

Alternatives

Alternative Development

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests plan revision began in 1994 with the determination there was a need to change both Forest Plans approved in 1986. Indicators for the need to change included:

- Public comments during implementation of the 1986 Plans.
- Changed conditions as reflected in monitoring and evaluation during Plan implementation.
- Availability of new information and scientific understanding.

The Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was published in 1996. In addition, 17 resource assessments were conducted to establish the context for change. An Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) was accomplished for each of 10 problem areas (issues) identified from the assessments. The AMS for each problem area thoroughly described the foundation for change, as well as potential range of response by problem area that could be developed into alternatives.

The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended by the Management Act of 1976, requires consideration of a broad range of reasonable alternatives. This consideration was accomplished by an interdisciplinary team in order to provide adequate basis for identifying the alternative that comes closest to maximizing net public benefit. The process used to formulate the alternatives considered in detail is described in Chapter 2 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Alternative 1 is a combination of the two current Forest Plans, but with a recalculated combined Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) of 1.46 billion board feet. The combined ASQ of the 1986 Plans was 1.67 billion board feet, however current Plan implementation monitoring had shown that the ASQ of 970 million board feet on the Nicolet was not reasonable based on new information.

Alternatives 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9 were developed to provide a range of movement towards the direction of change identified in the Notice of Intent. A range of choices for each issue was developed that, to varying intensities, addressed the need for change. Mixtures of these issue-specific choices were combined into individual alternatives. The range of alternatives for the revised Plan not only covered all the issues but provided the decision maker realistic choices regarding the level of response to the issues within any given alternative.

Alternatives Not Considered In Detail

Although they contributed to the range of alternatives, seven alternatives were eliminated from detailed study. A more detailed description of these alternatives and the reasons for not considering them further can be found in the FEIS, Chapter 2, *Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study*. The seven alternatives considered but eliminated from further study are listed below:

- An alternative that emphasized early successional habitat, employed limited emphasis on Alternative Management Areas, and emphasized increases in either motorized or non-motorized recreation.

- An alternative emphasizing maintenance of aspen acreage present at the end of the first decade of implementation of the 1986 Plans, while concurrently addressing the revision's biological diversity issue.
- Alternative(s) providing ATV off-road, off-trail cross-country use.
- Alternatives providing an increase in ATV intensive use areas.
- An alternative considering all Inventoried Roadless Areas mapped in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Final Environmental Statement (RACFS) as potential Wilderness.
- An alternative maintaining the combined ASQs for the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests at the level predicted in the 1986 Plans, or increasing the ASQs to the level calculated in the Maximum Timber Benchmark.
- An alternative permitting departure from the policy of non-declining timber yield.

Alternatives Considered In Detail

Selected Alternative

The Selected Alternative is a modification of Alternative 5. Like Alternative 5, the Selected Alternative provides a traditionally managed forest that emphasizes hardwood sawtimber, however, the Selected Alternative differs from Alternative 5 by increasing emphasis on ecosystem restoration and a higher level of landscape scale interior forest conditions. The emphasis on Old Growth areas in Alternative 5 is also present in the Selected Alternative. The amount of area recommended for Wilderness study is similar as well. It provides for increased species viability over time through protection of ecological reference areas, a higher allocation of management with modified silvicultural methods that provide for some amount of ecosystem restoration. Like Alternative 5, the Selected Alternative provides about equal and relatively moderate emphasis on motorized and non-motorized recreation. It provides a moderate level of new ATV trails on the Forests and low amounts of opportunities for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation. It provides a moderate level of aspen emphasis. The combined ASQ for this alternative is 1.31 billion board feet.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 is the No Action alternative and reflects the forest-wide direction from each of the 1986 Plans. "No Action" means that the current management allocations, activities and management direction found in the existing Plans, as amended, would continue. One change was included in this alternative: the combined ASQs were limited to 1.46 billion board feet because the timber capability was reanalyzed using the current Plans' management direction, and 1.46 billion board feet was the upper limit of timber production capability.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 places the most emphasis of the Revision Alternatives on production and maintenance of early successional species. It also emphasizes more motorized recreation than other alternatives, provides the highest amount of new ATV trails and connectors, and provides for the longest annual ATV use of designated routes (on-road use). This alternative provides the least emphasis on northern hardwood interior forest, oak and pine forest, and on management for surrogate barrens. It provides the highest number of acres with aspen emphasis, including Alternative 1. Alternative 2 identifies one area to be recommended for Wilderness study (6,300 acres). This alternative has a combined ASQ of 1.34 billion board feet, which is second highest of the alternatives.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 places the most emphasis of all alternatives on ecosystem restoration, landscape scale interior forest conditions, and providing semi-primitive non-motorized experience. This alternative provides no new ATV trails, a low number of connectors, and does not permit ATV use on classified roads. It identifies two areas for recommended Wilderness study (8,000 acres). Alternative 3 provides the highest acreage of the alternatives in Management Area 6B semi-primitive non-motorized areas (suited timberlands), and a relatively high amount of the Management Area 6A (non-suited timberlands) semi-primitive non-motorized areas. The alternative provides for a combined ASQ of 1.24 billion board feet, and provides the highest emphasis on modified silvicultural methods to achieve ecosystem restoration components. It provides a relatively low acreage of aspen emphasis.

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 responds primarily to the lack of quality remote recreational settings on the Forests, recommending all 8 potential Wilderness areas for study (56,100 acres), and designating the most Management Area 6A semi-primitive non-motorized acres of any alternative, and a relatively high amount of Management Area 6B semi-primitive non-motorized areas. No new ATV trails are provided for, ATVs are not permitted on roads, and ATV access is not permitted on the Nicolet. This alternative provides for a moderate level of ecosystem restoration, including a moderate emphasis on landscape scale interior forest conditions. Alternative 4 provides the lowest number of suitable acres, and the lowest combined ASQ of 1.22 billion board feet, and the lowest number of acres with aspen emphasis.

Alternative 5

Alternative 5 provides a traditionally managed forest that emphasizes hardwood sawtimber. It provides for species viability over time through protection of ecological reference areas, some allocation of management with modified silvicultural methods providing for some amount of ecosystem restoration. This alternative provides about equal and relatively moderate emphasis on motorized and non-motorized recreation. It provides a moderate level of new ATV trails and connectors on the Forests and 3 ½ months of ATV access to classified roads. The alternative recommends three areas for Wilderness study (15,400 acres), and provides low amounts of opportunities for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation. The alternative provides a low to moderate emphasis on landscape scale interior forest conditions, and a high emphasis on Old Growth areas. It provides a moderate level of aspen emphasis. The combined ASQ for this alternative is 1.30 billion board feet.

Alternative 6

Alternative 6 provides a forest where early-successional species receive some emphasis while providing moderate emphasis on biological diversity issues. There are moderate amounts of non-motorized recreational opportunities in this alternative, and more of the non-motorized areas are managed for timber. Conversion of early successional to longer-lived species progresses relatively slowly, and the alternative maintains a moderate emphasis on factors related to biological diversity. Recreation opportunities focus on non-motorized areas having a fully managed forest, on low amounts of semi-primitive non-motorized opportunities, and on low to moderate opportunities for ATV access. Alternative 6 recommends four areas for Wilderness study (28,985 acres). Its combined ASQ is 1.29 billion board feet, and it provides for a high number of acres emphasizing aspen.

Alternative 7

Alternative 7 responds to concerns for production of northern hardwood sawtimber products and has a moderate to high emphasis on biological diversity, providing a moderate amount of emphasis on landscape scale patches of interior forest. It provides a high amount of Old Growth areas. This alternative provides for no new ATV trails, some new ATV connectors, and no ATV road routes unless serving as connectors. Alternative 7 allocates a moderate amount of acres to semi-primitive non-motorized emphasis, and recommends four areas for Wilderness study (25,771 acres). The combined ASQ for this alternative is 1.29 billion board feet, and the alternative provides for a moderate level of aspen emphasis.

Alternative 9

Alternative 9 provides a high response to biological diversity issues, and provides high amounts of motorized recreation access and ATV use. This alternative provides for the most new ATV trails and connectors, but does not permit ATV access on classified roads, except as connectors. It recommends three areas for Wilderness study (15,803 acres), and provides a low amount of the more remote form of semi-primitive non-motorized areas, and a moderate amount of the semi-primitive non-motorized areas with timber management. This alternative provides the second strongest emphasis on ecosystem restoration, a high emphasis on landscape scale patch management and Old Growth. The combined ASQ for this alternative is 1.31 billion board feet, and it provides a low emphasis on aspen management.