



UPDATE February 2004

What's Happening?

Since the end of the four-month comment period (September 11, 2003) for the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) and proposed Forest Plans, the Chippewa and Superior planning team has completed coding a total of more than 1,200 printed pages of comments. Coding comments is part of a process called content analysis.

While content analysis can be time-consuming, it is also very informative. The Forest Service uses this method to systematically compile, categorize, and capture the full range of viewpoints and concerns expressed in public comments.

A database was created to track and assist in analysis of comments. A unique identifier number was assigned to each letter as it was received. Each letter was read at least twice by trained team members. Often, one letter

contained several comments on various topics. Each substantive comment was assigned a code based on the related plan revision topic and entered into the database with a link to the original letter.

The database was queried for lists of comments under the various topic codes. The team is writing "public concern statements" based on the database of comments and review of original letters.

Public Concern Statements

The planning team has developed "public concern statements" to which the Forest Service will respond. Public concern statements are written to indicate *what action*, by *whom*, and *where* the commenter (s) asks that the Forests make a specific change in the proposed plans or environmental analysis.

One public concern statement was written for every idea represented in the comments. One

Personnel Changes – Chippewa Forest Planner

The planner position on the Chippewa National Forest was left unfilled when Tracy Beck became Blackduck District Ranger, about one year ago. During the past year, the Chippewa Forest Planner job hasn't been vacant, but was ably filled by "acting planners" who are members of the planning team. In turn, Ann Long-Voelkner (Recreation Specialist), Steve Ludwig (Silviculturalist), and Jim Gallagher (Wildlife Biologist) took on the duties of the Forest Planner in addition to regular tasks. Each did an outstanding job. We extend a big "Thank You" to them for keeping the revision process moving forward.

Brenda Halter-Glenn recently accepted a "permanent assignment" to the Forest Planner position. Brenda has worked on the Chippewa for nearly ten years now. In that time, she served mainly as Forest Hydrologist, but also as a member of the Landscape Planning Team, National Forest Inventory and Monitoring Program Manager, member of the Forest Budget Team, and as the Forest NEPA Coordinator. Brenda officially began her new duties on January 12. She may be reached at the phone number listed on the back page or via email at: bhalterglenn@fs.fed.us **WELCOME, Brenda!**

statement may cover the same comment made by several people.

Example of public concern statement based on comment:

Public Comment - *“Scenic quality should be maintained along all permanent roads with buffers that prevent a view of harvest sites.”*

Public Concern Statement - The Chippewa and Superior National Forests should maintain buffers along all permanent roads to protect scenic quality.

The planning team is diligently following the content analysis process to review comments and determine appropriate responses.

Who Commented- What Did They Say?

Comments came from 37 states and represented many organizations, including private business, academia, special interests, and tribal or other governmental agencies. However, the largest category of comments came as original letters from individuals.

Not surprisingly, the comments received by the Forest Service represent every resource

SOURCE OF COMMENTS	
Format	
Letter	88%
Form or letter generator	7%
Public meeting form	4%
Organization Type	
Individual	88%
Business	3%
Preservation/Conservation	2%
Timber/wood products	1%
Other organizations	6%
State	
Minnesota	75%
Wisconsin	8%
Illinois	5%
Michigan	2%
Other states	10%

management issue addressed in the draft EIS and proposed Forest Plans. Many reviewers also commented on the strategic structure of the proposed Forest Plans.

Several comments focused on what is or isn't an appropriate land management role for the Chippewa and Superior National Forests, given current issues and local or global situations.

Coming Up:

The next step will be to respond to each public concern statement. Some comments could elicit changes in the EIS or the Plans. The response to other comments may be an explanation of why a change will not be made.

This is a continually adaptive and iterative process involving discussion at several levels of the Forest Service. As the planning team completes additional analysis or considers new information, the response to some comments may be affected.

The leadership teams on both Forests, as well as the Regional Forester and staff, will be directly involved in determining appropriate responses to comments. They will consider the established Purpose and Need for Change, agency policies, public benefits, and effects of making changes.

Based on these determinations, the planning team will perform additional analysis, adjust alternatives, add new information, and make corrections necessary to complete the final EIS and revised Forest Plans.

The entire list of public concern statements and Forest Service responses will be published in the appendix of the final EIS, along with copies of comment letters received from other federal, state, or local government agencies and elected officials.

Related News: The Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003

On November 21, 2003, Congress passed HR 1904, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). The House passed the bill with a vote of 286 to 140 and the Senate passed it through unanimous consent. This legislation provides new tools and authorities to restore more acres of forest more quickly.

Passage of the HFRA does not impact plan revision on the Chippewa and Superior National Forests. However, as we implement the final revised Forest Plans, we will use these new tools and authorities to meet our long-term management objectives as defined in the new plans.

The intent of the HFRA is to strengthen public participation, reduce the complexity of environmental analysis, and provide a more effective appeals process, encouraging early public participation in project planning. The act also instructs courts to balance the short-term effects of implementing the projects against the harm resulting from undue delay and the long-term benefits of a restored forest.

The past few fire seasons have brought the issue of forest health to the fore-front. It is believed that the catastrophic wildfires of recent years are the culmination of a century of aggressive fire suppression which have resulted in massive buildups of dense undergrowth

Overcrowded forests and drought conditions have caused, in part, many insect and disease infestations to become epidemic. Prescribed fire, thinning and slash removal are proposed to help resolve the problem.

For more information about the Healthy Forest Initiative or the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, visit the following web address: www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi

Specific direction of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act:

- 1) Allows hazardous fuel reduction through various methods, including thinning and prescribed fire on up to 20 million acres of federal land.
- 2) States that any activity within old-growth stands must fully maintain or contribute toward maintaining the integrity of old growth stands according to forest type.
- 3) Focuses tree removal activities outside old-growth acres on small diameter trees and leaving larger trees, as appropriate, for the forest type to promote fire resistant forests.
- 4) Instructs the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to identify project priorities considering recommendations from community wildfire protection plans, and directs overall that not less than 50% of the funds allocated for projects be used in the wildland urban interface.
- 5) Limits the number of alternatives that must be developed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and requires the Secretaries to engage in active public involvement.
- 6) Directs the Secretary of Agriculture to develop interim final regulations within 30 days after enactment to establish a pre-decisional administrative review process. This will serve as the sole means for administratively challenging a project decision under this act.
- 7) Requires courts to balance the short and long-term effects on doing the project against the short and long-term effects of not doing the project.
- 8) Provides grant programs to states, tribes, small communities and individuals for projects consistent with watershed restoration, biomass utilization, and conservation.
- 9) Authorizes the Forest Service Research and Development to conduct assessments on federal lands at risk under the new procedures under NEPA on as many as 1,000 acres.
- 10) Addresses the need for an early warning system for potential threats to forests from insects, disease, fire and weather-related risks, to increase the likelihood of successful prevention and treatment.

For more information regarding national forest plan revision in Minnesota contact:

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Or visit the Plan Revision web site: www.fs.fed.us/r9/chippewa

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