



File Code: 1950

Date: August 20, 2015

Dear Interested Party:

The Ottawa National Forest is seeking comments on the Wilderness Lakes Bike Trail System Project. The project proposes to develop bicycle trail segments that will connect to the Wilderness Lakes Trail system. The project also proposed to relocate the Whitefish Lake Trailhead parking area to an area that will also serve as a parking area and trailhead for the proposed bicycle trail segments (See Maps 1 and 2). This project is being planned in conjunction with Wilderness Lakes Trail, Inc., a non-profit organization that originally proposed the trail system, Watersmeet Township, the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Gogebic County Road Commission. Part of the proposed trail segments will be located on lands owned by the Gogebic County Road Commission. The Lac Vieux tribe has identified this route as a tribal access route which the Bureau of Indian Affairs has supported through funding and technical services support. The trail segments addressed through this project include only those segments on National Forest System lands.

The Wilderness Lakes Bike Trail System is the name given to the 37 mile bike trail loop surrounding the Sylvania Wilderness, linking the communities of Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin and Watersmeet, Michigan. The trail utilizes a combination of roads and trails, including the Agonikak National Recreation Trail. This project proposes to add new bike trail segments which will allow bicyclists to have a more diverse and secluded riding experience by moving the trail off Gogebic County Road 535. Bicyclists will experience safer riding conditions because the proposed segments are located on non-motorized trails, as opposed to roads shared with motor vehicles.

This project is also proposing to relocate the Whitefish Lake Trailhead and parking area outside the Sylvania Wilderness area and to construct a short segment of trail from the new trailhead to the Whitefish Lake hiking trail. The new location for the trailhead will also double as a parking area and trailhead for access to the new bike trail segments.

Purpose and Need for the Proposal

Currently bicyclists utilize Gogebic County Road 535, sharing the route with motor vehicles as there is no designated bike lane on this county road. This current recreation experience for bicyclists is undesirable and sharing the road with motor vehicles presents safety concerns. Therefore, there is a need to reconstruct and add the Albino Lake Road (Forest Roads (FR) 6331 and 6331-A), an unclassified road 0611302, and the Whitefish Lake Road (FR 6380) to the Wilderness Lakes Bike Trail System to improve the safety and riding experience for users.

The Whitefish Lake trailhead parking area is currently located within the Sylvania Wilderness boundary which is not in compliance with the Wilderness designation. Therefore, there is a need to relocate the parking area outside of the wilderness boundary. Also, to give trail users access from the new parking area to the Whitefish Lake Hiking Trail there is a need to construct a short trail segment. This short trail segment will be located entirely outside of the wilderness boundary.



Proposed Activities

Activities may include:

- Road reconstruction of Albino Lake Road (FR 6331 and 6331-A), unclassified road 0611302 and Whitefish Lake Road (FR 6380): road surface leveling, reshaping shoulders, and adding gravel. Culverts will be placed where needed to provide drainage.
- Whitefish Lake Trailhead parking relocation: relocate the parking area to the existing gravel opening just outside the Sylvania Wilderness Boundary at the southern end of FR 6380 and level and the shape the new parking area as needed to provide parking for 6 to 8 vehicles. Additionally, construct a short segment of trail to connect the new parking area to the Whitefish Lake hiking trail.
- Whitefish Lake Trailhead parking area: remove trailhead signs and culverts and place a berm or other barrier to block access to the old parking area.

Forest Plan Direction

The Ottawa National Forest's 2006 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) provides direction for Forestwide recreation management. A resource specific goal is to *"promote diverse and quality recreation experiences within the capability of sustainable ecosystems, and consistent with the niche of the Ottawa with an objective to maintain or increase opportunities for quiet and remote experiences"* (Forest Plan, p 2-4). Guidelines for non-motorized trails states that *"New non-motorized additions to the National Forest Trail system, or relocation of existing non-motorized trails, will generally be considered as they address special user needs, ensure resource protections, and are compatible with other resource management direction."* (Forest Plan, p. 2-14)

Authority

This proposal may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement under a category of activity that allows for the construction and reconstruction of trails (36 CFR 220.6 (e) (1)). I anticipate that a Decision Memo may be used to document the decision regarding this project proposal.

Public Involvement

I encourage you to review the Wilderness Lakes Bike Trail System Project proposal and submit any comments that you may have. To ensure that I have an opportunity to consider your comments when making a decision the comments, please submit them within 30 days of receiving this letter.

Please address your comments to: Norman Nass, District Ranger; E23979 US Highway 2 East, Watersmeet, MI 49969. A comment form is enclosed for your convenience. Office hours, for those who wish to hand deliver or provide oral comments, are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday - Friday (except Federal holidays). Oral comments can be provided at the above listed office, or by telephone at (906) 358-4014, during those hours. Alternatively, comments may be submitted by e-mail at: comments-eastern-ottawa@fs.fed.us (please put "Comments on Wilderness Lakes Bike Trail System Project" in the subject line).

Copies of the decision will be mailed to those who request it and those who comment on the project. More information is also available on the Forest's website:

<http://fs.usda.gov/goto/ottawa/projects>.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Melissa Simpson, Recreation and Wilderness Specialist (906) 932-1330 ext. 511, or Robin McCartney, Environmental Coordinator, at (906) 932-1330 ext. 514.

Sincerely,



NORMAN E. NASS
District Ranger

Enclosures

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