

DECISION MEMO
USDA FOREST SERVICE

“2004 Lakewood/Laona Timber Stand Improvement”

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
Forest and Oconto Counties, Wisconsin

DECISION

I have decided to perform timber stand improvement activities at 18 sites on the Lakewood/Laona Ranger District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. In all of the stands, we plan to release red pine or white pine trees from competition by hand cutting the woody brush that is overtopping or closely surrounding them.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Background: Timber stand improvement activities increase the growth and vigor of the desired species in the stand. The Forest Service utilizes hand release (removal of competing vegetation by cutting or girdling with hand tools) to aid in the establishment of desired species such as those that have been planted. Release increases the light and nutrients available to the desired trees.

Purpose and Need: The existing Forest Plan divides the National Forest into approximately 12 different emphases (Management Areas). Most of the stands to be treated fall within Management Area 4.1 (Forest Plan page 100) - Softwood (pine) production. As such, the Forest Service identifies the desired condition of these stands to be pine and has already made an investment of time and resources by preparing these sites and planting seedlings in them. Hand release of these trees is needed to promote their growth and vigor and thereby progress toward the desired objectives for these stands.

The remaining stands are located in Management Areas 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, and 9.2. While softwood production is not the primary objective in these areas, these stands are desirable to maintain a diversity of forest types.

Hand release has little or no impact on the sensitive species found on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (Nicolet National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan page 60). It is consistent with the goal of providing a variety of wood products (p. 21 Nicolet LRMP) and with the direction (regarding hand release) found on pp. 55-6 of the Forest Plan.

Rationale: My decision to improve timber stands through hand release is a common and routine practice. Considerable on-forest experience with this practice has shown it to provide the desired results and be cost-effective.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Category of Exclusion: I have determined this action falls under the following category of action that is normally excluded from documentation in and Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to FSH 1909.15:

31.2 #6: Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.

FINDING OF NO RELATED EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

I have considered conclusions by resource specialist reviews of conditions at the affected sites (Attachment A). I find there are no extraordinary circumstances that may result in a significant and adverse, individual or cumulative environmental effects on the following:

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species. All sites have been evaluated for Federally listed, proposed or sensitive species, or their critical habitat. A bald eagle nest is located near two of the sites. Treatments in these areas would not take place during the period of February 15 and August 1. With this design feature, there would be no impact to nesting eagles since they will be absent. No TES species or critical habitat is found at any of the other sites.
2. Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds. Neither floodplains nor watersheds will be adversely affected. Two of the stands border streams/floodplains. Slash from pruning and hand release would not be placed in the floodplains or piled in the wetlands. No municipal watersheds are affected by the proposed action.
3. Congressionally designated areas. All actions would occur on roaded sites. These actions will not occur in a wilderness or other congressionally designated sites.
4. Inventoried roadless areas. The affected sites do not lie within inventoried roadless.
5. Research Natural Areas. The affected area does not lie in or near a Research Natural Area.
6. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites. Local and affected American Indian tribal representative were contacted concerning this action. No effects to religious or cultural sites were identified.
7. Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas. A cultural resource inventory was completed by the Forest Archeologist and reviewed by the District Heritage Resource Paraprofessional. There are no heritage sites located in the proposed treatment areas.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public was informed of the proposed action through a mailing to potentially affected parties. Two comments were received and the commenters supported the proposed activities. Based upon public and agency scoping, no extraordinary circumstances have been identified. Consultation included contacts with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), the Stockbridge-Munsee Band, Forest County Potawatomi Band, Sokaogan Chippewa Band, the Menominee Band, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

I have considered relevant laws, regulations and agency direction. I find my decision complies with the National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act. I have considered direction in the FSM 1950 and FSH 1909.15 and find the analysis and my decision consistent with that direction.

I have reviewed this action in accordance with Executive Order 12898 (consideration of environmental justice). I find scoping was adequate to inform low income and minority populations that may be affected by this action. No concerns of disproportionate health or environmental effects surfaced. Adverse effects of this action will be very minor or not apparent. Therefore, I find my decision will not disproportionately create high and adverse health or environmental effects to low income or minority populations.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE

My decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8. This decision may be implemented immediately.

SIGNATURE AND DATE

/s/ Darrell Richards (for)
JOEL H. SKJERVEN
District ranger

March 26, 2004
Date

Attachments

Maps of project sites

Attachment A: Checklist - Extraordinary Circumstances