

D. Temporary Openings

The Forest Plan has an objective of increasing the average size of temporary openings. There is a standard that specifies that created openings should be no greater than 1000 acres. Creating larger temporary openings will increase interior forest over time while still retaining a range of small patches. The 1986 Forest Plan limited temporary opening size to 40 acres or less which created a landscape of fragmented habitat and small patch sizes. The 2004 Forest Plan direction represents a shift in management necessary to increase temporary opening sizes. Monitoring will provide insight into how well the Forest is moving toward these objectives.

Key Points

- The Forest is making progress in reducing the number of small temporary openings on the landscape. Opportunities to create larger temporary openings, especially those over 300 acres in size, need to be explored if Forest Plan expectations for larger openings are to be met.

Monitoring Question

The following question addresses the following regulatory requirement (FP, Table MON-1, p 4-3 and 4-4):

A determination of compliance with the following standard:

- [iii] Maximum size limits for harvest areas are evaluated to determine whether such size limits should be continued;

Results

The Forest Plan allows the Forest to create openings up to but not to exceed 1000 acres. Larger temporary openings are appropriate because fire disturbance on drier site LEs (Dry Pine, Dry Mesic Pine, Dry Mesic Pine/Oak) included stand replacement fires that created patches 10-100s of acres in size. Thoughtful management (e.g. clustering of harvests) can begin to establish large patches for the future. Creating larger patches of temporary openings today will provide replacement patches in the long term. In addition the Plan includes objectives to increase the average size of forest openings to reduce the amount of edge and increase the amount of interior forest.

Temporary openings represent early successional stages of forested communities. They are a result of even-aged regeneration harvests (clearcut, seed tree and some shelterwoods) that reduced the overstory stocking to a point where the age of the stand was set to “0” following harvest.

Upland patch sizes were evaluated using the following categories: 1- 40 acres, 41-100 acres, 101-300, greater than 300 acres.

Table 3- 21. Summary of temporary openings on National Forest lands on the Chippewa NF.

Year	Number of Temporary Openings by size category				Total	Largest patch
	< or = 40	41 - 100	101 - 300	> 300		
2004	1,123	141	22	4	1289	454-756
2011	650	88	13	0	751	250

In 2004, there were 1,289 temporary openings on the Forest landscape from harvests during 1996-2004. There were 4 openings greater than 300 acres; the largest of these openings was 756 acres. As the size classes get smaller, the number of openings increases. The smallest openings were less than an acre. There were a total of 33,612 acres in temporary openings.

In 2011, there were 751 temporary openings totaling 17,800 acres from harvests during 2002-2011. There were no openings larger than 300 acres. The largest opening was 250 acres. The smallest was less than one acre.

In 2011 there are fewer openings less than 40 acres (less than half compared to 2004); and fewer 41-100 acres openings. The number of 101-300 acre openings have also substantially decreased in number. The total number of acres of temporary openings on Forest decreased from 33,612 acres in 2004 to 17,800 acres in 2011.

Implications

The number of openings decreased about 52% (from 1,289 in 2004 to 751 in 2010). A decrease in the number of smaller openings is consistent with Plan objectives. These trends indicate a reduction in the number of acres being treated with even-aged regeneration harvests since 2004.

The size of the largest opening also decreased from 756 acres in 2004 to 250 acres in 2011. A decision made in the South Leech Lake project to create larger openings was not feasible to implement. There is a 150 acre patch planned in one of the recent decisions that has yet to be implemented. There may be some larger temporary patches that have not yet been harvested but these were not readily identifiable. According to the 2004 Forest Plan for Decade 1, one 390 acre patch is expected. For Decade 2, this increases to 3 patches totaling 1200 acres (FEIS, p. 3.2-65). It does not appear that expectations for either decade will be met.

The largest openings and a higher number of openings greater than 300 acres occurred in 2004 which is somewhat surprising given the direction of the 1986 Forest Plan to limit temporary opening to 40 acres or less. That said, there were some decisions (Pine Flats and Sand Plain) to create larger temporary openings in the late 90's and in early 2000 in the Lydick area on the Blackduck District that were probably evident on the landscape in 2004.

Opportunities to consolidate or create larger sized openings are limited because stands on today's landscape are smaller (due to 40 acre limitation in the 1986 Plan) and represent a range of age

classes. To create larger openings would entail even-aged regeneration harvest in adjacent young or immature stands. Because of past investments in these stands, there is hesitancy to regenerate stands before they mature.

There is also a hesitancy to create larger temporary openings in mature or older patches because of the Forest Plan direction to “maintain or increase the acres... of mature or older upland forest in patches 300 acres or larger” (O-VG-19, FP, p. 2-23). However, the analysis in the FEIS states that patch size may be decreased by regenerating stands to meet 0-9 objectives as long as Forest Plan standards are met.

To create larger temporary openings through harvest requires planning teams to think ahead several years to identify opportunities so that stand inventories and TES surveys are conducted by the time the NEPA process begins. Because of the lag between planning and implementation, it may take 10 years or more for temporary openings to actually appear on the landscape.

It may not be realistic to create larger temporary openings given the Forest’s social and political pressures. The Leech Lake Reservation is within the Forest, and the Forest is fragmented by private inholdings, State, and county lands.

Recommendations

- Identify Forest-wide opportunities to create larger temporary openings. Some of the best sites for larger openings occur in the jack pine forest type in the Lydick area on the Blackduck district. Larger openings may best be identified on a project by project basis.

A more detailed report is part of the project file and is available upon request.