
Decision and Rationale

Need for Change

The original Forest Plans were approved on August 11, 1986. The need to change these Plans became apparent to the Forests through a combination of the following: new scientific information and recommendations on managing for biological diversity provided by a committee of scientific experts formed by these Forests in 1992; new scientific information in the realm of conservation biology appearing in published research; management concerns developed as a result of monitoring and evaluation, including the difficulty in producing predicted outputs while also meeting standards and guidelines, and meeting acre treatment predictions; and public comments shared with the Forests throughout the implementation of the 1986 Plans. These sources all contributed to the conclusion there was a need to change some of the management direction for these Forests in the following four general topic areas: access and recreation; biological diversity; special land allocations; and timber production.

New information and recommendations for forest management were provided to the Forests in two reports: A scientific committee report in 1994 titled *Report on the Scientific Roundtable on Biological Diversity Convened by the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests*; and a subsequent report in 1995 titled *Report on the Socioeconomic Roundtable Convened by the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests*. The recommendations in these reports served as a source of new issues, information, and changed conditions (since 1986) that influenced the need to revise the Forest Plans.

In response to the recommendations, the Forest completed an ecosystems inventory that identified areas most able to respond to ecological restoration efforts and to serve as ecological references. The Forest also recognized the need for stronger management direction regarding aquatic ecological systems while an on-going effort to classify and inventory aquatic systems is completed.

The amount of recreational opportunities for high quality semi-primitive experience brought up during appeals and litigation for both Plans remained a concern for a segment of the public and for local forest managers. As required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976, an inventory and evaluation of areas suitable for consideration as additional wilderness was completed. This evaluation took into account contribution to quality semi-primitive recreational opportunities, as well as the aspects of ecological restoration that would be associated with Wilderness designation.

The 1986 Forest Plans had very divergent all-terrain vehicle (ATV) policies. The Nicolet National Forest did not permit ATV use, while the Chequamegon National Forest provided on-trail and on-road ATV use, as well as considerable off road/off trail ATV access. Public comment during issue development, and management concerns about off-road motorized recreation led to a more evenly balanced and resource sensitive ATV policy being an important consideration.

Yearly monitoring of timber harvest found the Forests unable to provide the predicted levels of timber volume. Two of the reasons for this were: net growth rates for timber were lower than predicted; and implementing integrated forest management and meeting goals and objectives of other resources effectively reduced the number of acres available for commercial timber treatments.

The 1996 Notice of Intent to revise the 1986 Forest Plans identified the issues described above as needs for change. In addition, other issues were identified such as road density and access management, special forest products, and the recognition of tribal treaty rights.

Chapter 1 of the FEIS identifies the following outline of issues/concerns/management opportunities as the primary areas where change needed to be considered:

Access and Recreation

- All-terrain and Off-road Vehicle Use/Motorized Use
- Semi-primitive Non-motorized areas
- Wilderness

Biological Diversity

- Aquatic, Riparian, and Wetland Ecosystems
- Ecosystem Restoration
- Landscape Pattern
- Old Growth
- Wildlife

Special Land Allocations

- Research Natural Areas
- Special Management areas

Timber Production

- Timber Production
- Special Forest Products

Decision Overview

I chose a modified version of Alternative 5 as the Selected Alternative. Alternative 5 was the Preferred Alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), and was the foundation for the Proposed Plan. The modifications I chose provide the best mix of benefits to address the needs for change identified in the Notice of Intent to revise these Plans. They were developed to respond to public comment received during the formal comment period on the DEIS and Proposed Plan, as well as to respond to further internal management issues and concerns considered during the comment period. Forest management is long-term in concept and implementation, and I seek to set in motion the actions that will provide future generations a healthy, beautiful, productive, and diverse forest.

The 1986 Plans were well crafted, and have guided the management of these Forests for 17 years. The vision in those Plans was excellent for that time. I have reviewed the 17 years of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and have listened to sources of new information as well as current expressions of public desire for management of these Forests. I make these adjustments to the management direction of the original Forest Plans to move these forests forward into the next 10-15 years.

I recognize that none of the Alternatives satisfy all of the interested publics, due to the diverse values and views on the highest and best uses of these Forests. The Selected Alternative provides the best opportunity to improve ecological conditions while providing a broad spectrum of recreational opportunities and a realistic level of commodity production.

The Selected Alternative is outlined in the companion document, *Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan). The finer details of my decision are contained within the revised Forest Plan as Goals and Objectives, Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines, Management Area desired future conditions (prescriptions) and their accompanying Standards and Guidelines, recommendations for Wilderness Study Areas, identification of lands suited/not suited for timber production, calculation of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ), and monitoring and evaluation requirements.

The management direction in the revised Forest Plan is designed to:

- Improve the long-term ecological health of the Forests.
- Contribute to meeting current and future social and economic needs.
- Provide sustainable and predictable levels of products and services.
- Emphasize management that is responsive to future needs for change.
- Provide consistent management direction at the Forest level that will support site-specific project decisions in the context of broader ecological, social, and economic considerations.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) documents the analysis of the alternatives considered and of the public comment received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Proposed Plan. This analysis served as the foundation for my decision on the revised Forest Plan for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests. My decision incorporates by reference the analysis of effects, the management direction disclosed in the FEIS and revised Forest Plan, and the planning record in its entirety. All references and citations used in this ROD are fully described in the FEIS and revised Forest Plan.

My decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests. It does not apply to any other Federal, Tribal, State, or private lands, although the effects of my decision on those lands are considered.