribed burning may typically be accomplished in the spring or the late summer and early fall. Opportunities for prescribed burning start in the spring when the snow cover has melted and usually end by May 15<sup>th</sup>, the beginning of the non-hibernation season for Indiana Bat. In some instances, the season may be extended to May 30<sup>th</sup>, if the burning conditions are appropriate. The late summer/early fall burning season begins on or around August 30<sup>th</sup>, the end of the Indiana Bat non-hibernation season, and continues until temperatures or snow cover make burning all but impossible.

## **Purpose and Need**

The White Mountain National Forest has a need to accomplish the following resource management objectives over the next 5 years:

- 1) Maintain existing wildlife openings across the National Forest
- 2) Promote, enhance or maintain certain vegetative communities that are currently under-represented on the National Forest (ecosystem restoration)
- 3) Maintain existing scenic vistas across the National Forest
- 4) Reduce fuels in locations where the potential for wildfire presents a hazard to communities, adjacent landowners, or resource values on the National Forest

The purpose of these resource management objectives is to meet the general direction for the White Mountain National Forest, as established in the 1986 Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP).

### ***Maintain Existing Wildlife Openings***

The 1986 Land and Resource Management Plan established the general direction for vegetative and wildlife management within the White Mountain National Forest.

- Page III-11 of the 1986 Plan describes the general direction for viable wildlife populations: “Habitat will be managed throughout the forest ecosystems to maintain viable populations of all existing native and desired non-native plants, fish, and wildlife.”
- Page III-12 of the 1986 Plan describes the general direction for composition objectives: “Vegetative species composition and age class distribution objectives will be established for each habitat management unit (HMU).”
- Page III-14 of the 1986 Plan describes the general direction for wildlife openings: “Permanent wildlife openings will be established according to specific requirements within each habitat community. Wildlife openings may be established and maintained by timber harvest, road construction, fire, herbicides, brushing or mowing, based on site specific prescription.”

Habitat Management Units may be up to 10,000 acres in size, depending on their location. However, regardless of overall size, most HMUs are designed to include approximately 4,000 acres of National Forest lands suitable for timber harvest. These lands, referred to as the suitable land base, are in Management Areas 2.1 and 3.1. The vegetative species composition and age class distribution objectives for each HMU refer to these 4,000 acres of suitable lands within the HMU.

Regardless of whether the suitable lands within an HMU are managed for even-aged or uneven-aged species and age distribution, Page III-13 of the 1986 Plan specifies that up to 3% of these suitable lands should be in permanent openings. Permanent openings are defined on Page VI-8 of the 1986 Plan as areas of land that are “managed to provide and maintain low shrub and/or herbaceous ground cover for wildlife habitat.” Examples of wildlife species that prefer such openings are mourning warbler, Eastern kingbird, and Eastern bluebird. For forest-dwelling species such as black bear and moose, openings add variety to their preferred habitat.

The White Mountain National Forest has a current inventory of at least 896 acres of permanent wildlife openings. This represents 0.27% of the total suitable land base of 338,000 acres. In order to maintain these existing sites as low shrub or herbaceous habitat, overlying or competing vegetation must be removed periodically. Depending on site-specific prescriptions, some sites may require mowing on an annual basis; others may be maintained on a less frequent cycle using prescribed burning or mechanical treatments.

Additional factors may also influence maintenance of permanent openings. In some cases, the presence of non-native invasive species may require a different treatment for a site than was initially prescribed. There may be secondary objectives for permanent wildlife openings, such as maintaining a vista adjacent to a hiking trail, contributing to hazardous fuels reduction, or providing a firebreak adjacent to a fire-dependent stand.

### ***Promote, Enhance or Maintain Under-Represented Vegetative Communities (Ecosystem Restoration)***

In addition to permanent wildlife openings, the species composition and age distribution objectives for the suitable land base of the White Mountain National Forest also includes promoting, enhancing or maintaining some habitat communities that are poorly represented, unique to the region, or in decline. For the purpose of this project, the promotion, enhancement or maintenance of these communities shall be referred to as “ecosystem restoration”. In some of these habitat communities, fire can help to regenerate stands or remove competing species. The oak, pine and oak/pine habitat communities are particular examples of these ecosystems. Prescribed burning can be an effective tool for promoting or enhancing a community (oak), or maintaining an existing community (pine).

Page III-13 of the 1986 Plan specifies that 1-2% of the suitable land base within an HMU should be in oak/pine, with the variation dependent on whether the management regime is even-aged or uneven-aged.

### ***Maintain Existing Scenic Vistas***

Page III-8 of the 1986 Plan describes the general direction for scenic vistas on the White Mountain National Forest: “Existing road and trailside vistas will be scheduled for regular maintenance. Potential vistas will be identified as part of ongoing management activities.”

### ***Reduce Hazardous Fuels***

Page III-27 of the 1986 Plan describes the general direction for fire management on the White Mountain National Forest: “Fire management will provide well planned and executed fire protection and prescribed fire programs that are cost efficient and responsive to land and resource management goals and objectives.”

Part of the strategy for implementing this direction is to identify habitat communities and specific sites within the National Forest that are influenced by fire or that present a wildfire hazard due to a build-up of fuels. In most cases where a wildfire hazard due to fuels build-up has been identified, the reduction of these fuels contributes to another resource management objective.

## Proposed Action

To meet the Purpose and Need, the White Mountain National Forest proposes to implement a 5-year program to maintain existing permanent wildlife opening; maintain existing scenic vistas; promote, enhance or maintain under-represented vegetative communities (ecosystem restoration); and reduce hazardous fuels on 258 different sites totaling 1,597 acres. This includes maintaining 224 existing permanent wildlife openings, totaling 896 acres; promoting, enhancing or restoring under-represented vegetative communities (ecosystem restoration) on 21 sites, totaling 663 acres; and maintaining existing scenic vistas on 11 sites, totaling 17 acres. Some 69 of these sites, totaling 459 acres, have a secondary objective of reducing hazardous fuels. Two additional sites, totaling 21 acres, have the primary objective of reducing hazardous fuels. To achieve these objectives, the Forest Service proposes to use a combination of management tools, including mowing (tractor-pulled brush hog), mechanical treatment (chain saw, brush cutter, excavator-mounted brush hog), piling and burning of slash, and prescribed broadcast burning.

The Forest Service proposes a 5-year program in order to afford flexibility in developing a prescribed burning program, and to modify or adjust site prescriptions depending on their success in achieving the desired results. In managing a prescribed burning program, the Forest Service is restricted by weather and funding. The Forest Service may plan a burn program for a given year, only to find that funds are not available, suitable weather for burning does not materialize, or a burn – when implemented – was not effective in meeting the objective for a site. In such cases, the Forest Service may need to defer a burn to the next funding cycle or the next burning season, or mechanically treat a site in one year to prepare it for a burn the following year.

With a 5-year program, the Forest Service can conduct the appropriate environmental analysis and planning for the 258 sites and develop a schedule of treatments, but still have the flexibility to shift treatments from one year to the next as necessary.

The 258 sites are distributed across the National Forest. Table 1 displays how the number of sites and acres are distributed by Ranger District. The Saco District has the fewest sites, but it features the two largest individual sites. These are the 120-acre Moat Pitch Pine site and the 150-acre Mt. Stanton Red Pine site, where the objective for each is to use fire to maintain the existing vegetative community.

**Table 1: Number of Proposed Treatment Sites and Total Acres, by Ranger District.**

RANGER DISTRICT	AMMO/PEMI RD	ANDRO RD	SACO RD	FOREST TOTALS
PROPOSED TREATMENT SITES	90 sites 401 acres	119 sites 688 acres	49 sites 508 acres	258 sites 1,597 acres

Table 2 displays how the number of sites and acres are distributed by management objective, both by Ranger District and across the National Forest. Sites proposed for ecosystem restoration range from 5 to 150 acres, with an average size of 31.6 acres/site. The permanent wildlife openings range in size from 1 to 62 acres; but the vast majority of these sites are 5 acres or less, with the average size of 4.0 acres/site. The scenic vista sites range in size from 1 to 5 acres; but 8 of the 11 sites are an acre or less, and the average size is 1.5 acres/site. Most of these sites are adjacent to a road or trail.

Many of the permanent wildlife openings have received regular maintenance over the past 10-15 years. Since 1998, 151 of the 224 permanent wildlife openings have received some form of maintenance. Of the remaining sites, 29 received their last maintenance between 1996 and 1998, 37 sites received their last maintenance between 1988 and 1996, 6 sites have no record of the last maintenance, and one site (the 6-acre Robbins Ridge site on the Saco District) would be receiving its first maintenance treatment.

For the ecosystem restoration sites, only one (the 11-acre Back A Pickering site on the Saco District) has been treated for this objective in the past. The other 20 sites will be receiving their initial treatments with the objective of promoting, enhancing or maintaining specific vegetative communities.

All but two of the scenic vista sites have received maintenance for this objective in the past (some in 1994, most since 1999). The two proposed for their first maintenance treatment are the 2-acre Old Mill Site and the 5-acre Hairpin Vista, both on the Ammo/Pemi District. All of the scenic vista sites have a secondary objective as permanent wildlife openings.

**Table 2: Number of Proposed Sites and Total Acres, identified by management objective for each Ranger District.**

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVE	AMMO/PEMI RD	ANDRO RD	SACO RD	FOREST TOTALS <sup>1</sup>
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT <sup>2</sup>	84 sites 308 acres	102 sites 369 acres	38 sites 219 acres	224 sites 896 acres 4.0 ac/site avg.
ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION <sup>3</sup>	2 sites 65 acres	16 sites 317 acres	3 sites 281 acres	21 sites 663 acres 31.6 ac/site avg.
VISTA MAINTENANCE	2 sites 7 acres	1 sites 2 acres	8 sites 8 acres	11 sites 17 acres 1.5 ac/site avg.

<sup>1</sup> Forest Totals do not include 2 sites on the Ammo/Pemi RD, totaling 21 acres, which have a primary management objective of fuels reduction.

<sup>2</sup> Includes 64 sites (totaling 338 acres) with a secondary objective of fuels reduction (28 sites, totaling 124 acres, on the Ammo/Pemi RD; and 36 sites, totaling 214 acres, on the Saco RD); and one 5-acre site on the Ammo/Pemi RD with a secondary objective of removing non-native invasive plant species.

<sup>3</sup> Includes 5 sites (totaling 121 acres), all on the Andro RD, with a secondary objective of fuels reduction.

Table 3 displays how the number of sites and acres are distributed by proposed treatment, both by Ranger District and across the National Forest. There is some variability in the type of treatment proposed for a given site. Some sites are clearly planned for prescribed burning, mowing or mechanical treatment. These treatments have proven effective at these sites in the past, or the conditions at these sites lend themselves to a particular treatment.

Over half of the sites (150 sites) are listed in the treatment category “Determined by site-specific plan: Could be mowing, prescribed burn, mechanical, or combination.” For these 150 sites, it should be assumed that the **preferred treatment is prescribed burning**, unless:

- 1) Fuel loading and arrangement needs to be changed mechanically to reduce fire behavior risks associated with heavy brush (this would most often be the case with sites that have not been maintained for several years), or
- 2) Weather conditions when the opportunity exists to burn a site simply do not fall within the site’s prescription parameters.

Forest and weather conditions change continuously, and they are evaluated close to the time of project implementation. If conditions will not permit a safe and effective burn, there needs to be flexibility to apply another treatment option.

**Table 3: Number of Proposed Sites and Total Acres, identified by proposed treatment for each Ranger District.**

PROPOSED TREATMENT	AMMO/PEMI RD	ANDRO RD	SACO RD	FOREST TOTALS
PRESCRIBED BURN <sup>1</sup>	12 sites 121 acres	0 sites 0 acres	7 sites 325 acres	19 sites 446 acres 23.5 ac/site avg.
DETERMINED BY SITE-SPECIFIC PLAN: COULD BE MOWING, PRESCRIBED BURN, MECHANICAL, OR COMBINATION <sup>2</sup>	8 site 70 acres	106 sites 655 acres	36 sites 157 acres	150 sites 882 acres 5.9 ac/site avg.
MECHANICAL TREATMENT FOLLOWED BY PILE & BURN OF SLASH	23 sites 68 acres	0 sites 0 acres	2 sites 7 acres	25 sites 75 acres 3.0 ac/site avg.
MOWING ONLY <sup>3</sup>	47 sites 142 acres	13 sites 33 acres	4 sites 19 acres	64 sites 194 acres 3.0 ac/site avg.

<sup>1</sup> Includes 4 underburn sites (2 sites, totaling 65 acres, on Ammo/Pemi RD; and 2 sites, totaling 270 acres, on Saco RD)

<sup>2</sup> Includes 17 underburn sites (16 sites, totaling 317 acres, on Andro RD; and one 11-acre site on Saco RD)

<sup>3</sup> Includes one 2-acre site on Saco RD planned for mechanical treatment only

Table 4 displays how the proposed treatments correlate to the management objectives, as summarized by the number of sites and acres for each. All of the ecosystem restoration sites are either proposed for or have the potential for prescribed burning (including all of the proposed underburn sites). The same holds for the vista maintenance sites. Among the wildlife openings, 136 sites totaling 628 acres are either proposed for or have the potential for prescribed burning. This represents approximately 60% of the wildlife openings, and 70% of the opening acres.

During the 5-year program, on average, mowing sites would be treated 2 to 3 times, mechanical treatment sites (with pile and burn, or without) would be treated once, and prescribed burn sites could be treated up to two times. Each burn case is dependent on the site-specific conditions. This might include the time of year an initial burn takes place, the type of vegetation on site, the elevation and aspect of the site, the weather at the time of the burn, and the microclimate of the site. Any one of these factors may limit the effectiveness of a burn, or require a planned second burn to achieve the management objective.

**Table 4: Number of Proposed Sites and Total Acres, identified by proposed treatment for each management objective.**

TREATMENT	WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT <sup>1</sup>	ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION <sup>2</sup>	VISTA MAINTENANCE
PRESCRIBED BURN	15 sites 111 acres	4 sites 335 acres	0 sites 0 acres
DETERMINED BY SITE-SPECIFIC PLAN: COULD BE MOWING, PRESCRIBED BURN, MECHANICAL, OR COMBINATION <sup>3</sup>	121 sites 517 acres	17 sites 328 acres	11 sites 17 acres
MECHANICAL TREATMENT FOLLOWED BY PILE & BURN OF SLASH <sup>4</sup>	24 sites 74 acres	0 sites 0 acres	0 site 0 acres
MOWING ONLY <sup>5</sup>	64 sites 194 acres	0 sites 0 acres	0 sites 0 acres

<sup>1</sup> Includes 64 sites (totaling 338 acres) that have a secondary objective of fuels reduction.

<sup>2</sup> Includes 5 sites (totaling 121 acres) that have a secondary objective of fuels reduction. Also note that all of the ecosystem restoration sites are planned or proposed underburn treatments.

<sup>3</sup> Does not include one site (20-acre Tripoli Road site on Ammo/Pemi RD) with primary objective of fuels reduction.

<sup>4</sup> Does not include one site (1-acre Fabyan's Cabin site on Ammo/Pemi RD) with primary objective of fuels reduction.

<sup>5</sup> Includes one 2-acre site on Saco RD planned for mechanical treatment only

## Decisions to be Made

Based, in parts, on your input, on the recommendations of an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists, and on the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, White Mountain National Forest Supervisor Tom Wagner, as the Responsible Official, will decide:

- 1) The level of analysis necessary to assess and document the environmental effects of this proposed project. This includes determining whether this project meets criteria for categorical exclusion from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment, including an assessment of any extraordinary circumstances (as defined in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3).
- 2) Whether there is sufficient information and analysis to make a decision to implement the proposed project.
- 3) The sites approved for treatment, and the treatments approved for each site.
- 4) What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements will help assure the proposed project meets 1986 Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources.
- 5) Whether a Forest Plan amendment will be required to accommodate this project.

All or part of this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement under FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.2-6, Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction (Service level D, FSH 7709.56). Under the new regulations for “Notice, Comment, and Appeal Procedures for National Forest System Projects and Activities; Final Rule (36 CFR 215, Code of Federal Regulations)” published June 4, 2003 in the Federal Register, projects that qualify for this categorical exclusion are not eligible for comment and/or appeal following publication of a Decision Memo. As such, this may represent your only opportunity to provide formal comment on this project. Once the level of documentation is determined and the analysis is completed, copies will be mailed to people who submit comments before or during this scoping period and to people who request copies.

## How You Can Submit Comments

You may submit your comments to the Forest Service via any one of the following means:

- 1) **Mail** – send to Tom Brady, Forest-wide Project Team Leader, White Mountain National Forest, 719 Main St., Laconia, NH 03246
- 2) **FAX** – send attn: Tom Brady @ 603-528-8783
- 3) **Phone** – contact Tom Brady @ 603-528-8746 (M-F, 8am-4:30pm) or use TTY number @ 603-528-8722
- 4) **E-mail** – tbrady@fs.fed.us

Comments must be submitted by close of business (5:00pm EST on Friday, July 18, 2003, and should include the following information:

- 1) Your name, address, and, if possible, your phone number and e-mail address
- 2) The title of the project to which your comment is in response
- 3) If you are commenting on specific sites, please identify the sites by name and reference number

The purpose of soliciting your comments during this scoping period is to collect additional information and to identify any unresolved issues regarding the proposal. To make your comments responsive they should be specific to the proposed action. Your comments may address sites and/or treatments individually (please refer to each site by name, district and map reference number) or collectively. Be sure to provide supporting rationale for your comments, including concerns about environmental effects of the proposed project.

Please be aware that your name, address and comments will become part of the public record and may be available for public inspection. If this is a concern, please contact Tom Brady at your earliest convenience.