

SUBJECT:	Spring/Summer Biological Surveys – White Mountain National Forest
DATE:	March 27, 2013
LOCATION:	WMNF – Campton
AUTHOR:	Courtney Dohoney
ATTENDEES:	Leighlan Prout (USFS), Dan Belin (E & E), Courtney Dohoney (E & E), Sean Meegan (E & E)

MINUTES:

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Dan Belin started the meeting by providing a summary of the winter survey effort. No Canada lynx or American marten were documented in the targeted areas of the lower 140 miles of the Northern Pass Project right-of-way (ROW). Each high priority area was surveyed at least two times, with the exception of areas where the SE Group Team had landowner interactions and were asked to leave the property. No surveys were conducted in the North 40 as this route is still under development.

Belin explained the process the SE Group Team wanted to follow in developing the spring and summer work plans, whereby the agencies provide feedback on the surveys that should be conducted for the spring and summer season and general methodology for those surveys, and then the SE Group Team will develop the Work Plan and submit to the agencies again for review and comment. We will then finalize based on any additional comments and deploy field crews to implement the Work Plan with the goal of being in the field in time for wetlands and vernal pool surveys.

Leighlan Prout noted that, in general, snakes and amphibians are not an issue of concern in WMNF. It is possible that Jefferson and blue-spotted salamander could be present, but unlikely. Prout's biggest wildlife concerns are bats and Bicknell's Thrush. As the SE Group Team intends to conduct wetlands, streams, and vernal pool surveys, Prout noted that the USFS vernal pool surveys usually start the third week of April.

Prout thinks that habitat is not a limiting factor in the WMNF for bats, and it is expected that they are present. As a result, acoustic monitoring may not be beneficial in determining impacts from the Project. The USFS's biggest request is that any tree clearing for the Project be conducted outside of the season when bats are likely to be present at the site (May 15 – September 15), meaning clearing should be done between September 16 and May 14. Northern long-eared bats have very few records in the WMNF and their presence has decreased since the onset of White Nose Syndrome (WNS).

The ruling on the listing status of both bat species will be made on September 30, 2013 and we should stay coordinated with USFWS with regard to this. Prout also referred us to Emily Brunkhurst at NHFG for information on the BMPs that the state is working on for bats.

Bicknell's Thrush is presumed to have suitable habitat within the ROW in the WMNF at elevations greater than 2,500 feet. Prout directed the SE Group Team to review the work Vermont Center for Eco Studies has done on Bicknell Thrush survey protocols as part of the Mountain Bird Watch program. This methodology utilizes 20-minute point count surveys, composed of 4, 5-minute consecutive survey periods. The USFS will be conducting Bicknell's Thrush surveys this year. The WMNF Forest Plan allows for no loss of habitat for

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Bicknell's Thrush within the forest. In order to identify habitat, Prout suggested reviewing a paper by Lambert et al. (2005) which modeled habitat preferences for the species, and is primarily based on elevation, tree species, and latitude. The SE Group Team would be able to recreate this model using our current data sets in order to identify targeted areas for surveys.

Regarding non-T&E bird surveys, Prout was not concerned about doing general breeding bird surveys as the WMNF has a good idea as to the general bird diversity in the forest and noted that an Osprey nest is present in the WMNF near South Pond.