



File Code: 1950-1

Date: February 5, 2009

Dear Interested Parties:

I have decided to implement Alternative 2 for the Maple Hill Project. The Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and other related documents for the Maple Hill Project are available on the Superior National Forest website under Projects and Plans at [www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/superior](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/superior). Printed copies are also available upon request from the Gunflint Ranger District.

The Maple Hill Project is located around Devil Track Lake. This project is somewhat different than other recent forest management decisions that I have made, but at the same time it is not unique. Generally our projects look at our natural resources from an ecological focus and are designed to meet landscape ecosystem objectives. However a lack of fire and maturing forests has contributed to an increase in fuel loading which raises the potential threat for a wildfire, putting many improvements and structures at risk. While this project maintained an ecological perspective, the driving force was to reduce the threat of wildfire to the Devil Track community.

Cook County has finalized its Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and has taken steps to implement various parts of that plan. Fire departments have received grants to improve their suppression capability and private landowners have received grants to address defensible space and fuels management on their property. Maple Hill is a project with its origins in the CWPP that is designed to mitigate the build up of flammable fuels near the community surrounding Devil Track Lake.

Following the blowdown of 1999 the Superior National Forest took extensive steps to address the fuels situation that the storm created. Now, as we have experienced wildfires over the past few years, we have learned several lessons and one of which is the value of fuels management near our communities. While the scale of this project is significantly smaller in scale than the blowdown work, it is sized just right to offer appropriate protection to the Devil Track community.

I have selected Alternative 2 because it will reduce the concentrations of hazardous fuels surrounding the Devil Track community using a combination of harvests or understory fuels reduction followed by prescribed fire, slash disposal, planting or other reforestation techniques.

I know there may be impacts to resources such as soils, wildlife, water and other plant species and they are outlined in the environmental assessment. However I'm confident the standards and guidelines from our Forest Plan and the Minnesota Forest Resource Council Guidelines will ensure any impacts are minimized.



Harvesting will change the scenic quality of some of the Cook County roads in the project area but we have reduced the impacts through measures such as not harvesting portions of some stands or leaving a higher density of trees in areas along the road. However, the interdisciplinary team and I have looked for long term gains that will be accomplished by planting trees such as red and white pine that tend to live much longer and grow much larger than the trees we'll be cutting.

I have met with the homeowners around Devil Track Lake twice during this project to better understand their concerns of scenic quality along Cook County Road 57. I would like to say up front that I greatly appreciated those discussions and the invitation to meet with them. Employees who will be implementing this project were also involved in these meetings to understand the landowners concerns. I believe we've done the best we can to meet the objectives for fuels reduction and take some steps toward improving long term scenic quality.

In making my decision, I considered the environmental effects of the Alternative 1- No Action and Alternative 2 as well as how they would meet the purpose and need and move the area towards the desired condition in the Forest Plan. Again, each alternative has trade-offs and I have tried to explain my choice for this decision in the Decision Notice. Please read through the Decision Notice for detailed rationale on my decision, as well the specific actions that are covered. There are divergent opinions expressed about this project and I understand it is not possible to select an action that is agreeable to all. This decision represents my consideration of appropriate forest management while taking into account the competing interests and values of the public.

I appreciate the time and effort you have made to express comments on this project. If you would like more information, please contact Becky Bartol, Project Leader, at (218) 387-3207.

Sincerely,



DENNIS D. NEITZKE  
District Ranger