



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET NATIONAL FOREST
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File Code: 2860
Date: July 30, 2006

Subject: Recreational Gold Panning Rules Chequamegon-
Nicolet National Forest

Thank you for your recent phone inquiry concerning recreational gold panning on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. The collection of minor amounts of rock samples by panning is allowed as a recreational activity on National Forest land, but the methods and intensity of activity are strictly limited. Recreational rock collecting and panning activities do not grant any rights to any discovered valuable mineral deposits. The 1872 General Mining Law does not apply to Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest lands.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest does authorize recreational mineral collecting, such as panning for gold, without the need for a permit. Gold panning is only allowed with the use of small hand tools (pan, small shovel, and hand pick). Occasional recreation panning, for an individual or group is limited to extremely small areas of stream disturbance: A few scattered areas of less than 1 square foot and totaling less than 40 square feet within a 500 foot segment of a stream and would occur less than 5 days per year. We do not issue permits for more substantial recreational collecting.

Use of suction dredges, any type of motorized equipment, mercury or any kind of chemical, and sluice type devices is prohibited.

Gold panning activity is not permitted in classified trout water before April 15th and after September 15th.

In non-trout waters during the months of May-August there are many species of fish engaging in spawning activity. Please be on the look out for nests (depressions, varying in size, on the bottom of the stream) and try to avoid disturbing these areas, particularly if there is fish activity around the nests. Areas with a mixture of sand/gravel/cobble are the most commonly preferred.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has the responsibility and jurisdiction concerning water quality. Past contacts with the WDNR have indicated that occasional recreational panning with no equipment other than small hand tools (pan, small shovel, and hand pick as defined in Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 345.03(8)) would not have substantial effects on water quality and a permit would probably not be required.

The Forest Service needs to know the locations and dates of your proposed recreational panning or collecting. Please contact me at 715-748-4875 ext.26 with location and date information as well as any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Gregory A. Knight
Minerals Program Manager

cc: Sue Reinecke, Phil Barker

