
Changes between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements

A substantial amount of public comment has been received and analyzed since the issuance of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the Proposed Plan. Based on this analysis, and on internal management concerns, I have made some modifications to Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative in the DEIS) and those modifications are now the Selected Alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. It is the basis of the revised Forest Plan.

I made some changes in the Goals and Objectives, and concurrently in the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan that is tied directly to the Objectives. A considerable number of changes were also made to the Standards and Guidelines, predominantly related to increasing clarity, improving the ability to adaptively manage the resources and eliminating guidance that is duplication of management direction already provided in laws, regulations, and/or in agency policy.

The most substantial changes were made in ATV policy, recommendation for three Wilderness Study Areas, and land allocations to areas with modified silvicultural prescriptions focusing on large-scale patches of uneven-aged interior northern hardwoods, even-aged oak-pine, and even-aged natural pine-oak. These three forested-ecosystems were primary design features for responding to recommendations for increasing landscape-scale patches across the Forests to support strengthened ecological sustainability, including response to species viability concerns.

All-terrain Vehicles

The following elements of an ATV policy remained as described in Alternative 5:

- No off-trail or off-road ATV use.
- No ATV play-areas.
- Roads and trails closed to ATVs unless posted open.
- ATV trails open all year except during Spring breakup.

Primary ATV policy changes made in the modification to Alternative 5 include:

- Classified Forest system roads on the Chequamegon will be open for ATVs except: 1) on roads where the Forest does not have the authority to designate as an ATV route; and 2) on roads closed by local District action.
- ATV routes on the Nicolet will be considered in consultation with township-governments to enhance ATV access.
- ATV routes (roads designated open for ATV use) are open to ATVs when the roads are also open to all vehicular traffic.
- ATV routes generally closed to public traffic (closed classified roads) will have the same ATV open season as ATV trails.
- Up to 185 miles of new ATV trail may be added to the Forests.
- Eliminated the term “connector.”

Other Off-Highway Vehicle policy change:

- The existing 25-mile Pipeline 4 Wheel Drive (4WD) trail will remain in place. No additional trails will be added unless they are due to relocation of the Pipeline trail.

These changes respond to public concerns that insufficient access had been provided in the Proposed Plan, that the open season for the ATV routes was far too limiting, and that no additional 4WD trails should be built.

Wilderness

Alternative 5 contained a recommendation of three areas as Wilderness Study Areas (Flynn Lake, Porcupine Addition, and Hungry Run). Public comments for and against new Wilderness designations were consistent with pre-draft commentary and did not suggest a particular change in Wilderness designation. Management considerations led to a proposed change in the areas recommended for study, while maintaining essentially the same acreage being considered for Wilderness Study Areas. I reallocated Hungry Run to management as interior northern hardwood, and changed the allocation of Spring Brook from Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized to an area recommended for Wilderness study. Review of the two areas showed that Spring Brook has the higher combined value for recreational characteristics, and ecological reference and restoration potential. My decision is to recommend only those areas for Wilderness study that have the highest combined values on those three characteristics. Although allocations to SPNM areas were decreased by 200 acres in total acreage (due to a change of Spring Brook from a SPNM area to a Wilderness Study Area), this change responds to the public concern shared about the limited amount and quality of semi-primitive recreational opportunity available on these two Forests.

Biological Diversity

Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative) provided a relatively low to moderate shift in management emphasis on landscape-scale patches of three forested ecosystems important to increasing biological diversity on the Forests. I decided to improve these aspects of landscape design in support of biological diversity. It is sufficiently important to long-term ecological sustainability to make the following modifications to the allocations to uneven-aged interior northern hardwoods, even-aged oak-pine, and even-aged natural pine-oak as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Acres of management areas emphasizing landscape-scale patches of three forested ecosystems		
Management Emphasis	Acres in Alternative 5	Acres in Selected Alternative
Interior Northern Hardwoods	130,000	209,000
Even-aged Oak-Pine	1,700	11,000
Even-aged Natural Oak Pine	16,500	30,000

I have concluded that the results of implementing the Selected Alternative will move the ecological systems on the Forests in the needed direction to increase overall security of species viability and diversity. The Selected Alternative will increase the likelihood of persistence of species of viability concern, and provide for an increase in species and ecological community diversity and sustainability.

As I stated above, I recognize the decrease in early successional forest is one of the effects of allocating more land area to these management emphases. I tempered the shift in emphases with concurrent consideration of the need to improve security for species of viability concern, the need to provide early successional habitat for related species and biological systems, and of the public concern for game species and the economic effects of decreases in hunting game species.