



New Vision Wilderness Special Use Permit Re-issuance Proposal Medford-Park Falls Ranger District, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest



Proposal and Need for the Proposal

The Forest Service is proposing to re-issue an outfitting and guide special use permit to New Vision Wilderness. In June of 2008, a permit was issued to New Vision Wilderness to operate a therapeutic based outdoor rehabilitation program for youth on the Medford land base. This permit was renewed in February 2014. An inspection was conducted in September 2019 to verify that New Vision Wilderness was in compliance with the authorization's terms and conditions.

As a Therapeutic Outdoor Program Provider, they provide counseling to troubled youth, teaching them basic outdoor skills. New Vision Wilderness desires to continue operating annually on National Forest System lands in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and specifically wishes to continue to utilize the Ice Age National Scenic Trail for hiking and camping activities due to its vicinity to their base camp of operations in Perkinstown.

New Vision Wilderness may also be requesting volunteer agreements from the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in order to provide outdoor service work for their program participants. Any work done under these or other volunteer agreements would be Forest Service previously approved projects.

Location

This project occurs on the Taylor County portion of the Medford-Park Falls Ranger District, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Special Use Permit activities would occur along and adjacent to portions of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and associated trail heads, specifically the portion of the trail from it's intersection with County Highway E, southwest to State Highway 64, Towns of Westboro, Molitor, Grover and Ford, Taylor County, Wisconsin. A Vicinity Map of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is attached.

Project Details

New Vision Wilderness is a year round adventure-based wilderness therapy program for teenagers and families from Wisconsin and surrounding areas. The overall program runs 80 days in length on average. During this time, students will participate in a personal growth program where they will learn how to: create, pursue, and accomplish personal goals; develop and maintain healthy relationships with others; communicate feelings and related emotions/behaviors appropriately to peers and adults; increase self esteem and decision making skills; utilize the forest as a tool for learning and; increase trust and respect for others and the environment. In the summer, students would be hiking and camping and in the winter would be utilizing snowshoes or cross country skis. Groups will stay in a given campsite for no more than four nights, unless emergencies dictate otherwise.

Students will be participating in camping and hiking activities along and adjacent to the Ice Age National Scenic Trail in order to learn how to:

- Plan, prepare, and participate in an intensive backpacking experience.
- Be self-reliant in the backcountry (including proper dress, gear upkeep and safety)
- Plan and prepare healthy meals.
- Utilize low-impact camping techniques.
- Better appreciate the inherent value of wild areas and solitude.

All counselors are certified Leave No Trace Master Trainers and Wilderness First Responders.

New Vision Wilderness would maintain a group size of no more than 10 students and 3 staff.

Primary camping areas for overnight stays will utilize existing dispersed sites adjacent to the Ice Age Trail. Additional campsites may be utilized if existing dispersed campsites are occupied or not accessible. The primary existing dispersed campsites that will be utilized by New Vision Wilderness in the upcoming season would be identified & documented as part of the special use permit.



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Documentation of campsites would include general campsite locations & access, specific coordinates, and closest vehicle access information. New Vision Wilderness would forward campsite information to the Taylor County Sheriff's Department and Forest Service Law Enforcement prior to the start of activities.

Identification of campsites would include an initial site condition and hazard tree assessment/identification. Prior to primary field season use, New Vision Wilderness would work with Forest Service staff on the mitigation of all identified hazards and the development of an action plan for any site condition concerns.

Preliminary Issues

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (Section 6(g) (3), (e) (iv), and (f) (i)) and resulting regulations (36 CFR 219.15) require that management practices carried out on National Forest System land meet the objectives and requirements of the 2004 Chequamegon and Nicolet Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). This project specifically meets Forest Plan Goal 2 by providing multiple benefits for people within the capability of sustainable ecosystems. (Forest Plan page 1-4).

Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species may be in the project area, but the camping and hiking activities are not expected to adversely affect them.

Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds would not be adversely affected. There are no municipal watersheds within the affected area. Floodplains are not expected to be impacted by camping and hiking activities. Campsites and occupants could be impacted if placed in floodplains. Wetlands and other water features could be impacted by the camping activities. For the previous stated reasons, any newly developed dispersed camping sites will be a minimum of 150 feet away from a trail/road or 200 feet from water features.

The proposed trail does not take place in congressionally designated areas such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas (Forest Plan FEIS 3-199, 3-201). The Ice Age National Scenic Trail will be utilized by New Vision Wilderness. As a National Scenic Trail, various standards apply to maintain the trail as a feature to be enjoyed by all users. All permitted activities conducted on National Forest will follow Leave No Trace guidelines (at a minimum) which will be listed as conditions of the special use permit.

The proposed trail is not within or adjacent to an Inventoried Roadless Area (Forest Plan FEIS Appendix C and 2000 Roadless Area Conservation Rule).

The proposed special use permit area does transect one candidate Research Natural Area or RNA (Forest Plan FEIS Appendix N). An initial assessment indicates there will be no impacts to the candidate RNA from the proposed activities.

Archaeological sites or historic properties or areas are not expected to be affected by the proposed trail. Some of the project area has been surveyed for sites potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. No campsites would be placed on or adjacent to potential heritage sites. Areas not already surveyed would be surveyed prior to any activities that could potentially result in impacts to potential sites.

The Decision

Assuming no extraordinary circumstances, this decision will be documented in a Decision Memo. The Decision will be whether or not and under what conditions to issue an outfitter/guide special use permit to New Vision Wilderness. The decision will include measures for the protection of other resources that could potentially be impacted. The Responsible Official for this decision is the Forest Supervisor. If you would like additional information or have questions about the project, contact the project leader Leesha Howard-McCauley at 715-748-4875 x7484837, email leesha.howard-mccauley@usda.gov.