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In early April 2007, six months into the FY07 federal fiscal year, White Mountain Forest Supervisor Tom Wagner was notified that he needed to reduce his budget by an additional 10%, or almost \$1 million dollars, during the current fiscal year. This reduction was the largest budget reduction at mid-year of any unit in the Eastern Region of the USFS.

Tom immediately implemented several stringent measures to try to meet his new budget target within the next six months:

- **Reducing seasonal employees by 75%.** This cut affects fieldwork such as trail maintenance, inventory work, backcountry patrols, timber marking, and staffing levels at visitor centers, including shutting down one visitor facility completely.
- **Reducing agreements with partner organizations.** These agreements with state agencies and NGOs to leverage work on the Forest, including cooperative trail programs and the HikeSafe program.
- **Reassigning permanent timber personnel to other resource areas and forests.** WMNF timber program staff will be used to accomplish work in other funded program areas on the WMNF, and will be moved around the region to assist other forests with forestry work. This means that WMNF timber program work will not get done, affecting the Forest's future ability to offer a reliable program to industry and impacting wildlife habitat objectives outlined in the Forest Plan.

In response to a request for information on the WMNF budget from the Tilton Diner Group (TDG), an ad hoc coalition of nonprofit organizations, state agency representatives, and individuals in the North Country (including Ted Sutton for the North Country Council), who have been meeting regularly with senior officials of the White Mountain National Forest for many years to share information, resolve conflicts, and build consensus around issues affecting the WMNF, Tom told the TDG about the budget cuts and the steps he had taken to meet his new budget target. The Tilton Diner Group then decided to send a letter to the New Hampshire congressional delegation, detailing the adverse impacts of these budget cuts on the WMNF. The letter also emphasizes concerns about future years' budgets, and concludes:

While we understand that much of these reductions are the result of the growing need in the West for wildfire suppression funding, these cuts create their own cascade of problems and service deficits in forests like the WMNF. As a magnet for tourism in the Northeast, and within several hours driving distance of more than 70 million Americans, the USFS cannot afford to negatively impact the management and operations—the public face—of the WMNF, and therefore of the USFS. We urge you to request the USFS to restore critical funding to the WMNF this fiscal year, and to work with WMNF staff and

the undersigned to ensure similar reductions are not repeated in the FY08 budget. We stand ready to help in any way we can.

The good news is that our New Hampshire congressional delegation also was ready to help by following up on the TDG group letter with the powers-that-be in Washington, DC. Senator Judd Gregg used a Senate hearing to question Mark Rey, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture, about why funding has been cut for the White Mountain National Forest, which is one of the most visited national forests in the country. Senator Gregg stated:

I recognize there's tremendous pressure out West to fight fires and that is absorbing huge amounts of money, and that reduced timber harvesting has reduced revenues for forest management. In the context of those resource pressures, it seems to me that we should not be putting a place like the White Mountains, which has a unique role in the Forest system with millions of visitors and a multi-use forest, on a path to failure.

The Senator received assurances from Mr. Rey that he would look into this matter closely.

A letter initiated by New Hampshire Congressman Paul Hodes, and signed by all four New Hampshire and Maine House members, was sent to the Chief of the USFS, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee. The letter includes this paragraph:

The White Mountain National Forest is one of the most popular national forests in the country. Unacceptable far-reaching impacts to the WMNF and its users will occur now that this ten percent budget reduction has taken effect. In order to prevent the extreme financial and conservation consequences to New Hampshire and Maine, we ask that the Forest Service restore the WMNF's budget to the appropriated level.

We are hopeful that the support shown for the WMNF by our Congressional delegation will have positive results.