



File Code: 1950
Date: July 29, 2020

Dear Interested Forest User:

The USDA Forest Service is seeking comments for the proposed Tillman Trails Project. This project would occur on the North River Ranger District of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Augusta and Rockingham counties, Virginia. Please refer to the enclosed Proposed Action Map for location information.

A. Proposed Action

The Forest Service is proposing to relocate the western portion of the Narrowback Trail (Trail #432) onto a sustainable grade and construct a new segment of trail that would connect to the Wolf Ridge Trail parking lot. This action would result in construction of approximately 3 miles of trail and permanent decommissioning of 0.75 miles of the Narrowback Trail. The newly constructed trail would follow a curvilinear alignment along sustainable grades (i.e., less than 10 percent). The decommissioned section may be graded and seeded to prevent further erosion and access. In addition, a bridge is planned for the bottom of the newly constructed trail near Tillman Road (Road #101). Should a bridge not be feasible, the trail would ford the stream. Other connected actions would include new painted blazes on trees identifying the trail relocations and the addition of several directional signs.

B. Need for the Proposed Action

There are two needs for the proposed action. The first need is to address resource degradation associated with unsustainable trail layout. The 0.75-mile section of the Narrowback Trail that would be decommissioned consistently exceeds grades of 15 percent and lacks adequate drainage features. At the base of the mountain, the trail crosses a series of small tributaries and wetlands without proper erosion control, resulting in a deterioration of the trail condition and increased sedimentation. The second need is to improve visitor experience. The current steep, eroded alignment has contributed to a significant drop in visitors in comparison to trails in the Tillman-Narrowback network. A sustainable trail alignment built on more moderate grades with specifications that intentionally provide an enjoyable user experience is needed to promote a diversity of trail users with varying abilities and skill levels.

The proposed action would occur on National Forest System lands within Management Prescription Area (MA) 13 Mosaics of Habitat, designated by the 2014 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the George Washington National Forest. MA13 is the predominant area where timber harvest is used to create and maintain ecosystem diversity objectives and where wildlife habitat management activities are focused for both ecological and recreational objectives.



C. Decision To Be Made

As District Ranger, I will be the responsible official. The decision to be made is whether or not to implement the projects described above; and if so, under what conditions. Pending results of a review of the resource conditions and the degree of potential effects on extraordinary circumstances, this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement under FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, Category 32.2: {36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) *Construction and reconstruction of trails.* }.

D. Public Involvement

As a result of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (Public Law No. 113-76) and the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill, Public Law No. 102-381), the Forest Service will no longer offer appeal opportunities for categorically excluded projects. However, we will continue to offer public involvement opportunities for these projects and will take public comments into consideration before final decisions are made. Therefore, we welcome your involvement and encourage your comments on this proposal. For your input to be most helpful, please identify issues/concerns specific to this project which you feel need to be addressed. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents. Please provide your comments within 30 days from the date of this letter. When a decision is made, we will promptly mail the appropriate decision and analysis documentation to those who participated in the process or who specifically request the information.

Comments may be submitted through the Tillman Trails Project website via the web form (<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=58134>). This web form can also be accessed from the project website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58134>. On the right hand side, you can select "Comment/Object on Project".

There are several options for providing comments. Comments may be faxed to our office at 540-432-1917 or may also be mailed to our office.

When sending comments through the postal system please use the following address:

Jay Martin, Interdisciplinary Team Leader
North River Ranger District
Tillman Trails Project 2020 - Scoping Comments
401 Oakwood Drive
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22801

If you have questions about this proposal, please contact Jay Martin at the North River Ranger District at jay.martin2@usda.gov. Thank you for your interest in the management of your National Forest.

Sincerely,



MARY YONCE
District Ranger, North River Ranger District

Enclosure - Maps: Vicinity and Proposed Action

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