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Understanding the FEIS

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Overview of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests cover over a million and a half acres in Wisconsin's 'North Woods'. Since 1993, the two Forests have been administered as one unit and the forest plan revision process has been accomplished jointly.

Both Forests were established by Presidential proclamation in 1933 and were originally made up of largely abandoned and tax delinquent land that was acquired by the Federal Government under the authority of the Weeks Act of 1911. During the Great Depression, Civilian Conservation Corps members planted thousands of acres of red pine and jack pine, built firebreaks, and constructed recreational facilities. Today, evidence of this history can still be seen on the Forests. People from major cities, Wisconsin communities, and other areas travel to the Forests to take part in both summer and winter recreation opportunities.

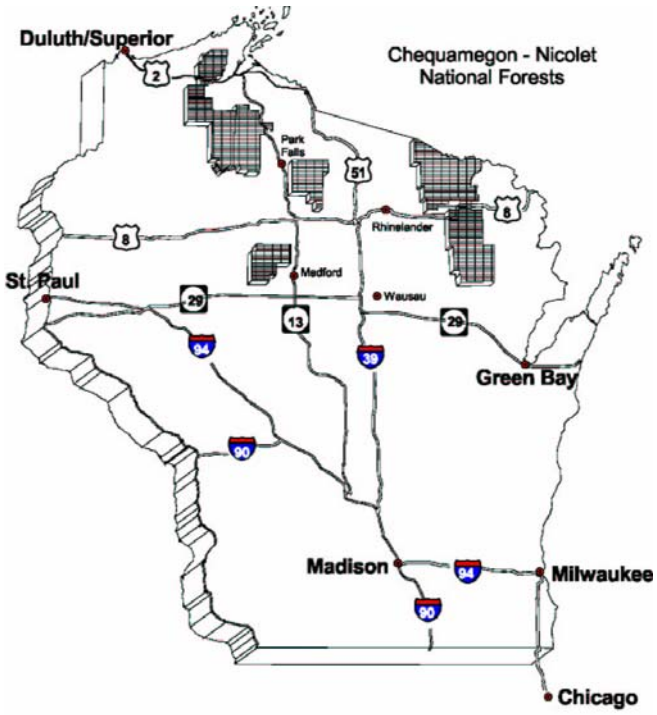

Figure P-1. Vicinity Map of Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests

The Forests' boundaries encompass National Forest System (NFS) lands within 11 different Wisconsin Counties: Ashland, Bayfield, Florence, Forest, Langlade, Oconto, Oneida, Price, Sawyer, Taylor, and Vilas. Table P-1 provides the acreages of NFS lands within each of these counties as well as the percent of total county land held by other non-private ownerships.

Table P-1. Ownership of Public and Tribal Lands within Eleven Northern Wisconsin Counties (acreage from Barish, 1995)

			Ownership Percentage Within Each County					
County	**County Acres**	**NF Acres**	**National Forest**	**State Lands**	**County Lands**	**Tribal Lands**	**Other Federal**	**Total Percent**
Ashland	668,096	180,630	27	2	5	8	3	45
Bayfield	944,896	270,145	29	2	18	1	1	52
Florence	312,384	85,030	27	4	12	0	0	43
Forest	649,024	344,030	53	0.5	2	2	0	58
Langlade	558,528	32,247	6	3	23	0	0	32
Oconto	638,784	141,353	22	1	7	0.02	0	30
Oneida	719,808	12,980	2	11	11	0.05	0	24
Price	801,728	150,676	19	4	11	0	0	34
Sawyer	804,160	126,685	16	11	14	6	0.3	47
Taylor	624,000	123,913	20	1	3	0	0	24
Vilas	558,592	54,536	10	27	1	5.5	0	44
Total / Avg	7,280,000	1,520,425	21	5	10	2	0.4	38

There are five Ranger Districts on the Forests. Three of the Ranger Districts—Great Divide, Medford-Park Falls, and Washburn—are on the Chequamegon land base of the Forests. On the Nicolet land base there are two Ranger Districts: Lakewood-Laona and Eagle River-Florence. Each Ranger District maintains an office in the communities with which they share their names except Great Divide, which has offices in the communities of Glidden and Hayward. The Argonne Experimental Forest and Oconto River Seed Orchard are also found on the Nicolet land base.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests are composed of four separate contiguous units: the Medford Ranger District, the Park Falls Ranger District, the Washburn/Great Divide Ranger Districts, and the entire land base of the Nicolet National Forest. The two largest units—the Nicolet National Forest and the Washburn and Great Divide Districts of the Chequamegon—are 662,000 and 576,000 acres, respectively. These two units represent the two largest contiguous areas of public land in Wisconsin. Private parcels of land are scattered within the boundaries of the National Forests. Average National Forest ownership within the four units is 77%.

Multiple Use management leads to a multitude of goods and services provided by the Forests. Trails for motorized and non-motorized uses are common. Dozens of campgrounds provide opportunities for lakeside recreation. Many more lakes and rivers are accessible at boat and canoe landings. A diverse range of forest products, from medicinal plants to sawtimber and pulp products, are important to local culture and the economy.

Physical and Biological Environment

Glacial geology characterizes the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests (CNNF), providing variety in landform from hilly glacial moraine to flat or pitted outwash sand plains. This variety in soils provides for a diverse mix of tree species and vegetative communities. Rare natural communities include pine barrens, northern dry forests, northern dry-mesic forests, and a small amount of boreal forest.

The Forests boast an abundance of water in the form of rivers, lakes, and wetlands. The CNNF is located within 41 different 5th level watersheds averaging 235 square miles. The watersheds fall within two major hydrologic regions with 19 of the watersheds draining through the Great Lakes to the Atlantic and 22 draining through the Upper Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico.

There are over 300 wildife species known to inhabit the CNNF some time during their life cycle. These species provide Forest users with a wide variety of recreational opportunities, such as hunting and wildlife viewing. The transition between northern boreal forests and eastern deciduous forests supports a rich diversity of birds, including neotropical migrants. Timber wolves are found throughout the Chequamegon and in limited numbers on the Nicolet. Bald eagles have been increasing in number both statewide and forestwide.

Social Environment

Larger communities near or within the CNNF include Ashland, Crandon, Eagle River, Florence, Lakewood, Laona, Medford, Park Falls, and Rhinelander. Small communities abound within the Forests, including Drummond, Clam Lake, Perkinstown, Phelps, Tipler, Alvin, Argonne, Hiles, Wabeno, Cavour, and Mountain. Population increases in the 11 counties surrounding the CNNF ranged from 1.4% to 18.8 % between 1990 and 2000. Some residents in these communities have long depended on the Forests for their livelihood and recreation while others have moved to the area more recently to retire and are interested in preserving resources and land values.

The Forests' smaller communities have the most potential to be affected by changes in tourism expenditures. National Forest visitors commonly travel from metropolitan areas such as Duluth, Minneapolis, and St Paul in Minnesota; Wausau, Green Bay, Madison, and Milwaukee in Wisconsin; and Chicago and northern Illinois. In addition, revenues from timber sales, special use permits, and other revenue-generating activities are important to the 11 counties with CNNF land within their boundaries, each of which is entitled to payments based on annual national forest receipts. Such payments have more than doubled from 1992 to 2001.

Roads and trails provide motorized access to most parts of the CNNF and are used by hunters, fishermen, and those who drive for pleasure. ATV and snowmobile trails are plentiful on the Chequamegon and snowmobile trails are common on the Nicolet. Sixteen semi-primitive non-motorized areas and five Congressionally-designated Wilderness areas provide solitude.

Development of the Revised Forest Plan and FEIS

Under the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 and the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), national forest system lands are managed for a variety of uses on a sustained yield basis to ensure a continued supply of goods and services to the American people in perpetuity. The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA) as amended by NFMA specifies that land and resource management plans shall be developed for all national forests. Regulations that implement NFMA are set forth in 36 CFR 219.

Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) were first completed for the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests in 1986. NFMA regulations state that forest plans should be revised at least every 15 years.

Current forest planning regulations are an extension of historic Forest Service land management planning experiences. Since its inception, the Forest Service has prepared land and resource use plans to guide inventories, identify special management areas, calculate sustainable use levels, and monitor resource conditions and trends. These planning procedures evolved over the years in response to increasing demands for forest resources, statutory developments, and the changing desires and expectations of the American public.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) incorporated environmental analysis and public participation requirements into the land management planning process in 1969. NEPA procedures ensure that environmental information is made available to the public before decisions are made and before actions are taken. Scientific analyses, expert agency input, and public scrutiny are all essential to implementing forest plan revision NEPA procedures. The NEPA process is intended to help public officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment. The applicable regulations that require federal agencies like the Forest Service to utilize NEPA procedures for broad-scale planning and project analysis are found in 40 CFR 1500-1508.

NFMA planning regulations acknowledge compliance with other laws such as the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and the Archeological Resources Protection Act. These regulations set forth requirements for monitoring and evaluation, and establish extensive analytical and procedural requirements for the development, revision, and amendment of forest plans. They also describe procedures for the formulation and evaluation of management alternatives, and require that management alternatives consider a range of resource outputs and expenditure levels.

On June 20, 1996, Regional Forester Robert Jacobs signed a “Notice of Intent” to prepare an environmental impact statement for the revision of the 1986 Forest Land and Resource Management Plans for the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests. The “Notice of Intent” stated that the revision would focus on changed conditions and demands within the areas covered by these plans.

As a result of ensuing media coverage, a series of open houses, and the solicitation of public comments concerning the need to revise the 1986 forest plans, the Forests received 188 responses. A Forest interdisciplinary team examined the comments to identify issues, concerns, and opportunities relevant to forest plan revision. The Forests identified the following four major Plan revision topics:

1. access and recreation opportunities;
2. biological diversity;
3. special land allocations; and
4. timber production.

A 1998 "End of Decade Monitoring Report" for 1986-1996 also helped determine the need to revise both forest plans in light of changed biological, social, and economic conditions for the Forests and surrounding areas.

Area resource assessments, prepared in 1997 and 1998, aided the Forests in taking stock of national forest and surrounding area resources (e.g., State and County lands). The assessments helped the Forests determine how well management problems identified in the 1986 Forest Plans had been addressed during plan implementation.

The following resources or resource functions were assessed: ecosystem sustainability, range of natural variability, fish and wildlife, use of fish and wildlife, heritage resources, lands and land ownership, mineral resources, recreation, all-terrain vehicle and snowmobile use, non-motorized trails, social conditions for "People of Northern Wisconsin," soils, special forest products, and timber. The information in these reports contributed to the completion of the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) phase of forest plan revision. The following AMS problem statements and reports were developed:

1. All-Terrain and Off-Road Vehicles;
2. Aquatic, Riparian, and Wetland Ecosystems;
3. Ecosystem Restoration;
4. Landscape Patterns;
5. Old Growth;
6. Special Land Allocations;
7. Special Forest Products;
8. Timber;
9. Wilderness and Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Areas; and
10. Wildlife.

The AMS compared 1986 Forest Plan direction with updated resource information, changes in economic and social conditions, current scientific knowledge and information, and the Forest Service mission and strategy for the future. The AMS reports provided a reasonably good indication of how well the 1986 Forest Plans addressed critical issues or revision topics, and helped determine the ability of the Forests to supply goods and services in response to public demand.

NFMA regulations require the AMS to include:

1. An analysis to help define the range within which management alternatives can be constructed;
2. An indication of the current and expected level of goods and services provided by the Forests;
3. Projections of public demands for resources using the best available techniques; and
4. A determination of the need to establish or change management direction.

The analysis and information in these reports provided a basis for formulating a broad range of reasonable alternatives to the existing Forest Plans.

By the summer of 1999, nine alternatives had been developed. Alternative 1 represented the existing forest plans. Alternatives 2-9 were often referred to as "Revision Alternatives" or "Action Alternatives" and represented different ways to meet goals and address revision topics. This information was presented at two public meetings—one in May and one in June of 1999. The Forests solicited public comments on the alternatives through these meetings and informational mailings. The public was asked to comment on the content of the proposed alternatives, indicate whether or not a reasonable array of alternatives had been developed, and whether or not additional alternatives should be considered. In response to both public comments and internal discussions, the interdisciplinary planning team revised and "fine tuned" the alternatives over the remainder of 1999. In December of 1999, a consortium of environmental groups (Chequamegon Audubon Society, Conservation Biologists of the Upper Great Lakes, Environmentally Concerned Citizens of the Lakeland Area, and the Green Onion Resource Center) proposed an additional alternative. The contents of this alternative were considered as a public comment for incorporation into alternatives.

The next step in the revision process was to evaluate the environmental consequences of the alternatives. This information was presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which was distributed for public review in April 2003 along with the Proposed Forest Plan.

With the aid of public input obtained during a 4-month comment period on the draft documents, an additional alternative was developed and analyzed and is referenced as the Selected Alternative in the Record of Decision and the FEIS. A detailed discussion of potential environmental impacts of the alternatives, including the Selected Alternative, can be found in Chapter 3 of this document.

Final versions of the Forest Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, and Record of Decision have been developed and the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet Land and Resource Management Plan based on the Selected Alternative will be put into action.

A Readers Guide to the FEIS

The Final Environmental Impact Statement is organized into the following chapters:

- Preface;
- Chapter 1: Purpose and Need;
- Chapter 2: The Alternatives;
- Chapter 3: The Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences;

- Chapter 4: List of Preparers;
- Chapter 5: List of People and Organizations that Receive the FEIS; and the
- Appendices.

A description of the five primary FEIS chapters follows.

The **Preface** introduces the reader to the development of the 2004 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and FEIS. It also provides a general description of the location of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests; the ecological, social, and economic environments of the Forests and northern Wisconsin; and the historical and contemporary uses of these areas.

Chapter 1, "Purpose and Need and Forest Plan Revision Issues", describes legal reasons for plan revision, decisions made in the Forest Plan, public involvement, need for change, and the environmental analysis and decision-making process. It discusses the four Revision topics and identifies 10 major environmental and social issues or problems to be addressed by the 2004 Forest Plan.

Chapter 2, "The Alternatives," describes the process used to develop alternatives, lists important points common to all alternatives, gives a general description of each alternative, explains why some alternatives were not considered in detail, and provides a summarized comparison of environmental consequences of alternatives, including the Selected Alternative.

Chapter 3, "The Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences", addresses the current condition of physical, biological, and social resources and displays possible environmental consequences of the alternatives when various combinations of management practices are applied. The mix of prescriptions under each alternative produces different levels of resource outputs, goods, and services. This chapter also describes specific resource commitments associated with the 2004 Forest Plan.

Chapter 4, "List of Preparers," describes everyone who worked on these documents.

Chapter 5, "List of People and Organizations that Receive the FEIS," lists those who are on the mailing list to receive these documents, including those who commented on the Proposed Plan and DEIS.

The following are appendices to the FEIS:

Appendix A—Forest Plan Revision Issues and Public Involvement

Appendix B—Description of the Analysis Process

Appendix C—Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Evaluation

Appendix D—General Assessment of Historic Range of Natural Variability

Appendix E—Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Report

Appendix F—Silvicultural Systems

Appendix G—Glossary of Terms

Appendix H—Acronyms

Appendix I—References

Appendix J—Biological Evaluation

Appendix K—Forest Scale Roads Analysis

Appendix L—Analysis of Elk Habitat in Relation to Forest Plan Alternatives

Appendix M—Timber Land Suitability

Appendix N—Existing and Proposed Research Natural Areas, Special Management Areas and Old Growth and Natural Features complexes

Appendix O—Potential Motorized Trail Relocation

Appendix P—Landscape Connectivity Maps

Maps for the Selected Alternative and the other alternatives are included in the Map Packet. Management area allocation in the Selected Alternative is displayed at two scales on maps titled “Management Areas.” The smaller scale map is 11”x17”in size and is included in the bound set of maps in the Map Packet. The larger scale map is a set of three 30” x 40”maps. An additional Selected Alternative map titled “Road Density” displays open road density zones and is included in the bound set of 11”x17” maps.

Management area allocation in Alternatives 1-9 is displayed on two separate maps for each alternative in the Map Packet, both at the smaller scale. One map is called the “Vegetative Management Emphasis Map” and the other is titled “Recreation Management Emphasis, Open Road Density, and Special Land Allocation Map.” The first map displays locations of Management Areas (MA) 1-4, 8A, 8B, 8C, and 8D. The second map highlights locations of MAs 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, 8E, 8F, 8G and open road density zones.

An All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Resource Suitability Map is also included in the Map Packet. This map is referenced in Forestwide Standards and Guidelines and serves as a guide to managers when selecting locations for development of new ATV trails.

Finally, a Scenic Integrity Map is included in the Map Packet, and is referenced within some Forestwide Standards and Guidelines. Roads and trails with High and Moderate Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIO) are shown, as are recreation sites and larger lakes.