

## II. INTRODUCTION

### Overview

The three million acre Superior National Forest (SNF) is located in northeastern Minnesota's arrowhead region and has rich and varied resources. The Forest provides pulpwood and sawtimber to the forest products industry. Visitors can enjoy year round recreation opportunities including travel in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). Many lakes and both cold and warm water streams provide abundant fish habitat within the SNF boundaries. Furthermore, the vast pine, fir, aspen, and spruce forest communities are home to numerous wildlife species including deer, moose, bald eagle, and black bear. Northern Minnesota is also home to Canada lynx and is one of the last strongholds of the gray wolf in the lower 48 States.

This is the fifth Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Report compiled under the 2004 Superior National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) that was approved on July 30, 2004 which stated that "at intervals established in the Forest Plan, implementation shall be evaluated on a sample basis to determine how well objectives have been met and how closely management standards and guidelines have been applied. Based on this evaluation, a Forest interdisciplinary team (FIDT) shall recommend to the Forest Supervisor such changes in management direction, revisions, or amendments to the Forest Plan as are deemed necessary."

In addition to the information summarized and displayed in this report, the data compiled and considered for this report is maintained in a monitoring and evaluation project file. This file is maintained and located at the SNF headquarters in Duluth, MN.

The M&E process enables the Forest Service to assess its effectiveness in moving toward stated management goals and desired conditions. The 2004 Forest Plan may be amended or revised to adapt to new information and changed conditions identified through M&E efforts. Through this adaptive management approach, the Forest Plan can be kept current.

This M&E Report summarizes the results of monitoring Forest Plan implementation (including activities within the BWCAW) from October 2008 through September 30, 2009. This report did not document any significant adverse changes to SNF resources during FY 2009 and therefore no changes in the Forest Plan are recommended.

The 2009 M&E Report framework utilizes the Forest Plan Monitoring Chapter (Chapter 4) as its foundation. Chapter 4 outlined the following four-step approach to conduct monitoring and disclose findings:

- Forest Plan Monitoring Chapter: Provides strategic monitoring direction.
- The Monitoring Guide: Provides prescriptive monitoring framework.
- The Annual Monitoring Schedule: Provides current year specific prescriptive direction.
- Monitoring & Evaluation: Provides previous years findings and identifies applicable management recommendations.

The Monitoring Chapter of the Forest Plan was approved as part of the Record of Decision (ROD) in July 2004. The 2009 Annual Monitoring Schedule was finalized jointly by the FIDT, District Rangers, and their staff in June of 2009. This M&E Report constitutes step four listed above.

The M&E Report is prepared by the FIDT and incorporates information gathered from Forest Service specialists across the SNF, partners, other agencies, private citizens and non-profit organizations. This resource report is intended to be comprehensive displaying Forest Plan direction, units of measure and evaluation, monitoring questions, methods, results, implications, and recommendations.

Additional details on selected resources are found in the Appendices. An Executive Summary that describes the Program Overview is also available.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation Report Objectives**

The following is a list of the primary objectives of the M&E Report:

- Provide current progress in implementing Forest Plan direction, including reaching desired conditions and producing goods and services
- Validate effectiveness of specific management practices (including standards and guidelines).
- Evaluate any potential need to change existing Forest Plan direction (Goals , Objectives, standards, and guidelines, Land Suitability Classification, and Management Areas).
- Evaluate new information such as emerging issues and changes in national or regional policy/direction.

### **Minimum Legally Required Monitoring**

Minimum monitoring and evaluation requirements were identified in the Forest Plan Monitoring Chapter. Some requirements provide guidance for the development of a monitoring program, while others include specific compliance requirements. Chapter 4 in the 2004 Forest Plan has a more thorough discussion of the required monitoring items.

### **Monitoring Progress of Forest-wide Desired Conditions and Objectives**

SNF desired conditions are broad statements describing conditions the SNF will strive to achieve. Achievement of desired conditions is not mandatory, there are no specific time frames for achieving them, and they are not amenable to direct measurement. In other words, desired conditions describe the ends desired rather than the means to achieve these ends.

Forest objectives are statements of measurable results intended to promote the achievement of Forest Plan goals. Objectives generally are achieved by implementing projects or activities. Objectives either have a stated timeframe for accomplishment, or they will be accomplished during the life of the Plan (10-15 years).

## **Monitoring Report Format**

The following items or sections are discussed under each resource chapter of this report:

- **Monitoring Question.** This section displays the applicable monitoring question, Forest Plan direction, units of measure and unit of comparison. The monitoring question generally is repeated from Forest Plan Chapter 4. Forest Plan direction is the pertinent Desired Condition, Objective, Standard or Guideline that identifies the reason why the SNF monitors a particular resource. A hyper link to the pertinent Forest Plan direction is shown for each resource. The unit of comparison describes how the unit of comparison compares to guidance contained in Forest Plan Objectives, standards and guides; projections and assumptions; and/or other federal or state regulations.
- **Monitoring Methods.** This section outlines methods used, locations, timing, and processes of monitoring data collection.
- **Results.** Objectives of the results section are to evaluate current progress in implementing Forest Plan direction, including reaching objectives, goals, and desired conditions and producing goods and services. Also, this section if applicable, displays the effectiveness of specific management practices, including standard and guidelines.
- **Implications.** This section discusses interpretation of the data. It addresses the “so what” question that relates the results and describes what the results mean.
- **Management Recommendations.** This section identifies specific management recommendation for ongoing or future projects.

Appendices A through J summarize the Monitoring Project File, Monitoring Key Points, Canada Lynx denning, habitat, and connectivity, vegetation composition and age, vegetation spatial objectives, wilderness character summaries, and Achievement of Forest Plan Direction.