

**DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Mount Tabor Seasonal Employee Housing Facilities
Environmental Assessment**

**USDA Forest Service
Manchester Ranger District, Green Mountain National Forest
Town of Mount Tabor – Rutland County, Vermont**

August 2003

Introduction

This document describes my decision, and the rationale for the implementation of the construction of the Mount Tabor Seasonal Employee Housing Facilities located on the Manchester Ranger District, Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) within the Town of Mount Tabor, Rutland County, VT (see attached vicinity map). The Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) are based on an environmental assessment of the proposed action and four alternatives to it, including the no action alternative.

The Mount Tabor Seasonal Employee Housing Facilities Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared by an interdisciplinary team (IDT) of Forest Service resource specialists as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). It describes the purpose and need for action, the issues raised through public scoping, the alternatives developed to address issues, and the potential environmental effects from each alternative considered in detail. It also describes the public involvement process used to complete the EA, and the individuals, organizations and agencies consulted during the analysis process.

Public Involvement

Public involvement for this project proposal was initiated with a “scoping period” by the mailing of a Scoping Notice to 149 individuals, organizations or public agencies on September 4, 2002. The mailing list included landowners abutting the project area, the Mount Tabor and Danby Selectboards, and U.S. and State elected officials. The Scoping Notice was also posted at the Mount Tabor Town Hall as well as on the GMNF internet website for the duration of the scoping period that ended on October 11, 2002. The Scoping Notice informed the recipients of the proposed action and requested their comments. A total of 12 letters, emails or phone calls were received from 10 individuals or organizations in response to the notice. In addition, 13 individuals (including the Mount Tabor Selectboard and Town Clerk) attended the October 8, 2002 Mount Tabor Selectboard meeting and voiced issues related to the proposed action.

The Mount Tabor seasonal housing facilities project was also listed in the GMNF Schedule of Proposed Action starting in the fiscal year 2003 first quarter issue (dated October 1, 2002 to

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December 31, 2002). This document provides information of upcoming projects on the Forest and is mailed to a wide audience of over 400 individuals, organizations and agencies. It has remained in subsequent quarterly issues of the Schedule of Proposed Action to date.

Each comment received during public scoping was evaluated to determine how it should be addressed (EA, Appendix A). There were five resource issues (e.g., Socioeconomics, Visual Quality, Heritage Resources, Air Quality, and Wetlands/Water) identified by the Forest Service IDT from the comments received from the public and other agencies regarding the effects of the proposed action (EA, pp 1-4 to 1-5). These issues served as the basis for developing alternatives to the proposed action, disclosing their potential environmental effects, and comparing the differences between alternatives (EA, pp. 2-9 to 2-10, Table 2.2). The public was also invited to attend an April 8, 2003 Mount Tabor Selectboard meeting to discuss their concerns associated with the tentative alternatives developed to address the issues as well as any other issues we may have missed during scoping.

The last component of public involvement that played a major factor in my decision was response to the 30-day Public Notice and Comment Period (June 28 to July 28, 2003) for the EA that was initiated by the legal notice published in our newspaper of record, the Rutland Daily Herald on June 27, 2003. The EA and an invitation to comment were mailed to 34 individuals, organizations, and agencies that had submitted comments during the initial scoping period and/or were thought to be interested in the project analysis. The legal notice and EA were also posted on the GMNF internet website. A total of 12 respondents submitted their comments to me for consideration in making my decision. A complete summary of how these comments were addressed can be found in the project planning record.

Decision and Rationale for the Decision

Background

The Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site is located on 10.5 acres of National Forest System (NFS) land within the Town of Mount Tabor in Rutland County, VT just east of U.S. Highway 7. The Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site was first developed as a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in the 1930's. At its peak, the camp accommodated more than 100 corpsmen and consisted of multiple buildings and structures including bunkhouses, a mess hall, a first aid building, and warehouses. The only remaining buildings at the site include a warehouse, workshop and garage, and oil/gas storage shed. The site served as the primary work center for the Manchester Ranger District until 1993 when the district moved to its current office site in Manchester, VT. The Mount Tabor Work Center is now used mainly for storage of miscellaneous equipment. Forest Service seasonal employees, formal partners, and volunteers periodically reside at the site under primitive conditions.

The desired level of management activities to fulfill the direction of the GMNF Forest Plan is highly dependent on a sizeable seasonal workforce. The 2000 GMNF Facilities Master Plan (FMP) foresees an increased reliance on a seasonal workforce to accomplish desired on-the-ground management activities in the future. The FMP specifically identifies a long-term need to provide seasonal housing space for up to 12 positions at the Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site to serve the south half of the GMNF. There is also additional space needed to accommodate the anticipated increased dependence on Forest Service partners, volunteer

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organizations, and academia desiring to assist in meeting Forest Plan management goals and objectives. There are currently not enough reliable rental properties and no government owned housing facilities within the vicinity of Mount Tabor to accommodate the seasonal workforce that helps meet the management needs of the south half land base. Without adequate seasonal housing facilities, the ability to recruit qualified individuals to the area for seasonal work will become increasingly difficult. This may jeopardize the long-term ability to fulfill important Forest Plan management goals and objectives on the GMNF.

The parking area associated with the existing Mount Tabor Work Center site is currently used as a public trailhead to access the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) snowmobile trail system during the winter months. VAST trail number 7F1 is an east/west corridor trail that connects a servicing area along US Highway 7 with the main VAST north/south corridor trail (trail number 7) along the spine of the Green Mountains. Trail number 7F1 currently runs through the Mount Tabor Work Center site. Parking capacity at the site depends on vehicle type and trailer size but can provide the 25-35 spaces needed to serve average weekend use. However, parking needs can peak up to 75 vehicles with trailers on busy weekends, holidays and during special events necessitating an overflow to adjacent areas along Forest Road (FR) 48 to Brooklyn Road (FR10). It is GMNF policy to separate public parking from employee parking associated with active administrative sites to reduce potential conflicts and traffic/parking congestion. If the work center becomes a more active administrative site with the construction of the housing facilities, it is desired to discontinue the existing public use of this area for parking associated with snowmobile activity.

The Mount Tabor EA documents the environmental analysis of five alternatives, including the no-action alternative, to meet this need. The no-action alternative is the basis from which the effects of the other four alternatives are derived.

Decision

Based on the results of the analysis documented in the Mount Tabor Seasonal Employee Housing Facilities EA, project planning record, and comments received during initial scoping and the 30-day notice and comment period (June 28 to July 28, 2003), it is my decision to select Alternative 5 for implementation. The selected alternative consists of the construction of seasonal employee housing facilities at the Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site located on NFS within the Town of Mount Tabor, VT. The activities will include the construction of housing facilities with a capacity for up to 20 individuals, related site work (access roads, parking and landscaping), and establishment or upgrade of utilities (water, sewer, electric, and telephone/data). It also includes the construction of a tent pad/Adirondack shelter area to accommodate up to 15 more people during periods of high demand. The housing facilities will be designed to blend in with the existing historical structures at the site and will have year-round capability with peak use anticipated during the non-winter months of April to October.

Parking for snowmobile activities at the Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site will continue as it currently exists, but will be phased out as soon as the new housing facilities are operational during the winter months and/or snowmobile parking becomes incompatible with the administrative functions of the facilities. Replacement of the snowmobile parking to serve the trail corridor through the Mount Tabor Work Center area and greater VAST trail system will be analyzed as a separate action at a future date. I am committed to initiating the collaborative

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process to address the existing and future snowmobile parking and trail needs as quickly as possible following this decision. See the attached Alternative 5 Map for more details.

The EA fully describes the environmental effects from Alternative 5 in Chapter 3 (pp. III-1 to III-40). A summary of the activities within Alternative 5 follows:

Housing Facilities (total of approximately 5,000 square feet of floor space)

- Single story residential design with sleeping wings connected to common living area (total building “footprint” or area of ground disturbance will be about 7,150 square feet or .15 acre). The building will include:
 - Sleeping rooms (includes both single and bunkhouse occupancy).
 - Bathrooms.
 - Common area (includes kitchen/dining area, living area, and bathroom/laundry).
 - Conference room area (includes small kitchen and bathroom).
 - Office space and storage.
 - Year-round capacity with heating and cooling system.
- Unobtrusively designed outdoor security lighting (“cut off” fixtures or “down lighting”).
- Tent pad area for 5-8 tents and 2-3 Adirondack type shelters (total area “footprint” or area of ground disturbance will be about 17,500 square feet or .4 acre).
- RV hookup capacity for 1-2 units.
- Unisex SST toilet or flush toilet and shower facility (with capacity for two toilets and two shower units). Selection of whether to construct the SST toilet facility or the flush toilet/shower facility will depend on costs and projected use of the tent pad/Adirondack shelter area at the time of implementation. The building structure for either option will occupy the same approximate footprint.

Site Work

- A paved parking lot with a total capacity for up to 20 vehicles (administrative parking for housing facilities).
- Pave/upgrade the access road (FR48) to double lane (this will include widening the existing road to 22 total feet – 4 feet more on each side).
- Upgrade/clarify FR48 and facility signing.
- Provide for adequate storm runoff from the site.
- Remove existing oil/gas storage shed.
- Historical site interpretation signing that displays the CCC Camp legacy of the site (anticipated to consist of two signs along FR48 near the work center compound area).
- All other landscaping.

Utilities

- Develop on-site water sources (well and/or spring) to meet all facility domestic needs (the Danby/Mount Tabor town water system will not be utilized).
- Upgrade existing on-site water lines and add additional line to the new housing facilities.
- Replace the gray water sewage system and vault toilets with an on-site wastewater (septic) system.
- Upgrade existing electrical service.
- Upgrade existing telephone service and meet anticipated data capacity needs.
- Design facilities for LP Gas or Fuel Oil heating systems.

Rationale for the Decision

When compared to the other alternatives Alternative 5 will best meet the purpose and need for the project while addressing key issues and concerns raised by the public, other agencies, and Forest Service resource staff. My selection of Alternative 5 is a reasoned, informed decision based on the review of a complete and thorough analysis, and full consideration of public input. Although the decision may not completely satisfy all comments and concerns, and be supported by everyone, I believe that it represents a reasonable balance between the issues raised and the objectives of the Mount Tabor Seasonal Employee Housing Facilities proposal.

The primary reasons for selecting Alternative 5 over the other alternatives considered are as follows:

1. It is consistent with the goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines provided by the 1987 GMNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for managing the GMNF as well as for site-specific Management Prescription Areas (MA) 4.1 and 9.4.
2. It best meets direction provided by the GMNF Facilities Master Plan dated January 2000 that identifies the Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site as the location of seasonal employee housing to serve the south half of the Forest. It provides year-round residential facilities to accommodate up to 20 individuals including 12 Forest Service seasonal positions as well as other partners, volunteer organizations and academia desiring to assist in meeting Forest Plan management goals and objectives. It also provides tent pad and Adirondack shelter space for an additional 15 individuals to accommodate needs during peak periods during the summer months. The Forest is increasingly dependent on a seasonal work force to implement management activities on NFS lands. The lack of dependable and adequate residential quarters within the Mount Tabor area is a major factor that reduces our ability to recruit qualified seasonal employees and volunteers. Without adequate seasonal housing facilities, our long-term ability to fulfill important management activities will be jeopardized.
3. It best addresses the need to separate public use of the existing Mount Tabor Work Center parking area for snowmobile activity and administrative use of the site. I recognize the importance of a public parking area to serve as a trailhead for the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) snowmobile trail corridor that transects the work center site (Trail No. 7F1). This corridor is an important connector trail between service areas along U.S. Highway 7 and the main VAST north/south corridor trail along the spine of the Green Mountains to the east. Without adequate parking, the existing use of this trail could be substantially reduced and may negatively impact businesses that currently serve snowmobiles using this area. It could also reduce the recreation opportunity for those who access the main VAST north/south corridor via this important connector trail. The elimination of snowmobile parking within the Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site may also result in parking and traffic congestion in the Mount Tabor/Danby area as well as increased occurrence of trespass onto private land and noise within these communities (EA, pp. 3-13 to 3-14).

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My selection of Alternative 5 will allow a separate and more comprehensive analysis of the snowmobile parking and trail issues before any resources are committed to construction of a new parking area on NFS lands. This analysis would determine the location and capacity of parking that would best serve the residents of Mount Tabor and Danby including those along Brooklyn Road, the VAST snowmobile community, and businesses in the area. It will also allow a broader review and analysis of potential alternative trail routes from the current location of the trail through the work center area that passes in close proximity to Mount Tabor residents along Brooklyn Road.

4. It best meets the purpose and need for the project while adequately minimizing adverse environmental effects within acceptable levels as documented in Chapter 3 of the EA. What I consider most important are the potential adverse impacts to the socioeconomics, heritage, visuals, air, and wetlands/water resources as a result of implementing Alternative 5. I am satisfied that with the proper mitigation measures in place, the adverse impacts will be minimal.
 - a) Of special concern are the potential impacts to the Mount Tabor municipal infrastructure and quality of life. I am confident that the design of the facilities along with mitigation measures for the socioeconomic and visual resources will minimize these impacts to within acceptable levels (EA, pp. 3-1 to 3-20).
 - b) I am also satisfied that the Civilian Conservation Corps legacy of the site will be fully protected and even enhanced by the actions under this alternative (EA, pp. 3-20 to 3-24).
 - c) Although I am aware of the current statewide air quality related health concerns from pollutant sources such as snowmobile emissions, there will be no change to existing air quality conditions from this action. I am satisfied that air quality in the general area including near residential homes along Brooklyn Road will continue to meet national Environmental Protection Agency standards for “criteria” pollutants (EA, pp. 3-29 to 3-30).
 - d) The wetland and water resources are adequately protected with no adverse impacts anticipated (EA, pp. 3-24 to 3-29).
5. The analysis completely addresses concerns for threatened, endangered, and sensitive (TES) species (EA, pp. 3-31 to 3-33), and Management Indicator Species (EA, pp. 3-33 to 3-36). I am satisfied there will be no adverse effects to these resources.
6. The resources along the Otter Creek and Big Branch corridors will be adequately protected and the activities under Alternative 5 will not reduce their recreational or fishery values as Recreational or Significant Streams as defined by the prescription for MA 9.4 (EA, pp. 3-36 to 3-39). I am confident that the action will be consistent with all standards and guidelines for MA 9.4 and that this resource will be fully protected.

In summary, I am convinced that Alternative 5 provides the best combination of activities that can be implemented to meet Forest Plan goals and objectives, direction found in the GMNF

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Facilities Master Plan, and the purpose and need for this project while minimizing adverse environmental effects within acceptable levels.

Mitigation

The GMNF Forest Plan standards and guidelines provide the bounds within which all actions are to be carried out in achieving the planned objectives to ensure adequate protection to resources. I find that all management activities described under Alternative 5 will be consistent with Forest-wide standards and guidelines by resource area (Forest Plan, pp. 4.15 to 4.90), and standards and guidelines specific to MA 4.1 (Forest Plan, pp. 4.109 to 4.114) and MA 9.4 (Forest Plan, pp. 4.180-5 to 4.180-20).

In order to address specific issues and concerns, specific mitigation measures were developed beyond Forest Plan standards and guidelines by the Forest Service IDT to further protect resources. Listed below, by resource area, are the specific mitigation measures that will be applied during the implementation of Alternative 5.

Socioeconomics

- S-1: Develop on-site domestic water sources (well or spring) to replace the need to connect to the Danby/Mount Tabor water system entirely.
- S-2: Children will not be allowed to stay at the Mount Tabor seasonal housing facilities beyond periodic visits to official residents of the site.
- S-3: Pets will not be allowed to stay at the Mount Tabor seasonal housing facilities with residents for long periods. When visiting at the site with pets, residents or visitors will be required to follow Town of Mount Tabor pet ordinances.
- S-4: A noise curfew will restrict activities allowed at the seasonal housing facilities between 10:00 pm and 7:00 am.
- S-5: FR48 will be posted at 15 mph.
- S-6: Reposition the entrance sign at the corner of Brooklyn Road (FR10) and FR48 to clear the line of sight to the east.
- S-7: If excessive traffic speed along the work center access road (FR48) becomes a safety issue after it is widened/paved, selected traffic calming measures will be implemented accordingly (i.e., increased law enforcement, additional signing, speed bumps, etc.).

Heritage Resource (These measures will also be part of a Memorandum of Agreement with the State Historic Preservation Office)

- H-1: Ensure that design of the new building is compatible with the historic nature of the CCC camp – i.e., it needs to fit as an “in-fill” in the Camp.
- H-2: Contract a National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) evaluation of the camp area; based on the results of the evaluation either nominate the whole camp to NRHP as a District or, possibly, just the single workshop/garage structure.
- H-3: Document the oil-and-gas shed before removing.

Visual Quality

- V-1: Research color and materials options for roof and exterior façade of the workshop/garage and warehouse buildings before committing to materials choices for the

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new proposed housing facility. This will allow for compatibility of color and material schemes between the old and the new development.

- V-2: Retain as many large white pines as possible throughout site.
- V-3: Efforts will be made to design the parking area to the east of the proposed housing facility structure to retain as much existing vegetation as possible.
- V-4: Blend roof color of proposed housing to the vegetative backdrop that consists mostly of white pine. If a metal roof is used, choose a matt finish to eliminate reflectivity and glare.
- V-5: Maintain or enhance tree planting within the existing vegetative island to offer some visual relief when viewing the expansive roof.
- V-6: Retain buffer of White Pine and Spruce located between the proposed septic field and proposed tent and shelter area.
- V-7: Establish timers for exterior parking lights set to come on before sunset and go off around 11:00 pm each night.

Sensitive Plants (To prevent the spread of non-native invasive plant species known to occur within the project area onto disturbed ground resulting from construction activities)

- SP-1: Disturbed sites not occupied by building construction or pavement will be reseeded with a native seed mix.
- SP-2: Any individual plants of morrow honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowi*) will be cut back to the ground. Any individual plants of purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) will be pulled prior to seed. Repeat both treatments as needed during construction activities and, if applicable, several years after construction activities are complete.

Monitoring

As part of my decision, a monitoring plan developed by the Forest Service IDT will be implemented to help ensure that key environmental effects disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA are within predicted levels, check the effectiveness of critical mitigation measures, and determine if Forest Plan standards and guidelines are adequately followed during project implementation. Additional mitigation measures and/or changes to the activities may be implemented depending on the outcome of the monitoring. The monitoring plan for the Mount Tabor project follows below.

Monitoring Actions for All Resource Areas

- 1) Monitoring of Forest Plan standard and guidelines, and mitigation measures.

What: Monitor whether Forest Plan standards and guidelines and project mitigation measures are being implemented, and meeting intended objectives.

Purpose: To verify whether resources are receiving protection.

Frequency and Responsible Person: Specialists as necessary during construction activities.

Monitoring Techniques: Visually check to see if all standards and guidelines are followed and mitigation measures are being implemented and if they are effective in protecting the resource within limits as disclosed in the EA.

Monitoring Actions for Visual Resources

- 2) *What:* Monitor effects to visual resource to see if and how specific mitigation measures were implemented.

Frequency: Monitor during leaf on and/or leaf off seasons as needed after completion of project. Monitor in daylight or nighttime conditions depending on the indicator being monitored.

Responsible Person: Forest Landscape Architect

Monitoring Techniques: Conduct visual inspections from locations referenced in the EA. Monitor using the following indicators to see if anticipated visual effects occurred:

- Lighting – brightness of lights and visibility from specific viewpoints
- Building Mass and Visibility on the Landscape
- Access Road and Parking – visual resource indicators from specific viewpoints

Monitoring Actions for Heritage Resource

3) *What:* Monitor the condition of the “contributing elements” to the National Register eligibility of the site. These elements include the workshop/garage, oil-and-gas shed, and “sense of place” (i.e., the scale, appearance and distribution of buildings; the flag pole and assembly circle; the presence of open/grassy spaces in the “camp”; and the configuration and scale of the driveway/roads).

Frequency: Monitor during and after construction activities.

Responsible Person: Forest Archeologist

- *Monitoring Techniques:* Monitor using the following indicators for each contributing element:
- Were SHPO-approved treatments or mitigation measures established in the Memorandum of Agreement for this project?
- If so, were they implemented?
- If implemented, did they have their desired affect?

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative (Alternative 5), I considered four other alternatives included for detailed analysis in the EA (EA, pp. 2-1 to 2-3). A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA (pp. 2-8 to 2-10, Tables 2.1 and 2.2), and a complete and detailed analysis of their effects can be found in Chapter 3.

Alternative 1: No Action

The No Action Alternative provides a baseline for evaluation and comparison of the other alternatives. There would be no development of facilities at the Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site under the No Action Alternative and the work center facilities would continue to be used and maintained at existing levels. The Forest Plan and associated Forest facilities management policies would continue to guide management of the project area.

I did not select Alternative 1 because it does not meet the purpose and need for the project as supported by direction in the GMNF Facilities Master Plan. Specifically, this alternative does not provide for seasonal employee housing needed to recruit a qualified workforce to assist in the implementation of management activities on NFS lands. As the Forest becomes more dependent on a seasonal work force to fulfill management direction in the Forest Plan, the lack of dependable seasonal housing will increasingly prohibit our ability to maintain the number of seasonal employees, partners, and volunteers needed to carry out important project work. The

lack of a dependable seasonal work force in terms of both numbers and skills needed for management activities will jeopardize our ability to meet the desired goals and objectives as provided in the Forest Plan.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Alternative 2 consists of the same elements as those described under Alternative 5 except it includes the construction of a separate parking area/VAST trail head for snowmobile use along the work center access road (FR48) outside of the immediate work center compound area about 500 feet to the west. Parking associated with snowmobile use within the existing Mount Tabor Work Center administrative site would be discontinued.

I did not select Alternative 2 because of the apparent associated impacts from the proposed construction and use of a new snowmobile parking lot along FR48. Although Alternative 2 provides for the needed seasonal housing facilities as described in the Facilities Master Plan, the construction of a new snowmobile parking lot would have undesirable impacts on private residents along the south side of Brooklyn Road. The close proximity of the parking area to homes and property directly adjacent to NFS lands would increase noise, degrade air quality, and have negative visual impacts from the construction and use of the parking area. The parking area location would also detract from the historical CCC legacy of the work center area.

Finally, Alternative 2 would not allow a more thorough analysis of the overall existing and future snowmobile parking and trail needs serving the larger VAST trail network in this area before resources are committed to the construction and/or improvement of snowmobile infrastructure near the Mount Tabor Work Center site.

Alternative 3: Relocate the Snowmobile Parking Lot

Alternative 3 consists of the same activities as those described under Alternative 5 except it would move the snowmobile parking lot to a location along FR48A south of the tent pad/Adirondack shelter site. The capacity of the parking area at this location would be reduced to about 20 pick-up trucks with trailers.

I did not select Alternative 3 because it did not adequately address the snowmobile parking issue to my satisfaction. Alternative 3 does provide for the needed seasonal housing facilities as described in the Facilities Master Plan and reduces some of the impacts to local residents along Brooklyn Road associated with the location of the snowmobile parking area directly adjacent to their property. However, the parking lot location and capacity may not be the ideal solution to the larger issues associated with snowmobile traffic and parking needs within the Mount Tabor work center area. Although this alternative would separate public use of the administrative parking associated with the work center and provide replacement parking to serve the VAST trail through the area, it may not create the parking space capacity that is needed for existing or future use of the trail system. It also does not address the apparent larger issue of snowmobile traffic traveling in close proximity to Mount Tabor residents along Brooklyn Road or through the work center site itself. Further, there is also concern that the location of the parking area under this alternative would lead to an increased illegal use of NFS lands directly to the south of the site that could detrimentally impact the nearby deer wintering habitat.

As with Alternative 2, the selection of this alternative would not allow a more thorough analysis of the overall existing and future snowmobile parking and trail needs serving the larger VAST trail network in this area before resources are committed to the construction of snowmobile infrastructure near the Mount Tabor Work Center site.

Alternative 4: Reduce the Size of Housing Facilities

Alternative 4 would reduce the size of the seasonal housing facility to accommodate 12 individuals, reduce administrative parking to a capacity of 10 vehicles, reduce the tent pad/Adirondack shelter area by half (pad area for 4 tents, 1 Adirondack shelter, & 1 RV hookup), and move the snowmobile parking lot to a location along FR48A as in Alternative 3. All other elements discussed under Alternative 5 would stay the same.

I did not select Alternative 4 because it does not meet the purpose and need as well as the selected Alternative 5. Although the reduced size of the facilities does address concerns associated with the visual quality of the area and potential impacts to the Town infrastructure from the larger design of the proposed action, I do not believe that the slight decrease of these impacts under this alternative warrant the reduction of the facility design. There is a need to provide the capacity for the number of people identified in the Facilities Master Plan at this time and I see no compelling reason to decrease the size of the facilities that would have a smaller capacity. My review of the analysis reveals that the visual and socioeconomic impacts from the larger design found in the proposed action can be adequately minimized to acceptable levels. Therefore, aside from the impacts associated with the snowmobile parking area location, the differences in the effects between Alternative 4 and the other action alternatives are not great enough to support my selection of a reduced facilities alternative. In addition, the same concern I discussed in Alternative 3 associated with the location and capacity of the snowmobile parking lot would apply under this alternative as well.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

My decision complies with all applicable laws and regulations as summarized below.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

The NFMA requires the development of long-range land and resource management plans. The GMNF Forest Plan was approved in 1987 and it has been amended nine times. The amended Forest Plan provides direction for all management activities on the GMNF. The NFMA requires that all projects and activities be consistent with the Forest Plan.

The Mount Tabor project area is within Management Areas (MA) 4.1 and 9.4 as described in the Forest Plan. Alternative 5 is consistent with all relevant Forest Plan direction provided by goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines for the general forest area (Forest Plan, pp. 4.03 to 4.14), as well as those specific to MA 4.1 (Forest Plan, pp. 4.107 to 4.114) and MA 9.4 (Forest Plan, pp. 4.180-1 to 4.180-20). All of the expected impacts from this action are consistent with, and within the range of, the expected impacts disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Forest Plan.

Since the decision does not involve timber harvest except for a limited number of individual trees during construction activities, the NFMA findings pertaining to lands suitable for harvest, appropriateness of even-aged timber management, optimality of clearcutting, and other vegetative manipulation requirements including assurance of restocking are not applicable to this project.

Alternative 5 is also consistent with the long-range strategic plan of facility implementation as described in the GMNF Facilities Master Plan (FMP) dated January 2000. The FMP conforms with the direction established by the Forest Plan and guides the development, acquisition, continued use, and disposal of facilities.

Endangered Species Act and Regional Forester's Sensitive Species

The activities under Alternative 5 are in full compliance with the Endangered Species Act. Two separate Biological Evaluations (BE) were prepared (one for plants dated March 2003 and one for animals dated February 2003) to assess the potential effects to Federally listed threatened and endangered species as well as species on the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species list dated February 29, 2000. The analysis of effects summarizing the BEs may be found in the EA on pages 3-31 to 3-33. A "no effect" determination has been made for threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species and to threatened and endangered animal species from the Mount Tabor Seasonal Employee Housing Facilities project. For sensitive animal species, a determination of "may impact individuals or habitat but not likely to contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability" for Creek Heelsplitter (*Lasmigona compressa*), and a determination of "no effect" for all other sensitive animal species has been made.

The GMNF completed a thorough analysis of its TES program in September 2001 with the culmination of a Forest Plan amendment (Amendment No. 9) that incorporated new information for not only Indiana bat but for all TES species by way of updated standards and guidelines, resource protection objectives, and monitoring. I believe that this extensive effort coupled with the compliance of relevant standards and guidelines in the amended Forest Plan allows us to implement Alternative 5 without fear of jeopardizing any TES specie.

Floodplains (Executive Order 11988)

Executive Order 11988 was issued to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined as "...the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year." No activities under Alternative 5 will be within any floodplain and therefore, there will be no effect to this resource (EA, p. 3-24).

Wetlands (Executive Order 11990)

Executive Order 11990 was issued to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. Wetlands are defined as "...areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs,

and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds.” The implementation of Alternative 5 will not impact any wetlands (EA, p. 3-26).

National Historic Preservation Act

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Both the existing workshop/garage structure and the entire former camp area may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The potential effects to these resources are disclosed in the EA (pp. 3-20 to 3-24). The State Historic Preservation Office has concurred with the activities under Alternative 5 and will be formalized in a Memorandum of Agreement with the GMNF prior to implementation.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

Executive Order 12898 requires consideration of whether this project will disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. There were no issues related to either of these population groups raised during scoping. This decision is not expected to adversely impact minority or low-income populations (EA, pp. 3-39 to 3-40).

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this decision supports compliance with NEPA.

Other Relevant Laws

I have considered other relevant laws and regulations that my decision may affect. These include, but are not limited to, the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act. I have fully considered the effects of this decision on the public, as well as the public’s issues and concerns brought forward during the comment periods and feel that these issues have been adequately addressed in the EA, its appendices, the project planning record, and in this Decision Notice. I have determined that my decision to implement Alternative 5 meets all applicable laws, regulations, and policies, as well as Forest Service direction and guidance as outlined in the Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

Context (40 CFR 1508.27(a))

The significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Based on the analysis provided in the EA and associated planning record, I believe that the physical, biological and social and economic

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effects from this action are limited to the local area. Considering this, my decision is consistent with management direction outlined in the Forest Plan, and with the Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement that analyzed effects at a larger scale. There is no evidence in the EA or supporting analysis that leads me to believe the context of the action results in a significant effect to the environment.

Intensity (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1-10))

Intensity is a measure of the severity of effects and is based on the determinations for the following ten factors:

1. **Beneficial impacts cannot reduce the level of significance:** Both beneficial and adverse impacts associated with my decision are disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA (pp. 3-1 to 3-40). The beneficial effects of the action do not bias my finding of no significant environmental effects. Each impact, beneficial or adverse, was considered individually, and no beneficial impact was considered to offset any adverse effect in determining severity or significance.
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety:** There is no indication based on the environmental analysis that there will be serious implications to public health or safety. Although there are some negative impacts associated with traffic safety and air quality from vehicles associated with snowmobile use in the area, I believe these impacts are minimal and, in the case of air quality, short-term and limited to a small locality (EA, pp. 3-6 to 3-14; 3-29 to 3-31).
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area:** The EA did not identify unacceptable impacts to any unique geographical area. Unique characteristics are defined "...such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecological critical areas".

The project area has historical value as the site of a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp from 1933-1942. Some of the remaining buildings from that era and possibly the entire site may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NR). The activities will have no unacceptable adverse effects on this resource or detract from its NR eligibility and in fact, may enhance this legacy through improvements to the site and the establishment of interpretative signing (EA, pp. 3-24 to 3-26). Further, the action has concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Office that will be formalized through a Memorandum of Agreement (EA, B-1).

There are no park lands or prime farmlands within or near the project area.

Although there are wetlands located within the project area south of the work center site and FR48A, there will be no impacts to this resource (EA, pp. 3-24 to 3-26).

There are no wild and scenic rivers within or near the project area, but Otter Creek (designated as a Potential Recreational Stream) and Big Branch (designated as a Significant Stream) are in close proximity. The values that have enabled the eligibility of Otter Creek or the potential eligibility of Big Branch to be part of the National Wild,

Scenic and Recreational River System will not be impacted by this project (EA, pp. 3-36 to 3-39).

Ecological critical areas are those areas that exhibit unique ecological characteristics or, if altered, may affect the viability of threatened or endangered plant or animal species. The Biological Evaluations conducted for this project found that there will be no adverse effects related to any threatened, endangered or sensitive (TES) species or their critical habitat (EA, pp. 3-31 to 3-33).

Based on the above considerations, I conclude there will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the geographic area.

4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:** In the context of this decision, controversy is defined as a dispute within the scientific community. The environmental analysis and public involvement process did not reveal any scientific controversy associated with the effects from the proposed action. Forest Service staff and other agency resource experts were consulted and have provided their input for the analysis documented in the EA (EA, Chapter 4). Although I anticipate my decision will not be acceptable to everyone, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial.
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment is highly uncertain or involves unique or unknown risks:** We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects of this action are within the range of effects disclosed at a broader scale in the Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement, are similar to effects of other like actions, and are reasonably predictable. The Forest Service staff that conducted the analysis encountered nothing that would indicate the effects are highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (EA, Chapter 3).
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 and I find no evidence in the EA that this action is likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan and therefore is not a decision of principle (EA, p. 1-2).
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulative significant impacts:** The cumulative effects are disclosed for each resource in the EA (EA, Chapter 3). I find that the effects from this action are not unacceptably adverse when combined with other past, present and foreseeable future actions, thus I conclude the cumulative impacts are not significant.
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:** The EA clearly shows that there will be no unacceptable adverse effect to any proposed or listed National Historic Places nor will there be any loss or destruction of scientific, cultural or historic places. The project area has historical value

as the site of a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp from 1933-1942. Some of the remaining buildings from that era and possibly the entire site may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NR). The activities will have no unacceptable adverse effects on this resource or detract from its NR eligibility and in fact, may enhance this legacy through improvements to the site and the establishment of interpretative signing (EA, pp. 3-24 to 3-26). Further, the action has concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Office that will be formalized through a Memorandum of Agreement (EA, B-1).

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 Biological Evaluations conducted for this project found that there will be no adverse effects related to any threatened, endangered or sensitive (TES) species or their critical habitat (EA, pp. 3-31 to 3-33).
10. **Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (EA, p. 1-1). The action is also consistent with the GMNF Land and Resource Management Plan (EA, p. 1-2). Any required permits will be obtained before implementation occurs.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.11 under the Notice, Comment, and Appeal Procedures for National Forest System Projects and Activities dated June 4, 2003. An appeal may be filed by individuals and organizations who have submitted substantive written or oral comments during the 30-day comment period for the Mount Tabor Seasonal Employee Housing Facilities EA (June 28 through July 28, 2003). To appeal this decision, a written Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received within 45 calendar days after the date that the legal notice of this decision is published in the Rutland Daily Herald newspaper (Rutland, VT). The written appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer by mail, fax, email or hand delivered to:

Appeal Deciding Officer, Paul K. Brewster
C/O Regional Forester
310 W. Wisconsin Ave, Suite 580
Milwaukee, WI 53203
414-944-3963 (FAX)
appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us (Email)

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project-specific or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why the Responsible Official's decision should be reversed. At a minimum, an appeal must include information as specified in 36 CFR 215.14(b).

Implementation Date

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five (5) business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for fifteen (15) days following the date of appeal disposition.

Contact

The detailed planning records for the Mount Tabor Seasonal Employee Housing Facilities EA are available for public review at the Green Mountain & Finger Lakes National Forests Supervisor's Office, 231 N. Main Street, Rutland, VT, 05701-2417. For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact the Responsible Official, Gina Owens, Manchester District Ranger, 2538 Depot Street, Manchester Center, VT, 05255-9419; 802-362-1251 (Fax); 802-362-2307, x218 (Voice); or 802-747-6765 (TTY); or contact Jay Strand, Project Coordinator, Rochester Ranger District, 99 Ranger Road, Rochester, VT, 05767-9431; 802-767-4777 (Fax); 802-767-4261, x522 (Voice); 802-747-6765 (TTY); or jstrand@fs.fed.us (email).

GINA OWENS
District Ranger
Manchester Ranger District

Date

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