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**Appalachian Mountain Club Supports Combination of Management Alternatives
In Proposed White Mountain National Forest Management Plan**

PLYMOUTH, N.H., Sept. 18-- The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) today expressed its support for elements of two of the management alternatives offered by the U.S. Forest Service in its Proposed Land Use Management Plan for the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF).

WMNF officials announced details of the plan at a Sept. 18 public meeting in Plymouth.

“Based on an initial review of the Proposed Land Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) the Appalachian Mountain Club favors the timber and wildlife management approach offered in Alternative 2 (the Forest Service’s Preferred Alternative), and we would combine that approach with the land allocation scheme offered in Alternative 3,” said Susan Arnold, director of conservation for the AMC.

AMC’s analysis of the proposal indicates that Alternative 3 provides significantly stronger protection for large, wild places on the WMNF than the other proposed alternatives. “Large natural areas represent a small fraction of our landscape, yet they provide critical ecological, recreational, spiritual and economic values that cannot be provided by roaded or harvested forests,” said Arnold.

Alternative 3 provides for the largest additions to designated Wilderness in the WMNF. AMC supports Wilderness designation in the Wild River area and the Dartmouth Range, as well as extensions to the Pemigewasset and Sandwich Range Wilderness Areas. However, the AMC believes there are additional lands worthy of Wilderness designation, most significantly the Scar Ridge region adjacent to the Sandwich Range Wilderness Area.

“At the same time, AMC supports the timber management approach offered under the Forest Service’s Preferred Alternative. This approach would benefit early-successional wildlife habitat and would enhance the volume and marketability of timber sales, resulting in greater economic returns,” said Arnold. “Under the land allocation of Alternative 3, nearly a quarter-million suitable acres would remain available for timber management in the national forest. Our preferred combination would result in a timber harvest somewhere between those provided under Alternatives 2 and 3,” she said.

“The AMC has long supported the concept of multiple-use in the White Mountain National Forest, including Wilderness and remote backcountry recreation, developed recreation and active timber management. We believe the current range of uses is appropriate and provides a wide range of public benefits. However, we believe there is a need to adjust the relative balance of uses on the forest,” Arnold said.

The White Mountain National Forest is the largest public land unit in New England and one of the largest in the Northeastern United States. It is uniquely positioned to provide benefits that cannot be supplied on the surrounding, more heavily developed land base, she said. Among the most important of these benefits are those associated with large, roadless, wild areas-- places that are extremely rare throughout the Northeastern United States. These roadless areas provide opportunities for backcountry recreation as well as opportunities for the restoration of large areas of unfragmented old forest habitat.

“The public has continually expressed a high level of support for the strong protection of large, roadless areas, and advances in scientific knowledge over the last two decades have highlighted the importance of these areas to the conservation of biodiversity,” Arnold noted.

Based on an initial reading of the draft plan, the AMC offers the following observations:

--Because of our support for continuing multiple use on the forest, as well as our desire to see stronger protection for large, wild places, we believe the most appropriate overall management plan would combine the land allocation scheme of Alternative 3 with the timber and wildlife habitat management approach of Alternative 2.

The land allocation scheme of Alternative 3 provides significantly stronger protection to large, wild places on the WMNF than the other proposed alternatives. It is the only alternative that increases the amount of land on the forest that would be managed as natural area. We support the level of new Wilderness proposed in this alternative, as well as the increased protection of other parts of Inventoried Roadless Areas through reallocation to management areas intended to maintain natural forest ecosystems. At the same time, the timber and wildlife habitat management approach of Alternative 2 creates certain benefits (including greater maintenance of early-successional wildlife habitat and greater marketability of timber sales) not provided by Alternative 3.

--We believe the plan would be significantly strengthened by a provision that would prohibit the construction of new roads in those portions of Inventoried Roadless Areas allocated to General Management.

The plan contains no specific provisions for the management of these areas. Under the Forest Service's preferred Alternative 2, more than 125,000 acres of roadless area would be open to new road construction, while, under Alternative 3, nearly 75,000 roadless acres would remain open. While the AMC acknowledges timber harvesting as an appropriate use in parts of these areas, we believe leaving tens of thousands of acres of Inventoried Roadless Area open to new road construction is an unwarranted oversight that threatens to degrade their remote character.

--We strongly support the prohibition on ATV use that is common to both Alternatives 2 and 3.

--We support the general approach to recreational management that is common to Alternatives 2 and 3.

We believe this is an appropriate approach that maintains the current balance of recreational uses that allows for some increase in use while improving oversight aimed at avoiding degradation of both recreational experiences and the natural environment on which these experiences depend.

--We support the designation of new management areas that will allow for the development of specific standards and guidelines for the Appalachian Trail, the alpine zone and the Wildcat River Wild and Scenic River corridor.

The AMC commends the U.S. Forest Service for the work it has put into developing this draft plan, and for seeking public involvement throughout the planning process.

The AMC will be providing additional comments on the draft plan once it has had the opportunity to review the documents in greater detail. Among the issues of particular interest to the AMC are the guidelines for management of backcountry recreation and Wilderness, proposals for new trail construction, the proposal to allow windpower development on the national forest; air quality, water resources and riparian area management, and the conservation of biodiversity.

Founded in 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club is the oldest conservation and recreation organization in the United States. With more than 91,000 members in the Northeast and beyond, the nonprofit AMC promotes the protection, enjoyment, and wise use of the mountains, rivers and trails of the Appalachian region.

In the White Mountain National Forest, the AMC provides trail maintenance, educational programs, scientific research, backcountry lodging, search and rescue assistance, and a wide range of visitor and information services for national forest visitors. AMC operates seven mountain huts, the Camp Dodge volunteer center, and Pinkham Notch Visitor Center for use by the public, under special-use permits from the Forest Service.

The AMC supports natural resource conservation while encouraging responsible recreation, based on the philosophy that successful, long-term conservation depends upon first-hand enjoyment of the natural environment.