



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

2006



Hiawatha National Forest Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement

*To accompany the 2006 Land and
Resource Management Plan*



Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement

To accompany the 2006 Land and Resource Management Plan

*Alger, Cheboygan, Chippewa, Delta, Mackinac, Marquette
and Schoolcraft Counties, Michigan*

Responsible Agency

U.S.D.A. Forest Service

Responsible Official

Randy Moore, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
626 E. Wisconsin Avenue ■ Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202
Phone: 414.297.3600; TDD: 414.297.3507

Forest Supervisor

Thomas A. Schmidt
Hiawatha National Forest
2727 N. Lincoln Road ■ Escanaba, Michigan 49829
Phone: 906.786.4062

For further information, contact:

Dave Maercklein, Forest Planner
Hiawatha National Forest
2727 N. Lincoln Road ■ Escanaba, Michigan 49829
Phone: 906.786.4062; TDD: 906.789.3337

Table of Contents	Page
Preface	i
Introduction.....	1
■ About the Forest Plan and the Hiawatha National Forest	1
■ A Vision of the Future	2
Decision Overview and Rationale	3
■ Need for Change Addressed in Plan Revision (issues).....	3
■ Decision Overview	5
■ Decision Summary and Rationale.....	5
■ Sustainable Ecosystems, Conditions and Uses	5
◆ Vegetation Management	6
◆ Old Growth.....	6
◆ Land Suitability/Timber Management	7
◆ Role of Fire.....	8
◆ Wildlife Habitat Management	8
◆ Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) Species	9
◆ Management Indicator Species (MIS)	9
■ Recreation Management	10
◆ Recreation Opportunity Spectrum	10
◆ Great Lakes/Inland Lakes Access	10
◆ Motorized Trails and Routes	11
◆ Cross-Country Travel	12
◆ Non-motorized Trails and Routes	13
■ Other Issues.....	13
◆ Watershed Health and Aquatic Habitat Management	13
◆ Management Area Allocation	14
◆ Research Natural Areas/Candidate RNAs.....	15
◆ Wild and Scenic Rivers	15
◆ Roadless Inventory/Wilderness Evaluations	15
◆ Economic and Social Sustainability of Local Economies	16
◆ Tribal Interests and Treaty Rights	17
Changes Between Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements	
■ Vegetation Management	17
■ Wildlife, Fish and Sensitive Plant Habitat Management.....	18
■ Watershed Management	19
■ Recreation Management	19
■ Land Uses Management	20
■ Transportation System	21
■ Monitoring.....	21
■ Appendices	21
Public Involvement	22
Alternatives	24
◆ Alternative Development.....	24
◆ Alternatives Eliminated	24
◆ Alternatives Considered in Detail	25
◆ Environmentally preferred Alternative.....	27
Consistency with Other National Policies, Laws and Authorities	28
Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation	32
Administrative Appeal of my Decision	35
Contacts.....	36

Preface

This Record of Decision describes how and why I reached my decision to select Alternative 2, as modified, as the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Forest Plan) for the Hiawatha National Forest. The Record of Decision has two purposes: first, it is a legal document detailing a formal decision from a government agency. Second, it explains the “why” of that decision. It is my sincere desire that this document clearly outlines my decision-making process.

Although this decision is mine, it has not been made alone. We received more than 3,300 comment letters since the forest plan revision process began in August, 2002. These comments helped guide the Hiawatha National Forest’s staff to develop the Revised Forest Plan.

The Hiawatha National Forest personnel have worked with tribal governments, state and local governments, members of the public, elected officials and other agencies and organizations to produce the Revised Forest Plan. I am pleased to make my decision based on the solid relationships and collaboration that have evolved to ensure sustainable conditions for the Forest’s human and ecological environments.

Revising a forest plan is not easy. Creating one that is supported by most members of the public is even more difficult. Forest management and forest plan revision are complex processes. There is a myriad of federal laws, executive orders and policies that govern national forest management. The American people, for whom these forests are managed, often have divergent views and values when it comes to what they want the Hiawatha National Forest to provide, to look like and to be managed for.

This Revised Forest Plan helps meet the mission of the Forest Service, which is “to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”

The Revised Forest Plan evolved from alternatives formed from the best available science and from the work of a dedicated Forest Service employee interdisciplinary team. However, science does not always provide definitive answers to complex resource management topics, nor can any one field of science provide all of the answers. However, science can offer insight into the effects of management decisions and actions. In other words, good science can clear the fog and help us make better decisions to reach our goals.

I want to thank the people who participated in the forest plan revision process. These people worked with the Forest Service to help develop issues and to identify the need for change topics; they provided input that helped develop alternatives and provided substantive comments on the draft documents. Your participation has been important and your interest and participation will continue to be important as we implement, monitor and update the 2006 Forest Plan.

- Tribal Governments (Voight Tribes, GLIFWC, Bay Mills Indian Community, and Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians) have worked with the Forest to ensure that specific rights and responsibilities within the Tribal Treaty Areas are fulfilled. I want to thank them for their involvement and collaboration in this planning effort.
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources has been a valued partner in management of public forest resources. Their expertise and helpful suggestions are reflected in this Plan, and they are true cooperators in managing Michigan’s forestlands.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service involvement was crucial as we developed management direction to ensure the protection and recovery of the listed threatened and endangered species. I thank USFWS for its guidance and review, and I look to the future when through our cooperative actions, these species can be removed from the threatened and endangered species list.

- **Other Federal Agencies** and divisions provided valuable review and comments. The contributions of the National Park Service, the North Central Forest Experiment Station and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, are much appreciated.
- **Interest Groups:** My thanks also go to the members of the various interest groups who reviewed and commented throughout the planning process: Cycle Conservation Club; Defenders of Wildlife; Eastern Upper Peninsula Partners in Ecosystem Management (EUPPEM), Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics; Heartwood; International Mountain Biking Association; Lake States Federal Timber Purchasers Committee; Michigan Association of Timbermen; Michigan Resource Stewards; Michigan Sharptailed Grouse Association; Michigan Snowmobile Association; Michigan United Conservation Clubs; Pulp and Paper Workers Resource Council; Ruffed Grouse Society; Sierra Club; Sportsman's Off-Road Vehicle Association; The Nature Conservancy and many others too numerous to mention.
- **Friends of the Hiawatha** have been interested and active in forest planning and Forest Plan implementation since the development of the 1986 Plan. They have provided encouragement, perspective and comment to help us develop a strategic and effective revised Plan. I want to thank them for their time, involvement and efforts to attend meetings, provide discussion and make comments. We look forward to continuing our relationship with the Friends through the implementation of the Revised Forest Plan.
- **Individuals:** I also want to thank the individuals who cared enough to attend meetings, to read documents and to provide comments. Many of your suggestions helped improve the Revised Forest Plan. We hope you continue to use and enjoy the Hiawatha National Forest. I also ask that you continue to provide us your ideas on how we can improve the management of the Hiawatha.
- **Michigan State University:** I value the contributions in research that MSU has provided over the past several years that have been used to identify recreation use and trends on the Forest, and to develop the initial Social and Economic Resource Assessment for the revision effort. We value our relationship and look forward to even greater partnerships and cooperation as we implement the revised Plan.
- **Forest Service Employees** worked many long and hard hours developing the Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Revised Forest Plan. Their knowledge, expertise and dedication is valuable and I appreciate their efforts.

We now have a Revised Forest Plan that will guide the management of the Hiawatha National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. But what does that really mean? The 1986 Forest Plan focused on what the land could produce, based on the desires that the public had 20 years ago. The Revised Forest Plan reflects public desires today and for the future focusing on outcomes, recognizing that what lies and remains on the landscape is vitally important.

The Revised Plan also recognizes how important Forest management is to people and to their social and economic well-being. The outputs and uses of the forest that result from achieving the desired conditions and objectives will continue to provide jobs, products and recreational uses for the American people. These lands can help maintain a quality of life for the people who live and work on them, for those who depend on them for fulfillment of hunting, recreational and gathering needs and for those interested in spending time visiting this American treasure.

I believe we have crafted a Revised Forest Plan with a strong foundation for ecological, social and economic sustainability over the long-term. However, our work is not finished; in fact it's just beginning. We must now transfer the words in the document and apply them to the ground to make the desired conditions a reality.

The Hiawatha National Forest is part of a vast and complex social, ecologic and economic ecosystem in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. It should not and cannot be managed without consideration and assistance from the various land managers, governments, agencies and people that are part of the landscape.

The challenge ahead of us is to continue to work together to implement the Revised Forest Plan. I fully understand this can be difficult to achieve. At the same time, I am confident that cooperation will unite us, because I believe that the concern we all have for the Hiawatha is our common bond. We want these lands to remain productive, ecologically healthy and beautiful for both the current generation and for future generations. I believe this Revised Forest Plan provides the springboard for managing the Hiawatha National Forest and for working with others in managing Michigan's Upper Peninsula's landscape.

I thank you again for your support, participation and patience throughout this process. I invite your continued partnership in helping implement the Revised Plan and in keeping it fresh and relevant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Reg Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a distinct "M".

Regional Forester
Eastern Region, USDA Forest Service

Introduction

About the Forest Plan

The Hiawatha National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan (Forest Plan) provides the principal framework for preserving and protecting the Forest's resources, while making those resources available to the public for a variety of uses and experiences. The Hiawatha's Forest Plan was first developed in 1986, and as required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the Forest Plan has been revised. Six programmatic decisions and future project-level decisions are made within the framework established in the Forest Plan.

1. Forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives (36 CFR 219.11(b))
2. Forest-wide management standards and guidelines (36 CFR 219.13-27)
3. Management area direction (36 CFR 219.11)
4. Lands suited/not suited for timber management (36 CFR 219.14) and establishment of an allowable sale quantity (36 CFR 219.16)
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11 (d))
6. Recommendations to Congress (36 CFR 219.17)

This 2006 Forest Plan replaces the Hiawatha's 1986 Land and Resource Management Plan. As the 2006 Forest Plan is implemented, management activities such as building and maintaining roads, restoring streams, harvesting timber, providing habitat for threatened and endangered species, and developing recreational opportunities will be achieved in a balanced, cost-efficient manner.

These activities will be designed to move the Forest toward meeting both forest-wide and management area desired conditions. The goals and objectives in the Forest Plan can be accomplished from physical, ecological, economical and legal perspectives. The management practices and outcomes proposed are projections that the Forest will strive to accomplish in order to achieve the desired conditions.

The 2006 Forest Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) are programmatic in nature and provide a long-range strategy for the Forest. The Plan is implemented through site-specific projects. Annual budgets will determine what projects are planned and implemented. Site-specific environmental analysis will occur for each project that is needed to implement this strategy. Any resulting environmental analysis documents will be tiered to the FEIS for the Revised Forest Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

The 2006 Forest Plan was developed with input from various tribal entities, many agencies and individuals. For example, in comments submitted on the Proposed Forest Plan, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (Michigan DNR) shows support of the ecological restoration focus of the 2006 Forest Plan. Comments from the Michigan DNR included the following:

"In general, we are pleased with the strategic directions outlined in the document. Some of the revision topics detailed are strategies that the Department has been promoting for State land management in the form of sustainable ecosystems, watershed health, recreation and natural areas. Aligning management units with ecological boundaries, considering connectivity, patch size and cumulative effects on species viability are strategies that should help all large landowners to achieve biodiversity and sustainability goals."

The Plan will be amended as needed to respond to new information, Congressional land designations and changing needs and opportunities. Any action taken to amend or revise the Forest Plan will include public participation.

About Hiawatha National Forest

The Hiawatha National Forest is located in the central and eastern portion of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The Forest's proclamation boundary encompasses nearly 1.3 million acres and touches three of the five Great Lakes. The Forest has two units: The East Unit was established by President Teddy Roosevelt in 1909 as the Marquette National Forest. The West Unit was established in 1931, when President Herbert Hoover signed a proclamation to create the Hiawatha National Forest in Michigan's central Upper Peninsula. A 1962 executive order transferred all Marquette National Forest lands to the Hiawatha National Forest.

The Hiawatha is largely a second growth forest, due to logging and burning that occurred when forest lands were privately-owned around the end of 19th century. Much of today's Hiawatha National Forest lands were purchased under the Weeks Act and a major emphasis since acquisition has been to restore the forest ecosystems. Fire control and planting took place in the 1930s and 1940s by the Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The Hiawatha's landscape is diverse and includes rolling hills forested with northern hardwoods, white pine and hemlock, flat land covered by red pine, jack pine and aspen, and large open and tree-covered wetlands. Wood products from the Forest provide an important contribution to Michigan's Upper Peninsula's regional economy. The Forest is home to more than one hundred species either listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened or endangered or included on the Regional Forester's list of sensitive plant and animal species.

The Hiawatha also provides a variety of recreational opportunities. Visitors can enjoy the forest's six federally-designated Wilderness Areas, five national Wild and Scenic Rivers or visit any of the six historic lighthouses located within the Forest. Anglers can fish on more than 75 lakes and 600 miles of streams, and people can hike, hunt, pick berries or watch birds throughout the forest. In the winter, visitors can ride for miles on groomed snowmobile trails, or move at a slower pace while cross country skiing, snow shoeing or ice fishing. The Forest has numerous developed and dispersed campgrounds.

A Vision of the Future

The forest that exists today has evolved from the influence of natural and human processes. Natural disturbance processes such as fire, wind and flooding helped shape the forest's vegetation, wildlife and aquatic resources. Native Americans introduced human influences into the forest, and human-caused influences reached a much larger scale during the mining, logging and settlement era of the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. Today's forest is different from the forest that would have evolved under natural processes. It is different from the forest that remained immediately following the logging era and is different from the forest that will exist in the future as a result of implementing this 2006 Forest Plan.

The Hiawatha National Forest will sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the forest to meet the needs of present and future generations. Forest management will continue to support the relationship between people and the forest. Vegetation composition and structure will provide plant and animal species habitats, timber products and settings for recreation activities. The Forest will contribute to the health of soil and water resources.

Biological diversity will be maintained or increased by establishing a greater portion of long-lived conifers such as white pine and hemlock. Hardwood forests managed for a diversity of age classes through uneven-aged management will provide a desirable setting for dispersed recreation. Representation of early successional systems and mid- to late-successional ecosystems will provide for species viability and diversity, as well as continue to supply healthy populations of game species.

Management will continue to provide habitat to support the recovery of the threatened bald eagle, gray wolf and Canada lynx and endangered Kirtland's warbler, Hines emerald dragonfly and piping plover. Management will also continue to provide habitat to support the recovery of rare plant species such as Lakeside daisy, Dwarf Lake iris, Houghton's goldenrod, Pitcher's thistle and Hart's-tongue fern.

The Hiawatha is an important recreation destination in Michigan, the Great Lakes region, and nationally. People will be able to experience a wide variety of recreational opportunities. The Forest will continue to provide ample access through roads and trails and will offer opportunities to experience solitude and more remote recreational experiences. The Forest will continue to offer a natural setting with road access to many areas.

The Hiawatha will contribute forest products to support the timber industry and contribute to the economic sustainability of local communities. Timber harvest methods will be designed to contribute toward increased restoration of important components of healthy ecological systems. The production of timber will be monitored to ensure sustainable harvest levels over the long-term.

Decision Overview and Rationale

Need for Change Addressed in the Plan (Issues)

When the Hiawatha published the Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan, Sustainable Ecosystems Conditions and Uses and Recreation Management were the two major areas that were identified as need for change topics. In addition, a number of issues were identified that needed to be addressed during forest plan revision.

Sustainable Ecosystems, Conditions and Uses

The Hiawatha National Forest has diverse ecosystems that provide habitat for numerous plants and animals, serve as a setting for recreational activities, and provide a mix of forest products. Since the original Forest Plan was developed in 1986, new information on the ecological function and capability of the forest landscape has been developed. In the Notice of Intent, the Hiawatha proposed to address the following:

- **Vegetation Management:** Some of the 1986 Plan's vegetation composition and structure goals were not met. This was due to numerous factors, including changed market demand for timber products; natural events such as wildfire, insect and disease outbreaks and wind; and the discovery and listing of new rare plant and animal species such as Hart's-tongue fern, Kirtland's warbler and Canada lynx. The tree species most affected were jack pine and aspen.
- **Old Growth:** Stands designated as future old growth in the 1986 Plan were classified as suited for timber production, which implied that timber harvest would eventually occur. New ecological information, public comments and monitoring of stands designated for the development of future old growth indicated changes were warranted. New research supports maintaining larger blocks and corridors connecting old growth areas in order to benefit those wildlife and plant species using these areas.
- **Land Suitability/Timber Management:** Because of improved ecological classification information, there was a need to review the Hiawatha's lands classified as suitable for timber production and to determine the amount of timber production that could be sustained on the forest while providing other multiple-use benefits.

- **Wildlife and Plant Habitat Management:** The Hiawatha's aquatic and terrestrial habitats support populations of native and desired non-native wildlife and plant species. In the Notice of Intent, the Hiawatha proposed to revise management direction to better address habitat needs of Federally listed threatened and endangered species and species listed as Sensitive by the Regional Forester. The Hiawatha also proposed to evaluate and change Management Indicator Species based on monitoring and new information.

Recreation Management

Recreation use and demands for access have changed since the 1986 Forest Plan was developed. Conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation users have increased and requests for access to inland lakes and the Great Lakes continue to rise. In the Notice of Intent, the Hiawatha proposed to address the following recreation topics:

- **Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS):** The Hiawatha proposed to change the ROS objectives of Delias Run, Boot Lake and Buck Bay Creek from semi-primitive non-motorized to semi-primitive motorized reflecting actual use and desired management of these areas.
- **Great Lakes and Inland Lakes Access:** The Hiawatha proposed to provide Plan direction for the types of access and facility development level for inland lakes and Great Lakes boat accesses, and to manage for a mix of motorized and non-motorized recreation access on inland lakes.
- **Motorized and non-Motorized Trails and Routes:** The Hiawatha proposed to modify management direction for motorized and non-motorized access to create opportunities for loops and connections between roads, trails and facilities and to change forest-wide direction for OHV (off highway vehicles) use to a "closed unless designated/posted open" system to promote consistent policy among the Michigan National Forests for OHVs. Although not carried forth for the final revised plan, the original proposal also would have applied a "closed unless designated open" system to snowmobile use in order to reduce effects on wildlife.

Other Issues

- **Management Area Allocation:** The Hiawatha proposed to change management area boundaries to better align with ecological land type boundaries and incorporate new information on ecosystems, sustainability and capability concepts, as well as other pertinent resource information.
- **Watershed Health, Aquatic Habitat and Soil Management:** The Hiawatha proposed to develop forest-wide management direction for watershed, riparian, aquatic and soils resources.
- **Candidate Research Natural Areas:** The Hiawatha proposed to review the list of candidate research natural areas included in the Forest Plan, considering new ecological information.
- **Wild and Scenic River Management Plans:** The Hiawatha proposed three river management plans and final river corridor boundaries for the Whitefish, Sturgeon and East Branch Tahquamenon Wild and Scenic Rivers.
- **Roadless Inventory/Wilderness Evaluations:** The Hiawatha disclosed the initial results of its roadless area inventory and evaluation of the Fibre area for wilderness potential, in compliance with National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirements for forest plan revision. Only the Fibre area meets the roadless area inventory criteria.

Decision Overview

From the very start of this revision effort, the Hiawatha National Forest sought to create a Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) that is broad-based in design, strategic rather than prescriptive, and incorporates a landscape-based management perspective. The revised plan reflects the understanding that the Forest does not exist in isolation, but is part of a larger landscape that is managed and influenced by many stakeholders who have a wide variety of interests.

I reviewed the Forest Plan's desired conditions, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. I also examined the mix of management area prescriptions and the environmental consequences disclosed in the Final EIS to see how each alternative provides for forest health and biological diversity and how each alternative meets social and economic needs. I selected Alternative 2, as modified, as the Hiawatha National Forest's Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). I chose this alternative because I believe it maximizes the net benefit to the public because it:

1. Maintains or enhances biodiversity and the long-term health of the Forest
2. Contributes to the economic and the social needs of people, cultures and communities
3. Provides sustainable and predictable levels of products and services from the Forest
4. Provides the best mix of benefits to address the needs for change identified in the Final Environmental Impact Statement
5. Emphasizes adaptive management
6. Provides direction at the Forest level that will assist managers in making future project decisions

I also considered how the selected alternative responded to public comments, to internal management concerns and to national policy. My decision incorporates by reference the analysis of effects and the management direction disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the Revised Forest Plan, and the planning record.

My decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the Hiawatha National Forest. It does not apply to any other federal, tribal, state, county, municipal or private lands. However in making my decision, I considered the effects of my decision on those lands. The rationale for each of the key elements of my decision is discussed below.

Decision Summary and Rationale

Sustainable Ecosystems, Conditions and Uses

The 2006 Plan ensures the long-term health of the land by providing a balance between ecosystems that will be actively managed through practices such as timber harvest, prescribed burning, wildlife and watershed enhancement projects, and ecosystems where natural processes will predominate. It establishes a framework for management that will enhance biological diversity at both the local and landscape levels. The range of vegetation objectives for ecological landtypes (ELTs) was selected to help maintain or restore ecological processes and functions. The Revised Plan also addresses the spread of non-native invasive species with a goal to eradicate, suppress or contain populations.

I believe that the 2006 Forest Plan provides the best direction to move toward providing a diverse, productive, healthy and sustainable forest that is resilient to natural and human-caused disturbances. It provides the tools needed to treat unnaturally high levels of hazardous fuels to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fire, while still maintaining objectives for increased structural composition and species diversity and ensuring older forest is not lost.

- **Vegetation Management:** In the 2006 Forest Plan, early successional forest types such as balsam fir and aspen will provide habitat for a variety of game and non-game species. Jack pine and savannas will be evident on xeric ecosystems to provide habitat for Kirtland's warbler, sharp-tailed grouse and other associated species. Lowland conifer and cedar stands will be managed primarily in older age classes; however there will be some young stands to meet vegetation age diversity objectives.

The Hiawatha's Revised Plan calls for a mix of even and uneven-aged northern hardwood management. The uneven-aged system will be used where the goal is to manage for late-seral shade-tolerant hardwoods, such as sugar maple and beech for wildlife habitat, recreational settings and quality sawtimber timber production. The even aged system will be used where the goal is to provide early and mid-seral shade intolerant hardwoods such as aspen and cherry. Within-stand diversity will be maintained or increased by encouraging long-lived conifers such as white pine and hemlock where ecologically appropriate. Even-aged hardwood management will emphasize species such as red maple, birch, oak and cherry. Even-aged management for these hardwood species will provide habitat for wildlife species that require a mix of temporary openings, closed canopy forest and forests with an open understory.

The 2006 Plan includes direction needed to maintain white pine as an important species on the Hiawatha as a result of both planting and natural succession. Red pine stands will be regenerated through both shelterwood and clearcut harvest methods. The Plan includes desired condition and vegetative goals for age, composition and tree species diversity for each of the Forest's management areas. It addresses Forest resources in an integrated fashion, and considers goals for biological diversity, timber production, forest health, wildlife habitat, aquatic and riparian values and desired recreational settings.

The EIS prepared in conjunction with the 2006 Plan provides a comprehensive environmental analysis of vegetation management at the programmatic level. This analysis took into consideration the information contained in the EIS for the 1986 Plan and monitoring reports. The 2006 EIS analysis demonstrates that the Forest took a hard look at the potential environmental effects of vegetation management at the programmatic level. The updated environmental analysis is the foundation for new management prescriptions based upon current resource conditions on the Forest and the best scientific information available. The 2006 Plan also contains new estimates of the proportion of probable timber harvest methods for the next 10 to 15 years pursuant to NFMA, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1604(f)(2) (Plan, Appendix A). This forecast of possible harvest methods is a non-binding estimate and does not mandate use of any particular harvest method.

The choice of harvest methods is determined at the site-specific level of analysis and decision making after further environmental analysis and appropriate public involvement. The probable method of timber harvest estimate is not a limit, but a projection of the methods of harvest that may be used. The comprehensive analysis of vegetation management was prepared with considerable public involvement. We carefully considered the public input on possible harvest methods and other vegetation management issues in the development of the 2006 FEIS, Forest Plan, and decision. Further site specific environmental analysis and public involvement will occur prior to any ground-disturbing vegetation management projects.

- **Old Growth:** The 1986 Forest Plan provided for a minimum of 51,988 acres of lands designated for management that would eventually provide old growth forests. This specific acreage resulted from a negotiated settlement of appeals to the 1986 Plan. These lands were classified as suited for timber production. The Plan also provided goals for the amount and species composition of old growth by management area. This approach to providing for old-growth resulted in a

fragmented old growth system design and was identified as an area that needed change through this plan revision. The 2006 Forest Plan will continue to provide for developing old growth conditions on approximately 52,000 acres — the same as the 1986 Forest Plan because there is no indication that more is necessary or desirable.

I have changed some of the locations to provide for better ecological representation and connectivity between future old growth areas. I have reclassified these lands managed for old growth as unsuited for timber production. In addition, the old growth system will be complemented by about 158,000 acres of other forested unsuited lands (including wildernesses, candidate and research natural areas, Management Areas 6.1 and 6.3, the wild-classified segments of the Hiawatha's wild and scenic rivers, Grand Island National Recreation Area, and stands with low productivity). This designated old growth system, combined with the other unsuited lands that will eventually provide old growth conditions will provide an important component of the overall biological diversity of the forest.

On the Hiawatha, areas designated for management as old growth forests are intended to provide ecosystems where natural biological processes predominate. Old growth can be described as, blocks of land characterized by older larger trees, native species, and low road and trail densities. The structural diversity contained within an old-growth forest can include multi-layered canopies, canopy gaps, tip-up mounds and an accumulation of dead woody material including standing snags and large logs on the forest floor. Functional diversity is tied to structural diversity and includes the maintenance of natural soil processes, hydrology and wildlife habitats.

Old-growth blocks will vary from small isolated forested areas to larger landscape complexes that may be interspersed with patches of young forest resulting from natural disturbances, wetlands and water bodies. The old growth design will provide for large patches of old forest with corridors between the patches. Succession and natural disturbances will be the driving force of the vegetation change.

- **Land Suitability/Timber Management:** The National Forest Management Act requires that lands identified as suitable for timber production and the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) be reviewed during Forest plan revision. Updated ecological classification information was used when the forest's interdisciplinary planning team conducted the review of lands classified as suitable for timber production. The suitability analysis for the selected alternative determined that 578,461 acres were biologically, physically and socially suitable for timber production. Based on this suitable timber base, an ASQ was set at an average of 109 MMBF (million board feet) per year for Decade 1 of the Plan. This ASQ also represents the long-term sustained yield capacity from lands classified as suitable for timber production.

In making my decision, I recognize there is a high level of concern from the timber industry about the level of the ASQ. The revised plan ASQ provides an increase in the ASQ established in the 1986 plan (an average of 70 MMBF per year during the first decade). ASQ is simply an upper limit on harvest, not a commitment to sell that particular amount over the next decade. However, I have confirmed with the Forest Supervisor that the ASQ established through this plan revision is attainable depending on resources available and finding expected conditions when site-specific projects are designed on-the-ground.

I believe that the Hiawatha's timber management activities will move the forest towards a desired condition of having a diverse mix of plants and animals and enhance settings for a wide variety of recreational opportunities, as well as help support economic sustainability by providing a variety of timber products needed by local timber industry. These activities will provide for steady and predictable supplies of forest products from the Hiawatha National Forest. The Revised Plan will ensure that a balanced mix of forest products by species and size are available to local mills.

- **Role of Fire in Forest Health:** Fire suppression has created areas of unnaturally high fuel loading that pose an increased risk of catastrophic wildland fire. Fire and fuels is recognized by the Chief of the Forest Service as one of the four threats to the Nation's forests. To help national forests move towards reducing the threat of wildfire, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (H.R. 1904) and the Healthy Forest Initiative were enacted.

The 2006 Forest Plan includes direction for the Hiawatha to use fire as a management tool to accomplish ecological, silvicultural, forest health and public safety goals and objectives. This direction will move the Forest towards its desired condition of a having a healthy forest that has reduced the risk of catastrophic wildland fires. It will also increase the forest's resilience to wildland fires. Prescribed fire that mimics natural fire disturbance patterns will be used for restoring or maintaining desirable plant communities, processes and functions. Prescribed fire will complement mechanical treatments of vegetation in achieving objectives and moving the forest toward desired conditions.

In my decision, I am recognizing a need for the increased use of fire as a management tool to accomplish ecological, silvicultural, forest health and public safety goals and objectives. I believe the management direction for use of fire included in the revised plan will protect soil, water and air resources and will not compromise public health and safety.

- **Wildlife Habitat Management:** Based on extensive analysis, I have determined that the Revised Forest Plan will provide the habitat needed to maintain viable populations of all native and desired non-native species that occur on the Hiawatha National Forest within the capability of the land. The revised plan shifts management direction from the 1986 Plan's emphasis on game species toward managing for the entire spectrum of wildlife habitats. However, even with this more holistic approach, the plan will continue to manage for high quality habitat for game species in order to support quality hunting and fishing experiences

The Plan takes a coarse filter or ecological approach first, because providing a variety of ecological conditions will support the habitat needs of most species. We also took a fine filter or species approach to ensure that the needs of species listed as threatened or endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or on my Regional Forester's list of sensitive species would be met. This "fine-filter" approach generally required adding specific standards and guidelines to the plan.

Although many people were concerned about maintaining populations of important game species such as deer, grouse and woodcock, others thought that high populations of deer (and deer browse) in some areas of the Forest is reducing the biological diversity of the forest and poses a safety concern because of deer-car collisions. Many factors contribute to game species populations including habitat, state hunting regulations and winter severity. Managing wildlife on the Hiawatha is accomplished cooperatively between the Forest Service, the USFWS, the Michigan DNR and other federal, state and local agencies and organizations. The 2006 Plan vegetation goals provide a balance of habitat for deer species—including foraging (aspen and white cedar) and winter cover (late seral lowland conifers).

My decision to select this alternative includes an emphasis on managing for a wide spectrum of wildlife habitats. Vegetation goals and desired conditions were designed considering wildlife habitat needs. The 2006 Plan continues to emphasize providing habitat for a variety of game species in recognition of the social and economic importance of hunting to people who live in or visit the Upper Peninsula.

- **Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Plant and Wildlife Species:** The Hiawatha National Forest is home to 11 federally-listed threatened and endangered plant and wildlife species and 91 Regional Forester sensitive plant and wildlife species. Since the 1986 Forest Plan was approved, Canada lynx, Hines Emerald Dragonfly, Hart's-tongue fern, Dwarf Lake iris, Pitcher's thistle, Houghton's goldenrod and Lakeside daisy have been added to the federal list.

The 1986 Forest Plan provided specific direction for all threatened, endangered and Regional Forester sensitive plant and animal species that were listed at that time. In the Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan, the Forest proposed to incorporate by reference the federal threatened and endangered and Regional Forester sensitive species lists, and to include conservation measures in the 2006 Plan.

I believe the 2006 Forest Plan's conservation measures and direction to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to implement approved federal recovery plans for threatened and endangered species will allow the Hiawatha to be a leader in the conservation or recovery of these protected plant and animal species. In addition, I believe the management direction in the selected alternative provides the best opportunities for contributing to the conservation and recovery of all TES species. This decision is based in part on the expertise of the Hiawatha's wildlife biologists and on the Biological Opinion provided by the USFWS. In that opinion, the USFWS concurred with the Hiawatha that implementation of Alternative 2 would not jeopardize the federally-listed threatened and endangered species on the Forest.

I also believe the management direction in the 2006 Forest Plan will not result in any species trending toward listing under the Threatened and Endangered Species Act. For a few species that are naturally rare or on the edge of their range, the Revised Plan includes specific standards and guidelines or management objectives needed for the protection of the species' habitat.

In the 2006 Forest Plan, the Hiawatha has established goals that contribute to the conservation and recovery of federal threatened and endangered species and to the conservation of Regional Forester Sensitive Species by working cooperatively with federal and/or state agencies to complete and implement appropriate recovery plans, conservation assessments and management strategies. However, given all these provisions of the revised plan, I recognize that there are inherent limitations to the capability of the land to provide for these species. Although the risk of viability for some species will likely continue to be very high, the Plan promotes protection of the species and improvement of habitat.

- **Management Indicator Species (MIS):** The 1986 Forest Plan identified 23 Management Indicator Species (MIS) to represent 22 habitats. In addition, the Plan also identified seven species of concern for monitoring. Forest plan revision included a review of those MIS and a selection of MIS to include with the revised plan. This process is described in detail in Appendix E in the final EIS. In the 2006 Forest Plan, four MIS were selected to monitor a variety of habitats:
 - Ruffed grouse to represent the early-successional stage of the aspen community
 - American marten to represent the late-successional northern hardwoods and conifer-dominated forests
 - Sharp-tailed grouse to represent the open land savannahs and early successional stages of jack pine ecosystems
 - Brook trout to represent species that reside in coldwater streams

Many people expressed concern that four Management Indicator Species were not enough to adequately monitor the range of habitat types on the Hiawatha National Forest. I believe the four MIS are adequate because of the importance of these habitats and the associated species they represent. In addition to monitoring the MIS, the Forest will also monitor TES species. Furthermore, there is new technology (Geographic Information System) that will allow the Forest to easily monitor a variety of habitats — both spatially and temporally as necessary reducing the reliance on MIS. I believe by using this new technology, the Hiawatha will be able to successfully evaluate the health of the communities to which these species belong.

Recreation Management

Since development of the 1986 Forest Plan, recreation use and means of access to the Forest have changed. The Plan provided for snowmobile and OHV use and the construction of new trails, with an emphasis on providing greater opportunities for long-distance hiking. However, the increased demand for use by off-highway vehicles (OHVs), personal watercraft (PWC), snowmobiles, horseback riding, and new uses such as mountain biking were not envisioned when the 1986 Plan was developed. With the increased use, motorized and non-motorized recreationists on the Forest have experienced increased conflicts and both groups have asked the Hiawatha to provide more routes and facilities for their respective uses, and to maintain or decrease the number of routes for the other uses.

In the Notice of Intent, the Hiawatha identified the need to change the Forest Plan to provide a better network of loops and connectivity for both motorized and non-motorized trails; to change the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) objectives for three areas; and to revise management direction for both inland lakes and Great Lakes watercraft accesses and facilities. As part of the revision process, the Forest also developed a desired condition statement for forest-wide recreation access.

- **Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS):** The 1986 Plan allocated the Delias Run, Boot Lake and Buck Bay areas to Management Areas 2.1 and 2.2 (management areas with roaded natural ROS objectives), but prescribed that these areas be managed toward a semi-primitive non-motorized (SPNM) ROS objectives.

In the NOI, the Hiawatha proposed to change the ROS objectives for these areas to semi-primitive motorized (SPM) because these areas experience high levels of motorized use and include Forest system roads and snowmobile trail(s). They do not contain features or recreation values that support a quality SPNM experience, and management toward a SPNM setting conflicts with the desired roaded natural recreation setting for the surrounding lands within these management areas. This change decreases the amount of land managed for a SPNM objective by about 5,000 acres, resulting in approximately 64,000 acres of lands managed for SPNM objectives in the selected alternative (See FEIS Table 3-ROS-5). It also provides ROS objectives for these areas that better match the reality of conditions on the ground and anticipated public demand.

I believe that changing the ROS objectives for Delias Run, Boot Lake and Buck Bay as included in the Selected Alternative, best reflects the public's desire for recreational use in these areas of the Forest and it provides a balance in the Forest's objectives for high quality recreation opportunities.

- **Great Lakes/Inland Lakes Access:** The 1986 Forest Plan identified watercraft access facilities to provide on the Forest's inland lakes. Monitoring and analysis completed during forest plan revision indicated that numerous user-created accesses have been developed on many of these lakes, with some resulting in resource damage. Biologists are concerned with motorized access and use conflicts with

wildlife during nesting periods on certain inland lakes, and conflicts and complaints between motorized and non-motorized watercraft users, particularly in response to personal watercraft use, have increased.

The 2006 Plan provides for a variety of watercraft accesses on inland lakes that closely reflects the current condition for motorized/non-motorized and personal watercraft use. In addition, the Plan allows for one new boat access on the Great Lakes. While the state of Michigan retains regulatory authority over the water and beds of most rivers, lakes and streams, the Forest Service has the authority to regulate the types of watercraft access facilities that are constructed on NFS lands and to manage the launch and retrieval of watercraft from NFS lands. When concerns arise, the Forest Service has a history of working cooperatively with the State to resolve them.

I believe that the 2006 Plan's provisions for watercraft access and facilities will meet the needs for watercraft access for all users; it will provide the opportunity to reduce user conflicts and complaints; and it addresses concerns about potential resource damage and negative effects to wildlife nesting. The range of access types, both motorized and non-motorized, prescribed in the 2006 Forest Plan provides a balanced approach and a full spectrum of recreation opportunities, without creating large-scale changes to current inland lakes watercraft accesses. My decision also supports the opportunity to develop one additional Great Lakes boat launch during the next planning period. This will meet future needs for safe harbors, Tribal, and public needs for access to the Great Lakes from national forest lands.

- **Motorized Trails and Routes:** The Chief of the Forest Service identified unmanaged recreation as one of four major threats facing national forests. Impacts cited include the amount of user-created roads and trails, erosion, lack of quality riding opportunities, water degradation and habitat destruction from OHV activity. The Chief also emphasized that OHV use is a desired and valued recreational use on national forest system lands, but must be managed.

Off-highway vehicle use in Michigan has grown significantly since the 1986 Plan was developed. The Hiawatha supports an extensive system of Forest roads and trails that are open to OHV use, and has worked with the public to add more miles of Maintenance Level 3 and 4 roads to the OHV system. The Forest also supports extensive groomed and non-groomed snowmobile riding opportunities.

User desires for additional OHV and snowmobile riding opportunities are increasing. With the increased use on the Forest, conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreationists have increased. In addition, there are concerns about the impact of this increasing use to wildlife and to other Forest resources. I believe the Revised Plan's objectives for increased miles of OHV and snowmobile roads and trails will provide excellent opportunities for continued use of snowmobiles and OHVs on the Hiawatha. They will also help reduce user conflicts through the creation of loops and connections to better distribute and connect newly developed and existing riding routes, and they can be provided without undue user conflicts or resource damage. By monitoring use, the Forest will assess if user conflicts and resource damage are acceptable and if the Forest is meeting demands.

I also believe my decision to enact a "closed unless designated (authorized) open" policy for OHV travel will reduce user conflicts and provide a consistent policy for OHV use across the Hiawatha and other national forests. A Forest Motor Vehicle Use Map(s) is required under the Forest Service's 2005 Travel Management Rule and will be the means to designate existing and future OHV and snowmobile routes, after appropriate public involvement, collaboration and line officer decision-making has occurred.

In the preliminary analysis of the need to change the Forest Plan and in the Notice of Intent, the Forest identified a need for continued motorized OHV and snowmobile riding opportunities. The Forest emphasized the need to better utilize the existing route system by creating opportunities for loops between the roads and trails open to these uses, and connections to facilities and services. Comments in response to the NOI and the proposed Revised Forest Plan showed that some people desired increased riding opportunities and others wanted a reduction of OHV and/or snowmobile use on the Forest.

The 2006 Forest Plan allows for a moderate level of increased snowmobile and OHV route development primarily focused on creating loops and connections between existing roads, trails and facilities. The Revised Plan does not make any final agency decision to develop or designate any specific route for either snowmobile or OHV use. The Forest will work closely with local governments, interest groups and individuals to determine specific routes to be developed in the future.

Concerns about snow compaction from winter recreation uses as they relate to species recovery efforts for the Canada lynx have been addressed by providing guidelines for trail development and management in the Revised Forest Plan. All snowmobile trails and winter non-motorized trails will meet the Revised Plan's management direction for the recovery of Canada lynx.

In making my decision, I considered the many public comments and the need to provide opportunities for these popular recreational pursuits, as well as the need to protect resources and provide opportunities for non-motorized recreational uses. I believe my decision provides opportunities for motorized use that is managed in a way that protects the forest's ecological resources and will reduce conflicts among users. In addition, I believe the 2006 Forest Plan is compatible with the Forest Service's 2005 Travel Management Rule.

- **Cross-Country Travel:** The Proposed Forest Plan would have prohibited cross-country snowmobile travel. It also proposed to continue the current prohibition on cross-country OHV travel. In response to the Proposed Forest Plan, the Hiawatha received numerous comments from snowmobilers who desired to retain current direction to allow cross-country snowmobile travel as well as comments from those who supported the prohibition. Comments were also received from users who want cross-country OHV travel and unrestricted OHV access for persons with disabilities.

In response to these comments, the Hiawatha completed additional analysis on the environmental effects of allowing cross country snowmobile travel. We determined that the effects on the Forest under current or anticipated future use levels would not increase risks to species viability or result in any other potential environmental harm. Based on this analysis, I have decided to allow cross-country snowmobile use to continue. The Forest will continue to monitor use to evaluate the effects of cross-country snowmobile travel on species viability, other environmental effects and user conflicts.

The Hiawatha provides a network of access for hunters and other recreationists through the transportation system that will continue to maintain access for persons with disabilities, commensurate with the access afforded to other Forest users.

I have decided to maintain the Forest's prohibition of cross-country OHV travel because this was not identified as a need for change in the NOI, and because I believe continuing the prohibition on cross-country OHV use will reduce the spread of non-native invasive species, avoid resource damage, avoid user conflicts and protect sensitive wetlands and resources across the Forest. This decision will continue the current management direction and will comply with the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

- **Non-motorized Trails and Routes:** Use on the Forest's non-motorized trails is low to moderate, with some exceptions. Cross-country skiing on groomed trails continues to be a popular and growing use. Equestrian use has increased over the last five years and has expanded onto trails where it has not occurred previously and onto trails that were not designed for horses. Mountain biking, which was not addressed in the 1986 Forest Plan, is growing in popularity and occurs on several of the Forest's longer and looped trails. Research (Cordell 1999) predicts that the number of trips for walking, cross country skiing, biking and horseback riding are all projected to increase faster than the rate of population growth over the next decade.

Despite current low to moderate use on non-motorized trails, the Hiawatha receives complaints about conflicts between uses. While the Forest maintains enough trails to meet current and projected demand, the Revised Forest Plan has identified the potential to increase the miles of non-motorized trails during the next planning period to help reduce conflicts between uses and/or to relocate some uses onto trails that are better designed and constructed for certain uses.

I believe these changes in the 2006 Forest Plan will help achieve the desired condition by providing non-motorized recreationists with a variety of looped trails and routes within a variety of settings that are connected to recreation facilities and day use areas. Some trails will be managed for multiple non-motorized uses, while others will be managed for single uses to reduce resource damage and to minimize user conflicts.

Other Issues

- **Watershed Health, Aquatic Habitat and Soils Management:** Clean and productive waters are a big reason that people come to the Hiawatha National Forest to fish, swim, boat, camp and view scenery. But these waters also provide important ecological functions that contribute to biodiversity and fish and wildlife habitat. Maintaining and improving watershed health, healthy riparian areas, a productive fishery and ensuring soil productivity are vitally important in managing the Forest.

Approximately 39 percent of the Hiawatha is designated as wetlands and many of these wetlands were impacted as a result of 19th century logging practices. Three of the five Great Lakes border the Hiawatha National Forest. Fishing activities generate millions of dollars to Michigan's economy each year. The magnitude of the industry, along with the combined contributions of the Michigan National Forests water resources, underscores the importance of the Forest Service's role in managing fish habitat and lake access.

Although the 1986 Forest Plan provided direction for watersheds, riparian areas, aquatic ecosystems and soils, there were no clear forest-wide desired conditions, goals or objectives and limited standards and guidelines. I believe the management direction in the Revised Forest Plan will protect and improve water quality and move the Forest toward achieving the desired condition of having healthy watersheds that are resilient to natural disturbance events such as floods, fire and drought and are capable of absorbing the effects of human-induced disturbances.

My decision to select Alternative 2, as modified, as the Revised Plan is made in part because it maintains the overall integrity of the aquatic system while supporting sustainable populations of sport fish. In choosing this alternative, I elect to proactively manage watersheds and riparian areas for their inherent values. This means favoring long-lived tree species and managing for longer rotations within riparian zones and improving road and trail crossings on streams to ensure stable soils, fish passage, unimpeded water flow and reducing sediment transport.

The FEIS recognizes the potential for increased risk to watershed health due to motorized uses and water access development. Proactive watershed management and the goals established for reducing road densities and uncontrolled access through closures and decommissioning offset these risks. The Revised Plan represents the best approach for protecting lakes and streams and enhancing watershed health. The Plan recognizes the important roles, authorities and cooperative relationships that exist among the National Forests, American Indian tribes and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources regarding water and fish habitat management.

- **Management Area Allocation:** In the 1986 Forest Plan, the Hiawatha maintained 26 different management areas. Each management area had a prescription which included a desired condition, goals, objectives and standards and guidelines. The Revised Plan provides new or updated desired condition statements, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines to effectively manage the Forest's resources. Table ROD-1 shows the Hiawatha' updated management area allocations.

MA	Emphasis Summary	Acres*
1.2	Aspen management for fiber production and deer and grouse habitat; dispersed recreation.	45,891
2.3	Older forest management for uneven-age hardwoods and high quality sawlogs; dispersed and developed recreation.	208,874
4.2	Conifer management for sawlog production and non-game wildlife.	126,128
4.4	Conifer management for fiber production and upland wildlife species habitat; dispersed and developed recreation.	113,166
4.5	Older forest management for conifer sawlogs, wetland plant communities, deeryards, and upland and lowland wildlife habitat; dispersed recreation.	116,065
5.1	Congressionally-designated wildernesses.	37,020
6.1	Semi-primitive non-motorized recreation; undisturbed wildlife species habitats.	11,486
6.2	Semi-primitive motorized (SPM) recreation and access to fishing and canoeing areas. Even and uneven-aged timber management and game and non-game wildlife habitats.	17,511
6.3	Semi-primitive non-motorized recreation and non-game wildlife habitats.	2,606
6.4	Even and uneven-aged timber management and game and non-game wildlife, waterfowl and wetland habitats. Semi-primitive motorized recreation and access.	46,603
7.1	Developed recreation areas.	1,086
8.1	Candidate and Research Natural Areas (protected areas of significant biological, geological or cultural features).	16,078
8.2	Forest research activities in concentrated areas.	5,573
8.3	Even and uneven-aged timber management, wetland plant communities, secluded wildlife habitat and dispersed recreation.	103,964
8.4	Congressionally-designated Wild & Scenic Rivers.	29,841
8.5	Direction for the Grand Island National Recreation Area.	13,421
Total National Forest System Acres		895,313

*Acres are based on the EIS analysis.

- **Research Natural Areas/Candidate RNAs:** Research natural areas are part of a national network of ecological areas designed in perpetuity for research and education and/or to maintain biological diversity on National Forest System lands. The Hiawatha has 3 designated and the 1986 Plan identified 18 candidate RNAs.

During forest plan revision, we reviewed all candidate research natural areas, using new ecological information (ecological land-type mapping). The ID team reviewed new ecological information, evaluation reports and documents to determine if the candidate RNAs were still eligible for RNA status and if they provided the intended ecological representations. The 2006 Forest Plan makes no change to established RNAs. However, boundary adjustments were made to several candidate RNAs and two candidate areas were merged into one. These changes have increased the acreage of candidate RNAs from approximately 18,500 to 20,370 acres.

I believe these changes to the candidate RNAs will further enhance their protection and function for future RNA consideration. As the Forest implements the Plan, candidate RNAs will be further assessed to determine if administrative steps should be taken to proceed with designation of these areas as RNAs.

- **Wild and Scenic Rivers:** The Hiawatha National Forest has five designated National Wild and Scenic Rivers (Indian, Carp, Whitefish, Sturgeon and East Branch Tahquamenon). The Hiawatha completed resource assessments for all five rivers and amended the 1986 Plan with comprehensive management plans and final river corridor boundaries for the Indian and Carp Rivers, prior to Forest Plan revision. No changes to these two plans were proposed in the Notice of Intent.

As part of the revision effort, the Hiawatha developed final river corridor boundaries and river management plans for the Whitefish, Sturgeon and East Branch Tahquamenon Rivers and updated management direction for the Forest's four remaining study rivers. The final boundaries and management area direction were published in the Notice of Intent.

Management direction for these rivers, as well as the Carp and Indian, was consolidated and reformatted in the proposed revised Plan. Public comment in response, identified suggestions for minor editorial revisions and there were suggestions to retain the 1986 Plan's interim one-quarter mile boundary for the rivers (as was analyzed as part of Alternative 1).

I selected Alternative 2 as the 2006 Forest Plan because it provides the necessary protection for these rivers and complies with the requirements of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. It also establishes final river corridor boundaries that were developed to protect the outstandingly remarkable values by expanding and contracting corridor acreage as necessary, rather than maintaining a set distance from the river. The interim boundaries of a constant quarter mile on either side of the river were intended to be in place only until final river corridor boundaries that protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the river could be developed. The final river corridors that are now established match the characteristics of the individual rivers and the lands within the corridors.

In addition, as part of the revision process, Forest interdisciplinary teams completed an evaluation to determine if there were any other rivers on the Hiawatha National Forest that were "eligible" for further study and consideration as potential Wild and Scenic Rivers. The teams determined that no other rivers or river segments on the Forest meet the eligibility criteria. I concur with the teams' findings.

- **Roadless Inventory/Wilderness Evaluations:** As part of the forest plan revision process, Hiawatha interdisciplinary teams completed a forest-wide roadless inventory to determine if there were any areas meeting the roadless area criteria. Any area meeting the inventory criteria was further evaluated for potential wilderness

recommendation. The teams followed the requirements for inventorying roadless areas and evaluating wilderness potential in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 219.17), Forest Service Manual 1923, and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12.

The teams determined that only the Fibre area meets the roadless inventory criteria. The team evaluated that area for potential wilderness, but did not recommend it for wilderness study (See FEIS Appendix C). Fibre is a former RARE II area (along with Government Island) and both areas were identified in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Government Island no longer meets the roadless inventory criteria, primarily due to the heavy recreation use and influences from the private lands which surround it.

Under the 1986 Plan, the Fibre area has been managed primarily as habitat for game and non-game wildlife species, water fowl and wetland habitat, and under semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunity spectrum objectives. A large portion of the area was burned in the Camp Faunce fire (1998). Since the passing of the Wilderness Act in 1964, the area has had several hard looks and reviews to consider its suitability for wilderness designation. It was last considered by Congress for potential wilderness designation in the 1987 Michigan Wilderness Act, but was not included in the Act.

In the public comment period following publishing of the draft EIS and proposed Forest Plan, the Hiawatha received comments suggesting areas on the Forest to consider for potential wilderness, including the Fibre area. In response to those comments, the Forest took another look at several areas that were referenced and performed field reviews. This review confirmed the previous findings.

In the Revised Plan, roadless area characteristics will be retained in the Fibre area through management which emphasizes wetland plant communities, secluded wildlife habitat, dispersed recreation and semi-primitive motorized recreation settings along existing roads, grading to semi-primitive non-motorized recreation settings away from the main access road and exterior boundary roads. The Fibre area has been removed from the lands suited for timber production; therefore, it is unlikely that commercial vegetative treatments will occur in the area.

I support the ideals and values of Wilderness management on public lands. However, it is my decision to recommend those lands which best provide wilderness characteristics and which provide quality opportunities for remote, undisturbed areas and secluded recreational settings where natural processes function without human interference. Despite the continued high degree of interest by some stakeholders for more Wilderness, the Hiawatha's analysis did not reveal compelling features and conditions, nor changed conditions within the Fibre area to warrant its recommendation and/or reconsideration for wilderness study by Congress.

After reviewing the variety of public comments, both for and against recommending additional wilderness on the Hiawatha, it is my decision not to recommend the Fibre area for wilderness study.

- **Economic and Social Sustainability:** The Hiawatha National Forest will continue to be an important contributor to the social and economic well-being of Upper Peninsula communities. Although the Forest is not the only factor driving the social and economic well-being of these communities, it will contribute to a vibrant timber industry and draw tourists year-round. Direction in the Revised Forest Plan addresses forest health, species viability, managing invasive species, watersheds and game species habitats. This direction will move the Forest toward meeting the forest vegetation desired condition to, "provide a diverse, productive, healthy, sustainable forest that is resilient to natural and human-caused disturbances."

I believe the Revised Plan provides a blend of goods and services, and sustains multiple use of the federal land while protecting and enhancing the health of the land. Although my decision may not provide the highest return to counties (based on potential timber receipts), I believe it provides the best mix of the many resources that contribute to local economies. My decision recognizes the incomparable value of the many developed and dispersed recreation activities and wildlife benefits, and the contribution to local economies by those pursuing recreation opportunities on the Forest. Although there will be some shift in the mix of goods, services and uses from the Hiawatha National Forest, local communities will continue to enjoy the same types of settings, products, and uses that support community stability.

- **Tribal Interests and Treaty Rights:** Throughout the revision process, the Hiawatha collaborated with local Tribes. Forest staff met with Tribal leaders on several occasions to update them on the revision process and to address any concerns raised by the Tribes. General trust responsibilities and obligations are in large part met by national forests through compliance with laws and regulations relevant to federal land management. Many of these laws and regulations include specific provisions for consulting with American Indian Tribal governments. Conducting meaningful consultation is one key to fulfilling general trust responsibilities.

I've considered not only Treaty Rights and our Government-to-Government relationship, but also comments from tribal members who use, live in and enjoy the Forest. My decision supports Tribal Treaty Rights, and provides for other activities and uses deemed important by those who use the Forest for a wide variety of reasons. The Revised Forest Plan will sustain those values held important by tribal members. We will continue to work with the Tribes as we implement the Forest Plan.

Changes Between the Draft and Final EIS

We received a great deal of public and internal comment on our Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Proposed Forest Plan. We listened to your comments, and in response, made several modifications to the selected alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and to the Revised Forest Plan. The changes ranged from minor editing to improve clarity to changes in desired condition statements, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. Changes were also made to the Plan's monitoring and evaluation strategy that is tied directly to the objectives. Some changes were also based on data corrections or further vegetation modeling efforts. Chapter 2 of the Forest Plan was also reorganized to provide a better flow of information.

Some other notable changes made between the Draft and the Final Environmental Impact Statements included updating the stand data used in the analysis of Alternative 2, as modified, and recalculating the economic effects of all alternatives based on the updated allowable sale quantity. These changes are reflected in the Final EIS and in the Final Forest Plan. The summary that follows describes the most substantial changes made between the DEIS and FEIS and the Revised Forest Plan.

Vegetation Management

Vegetation Goals: Based on the comments received and the analysis of model results between the draft and final documents, adjustments were made in some of the vegetation goals. After the DEIS was issued, the Forest updated its SPECTRUM model by refining assumptions and adjusting yield tables based on new information. This resulted in some changes in the predicted amount and size classes of vegetation. While vegetation goals are generally similar to those in the proposed Forest Plan, some adjustments were made to aspen and jack pine goals.

Comments were received regarding the predicted decline of aspen over time. I recognize that aspen is important habitat for a variety of game and prey species. While aspen levels will still decline under the Revised Forest Plan due to forest succession, aspen goals were raised to minimum goals similar to the 1986 Plan. This change results in a prediction of approximately 9% (76,400 acres) of the Forest in aspen at year 100. This is about a 7,500 acre increase in the amount predicted for the preferred alternative in the DEIS. This change will ensure a minimum level of aspen to provide species habitat and to supply fiber to area mills. The change was made in response to concerns about the amount of habitat available to species such as ruffed grouse and woodcock, and the amount of aspen available to industry. In making this change, the Forest reviewed the effects of this change for the selected alternative to other species habitat and determined that effects would be negligible.

Jack pine vegetation goals were also adjusted after the Forest reviewed the revised model outputs. Jack pine plays an important role on the Forest by providing habitat for a number of species. The revised outputs showed a decline in jack pine compared to what was predicted in the DEIS. In response, for the selected alternative jack pine goals were raised in MA 4.4 to better align the vegetation composition with the desired condition for that management area.

Management Area 4.2 will continue to emphasize late seral conifer management; however, jack pine goals were raised slightly to allow for increased management of Kirtland's warbler and other associated species. These adjustments will result in jack pine levels remaining near current levels throughout the planning horizon. This change will aid in providing opportunities to manage habitat for Kirtland's warbler and other associated species such as sharp-tailed grouse.

Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ): The estimated allowable sale quantity for the first decade decreased from an average 114 million board feet per year in the DEIS to 108.5 million board feet per year in the FEIS. Between the draft and final, Forest staff continued to refine assumptions that relate to the timber yields that were used to model timber harvest, and to adjust some vegetation goals in response to the comments received. The ASQ outputs were adjusted for all alternatives in the FEIS based on these same changes in assumptions.

Wildlife, Fish and Sensitive Plant Habitat Management

Kirtland's Warbler Management Direction: The Forest worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to provide management direction to aid in the recovery of all federally-listed species. Management direction for the endangered Kirtland's warbler (KW) was refined based on discussions with USFWS and recommendations from the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team. Significant changes include:

- Providing for Kirtland's warbler management opportunities within MA 4.2. While MA 4.4 is the primary management area for KW, this change allows for habitat creation (as appropriate, to meet recovery goals) in MA 4.2 while retaining the desired overall vegetation goals for the management area.
- Removing references to specific desired age classes and stem densities for Kirtland's warbler nesting habitat (e.g. jack pine in the 6 to 20 age class with 1,089 trees per acre). Stem density and age classes for various tree species is variable and can be dependent upon site-specific environmental factors, such as soil fertility. Rather than specify these in the Plan, age and density guidelines will be developed for each project in consultation with the FWS. As research continues, habitat requirements will be refined and may change based on new scientific information and specific site characteristics.
- Changing the maximum size of an opening from 550 acres to 1,100 acres. This change is based on recommendations from the KW Recovery Team. Recent research has shown that Kirtland's warbler respond better to larger blocks of habitat. This change may also benefit other open land species such as sharp-tailed grouse. The rationale and environmental effects of the 1,100 acre opening size for KW has been added to the FEIS.

These modifications do not represent a major shift in the intent of the management direction. Protection of threatened and endangered species was a priority in developing the Revised Plan and these modifications are a logical outgrowth of the ongoing consultation dialogue that the Forest has had with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Watershed Management

Based on my review of the comments on the Revised Forest Plan, I made some adjustments to the management direction and included further analysis in the environmental consequences section for the Final EIS. The changes in the 2006 Forest Plan include:

- Changing the management direction to implement the state of Michigan's Best Management Practices (BMPs) from a standard to a guideline. The State applies the use of BMPs as a guideline, recognizing that site-specific factors, level of construction and potential effects will determine the degree of protection to employ and implement to protect forest resources. As a guideline, it is recognized that BMPs are a common and generally used protocol; however, under certain site-specific situations or conditions changes to the use of BMPs may be necessary.
- Changing the management direction for soils that limits equipment operation to only those times when it is possible to reduce detrimental compaction, puddling or rutting from a standard to a guideline. As a standard, it fails to acknowledge that restorative actions can correct compaction, puddling and/or rutting on a site-specific basis. What is critical is the degree or extent that these factors occur and the desired management is to prevent adverse levels of these activities and/or to restore or rehabilitate areas where these effects may occur from equipment use, but are necessary to complete needed work. This change makes the Forest Plan more adaptable for project implementation while continuing to provide resource protections.
- Disclosing the beneficial effects of beaver impoundments on the landscape. The DEIS focused heavily on the negative effects of beaver and beaver impoundments and did not adequately disclose the beneficial effects of beaver. The effects analysis in the FEIS better addresses the negative and the positive effects for consideration and public disclosure.

Recreation Management

Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails and Routes. Based on the release of the Forest Service 2005 Final Travel Management Rule (Rule), the management direction and effects analysis in the FEIS and Revised Forest Plan were changed to incorporate the requirements in the Rule. The Rule established specific terminology and definitions that were incorporated into the glossary, including the definition for off-highway vehicles (OHV). The Forest removed the 50-inch limit for OHVs in the draft Plan and DEIS glossary definition for OHVs and specified that on the Hiawatha, "OHV use is restricted to all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), multi-passenger all-terrain vehicles (MATVs), and motorcycles unless otherwise authorized on the Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map(s)." A definition of MATVs was added.

In the interim, the current OHV travel management direction will be maintained until the Forest issues Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM). At that time, the MVUM will depict and designate "authorized" motorized routes by vehicle class and all other routes that are not shown on the MVUM will be "unauthorized." The MVUM will be the information and enforcement tool for routes that are open to OHV use on the Forest in accordance with the Rule. When the MVUM is developed, the Forest will enact a "closed unless designated (authorized) open" travel system for motor vehicles and for OHVs.

Based on the comments received to the DEIS and proposed revised Plan, the Forest completed additional analysis on the environmental effects of allowing cross-country snowmobile travel. This analysis determined that the effects of snowmobile use at current

levels would not increase risks to species viability or result in resource damage or significant user conflicts. Alternative 2 was modified to allow cross-country snowmobile use to continue and a standard was added to the Forest Plan which states, "Cross country snowmobile use is generally allowed within motorized ROS classes unless prohibitions or restrictions are needed for resource protection to meet management objectives." This management direction allows the Forest to manage or restrict snowmobile use when needed to protect resources where conflict occurs, while accommodating user needs for cross-country travel.

The charts describing the current condition and summarizing the range of alternatives for snowmobiles and OHV use were edited for clarity. Alternative 2 was also modified to specify that Forest roads will remain open unless designated/posted closed for snowmobile use to complement the allowance for cross-country travel. The Forest will retain and reference one designated OHV/snowmobile area (Thunderbowl); however, cross-country travel by snowmobiles will be permitted as well. The Forest will continue to monitor snowmobile use to evaluate the effects of cross-country travel on species viability and for other resource effects.

Comments in response to the draft EIS and proposed Revised Plan included information on studies, research and papers on recreation use, and snowmobiles/OHV use and effects on Forest lands and resources. The data and information that was provided was reviewed and information that was relevant to the analysis was incorporated by reference into the comments in the Final EIS and into the Revised Forest Plan (see FEIS Appendix L).

Land Uses Management

In response to comments, I modified some forest-wide and some management area (MA) standards and guidelines in the Revised Forest Plan. These changes resulted in no additional analysis in the Effects Section of the final EIS. Significant changes include:

- **Forest-wide.** Added a guideline to incorporate Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Best Management Practices to protect water quality during utility (corridor) construction and maintenance. The state of Michigan's BMPs were designed for general forest management practices and activities and are referenced in the Watershed Section as a guideline. However, FERC works through landowner jurisdictions and authorities, and has regulatory control over most utility gas and powerline authorizations. The FERC BMPs were designed specifically to manage unique circumstances that are encountered in utility construction, operations and maintenance. The FERC BMP guideline in combination with the state of Michigan BMPs, will provide protection for forest resources in accordance with proposed utility corridor activities on a site-specific basis.
- **MA 8.1 (Candidate and Research Natural Areas).** A guideline was added in response to a comment regarding a need for limited motorized use to meet ongoing maintenance and inspection needs within public utility corridors. The new guideline states, "Motorized use should be prohibited except for emergency or administrative situations." This allows the permittee to continue inspections and to have motorized access in an efficient and cost-effective manner. It will be managed through the Forest's administration of the operation and maintenance agreement in the permit.
- **MA 8.4 (Wild & Scenic Rivers).** The requirement to use directional boring for river crossing construction was changed from a standard to a guideline. Most river/stream crossings that may occur for maintenance, construction, or reconstruction will employ directional boring. However, there are some conditions on the Forest where directional boring cannot occur because of the risk of fracturing in the bedrock which could release boring mud and/or other material into the waterway. In these cases, other methods of crossing may be needed to protect the outstandingly remarkable values, free-flowing condition and water quality of the rivers. This change recognizes the variable conditions that exist on the Forest that may make directional boring infeasible, while continuing to provide resource protection.

Transportation System

I modified some forest-wide and management area standards and guidelines in the Revised Forest Plan. These changes did not result in the need for additional analysis to the Effects Section in the final EIS. The changes include:

- **Modifying and clarifying Table 7700-2: Maximum Trail and Road Densities** in response to comments that the table was difficult to understand. I changed the “0” in the Miles of Motorized Trails per Square Mile for MAs 6.1 and 6.3 to “No motorized trails allowed” to be clearer about the intended management direction for these areas. I added “not specified” to the column for Miles of System Roads per Square Mile column for MA 8.4 to clarify that in the study river corridors, most of the lands and transportation system are not under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service because they are privately held or county-managed.
- **Changing MA 8.2 maximum road density** (Duke’s Experimental Forest) from a maximum of 3 miles to 4 miles of roads per square mile. The transportation system in this area is largely already established and provides access for private lands and recreational uses, as well as meeting research needs. This change maintains the current road system in this area.
- **Modifying the MA 8.3 guideline (7700)** to read, “Maintenance Level 2 roads in this management area should be closed when not needed to provide access for management activities.” This wording clarifies the intent of the guideline to allow access for management needs, and when no longer needed for immediate resource purposes, to provide more remote, secluded settings for this management area.
- **Incorporating the definitions for system roads** from the recently released 2005 Travel Management Rule and changing the references of “classified” and “unclassified” to “authorized” and “unauthorized.” Reference to the development and use of the Motor Vehicle Use Map(s) was also incorporated.

Monitoring

The Forest received several comments about monitoring. After reviewing these comments I made some minor modifications and clarifications to Chapter 4 in the Revised Forest Plan. The Forest will continue to monitor its progress toward achieving the desired condition and management objectives in the revised Plan, and in accordance with legal requirements. The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 complements the strategic nature of the Revised Plan. Further details about specific monitoring techniques to be used will be developed as the Plan is implemented.

Appendices

I modified several of the Appendices in response to various comments which identified some needed changes and/or clarifications. Substantive changes include:

- **Forest Plan Appendix A: Proposed and Probable Practices, Goods Produced and Other Information.** I deleted the tables displaying vegetation objectives on suited lands because they are too prescriptive, and not necessary to achieve the desired outcomes of the Plan. This change will maintain the revised Forest Plan’s design to be more strategic and adaptive to respond to changing conditions during implementation. In addition, changes in the linear program model assumptions and resulting analysis, have resulted in updates to the Forest-wide harvest treatments.

- **FEIS Appendix C: Roadless/Wilderness Evaluation.** Based on comments received for the Draft EIS regarding the roadless area inventory, I directed additional analysis of several areas to verify the Forest's findings. I reviewed the analysis and I agree with the findings and recommendations made for all of the areas, as identified in the Selected Alternative in the 2006 Forest Plan. This information and documentation has been incorporated in the narrative.
- **Forest Plan Appendix D: Seral Class Definitions.** This appendix was added for clarity and to provide improved definitions of forest vegetation seral classes. Vegetation composition goals in the Plan are based on ecological land type (ELT) and seral classes. Each ELT has a unique mix of species that define the seral classes within that ELT. Table D -1 provides a crosswalk between forest cover type and seral classes by ELT.
- **FEIS Appendix E: Management Indicator Species.** We received many comments regarding the Management Indicator Species questioning why the Forest chose the species named for MIS. Information to explain the rationale, representations and species associated with each MIS was added to this appendix in response to these comments.
- **FEIS Appendix I: Ecological Processes.** To provide clarification and additional information for consideration, narrative that addresses the historic range of variation of vegetation and ecological processes was incorporated into this appendix. This information provides additional data for consideration in reference to the bio-physical reference condition descriptions and understanding. Reference condition is used in fire regime condition class analysis addressed in Appendix H.
- **FEIS Appendix L: Response to Comments.** This new appendix contains the comments received during the public comment period for the Proposed Forest Plan and Draft EIS, and includes the Forest's response to those comments.

Public Involvement

The Hiawatha National Forest used many methods to involve people in the forest plan revision process. Individuals, tribes, government agencies and public and private organizations were engaged by meetings, mail, e-mail, newsletters, and through announcements in broadcast and print media at several crucial stages during the forest plan revision process. Early in the process, a forest plan revision website was developed and maintained. Many documents were posted on the site to provide information and updates on the progress of the revision.

The Hiawatha held three series of informational meetings in Upper Peninsula communities to keep citizens apprised of the revision process and to solicit their comments. Press releases and letters were sent to inform citizens of upcoming meetings, and to respond to inquiries and comments. In addition, the three Michigan National Forests held joint public meetings at several of the larger communities in Michigan's Lower Peninsula after the Notice of Intent and the draft EIS and Proposed Forest Plan were published.

The Hiawatha also attended twice-yearly open meetings with the Friends of the Hiawatha. This group is comprised of individuals and representatives of various interests groups who are stakeholders in the future management of the Hiawatha National Forest. Forest Plan revision efforts and information was routinely presented and discussed at these meetings.

- **Consultation with Federal, State and Local Governmental Agencies:** The Forest Supervisor routinely provided updates and briefings throughout the process with the Congressional delegation, state legislators and other public officials. The Forest Supervisor or staff attended meetings with stakeholders and interest groups and shared information on the planning efforts, issues and progress.

- **Consultation with Tribal and other Governmental Agencies:** Throughout the revision process, the Forest Service worked with local tribes, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Park Service, Forest Service Research, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and other governmental agencies to consult on common management concerns and to keep them apprised of the status of forest plan revision.
- **Initial Outreach:** The Hiawatha, Huron-Manistee and the Ottawa National Forests worked together to contact legislators, government and tribal officials, and public organizations to discuss forest plan revision for the three forests. Informational packets were mailed in August 2002 to individuals and organizations who expressed interest in forest plan revision.
- **Need for Change:** The Hiawatha solicited input from the public, employees, other government agencies and representatives and tribal governments to determine elements within the Forest Plan that needed change. In addition, public meetings were held in Upper Peninsula communities in December 2002 and again in April 2003. At these meetings, citizens were encouraged to provide suggestions, ideas and comments on the areas of the 1986 Forest Plan they thought needed to be revised. In January 2003, the Hiawatha published a newsletter that provided more information on the revision process. Subsequent newsletters and mailings were also provided at key junctures within the planning process.

A Hiawatha National Forest employee interdisciplinary team reviewed all the comments and the proposed changes, and then developed a list of potential “need for change” issues. The Hiawatha’s Forest Leadership Team and the Regional Forester reviewed the proposed changes and approved the proposal that was published in the Need for Change document in September 2003.

- **Notice of Intent (NOI):** The three Michigan National Forests published a joint Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* on September 18, 2003. The NOI indicated that much of the Hiawatha’s management direction in the 1986 Forest Plan was still appropriate and would be carried forward into the Revised Forest Plan with little or no change. However, the Hiawatha identified several areas in need of change. These areas needing change are discussed in the “Need for Change” section of this document.
- **Issue Development:** After the 60-day public comment period on the NOI closed, the Hiawatha used the comments from the public and the recommendations made by Forest Service resource specialists to identify significant issues associated with the proposed changes in the Plan. The significant issues provided the basis for developing the range of alternatives published in the draft Environmental Impact Statement.
- **Review and Comment on the draft EIS and Proposed Forest Plan:** These documents were published on March 25, 2005, and were available for a three-month public comment period. The Hiawatha also issued a “Reviewer’s Guide” to help reviewers navigate through the documents so they could provide substantive comments.

The documents were mailed to more than 1,000 individuals, groups, agencies, tribes, libraries and federal, state and local government officials who requested to remain informed and involved in the revision process. Copies were also sent to local libraries and posted on the internet. The Hiawatha held a series of informational meetings in the Upper Peninsula and joined the Huron-Manistee and Ottawa National Forests at meetings in Detroit, Lansing and Grand Rapids areas. Members of the planning team were on hand to answer questions and provide information to help people understand the documents and prepare their comments.

The Hiawatha National Forest received nearly 2,700 responses to the draft documents. The comments contained in these responses helped craft the Revised Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement.

- **Response to comments and preparation of Revised Forest Plan and Final EIS:** Appendix L of the Final EIS contains a summary of the comments received during the public comment period on the Draft EIS and Proposed Revised Plan and how the Hiawatha responded to the comments.

Alternatives

Alternative Development

During the forest plan revision process, the Hiawatha identified issues that helped define the range of alternatives. Significant issues represented a wide range of comments and viewpoints regarding how the Hiawatha proposed to change the Forest Plan through this plan revision.

The Hiawatha's interdisciplinary planning team developed four alternatives that were studied in detail. Although all four alternatives have many things in common, they differ in the management emphasis given in response to identified issues and concerns. All alternatives comply with applicable laws, regulations and Agency policies and guidelines, and are fully implementable. They adhere to the concepts of multiple use and ecosystem management and were developed considering the best available scientific information. In addition to the four proposed alternatives, the Hiawatha also considered three alternatives that were eliminated from detailed study.

Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study

Federal agencies are required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating alternatives that were not considered in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). Some of the comments received in response to the Notice of Intent suggested alternatives that were outside the scope of the proposed changes or essentially duplicated approaches for management that were already a part of an alternatives considered in detail. Three alternatives were considered but dismissed from further consideration.

- **Additional Wilderness Alternative:** The Hiawatha National Forest contains six Wildernesses and two previously inventoried roadless areas that were identified under the second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II). These two areas are Fibre and Government Island. During the public comment period on the NOI, the Hiawatha received requests for more wilderness areas.

Based on the information provided in the Draft EIS, the Forest received comments identifying other areas on the Forest, in addition to the Fibre area, that commenters felt should qualify for addition to the National Wilderness System. Interdisciplinary teams inventoried the Forest for areas that meet the roadless area criteria, and performed on-the-ground assessments. The Forest determined that only the Fibre area meets the roadless area characteristics identified in 36 CFR 219.17, Forest Service Manual 1923, and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 (Chapter 7).

The Fibre area is mainly a wetland and is surrounded by roads, with a publicly-used interior access road leading to a private land in-holding. The area is managed under a semi-primitive motorized ROS objective and there is nothing culturally, biologically or physically unique or of significant value. Fibre was considered by Congress in 1987 and was not designated as Wilderness in the Michigan Wilderness Act. The Fibre area was evaluated for potential wilderness and was not recommended for additional study in any alternative. Nothing has changed since 1987 that would warrant a re-evaluation by Congress for designation as a Wilderness. (See Appendix C of the FEIS). In all

alternatives analyzed in detail, the Fibre area (and Government Island RARE II area) are removed from the land-base suitable for timber production. This will help retain the roadless area characteristics in the Fibre area.

- **Additional Wild & Scenic Rivers Alternative:** During the public comment period for the NOI, the Hiawatha received requests for additional wild and scenic rivers. An interdisciplinary team completed a forest-wide wild and scenic river assessment and found no additional “eligible” rivers (Reference Appendix B, FEIS).
- **No Harvest Alternative:** The Hiawatha received requests to consider an alternative that eliminated commercial logging on the Forest. This alternative would not meet the purpose and need as stated in the NOI. Specifically it would not provide forest composition and structure necessary to support the viability of all animals and plants on the Hiawatha. It would not provide habitat for publicly desired game species. It would not supply wood products for local and regional needs. For these reasons this alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative 1: This is the “no action” alternative as required by NFMA. No action means that the management allocations, activities and directions found in the Hiawatha’s 1986 Plan would continue for the next 10-15 years. This alternative continues to move the Hiawatha toward the desired conditions, goals and objectives that were identified in the 1986 Forest Plan. Minor aspects of the Plan have been updated and obsolete direction has been removed. Projected outputs were updated based on the most current information for items such as timber yield and recreation use.

- ■ **Decision Rationale:** During my evaluation of the alternatives based on the six criterion listed in the Decision Overview Section of this document, I determined that Alternative 1 would not provide management direction for the Hiawatha’s natural resources or provide conditions supporting the Hiawatha’s ecological capabilities to the extent of the Selected Alternative. In addition, Alternative 1 would provide the least contribution to the vitality of the social and economic environments, since it would not provide goods and services to the same degree as the Selected Alternative. Alternative 1 does not meet the Need for Change identified in the Notice of Intent.

Specifically, I find that Alternative 1 would not enhance biological diversity and ecological sustainability to the extent the Selected Alternative does. Management direction that provides benefits to federally threatened, endangered and the Regional Foresters Sensitive species would continue to be limited. Suitable habitat for Canada lynx or Kirtland’s warbler is lower than the selected alternative. Jack pine forests treatments are reduced and resulting in higher wildfire risks and greater potential for insect epidemics. Designated old growth block size is too small and too scattered across the Forest in this alternative resulting in less connectivity and ecological representation. These lands would also remain available to timber harvest on an extended rotation. In addition, this alternative does not include improved management direction for enhancing soil and water quality, preventing the spread of undesirable, non-native invasive species, providing diversity of vegetative communities, and managing the Hiawatha’s resources in closer alignment with ecological capabilities.

The economic contribution under full implementation of all alternatives is similar. However, fewer lands are suited for timber harvest resulting in the second lowest allowable sale quantity (ASQ) which could lead to lower potential to provide timber products to area markets. Alternative 1 does not incorporate comprehensive management plans for three wild and scenic rivers. This would require a separate

decision to incorporate final boundaries and river specific management direction for the designated and study rivers. Alternative 1 does not identify increase mileage of snowmobile and OHV routes and trails opportunities to meet increased user demands for motorized travel. This could lead to unauthorized OHV cross country travel and user created trails leading to degradation of soil and water quality, spread of non-native invasive species, and decreased opportunities for solitude and feelings of remoteness that some Hiawatha non-motorized visitors value.

Alternative 2 (Selected Alternative): Alternative 2 was presented as the preferred alternative in the DEIS and was the basis for the Proposed Revised Forest Plan. Comments received on the DEIS and Proposed Forest Plan were critical in shaping the 2006 Forest Plan for managing resources on the Hiawatha. The Selected Alternative best meets the Forest Service's mission, legal mandates, the goals of both NEPA and NFMA, and the interests of the public as a whole.

Alternative 2 responds to the proposed changes published in the Notice of Intent. It provides a mix of early and late successional species, with similar area (lands) managed for aspen as the 1986 Plan and more area (lands) managed for uneven-aged hardwood sawlogs. It responds to comments about the need for more and the management of OHV and snowmobile loops and connected trails/routes, and it includes management direction for motorized and non-motorized lake access and facilities that would retain access similar to the current condition.

- **Decision Rationale:** My rationale for selecting Alternative 2 as the 2006 Forest Plan is detailed in this Record of Decision. See the *Decision Summary and Rationale* section for more information.

Alternative 3: This alternative responds to public comments requesting increased hunting and motorized recreational opportunities, more lands available for timber production and less old growth. The vegetation goals emphasize early seral species such as aspen and jack pine for wildlife (such as woodcock, ruffed grouse, sharp-tail grouse and Kirtland's warbler). This alternative also provides for a greater amount of even-aged management of northern hardwoods than the other alternatives. It responds to comments requesting increased OHV loops and snowmobile trails and connected trails/routes, and it provides increased motorized access to inland lakes and a greater level of developed lake access facilities.

- **Decision Rationale:** During my evaluation of the alternatives based on the six criterion listed in the Decision Overview Section of this document, I determined that Alternative 3 would not provide management direction for the Hiawatha's natural resources or provide conditions supporting the Hiawatha's ecological capabilities to the extent of the Selected Alternative

Specifically, I find that Alternative 3 maintains or enhances biological diversity and ecological sustainability to lesser extent than the Selected Alternative because management direction for federally listed threatened, endangered and Regional Forester sensitive species would emphasize species that prefer early seral vegetative conditions such as Kirtland's Warbler. It provides the least amount of habitat for plants and animals favoring late seral conditions. Forested vegetative conditions would emphasize early seral species such as aspen and jack pine while late seral conditions are reduced. While some may see this as a benefit to provide more habitat for species such as ruffed grouse and deer management, this skew toward early seral species does not provide the mix of conditions that Hiawatha's ecological capabilities could offer when compared with the Selected Alternative. Old growth acreage is the lowest of all alternatives, resulting in reduced block sizes that are scattered across the Forest and resulting in less connectivity and lower ecological representation.

The increase in motorized use emphasized in Alternative 3, could decrease opportunities for solitude and remoteness that some Hiawatha visitors value. I feel the Selected Alternative provides a better balance between motorized and non-motorized use on the Forest. In addition, increased inland lakes motorized access could mean greater risks of spreading aquatic non-native invasive species and increased conflicts between motorized and non-motorize user groups. The economic contribution is similar to the Selected Alternative, providing no discernable advantage.

Alternative 4: This alternative responds to comments requesting that the Forest be managed for less commodity production and more old growth characteristics. It would provide greater late seral species components and more management for uneven-aged hardwood sawlogs, than the other alternatives. It responds to comments requesting more restrictions on OHV and snowmobile access. It also responds to comments for decreased motorized access to inland lakes and fewer developed lake access facilities.

- ■ **Decision Rationale:** During my evaluation of the alternatives based on the six criterion listed in the Decision Overview Section of this document, I determined that Alternative 4 would not provide management direction for the Hiawatha's natural resources or provide conditions supporting the Hiawatha's ecological capabilities to the extent of the Selected Alternative

Specifically, I find that Alternative 4 does not maintain or enhance biological diversity and ecological sustainability to the extent of the Selected Alternative because management direction for federally threatened, endangered and the Regional Forester sensitive species emphasizes primarily late seral vegetative conditions. It provides less habitat for those species favoring early seral conditions such as Kirtland's Warbler and could affect efforts to recover the species. In addition, less jack pine and aspen forest types would reduce habitat for important game species such as deer, woodcock, and ruffed grouse which affects hunting, which is an important aspect of the Upper Peninsula culture and economics. I feel this alternative does not provide the best mix of habitat for game and non-game species.

While economic benefits to the local communities vary slightly between alternatives, this alternative has the second lowest amount of lands suited for timber harvest, resulting in the lowest allowable sale quantity (ASQ). This leads to lower potential to provide timber products to support area markets. Alternative 4 has less emphasis on motorized travel allowing the lowest increase of OHV routes and trails opportunities and restricts snowmobile use to designated routes. Because of lower OHV routes and trail opportunities, this could lead to increased risk of unauthorized OHV travel and user created trails and could degrade soil and water quality, spread non-native invasive species. In addition, cross country snowmobile travel would be prohibited restricting some access to communities and facilities, resulting in less economic benefits. With less motorized emphasis on inland lakes there is an increased risk of user created access resulting in greater potential to reduce water quality and non-motorized recreational experience.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Regulations implementing NEPA also require the specification of "...the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable" (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). Based on the analysis of effects contained in the FEIS, I have determined that Alternatives 2 and 4 are the environmentally preferable alternatives.

Although all alternatives emphasize an ecological approach, Alternative 4 would move the vegetative condition of the Hiawatha to more late seral species (white pine, hemlock, cedar and northern hardwoods) and manage for large diameter forests. It will also move towards more uneven-aged hardwoods. This alternative has the lowest allowable sale

quantity, the highest acres of designated old growth, and provides increased habitat for species dependent on later seral forests. Alternative 4 places a greater emphasis on non-motorized recreation activities. OHV (ATV, MATV and motorcycle) and snowmobile routes will be limited or reduced and cross country travel is not allowed. Alternative 4 addresses the ecologic aspect of the human environment but was not selected as the Revised Plan, because it focused too little attention on the equally important social and economic aspects. Timber and tourism are important contributors to the Upper Peninsula's economy, and the management direction in Alternative 4 could harm these industries. Alternative 4 will move the forest towards more late seral species, which could affect species that are dependent on younger forests, such as the federally-listed Kirtland's warbler.

While Alternative 2 provides more motorized use and timber harvest than Alternative 4 this does not necessary mean it is less environmentally preferred. Timber harvest is used as a tool to manipulate the forest vegetation providing habitat for those wildlife species that favor more early seral conditions. This results in Alternative 2 providing for a broader array of wildlife species habitat and the best overall species outcome ratings then any of the alternatives. In addition, the environmental impacts from more motorized recreation use and timber harvest are anticipated to be low because the flat topography and soil types are such that off site erosion would be minimal. Management direction to protect soil and water quality I believe are adequately designed to ensure their protection. I believe my choice of the Selected Alternative is the appropriate management approach for the Forest to provide the highest net benefit to the public over the long-term.

Consistency with other National Policies, Laws & Authorities

The Forest Service manages the Hiawatha National Forest in conformance with many laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies. The list provided here is not a complete list of all governing statutes that apply to the Forest Plan Revision, but it highlights the primary statutes guiding the preparation of the Revised Plan. In all cases the Revised Plan is consistent with national law, policy and direction.

- **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):** The Forest has compiled and generated information relevant to the effects of each of the alternatives considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. I find that the environmental analysis and public involvement process complies with each of the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508). These include:

- Considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives
- Disclosing cumulative effects
- Using the best scientific information
- Considering long-term and short-term effects
- Disclosing unavoidable adverse effects

The decision here does not directly authorize any new ground-disturbing activities or projects. However, these activities and projects will be subject to additional site-specific environmental analysis that will tier to the Final EIS and will follow applicable environmental analysis, public involvement and administrative appeal procedures.

The Revised Forest Plan has adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing those ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity, and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The Revised Plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

- **National Forest Management Act (NFMA):** When the Hiawatha's Plan revision effort began in 2002, the Agency's 2000 planning regulations were in effect, however that rule included transition language that allowed plans to be initiated under the 1982 Rule during the transition period. Given discretion to use either the 2000 Rule or the 1982 Rule, I choose to use the 1982 Rule. When the 2005 Planning Rule was adopted, it allowed ongoing revisions to be completed under the provisions of the 1982 Rule if the revision had already begun. The Hiawatha National Forest met this criterion and therefore proceeded to completion under the 1982 planning regulations. The NFMA planning regulations specifies a number of requirements that guide Forest Service planning. The Revised Forest Plan complies with each of these requirements, as explained in this Record of Decision and the accompanying Plan, FEIS and Appendices.

Present Net Value and Net Public Benefit

The 1982 Planning Rule requires identification of the alternative that maximizes the present net value (PNV) and how the Selected Alternative compares to this alternative. According to the economic analysis displayed in the FEIS, Alternative 2 maximizes PNV due to the mix of products and services provided and the treatments and management actions prescribed. Analysis indicated that Alternative 2 will have an economic PNV of \$20.11 million annually. I have also determined that Alternative 2 will provide the highest net public benefit.

- **Endangered Species Act (ESA):** This Act creates an affirmative obligation "...that all Federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened (and proposed) species" of fish, wildlife, and plants. This obligation is further clarified in the national Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) which states our shared mission to "...enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources." Based upon consultation with the USFWS, their concurrence with our Biological Assessment and the finding of non-jeopardy in their Biological Opinion, I have determined that this Plan is in compliance with the ESA.
- **Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act/Forest Service Strategic Plan 2004-2008:** The procedures of the 1982 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.12(f)(6)) require that at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest as displayed in Regional Guides. There is no longer a Regional Guide for the Eastern Region. This was withdrawn on November 27, 2001, as required by the 2000 planning rule (36 CFR 219.35 (e)). The Forest Service Strategic Plan 2004-2008, in lieu of an RPA Program, was completed in accordance with the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) and the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. While forest plans should be consistent with the broad guidance provided in the Strategic Plan and should consider the information provided by the RPA Assessment along with other available and relevant science, neither the Strategic Plan nor the Assessment contain recommended outputs to incorporate in specific forest plans. I find that the Revised Plan is in compliance with, and contributes toward the broad goals of the Forest Service Strategic Plan, which are:
 - **Reduce the risk from Catastrophic Wildland Fire:** Fire, both prescribed and wildland, will be used as a tool to enhance ecosystem resiliency and to maintain desired fuel levels. Fire will play its natural role where appropriate and desirable, but will be actively suppressed where necessary to protect life, investments and resources. The Revised Plan contains management direction in the form of desired conditions and objectives to increase the amount of forest restored to or maintained in healthy condition to reduce risk and damage from fire. The Revised Plan also focuses on treating vegetation in high hazard areas within the wildland/urban interface areas to reduce risk from wildland fire.

- **Reduce the Impacts from Invasive Species:** The Revised Plan contains direction to address the spread of terrestrial or aquatic non-native invasive species that pose a threat to Forest ecosystems.
- **Provide Outdoor Recreation Opportunities:** The Revised Plan will continue to emphasize outdoor recreational use of the Hiawatha National Forest. The Forest will provide a variety of high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities that are designed to address recreation demands, provide desired settings, and minimize user conflicts, while sustaining natural resources. It increases direction needed to better manage the use of motorized and non-motorized recreation (including OHVs, snowmobiles and lake access) and incorporates management plans and corridor boundaries to manage the Forest's designated and study wild and scenic rivers.
- **Help Meet Energy Resource Needs:** There are no biomass energy projects currently in the area surrounding the Hiawatha National Forest. However, if a nearby biomass or energy project were developed, it could create a market for smaller diameter trees and lower quality wood products that would contribute to our ability to meet vegetative objectives identified in the Revised Plan. Because the Revised Forest Plan is strategic, the Hiawatha will be able to respond to requests to explore alternate methods for providing energy, as long as the activities comply with direction for the management area.
- **Improve Watershed Conditions:** The Revised Plan employs a proactive approach to managing watersheds and riparian areas. It will move the Forest towards achieving the desired condition to have healthy watersheds that are resilient to natural disturbance events such as floods, fire and drought and are capable of absorbing the effects of human-induced disturbances. The Forest's watersheds will provide high quality wildlife and fish habitat that allows for the conservation of native and desired non-native species. The Forest will provide habitat to support a quality recreational fishing experience that includes a variety of fish species and access to lakes and streams.
- **Mission-related work in addition to that which supports agency goals:** The Revised Forest Plan was developed to be consistent with the overall laws and policies that guide the management of national forests. It provides for human uses of the environment, as well as sustaining ecological processes for future generations. It also includes management direction to protect, improve or mitigate impacts to watersheds, riparian and aquatic habitats, visual integrity and threatened, endangered and sensitive species habitats. Monitoring and evaluation are incorporated to ensure an adaptive management approach that is consistent with land capability, scientific understanding and expected outcomes.
- **Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA):** In 2003, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act was signed into law. I find that the Revised Plan is consistent with HFRA in that it provides for the protection of old growth when conducting HFRA covered projects, provides for public involvement in assessing and conducting hazardous fuels reductions projects and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuels reduction based on condition class and fire regime. In addition, the Revised Plan addresses and displays fire regime condition classes and it also emphasizes protection and enhancement of riparian areas and watershed health as directed under HFRA.
- **Environmental Justice:** Executive Order 12898 (59 Federal Register 7629, 1994) directs federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations. I have determined, from the analysis disclosed in the Final EIS, that the Revised Forest Plan is in compliance with this Executive Order.
- **National Historic Preservation Act:** The 2006 Forest Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Projects undertaken in response to direction of the Revised Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The Plan contains direction for cultural resource management including

direction to integrate cultural resource management with other resource management activities. Several other laws apply to the preservation of cultural resources on federal land. Since the Revised Forest Plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) under the NHPA is not required. However, the Hiawatha did request SHPO to review the Draft Forest Plan and received correspondence from SHPO stating they accepted the changes proposed in the revised Forest Plan. In addition, Tribal consultation has occurred during the development of this Revised Forest Plan. It is my determination that the Revised Forest Plan complies with the NHPA and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

- **Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Government (1994):** These policies support the Forest Service actions in establishing mutual and beneficial partnerships with American Indians and Alaska Natives and honoring treaty obligations. Forest Service policy is recorded in FSM 1563. The Hiawatha met with tribal leaders on several occasions during the forest plan revision process. Concerns voiced by the tribes were addressed and incorporated into the revision documents. I believe the Revised Forest Plan is consistent with Forest Service policy in Forest Service Manual section 1563.
- **Data Quality Act and its federal guidelines** concern the quality of information used in the work of federal agencies. The Revised Forest Plan and its accompanying EIS were developed by an interdisciplinary team of agency scientists and resource specialists using the best available scientific information. Data quality was a paramount concern, as the objectivity and quality of scientific data is key to developing a realistic resource plan. The interdisciplinary team was aware of USDA information guidelines and devoted considerable efforts towards ensuring that the information used in developing the Forest Plan was credible and appropriate for the context. Scientific information was solicited from other federal agencies, state resource agencies and other recognized experts and scientists. Although the USDA Data Quality Act guidelines are not intended to be legally binding regulations, they were carefully considered while developing the Revised Forest Plan and the FEIS.
- **Energy Policy Act of 2005:** I find the 2006 Forest Plan is consistent with the Energy Policy Act of 2005. This Act makes it clear that domestic energy production from both renewable and nonrenewable sources is a national priority.
- **USDA Forest Service Travel Management Rule:** The Travel Management Rule (70 Federal Register 68264), dated November 9, 2005 (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295) revised regulations regarding travel management on National Forest System lands to clarify policy related to motor vehicle use including off-highway vehicles. This rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system or use inconsistent with those designations once designations are published on a Motor Vehicle Use Map.

The majority of the Hiawatha National Forest transportation system is already in place and supports an extensive system of Forest roads and trails that are open to OHV use. The Revised Plan sets desired conditions, goals and objectives that enact a “closed unless designated (authorized) open” policy for OHV travel; it allows for a moderate level of increased OHV route development, primarily focused on creating loops and connections between existing roads, trails and facilities; and it continues the Forest’s current prohibition on cross-country OHV travel.

The 2005 Plan does not make any final agency decision to develop or designate any new or specific routes for either snowmobile or OHV use. The Forest will work closely with local governments, interest groups and individuals to determine specific routes to be developed in the future. Likewise, changes to the existing travel management system will involve further site-specific analyses and public involvement, as appropriate. Any changes will then be incorporated into the Motor Vehicle Use Map. Over time the Motor Vehicle Use Map will reflect the desired conditions in the Forest Plan. Desired conditions will not be met immediately, but over the next 10-15 years through site- specific project analysis, and with

public involvement, to eventually provide up to 31 miles of additional OHV trail and 22 miles of additional roadway open to OHVs to connect existing routes. Upon publication of the MVUM, motor vehicle use on routes not shown on this map will be prohibited.

- **Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186:** The 2006 Forest Plan focuses on enhancing ecological health and plant and animal community diversity to the benefit of wildlife species, including migratory birds. The management direction in the 2006 Forest Plan is in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and was developed with full consideration of the broad objectives and intent of Executive Order 13186.
- **Other Laws, Policy and Regulations:** I also find that FEIS and the Revised Forest Plan are consistent with the following body of policy and regulation:
 - The National Energy Policy (Executive Order 13212)
 - The Clean Air Act
 - The Clean Water Act
 - The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act
 - The Energy Requirement and Conservation Potential
 - Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species,
 - Secretary of Agriculture’s Memorandum # 1827 on Prime Farmland, Rangeland and Forestland
 - Executive Order 1099 on the protection of Wetlands and Floodplains, and
 - The existing body of national direction for managing national forests.

Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation and Future Changes to the Plan

Implementation Begins in 30 Days

The 2006 Forest Plan becomes effective 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and Final EIS is published in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1)) of the 1982 Planning Rule.

Transition from 1986 Plan to the 2006 Forest Plan

The 2006 Forest Plan direction will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the effective date of this Record of Decision. Because this was a revision of the Hiawatha’s 1986 Forest Plan, much of the management direction from the Plan is carried forward relatively unchanged into the 2006 Plan. Therefore, many existing projects and ongoing actions that were consistent with the 1986 Plan will continue to be so with the 2006 Forest Plan. Many management actions decided prior to issuance of the Record of Decision are routine and ongoing. Those decisions are generally allowed to continue unchanged because the projected effects of these actions are part of the baseline analysis considered in the Final EIS and Biological Assessments for the revision.

The NFMA requires that “permits, contracts and other instruments for use and occupancy” of National Forest System lands be “consistent” with the Forest Plan (16 U.S.C. 1640(i)). I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the 2006 Forest Plan. These contracts will be executed according to their terms and these effects and conditions were considered in the FEIS. Existing timber contracts will, in most cases, be completed within three years. The decision is left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other use and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts. These agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the 2006 Forest Plan. Recent project decisions that have not been implemented will be reviewed and adjusted as needed by the decision-maker to meet the direction found in the revised Plan.

Key Considerations in Plan Implementation

The 2006 Forest Plan provides broad, strategic, landscape level direction for managing the Hiawatha National Forest. It does not make project-level decisions. Working toward the desired conditions and achieving the objectives in the Plan will be accomplished through site-specific project decisions, using the appropriate analyses and processes to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws and regulations.

The Final EIS for the Revised Plan did consider and evaluate the total management program that likely would be necessary to implement the objectives of the Revised Plan. It also dealt with those issues and concerns relevant at a larger landscape or forest-wide level. Therefore, in essence, the Final EIS is a large cumulative effects document, because it analyzed the total of activities that may be expected in the first decade (and longer term) and disclosed the forest-wide effects of those activities considered in total.

By tiering to the Final EIS, we will make use of this forest-wide analysis to streamline our environmental analysis for project-level decisions. We will not revisit landscape or forest-wide scale issues and effects because those effects have already been considered and disclosed in the Final EIS. This has applicability to a wide range of findings that are appropriately done at the forest-wide level.

Findings related to species viability and threatened species should be greatly simplified when projects are within the parameters of the Revised Plan and Final EIS. Project level analyses will focus on the impacts and effects at the specific site. Project-level decisions will not determine whether implementation of the 2006 Plan is appropriate, but rather, which management techniques (if any) and mitigations (beyond those in the Revised Plan) are best suited to the site being analyzed.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is designed to answer questions regarding implementation of the Revised Plan. Monitoring and evaluation will tightly focus on decisions made in the Record of Decision. Evaluation reports will display how Forest Plan decisions have been implemented, how effective the implementation has proven to be in accomplishing desired outcomes, and what we learned along the way. This will allow a check and review of the validity of the assumptions upon which this decision is based.

The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 ties well with the strategic nature of Forest Plans, with increasing specificity as the Plan is stepped down to specific projects. This monitoring framework has four key monitoring elements. The first element is the direction provided in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan. The remaining three are implementation tools to ensure a common approach in monitoring plan direction:

1. The Forest Plan (Chapter 4) direction that provides broad, strategic guidance
2. A procedural guide that provides specific, technical guidance
3. An annual monitoring schedule that outlines annual, specific tasks for the current year
4. An annual monitoring evaluation review that provides a forum to review current year findings and identify specific modifications if necessary.

Amending the Forest Plan

The revision of this Forest Plan is shaped by a central idea: How we manage the forest should adapt to changes in how we understand the ecological, social and economic environments.

In the Forest Service, we call this adaptive management. The 2006 Forest Plan is structured for adaptive management to occur because it describes the desired conditions toward which we will strive as we implement the Plan. In fact, those desired conditions are the very basis for the projects we will accomplish during the life of the Plan.

In making the decision on the Revised Plan, I have determined that this Plan will be adaptive and subject to change as we monitor, learn and gain new information. I hope that you choose to be partners with us in our monitoring, learning and adapting. The revision of the Hiawatha National Forest Plan has incorporated much that has been learned since the 1986 Plan was released and even as the 2006 Plan was developed. However, this Plan is not perfect. Neither is it to be unquestioningly adhered to for the next 15 years.

We will track progress toward reaching the desired conditions identified in the Plan, and modify or reformulate management actions in response to that progress. If a particular management strategy, technique or practice is applied, the results will be monitored to see if the desired effect is occurring. If the results aren't occurring, a modified or new strategy will be developed and will be implemented. The new strategy will also be subject to monitoring and evaluation and will be changed if necessary.

Changes to the Plan will generally take the form of Plan Amendments or corrections and will follow the appropriate procedures specified in the National Forest Management Act regulations. The correction of simple errors may take the form of an errata statement.

My decision in choosing this Revised Plan along with adaptive management will result in a cycle of learning and adjustment through which the Hiawatha National Forest will be able to provide the most appropriate package of benefits to the American people.

Administrative Appeal of Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service within 90 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the Milwaukee Journal. Appeals must be sent to:

Regular Mail	Express Mail
USDA Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination 1400 Independence Ave, SW Mailstop Code 1104 Washington, DC 20250-1104	USDA Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination 201 14th St., SW, 3rd Floor, Central Wing Washington, DC 20024 Phone: (202) 205-0895
Electronic Mail	
appeals-chief@fs.fed.us	
The use of Microsoft Word (.doc), WordPerfect (.wpd) or Adobe (.pdf) is recommended	
A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:	
Randy Moore, Regional Forester USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region 626 East Wisconsin Avenue Milwaukee, WI 53202	
Simultaneous electronic filing to the deciding officer should be sent to:	
appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us	

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217
- The name, address and telephone number of the appellant
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and by subject
- Date of the decision and name and title of the Deciding Officer
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made
- The reason for the appeal including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks

Contacts

More information on this decision, the Revised Hiawatha National Forest Land and Resource Plan, and/or the Hiawatha National Forest Final Environmental Impact Statement can be obtained by contacting:

Thomas A. Schmidt, Forest Supervisor

Phone: 906.786.4062

E-mail: taschmidt@fs.fed.us

Dave Maercklein, Forest Planner

Phone: 906.789.3301

E-mail: dmaercklein@fs.fed.us

Mailing Address:

Hiawatha National Forest
2727 N. Lincoln Rd., Escanaba, MI 49829

Electronic copies of the Final EIS, the Forest Plan, the Executive Summary and the Record of Decision can be obtained at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hiawatha/revision/rev_welcome.html



Randy Moore, Regional Forester

March 20, 2006

Date

“... never before have the people of a great country still rich in the foundations of prosperity sought to forestall future disaster by applying a national policy of conservation --- of which planned land use is the central core.”

Ferdinand A. Silcox
Forest Service Chief (1933–1939)



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.), should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202.720.2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA; Director, Office of Civil Rights; Room 326-W, Whitten Building; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-9410; or call 202.720.5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.