

Recreation

Introduction

This chapter provides monitoring information on Recreation Motor Vehicles (RMVs). There is no new or additional monitoring to report on for Developed Recreation or Trails. The miles of road decommissioned in 2009 did not result in measurable changes to the inventoried Recreation Opportunity Spectrum. See the 2006, 2007, and 2008 Monitoring and Evaluation reports for past monitoring results.

Recreation Motor Vehicles

Monitoring Question

Recreation Motor Vehicle monitoring addresses the monitoring questions listed in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan:

To what extent is the Superior National Forest (SNF) providing Recreation Motor Vehicle (RMV) opportunities; what are the effects of RMVs on the physical and social environment; and how effective are forest management practices in managing RMV use?

These questions are driven by the following [Forest Plan direction](#) desired conditions and objective:

D-RMV-1. The Forest provides RMV road and trail riding opportunities with experiences in a variety of forest environments, while protecting natural resources.

D-RMV-2. Allowed, restricted, and prohibited RMV uses are clearly defined to the public. Where practical, RMV policies are consistent with adjacent public land management agencies.

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.

The monitoring questions above were selected because they are the Forest Plan Monitoring Questions associated with RMV opportunities and effects. The Forest Plan provides direction and clear guidance on RMVs and expected outcomes. In addition O-RMV-1 provides a Forest Plan benchmark. These drivers will be particularly important when documenting road closures and changes to the RMV opportunities that would result from implementing management decisions, including the Travel Management Project.

The Units of Measure selected were; 1. Change in miles of designated RMV opportunities since 2004 and 2. Travel management compliance. The effects of RMV activity on the Forest during 2009 will be compared with the results obtained in 2005, 2006, and 2008. RMV effects were not documented in 2007.

These measures are effective and appropriate because they are easily verifiable through field monitoring and they help show the effectiveness of RMV management actions.

Monitoring Method(s)

Change in miles of designated RMV opportunities – Units of Measure #1

This will be determined through a comparison of miles of RMV added to the system and RMV opportunities closed through project decisions.

Travel Management Compliance -Units of Measure #2

Field monitoring of RMV use and effects is accomplished by documenting the compliance of motorized travel with the current year travel management map. Use on unauthorized routes (including user created trails) with associated resource impacts (if any) is noted and summarized. Monitoring occurs throughout the year; although the majority of monitoring occurs from September through November as RMV use associated with hunting is greatest during this period.

Incidents of noncompliance and associated resource damage are forwarded to the unit line officer and law enforcement when they are observed in the field.

Results

Change in miles of designated RMV opportunities

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 2009 there were no ATV 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.

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 five years. This open mileage assumed that all summer Objective Maintenance Level (OML) 1 roads, all OML 2 roads, and most unclassified roads were open to RMVs. It also assumed that all winter OML 1 roads, and OML 3, 4, and 5 roads were closed to RMVs (G-RMV-1 and G-RMV-4, Forest Plan p. 2-44).

Project decisions approved from 2005 through 2009 have closed or propose to close approximately 159 miles of roads to RMV travel, reducing mileage open to RMVs 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 13.1 and Figure 13.1 displays the changes of roads open versus closed to RMV travel from 2004 through 2009 resulting from project decisions.

Table 13.1. Proposed road designations and motorized use on the Superior National Forest. NFS = National Forest System, RMV's = Recreational Motor Vehicles.				
Decision	Miles			
	OML 1	OML 2	OML 3	Unclassified
New Road in NFS, Closed to RMV's				
2004-2005 Decisions	5.2	0.1	0	
2009 Decisions	2.4	0	2.4	
Unclassified roads Re-designated, Open to RMV's.				
2004-2005 Decisions	14.5	18	0	
2006 Decisions	4.4	0	0	
2007 Decisions	3.4	1.9	0	
2009 Decisions	.6			
Unclassified roads Re-designated, Closed to RMV's				
2004-2005 Decisions	11.8	0.5	0	
2007 Decisions	2.2	0	0	
2009 Decisions	2	0	0	
To be Decommissioned roads, 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
2009 Decisions	9.5	0	0.2	2.5
Subtotal Open To RMV's	23	20	0	0
Subtotal Closed To RMV's	38	7.2	0	116.5
Total Open to RMV's	43			
Total Closed to RMV's	164			

Travel Management Compliance

During the fall of 2009, RMV use monitoring occurred at 19 different sites along the Gunflint Trail. Sites visited included system and non-system roads and trails. The objectives were to identify and document illegal motorized intrusions into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), along with documenting compliance with the September 2006-2008 ATV Roads and Trails Travel Map. Attributes documented were:

- Mapped Closed Roads/Trails Used by ATVs
- Unmapped Roads/Trails Used by ATVs.
- Wilderness User Created Trails
- Non Wilderness User Created Trails
- Resource Damage (i.e. rutting, trampled vegetation, damaged structures, etc.)

Even though the number of roads visited represents a small sample of all Forest roads and are very qualitative, this monitoring provides sufficient information to assess success in meeting Forest Travel Management objectives and provide insight on trends. A summary of monitoring results during 2009 and how they compare with monitoring conducted in other areas of the Forest in 2005, 2006, and 2008 are shown below in Table 13.2.

Visits	2005	2006	2008	2009	4 Year Total
# of Roads/Trails Visited	23	81	14	19	137
Mapped "Closed" Roads/Trails Used by ATV's	3	12	3	0	18
% Roads/Trails Visited	13%	15 %	21%	0	13%
Mapped "Open" Roads/Trails Used by ATV's	7	21	3	12	43
% Roads/Trails Visited	31%	26%	21%	63%	31%
Unmapped Roads/Trails Used by ATV's	3	23	3	5	34
% Roads/Trails Visited	13%	28%	21%	26%	25%
BW User Created Trails	1	9	2	0	12
% Roads/Trails Visited	4%	11%	15%	0	9%
Non-BW User Created Trails	9	16	3	2	30
% Roads/Trails Visited	39%	20%	21%	10%	22%
Roads/Trails Visited With Resource Damage	13	37	7	7	64
% Roads/Trails Visited	57%	45%	50%	37%	55%

During 2009, none of the mapped closed roads visited had unauthorized motorized use. However in three situations, motorized use and associated resource impacts occurred beyond the road on apparent snowmobile routes. There were no signs showing where the roads open to RMV travel ended and where the snowmobile route began. See Figure 13.1.

In addition, one mapped road open to motorized travel, in reality entered the BWCAW; but again there were no signs informing the traveler of the boundary. This situation was relayed to the Forest Recreation Program Manager. During the past four years, 118 roads were visited and 18 of these roads or 15 percent were closed roads that were being used by ATVs.

Figure 13.1. FR1351 on ATV map as “Open to ATV use”.
No sign indicating end to ATV Travel and start of snowmobile trail



Site 7

Past FR 1351. Ruts in low-lying area.
Motor vehicles beyond “open ATV” road.

Sign at start of FR 1351. ATV use is allowed.

User created trails represented about 10 percent of the visits this past year. None of these user created trails entered the Wilderness. This compares to 39 percent encountered in 2005 and 21 percent during 2008. This does not necessarily suggest a trend because sampled visits occurred within different sections of the Forest. Rather, it displays an annual comparative snapshot.

Resource damage was observed on approximately 37% of roads/trails visited during travel compliance monitoring. This compares to a high of 57% in 2005 and 50% in 2008. Most of this damage was a result of user created trails.

Implications

Change in miles of designated RMV opportunities

The Forest issued the Forest-wide Travel Management Project decision in 2009. This decision provides direction on which roads and trails are open for motorized vehicle use and closes all other roads and trails to motorized use. The Travel Management Project will also improve signing and expands enforcement and monitoring actions. This decision is currently under litigation and none of the specific actions have been implemented.

Other projects, such as large-scale vegetation projects and site-specific recreation, wildlife, fuels, and trail projects will continue to be planned and implemented and may include proposed changes to the road and trail system.

Travel Management Compliance

Travel management compliance will continue to occur, including monitoring of past decommissioned roads, conducting law enforcement checks, inspecting areas with past illegal use, and continued planning to better manage the RMV opportunities.

Creation of and travel upon user created trails during 2009 was less than what was documented during previous year's monitoring although it continues to occur (10 percent of visits). In addition resource damage associated with these illegal trails and also noted on authorized open roads occurred on at least 30 percent of the roads visited during FY 2009. Moreover, motorized use of roads not displayed on the Travel Management Map continues to occur (26 percent of the visits). A substantial amount of this travel on unmapped routes is occurring on unclassified roads.

While resource and social impacts are likely to continue to occur, the SNF has fully decommissioned many miles of roads and reduced impacts and has designated some roads open for RMV use and these routes will be maintained and signed to ensure they are managed for RMV use.

Generally road decommissioning projects are achieving desired objectives. Decommissioned roads are blending or have blended into the landscape and are significantly less noticeable after each growing season. Over 80 percent of the decommissioning projects have been successful in preventing motorized recreation travel.

Recommendations

1. Continue to improve signing and mapping of existing RMV routes particularly where multiple users travel the same route and where routes enter or are adjacent to the BWCAW boundary.
2. Implement the Travel Management decision as soon as practical, pending outcome of court litigation.
3. Expand law enforcement patrols, especially during the fall hunting season.