

## 3.19 Inventoried Roadless Areas

### 3.19.1 Summary

Alternative 1 does not propose any vegetation management or road construction activities within the Echo River Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Area considered in the 2004 Forest Plan FEIS. Alternative 1 would not have any direct or indirect effects to the criteria listed in Table 3.19.2 qualifying areas as inventoried roadless.

Alternative 2 includes 32.8 acres of non-harvest restoration treatments specifically in the Echo River Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Area. This would be less than two percent of the total area of the Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area. This treatment would not affect the inventory criteria requirement of no more than 20 percent of an area harvested per decade since it is a non-harvest method. Therefore, the area would still meet that inventory criteria. The 120 acre non-harvest restoration treatment, shearing lowland brush, (32.8 acres of which are in the Echo River Roadless Area) would help decrease old, decadent forage and establish forage preferred by moose. The shearing would also create open areas for woodcock habitat. Hence, the proposed treatments would help address Forest Plan objectives by improving desired conditions for wildlife; in this case moose and woodcock.

Alternative 3 does not propose any vegetation or road construction activities within the inventoried roadless areas considered in the 2004 Forest Plan FEIS. This alternative was created to help meet a portion of the significant issue identified during scoping, which includes the possibility of diminishing scenic qualities. Alternative 3 would not have any direct or indirect effects to the criteria listed in Table 3.19.2 qualifying areas as inventoried roadless.

There are no known cumulative effects in any of the alternatives that would exceed the inventory criteria. The Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Area in the Border Project would continue to meet inventory criteria in all alternatives.

### 3.19.2 Introduction

This section includes some background clarification information on past roadless inventories and current direction for analysis of effects within Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Areas.

#### Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Areas

Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Areas are lands in a National Forest that met specific criteria identified in Table 3.19.2. These criteria used in the Forest Plan Revision FEIS directly relate to those listed in FSH (Forest Service Handbook) 1909.12, 71.12 that qualify areas for inventory as lands that may have potential for wilderness recommendation. This section of the FSH states:

*“National Forest lands in the eastern United States (east of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian) have been acquired over time from private ownership. Criteria for inventorying those lands that may have potential for wilderness recommendation recognize that much, if not all the land, shows some signs of human activity and modification even though they have shown high recuperative capabilities.”*

The Forest Plan revision process, completed in 2004, required an up-to-date inventory to address roadless area management issues. At the time of the Superior National Forest plan revision, all national forests were required to evaluate those previously inventoried roadless areas, and other lands, which remain essentially roadless and undeveloped, and had not been designated for wilderness. Areas that met the FSH inventory criteria were evaluated and considered for wilderness study recommendation (FSH 1909.12). The Forest Plan Revision Record of Decision (ROD) (pages 17 and 18) described why the areas were not recommended for wilderness study. Since the Roadless Areas were not recommended for wilderness study in the 2004 Forest Plan, all the inventoried areas were allocated to other Management Areas.

The Forest Plan Revision FEIS analysis of Inventoried Roadless Areas is in section 3.7 Special Designations, pages 3.7-1 – 3.7-13. Appendix C of the FEIS to the Forest Plan displays the Forest Roadless Area Inventory and Evaluation for the 2004 Forest Plan. Appendix C also includes thorough descriptions of each area.

Since the ROD for the Forest Plan was signed in July 2004, any proposed site-specific project within a Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) requires an environmental analysis that considers effects of the project proposal on the roadless characteristics in the area. The effects analysis includes the entire Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area, which is wholly within the Border Project area.

This analysis of an Inventoried Roadless Area is important because of the relatively high level of interest expressed by the public about potential effects to roadless areas. Table 3.19.1 lists the Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Area associated with the Border Project area and the corresponding MA allocation.

Proposed treatment activities (shearing lowland brush) for the Border Project area would occur in one inventoried roadless area: Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area (Table 3.19.1).

The purpose and need for this Project includes the following statement from Chapter 2: “The Forest Plan states “Move terrestrial and aquatic habitats in the direction of desired conditions and objectives for all native and desired non-native wildlife” (O-WS-2). The Border Project interdisciplinary team identified areas within the Border Project to be treated to increase wildlife habitat and to enhance management areas identified by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). The MDNR has a Moose Management Area located within one mile of the proposed non-harvest treatment area proposed in the Echo River Roadless Area.

<b>Area Name</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>National Forest Acres</b>	<b>Acres of Treatment</b>	<b>Forest Plan Management Area</b>
Echo River	1,900	1,900	32.8	General Forest – Longer Rotation and Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape

**3.19.3 Analysis Methods**

As described in Section 1.10 Significant Issues, the resource effects to scenic qualities in some specific areas were of concern to the public. The issue is that vegetation management activities could affect Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Areas, which could adversely affect the scenic quality characteristics of the area.

Indicators for this inventoried roadless area analysis come from Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 – Land Management Planning Handbook, Chapter 70 – Wilderness Evaluations. These indicators consider potential effects that would be noticeable over time. Table 3.19.2 shows how the inventoried roadless area analysis for this Project considered the criteria.

<b>Criteria Description</b>	<b>Used in this Analysis</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
The land is regaining a natural, untrammeled appearance.	Yes	Indicates prior activities within the area prior to and including this Project.
Improvements existing in the area are being affected by the forces of nature rather than humans and are disappearing or muted.	Yes	Non-harvest restoration treatments would provide habitat improvements and would be natural looking.
The area contains no more than a half mile of improved road for each 1,000 acres, and the road is under Forest Service jurisdiction.	No	No improved roads would be constructed or decommissioned in the inventoried roadless areas.
The area has existing or attainable NFS ownership patterns, both surface and subsurface, that could ensure perpetuation of identified wilderness characteristics.	No	No actions are proposed that would change the ownership patterns.
No more than 15 percent of the area is in non-native, planted vegetation.	No	The proposal does not include planting non-native vegetation.
Twenty percent or less of the area has been harvested within the past 10 years.	No	No prior harvesting within the past ten years and the Border Project does not propose harvest in the IRA.
The area contains only a few dwellings on private lands and the location of these dwellings and their access needs insulate their effects on wilderness characteristics on NFS lands.	No	No actions are proposed that would change landownership.

Sections 3.9 Recreation and 3.11 Scenery contain analyses relating to potential effects to recreation and scenery characteristics within inventoried roadless areas as well as other areas affected by the activities proposed for the Border Project area.

### 3.19.4 Analysis Area

The geographic area for the direct and indirect effects includes National Forest System land within the Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area. The cumulative effects Analysis Area includes land of all ownerships within the Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area. These boundaries are adequate because they are consistent with the criteria used in the Forest Plan Revision FEIS analysis for inventoried roadless areas and their potential to be studied for wilderness designation (Forest Plan Revision FEIS, Appendix C, page C-13). Map 6 displays the inventoried roadless area in the Border Project area. Maps 2 and 3 display the proposed actions. Maps of all the inventoried roadless areas on the Superior National Forest are also in the Forest Plan Revision FEIS, Appendix C, pages C-95 – C-110. The time scale for direct and indirect effects is the end of the first decade of Forest Plan implementation (2014) because that includes vegetation management actions on National Forest System land because it is reasonable to assume that all Border Project proposed activities would be implemented within this timeframe and expected effects would have occurred.

The time scale for cumulative effects analysis includes vegetation management done in the past 10 years and what is proposed through the first decade of implementing the 2004 Forest Plan in the year 2014. Cumulative effects to inventoried roadless areas consider the prior 10-year period in order to be consistent with the Forest Plan Revision roadless inventory criteria regarding harvest in the last ten years. The cumulative effects analysis considers reasonably foreseeable harvest through 2014, since that is when the inventoried roadless areas would potentially be re-evaluated for their roadless values and past, present and reasonably foreseeable future vegetation management would be implemented. The year 2014 is a potential start of another forest planning cycle. The Border Project is the only project expected to include any type of treatment in the inventoried roadless areas in this Analysis Area through 2014.

### 3.19.5 Affected Environment

The Forest Plan Revision FEIS, (Appendix C. Forest Roadless Area Inventory and Evaluation, pages C-24 – C-90) describes the Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area listed in Table 3.19.1 in extensive detail. Descriptions include information on each area in terms of acreage, location and access, geography and topography, vegetation, current uses of the area, appearance and surroundings, and key attractions. The FEIS also describes the areas in terms of wilderness capability, availability for wilderness, wilderness evaluation, and environmental consequences. See Map 6 for location of the Forest Plan inventoried roadless area in the Project area.

The Forest Plan Revision FEIS considered the effects to the inventoried roadless areas in terms of the analysis criteria through July 2004. No even-aged harvest or road construction or decommissioning projects have occurred in the area in the past 10 years. No future approved even-aged harvest, non-harvest restoration, or road construction activities are foreseeable within the roadless area.

The Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) had little timber harvest in the early to mid 1900s. Although some harvest occurred in this area in the past, it met roadless criteria for the Forest Plan revision because the harvesting occurred more than ten years prior to evaluation in the Forest Plan revision.

The Echo River IRA has two dominant forest types including pine and aspen. The majority of both types of these stands are considered to be in the mature/old age grouping. Other forest types make up approximately 20% of the 1900 acre roadless area. All pine stands date back to 1968 or earlier. Seven hundred acres of aspen were harvested in the early 1990s. To meet roadless criteria, less than 20% needs to be within the 0-9 age class category. Approximately 65 acres of the Echo River IRA currently falls into the 0-9 age class category, which is 3 % of the total area and well below what is required.

The Echo River IRA currently contains approximately 1.3 miles of unimproved roadway (OML 1 winter road). No current or future improved road construction is proposed within the Echo River IRA.

**3.19.6 Environmental Consequences**

**3.19.6.1 Direct and Indirect Effects**

Table 3.19.3 summarizes the primary acres and percent of even-aged harvest and non-harvest restoration activities occurring within the Echo River Inventoried Roadless area.

<b>Table 3.19.3 Acres and Percentage of Vegetation Management in Echo River Roadless Area</b>							
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>Type of Treatment</b>	<b>Alternative 1</b>		<b>Alternative 2</b>		<b>Alternative 3</b>	
		<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>
1900	Even-Aged Management	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Enhancing Select Cut	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Harvest Restoration	0	0%	32.8	2%	0	0%

**Alternative 1 (No-action)**

No Forest Service management activities affecting the vegetation, setting/solitude, ownership, roads or shape of the inventoried roadless area would occur. No effects to the roadless character would occur to the inventoried areas under the No Action Alternative. No new vegetation or road management activities would take place within the inventoried roadless area.

**Alternative 2**

The Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area, under Alternative 2, would include a portion of a non-harvest restoration treatment. The area would include 32.8 acres within Echo River IRA of a restoration treatment totaling 120 acres in size. The purpose of the non-harvest treatment would be to remove undesirable older vegetation which would regenerate to desirable fresh plant shoots, buds, and leaves for moose forage. It would also provide openings for woodcock habitat. The proposed non-harvest treatment area is 2 percent of the total Echo River area. The treatment would occur over a 3 year period with one-third of the total area being treated each year. The treatment area would be accessed during the winter months over snow trails, which would eliminate the need for

road access to the area. The treatment area would likely in the short-term have a slightly trammled appearance because of brush left on the ground. The Echo River IRA would continue to meet inventory criteria for Forest Plan inventoried roadless areas.

### **Alternative 3**

No timber harvest or non-harvest treatments would occur under this alternative. No temporary roads would be constructed. The area would continue to meet the inventory criteria for Forest Plan inventoried roadless areas.

### **Conclusion – Direct and Indirect Effects**

All alternatives would continue to meet inventory criteria for Forest Plan inventoried roadless areas. Alternative 2 proposes a non-harvest treatment for two percent of the Echo River Forest Plan IRA; which would still maintain the inventory criteria of no more than 20 percent of the area harvested within a ten year period since the treatment is not a harvest treatment. This alternative would help improve the desirable moose forage more than Alternatives 1 and 3. The Echo River Roadless Area currently has no known special habitat needs and regeneration of moose forage along with opening woodcock habitat would only improve the area's availability for wildlife viewing. The area would continue to meet Forest Plan roadless area inventory criteria.

#### **3.19.6.2 Cumulative Effects**

Within the past 10 years, no even-aged harvest or road construction has occurred within the Border Project's Forest Plan Inventoried Roadless Area on NFS land. In addition, no future even-aged harvest or road construction activities are planned in the next 10 years. Harvest on other ownership within the roadless areas would not affect an area's ability to meet inventory criteria. Nevertheless, no past or foreseeable future harvest and associated road construction on non-federal land within this area is known or anticipated. Finally, there are no current or anticipated road access requests through the Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area. In conclusion, there are no cumulative effects to the Echo River Inventoried Roadless Area. The area would not only continue to meet the inventory criteria under all of the action alternatives, the area's wildlife habitat would be enhanced in Alternative 2, improving the Echo River area's wilderness eligibility.