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Dear Forest Partner:

After several years of analysis and evaluation, engagement with stakeholders and the public at-large, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest has completed its work under the Forest Service's national guidance for "sustainable recreation." This work has resulted in the enclosed Recreation Facility Strategy and associated 5-Year Program of Work for developed recreation areas (campgrounds, boat landings, etc.) on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. I want to thank individuals, groups and local government entities that have actively participated in this effort and provided us with timely and useful information, input and feedback.

The sustainability of our developed recreation assets came to light in 2014, when we started to experience challenges in staffing and funding levels, which affected our ability to maintain our developed recreation sites to an appropriate and reasonable standard of quality for users. As a result, we implemented temporary closures and reductions in services in 2015 at a small proportion of our sites so that we could maintain operations to appropriate standards at remaining sites.

Funding trends for Forest Service recreation have not improved and are not expected to at any time in the near future. We have made modest increases in user fees to support the recreation program, but they (combined with other funding sources) do not allow us to operate and maintain all of our recreation sites to the required and desired standards.

Over the past three years, we have worked diligently on Recreation Site Analysis (RSA) with the stated intent of creating a more sustainable developed recreation program on the Forest. We have engaged users, stakeholders, local governments and Tribes extensively and in a variety of ways. We gathered information from state and county public land partners on their developed recreation assets to better understand the spatial context of CNNF developed recreation assets. We have worked closely with our state agency partner, the Wisconsin DNR, as they recently completed recreation opportunity analysis for their properties. All of this information has contributed to the Recreation Facility Strategy.

The completed Recreation Facility Strategy outlines prioritized investments, as well as changes to operations or maintenance of developed recreation sites and facilities that will reduce costs and maximize public benefits, while balancing social, economic and environmental effects.

Through RSA, the Forest analyzed all 193 developed recreation sites on the CNNF to determine what suite of actions would provide the optimal set of benefits for recreation users and be financially sustainable. The Recreation Facility Strategy calls for 52 sites to remain as is. At 118 sites there will be changes ranging from increased amenities to minor reductions in the level of operation and maintenance. Examples of improved amenities may include electrification of campsites, upgraded hand pumps, new fire rings, picnic tables, restrooms and additional improvements. Twenty-three sites will have their infrastructure removed and will be converted back to an undeveloped condition (general forest) like surrounding forests.



The strategy represents difficult, but I believe well informed, tradeoff decisions, and identifies key investments to support a developed recreation program on the national forest that is both sustainable and responsive to local tourism based economies and communities.

I understand that some of the changes to developed recreation sites on the CNNF with established and likely long-term patterns of traditional use by local citizens, recreationists, and associated business opportunities, is undesirable. I wish such changes were not necessary. However, I believe that the improvements identified in the RFS will increase visitor use thereby offsetting negative effects and positively affecting local businesses and the tourism economy of our local rural communities. Through our thorough evaluation of similar developed recreation assets on nearby state and county public lands, I believe that recreationists will find similar and enjoyable places to camp, swim, boat and fish. Working together and with our county tourism and economic development partners, I believe northern Wisconsin will continue to be a preferred destination spot for tourists who want to recreate outdoors.

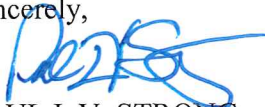
The CNNF intends to begin implementation of the 5-Year Program of Work described in the Recreation Facility Strategy yet this year. In the coming years, there will be a combination of improvements and de-investments that will help create a more sustainable program into the future. When fully implemented, the Recreation Facility Strategy is estimated to reduce costs \$300,000 annually, an approximate 25 percent reduction from current operational and maintenance costs. These changes, as well as other cost saving measures the Forest is working on within the recreation program, will allow us to operate and maintain our recreation areas to standards providing a positive user experience.

The CNNF recreation program is more than just the developed recreation sites. Without these important changes to developed sites, the current and future projected costs will prevent the Forest from addressing other important program components, in particular, motorized trails, non-motorized trails, wilderness stewardship, dispersed recreation, interpretive programming, and recreation special uses.

Thank you again for your engagement in the development of our Recreation Facility Strategy. I am looking forward to ways we can continue to coordinate and cooperate with stakeholders for the good of our local communities.

If you have any questions or concerns about the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Recreation Facility Strategy, please contact Tim Vetter, Recreation, Wilderness & Lands Program Manager at 715-362-1373 or timothy.vetter@usda.gov.

Sincerely,



PAUL I. V. STRONG
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure (1)

cc: Tim Vetter, Lenore Lamb, Brad Turberville, Mike Martin, Chad Kirshbaum, Melanie Fullman, Mike Brown