

## **2 Decision**

This section describes the specific elements of our decision to conduct vegetation and associated transportation management activities in the Echo Trail Area Forest Management Project. Our decision encompasses the following:

- 1) What actions will be used to address the Purpose and Need.
- 2) Where and when those actions will take place.
- 3) Design features, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements that will be used.

Based upon review of all alternatives, we have decided to implement Alternative 3 Modified (Selected Alternative). Our decision is based upon our knowledge of the Project Area, information gathered through on-the-the-ground field reviews, public issues raised during scoping and review of the Draft EIS, review of the project file including the Draft EIS, review of the Final EIS with the Forest Service's response to comments received from the public on the Draft EIS, requests/discussions with the State for access permits, discussions/meetings with tribal representatives, consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), review of relevant laws and regulations, and our combined experience in working on and managing National Forest System land.

Please refer to Table ROD-1 Amount and Type of Activity in the Decision for an overview of the approved actions and Map ROD-1 for the approximate locations of the approved projects. In brief, the Selected Alternative will include clearcut with reserves, partial cut, and thinning treatments on about 12,701 acres, regeneration (natural or with planting) of stands on 11,922 acres, diversity planting and release work outside harvested areas on 1,280 acres, disposing of about 601 slashpiles, construction and subsequent closure of 74 miles of temporary road, decreasing the National Forest System of roads by 11 miles, decommissioning a total of 35 miles of road, and maintaining 37 gravel pits. Figures ROD 2, 3, and 4 depict typical examples of clearcut, partial cut treatment, and thinning treatments. Figure ROD 5 depicts an example of successful pine regeneration.

Although Forest Plan guideline (G-WS-8) indicates that harvest is discouraged on Ecological Land Type (ELT) 18, our decision does include harvest activities on more productive mapped ELT 18s. ELT 18 productivity can vary due to soil depth and possibly bedrock composition. Well-drained ELT 18s support red, white, and jack pine along with some smaller red maple, paper birch, and oak. While there are up to 1,360 acres of mapped ELT 18 in the identified treatment units, only mapped ELT 18s that are verified to be more productive than the ELT 18 "model" are chosen for treatment activities. These verified sites will be monitored to insure adequate reforestation to sustain the 20 cubic feet/acre/year growth capability. The specific mitigation and monitoring for ELT 18s is included in ROD Attachment 9. (Attachments are described below.)

**Table ROD 1. Amount and Type of Activities in the Decision**

Vegetative Treatments		
<b>Harvest Type (stand acres)<sup>1,2</sup></b>		
	Clearcut (with reserves)	11,181
	Partial Cut	741
	Thinning	779
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12,701</b>
<b>Regeneration (acres)</b>		
	Planting and release	4,559
	Natural	6,460
	Natural with diversity planting	903
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11,922</b>
<b>Diversity Planting (acres) and release outside harvested areas</b>		
	Plant white pine, red pine, and white spruce in forested stands	<b>993</b>
<b>Timber Stand Improvement (acres) outside harvested areas</b>		
	Release	<b>287</b>
<b>Management Area (percent) proposed for Clearcut with Reserves (CCR)/Partial Cut (PC)</b>		
	General Forest – Longer Rotation Management Area	11 CCR
		0 PC
	Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape Management Area	5 CCR
		0 PC
	Semi-primitive Motorized Recreation Management Area	1 CCR
		6 PC
Transportation Management		
<b>Road activities (miles)</b>		
	Decrease in system roads	11
	Temporary roads <sup>3</sup>	74
	Temporary Special Use Authorizations (11 permits)	6
	Unclassified roads open for motorized use <sup>4</sup>	13
<b>Roads Decommissioned (miles)<sup>5</sup></b>		
	Roads decommissioned	<b>35</b>
<b>Gravel Pits Maintained (number of pits)</b>		
	Existing	36
	New	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>
<p><sup>1</sup> ROD Attachments 1 and 2 include detailed treatment tables.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Harvest acres displayed in this table and throughout the EIS were calculated using stand acreages. Actual treated acres would be less than those displayed in this table because of legacy patches and reserve islands remaining in the stand after harvest, and other resource mitigations.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> For the Selected Alternative, about 5 miles of the total temporary road miles needed to access treatment areas are on nonfederal land and permission from the landowners will be secured prior to implementation.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> Includes 3 miles of unclassified road used as temporary roads and then left open as unclassified roads.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> Of these existing roads to be decommissioned, 6 miles will be used as temporary roads and then decommissioned. The 6 miles are also shown in the temporary road total.</p>		



Figure ROD-2 *Example of a clearcut with reserves treatment.*



Figure ROD-3 *Example of a partial cut 30 treatment.*



Figure ROD-4 *Example of a thinning treatment.*



Figure ROD-5 *Example of pine regeneration.*

The following first nine attachments list the site-specific projects, mitigation measures, and monitoring that will be implemented as part of our decision. The tenth attachment is included for reference.

- 1) Vegetative Treatment Units
- 2) Sequence of Vegetative Treatments for each Forest Type
- 3) National Forest System Classified Road Additions
- 4) National Forest System Classified Road Changes (OML or Class)
- 5) Roads for Decommissioning
- 6) Special Use Authorizations
- 7) Gravel Pits
- 8) Summary of US Fish and Wildlife Service terms and conditions for the Little East Creek Area
- 9) Design Features, Mitigation Measures, Implementation and Monitoring Plan
- 10) Management Indicator Habitats

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the Selected Alternative have been adopted in this decision. (40 CFR 1505.2) Implementing design features and mitigation measures (ROD Attachment 9) in the Selected Alternative will minimize potential adverse impacts. The purpose of “design features”, which are based on Forest Plan direction, is to minimize or avoid adverse effects which could occur from management activities. Design features include established Forest Service policies, Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Minnesota Forest Resource Council (MFRC) Forest Management Guidelines, and federal laws and regulation. Mitigation measures are additional site-specific actions, designed specifically for the Echo Trail Area Project, which will minimize potential effects. Site specific mitigation measures can be found on the Unit Cards which are included as Appendix B of the EIS. Appendix B contains a map of each stand and a description of the stand treatments and mitigation measures. Appendix B is available upon request and can be downloaded from the Projects & Plans section on the Superior National Forest web page at [www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior). The unit cards that apply to the Selected Alternative are also incorporated into this decision even though they are not repeated as an attachment.

The monitoring identified in ROD Attachment 9 includes specific actions we will take to determine whether the Project is implemented as designed, and whether project implementation complies with the decision made on this Project. Implementation monitoring is designed to answer, “Did we do what we said we were going to do?”

Alternative 3 was developed to address three significant issues that arose during public scoping. (The Final EIS Section 1.12 describes the process used to identify and defines the four significant issues for this Project.) The three significant issues dovetail because Issue 1 describes how people believed that the Proposed Action would leave insufficient mature and old areas of the forest for wildlife needing that kind of habitat and Issue 3 describes how people believed that harvest, especially near recreation areas would have adverse impacts to recreationists. In Alternative 3, more mature stands near recreation areas were left untreated when compared to Alternatives 2 and 4. The second issue ties in with the first and third issue by describing that some people believed that smaller harvest areas should be used in order to manage for wildlife habitat related to hunting opportunities. Therefore, in Alternative 3 there is less harvest of mature stands, some smaller patches, and little or no harvest near some of the specific recreation areas identified by the public. We modified Alternative 3 based on public comments to the Draft EIS while still addressing the first three significant issues and refer to it as Alternative 3 Modified.

## ***Echo Trail Area Forest Management Project***

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Management Areas where activities are proposed include: General Forest – Longer Rotation, Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape, and Semi-primitive Motorized Recreation. All three management areas emphasize long-lived species such as pine. The percent of clearcut with reserves (CCR) and partial cut 30 (PC) within each Management Area that is within the Project Area is shown in Table ROD 1.

**General Forest-Longer Rotation MA** emphasizes land and resource conditions that provide a wide variety of goods, uses, and services. These include wood products, other commercial products, scenic quality, developed and dispersed recreation opportunities, and habitat for a diversity of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and fish species. Numerous roads that are open to public travel provide access to resources and roaded recreation opportunities. Non-motorized recreation opportunities also occur.

**Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape MA** emphasizes land and resource conditions that provide a scenic landscape for recreational activities in natural-looking surroundings and also provides wildlife habitat to enhance recreational wildlife watching opportunities.

**Semi-primitive Motorized Recreation MA** emphasizes land and resource conditions that provide recreational opportunities in nearly primitive surroundings where motorized use is allowed. Most recreation use occurs on lakes, trails, portages, and low standard roads. Interaction among recreational users is low. Forest management enhances recreation and scenic objectives and may occasionally be noticeable to visitors.