

B. Scenic Resources

The scenic resources are an important aspect of the landscape character across the Forest. The landscape lakes, rivers, and wetlands combined with the vast expanse of forest is what people have invested meaning and value into. The northwoods character, or scenic quality, affects the social and economic setting of the Forest.

Scenic Quality is determined within National Forest daily management through scenic integrity objectives. Scenic Quality Objectives (SIOs) guide the amount, degree, intensity, and distribution of management activities needed to achieve desired scenic conditions.

Key Points

- The Forest Plan indicates goals, objectives, standards and guidelines for scenery management across the Forest. Employees implementing forest projects do not know the specifics of translating the projects goals into the SIOs. Training is recommended.
- No monitoring has been conducted.

Monitoring Question

Are forest management activities providing scenic quality as defined by the Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIO)?

Results

Research has demonstrated that the activity that the majority of Chippewa visitors participate in is driving for pleasure, which includes viewing the landscape. (NVUM Surveys, 2002 & 2007)

The Chippewa's range of SIOs is grouped into high, moderate and low scenic integrity objective areas. High, moderate and low scenic integrity areas are defined in terms of the evidence of management activities. The more noticeable management activities are, the lower the scenic quality objective. Management activities include but are not limited to timber harvesting, utility corridor construction and construction of recreation facilities.

Scenic integrity objectives have not been monitored during the past five years. No protocol has been developed for monitoring SIOs so that monitoring would be conducted in a consistent manner across the forest. Although mitigation measures typically are identified in Environmental Assessments and implemented to maintain moderate or high SIOs, it is undetermined if mitigation measures have adequately been implemented or are effective.

Administration Correction #7 on August 18, 2006 changed the incorrectly mapped North Country Trail SIO from moderate to high.

Implications

The generation of the information in the DEIS and Forest Plan was generated by a Landscape Architect (LA). National Forests have employed LAs to (among other items), contribute to the

Forest NEPA project proposals regarding guidelines and mitigation for project implementation. Subsequent monitoring would have been also completed by the landscape architect. General information is available regarding implementation of standards and guidelines to forest harvesting, but does not demonstrate the nuances of project implementation. Training should be made available to forest staff with the goal of being able to effectively implement scenic integrity goals, standards, and guidelines.

The scenic resources of the Chippewa continue to be managed for the objectives of the Forest Plan in terms of striving to reach the scenic integrity objectives of an area. The scenic resources are tied to Forest Plan corridor and area defined scenic integrity objectives. Those objectives have not changed.

New Issues

Clearcutting and intensive thinning harvesting methods within and surrounding recreational areas continue to be internally controversial.

Recommendations

- The aesthetics of the Chippewa NF are important. Visitors continue to identify northern Minnesota as the northwoods and a significant component of the northwoods is the visual example of older, larger pine and hardwood. Areas of the forest identified with visual concern levels should reflect the scenic integrity objectives as a result of forest project implementation. Guidelines on SIO goals and how to get there through appropriate harvesting guidelines should be understood by appropriate employees. Training is recommended.
- Develop a monitoring protocol and conduct forest-wide monitoring to determine if SIOs are being met and mitigation identified during planning is appropriate and adequate.

Additional information can be found in the project file and is available upon request.