

5 Public Involvement

The primary actions that involved the public, tribes, and other agencies are described in this section. We developed alternatives to the Proposed Action using significant issues as developed from public comments on the April 2005 scoping information. Public comments on the Draft EIS also were used to modify alternatives as described in the Final EIS.

5.1 Proposed Action Scoping and Draft EIS

A field trip and meeting was held on November 22, 2004, to gather ideas on the concept of the Proposed Action. A variety of organizations including timber industry, recreation, environmental, and other civic and State advocacy groups were represented at the meeting.

A project Scoping letter that included information on the Project Area, a preliminary Purpose and Need, a Proposed Action, instructions for submitting comments, and two maps displaying the proposed vegetation treatments and road transportation system was mailed on April 8, 2005 to approximately 5,830 individuals, landowners, and agencies considered to have potential interest in the Project based on past project participation, or because they lived or had business interests within or adjacent to the Project Area boundaries. Comments on the Scoping letter were requested from the following agencies: St. Louis County, Lake County, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of Interior – National Park Service – National Scenic Trails, Vermilion Lake Township, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Interagency Fire Center, Minnesota Office of Tourism, Cities of Ely, Tower, Winton, University of Minnesota, and the Minnesota Parks and Trails Council. Approximately 340 comments on the Scoping letter were received from the public.

In addition to the project Scoping letter, several other methods to inform the public about the Echo Trail Area Forest Management Project occurred. A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on March 25, 2005 (Federal Register: Vol. 70, No. 57, pp. 15284-15285). A news release was published in local and regional newspapers the week of April 8, 2005. A legal notice was published in the Mesabi Daily News on April 8, 2005. A public meeting and field trip was conducted on April 29, 2005 when nineteen members of the public attended all or part of the meeting and field trip.

Meetings and phone conversations with individuals and groups were held upon request. Meetings were held with the representatives of Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and the Friends of the BWCAW on July 28, 2005 and with a local timber purchaser on August 31, 2005. Phone conversations occurred with a variety of individuals throughout the scoping period and those conversations were documented in the project file.

The Draft EIS was distributed to the public in April 2006 and the 45-day comment period began April 14, 2006 with publication of the Notice of Availability in the federal register. Approximately 300 copies of the Draft EIS were mailed to interested parties. The public was also notified of the Draft EIS availability in a legal notice that was published in the Mesabi Daily News, Virginia, MN on April 15, 2006 and in news releases published in the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily, Ely Echo, Cook News Herald, Timber Jay, Duluth News Tribune, St. Paul Pioneer Press, Minneapolis Star Tribune, and Tower News. In addition, Forest Service personnel made contacts with individuals, agency representatives, and organization representatives known to have a strong interest in the Project. Finally, the Draft EIS and all

appendices were available on the Superior National Forest web site.

A field trip on April 28, 2006 was held to answer questions about the Draft EIS, show real examples of treatments discussed in the Draft EIS, and provide an opportunity for the public to talk directly with interdisciplinary team members. Ten members of the public attended the trip. (Figure ROD 32)

Approximately 1200 pieces of correspondence (letters, emails, FAX, and phone calls) were received in response to the Draft EIS. Responses to representative comments received from the public can be found in Appendix J of the Final EIS: Public Comments on the Draft EIS with Forest Service Responses.

5.2 Tribal Consultation

Tribal consultation occurred on July 26, 2005 with representatives of the 1854 Authority and on September 9, 2005 with the Natural Resources Director for the Bois Forte Reservation Tribal Council. We met again with 1854 Authority personnel on June 26, 2006. Concerns discussed included the effects of the project on the Tribal Communities in regards to game species and hunting, the tribes' use of and access to the area, and protection of heritage resources. We recognize this area is part of the ceded territory and that tribal members use the area for hunting, fishing, gathering forest products, recreating, and other cultural activities. The Selected Alternative will not adversely affect the wildlife or fish populations, heritage resource sites or tribal members' use of this area.

5.3 Agency Consultation

The Minnesota Historical Society reviewed the project pursuant to the responsibilities given to the State Historic Preservation Officer by the National Preservation Act of 1966 and the Procedures Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (36 CFR 800). No concerns were identified during their review.

The Environmental Protection Agency reviewed the Draft EIS and requested clarification on mitigation and monitoring. The Final EIS, Appendix A (ROD Attachment 9, Design Features, Mitigation Measures, Implementation and Monitoring Plan) reflects clarifications requested as verbally confirmed on August 24, 2006.

The Forest Service consulted with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) throughout the Project planning and the FWS was provided with a copy of the Echo Trail Area Project Biological Assessment to this EIS for their review. The BA determines that the threatened species eagle, lynx, and wolf or lynx proposed critical habitat and wolf critical habitat, would not likely be adversely affected (BA, Executive Summary 5.0, D Sections) and the Fish and Wildlife Service concurs with that conclusion (Jeffrey C. Gosse, Acting Field Supervisor, August 7, 2006).

5.4 Changes between Draft EIS and Final EIS

In general, changes were made between the Draft and Final EIS to address public comments, to use updated inventory information, or to correct errors. The primary conceptual changes are listed below. Specific changes made to the alternatives are identified in the EIS Chapter 2, Section 2.2 and 2.3. The Project file also includes information on changes made between the Draft and Final EIS.

1. All maps and analyses include updated transportation system (including gravel pits) inventory information that was not available at the time of the Draft EIS. Public comments regarding accuracy of roads across public land were addressed.
2. Alternative Maps 2, 3 Modified, and 4 were updated as follows. Many of these changes were made to clarify information for the public.
 - The unclassified roads that would be used temporarily and left open were inadvertently left off the Draft EIS maps. These roads now show on the maps as unclassified roads.
 - Roads in the southeast corner of the Project Area in the vicinity of Tamarack and Foss Lakes were edited to better show federal and nonfederal road ownership.
 - Non-harvest restoration stands are no longer shown on the maps because there is no active management planned for them. Because they were shown on the maps, some members of the public thought that some active management was being planned. The stands are not proposed for harvest or management of any kind at this time.
 - Forest Plan inventoried roadless areas are no longer shown on the maps because they are not a Management Area designation. Instead, Management Areas are shown on the maps. This was also done to clarify information for the public. It appeared some members of the public thought that inventoried roadless areas were a designated Management Area.
3. Two sections (3.25 Transportation System and 3.26 Special Use Authorizations) were added to Chapter 3 rather than having all the road and special use data and information in appendices
4. Modifications to the alternatives were based on public comments and further interdisciplinary team review of management area direction (Section 2.2 and 2.3). Consequently, tables in Chapter 3 were updated with the revised data for the alternatives and most analyses were re-run using the updated data.
5. Clarifications were made in Alternatives U and Y under Section 2.4 Alternatives Considered and not Carried Forward for Detailed Analysis. The clarifications were made to address public comments and include further IDT analysis.
6. Appendix A was reformatted and includes some additional information to address public comments, especially comments from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 5.
7. Appendix J, Public Comments on Draft EIS with Forest Service Responses, is included with the

Final EIS to show the response to public comments. The agency responses indicate where changes were made to the Final EIS based on specific public comments. Due to the volume of comments received, Appendix J does not include responses to all comments. It includes responses to representative samples of all comments received.

8. Cumulative effects for forest-wide NFS land LE and mih data was updated to incorporate the following changes:

- The minor changes to the alternatives proposed harvest acres.
- Proposals such as the Whyte Project on the Laurentian District that was scoped between the Echo Trail Project DEIS and FEIS.
- Correction to a mistake found in the GIS coverage for the DEIS that related to the year-of-origin for stands in 2005. When comparing the DEIS to the FEIS, this affected the data for existing condition and the updated analysis did not result any overall conclusions in the vegetation section for the predominant LEs. The updated analysis also did not change determinations made in the biological evaluation.

5.5 Administrative Record

The administrative record (also referred to as the Project file) for this project includes the Draft EIS, Final EIS, Superior National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and all material incorporated by reference.



Figure ROD-32. Members of public and Forest Service employees at April 28, 2006 public meeting/field trip.

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