

6. Recreation

This section includes a discussion on a number of recreational resources -- recreation facilities and opportunities, scenic resources, recreation opportunity spectrum objectives, non-motorized and motorized recreation opportunities, OHVs, and over the snow designated trail routes.

Public visitation of the CNF has increased over the past decade. The Forest is responsible for identifying an appropriate mix of recreational opportunities and the settings needed to provide quality recreational opportunities.

Managing for recreational opportunities results in a number of economic and social benefits to the surrounding communities, the regional area and nationally. Research has demonstrated that visitors to the CNF participate in a number of different activities, including snowmobiling, camping, hiking, ATVing, biking and fishing. (NVUM Surveys, 2002 & 2007)

A. Recreation Facilities and Opportunities

Recreational facilities and opportunities play an important role on the Forest. Recreation facilities include the campgrounds - the fire rings, toilets, water pumps, parking; swimming beaches, and camping spurs. At remote campsites it includes amenities such as fire rings. There are also the trails and trailheads; boat landings, and picnic areas.

Key Points

- The CNF has been meeting basic health and safety and accessibility standards, managing within budget, and responding with appropriate management options to reduce maintenance costs. The range and scope of opportunities has decreased. Given a continued reduction in recreation budgets, additional facility decommissioning will occur.
- Although the Forest is experiencing reduced budgets; it is meeting Forest Plan direction for recreation facilities and operations.

Monitoring Question

To what extent do Forest recreation facilities and opportunities meet accessibility, health, safety, cost, and maintenance requirement and achieve resource and social objectives?

Results

Meeting Health and Cleanliness Targets

The Forest has met annual targets and expectations as specified in the Forest Service Handbook for health and cleanliness in the recreation facilities.

Accessibility

Accessibility expectations are that any new construction be accessible. There has not been new recreation facility construction over the past five years. Existing facilities continue to be accessible to the same degree they were five years ago.

Managing Within Annual Budgets

Management of the recreation facilities has been within the annual budget allocation over the past five years.

Maintenance Requirements

The Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA) identified facilities that reflect our recreation niche, balance quality recreation experiences with reduced staffing and financial resources, and addressed deferred maintenance backlog (RFA, 2008 pg 1). Opportunities were identified to respond to recreation facility maintenance in the context of the budget.

Maintenance, campgrounds and other recreation facilities changes since the 2004 Forest Plan:

- Reduced site visits to mow, pick up trash, clean toilets at 25 recreation facility sites
- Reduced site service and facilities
- Implemented a special use permit for operation and maintenance of the historic Ruby Lake CCC camp
- Working to implement a special use permit at Rabideau CCC Camp.
- Reduced maintenance costs at Rabideau CCC Camp due to the ARRA investment in the facilities.
- Removed eleven toilet facilities.
- Condensed operating season for ten developed campgrounds to Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. The operating season has been reduced at three campgrounds to focus on the two month peak season, July and August. Eight campgrounds have remained open from fishing opener through September.
- Partnerships with the MN DNR to share in the maintenance of many of the water access locations were explored. The MN DNR has had a reduction in their maintenance/operations budget and subsequently we were not able to identify specific areas of shared maintenance.
- Removed trash cans, tables, toilet at a recreation site
- Decommissioned a one day use recreation facility site
- Decommissioned one campground
- Maintained trails are half as often
- Reduced Visitor Center open days
- Contracted water sampling
- Decommissioned day use hand pumps
- Dispersed sites with amenities are visited 0 – 1 times per year versus 1-3 times
- Transferred operations at the Marcell Ranger Station to the Discovery Center – a partner operated visitor center
- Discontinued grooming of Simpson Creek Trails
- Formalizing an agreement with the Northern Lights Ski Club in grooming Trout Lake Trails
- Reduced the SCSEP program across the Forest – 25 fewer employees working recreation focused jobs
- Reduced the size and scope of garbage collection contract

Trail miles

The trail miles have not changed since the 2004 FEIS.

Implications

There are fewer recreational facility opportunities available now than there were in 2004. The reduction in recreation facilities has been budget-driven to primarily reduce annual and deferred maintenance costs. The forest recreation facility costs have decreased, however, budgets will most likely continue to decrease. Subsequently, additional recreation facility changes will be analyzed over the continued life of the Forest Plan. These changes will include but are not limited to: campground fee increases, facility closures, continued and additional reduced services.

The Forest has been meeting basic health and safety and accessibility standards, managing within budget, and responding with appropriate management options to reduce maintenance costs.

Although the Forest is experiencing reduced budgets; it is meeting Forest Plan direction for recreation facilities and operations.

New Issues

The recreation program on the Forest is an excellent program, providing opportunities to over 900,000 visitors that recreate. The program and facilities will change as significant budget reductions are implemented.

Recommendations

- The CNF must continue to evaluate the facilities and determine the cost effectiveness of keeping them open.

Additional information is part of the project file and is available upon request.