

## Recreation Facility Strategy on Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

---

### Questions and Answers

#### **What is Recreation Site Analysis (RSA) and the Recreation Facility Strategy (RFS)?**

Recreation Site Analysis is a comprehensive analysis of the Forest's developed recreation sites. Forest recreation specialists inventoried and assessed 193 recreation sites, campgrounds, picnic grounds, trailheads, boat landings, beaches, and interpretive sites to determine the sites' values in contributing to recreation demand and preferences, environmental integrity, and the economic vitality of the forest and its communities.

The purpose of RSA was to evaluate how the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest can best provide quality and sustainable recreation opportunities in the long-run, given current and projected financial and staffing constraints as well as existing and projected visitor demands. The Forest looked at the type of recreation sites and amenities offered across the landscape of northern Wisconsin (state, county, town and private) to identify gaps or overlaps in recreation opportunities.

Developed site benefits and costs were evaluated in consideration of the effects on the rest of the recreation programs, such as Wilderness and heritage program management, administration of outfitter/guide, motor vehicle use, visitor information and other recreation services.

The result of this analysis is the 5-year Recreation Facility Strategy that the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest will prioritize investments, as well as pursue changes in operations or maintenance of developed recreation sites and facilities. The strategy is intended to reduce operations and maintenance costs and maximize public benefits, while balancing social, economic, and environmental factors.

#### **How was public feedback incorporated into the final Recreation Facility Strategy?**

Public feedback was critical to ensuring the final RFS would incorporate the interests of our visitors and partners. Early outreach and communication efforts in the fall of 2017 brought to light the most significant public concerns regarding recreation activities and sites that they value. As a result, key adjustments were made to the proposed management actions that were sent out for public comment in the fall of 2018.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest solicited comments from October 15-December 15, 2018. The feedback received was taken into consideration in finalizing the 5-year Recreation Facility Strategy. Public involvement was key to finalizing the RFS and this interaction resulted in the minor adjustment of action items.

#### **What is the difference between operating vs. maintenance costs?**

Operating costs include toilet cleaning, trash pickup, patrols, and other daily duties. Maintenance costs include repairing doors, re-roofing buildings, grading/gravelling parking areas, etc.

**How much will the implementation of RFS reduce the operations and maintenance costs of the developed recreation program on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest?**

If all changes are made, the anticipated cost savings for operations and maintenance would be about \$300,000 per year Forest-wide, or a reduction of about 25 percent from current costs.

**Will those reductions in operation and maintenance costs be adequate to sustain the program?**

The projected savings of 25-percent of annual operations and maintenance costs will not fully compensate for the overall budget challenges the Forest has faced over the last decade in the recreation program.

However, these changes, as well as other cost saving measures the Forest is working on within the recreation program, will allow us to operate and maintain our recreation areas to standards providing a positive user experience.

More significant changes and/or reductions in developed recreation site services were initially discussed however, not recommended.

The recreation program includes more than just developed recreation sites. Without these important changes the current and future projected costs of the developed recreation program will prevent the Forest from addressing other important program components, in particular, motorized trails, non-motorized trails, wilderness, dispersed recreation, interpretive programming and special uses.

**How much will implementation of the RSF actions cost the Forest?**

The Forest estimated that full implementation costs over the next five years will be approximately \$1,389,000. This includes improvements, site conversions to general forest and other actions identified in the RFS. Funding for projects will come from fee dollars collected, annual appropriations and other, internal and external, funding sources. Additional funding sources are being pursued and/or will be needed.

**Could actions identified in the Recreation Facility Strategy shift as a result of changed conditions or additional public/partner engagement?**

All actions in the RFS are proposals requiring implementation actions. The forest expects to begin implementing proposals from the 5-year Recreation Facility Strategy during the 2019 recreation season. Some actions may require a level of environmental analysis through the National Environmental Policy Act. Proposed management actions may shift slightly as a result of continued public input and changing conditions, but projected agency funding and resources will still constrain the total number of sites and services the Forest Service can provide into the future.

Annually, the Forest will review and prioritize the actions identified in the Recreation Facility Strategy. The Forest plans to share the list of priorities each year.

**The draft proposed management actions included the statement “a partner will be pursued” for several sites. What is the plan for those sites in the RFS?**

The Forest welcomes partner engagement at all of our recreation sites. We have identified some unique sites through RSA that would be opportunities for a partner to operate and maintain. If partners are not found, the Forest will consider the trade-offs of investing in the site or converting the site to a general forest area.

Incorporating sustainability into recreation program management requires us to make choices about what to say “yes” and “no” to. We often find that it’s easy to say “yes,” particularly when a partner has funding to support a project. But having funding does not mean that the project contributes to sustainability or the overall goals of the recreation program.

**When might changes called for in the Final RFS be made to recreation sites?**

All actions in this RFS are proposals requiring implementation actions. The Forest expects to begin implementing proposals from the 5-year Recreation Facility Strategy during the 2019 recreation season. Some actions may require a level of environmental analysis through the National Environmental Policy Act. Other actions that do not constitute ground disturbing actions may be implemented immediately or as soon as funding and capacity to do so is available.

**When will Stockfarm Bridge and Smith Rapids campgrounds be available for camping?**

The Forest will be reopening the Stockfarm Bridge and Smith Rapids campgrounds in 2019 once safety and health standards are met. These campgrounds have been closed since 2015, and little to no maintenance has occurred since then. The Forest will conduct an assessment and prioritize work to reopen the areas. An announcement will be made once that work is complete, and the campgrounds are ready to be opened.

**What does the wording “recreation use fee would increase or current camping fee would increase” mean?**

The Forest implemented fee changes in 2018 after approval from the Recreation Resource Advisory Committee. The Forest plans to again propose fee changes through the RRAC (which will include public engagement) as the 5-year RFS is implemented. These fee proposals will be associated with implementation actions such as campgrounds with new amenities (electric sites, new double or group sites) or day use sites, should national direction for recreation use fees change from the current standard \$5.00 fee.

**Are any sites going to be closed or be decommissioned?**

The Forest is planning to convert 23 sites to general forest area as infrastructure is removed. The access to these sites will be maintained through roads listed as open on the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

The removal of infrastructure and site conversions will occur as resources and funding are available. These are sites that typically have low visitation and a higher operation and maintenance cost.

**What does the wording “convert back to general forest areas” mean?**

General forest areas are anywhere in the Forest open to the public where there is no active recreation management such as hazard tree removal, regular trash collections, routine patrols or other restrictions. These areas are typically also void of improvements like fire rings, toilets and picnic tables.

**What does the wording “alternative funding sources as available” mean?**

The Forest may have the capability to supplement recreation program funding through alternative, internal & external funding sources. The recreation sites with proposed management actions that include this language will happen only if alternative funding sources were to become available or after completion of proposed actions in 5-year RFS.

**Is the draft Recreation Facility Strategy consistent with the Forest Plan?**

The actions in the Recreation Facility Strategy are consistent with the Framework for Sustainable Recreation and the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet Land and Resource Management Plan. The Forest Plan guidance pertaining to the Recreation Facility Strategy is below. The 5-year Recreation Facility Strategy will provide more detailed information as the Forest builds a sustainable recreation program, balancing economic, social, and environmental benefits, and meeting public needs within fiscal constraints.

## Forest Plan Guidance pertaining to Recreation Facilities Strategy

Goal 2.1 – Recreation Opportunities: Maintain or enhance the diversity and quality of recreation experiences within acceptable limits of change to ecosystem stability and condition.

- Recreation facility rehabilitation should be undertaken in the following priority: (1) Correct health and safety problems; (2) Protect the environment; (3) Improve accessibility; (4) Changing camp unit design for efficient administration; and (5) Refurbish worn facilities.
- Utilize the following criteria when evaluating developed sites for closure: (1) High unit operating costs; (2) High deferred maintenance costs; (3) Less than 25% of practical maximum capacity use within two preceding years; (4) Public concerns; (5) Able to satisfy demand at alternative locations; (6) Resource damage; and (7) strategic change to meet regional tourism goals and meet customer demand.
- Improve some boat landings to minimize resource impacts or improve customer convenience where fully surfaced access roads (graveled, paved, or concrete) already exist.

## Lands Guideline

- Do not encumber land available for exchange with Forest Service capital improvements that compromise land exchange opportunities (i.e., buildings, developed recreation facilities, dams, and new roads).