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Geoenvironmental Assessment of Dolly Sods Trail Network for CERCLA Review

Project No. GEO – 25

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Project Description: Popular with outdoor recreationists, the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area of the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia falls within the boundaries of the former West Virginia Maneuver Area. This two million acre Maneuver Area was utilized during World War II by the Department of the Army to train troops in various aspects of mountain warfare. A portion of the Maneuver Area included an impact area for heavy artillery and mortar practice ranges, a portion of which lies in the Dolly Sods Region. During 1997 & 1998 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) undertook unexploded ordnance (UXO) removal actions to protect human health, safety and the environment. Under this USACE removal action all known trails and campsites within the Dolly Sods Region (Dolly Sods North, Dolly Sods Wilderness, and Dolly Sods Scenic Area) were cleared of UXO. The Environmental and Remediation Section of the Huntington District of the USACE is currently conducting the second five-year review of the 1997-98 removal action to determine if the removal is still protective of human health and the environment. West Virginia Water Research Institute's project provides GIS support to the USACE for the development of the five-year recurring CERCLA review and will include an update and revision of the existing Dolly Sods GIS database to accurately document current trail and campsite conditions, recent UXO finds, and other pertinent project information.

The first review of the UXO removal action occurred in 2003-2004 when stakeholders and community members were surveyed, relevant documentation and data were reviewed, an assessment of site conditions was conducted and a GIS database was established. This GIS database will be updated to include collection of spatial data from hard copy information and through site visits to each hiking trail in Dolly Sods. Parameters such as trail conditions, trail markings, trail use, hiking difficulty, off-trail campsites, off-trail paths, erosion concerns, hazard sign placement and geo-caching sites will be recorded. This information will be incorporated into the project GIS database along with historic and background images and files.

The USACE will conduct user surveys to determine the community's knowledge of the safety hazards at the site. The results of these surveys will be incorporated into the GIS database which will help to determine the effectiveness of the ongoing USACE public awareness program.