

Chapter I - Purpose and Need and Public Involvement

Purpose and Need for Action

This Final Environmental Impact Statement has been prepared to document the revision of the Huron-Manistee National Forests' Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976. The Forest Plan was approved in 1986 and amended 25 times.

Since 1986, the Huron-Manistee National Forests have successfully implemented site-specific projects with management direction provided in the Forest Plan, as amended. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 requires Forest Plans be revised at least every 15 years.

- The Huron-Manistee National Forests began this process by soliciting input from the public, employees, other government agencies and tribal governments to determine areas of the Forest Plan that needed to be changed. An interdisciplinary team reviewed the list of comments and then developed a list of potential need-for-change items. The Huron-Manistee National Forests' Leadership Team reviewed the proposed changes and recommended the proposal in the Need for Change document that was published in September 2003.
- The three Michigan National Forests (Hiawatha, Huron-Manistee and Ottawa) published a joint Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on September 18, 2003. The Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Huron-Manistee National Forests (2003) indicated that much of the information and direction in the Huron-Manistee National Forests' 1986 Forest Plan, as amended, was still appropriate and would be carried forward into the revised Forest Plan with little or no change.

The following indicators direct the need to revise the Forest Plan:

- **When conditions of the land or demands from the public have changed significantly.** There have been no significant catastrophic changes to forest landscapes since the Forest Plan was written (Huron-Manistee National Forests, Analysis of the Current Management Situation 2003). However, public demand for forest products and services has changed. Public interest in management of the national forests has increased since 1986. Comments received from the public helped identify the need-for-change topics published in the Huron-Manistee National Forests' Notice of Intent.

Conditions of the land or demands from the public that have changed significantly since 1986 include:

- The demand for semiprimitive recreation, both motorized and nonmotorized, has increased.

- **When changes in Agency policies, goals or objectives have a significant effect on Forest programs.** The Agency goals and objectives, federal laws and initiatives, and national guidance for strategic plans and programs have changed since 1986 and must be incorporated into the Forest Plan. The United States Department of Agriculture-Forest Service's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2004-2008 explains the Forest Service's many areas of responsibility, as captured in the Agency's mission statement: "The mission of the United States Department of Agriculture-Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." Six goals are identified in the Strategic Plan:
 - 1) Reduce the risk from catastrophic wildland fire.
 - 2) Reduce the impacts from invasive species.
 - 3) Provide outdoor recreation opportunities.
 - 4) Help meet energy resource needs.
 - 5) Improve watershed condition.
 - 6) Perform other mission-related work in addition to that which supports the agency goals.

Changes in Agency policies, goals or objectives having a significant effect on Huron-Manistee National Forests' programs include:

- The Forests recognized the need to incorporate fire and fuels management considerations, including the National Fire Plan and the recently enacted Healthy Forest Restoration Act into the Forest Plan revision process.
 - The Forests recognized the need to incorporate measures to control non-native invasive species during the Forest Plan revision process.
 - The Forests recognized the need to incorporate regulatory requirements under the Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act into the Forest Plan revision process.
 - The Forests recognized the need to update aquatic Standards and Guidelines based on new direction.
- **When an interdisciplinary team recommends a revision as the result of a monitoring and evaluation process.** Specialists reviewed data, information, and monitoring and evaluation reports to prepare assessments of forest resources, then recommended changes to the Forest Plan. Evaluations were completed for the following resources: aquatic, fire ecology, heritage, botanical, recreation, socio-economic, soil, transportation, vegetation, visual quality, Wild and Scenic Rivers and wildlife.

Species Viability Evaluations revealed a need for the following changes to the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended:

- There is a need to have large-scale openings of grassland, prairie, savannah and oak-pine barrens of approximately 500 acres in size in up to 10 percent of the sandy hills and plains landtype associations.
- **When new information suggests that a revision is necessary.** Land acquisitions and exchanges have changed ownership patterns of National Forest System lands on the Huron-Manistee National Forests. New scientific information on topics, such as ecological information, species viability, soils, insects and diseases and water resources, has become available. This new information will be used to revise Standards and Guidelines and goals and objectives in the Forest Plan. New technology has also helped identify needed changes to the Forest Plan.

New information suggesting a change is needed include:

- Utilizing the most current scientific information, the Species Viability Evaluations revealed a need for change.
- The Scenery Management System represents the most up-to-date assessment tool available to identify important landscapes and prioritize the scenic value they represent to the public. The Scenery Management System replaces the Visual Quality Objective methodology, and is tied to landtype associations. The Scenery Management System assists the Forests in identifying and stratifying landscapes into scenic integrity classes. It identifies visual concerns in an area not just by number of users, but type of use and level of user-expressed concern, and measures changes to landscapes based on a desired future condition instead of the level of modification of the view.
- New information and evaluations revealed a need to evaluate the potential for new Research Natural Areas.
- The Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team issued a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, dated January 12, 2002, to amend the 1985 Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Plan. This letter identified the need for additional habitat and larger opening sizes for the Kirtland's warbler.

Decisions to be Made in the Forest Plan

The National Forest Management Act provides direction for the six decisions made in a Forest Plan. The 1982 Forest Planning Rules were used for Forest Plan revision.

The six Forest Plan decisions are:

1. **Forest-wide multiple use goals and objectives** [36 CFR 219.11 (b)]. A goal describes a desired condition of the land to be achieved in the future. An objective is a concise, time-specific statement of measurable, planned results that responds to pre-established goals.

2. **Forest-wide management requirements** (36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27). The Forest Plan establishes forest-wide management requirements in the form of Standards and Guidelines which establish the “bounds” or “rules” which are applied to management practices designed to achieve the Forest Plan’s goals and objectives.
3. **Management area direction** (36 CFR 219.11). Management areas are “subdivisions” of the forest with their own sets of goals, objectives, desired conditions, and Standards and Guidelines.
4. **Determining Lands Suited for Timber Management and the Allowable Sale Quantity** (36 CFR 219.14 and 36 CFR 219.16). Land Suitability: Forest lands are analyzed for suitability for timber management. Allowable Sale Quantity: The maximum level of timber that may be harvested from suited lands covered by the Forest Plan.
5. **Monitoring and evaluation requirements** [36 CFR 219.11 (d)]. Monitoring and evaluation determines the progress in meeting Forest Plan direction.
6. **Recommendations for Wilderness Areas or Wild and Scenic Rivers.** The Forest Service makes recommendations to Congress regarding designation of lands as wilderness areas [36 CFR 219.17 (a) or Wild and Scenic Rivers 16 USC 1271-1287, 36 CFR 297 and 47 FR 36454].

Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to revise the 1986 Huron-Manistee National Forests’ Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). In conjunction with Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks, the revised Forest Plan would establish direction for managing natural resources on National Forest System land for the next 10 to 15 years.

The Huron-Manistee National Forests' revised Forest Plan will:

- Meet the objectives of federal law and regulations.
- Respond to the public’s needs and desires.
- Manage ecosystems to provide for long-term sustainability.

The Notice of Intent proposed the following changes to the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended:

- **Sustaining Ecosystems, Conditions, and Uses**
 - Increase ruffed grouse emphasis areas.
 - Increase Proposed Candidate Research Natural Areas.
 - Decrease sandy hill and plains management areas.
 - Decrease deer and wildlife emphasis areas.

- Establish desired conditions, goals, and objectives for aquatic and riparian resources, undesirable invasive species, fire and hazardous fuels management, and oil and gas resources.
 - Update the desired conditions, goals and objectives for vegetation, wildlife, fish, rare plants, soils and semiprimitive recreation areas.
 - Manage according to the Eastern Region Regional Forest's Sensitive Species Framework.
 - Restore and maintain large-scale openings for grassland, prairie, savannah and oak-pine barrens up to approximately 10 percent of the sandy hills and plains land type associations, approximately 58,600 acres. The size of openings may be up to approximately 500 acres.
 - Restore Kirtland's warbler nesting habitat area up to approximately 550 acres in size.
 - Protect resource values by managing landforms such as coastal plain marshes, bogs, swales, fens and mesic prairies consistent with ecological processes.
 - Improve habitat conditions for species such as: American ginseng, northern goshawk, red-shouldered hawk, red headed woodpecker, Eastern massasauga rattlesnake, cerulean warbler and common loon.
 - Change Nordhouse Dunes North Semiprimitive Area to a grouse emphasis area.
 - Assess and revise management indicator species and monitoring requirements.
 - Recalculate the long-term sustained yield. Add an objective/outcome for timber derived from lands classified as unsuited for timber production.
 - Incorporate the aquatics ecological classification and inventory system into the desired conditions, goals and objectives for aquatics.
 - Categorize lakes in the desired conditions, goals and objectives in terms of baseline trophic status and morphological/hydrological sensitivity.
 - Incorporate the terms and conditions of applicable Federal Energy Regulatory Commission license orders as Standards and Guidelines.
 - Update guidelines on vegetation management in riparian areas to better mimic natural disturbance regimes.
- **Recreation, Semiprimitive Areas and Access**
 - Increase semiprimitive areas.
 - Increase rural areas.
 - Implement the National Scenery Management System.
 - Update Wild and Scenic River boundaries for the Au Sable, Pine and White Rivers.
 - Drop the Little Muskegon and Muskegon Rivers from further study due to limited federal ownership and changes in condition due to development.
 - **Wildland Fire and Fuels Management**
 - Add goals, objectives, and desired conditions.
 - Incorporate the National Fire Plan and the Huron-Manistee National Forests' Fire Management Plan.
 - Identify and address fire risks.
 - Identify standards and effectiveness monitoring of the fuels management program.

- **Minerals**
 - Document the reasonable foreseeable oil and gas development scenario for the next 10 to 15 years.
 - Identify National Forest System lands that may be considered available for leasing and, if available, under what conditions and those lands not available for leasing.

Public Involvement

The Huron-Manistee National Forests have involved citizens and federal, tribal, state and local government agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations throughout the revision process. Outreach efforts have included newsletters, news releases, open houses, informational meetings, and Internet postings.

Initial Outreach:

Efforts to involve the public began in 1996 when Forest Plan revision efforts were initiated on the Huron-Manistee National Forests. Comments received in 1996 were reviewed and analyzed, under contract with Michigan State University staff. After three years of inactivity due to Congressional mandate, Forest Plan revision activities resumed in 2001. In addition to working with Forest Service resource specialists, the three National Forests in Michigan, Huron-Manistee, Hiawatha and Ottawa, collaborated in efforts to contact legislators, government and tribal officials, and public organizations regarding Forest Plan revision efforts. Informational packets were mailed to individuals, organizations and government agencies in August 2002. These packets included informational brochures and a scoping letter which explained the revision process, timelines and an invitation to become involved in these activities. Additionally, listening sessions were held throughout Michigan to receive comments prior to issuance of the Notice of Intent.

Analysis of the Management Situation:

A critical step undertaken during the Forest Planning process involved reviewing the present management situation to assess how well the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended has worked. Some questions asked included:

- What has been successfully implemented?
- What has been unsuccessful?
- What has changed since the time the Forest Plan was developed?
- Must those changes be addressed now?
- What did the Forest Plan project, and how accurate were the projections?
- What is the capability of the Huron-Manistee National Forests to provide goods, services and other values?

To address these questions and establish the basis for future planning, regulations to implement the National Forest Management Act require an Analysis of the Management Situation. The Analysis of the Management Situation identified the need for changes to the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended. The maximum production benchmarks were identified and the sustainability of the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended was assessed. Species Viability Evaluations were completed. The Analysis of the Management Situation established the range of possible alternatives and information necessary to assess the need for changes to the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended. The Huron-Manistee National Forests completed the Analysis of the Management Situation in September 2003.

Need for Change Document:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests solicited comments from the public, employees, other government agencies and tribal governments to determine areas of the Forest Plan that needed changing. An interdisciplinary team, comprised of Huron-Manistee National Forests' employees, reviewed the comments and the proposed changes, then developed a list of potential need-for-change issues. The Huron-Manistee National Forests' Leadership Team reviewed the proposed changes and recommended the proposal as published in the Need for Change document, dated September 18, 2003.

Notice of Intent:

The three Michigan National Forests published a joint Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on September 18, 2003. The Notice of Intent indicated that much of the information and direction provided in the Huron-Manistee National Forests' 1986 Forest Plan, as amended was still appropriate and would be carried forward into the revised Forest Plan with little or no change.

Public Outreach:

During the 60-day public comment period following issuance of the Notice of Intent, 10 public meetings were held throughout Michigan to update citizens on the revision process and hear comments. Press releases and letters were distributed to inform citizens of upcoming meetings and methods to participate. Following publication of the Notice of Intent, informational meetings and hearings were held in each of the Ranger District locations. Additionally, the three National Forests in Michigan held joint public meetings in several of the larger communities in the Lower Peninsula. Internet mailboxes were established to accept comments during the revision process.

Comments:

During the Notice of Intent comment period, the Huron-Manistee National Forests accepted comments concerning the proposed changes. Citizens, agencies and interest groups submitted their comments by mail, e-mail, faxes and phone calls and during public meetings.

Issue Development:

Following the 60-day public comment period on the Notice of Intent, comments were analyzed by experts from the USDA-Forest Service Content Analysis Team. The Huron-Manistee National Forests' Interdisciplinary Team used this information to identify significant issues and the range of alternatives as presented in this Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Newsletters:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests distributed Forest Plan Revision Newsletters to over 1,200 citizens, employees, Tribal governments, other governmental agencies, and public and private organizations throughout the revision process; June 2003, April 2004 and August 2004.

Web Site:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests maintained a Forest Plan Revision website at www.fs.fed.us/r9/hmnf/pages/planning.htm. The website contained the Notice of Intent, resource assessments, monitoring and evaluation reports, the summary of public comments, old-growth and management area maps, a glossary and list of acronyms, newsletters, the Proposed Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement and other relevant information.

Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests accepted comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and the Proposed Forest Plan during a 90-day public comment period which started March 18, 2005. Comments were analyzed and changes were incorporated into this Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Revised Forest Plan. The selected Forest Plan Revision alternative is published in the Record of Decision.

Significant Issues

Many of the topics proposed for change, as stated above, were incorporated in the revised Forest Plan. These topics reflect regulation changes; changes in Agency policies, goals or objectives; federal laws and initiatives; and national guidance.

Issues are defined as points of discussion, debate, or dispute about environmental effects of the Proposed Action. Significant issues are used to formulate the range of alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures or analyze environmental effects. Issues are "significant" because of the extent of their geographic distribution, the duration of their effects or the degree of uncertainty about effects on the human environment.

Issues determined to be significant are:

- Something within the scope of the purpose and need for action.

- Something within the Forests' authority to address.
- Something not already addressed by law, regulation or agency policy.
- Something relevant to the decisions being made.
- Something having sufficient scientific data and information available to conduct a meaningful analysis and make a reasoned decision.
- Something related to Forest Plan direction, not implementation.

Five significant issues were identified in this Final Environmental Impact Statement:

- Management for wildlife and rare plants.
- Timber management.
- Management of riparian and aquatic resources.
- Recreation, semiprimitive areas and access.
- Wildland fire and fuels management.

Following is an explanation of each issue, a description of how the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended, addresses the issue, a summary of public comments and the range of alternatives developed to respond to these issues. Evaluation criteria, or indicators, were identified to measure the Forests' response to each issue in each alternative were identified. These indicators were selected to ensure an adequate range of alternatives was evaluated during analysis.

Proposed Need for Change - Wildlife and Rare Plants:

In response to the Forests' proposed changes to management for wildlife and rare plants, the public identified the following issue: The amount, distribution and types of habitat, such as early successional versus late successional, necessary to maintain minimum viability of all native and desirable non-native species while providing other wildlife resources to benefit social, economic and ecological systems.

Public Response to the Notice of Intent Proposed Change:

Many comments were received that address this issue, including the desire to:

- Maintain a variety of diverse forested ecosystem types and manage for a diversity of species and communities.
- Manage certain areas to emphasize game species, such as white-tailed deer and grouse.
- Designate or manage areas for a variety of species, not individual species.
- Ensure viable populations of threatened, endangered, sensitive and rare species through various management approaches and consider reintroductions of extirpated species.
- Reduce restrictions on human activities in habitats protected for threatened, endangered, sensitive and rare species.
- Create additional early successional forest to benefit species dependent on this habitat.
- Reduce artificially high levels of early successional habitat, such as aspen.
- Expand the amount of northern hardwoods on the Forests.
- Increase old growth for biodiversity, habitat, ecosystem and tourist related reasons.

- Decrease old growth to enhance habitat, fire and fuels, insect and disease, environmental management, for example, carbon assimilation, and recreational management.

Evaluation Criteria:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests used the following indicators to evaluate the species viability issue and develop variations between the alternatives:

- Age of stand entry.
- Acres of deer, grouse and wildlife emphasis areas.
- Acres of Kirtland's warbler management.
- Acres of aspen/paper birch early successional habitat.
- Mix of forest types under management.
- Acres of barrens, savannahs and prairies managed.
- Acres of shrub/scrub managed.

Proposed Need for Change - Timber Management:

In response to the Forests' proposed changes to management for timber, the public identified the following issue: What mix of timber products, by timber type, will be produced? How does non-chargeable volume impact the available timber supply?

Public Response to the Notice of Intent Proposed Change:

Opinions varied about how the Forests' vegetation should best be managed. A range of opinions was received on the mix of timber products by timber type that should be produced on the Huron-Manistee National Forests. Comments ranged from a desire to emphasize more early seral vegetation to those emphasizing older-aged late seral forest. Components of this issue include the amount and distribution of aspen and jack pine, old growth, late seral species and determining the ecological conditions needed for species viability.

Evaluation Criteria:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests used the following indicators to evaluate the vegetation management issue and develop variations between the alternatives:

- Species composition, size structure and objectives.
- Mix of forest types under management.
- The chargeable and non-chargeable timber volumes.

Proposed Need for Change - Riparian and Aquatic Resources:

In response to the Forests' proposed changes to management of riparian and aquatic resources, the public identified the following issue: The extent to which riparian zones are managed for early successional habitat.

Public Response to the Notice of Intent Proposed Change:

Comments generally supported watershed protection. Some requested timber harvest, mineral exploration, oil and gas development and Off-Highway Vehicles and other heavy recreational uses, such as canoe liveries, be restricted to protect watershed values. Others requested watershed and stream corridor management policies be revised to allow for management of early successional habitat and other resource values in riparian areas.

Evaluation Criteria:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests used the following to evaluate the riparian and aquatic resource management issue and to develop variations between alternatives:

- Acres of riparian habitat in early successional stage.

Proposed Need for Change - Recreation, Semiprimitive Areas and Access:

In response to the Forests' proposed changes in recreation management, the public identified the following issue: How many acres will be designated in the semiprimitive motorized and semiprimitive nonmotorized management areas?

Public Response to the Notice of Intent Proposed Change:

Comments on this issue were diverse, with suggestions for either increasing or decreasing semiprimitive motorized or nonmotorized areas, backcountry or other use allocations. Others suggested improving or increasing developed recreation facilities, increasing motorized recreation opportunities and increasing restrictions on motorized recreation. Others emphasized the need to decrease roads and designate separate trails for different uses. Still others desire to improve visual quality along travel routes through logging restrictions.

Evaluation Criteria:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests used the following to evaluate the recreation, semiprimitive areas, and access management issue and to develop variations between alternatives:

- Acres of semiprimitive motorized and nonmotorized areas.

Proposed Need for Change - Wildland Fire and Fuels Management:

In response to the Forests' proposed changes to wildland fire and fuels management, the public identified the following issue: Whether the management activities proposed for the Huron-Manistee National Forests are adequate and appropriate to maintain the biological integrity of fire-dependent ecosystems, provide for public safety, and protect public property from wildfire.

Due to the highly fragmented land ownership pattern, a considerable portion of the Huron-Manistee National Forests lies within a rural-urban interface. The Forests contain large areas of fire-dependent ecosystems with aging forests, increasing hazardous fuels and, at times, dry conditions. This situation may place communities, private landowners, and natural resources at risk from large-scale wildfire. The 1986 Forest Plan, as amended contains only general guidance on fire and fuels management.

Public Response to the Notice of Intent Proposed Change:

Those who commented on this issue generally recognized the importance of fire in some ecosystems. Some suggested the use of prescribed fire to ensure continuation of fire-dependent communities, while others favored increased thinning, prescribed burning or both. Many suggested concentrating fuel reduction activities in urban interface areas and educating the public. Other commenters suggested using the frequency of historic disturbance regimes to plan disturbances for optimal social and environmental benefit.

Evaluation Criteria:

The Huron-Manistee National Forests used the following to evaluate the wildland fire and fuels management issue and to develop variations between alternatives:

- Fuels treatment acres.
- Fuelbreak creation acres.
- Mix of forest types under management.
- Acres of prairies, savannahs and barrens.
- Age of stand entry.

Nonsignificant Issues

Regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act developed by the Council on Environmental Quality allow forests to "...identify and eliminate from detailed study those issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)." The Huron-Manistee National Forests received comments on many issues during the comment period which fell outside the definition of what was considered significant. These "non-significant issues" may be addressed through other means and were either not considered in the analysis or were not used to develop alternatives or mitigation measures. Issues considered nonsignificant were:

- Outside the scope of the proposed action or beyond the authority or mission of the Forest Service.
- Already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan or other higher level decisions.
- Irrelevant to the decision to be made.
- Conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence.

- Something having insufficient scientific data and information available to conduct a meaningful analysis and make a reasoned decision.
- Not related to Forest Plan direction, but rather how the Forest Plan will be implemented.
- A comment, opinion, or position statement.

Relevant Issues Not Considered in Detail

Old Growth:

Background/Current Direction:

The 1986 Forest Plan, as amended, allocated approximately 173,000 acres to old growth. Following extensive public involvement, Forest Plan Amendment 24 was issued in 2003. This amendment defines the Standards and Guidelines for old-growth management.

Subsequent to amending the Forest Plan in 2003, the Huron-Manistee National Forests did not identify changes to the old-growth direction in the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended.

Timber Output:

Background/Current Direction:

The National Forest Management Act requires that projected timber outputs be reviewed and evaluated during Forest Plan revision. Timber output is directly related to the outcomes derived as a result of moving toward the desired condition in any management area, as well as the amount of suited acres available.

The 1986 Forest Plan, as amended, identified a maximum allowable sale quantity of 82.2 million board feet per year for the first decade.

The allowable sale quantity is an outcome of vegetation management activities rather than an objective. The Huron-Manistee National Forests recalculated the allowable sale quantity using updated volume information.