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Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests

Final Environmental Impact Statement Summary

*To accompany the 2004 Land and
Resource Management Plan*



Abstract

This is a summary of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that accompanies the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests 2004 Land and Resource Management Plan (2004 Forest Plan). This summary presents the major findings of the analysis that went into building the FEIS.

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Final Environmental Impact Statement



Summary

**Ashland, Bayfield, Florence, Forest, Langlade, Oconto, Oneida,
Price, Sawyer, Taylor, and Vilas Counties, Wisconsin**

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Final Environmental Impact Statement

Summary

This is a summary of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that accompanies the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). This summary presents the major findings of the analysis that went into building the FEIS.

In addition to the FEIS, documents related to the 2004 Forest Plan also include a packet of maps that illustrate much of the data and results found in the 2004 Forest Plan and FEIS, Appendices to the FEIS, and a Record of Decision.

All of this information is available to you at your local Forest Service office or public library. However, we realize this amount of information can be overwhelming.

We hope this summary will help you see what we did, why we did it, and where we go from here.

This summary contains the following information:

- An overview of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests and Forest Plan
- Public involvement process
- Brief descriptions of the revision topics
- Emphasis of each of the forest management alternatives
- Land allocations for each forest management alternative
- Probable effects that each alternative will have on the Forests

Overview of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests and the 2004 Forest Plan

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests are located in Wisconsin's 'North Woods,' covering over a million and a half acres. As of 1993, the two Forests have been administered together and the Forest Plan Revision process for both Forests has been completed as one unit. Both Forests were established by Presidential proclamation in 1933 and were originally made up of largely abandoned and tax delinquent land that was acquired by the Federal Government under the authority of the Weeks Act of 1911. During the Great Depression, Civilian Conservation Corps members planted thousands of acres of red pine and jack pine, built firebreaks, and constructed recreational facilities. Today evidence of this history can still be seen on the Forests. People from major cities and communities from Wisconsin and other areas travel to the Forests to take part in both summer and winter recreation opportunities.

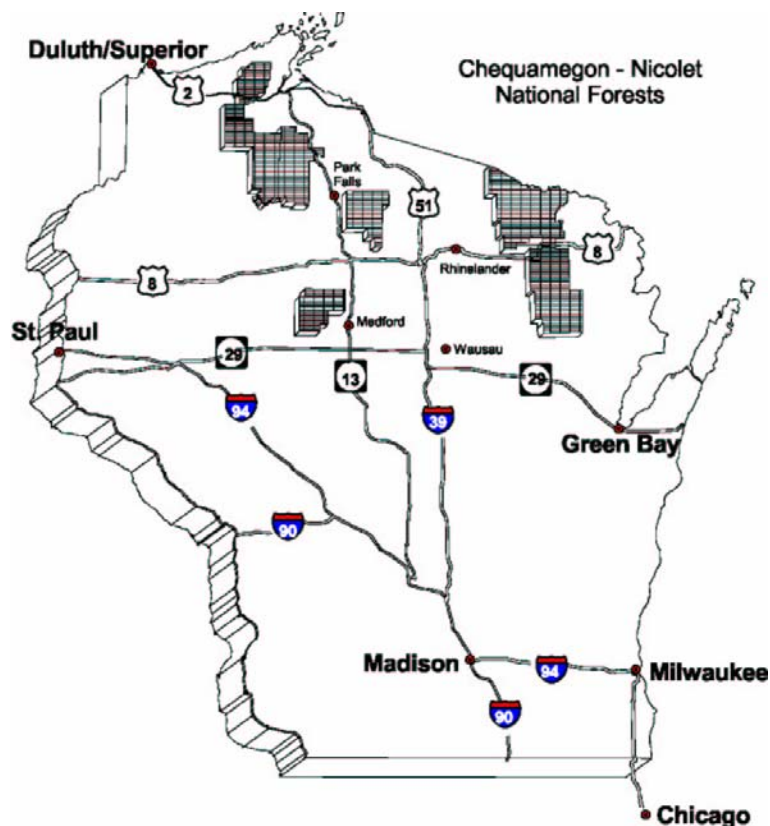


Figure 1. Vicinity Map of Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests

The Forests' boundaries encompass National Forest System (NFS) lands within 11 different Wisconsin Counties: Ashland, Bayfield, Florence, Forest, Langlade, Oconto, Oneida, Price, Sawyer, Taylor, and Vilas. Table 1 provides the acreages of NFS lands within each of these counties as well as percents of other non-individual ownership.

Table 1. Ownership of Public and Tribal Lands within Eleven Northern Wisconsin Counties (Acres from Barish, 1995)

County	County Acres	NF Acres	Ownership Percentage Within Each County					Total Percent
			National Forest	State Lands	County Lands	Tribal Lands	Other Federal	
Ashland	668,096	180,630	27	2	5	8	3	45
Bayfield	944,896	270,145	29	2	18	1	1	52
Florence	312,384	85,030	27	4	12	0	0	43
Forest	649,024	344,030	53	0.5	2	2	0	58
Langlade	558,528	32,247	6	3	23	0	0	32
Oconto	638,784	141,353	22	1	7	0.02	0	30
Oneida	719,808	12,980	2	11	11	0.05	0	24
Price	801,728	150,676	19	4	11	0	0	34
Sawyer	804,160	126,685	16	11	14	6	0.3	47
Taylor	624,000	123,913	20	1	3	0	0	24
Vilas	558,592	54,536	10	27	1	5.5	0	44
Total / Avg	7,280,000	1,520,425	21	5	10	2	0.4	38

The Forests are divided into the following five Ranger Districts: Great Divide (Glidden and Hayward), Medford-Park Falls, Washburn, Lakewood-Laona, and Eagle River-Florence. The Argonne Experimental Forest and Oconto River Seed Orchard are found on the Nicolet land base as well. Each Ranger District maintains an office in the communities with which it shares its name except Great Divide with offices in the communities of Glidden and Hayward.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests are composed of four separate contiguous units. The two largest units—The Nicolet National Forest, and the Washburn and Great Divide Districts of the Chequamegon—are 662,000 and 576,000 acres, respectively. These two units represent the two largest contiguous areas of public land in Wisconsin. Private parcels of land are scattered within the boundaries of the National Forests. Average National Forest ownership within the four units is 77%.

Multiple use management leads to a multitude of goods and services provided by the Forests. Trails for motorized and non-motorized uses are common. Dozens of campgrounds provide opportunities for lakeside recreation. Many more lakes and rivers are accessible at boat and canoe landings. Forest products gathered as medicinal plants and other miscellaneous products, as well as sale of sawtimber and pulp products are important to local culture and the economy.

Physical and Biological Environment

Glacial geology characterizes the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests (CNNF) providing variety in landform from hilly glacial moraine to flat or pitted outwash sand plains. This variety in soils provides for a variety of tree species and vegetative communities. Rare natural communities include pine barrens, northern dry forests, northern dry-mesic forests, and boreal forests.

The Forests boast an abundance of water in the form of rivers, lakes, and wetlands. The CNNF is located within 41 different 5th level watersheds averaging 235 square miles. The watersheds fall within two major hydrologic regions with 19 watersheds draining through the Great Lakes to the Atlantic and 22 draining through the Upper Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico.

There are over 300 wildlife species known to inhabit the CNNF some time during their life cycle. These species provide Forest users with a wide variety of recreational opportunities, such as hunting and wildlife viewing. The transition between northern boreal forests and eastern deciduous forests supports a rich diversity of birds, including neotropical migrants. Timber wolves are found throughout the Chequamegon and in limited numbers on the Nicolet. Bald eagles have been increasing in number both statewide and Forestwide.

Social Environment

Larger communities near or within the CNNF include Ashland, Crandon, Eagle River, Florence, Lakewood, Laona, Medford, Park Falls, and Rhinelander. Small communities abound within the Forests, including Drummond, Clam Lake, Perkinstown, Phelps, Tipler, Alvin, Argonne, Hiles, Wabeno, Cavour, and Mountain. Population increases in the 11 counties surrounding the CNNF ranged from 1.4% to 18.8% between 1990 and 2000. In these communities some residents have long depended on the Forests for their livelihood and recreation while others have moved to the area more recently to retire and are interested in preserving resources and land values.

The Forests' smaller communities have the most potential to be affected by changes in tourism expenditures. National Forest visitors commonly travel from metropolitan areas such as Duluth, Minneapolis, and St Paul in Minnesota; Wausau, Green Bay, Madison, and Milwaukee in Wisconsin; and Chicago and Northern Illinois. In addition, 25% revenues from timber sales, special use permits, and other revenue-generating activities are important to counties. Such payments have more than doubled between 1996 and 2001.

Roads and trails provide motorized access to most parts of the CNNF and are used by hunters, the fishing public, and those who drive for pleasure. ATV and snowmobile trails are plentiful on the Chequamegon and snowmobile trails are common on the Nicolet. Sixteen semi-primitive non-motorized areas and five Congressionally-designated Wilderness areas provide solitude.

Forest Planning

Land and resource management plans guide management activities on NFS lands. They contain direction on how and where different types of activities can occur. They also provide guidance on implementation and on monitoring of each plan's effectiveness.

The FEIS contains an analysis of a number of different potential Forest Plans, each of which represents a combination of, and revision of the current Forest Plans for the CNNF. These different potential Plans are called alternatives. The FEIS contains 9 alternatives. Each of the alternatives can be considered to be a separate and complete Forest Plan. Alternative 1 represents the existing Forest Plans. Alternative 5 was selected as the Preferred Alternative and was the basis for the Proposed Plan published with the Draft EIS (DEIS). Following public comment on the draft documents, Alternative 5 was modified in response to both internal and public comments and the newly created alternative was called the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative is the basis for the 2004 Plan, and environmental consequences of this Plan and the other alternatives are displayed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Appendices, and maps. A Record of Decision has been written that explains the following:

1. The rationale for selecting modified Alternative 5 (Selected Alternative) to be the 2004 Forest Plan,
2. How the Selected Alternative responds to Plan revision problems and public issues, and
3. How the 2004 Plan relates to existing laws and regulation.

We have been applying the existing Forest Plans since they were approved in 1986. Monitoring and evaluation during implementation of these Plans showed that there were several reasons to update or revise them. These reasons include public comments during implementation of the 1986 Plans, changed conditions as reflected in monitoring and evaluation during Plan implementation, the availability of new information and scientific understanding, and the changes in public perceptions about what constitutes maximum net public benefit related to national forests. Work began on revising the existing Forest Plan several years ago.

Many laws and policies guide National Forest management. Some of the more familiar ones include the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NFMA requires that National Forest System lands be managed for a variety of uses on a sustained basis to ensure a continued supply of goods and services to the American people. NEPA ensures that environmental information is

made available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made and before actions are taken.

The FEIS was prepared according to NEPA regulations. It displays the Forest Plan alternatives and the environmental consequences each alternative would have.

In addition to existing guidance, new policies needed to be incorporated into the revised Forest Plan. The USDA Forest Service published its *USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000 Revision)* setting long-term goals and objectives that will guide future agency actions in concert with the Government Performance and Results Act. One objective is to “provide ecological conditions to sustain viable populations of native and desired nonnative species and to achieve objectives for Management Indicator Species.” Strategies to accomplish this objective include implementing habitat restoration and management activities for species with viability concerns and ecosystems at risk. This strategy is in accordance with recommendations provided to the Forests’ within “*Report on the Scientific Roundtable on Biological Diversity Convened by the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forest.*”

The Forest Plan focuses on those goals, as well as other issues that have been raised through monitoring and public input.

Public Involvement and Cooperation

The overall goal for public participation was to identify and have all potentially affected interests informed and participating in the revision effort. Opportunities to bring individuals with different interests together to discuss issues being addressed in the Plan Revision were pursued. Consultation with Federal agencies and State, Tribal, and local governments was also carried out.

External Participation

Approximately 3000 individuals, groups, organizations, and agencies were contacted and/or have participated in the planning process through the Forests’ public involvement efforts. Contacts have been through news releases, newsletters, one-on-one contacts, open houses, informational meetings, and the Forest web page.

Consultation with the 11 counties encompassing the National Forests was done via a group of representatives organized by the County Forester’s Association. The Wisconsin DNR also formed a committee for the purpose of review and consultation with the Forest Service regarding Forest Plan Revision. Tribal entities were consulted both formally with the Voigt Inter-Tribal Task Force and informally with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. FEIS Appendix A provides more detail on public involvement during the planning process, as well as response to public comments received on the Proposed Plan and DEIS.

Internal Participation

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests employees manage the Forests’ resources on a daily basis and continually interact with the public. Employees have a good understanding of what the issues are and what concerns the public has. Documents were e-mailed to employees several times for review and comment beginning with discussions identifying potential issues previous to publishing the Notice of Intent to Revise the Forest Plans. An employee meeting to provide feedback was held in August 1999, as

well. District Rangers have made efforts to keep employees apprised of developments in the revision over time.

The Interdisciplinary core team and extended team (ID Team) that leads the analysis process for the revision is made up of Forest employees. Employees from all over the Forests assisted with inventory and analysis, public contacts, and development of Alternatives, Standards, and Guidelines.

How Public Comment Was Used in the FEIS

All written comments the Forest received following publishing the Notice of Intent (NOI) were read and categorized by subject matter; then issues were identified. About 188 responses to the NOI were received. During the period between October 11, 1996 and August 31, 2001, comment letters were received in response to information shared at Open Houses, Public Meetings, or other communications. Approximately 1800 responses were received during that time. They, too, were read, categorized by subject matter, and considered during the development of Alternatives.

By April 2003, eight alternatives had been developed and were described in Chapter 2 of the DEIS. The eight alternatives were developed using significant issues raised by the public in addition to those identified as needing revision in the End of Decade Monitoring Report. Alternative development also incorporated resource specialist experience and expertise, professional knowledge from employees, and knowledge from experts participating in Species Viability Evaluation. Other sources for alternative development include Forest Plan monitoring and internal documents including the Purpose and Need (December, 2002), Planning Criteria (August, 1998), Resource Assessments, and Analysis of the Management Situation reports. Environmental consequences of each alternative were presented in Chapter 3 of the DEIS.

The DEIS was made available for public comment in April of 2003. Based on public requests, the original 90-day comment period was extended to August 11, 2003. Approximately 3,000 individual responses were received from public, county, State and federal officials, public interest organizations, and private businesses. A specialized Forest Service unit, the Content Analysis Team (CAT), reviewed all responses, organized them into an electronic database by subject, and generated public concern reports. This helped the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests ID-team and decision-makers to systematically consider public input and respond to it (see Appendix A, Response to Comment).

After considering public comments on the Proposed Forest Plan and DEIS, the interdisciplinary team, in consultation with the Forests' Leadership Team, made necessary changes and revisions. These are presented in the FEIS volumes and in the 2004 Forest Plan. One change of note is the formulation of an additional alternative that is a modified version of Alternative 5 and is called the Selected Alternative. It is described later in this document and in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. Analysis of all 9 alternatives is presented in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.