

RECREATION

Key Points

- Since 2004, 42 road miles have been designated open and 145 road miles designated closed through project decisions.
- All road spurs or user created/maintained trails found inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) originated from older established roads associated with timber sales or other access purposes that pre-dated the 2004 Revised Forest Plan.
- Management actions (law enforcement and signing) have been successful in preventing or reducing motorized intrusions into the BWCAW.
- ATV sound monitoring at five wilderness sites revealed that any All Terrain Vehicles (ATV's) heard outside the wilderness were less than 30 decibels (dBA). This level, according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) noise level rating, is comparable to those expected within a secluded woods setting.

A. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Forest Plan Direction

This monitoring was conducted to address Forest Plan Desired Condition: D-RMV-1 The Forest provides Recreational Motorized Vehicles (RMV) road & trail riding opportunities with experiences in a variety of forest environments, while protecting natural resources, Forest Plan Direction: 36 CFR 219.21[g]. Off-road vehicle use shall be planned and implemented to protect land and other resources, promote public safety, and minimize conflicts with other uses of the National Forest System land, Forest Plan Objective: O-REC-2 Management activities will move toward the ROS class objectives in Table O-REC-1 and on Figure O-REC-1. Management activities may meet a less developed ROS class but cannot meet a higher developed class than the mapped ROS class objective, Forest Plan Objective: O-REC-3 Through project level planning, the Forest will consider management of some inventoried semi-primitive ROS areas for separate non-motorized or motorized recreation uses, Forest Plan Objective: O-RMV-1 A maximum of 90 additional ATV trail miles and 130 snowmobile trail miles with associated trail facilities (trailhead parking, signs, toilets, etc.) may be added to the designated National Forest Trail System and Forest Plan Desired Condition: D-REC-11 The Forest provides developed recreation sites, such as campgrounds and picnic areas that accommodate the needs of a wide variety of visitors. Most developed sites accommodate concentrated public use.

Monitoring Conducted

RMV Management and Opportunities

The US Department of Agriculture revised regulations and clarified policy related to motor vehicle use, including the use of off-highway vehicles. This final Travel

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Management Rule (TMR) requires designation of roads, trails and areas that are open to motor vehicle use.

Designations will be made by class of vehicle and, if appropriate, by time of year. The final TMR prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system, as well as use of motor vehicles on routes and in areas that are not consistent with the designations.

The final TMR route designations for the Superior National Forest (SNF) are ready to implement (scheduled for the later part of 2010). Road travel designations have occurred through other project decisions (primarily through large vegetation treatment projects).

Travel Management Compliance including User Created Trails

During the fall of 2008, RMV use at fourteen different sites was monitored. These surveys were primarily follow-up actions to more extensive RMV monitoring conducted in 2006. The objectives of the monitoring were to identify and document illegal motorized intrusions into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), document compliance with the September 2006-2008 All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Roads and Trails Travel Map and to identify recreation travel management opportunities within project areas.

Sound Monitoring

Sound generated from ATV's was monitored at five BWCAW receptor sites during 2008. ATV noise activity was created by Forest Service personnel on Forest roads near the BWCAW. The intent of this monitoring was to determine the potential of increased ATV noise within the BWCAW, if any, resulting from implementation of the pending TMR decision.

Sound was recorded with an Extech sound meter/datalogger at selected wilderness locations (lakeshore, campsite, portage trail) to record the sound pressure levels (dBA) over a given set of time, usually 10, 20 or 60 minutes per sample,

Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

Designated and permitted recreational motorized use resulting from transportation decisions (change in road and/or trail mileage and location) has a direct effect on the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) on the SNF. The ROS is a formal agency process designed to delineate, define and integrate outdoor recreation opportunities. ROS designations describe the kind of recreation experience one may have in a given part of a National Forest. There are four opportunities described in Appendix B of the Revised Forest Plan which include Primitive, Semi-primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM), Semi-primitive Motorized (SPM) and Roaded Natural. Change in ROS opportunities, particularly SPNM, is of interest to Forest Service managers and the public. On the SNF, a SPNM ROS is defined as an area that is at least 1,500 acres and at least one-half mile away from roads and motorized trails.

Road management decisions approved from 2004 through 2007 that affect SPNM ROS within or immediately adjacent to project areas continued to be implemented during 2008. Five of the nine project areas encompassed or included inventoried SPNM within their boundaries. Table 13.1 displays the project areas that were analyzed.

Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails

The SNF annually updates and maintains a comprehensive Forest Transportation Atlas that provides an inventory of all known trails. The Atlas includes road (and trail) attribute information from an electronic database known as INFRA. INFRA is complemented by and linked to the Trails Layer, an electronic spatial inventory that shows the location of the routes in INFRA.

The SNF currently has approximately 1962 miles of tread which provides 750.6 miles of motorized trail opportunities and 2039 miles of non-motorized trail opportunities. Many of these trail miles serve both winter and summer activities. For example some winter cross country ski trails and snowmobile trails also serve as summer hiking trails and/or summer ATV trails.

Developed Recreation

Since 2005 several large recreation facility improvements or reconstruction projects have been completed. The most notable projects include the following:

- 2005
 - Fall Lake campground reconstruction (Figure 13.1)
- 2006
 - Nine toilets installed on the SNF
 - Camp Four enhancement
 - Fenske Beach and step enhancement
 - Picnic table construction.
- 2007
 - Tommila Lake trail improvements
 - Trails End and Iron Lake Campground renovations from Ham Lake Fire.
- 2008
 - Sawbill Lake Toilet
 - SeaGull Creek snowmobile trail bridge
 - Pincushion Ski trail bridge

Evaluation and Conclusions

RMV Management and Opportunities

When the Forest Plan was approved in 2004, approximately 1,550 miles of roads were generally open to RMV travel. This includes 1,488 miles displayed in Appendix F of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Forest Plan and recently discovered unauthorized (previously unclassified) roads resulting from enhanced inventories conducted over the past three years. This open mileage assumed that all summer Objective Maintenance Level (OML) 1 roads, all OML 2 roads, and most unclassified

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roads are open to RMV's. It also assumed that all winter OML 1 roads, and OML 3, 4, and 5 roads are closed to RMV's (G-RMV-1 and G-RMV-4, Forest Plan p. 2-44).

Project decisions approved from 2005 through 2008 have closed or propose to close approximately 145 miles of roads to RMV travel, reducing mileage open to RMV's from approximately 1,550 miles to about 1,405 miles. These road closures would be completed through road re-designation or road decommissioning. Further changes to the road and trail designations can be expected when the Forest-wide TMR is implemented in the future. Table 13.2 and Figure 13.2 displays the trend of roads open versus closed to RMV travel from 2004 through 2008 resulting from project decisions.

Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails

The Forest Plan states that a maximum of 90 additional ATV trail miles may be added to the designated SNF National Forest Trail System. During 2008 there were no motorized trails added to the designated National Forest Trail System. To date approximately seven miles have been added to the Forest Trail System which represents about eight percent of the maximum potential of 90 miles.

Travel Management Compliance including User Created Trails

During 2008, fourteen sites were visited to document compliance with the September 2006 ATV Roads and Trails Travel Map especially for illegal motorized intrusions into the BWCAW. Highlights of this monitoring include the following, two existing user created trails with recent or ongoing motorized use into the BWCAW were found (14% of visits), three existing user created trails outside the BWCAW with apparent ATV use were found (21% of visits) and three roads closed to motorized vehicles had recent motorized travel (21% of visits) (Figure 13.3).

The percentage of active user created trails encountered has decreased since 2005 (44% of total visits in 2005 compared to 35% of total visits in 2008). Moreover management actions were found to be effective once District Rangers and Law Enforcement became aware of unauthorized RMV use. For example during 2006, illegal ATV use into the BWCAW at or near Perent Lake was documented on several occasions and relayed to the District Ranger and Law Enforcement personnel. During 2007 and 2008 the trail at the wilderness boundary was posted and signed. Monitoring of this user created trail during the fall of 2008 revealed that ATV use had ceased, indicating that these management actions were effective. Law Enforcement, along with signing and education has played an important role in achieving compliance with our travel management objectives. During Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, Law Enforcement recorded 22 incident reports and issued 17 warnings and citations related to recreation motor vehicles (Wilderness chapter and the Monitoring Project File).

Monitoring was also conducted within fairly recent (2000 & later) vegetation treatment units (burning and harvest) to determine if these activities increased use of RMV occurrence. During September 2007 fourteen treatment units were evaluated within the Rusty Diamond Project Area. RMV use associated with these vegetative treatments was

noted in only 14 percent of the units (two of the 14 units) and no RMV use occurred within the BWCAW.

Sound Monitoring

During the 2008 field season the Forest monitoring crew documented sound at selected wilderness sites originating from ATV's traveling outside the wilderness. ATV's were traveling between one-fourth and one-half of a mile from selected wilderness sites where sound recordings occurred. All ATV's heard were less than 30 dBA. This level, according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) noise level rating, is comparable to those expected within a secluded woods setting. In addition, none of the ATV sounds heard exceeded a sound ranking of 2 "Faint yet specific noise source is distinct, masked occasionally by the existing ambient soundscape (wind, leaves, water, animals, and human sounds)". (Wilderness chapter and Appendix A).

Changes in Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS

There were no road or trail management decisions made during FY 2008. However, road management decisions between 2004 and 2007 continued to be implemented during 2008 and did or will influence existing inventoried SPNM ROS within the Devils Trout, Tomahawk, Echo Trail, Virginia and Whyte project areas (Table 13.1). There was a small increase (929 acres) in the overall inventoried SPNM ROS. However, when analyzing each project area, SPNM acreage within the Echo Trail and Whyte projects increased by 1,587 acres. The other three project areas had a decrease in inventoried SPNM acreage because of net additional road mileage and/or road location.

In addition, smaller non-motorized areas or polygons less than 1,500 acres were created in project areas due to transportation decisions. However, since these new areas were each less than 1,500 acres and did not meet the Minnesota ROS classification, they do not qualify as SPNM ROS. They are important to document and spatially map to assist managers in evaluating or selecting future decisions. Table 13.3 displays acreages of these small polygons resulting from project transportation decisions.

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Table 13.1. Changes in inventoried Semi-primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) areas within projects on the Superior National Forest.

Project Name	Inventoried SPNM Acres	SPNM Acres Added	SPNM Acres Lost	Adjusted SPNM Acres	Net Change in Acres	Percent Change
Devil Trout	2,641	0	265	2376	-276	-9
Tomahawk	2,524	336	999	1,861	-663	-27
Echo Trail	23,932	1027	0	24,959	+1,027	+4
Virginia	20,840	270	0	21,110	+270	+1
Whyte	40,605	685	125	41,165	+560	+1
TOTAL	90,542	2,318	1,389	91,471	+929	+1

Table 13.2. Proposed road designations and motorized use on the Superior National Forest. NFS = National Forest System, RMV's = Recreational Motor Vehicles.

Decision	Miles			Unclassified
	OML 1	OML 2	OML 3	
New, NFS, Closed to RMV's				
2004-2005 Decisions	5.2	0.1	0	
Unclassified, NFS, Open to RMV's.				
2004-2005 Decisions	14.5	18	0	
2006 Decisions	4.4	0	0	
2007 Decisions	3.4	1.9	0	
Unclassified, NFS, Closed to RMV's				
2004-2005 Decisions	11.8	0.5	0	
2007 Decisions	2.2	0	0	
To be Decommissioned, Closed to RMV'S				
2004-2005 Decisions	0	0	0	59.4
2006 Decisions	0	0	0	4.3
2007 Decisions	5	6.6	0	50.2
2008 Decisions	0	0	0	0
Subtotal Open To RMV's	22.3	20		0
Subtotal Closed To RMV's	24.2	7.2		114
Total Open to RMV's			42	
Total Closed to RMV's			145	

Table 13.3. Small Semi-primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) polygons by project area on the Superior National Forest.

Project Name	Number of Polygons	Total SPNM Acres	Average Polygon Size
Devil Trout	1	45	45
Tomahawk	26	2,678	103
Echo Trail	21	1,428	68
Inga South	4	147	37
Tomahawk	2	487	243
Virginia	41	5,585	243
Whyte	19	2,847	150

Figure 13.1. Fall Lake campground reconstruction in 2005 on the Superior National Forest.



Figure 13.2. Road miles open to Recreational Motorized Vehicle (RMV's) use from 2005 through 2008 on the Superior National Forest.

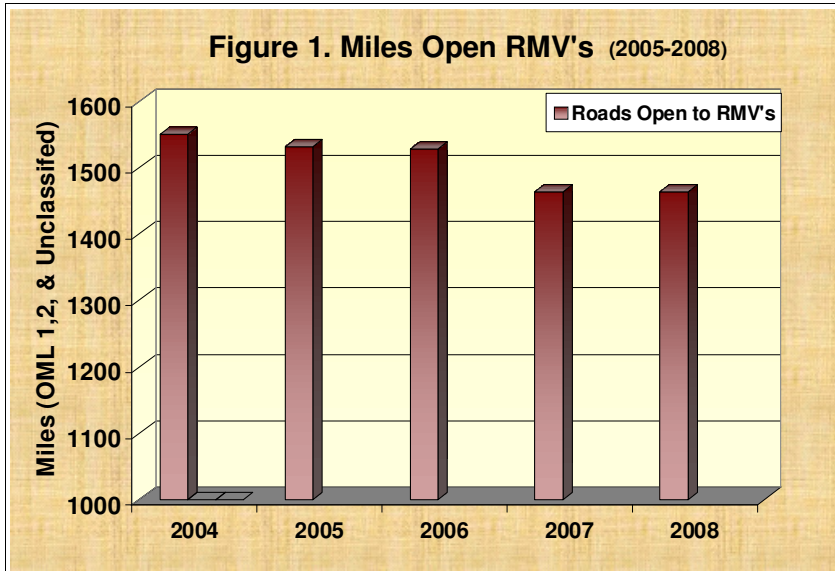


Figure 13.3. A user created trail leading to a deer stand on the Superior National Forest.

