C. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Objectives (ROS)

The ROS setting emphasizes recreation activities and opportunities that are appropriate to remote natural settings. The FS uses a nationally recognized classification system called the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum that help describe different recreation settings, opportunities, and experiences. Forest recreation settings vary from semi-primitive – where there is some evidence of other people, difficult access, and opportunities for self reliance – to more developed rural areas which offer more facilities, better access, and opportunities to interact with other people.

Key Points

- The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is a valuable tool for forest management. Primarily due to improved road inventories and road decommissioning, the ROS inventory has changed since the Forest Plan revision. The ROS mapping criteria is available for project planning and analysis.

Monitoring Question

To what extent are Forest management activities within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Objectives?

Results

During forest plan revision, criteria for defining ROS class was refined to respond to northern Minnesota landscape conditions. The primary criteria for determining ROS classes are the distance from roads. Other inventory criteria are the distance from motorized lakes and trails. (FP, Appendix B).

The ROS inventory has changed ROS percentages. These inventory criteria include:

- Roads: No new roads have been built. Some Forest Service roads have been decommissioned.
- Motorized trails: No new motorized trails have been designated.
- Lake Access: Lake access has not changed, inferring that motorized or non-motorized use has not changed.

The following table indicates the percentage of CNF land by ROS Class:

Table 6-1. Percentage of National Forest land by ROS class.

ROS Class Objective	2004 Percent	2011 Percent
Semi-primitive non-motorized	4%	4%
Semi-primitive motorized	2%	2%
Semi-primitive (motorized) – Remote Character	34% (estimated)	24%
Roaded Natural	59% (estimated)	67%
Rural	3%	3%

*Table ROS-5 Chippewa National Forest's Alternative's ROS Class Objectives.

The changes indicated in the remote character or semi-primitive (motorized) ROS inventory indicates approximately a 10% reduction. This reduction is not due to on the changes in lake access or lake use or trails on the Forest, rather, it is primarily a function of better data on the quantity and location of Forest Service system roads. The majority of the changes have been due to mapping changes since the 2004 Revision.

A Forest Plan amendment was completed, adding an additional 1,868 acres to the North Winnie Semi-primitive Non-motorized area. The acreage is not large enough to reflect a percentage change.

Implications

The semi-primitive non-motorized acres have not changed enough to increase the percentage within the Forest as a whole. There were 1,868 acres added to the Winnie North SPNM area. The additional area required that signing, road closures, and trail development work be completed.

The Semi-primitive motorized ROS inventoried acres were considered as designated within Management Areas of Eligible Scenic Rivers, Unique Biological, Geological, or Historical Areas, and Riparian Areas. These have not changed.

Also considered semi-primitive (motorized) are the "remote character" areas within the Roaded Natural designated areas. These areas were not formally identified within the Forest Plan, rather the intention is to implement the Goals and Objectives of identifying and analyzing opportunities for motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities and forest settings.

The proximity to roads is one of the key criteria for determination of meeting semi-primitive qualifications. Reviewing the past five years, there have not been permanent roads built. There have been roads decommissioned resulting in approximately 1,500 contiguous acres of National Forest land that now meets the semi-primitive non-motorized ROS criteria.

Continuing to improve road, lake access, and trail inventory to be able to create the most accurate ROS inventory will be critical to the accuracy of the ROS data used in the next Forest Plan revision analysis. Good data is also important during project level analysis to implement the 2004 Forest Plan goals and objectives.

New Issues

Managing lands collaboratively within the Chippewa NF and across connected landscapes with the DNR, Counties, LLBO, and other interested individuals is an opportunity to work toward common goals. ROS criteria applied across the landscape of the Forest indicates that there may be opportunities through collaboration to manage lands for identified ROS objectives.

Recommendations

- Continuing to improve road, lake access, and trail inventory to create the most accurate ROS inventory will be critical to the accuracy of the ROS data used in the next Forest Plan revision analysis.

- The ROS inventory can inform priority road decommissioning decisions. Roads have been identified for decommissioning through project level analysis. There are not enough funds to decommission all identified roads. The ROS objectives can provide a framework for prioritizing road decommissioning decisions. For example, an ROS inventory indicates an area may be considered semi-primitive non-motorized with an additional road decommission. Given the ROS objective, the limited funds should be allocated to decommission that road.

- The Forest Plan says that through project level planning, the Forest will consider management of some inventoried semi-primitive ROS areas for separate non-motorized or motorized recreation uses. (O-REC-3).

- Road decommissioning may continue to change the ROS inventory. The changes should be incorporated into project level analysis and planning.

- Three areas (Bass Lake/Rush Island, Simpson Creek/Trail area, Fiske Lake) have been identified on the Forest as having been formally (through a Forest Supervisors Order), or informally (managing land in conjunction with the neighboring state non-motorized designation) managed as semi-primitive non-motorized. These areas are not formally recognized within the Forest Plan. They should be formally analyzed and managed as O-REC-3 recommends.