

Wilderness Management, Wilderness Study Areas, and Roadless Management

Key Message:

Wilderness is an important management emphasis on the Superior National Forest and in the area surrounding northern Minnesota. While roadless areas and wilderness share some characteristics, there are some important aspects to understand about how they play into forest plan revision.

Wilderness Management: *The Revised Plan carries forward, without change, the existing management direction for the BWCA Wilderness. The 1986 Forest Plan was amended in 1993 to update management direction for the BWCAW. There was no overwhelming need to change that updated direction. The Revised Plan did make technical changes to correct errors in the mapping of management areas in the BWCAW. These were not changes in management, as we were already managing the BWCAW according to these changes for a long time. The changes in the mapping of motor/non-motor areas were brought about through motor phase-outs and motor restrictions resulting from the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act and the 1998 Transportation Equity Act.*

Wilderness Study Areas: *During plan revision, the Forest Service is required to conduct an inventory of roadless areas for potential recommendation as wilderness study areas. Only Congress can actually designate Wilderness. The Superior and Chippewa NFs conducted inventories based upon the direction in the Forest Service Handbook, resulting in 30 areas (60,163 acres) on the Superior, and 2 areas (6,213 acres) on the Chippewa meeting the inventory criteria. All areas identified in the 2000 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (also called RARE II Areas) were also inventoried, and only parts of 8 areas on the Superior still met the criteria of the Forest Service Handbook. Over 14,600 acres of the original RARE II areas were added to the added to the BWCAW by the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act.*

The Revised Plan identifies no additional areas to be recommended for Wilderness Study, because they did not add significantly to wilderness opportunities. Although these areas had the character of being essentially roadless, they did not have attributes that would justify recommendation for wilderness study by Congress. Within and adjacent to northern Minnesota, over 2.39 million acres (more than 3,700 square miles) are already being managed for wilderness values.

A large number of comments on the Draft EIS and Proposed Plan concerned potential wilderness and many comments mixed the roadless issues with potential wilderness.

Roadless Conservation Rule Areas: *In January of 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule was enacted. It generally prohibited road construction and timber harvest within areas identified in the Roadless Rule Final EIS. The Superior had 13 areas (61,456 acres) and the Chippewa had 3 islands (77 acres) identified in the*

roadless rule. The Forest Service was legally enjoined from implementing the rule. As of this writing, a new proposed Roadless Rule is out for public comment. The Revised Plan allocates these areas to various management areas.

The Plan:

- *Carries forward BWCAW management direction, without change, from the amended 1986 Forest Plan.*
- *Makes technical corrections to Management Area mapping in the BWCAW to account for legal changes to motor/non-motor lakes.*
- *Allocates the 3 RARE II, RACR areas on the Chippewa to Unique Biological MA and General Forest MA. None of the 77 acres are in the suitable timber base.*
- *Allocates the 13 RARE II, RACR areas on the Superior to various MA's including General Forest, General Forest-Longer Rotation, Candidate RNA, Semi-primitive motorized, and Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape MAs. There is a mix of both suitable and non-suitable for timber management.*
- *Allocates 1 of the 2 inventoried areas on the Chippewa NF to Unique Biological MA (non-suitable for timber mgt), and the other to Riparian Emphasis MA (some acres suitable for timber mgmt).*
- *Allocates the 30 inventoried areas on the Superior NF to various MA's. Those areas with best roadless attributes were allocated to MA's other than General Forest or General Forest-Longer Rotation.*
- *Provides protection for unique ecological areas through allocation to Unique Biological MAs and Candidate RNA MAs.*
- *Considers PL 95-494 language in providing for additional areas outside the BWCAW, where recreation use is allowed under rules that are less restrictive than those within the Wilderness.*

Criteria for roadless inventory is located in the Forest Service Handbook, 1909.12, Chapter 7 and in advice in the Regional Forester memo of August 13, 1997 titled "Roadless Area Inventory for Forest Plan Revision". The criteria in the FSH generally are as follows:

Vegetation:	No more than 20 percent of the area harvested in the past 10 years.
Setting/Solitude:	At least about 2,500 acres of semi-primitive area if not adjacent to existing wilderness. No acre limit adjacent to existing wilderness.
Ownership:	At least 70 percent federal ownership. No future non-federal land access needs.
Roads:	No more than ½ mile of improved roads per 1,000 acres. No roads not under Forest Service jurisdiction.
Shape:	A manageable area without narrow, elongated, or gerrymandered boundaries.

Criteria used to evaluate the inventoried areas as to whether they should be recommended for Wilderness Study

With regard to potential wilderness areas, we looked at the capability, the availability and the need. Capability relates directly back to wilderness characteristics – natural integrity (how human activity has affected natural ecological processes), natural appearance, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Availability relates to other resource demands and constraints. Need was assessed from a biological and social perspective.

The 30 areas (over 60,000 acres) on the Superior that met the criteria for roadless inventory did not add significantly to wilderness opportunities. Although they had the character of being essentially roadless, they did not have attributes that would justify recommendation for wilderness study by Congress. The RF determined that none of these 30 areas enhanced or contributed extraordinary character to the BWCAW or national wilderness preservation system.

Several of these parcels (Big Lake, Cucumber Lake, East and West Greenstone Lakes, and an enlarged Brule Lake), although not being recommended for wilderness, provide special opportunities for the public to recreate and enjoy the land in a non-wilderness setting while still enjoying a more primitive experience. These parcels are allocated to management areas that emphasize semi-primitive non-motorized recreation or semiprimitive motorized recreation. They will provide options for those that cannot use, or do not want to use the BWCA Wilderness, yet still seek a more primitive, backcountry experience. This also helps to fulfill Section 18 of the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act, which requires that the Forest Service consider the need to provide additional areas outside the BWCA Wilderness where water travel is allowed under rules that are less restrictive than those within the Wilderness.

Any proposed site-specific projects within an inventoried area will require an environmental analysis which considers effects of the project proposal on the roadless characteristics in the area. The effects analysis must consider the entire inventoried area, not just the project area. (FS Regional Forester, August 13, 1997 direction to Forest Supervisors)

The Superior has 61,456 acres that are included in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR). The proposed Roadless Rule is currently available for public comment. It is not known if or how the rule may change when it is issued in its final form.