

Final Environmental Impact Statement Volume I

To accompany the Land and
Resource Management Plan

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Preface

Organization of the Final Environmental Impact Statement

The Ottawa National Forest (the Ottawa) has prepared this Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant laws and regulations.

This FEIS documents the effects of implementing various management options on the Ottawa. The FEIS is the basis for determining what changes will be made to the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Ottawa. The FEIS is organized as follows:

Preface	Understanding the FEIS. This chapter introduces the reader to the development of the Forest Plan and FEIS. It describes in general terms where the Ottawa is located, what the environments of the Ottawa are today, and the historical and contemporary uses of these areas. It also includes the applicable laws, regulations, and direction that national forests must follow when completing Forest Plan revisions.
Chapter 1	Purpose and Need and Public Involvement. This chapter describes legal reasons for Forest Plan revision, decisions made in the Forest Plan, public involvement, the need for change, identification of principle and secondary issues, and the environmental analysis and decision-making process.
Chapter 2	The Alternatives. This chapter describes the process used to develop alternatives, lists important points common to all alternatives, gives a general description of each alternative, describes and explains why some alternatives were not considered in detail, and identifies the preferred alternative—comparing it to the other alternatives considered.
Chapter 3	Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences. This chapter describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and the other alternatives.
Chapter 4	Consultation and Coordination. This chapter provides a list of preparers, and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental impact statement.
Chapter 5	Distribution List. This chapter provides a list of people and organizations who received the FEIS.

Appendices, which provide detailed information to support the analyses presented in the FEIS, follow Chapter 5. Following the appendices are a Forest Service glossary, a list of references, and a document index. A list of acronyms commonly used is also provided.

Additional documentation, including the Notice of Intent, newsletters, briefing papers, public comments, and more detailed analyses of project area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Supervisor's Office, Ottawa National Forest, E6248 US Hwy 2, Ironwood, Michigan, 49938. Much of this information is also available on the Ottawa's web site: http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/ottawa/forest_management/forest_plan/revision/index.htm.

Forest Niche and Historical Perspective

Introduction and Brief History

The Ottawa encompasses about one million acres within the western end of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The Ottawa is characterized by landscapes shaped by glaciers, which have provided a variety of landforms, from hilly glacial moraine to outwash sandplains. Rock outcrops, hills and ranges from geological events have contributed to the ecological and scenic features of the Ottawa.

The Ottawa was largely created through the reforestation, financial assistance, and employment programs of the federal government during the Great Depression. The Ottawa was completely cut over between 1870 and 1920, followed by large, catastrophic fires. In 1929, there were extensive tracts of tax-delinquent land in each of the Lake States. The Forest Service acquired many of these clearcut, burned, and barren lands in cooperation with the states. With the advent of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), large forest nurseries were developed and pine plantations were established. Establishment of the CCC and location of many camps in the region vastly increased the rate of reforestation by providing essential labor, developing substantial forest nurseries and controlling wildfire. The result was to greatly accelerate renewal of the forest resource on what had been unproductive land.

Native American tribes have used the lands that make up the Ottawa for thousands of years and treaties ensure their continued use. Treaty rights are exercised by Native American tribes and tribal members in various ways, such as hunting, fishing, cultural practices and gathering of forest plants. The Forest Service recognizes treaty rights as a matter of national policy and more locally on the Ottawa through a "Memorandum of Understanding" with sovereign and federally recognized tribes of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians.

The Ottawa Today

The Ottawa has a remote solitude that is unique and unexpected for the Upper Midwest. Located a day's drive away from Detroit, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Chicago and other large, metropolitan areas, the Ottawa is a frequent destination for people craving a natural and peaceful experience. The overall population density in Michigan is 175 people per square mile, while the area encompassing the Ottawa is 25 or fewer people per square mile. The visitor gets an immediate perception of wildness and remoteness when entering the Ottawa and will experience miles of beautiful roadways with continuous natural scenery. Outstanding scenic beauty abounds in the Ottawa's steep to level terrain, with rock outcrops and ledges. Most spectacular is the northern hardwoods autumn color display.

The Ottawa is composed of predominantly northern hardwood tree species with associated plants and animals. Mixed stands of early successional (aspen/birch), and lowland and upland conifer trees are also common. Much of the forest cover is less than 100 years old and is rapidly maturing. More information about the Ottawa's resources is provided below.

Programs, Activities and Uses

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Visitors to the Ottawa are often surprised at the multitude and variety of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. The Ottawa offers a wide spectrum of camping experiences, hiking and other trails, and Scenic Byways. About 116 miles of the North Country National Scenic Trail traverse the Ottawa. Hunting is also a major recreational activity, with habitat for deer, black bear, and grouse.

With over 500 lakes, 2,000 miles of fishable streams including 300 miles of designated and over 175 miles of study National Wild and Scenic Rivers, and access to Lake Superior at Black River Harbor, the Ottawa provides a wide variety of canoeing, kayaking, and boating experiences along with high quality warm and cold water fishing opportunities. Restoring and maintaining water flows is a focus of forest management activities.

Portions of the Ottawa receive over 200" of snow annually. Referred to as "Big Snow Country", winter sports enthusiasts enjoy alpine and nordic skiing, snowmobiling, dog-sledding, and ice fishing for several months of the year. There are over 450 miles of groomed snowmobile trails and numerous cross-country ski trails.

For those people seeking a more remote experience, the Ottawa is home to three unique and very different wilderness areas. As the Ottawa's appeal as a recreation destination grows, forest managers are challenged with balancing increased demand and protection of natural resources, conflicts between motorized and non-motorized use, and a need for maintaining trails and recreational facilities.

Providing Habitat for Wildlife, Plants and Fish

The Ottawa land base lies in an ecological transition between the northern boreal forests and eastern deciduous forests. A great diversity of species are supported in this environment, such as gray wolf, bald eagle, common loon, bobcat, fisher, various species of trout, lake sturgeon, unique aquatic species, as well as many kinds of ferns and flowering plants. Some species are common; others are relatively rare and/or exist on the "edge" of their most southerly or northerly ranges. In recent years, new "non-native invasive species", such as European buckthorn, purple loosestrife, and Eurasian water milfoil, have been occurring on the Ottawa, creating new management challenges.

Forest Health and Restoration, and Use

Restoration of forest health occurs through the interplay of natural processes and management practices of forest managers. The Ottawa's recovery from the logging era is a function of this. Ninety percent of the Ottawa is forested. Factors that shape the Ottawa's forest health programs include: (a) the federal requirement to contribute to the viability of forest plant and animal

species known to exist on the Ottawa; (b) a strong local and regional economic demand for forest products; (c) natural successional patterns of forest vegetation related to soils, seed sources, climate and other factors; (d) numerous “overstocked”, dense forests in the aftermath of the turn-of-the-20th-century logging era; (e) demand for cultural and traditional products of the forest; (f) increasing scientific knowledge about forested ecosystem function, structure and processes in the forests of the Upper Peninsula, and (g) fire management. The Ottawa’s timber management program is the primary tool for restoring and providing a diverse range of sustainable habitats for many species, supporting forest restoration and health, and providing for traditional and cultural uses and wood fiber.

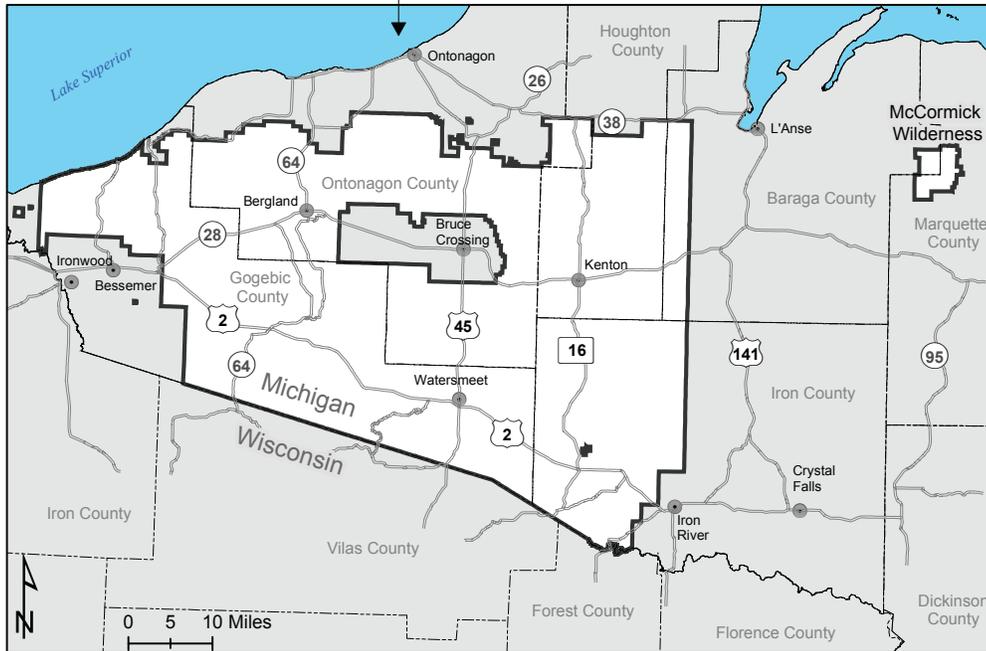
Transportation System

The transportation system on the Ottawa provides access to the public for a diverse mix of uses. The federal government has jurisdiction of and manages approximately 60 percent of the land within the administrative boundary of the Ottawa. Because the Ottawa is managed for multiple uses, such as fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and timber products, most resources benefit from variety in road densities and standards. Since the Ottawa’s road system is already in place, efforts focus on maintenance and reconstruction to provide an adequate and affordable transportation system.

The Future

In addition to the programs and challenges cited, changing public values, an increased need for goods and services, and shrinking budgets create a challenging environment. An important goal is to maintain the unique and remote characteristics of the Ottawa National Forest that make it such a special place. Together with support and input from the public, local and state governments, Native American tribes, and other groups, the Ottawa can be managed in a sustainable manner that will contribute to the needs of present and future generations.

Forest Map



Planning Laws

Current forest planning regulations are an extension of historical Forest Service experience in land management planning. For many years, the Forest Service has prepared plans to guide inventory development, identify special management areas, calculate sustainable use levels, and monitor resource conditions and trends.

Forest Service planning activities are guided by several key federal laws. Under the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), National Forest Service System lands are managed for a variety of uses on a sustained basis to ensure a continued supply of goods and services to the American people. NFMA amended the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 to specify that land and resource management plans (forest plans) be developed for units of the National Forest System.

The following are the major federal laws and Forest Service rules, regulations and initiatives that were used to revise the Ottawa National Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan.

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act regulations establish extensive analytical and procedural requirements for the development, revision and significant amendment of Forest Plans. NFMA regulations describe procedures for formulating and evaluating alternatives and require that alternatives consider a full range of resource outputs and expenditure levels. NFMA regulations also acknowledge the need to comply with other laws such as the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and the Archeological Resources Protection Act.

NFMA requires Forest Plans to be revised every 10 to 15 years. Although it has been more than 15 years since the 1986 Forest Plan was approved, Congress passed P.L. 108-108, which states that the Secretary of Agriculture will not be considered in violation of NFMA if more than 15 years have passed without a revision to a Forest Plan providing that the Forest Service is acting expeditiously and in good faith.

NFMA directs the Forest Service to identify criteria to guide the planning process. The 1982 Planning Rule regulations (36 CFR 219.12[c]) were used for the development of this revised Forest Plan as permitted by 36 CFR 219.14[e] of the 2005 Planning Rule. Under NFMA guidelines, criteria must be included that achieve the objectives of maximizing net public benefits (the overall long-term value of positive effects less negative effects). The Forest Service used the following criteria to develop the proposal for revising Ottawa's Forest Plan:

- **Role in Providing Public Benefits:** Defining the Ottawa's role in identifying the values and benefits it is best able to provide in the Eastern Region.

- **Integrating Program Goals and Protecting Resources:** Complying with NFMA management requirements (36 CFR 219.13 through 219.26, 1982; as permitted by 36 CFR 219.14[e] of the 2005 Planning Rule), for integrating program goals for timber, vegetation management, recreation, fish and wildlife, soil and water, and research natural areas.
- **Conserving Biological Diversity:** Providing for diversity of plant and animal communities and tree species consistent with the Ottawa's overall multiple-use objectives.
- **Social Needs:** Integrating public needs, expectations, and concerns into the decisions about ecosystem health and diversity, and providing for social and economic needs, goods, and services.
- **Collaborative Stewardship:** Native American tribes, local units of government, public and private organizations, landowners, and concerned citizens will be involved in the Forest Plan revision effort.

National Environmental Policy Act

The landmark 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) brought environmental analysis and public participation requirements into land management planning. NEPA ensures that environmental information is made available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made and before actions are taken. The goal is to help Forest Service officials base their decisions on an understanding of environmental consequences and to take actions that protect, restore and enhance the environment. Accurate scientific analyses, expert agency input and public scrutiny are essential to the NEPA process.