

CONTACT REPORT

ORGANIZATION: U.S. Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest

PERSON
CONTACTED: Stacy Lemieux, Planning, NEPA, Appeals, & Litigation

PHONE NO.: 603-536-6222

EMAIL: slemieux@fs.fed.us

FROM: Blythe Mackey, E&E

TO: Dan Belin, E&E / Angela Gardner, E&E / Travis Beck, SE Group

DATE: January 31, 2012

SUBJECT: Northern Pass Transmission Line – Discussion of survey methodology within the White Mountain National Forest.

On January 30, 2012 The SE Group team hosted a conference call with USFS White Mountain National Forest Service to discuss survey methodology for winter surveys, sensitive species, and sensitive ecological resource surveys for the Northern Pass Transmission Line Project. The following people participated in the conference call: Stacy Lemieux, USFS; Leighlan Prout, USFS; Chris Mattrick, USFS; Travis Beck, SE Group; Dan Belin, E&E; Angela Gardner, E&E; and Blythe Mackey, E&E.

The first topic of discussion focused on winter survey methodology for the following species: American marten, Canada lynx, moose and deer. E&E inquired about available information from USFS that would help focus these survey efforts. USFS agreed to provide the following information:

- Shapefiles of known lynx locations as well as habitat (foraging and denning)
- Shapefiles of snowshoe hare habitat
- Transects and occurrences of American marten data
- Shapefiles of known moose and deer yards
- Shapefiles of stand level map (silvicultural dataset)
- Transects and data associated with Bicknell's thrush

E&E requested that files be clipped to a 5-mile buffer on either side of the existing ROW for T&E species and 1-mile on either side for other data.

USFS discussed that there have been no confirmed lynx tracks within the White Mountain National Forest since 2006. Proposed survey methodology was discussed. The USFS had sent the SE Group team their protocol that was partially based on Maine Division of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife protocol. E&E agreed to follow this protocol and stated that they would backtrack where they could if they found tracks, but that they would be limited to operating within the right-of-way and may not be able to backtrack all the way to dens. Where they are able to E&E agreed to do so and collect hair samples if they find them. USFS stated that this was more important for tracks that are unclear. Prout stated that Figure 1 in Maine's protocol was the most important methodology to follow and E&E agreed to do so. The USFS approved of the use of game cameras to provide additional information.

The USFS next described the best habitat for American marten as habitat above 2,000 to 2,500 feet. Some of the data within the known moose and deer yard data set is 50 to 60 years old and other data is more recent and has been confirmed in the field. A search of the attribute table should indicate the year of the data. USFS discussed that our survey approach generally concurred with surveys they conduct within the White Mountain National Forest. USFS aims to complete winter surveys by the end of February; however, with the lack of snowfall this year, they have not met criteria to conduct winter surveys. In addition, because of warmer temperatures, there has been a lot of bear activity noted within the area. USFS inquired if 2012 would be the only year of winter surveys, given the lack of snowfall and warm temperatures. E&E responded that with the current project schedule, yes.

E&E will submit the work plan of winter surveys to USFS by the end of the week for their review. With the current project schedule, E&E aims to start winter surveys the week of February 15th. This schedule depends on receiving the northern 40 miles of the project route by February 1st.

A more general discussion continued of the project and other sensitive species and resources such as wetlands and waterbodies within the White Mountain National Forest. E&E mentioned that they had not yet received the application for the Special Use Permit from Craig Young and Stacy Lemieux commented that she would help facilitate that process. Stacy believed that the permit language could be inclusive of both winter and summer surveys and may need to include the possibility of overnight camping due to distance issues and access of the ROW. The general project area was discussed that the project footprint is limited to the existing ROW with the construction of new towers and new lines. Stacy discussed that in several locations the existing ROW is not the same as the cleared area; so E&E will need to be aware of that when conducting field surveys. USFS inquired if E&E was aware of auxiliary project features such as access roads, staging areas, etc. and E&E responded that we had not been provided yet with these features. USFS informed E&E that there was access to the ROW via Route 112 and Route 116.

E&E discussed that they will be conducting floristic surveys in the spring. General methodology was discussed with Chris Mattick. E&E stated that they intend to conduct random "wandering" transects within targeted survey areas and inventory all species encountered. In addition to looking for sensitive plant species, they will also document noxious and invasive species. E&E will

use the T&E datasheet from the Natural Heritage Bureau to be consisted with data collection procedures. USFS will provide a list of noxious and invasive species. E&E will be field verifying wetlands and waterbodies, and vernal pools. USFS will provide stream data which includes mapped perennial and intermittent streams. USFS indicated that conditions can change in the field from mapped streams and would appreciate updated information. In addition, they informed us that due to the warm winter, this could mean an early spring and therefore early vernal pool surveys.

Other species on the USFS RFSS list were also discussed in a general nature. Prout indicated that Bicknell's Thrush as a species of concern for the USFS. She stated that they do not need an individual survey for that specific species, but if E&E conducts breeding bird surveys, they would suffice to capture the relevant information. She stated that USFS has transects at Kinsman ridge that they survey every other year and she would get us the GIS data associated with these transects. She also stated that two species of bats (can't remember which ones) are currently being petitioned as Candidate species under the Endangered Species Act. There are three hibernacula for these species to the west and south of WMNF. We discussed our proposed approach of active acoustic monitoring by walking transects, and she said that they do passive monitoring at streams and are able to place the monitors on the ground with good results. WMNF did not think there was any potential habitat for wood turtle within the project area and also did not see the need to survey for macroinvertebrates. Those species could be handled with BMPs when a determination is made how construction and operation could affect them.

The SE Group team agreed to notify WMNF when we are in the area to conduct our surveys.

To facilitate data transfer, Mackey will set up a folder on the E&E FTP site and be the point of contact for data transfer.