3.15 Economics

3.15.1 Summary

The cost of implementing and maintaining the changes in ATV trails and the costs of decommissioning unneeded roads was analyzed to determine the feasibility of implementing each Alternative given present and anticipated budgets. Law enforcement costs would not vary by Alternative. There would be a minor change in maintenance costs as the result of a decision on any of the action Alternatives. Road decommissioning costs vary substantially by Alternative, but this cost would be measured out over time and would not substantially impact the SNF road budget on an annual basis. However, the amount of time necessary to implement road decommissioning would vary by Alternative. There would not be substantial cumulative effects to the cost for implementing each Alternative since decisions made by State and County land managers do not substantially affect Forest Service expenditures.

3.15.2 Introduction

The designation of routes on which OHVs can travel and the disposition of unclassified roads are relevant to the budget of the Superior National Forest. The cost of administering OHV use was analyzed to determine the feasibility of implementing each Alternative given present and anticipated budgets.

3.15.3 Analysis Methods

The cost for the Forest Service to implement the Forest-wide Travel Management project is dependent on the number of miles of road and trail added to the system and the number of miles of road decommissioned under each Alternative. These costs include new construction or upgrading, decommissioning, annual maintenance costs and law enforcement. Accordingly, the indicators used are as follows:

Indicator 1: <u>ATV Trail construction and maintenance and road upgrade and decommissioning costs.</u>

Estimated average costs:

- OHV Trail maintenance: $128/mile per year
  (This cost may be defrayed by funds from the Minnesota Grant-In-Aid program for OHV trail maintenance and by work completed by volunteer groups)
- OHV Trail new construction: $2,500 per mile.
- Conversion of snowmobile trail to ATV trail: $550 per mile (estimate). This would be to harden portion of trail to accommodate ATV use.
- Upgrade of OML 1 to OML 2 Road: $550 per mile.
- Road decommissioning: Costs range from $750 to $3,500 per mile. The reason for this wide range in costs is due to the nature of the decommissioning needed. In some areas, such as visually sensitive areas along major travel routes, extensive work is done to obliterate the road, including bringing in soil, boulders and doing landscaping. In other areas, decommissioning can be

accomplished by effectively blocking the roadway to use for a considerable distance, and natural re-vegetation would occur over a period of a few years.

3.15.4 Analysis Area

The analysis area for Travel Management is the area within the Superior National Forest proclamation boundary (see Figure 1-1, Vicinity Map).

3.15.5 Affected Environment

The affected environment inside the Superior National Forest proclamation boundary includes the forested and rural areas of northeast Minnesota and surrounding small towns such as Grand Marais, Tofte, Ely, Cook and Aurora.

Environmental Consequences

3.15.6 Direct and Indirect Effects

The estimated direct effects to the cost of administering each Alternative are listed in Table 1. The costs listed in Table 1 include the money paid to contractors to construct, decommission or maintain roads and trails.

Table 3.15-1 Trail Maintenance, Construction and Road Decommissioning Costs

	Alt. 1 No Action	Alt. 2 Mod. Proposed Action	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
ATV Trail Maintenance $128 per mile, 100% maintenance per year				
Miles of ATV trail	51	105	165	59
Annual Maintenance Cost	$6,528	$13,440	$21,120	$7,552
New ATV Trail Construction Cost $2,500 per mile				
Miles of New ATV Trail Construction	0	2.5	2.1	1.7
Construction Cost	0	$6,250	$5,250	$4.250
Snowmobile Trail Treadwork for Conversion to ATV Trail $550 average cost per mile				
Miles of Conversion	0	39	57	1
Conversion Cost	0	$21,450	$31,350	$550
Unclassified Roads Decommissioning Costs (Costs vary from $750 to $3,500 per mile depending on local conditions) Range of costs is shown to cover the range, but most decommissioning would be at lower end of scale)				
Miles of Decommissioned Road	0	157	78	188
Decommissioning Costs	0	$118,000 to $550,000	$59,000 to $273,000	$141,000 to $658,000
Upgrading from Unclassified to OML-2 $550 per mile				
Miles of upgraded road	0	56	59	52
Upgrading Cost	0	$30,800	$32,450	$28,600

There is relatively little difference among the action alternatives for trail maintenance, new trail construction, or upgrading from unclassified to OML-2 roads. Costs for conversion of snowmobile trails to ATV trails and costs for road decommissioning have greater variation by alternative. Alternative 1 has the overall lowest costs, primarily because it only reflects costs for maintaining the existing ATV trail on the Forest, because no other activities or changes are proposed. Alternative 3 has the next lowest costs primarily because it decommissions the fewest miles of road of any of the action alternatives. Conversely, it adds the most miles of road to the National Forest Road system, so road maintenance costs would likely increase under this alternative. Alternative 2 has a higher implementation cost and Alternative 4 has the highest cost because these alternatives have more miles of road to be decommissioned.

The cost of decommissioning roads is large and would constitute a large portion of the forest roads budget for any one year. However, decommissioning is expected to be carried out over several years and some may be done in association with vegetative management projects and stewardship contracts. This would serve to reduce direct costs and distribute them out over a period of several years. In the interim, roads identified for decommissioning would be posted closed to all public motor vehicle use.

Law enforcement costs are not expected to vary by alternative. Law enforcement personnel patrol roads whether or not OHVs are allowed on them and also check closed roads to ensure that the closure is enforced. The Superior National Forest has recently added two additional law enforcement officers to the staff. In addition, many of the Forest's staff are qualified as Forest Protection Officers and have training and authority for lower-level patrol and enforcement situations, including issuing citations.

3.15.7 Cumulative Effects

The area relevant for cumulative effects to costs for the Forest Service to implement the Travel Management Rule includes the area inside the Superior National Forest Proclamation boundary along with roads and trails connecting to this area. It is likely that additional decisions will be made with regard to roads and trails on the Superior National Forest in the future. The time scale for cumulative effects is 15 years, looking back 10 years into the past, and 5 years forward. This is also an appropriate time scale for cumulative effects because it allows for the most realistic prediction of reasonably foreseeable future projects.

Corrections of errors, discovery of additional unclassified roads, or changes in condition for existing roads will likely result in minor changes in road mileage and the types of uses allowed. It is possible that additional miles of ATV trail could be designated in the future. State land managers have already designated routes for OHV use on state lands in some portions of this area and will continue to do so in other portions of this area in the foreseeable future. However, these decisions do not substantially affect costs incurred by the Forest Service for managing Forest System roads as federal and state budgets are separate. With only limited changes in future road and use conditions on National Forest System lands, and the minimal effect of State decisions on maintenance of National Forest Roads and Trails, there would be no substantive substantial cumulative effects to Forest Service maintenance expenditures.

3.15.8 Conclusion-Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

There would be a minor change in maintenance costs as the result of a decision on any of the action Alternatives. Road decommissioning costs vary by Alternative, but this cost would be measured out over time and would not substantially impact the Forest's road budget on an annual basis. The amount of time necessary to implement road decommissioning would vary by Alternative. There would not be substantial cumulative effects to the cost for implementing each Alternative.

Comment [F1]: Does this matter in regards to EA vs EIS?