

RECREATIONAL MOTOR VEHICLES (RMV'S)

Monitoring Questions

To what extent is the Superior National Forest (SNF) providing Recreation Motor Vehicle (RMV) opportunities? What are the effects of RMV's on the physical & social environment & how effective are forest management practices in managing RMV use?

Monitoring Conducted

RMV Management and Opportunities

Desired Condition. D-RMV-1. *The Forest provides Recreational Motorized Vehicles (RMV) road & trail riding opportunities with experiences in a variety of forest environments, while protecting natural resources and*

Desired Condition. D-RMV-2. *Allowed, restricted, and prohibited RMV uses are clearly defined to the public. Where practical, RMV policies are consistent with adjacent public land management agencies AND*

Objective. O-RMV-1. *A maximum of 90 additional ATV trail miles and 130 snowmobile trail miles with associated trail facilities (trailhead parking, signs, toilets, etc.) may be added to the designated National Forest Trail System.*

Status of Travel Management: Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use

During Fiscal Years (FY) 2005 and 2006, four projects made decisions on 118 miles of roads including designation of roads open or closed to RMV's. These project decisions designated approximately 37 miles open to

RMV travel. The remaining 81 miles of roads are to be closed to RMV use or decommissioned (See Table 1).

Prior to project designation, all of the unclassified roads (113 miles) within the project area were open to RMV travel as allowed under the Forest Plan.

The Department of Agriculture revised regulations and clarified policy related to motor vehicle use, including the use of off-highway vehicles. This final Travel Management Rule requires designation of those roads, trails and areas that are open to motor vehicle

use. Designations will be made by class of vehicle and, if appropriate, by time of year. The final Rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system, as well as use of motor vehicles on routes and in areas that is not consistent with the designations. The clear identification of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use on each National Forest will sustain natural resources values through more effective management of motor vehicle use, enhance opportunities for motorized recreation experiences on National Forest System lands, address needs for access to National Forest System lands and preserve areas of opportunity on each National Forest for non motorized travel and experiences. The Rule was effective December 9, 2005.

To facilitate implementation of the Travel Management Rule, the SNF has been working in collaboration with the State of MN, Cook County, and the 1854 Authority including the Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe to identify current and potential opportunities for motorized recreation including providing ATV routes and trails within Cook County and parts of Lake County. This process includes conducting appropriate public involvement and

Table 1. Proposed Road Designations and Motorized Use				
Decision	Change in Road Status (miles)			
New Roads Added; Designated to NFS System Roads. Closed to RMV's				
	<i>OML1</i>	<i>OML2</i>	<i>OML3</i>	<i>Unclassified</i>
<i>'04* & 05 Decisions</i>	5.2	.1		
Unclassified Road Designated to NFS System Roads. Open to RMV's				
<i>'04* & 05 Decisions</i>	14.5	17.9		
<i>2006 Decisions</i>	4.4			
Unclassified Road Designated to NFS System Roads. Closed to RMV's				
<i>'04* & 05 Decisions</i>	11.8	.5		
Unclassified Road Decommissioned. Closed to RMV's				
<i>'04* & 05 Decisions</i>				59.4
<i>2006 Decisions</i>				4.3
<i>Sub Total Open To RMV's</i>	19	18		0
<i>Sub Total Closed To RMV's</i>	17	.6		63.7
Total Open to RMV's	37 Miles			
Total Closed to RMV's	81 Miles			

completing NEPA requirements and documentation. In addition, the SNF will review all unclassified roads within Cook County to determine their appropriate designation. The remainder of Lake County and the Superior National Forest (SNF) portion of St Louis County will also be analyzed, with completion of all three expected sometime in 2008.

RMV Effects

36 CFR 219.21[g]. Off-road vehicle use shall be planned and implemented to protect land and other resources, promote public safety, and minimize conflicts with other uses of the National Forest System lands. Forest planning shall evaluate the potential effects of vehicle use off roads and, on the basis of the requirements of 36 CFR 295 part of this chapter, classify areas and trails of National Forest System lands as to whether or not off-road vehicle use may be permitted

During late summer and fall of 2006, eighty one roads and trails within selected areas across the SNF were inventoried. The SNF focused these inventories within or adjacent to unique or priority areas including the BWCAW, Mapped “Management Areas Closed to ATV Use”, and Landscape Assessment Project areas. Objectives were to: (1) identify and document motorized intrusions into the BWCAW; (2) document compliance with the September 2006 ATV Roads and Trails Travel Map; and (3) identify recreation travel management opportunities within project areas. Visits were focused within five miles of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) boundary from the west side of Crane Lake to the east side of the Cascade mid-level project. In addition, twenty one mapped area closures and four project areas were surveyed. ATV use of mapped roads open to ATV’s was not reported. See Appendix G for more detailed discussion.

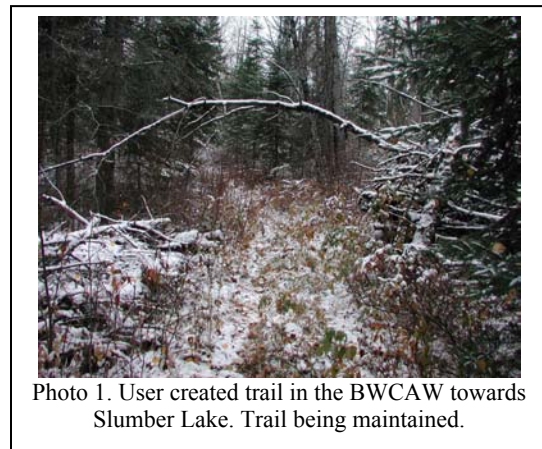


Photo 1. User created trail in the BWCAW towards Slumber Lake. Trail being maintained.

Highlights of the ATV road and trail inventory:

- * 9 existing user created trails with recent or ongoing motorized use into the BWCAW were found (11% of visits).
- * 16 existing user created trails outside the BWCAW with apparent ATV use were found (20% of visits).
- * 12 roads closed to motorized vehicles had recent motorized travel (20% of visits).
- * 8 Area Closures were visited. No recent motorized travel was observed.



Photo 2. Mapped, signed, closed road used by ATV's.



Photo 3. User created trail ending at illegal deer stand

Changes in Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

O-REC-2. *Management activities will move toward the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class objectives in Table O-REC-1 and on Figure O-REC-1. Management activities may meet a less developed ROS class but cannot meet a higher developed class than the mapped ROS class objective for an area. O-REC-3* *Through project level planning, the Forest will consider management of some inventoried semi-primitive ROS areas for separate non-motorized or motorized recreation uses.*

Designated and permitted recreational motorized use resulting from transportation decisions (change in road and/or trail mileage and location) has a direct effect on the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) setting on the SNF. The ROS is a formal agency process designed to delineate, define, and integrate outdoor recreation opportunities. ROS designations describe the kind of recreation experience one may have in a given part of the National Forest. There are four opportunities described in Appendix B of the Revised Forest Plan and they include Primitive, Semi-primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM), Semi-primitive Motorized (SPM) and Roaded Natural. Changes in ROS opportunities, particularly SPNM, is of interest to SNF managers and the public and is the focus of this section of the Monitoring Report. On the SNF, a SPNM ROS is defined as an area that is at least 1,500 acres and at least ½ mile away from roads and motorized trails.

Road management decision effects on SPNM ROS within or immediately adjacent to project areas were documented within seven projects on the SNF. Four of the seven project areas encompassed or included Inventoried SPNM within their boundaries. Table 2 displays the project areas analyzed.

Evaluation and Conclusions

RMV Management and Opportunities

When the Forest Plan was approved in 2004, approximately 1,550 miles of roads were actually open to RMV travel. This includes 1,488 miles displayed in Appendix F of the Final Environmental Impact Statement and 61 miles of recently discovered unclassified roads resulting from enhanced inventories conducted the past two years. This open mileage assumes that all summer OML 1 roads, all OML 2 roads, and most unclassified roads are open to RMV's and all winter OML 1 roads, and OML 3, 4, and 5 roads are closed to motorized vehicles.

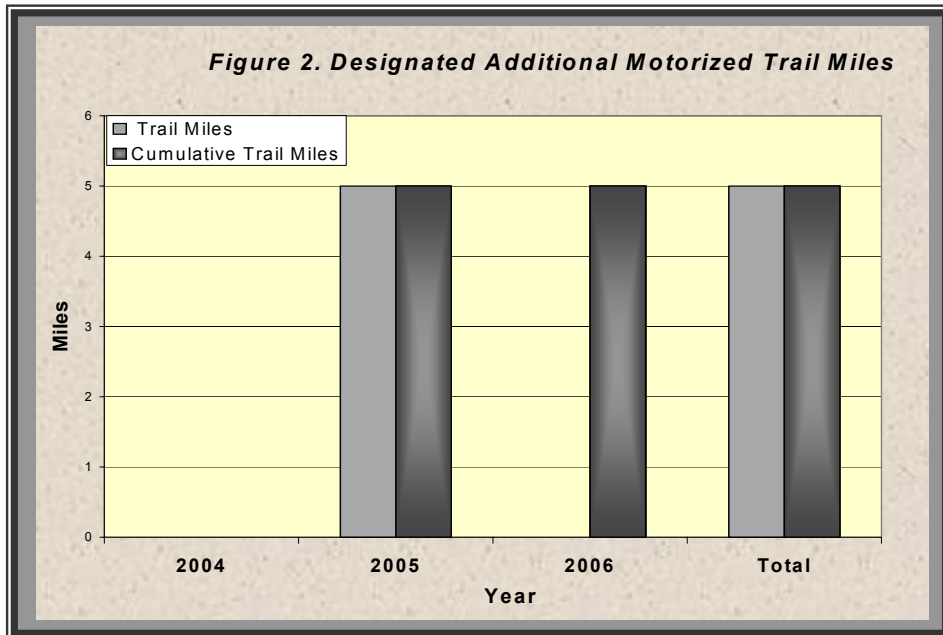
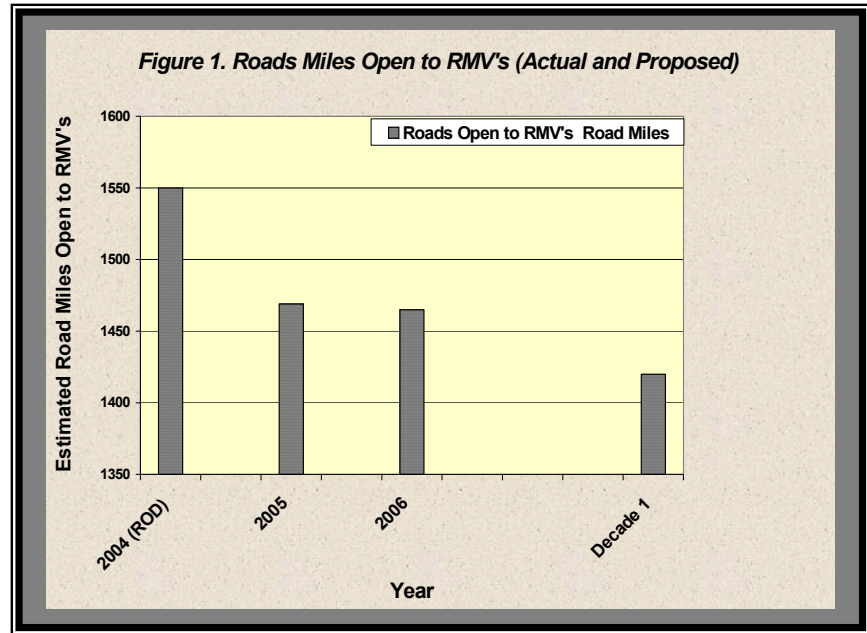
Project decisions approved in 2005 and 2006 have closed or propose to close 81 miles of roads to RMV travel, reducing mileage open to RMV's from 1,550 miles to 1,469 miles. These road closures would be done through re-designation or road decommissioning. Roads presently open to RMV travel can be expected to further decline as portions of the remaining unclassified roads are either decommissioned or re-designated closed to RMV use. The extent of this decline is unknown at this time. There is no projected Decade 1 road mileage open to RMV's per se. However, there are Decade 1 mileage projections for OML 1 summer roads and OML 2 roads and if these roads were to remain open through future decisions the upper limit for open roads would be 1,420 miles (1,432 Decade 1 OML 1 summer and OML 2 miles minus 12 miles of roads closed through recent decisions). Figure 1 displays the trend.

The Forest Plan states that a maximum of 90 additional ATV trail miles may be added to the designated SNF National Forest Trail System. During 2006 no motorized trails were added to the designated National Forest Trail System. In 2005, 5 miles were added to the System. To date the 5 miles added to the Forest Trail System represent about 5.5 % of the maximum potential amount of 90 miles. Figure 2 displays motorized trail designations during the past 2 years and the trend towards the Decade 1 projection.

RMV Effects

Unauthorized RMV use and impacts were immediately brought forward to District Rangers and Law Enforcement personnel. Law Enforcement followed up on user created trail use particularly within the BWCAW and filed incident reports. Several of the incidents are still ongoing. The Districts have addressed motorized incursions into the BWCAW and travel on closed roads outside the wilderness through barricades, road and or trail obliterations, and improved signing.

As a percentage of roads visited, RMV use on closed roads is similar between 2005 and 2006, while the percentage of user created trails encountered was down during 2006 compared to 2005 (44% in 2005 compared to 31% in 2006). These percentages are based on a very small sample size and are very qualitative. However they do provide some limited insight on trends.



Changes in Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

Road and trail management decisions between 2004 and 2006 did influence existing Inventoried SPNM ROS within the Devils Trout, Tomahawk, Echo Trail, and Virginia project areas as shown in Table 2. There was only a very minor increase (22 acres) in the overall Inventoried SPNM ROS. However, when analyzing each project area, SPNM acreage within the Echo Trail project increased by 2,138 acres whereas the three other project areas lost Inventoried SPNM acreage because of net additional road mileage and/or road location.

Table 2. Changes in Inventoried SPNM Within Project Areas					
Project Name	Inventoried SPNM Acres	SPNM Acres Added	SPNM Acres Lost	Adjusted SPNM Acres	Net Change in Acres
Devil Trout	2,641	0	530	2,111	-530
Tomahawk	2,524	1,338	2,000	1,862	-662
Echo Trail	23,932	2,138	0	26,070	+2,138
Virginia	20,840	17	941	19,916	-924
TOTAL	49,937	3,493	3,471	49,959	+22 Acres

In addition, smaller non motorized areas or polygons less than 1,500 acres were created in project areas due to transportation decisions. However, since these new areas were each less than 1,500 acres and did not meet the Minnesota ROS classification, they do not qualify as SPNM ROS. They are important to document and spatially map to assist managers in evaluating or selecting future decisions. Table 3 displays acreages of these small polygons resulting from project transportation decisions.

Table 3. Acres of Small SPNM Polygons by Project Area			
Project Name	# of Polygons	Total SPNM Acres	Average Polygon Size
Devil Trout	1	45	45
Tomahawk	22	2,106	96
Echo Trail	18	1,352	75
Inga South	4	147	37
Tomahawk	2	487	243
Virginia	31	1,629	53

Standards and Guidelines

There are seven Standards and Guidelines (S&G's) applicable to the RMV resource. These are S-RMV-1 through 3 and G-RMV-1 through 4 (Forest Plan pp. 2-43 to 2-44). During 2006, four S&G's pertinent to RMV route designations and/or prohibitions were monitored and found to be implemented successfully by virtue of their designation on the 2006 Forest Travel Plan. This does not mean that violations or non-compliance of the Travel Plan did not occur, but rather the SNF did designate roads and trails open or closed as directed in the S&G's. Law enforcement personnel addressed violations as described above. The other three S&G's (addressing snowmobile trails, RMV use of road ditches, and RMV scramble areas) were not applicable, not actively monitored, or not encountered during 2006.

Necessary Follow-up Actions and Management Recommendations

After reviewing monitoring findings, the Forest Interdisciplinary Team identified three Follow-up Actions to carry forward during FY 2007. A full list of Follow-up Actions is displayed in Appendix A.

Follow-up Actions

- * Ensure road management decisions reflect Forest Plan Management Area direction. (Example: cRNA's SPNM)
- * Issue a correction to the Forest Plan glossary. Replace existing ORV definitions with national definitions, as per Washington Office Plan Appeal direction
- * Ensure public forest ATV maps reflect accurate inventories.

Collaborative Opportunities To Improve Efficiency And Quality Of Program

Partnerships

To date the primary partners involved in implementing recreation motor vehicle management on the Superior National Forest have been the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the counties. The 1854 Authority and tribal bands have been consulted. The Travel Management project to designate RMV riding opportunities across the SNF is being developed. Public and interest groups are involved in developing and managing RMV opportunities through this project as well as assisting in education efforts.

Summary Conclusions

- * During Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006, four projects made decisions to designate approximately 37 miles of road open to RMV travel and 81 miles of roads closed to RMV through closure or decommissioning.
- * As a percentage of roads visited, RMV use on closed roads is similar between 2005 and 2006, while the percentage of user created trails encountered was down during 2006 compared to 2005 (44% in 2005 compared to 31% in 2006).
- * All road spurs or user created/maintained trails found inside the BWCAW originated from older established roads that were apparently associated with older timber sales or other access purposes.