

TRANSPORTATION

Key Points

- Overall, the mileage of National Forest System roads is trending towards Forest Plan projections for the first decade, with the exception of surpassing OML 2 mileage expectations.
- When 2004 through 2008 NEPA decisions are fully implemented, a total of 133 miles of roads will have been decommissioned.
- Contractual practices and techniques were effectively implemented for decommissioning temporary roads, which included preventing motorized recreation vehicle travel on 80 percent of decommissioned roads.

A. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Forest Plan Direction

This monitoring was conducted to address Forest Plan Objective: O-TS-2 Few new OML 3,4, and 5 roads will be constructed and Forest Plan Objective: O-TS-3 New roads built to access land for resource management will be primarily Objective Maintenance Level (OML)1 or temporary and not intended for public motorized use.

Monitoring Conducted

National Forest System Roads

The Superior National Forest (SNF) maintains a comprehensive Forest Transportation Atlas (Atlas) that provides an inventory of all known roads on the Forest. The Atlas includes road (and trail) attribute information from an electronic database known as INFRA. INFRA includes tabular data such as, length, surface type, and the intended Objective and Operational Maintenance Level (OML). INFRA is complemented by and linked to the Geographical Information System (GIS) Roads Layer, an electronic spatial inventory that shows the route location.

Roads are categorized as wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the SNF and are necessary for the protection, administration and utilization of the National Forest System (NFS) and the use and development of its resources (36 CFR 212.1).

Unauthorized roads (previously known as unclassified roads) are those roads that are not a Forest road or trail or a temporary road or trail and are not included in the Atlas (36 CFR 212.1)

Temporary roads are roads necessary for emergency operations or authorized by contract, permit, lease or other written authorization that are not a Forest road or trail and that are not included in the Atlas (36 CFR_212.1).

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Miles of National Forest System Roads

In 2008 the SNF continued to make minor edits to the roads data to correct errors identified through field visits or review of existing documents. These corrections were made in the roads database and accompanying roads GIS layers.

Forest Plan Direction

Road Closures and Decommissioning

This monitoring was conducted to address Forest Plan Standard: S-TS-4 Decommission unclassified roads that are not needed in the National Forest road and trail system and special use permitted roads that are no longer needed. Decommissioning will make the road unusable by motorized vehicles and stabilize the roadbed, Forest Plan Objective: O-TS-3 Temporary roads will be decommissioned after their use is completed. All newly constructed OML 1 roads will be effectively closed to motorized road and recreation vehicles following their use unless they are needed for other management objectives, Forest Plan Objective: O-TS-6 Decisions will be made on Forest unclassified roads to designate them as a National Forest System road or trail or to decommission them and Forest Plan Objective: O-TS-8 The Forest will decommission approximately 80 miles of road.

Monitoring Conducted

Miles of Road Decommissioning

The SNF monitored the miles and location of decommissioned roads by reviewing or evaluating updated road inventory maps, project decisions and road management contracts. This information allowed SNF to assess the degree to which Forest Plan objectives for decommissioned road miles and project effectiveness were met.

Evaluation and Conclusions

National Forest System Roads

Table 14.1 shows the road mileage status on the SNF for 2004 (Forest Plan existing condition) and 2008. The road mileage displayed for 2004 was derived from the October 2002 INFRA database which was incomplete at the time as it was being updated and refined. This table also shows the 2014 projection from the Forest Plan for the end of the first decade. Forest Plan objectives for roads were assessed by comparing the data for these timeframes.

OML 1 and 2 Roads

Since 2004 the miles of OML 1 and 2 roads have increased. Existing and planned OML 1 road miles are consistent with Forest Plan projections. Existing and planned OML 2 road miles currently exceed the miles projected for 2014. This increase is due to edits to errors in the database and accompanying roads GIS layers as well as assigning

unclassified roads and OML 1 roads to OML 2 roads. No new OML 2 road construction was approved in 2008 decisions.

OML 3, 4 and 5 Roads

Between 2004 and 2008 the total miles of OML 3, 4 and 5 roads have decreased slightly. The most current existing and planned mileage are below the 2014 projection. This change is likely related to the correcting of errors in the database and fixing erroneous mileages. This condition is consistent with Forest Plan objectives to build few new OML 3, 4 or 5 roads and to maintain the system with the minimum needed to provide adequate access.

Unauthorized roads

The Forest Plan objective is to have no unauthorized roads. We will strive to meet this objective by implementing Forest Plan direction to either add these roads to our system or to decommission them. Our current inventory shows a net total of 76 miles more of unauthorized roads (previously unclassified roads) than the 2004 inventory. This increase is not a result of new road construction.

When actual accomplishments and all approved decisions are implemented, unauthorized road mileage would be reduced from 2004. We anticipate that in early 2010 the Travel Management Rule (TMR) Environmental Assessment (EA) Decision will be implemented. This will reduce the inventoried unauthorized road miles to near zero but, this decision will increase the OML1 and OML 2 total miles.

Since 2004, system road mileage has gradually increased and is trending towards the projection for 2014. In contrast, the total road miles (which includes unauthorized roads), has gradually decreased towards the 2014 projection. This reflects the elimination of unauthorized roads through decommissioning.

Road Decommissioning

During Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, approximately ten miles of NFS road were decommissioned. In addition, approximately 93 miles of roads approved for decommissioning but not yet accomplished, were identified in eight NEPA decisions during 2004 to 2008. When these planned projects are fully implemented, a total of 133 miles of roads will have been decommissioned.

The Forest Plan objective O-TS-8: The Forest will decommission approximately 80 miles of road, was in part derived from estimated unclassified road mileage (approximately 223 miles) in the 2002 INFRA Travel Routes database and GIS roads layer (EIS Volume II Appendix F, pg F-18). Since 2004, over 425 miles of unclassified roads have been inventoried of which 300 miles remain to have decisions made on them. Most of those 300 miles will be addressed through TMR. Although we have decisions that would exceed the objective for decommissioning 80 miles of road, our actual accomplishment rate is trending towards consistency with the Forest Plan objectives and projections.

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Road Decommissioning Forest Plan Guidelines

Twenty one roads decommissioned as part of the Nira Stewardship project were evaluated during FY 2007 and FY 2008 (Figures 14.1 and 14.2). Forest Plan guideline G-TS-16 states that roads and trails designated for decommissioning will generally be subject to the following: a) The road or trail will be rendered unusable by motorized vehicles but may remain accessible to foot travel b) Stream crossing structures will be removed c) Road and trail fills will be removed from flood prone and wetland areas to restore stream and wetland crossings to original contours d) Removed fill will be reused or disposed of in a way that will not restrict flow or contaminate surface water e) Exposed soil will be re-vegetated.

Contractual practices and techniques were effectively implemented for decommissioning temporary roads, including removal of drainage structures, removal of ruts and berms, reshaping and re-contouring, seeding and mulching, drainage control and effective road blockage. Furthermore, over 80 percent of the projects were successful in preventing motorized recreation vehicle travel. Those roads, where unauthorized motorize travel was noted (20 %), will be revisited during 2009 and if use is still occurring, appropriate closure practices (additional rocks) and/or administrative action (signing and law enforcement) will be taken. A more thorough discussion about road decommissioning can be found in Appendix A and the project file.

Table 14.1. Mileage by road classification from the infrastructure database (INFRA) on the Superior National Forest.

Year	OML1	OML2	OML3	OML 4 & 5	Total System Roads	Inventoried Unauthorized (Data will be updated when TMR is implemented)	Total Roads***
2004*	883	867	248	408	2046	223	2269
2008	878	907	231	401	2417	299**	2696
2014 Projection from Forest Plan	1132	867	248	408	2655	0	2655

*Road mileage displayed for 2004 was derived from October 2002 INFRA database which was incomplete at the time as it was being updated and refined. **Reflects additional roads discovered through enhanced project inventories and large vegetation project decisions to decommission or convert to NF System roads. ***Reflects revised unauthorized.

Figure 14.1 Immediately (2007) after decommissioning a road on the Nira Project 13 on the Superior National Forest.



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Figure 14.2 One year (2008) after decommissioning a road on the Nira Project 13 on the Superior National Forest.

