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## **Public Involvement**

The Forest Service conducted an active public involvement program throughout the plan revision process, including consultation with Federal, State, tribal, and local governments and agencies. A large number of private citizens became involved in the revision process through participation in public meetings and open houses, attendance at public hearings, and sharing their ideas verbally or in writing throughout the revision effort. A full description of the public participation activities that were undertaken is located in Appendix A of the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

On October 18, 1994, the Forest Supervisor sent a letter to all Forest employees outlining an approach to the forest plan revision, including public involvement. He emphasized the importance of working collaboratively and building relationships with people in order to effectively involve the public in the management of their national forests.

In May 1996, the Forests held a public meeting to seek public input on establishing an effective public involvement plan for the revision process. As a result of that meeting, a public involvement plan was developed.

The Forests provided proposed revision issues to the general public for comment during July 1995, and held a series of public open houses at that time to facilitate information sharing. Resulting comments were analyzed and incorporated into the design of the revision topics, which were published in a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register on June 27, 1996.

The NOI informed the public of the 60-day comment period, and provided the calendar for a second series of open house meetings, which were held in July and August 1996. These meetings were held in northern Wisconsin towns containing Forest Service offices, and were designed to:

- Provide information about the need for changing the Forest Plans, the plan revision process, preliminary issues, the nature, and scope of the decisions to be made, and the aspects of the current plans that would not be changed.
- Provide descriptions of the alternative development and public involvement components of the revision process.
- Aid the Forests in gathering additional public perspective on the scope of the decisions made.

In December 1996, the Forests completed content analysis of 188 responses that were received in response to the NOI and associated public open house meetings. This information was then used to further develop revision issues and/or in the development of alternatives.

The Forests received hundreds of comments on a wide variety of issues in response to further public involvement efforts such as scoping letters, various types of media coverage, and additional open house meetings. During 1999, another series of local meetings were held in most northern Wisconsin towns with Forest Service offices. Six public meetings were held in Wausau, Wisconsin, between February 1997 and June 1999.

The public input received throughout the planning process, 17 resource assessments completed in 1997, and 10 Analysis of the Management Situation reports accomplished in 1998 all contributed to the development of 10 Problem Statements. These Problem Statements refined the NOI issues, and were used as the basis for designing the alternatives.

During the period between October 11, 1996 and August 31, 2001, approximately 1800 comments were received in response to communications activities. All told, approximately 2000 individuals, groups, organizations and agencies have been contacted and/or have participated in the planning process.

The Proposed Forest Plan and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) were made available to the public for review and comment on April 11, 2003, with a 90-day comment period of April 11 to July 11. The comment period was later extended, in response to public requests, to August 11, 2003. During the comment period there were 10 open houses and 5 hearings held throughout the State to provide the public the opportunity to obtain more information about the draft documents and to offer another avenue for providing their comments.

A total of 2,941 responses, oral and written, were received during the 120-day comment period. Additional responses were received after the close of the comment period. All responses were considered when the decisions on the Final Forest Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) were being made.

A summary of the public comment analysis and the Forest Service response to comments is located in Appendix A of the FEIS.