

How to Read This Document

To read this EIS more effectively, carefully study this page. Following Federal regulations, we have designed and written this EIS (1) to provide the District Ranger of the Great Divide Ranger District with sufficient information to make an informed, reasoned decision concerning the proposed Cayuga Project and (2) to inform members of the affected and interested public of this project so that they may express their opinions to the District Ranger.

This EIS follows the organization and content established by the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508). The EIS consists of the following chapters:

- Purpose and Need for Action
- Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action
- Affected Environment
- Environmental Consequences
- Consultation and Coordination (List of preparers and contributors, List of agencies and persons consulted, and Distribution of the Final Environmental Impact Statement)
- Appendices

Chapter 1 introduces the Cayuga Project. It provides a brief description of the Cayuga Project and then explains three key aspects of the project: (1) the relevant environmental issues, (2) the decisions that the District Ranger must make concerning this project, and (3) the relevant laws, regulations, and consultation with which the Great Divide Ranger District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest must comply.

Chapter 2 serves as the heart of this EIS. It provides detailed descriptions of Alternative 1: No Action and Alternative 5: Preferred Alternative, Alternative 2: original Proposed Action, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4. Most important, it includes a summary comparison of the predicted effects of these five alternatives on the human environment, providing a clear basis for choice between the five alternatives for the Decision maker and the public.

Chapters 1 and 2 together serve as an Executive Summary that pull together the more detailed information found in following chapters, appendices and the project record file.

Chapter 3 briefly describes the past and current conditions of the relevant resources (issues) in the project area that would be meaningfully affected, establishing a part of the baseline used for the comparison of the predicted effects of the alternatives.

Chapter 4 presents the detailed, analytic predictions of the consequences of implementing Alternatives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. These predictions include the direct, indirect, short-term, long-term, irreversible, irretrievable, and cumulative effects of implementing the alternatives.

Chapters 3 and 4 together serve as the scientific and analytic basis for comparing of the predicted effects presented in Section 4.0.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Hayward Office of the Great Divide Ranger District.

Summary

The Great Divide Ranger District on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest proposes to implement a number of forest management activities including: 5,610 acres of timber harvest and associated timber stand improvement, planting, and natural regeneration preparation; 14 miles of temporary road construction; 11.4 miles of road decommissioning; 23 miles of road maintenance work; 113 acres of recreation site improvements; 1 acre of noxious weed control; 1.5 miles of stream and riparian area improvement; 85 acres of wildlife opening restoration; 7 road/stream crossing improvements; 0.4 mile of snowmobile trail relocation; construction of a 1 acre trail parking lot; conversion of approximately 519 acres of aspen to longer lived conifers and hardwoods (The acreage of aspen conversions is also included in the total acres of timber harvest identified above). These activities were analyzed together as Alternative 5, the Agency Preferred Alternative in the Cayuga Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

The area affected by the proposal is located in T43N, R2W, Sections 6-7, 16-20, and 29; T43N, R3W, Sections 1-18, and 23-24; T43N, R4W, Sections 1-3, 10-23, and 27-33; T43N, R5W, Section 24; T44N, R3W, Sections 19-23 and 26-35 and T44N, R4W, Sections 23-27 and 34-36, Ashland County, Wisconsin. A portion of the project area is located within Management Areas 181, 191, 221, and 231. These Management Areas fall under Forest Management Prescription 1, hereafter referred to as Goal Area 1 in this document. The remainder of the project area lies within Management Areas 192 and 172, which fall under Management Prescription 2 (Goal Area 2). (CNF Plan IV-101-102). These actions are needed to improve forest age and composition, address public health and safety concerns, improve water quality, restore and improve wildlife and fish habitat, and control noxious weeds.

The Notice of Intent (NOI) for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was published in the Federal Register on April 23, 2001. The NOI asked for public comment on the original proposal (which was Alternative 2 in the DEIS) from April 23, 2001 until June 4, 2001. In addition, the Cayuga ID team sent out 465 project information packets to interested individuals, local, state, and county agencies, tribal governments, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), and landowners within and adjacent to the project area.

Those who submitted comments raised the following issues:

- Issue 1: Early Successional Management
- Issue 2: Wildlife Openings
- Issue 3: Vegetation Composition
- Issue 4: Fragmentation
- Issue 5: Roads
- Issue 6: Water Quality
- Issue 7: Noxious Weeds
- Issue 8: Soil Quality
- Issue 9: Floodplains and Wetlands
- Issue 10: Visual Quality
- Issue 11: Recreation Facilities and Trails
- Issue 12: Social and Economic

These issues led the agency to develop alternatives to the original Proposed Action (Alternative 2). A brief description of the alternatives that were analyzed in the Draft EIS follows:

Alternative 1: No Action. The issues above would not be addressed at this time. The No Action Alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act and also serves as a baseline for comparing other alternatives. Current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. Ongoing permitted and approved uses on National Forest lands would continue within the project area. These include, but are not limited to firewood cutting, use of trails, fire suppression, use of recreation facilities, normal road system maintenance, and use of a gravel pit as a parking area under special use permit.

Alternative 2 was the original Proposed Action and agency preferred alternative in the DEIS. It was designed to best meet the widest range of Forest Plan direction, while incorporating findings and new information such as the “Scientific Roundtable on Biological Diversity” and the Forest Plan Revision process. It emphasizes the management of early successional species, yet proposes to convert 646 acres of aspen to longer-lived northern hardwood and conifer species for visual quality, fragmentation, vegetation composition, riparian area, and other reasons. It also favors more even-aged and less un-even-aged hardwood management than the other alternatives. Approximately 5,414 total acres of timber harvest would occur, yielding 23 million board feet (MMBF) of timber volume. Other proposed activities include approximately 12.6 miles of temporary road construction, 6.5 miles of road decommissioning, and 22.8 miles of road maintenance work; restoration of approximately 85 acres of upland openings, and construction and placement of brush bundles along 1000 feet of McCarthy Creek. Six

culvert crossings would be improved to reduce stream sedimentation and restore fish passage, one culvert crossing would be removed, a one-acre snowmobile parking lot would be constructed off of FR 1296, and 0.4 miles of snowmobile trail 8 would be relocated. The noxious weed Leafy Spurge would be treated with a biological control agent (flea beetle) at three sites totaling less than 1 acre.

Alternative 3 emphasizes the management of early successional species and closed-canopy northern hardwood forests. It would generate the greatest timber volume (28 MMBF) and harvest the most acres (6,178) of all the alternatives. It would provide the least loss of aspen cover, but would result in the greatest amount of fragmentation. Approximately 80% more acreage, than is proposed in Alternative 2, would be harvested by clearcutting to regenerate aspen and mixed stands. Other activities would include approximately 16.3 miles of temporary road construction, 5.7 miles of road decommissioning, and 23.3 miles of road maintenance work. The recreation, stream, and trail improvement projects would be about the same as proposed in alternative 2, except that one stream crossing would be removed rather than replaced and Leafy Spurge would not be treated with the biological control agent.

Alternative 4 places more emphasis on the forest fragmentation and vegetation composition issues. It was designed in response to the issues of fragmentation, the amount of timber harvest along County Hwy GG, and harvest activities near the McCarthy Lake and Cedars Research Natural Area (RNA). It emphasizes larger blocks of contiguous hardwood management. Of the action alternatives, it ranks lowest in timber volume (20 MMBF) and least in harvest acres (4,880). It would decommission the most miles of unneeded road (11.4 miles). Approximately 45 percent less clearcutting for aspen regeneration and 70 percent more selective harvest for unevenaged northern hardwood management would take place, than is proposed in Alternative 2. The other projects would be about the same as in Alternative 2, except that there would be 1/3 less treatment along Highway GG for visuals, and the treatments that would occur would be thinnings instead of shelterwood cuts.

Preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Appendices

The Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was published in the Federal Register on December 6, 2002, as well as in the Ashland Daily Press, Sawyer County Record, and Glidden Enterprise. In addition, the Cayuga ID team sent out approximately 100 copies of the Draft EIS and 25 copies of the Summary of the Draft EIS to those individuals who had commented on the original proposal, and to other interested individuals, local, state, and county agencies, tribal governments, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), and landowners within and adjacent to the project area.

The comment period for the Draft EIS extended from December 7, 2002 until January 22, 2003. Comments were received from 23 individuals or organizations. The comments received along with responses to each of them are in Appendix B.

Alternative 5 (Agency Preferred Alternative)

As a result of comments received on the DEIS, and further discussion between the Decision maker and the Interdisciplinary Team, Alternative 5 was added to the FEIS. It is merely a modification of Alternative 2, in that it adds some of the activities proposed in Alternative 3, and drops other activities. It was described in the first paragraph of this summary. The modifications include: Clearcutting 273 additional acres of aspen (13 stands), to increase the percentage of 1-20 year aspen in Goal Area 1; deferring the conversion of two aspen stands (62 acres) to other species, to increase the percentage of aspen in Goal Area 1; changes approximately 600 acres of even-aged hardwood thinnings to Uneven-aged management (Selection and Improvement cuts), to better meet Forest Plan objectives; and calls for eliminating the FR 355 crossing of an unnamed tributary to the Bad River, by removing the culverts and restoring the stream channel and floodplain, as proposed in alternatives 3 and 4. All of the actions in Alternative 5 are within the bounds of analysis that was conducted for the Draft EIS. That is, effects fall between those identified for Alternatives 2 and 3.

The other 4 alternatives are the same in the FEIS as they were in the DEIS. Information from Specialist Reports in the Project Record was added to some sections of the FEIS to clarify or elaborate in response to comments received on the DEIS.

Major conclusions include: Table 2.5b in Chapter 2 displays the results by alternative if implementation of each activity would occur. The environmental consequences analysis showed that no significant effects would occur to any of the resources in all of the alternatives when design features and mitigating measures as described in Appendix C of this FEIS were followed. There would be no irretrievable or irreversible commitments of resources.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide:

- What actions would be taken at this time
- Where the actions would occur
- What treatment methods would be used
- Which mitigation measures would be required