

Record of Decision

Introduction

The 2004 *Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests Land and Resources Management Plan* (Forest Plan) is a 10- to 15-year strategy for managing National Forest resources. The strategy outlines environmentally sound management to produce goods and services in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits. The Forest Plan emphasizes general land management practices and prescriptions at varying intensities on different areas of the Forest. Management practices include such activities as road building and maintenance, stream restoration, timber harvesting, and campground rehabilitation. Management prescriptions refer to conditions of the land, such as ecological conditions or recreational characteristics. In these ways, multiple-use goals and objectives are achieved in a balanced, cost efficient and sustainable manner.

This revised Forest Plan replaces all previous resource management plans for these Forests, subject to existing rights, contracts, and specific direction for special areas such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and national trails. The Forest Plan provides a fresh strategy for sound environmental management based on new information.

The Forest Plan may be amended or revised to respond to new information or management technologies, Congressional land designations, and changing needs and opportunities. Any action taken to amend or revise the Plan will include public involvement.

Six primary decisions are made within the Forest Plan:

1. Forest wide multiple-use goals and objectives.
2. Forest wide management requirements.
3. Management Area direction.
4. Lands suited/not suited for timber management.
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements.
6. Recommendations of Wilderness Study Areas to Congress.

All Goals and Objectives in the Forest Plan can be accomplished from physical, ecological, economical, and legal perspectives. The management practices and outputs proposed are projections the Forests will strive to accomplish. The Plan is implemented through site-specific projects, and annual budgets determine which and how many of such projects are planned and implemented during any given year.

The Forest Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) are programmatic in nature, providing a long-range strategy for the Forests. Site-specific environmental consideration will occur for the project level implementation of this strategy, resulting in environmental analyses, environmental impact statements, categorical exclusions, and/or amendments or revisions of the Plan. Any resulting documents will be tiered to the FEIS for the revised Forest Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

The Forests

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests are lands of sylvan beauty. They are a sea of green punctuated by islands of blue lakes and rivers. Eagles and hawks ride air thermals over the landscape, deer wander through clearings along the edges of deeper forests and wolves glide almost invisibly in forest cover. Loons haunt us with their wails of the wild places, and if we listen carefully we hear the deep bass drumming of ruffed grouse and the sweet melodies of warblers singing from their nesting grounds. Whether these sights and sounds occur in our absence or are the source of pleasure during our sojourns in the forest, they serve as a sense of timeless security.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet Forests are sources of living and renewing natural resources. They help meet our need for wild places and provide essential forest products, contributing to social and economic well being in forest-related communities, near and far. Forest products such as fish, berries, maple syrup, grouse, herbs, lumber/pulp, mushrooms, deer, fir boughs, and birch bark are far more than simple economic elements, although they often serve effectively in that role. For example, fish from the forest area are important to local economies, because they provide opportunities for hiring fishing guides, selling boats and fishing equipment, renting cabins and motel/hotel rooms, and supporting eating establishments that feed the throngs of people who enjoy sport fishing. At the same time, the individual joy and the social bonding associated with fishing with friends and family extend beyond economics. Timber products are another good example of the far-reaching effects of forest products. Lumber and pulp are more than the source of employment for fallers, truckers, paper mill workers, and furniture makers. They also set the foundation for a sense of belonging within the social and economic fabric of forest-related communities. Raw products themselves, when transformed into secondary or tertiary products, become that beloved old rocker that grandpa sat in, the wooden railing along the cabin porch where the family gathers every year, or the paper on which the daily news arrives.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests are a collection of interrelated biological systems that contribute to local, State, regional, national, and global scales of healthy and sustainable ecosystems. Some areas of the Forests are early successional forests – young, simply structured systems where aspen are the most common tree species and where ruffed grouse, white-tailed deer, and chestnut-sided warblers thrive. In contrast, largely contiguous mid- to late-successional northern hardwood forests characterize other sections of the Forests, where older and larger sugar maple, hemlock, yellow birch, basswood, and white ash predominate. These are the forests where least flycatchers, northern goshawks, and black-throated blue warblers make their home. There are a wide variety of non-forested and aquatic ecosystems that mix throughout the Forest. The relative sizes of these forest systems, their relative positions on the landscape, and their interconnectedness all contribute to a landscape pattern that defines the Forests' contribution to ecosystem sustainability at various scales. The Forests are unique land bases in Wisconsin because of their large contiguous parcels. This uniqueness contributes ecosystem components that other lands cannot provide at this time.

The Forests are lands intrinsically connected to native peoples who live their traditions through forest products and maintain spiritual bonds to the land and water, trees and wildlife. The beauty and peace offered by the Forests also contribute to the economic well being of communities by drawing tourists into the area. The results of vegetation management on these national lands provide settings that tourists enjoy and return to year after year. The same forest management also contributes to restoration of ecological land patterns and structure and the long-term sustainability of forest products. All these

aspects are integral to a holistic view of the Forests and define our management responsibility for such important resources.

A Vision of the Future

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests will be managed to support the relationship between people and the forest. As the Forests continue to mature they will further contribute to the public's enjoyment as well as to the socio-economic stability of human communities by providing a setting that retains a sense of place for people. The maturing forest will contribute to restoration of sustainable aquatic and terrestrial ecological health and will offer diverse forest products.

A wide variety of recreational opportunities will be provided on the Forests. The Forests will continue to offer a natural setting with road access to many areas. Developed camping sites will remain similar to the present, although some sites may be restored and some campgrounds may add additional sites. Cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, horseback riding, mountain biking, boating, hiking, fishing and hunting, motorized sightseeing, and all-terrain vehicle riding will be supported. A consistent policy for all-terrain vehicle opportunities will limit use to roads and trails (ending off-trail and off road access) and will better protect other resource values. More trails will be made available, and road routes will become available on the east side of the Forests.

Managing semi-primitive areas for a more remote setting will enhance recreational experiences. Additional Wilderness designations would provide more opportunities for experiencing solitude within the Forests.

The transportation system on the Forests will continue the reduction of total road density and move further toward the continued goal of three miles per square mile of total road. The Chequamegon is approaching that total density now, while there is still much work to do on the Nicolet. Open road density will be managed to provide quiet hunting or hiking opportunities while still providing thousands of miles of road access.

Forest products will continue to be made available in support of economic stability and will be offered in an environmentally sound manner. Native peoples will continue traditional uses of forest resources. Prescriptions and methodologies for timber harvesting will contribute to an increased restoration of important components of healthy ecological systems across the broader landscape. Special forest products will be available for personal and commercial use. Some products will be monitored more thoroughly to determine sustainable harvest levels over the long-term.

Forest species and the pattern of forested ecosystems across the landscape will include larger patches of interior mature mixed northern hardwoods, and long-lived pine and oak systems. A diversity of ecological systems such as 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 a variety of game species. Globally rare barrens communities will be enhanced, and management will continue to provide habitat in recovery support of threatened and endangered species such as the gray wolf and bald eagle.

Achieving this vision for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests will require collaboration with the public and responding to issues and concerns promptly with courtesy and fairness. It means being good neighbors, working cooperatively, inviting the involvement of others, and sharing credit for accomplishments.