



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

September 2003



RECORD OF DECISION

MCCASLIN PROJECT

**Lakewood/Laona Ranger District
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest**

Oconto and Forest Counties, Wisconsin

Legal description: Township 33 North, Range 15 East, sections 1-3, 11-14, and 24-5; Township 33 North, Range 16 East, sections 1-11, 14-23, 27-30; Township 33 North, Range 17 East, sections 5 and 6; and Township 34 North, Range 16 East, sections 16, 17, 20-29; 32-36, 4th Principal Meridian.

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DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the associated planning record for the McCaslin Project, it is my decision to implement Alternative 5. This alternative moves the area towards the Forest Plan desired vegetation conditions (as identified in the Purpose and Need, FEIS Section 1.3) while striking a balance between issues of providing for interior forest and aspen communities and forest products. Alternative 5 also implements the Forest Service Road Management Policy (36 CFR 212, 01/12/2001) by taking affirmative steps to address the needs identified in the Roads Analysis Process (Project File).

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents the specific components of my decision and the rationale for my decision. The following actions comprise the major elements of my decision. A more detailed description of Alternative 5 can be found in Chapter 2 and Appendix A of the McCaslin FEIS. Maps showing the location of each action are attached to this decision record. Detailed descriptions of other specific design features and mitigation measures are also attached.

Timber Management Actions: Timber management will occur on nearly 9,000 acres. This includes 8,500-8,600 acres of commercial timber harvest and 300-350 acres of pre-commercial stand improvement. Harvest actions are used to maintain or improve the forest to desired community types and structures. Commercial timber harvest will yield about 68,000 hundred cubic feet or “CCF” (41 million board feet or “MMBF”) of wood products. Timber management actions include:

- Selection Cutting: 53%, or about 4,700 acres
- Commercial Thinning: 35%, or about 3,100 acres
- Clearcutting: 7%, or about 600 acres
- Shelterwood: <1%, or about 41 acres
- Remove overstory of regenerated stands: 1%, or about 120 acres
- Release young plantations from brush: 4%, or about 315 acres.

Road and Access Management Actions: Nearly 40 miles of road management activities will occur in the McCaslin area. Efficient placement and design of every mile of new road will allow the removal or closure of about 10 miles of old road. Roads with environmental problems will be reconstructed to correct existing problems. Closures will be used to reduce maintenance and environmental damage on roads not warranting year-round use. Road management actions include:

- New Road: 7%, or about 3 miles (will be gated and closed when not in use)
- Road Reconstruction: 17%, or about 7 miles (access will not change)
- Road Closures: 6%, or about 2-3 miles
- Road Decommissioning: 70%, or about 28 miles (will be eliminated from system)

Wildlife and Fish Habitat Improvement Actions: Habitat improvements will support Forest Plan wildlife and fish objectives in the McCaslin area and serve to compliment the timber and road management actions in achieving a fuller range of desired conditions. Actions include:

- Upland “Openings” Habitat: About 53 acres will be burned to create desired grassland vegetation. 128 acres will be hand cut, mowed or burned to maintain openings. Seven acres of wildlife openings will be planted with native, fruit-bearing shrubs.
- Understory Plant Diversity: About 120 acres of oak will be underburned, 276 acres inter-planted (with white pine, butternut, hemlock and spruce), and 111 acres protected from browse through fencing.
- Aquatic Habitat Restoration: 250 feet of trail and stream bank will be treated to reduce erosion, restore shoreline fish structural habitat, and construct osprey nesting platforms.

Archeological Evaluation and Interpretation Actions: A number of cultural and historical sites exist in the McCaslin Area. My decision takes advantage of the opportunity to evaluate and interpret the historical importance of 26 sites.

Required Features and Mitigation Measures: A number of design features are required to meet Forest Plan Standards, or to avoid environmental effects. Additionally, specific mitigation measures are required to reduce effects from my selected actions. Utilization of these features and measures were considered in determining the effects of Alternative 5 and are part of my selected action. A description of these actions is attached to this document.

Monitoring: A monitoring plan for McCaslin actions has been developed that is consistent with requirements on pages 160-162 of the Forest Plan. This monitoring plan is a required part of my decision and is detailed in Section 4.15 of the FEIS.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

In reaching my decision, I have considered the Purpose and Need for action, the environmental effects of each alternative, public comments and issues, and social and economic needs of the local communities. Environmental documents I considered in my decision include the McCaslin FEIS, Case File and Biological Evaluation (BE); the 1986 Nicolet Forest Plan, FEIS and ROD; the Forest Service Road Management Policy and the December 2002 Roads Analysis for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest; and the 2003 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Proposed Land and Resource Management Plan and DEIS. The key factors in my decision focused on:

1. How well an alternative moved the McCaslin area in the direction of desired vegetation conditions (Purpose and Need #1 and #2, FEIS pp. 3-5).
2. How well an alternative addressed environmental effects to forest raptors (goshawk and red-shouldered hawk) and management indicator species. This factor responds to public comments I heard on the McCaslin DEIS.
3. How well an alternative managed excess roads (Purpose and Need #3 (FEIS p. 5), the Chequamegon-Nicolet 2002 Roads Analysis, and the Road Management Policy).
4. How well an alternative addressed supply of timber products (Purpose and Need #1, FEIS p. 4; Forest Plan goal #4, p. 20).

I selected Alternative 5 as it consistently ranked at or near the top in relation to my key decision factors. Other alternatives may have ranked better on an individual factor, but low on another. No other alternative was as consistently good on all factors.

Desired Vegetation Conditions

Each action alternative achieved fish and wildlife, erosion control, and archeological objectives equally. Where alternatives varied most was in how they achieved the vegetation objectives of the Purpose and Need. The McCaslin area covered a range of Management Areas with differing and numerous vegetation objectives. All action alternatives attained some level of movement toward desired goals for vegetation. However, each alternative emphasized a differing set of vegetation components. In determining which alternative was best in achieving vegetation objectives, I focused on the aspen and hardwood components. These two components made up the overwhelming majority of the acreage in the McCaslin area (see the FEIS “Need #1”, p. 3; Table 3.5-1, and Figure 3.1, p. 34). Alternative 5 best balances the management of aspen and interior hardwood forest.

Specifically, Alternative 5 performed better than other alternatives in managing aspen and hardwood stocking and composition goals (Table ROD-1 and FEIS Tables 2.5-1 through -4). Although Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 were similar in attaining aspen age class distribution, it is the 0-10 year age class that is now furthest from desired conditions. Alternative 5 ranks second best in attaining 0-10 year age class objectives (see FEIS Table 2.5-5). Alternative 5 does not differ greatly from the higher-ranking Alternative 2, and provides a substantial improvement in this age class compared to the existing condition.

The focus on selection cutting in the hardwood stands in Management Area (MA) 3 serves to move McCaslin area closer to desired uneven-aged structures that are now severely underrepresented. Alternative 5 treats the highest amount of even-aged hardwood with selection. Although Alternative 3 treats more total forest area by selection, the additional treatments occur in MA 1 and 4, where aspen, not hardwood, is underrepresented (FEIS, Tables 2.5-2 through -4).

Environmental Effects and Public Comments

Upon reviewing the environmental effects disclosed within the FEIS, I find them to be small and not significant. Alternative 5 will result in no impact to Federally Threatened or Endangered species. Of the six Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS) that may be impacted by Alternative 5, the impact would not cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability. Alternative 5 contains requirements to provide protection to all six of these species (see attached Design and Mitigation Features).

None of the alternatives resulted in effects that would threaten the viability of Management Indicator (MIS) bird species (FEIS Section 4.7.5). All resulted in more (though slightly differing) suitable habitat for all MIS birds except pine warbler (FEIS, Table 4.7.1).

On the whole, the environmental effects did not vary substantially between alternatives. However, public comments on RFSS forest raptors (goshawk and red-shouldered hawk)

and MIS birds (cerulean warbler) prompted me to look harder at even small changes in suitable habitat.

I recognize there is some controversy on the reason for apparent declines in some forest birds and as to what constitutes suitable habitat. In response to this, further discussion with independent woodland raptor experts Dr. Thomas Erdman, Thomas Doolittle, and John Jacobs; and a more refined analysis of habitat were conducted (see Project File Section M). My review of these discussions and analysis found the original conclusions in the DEIS to be supported. However, the refined analysis allowed a better differentiation of the small changes in effects between alternatives. Additionally, I asked the district biologist to re-assess impacts to cerulean warbler based upon the apparent lack of evidence in the BE supporting its occurrence in the McCaslin project area.

Alternative 5 results only in short-term, adverse effects on less than 1% of occupied forest raptor habitat. Its effects are less than half of those in Alternative 2 (originally identified as preferred in the DEIS). Alternative 5 ranks equal to or better than other alternatives in overall long-term effects to both occupied and vacant habitat (see Table ROD-1). Long-term effects will supply more suitable habitat in hawk territories than present now. Thinning in Alternative 5 will serve to improve forest health, vigor, and composition toward desired balances of habitat. Selection cutting will increase tree species diversity and move the stands toward uneven-aged structure, thereby improving habitat for forest raptors in the long term (FEIS Section 7.1.1, p. 27; Section 7.1.4, p. 31). Alternative 5's emphasis on converting large blocks of even-aged stands to uneven-aged in the northern portion of the project will move the area toward larger, contiguous blocks of suitable habitat, better addressing habitat fragmentation concerns.

Upon taking a harder look at effects to cerulean warbler, I determined it was not reasonable to assume this species is present in the McCaslin area. McCaslin lies outside the range of ceruleans, annual surveys have never confirmed its occurrence, and independent experts think it unlikely the species could become well established here. Therefore, the biologist has amended our determination to "No Effect" on cerulean warbler (See 09/22/2003 Memo, Project File, Section M).

Access Management: Alternative 5 reconstructs existing roads to improve safety and reduce resource impacts such as erosion. It ranks highest in total miles of roads repaired, closed, and decommissioned. By reconstructing and building new road, Alternative 5 most efficiently provides for desired access while still decommissioning a substantial amount of unneeded roads (see Table ROD-1).

Timber Product Supply: In addition to many public comments expressing a concern about sustaining a supply of wood products from the forest, I considered the goals of the Nicolet Forest Plan (FP) to provide wood products and meet projected timber demand (FP pp. 20-21; FEIS, p. 6, "Need #1).

Although Alternative 5 does not provide as high a level of timber products as Alternatives 2 and 4, it still provides a substantial amount, and does so in a more economically efficient manner than higher volume alternatives (see Table ROD-1; FEIS Table 2.5-13). Alternative 5 harvest levels meet the goals of the Forest Plan by utilizing commercial harvest wherever appropriate. The level of wood products supplied, though modest, will contribute to projected timber demands for the local area. It will contribute

social benefits to the state and counties by sustaining jobs, lifestyles, and income in local communities.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

On April 12, 2000, scoping letters were sent to potentially interested parties on a set of proposed actions for the Deer Island Project. This project was to take place in the now southern half of the McCaslin project area. Potentially interested parties consisted of members of the public who owned property in that area or who otherwise may have an interest in the project. As a result of the scoping, the Forest Service received fourteen letters or telephone calls with comments from individuals or organizations.

A similar project was planned for the north half of the McCaslin project area immediately following completion of analysis of the Deer Island proposal. The Forest Service subsequently decided to combine the two proposals and call them the “McCaslin Project”.

On January 3, 2001, letters describing the proposal for the McCaslin Project were sent to the general public. This letter was sent to landowners and interested parties and included those people who were previously contacted for the Deer Island proposal. This proposal has appeared on the Forest’s quarterly “Schedule of Proposed Actions” since April of 2001. This schedule is mailed to all parties who have asked to be informed of projects proposed on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (400-500 parties).

On April 5, 2001, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare and environmental impact statement (EIS) was published in the Federal Register. The NOI asked for public comment on the proposal during the period of April 5 and May 7. As a result of the outreaches described, the Forest Service received 83 responses providing comments and concerns.

Additional public input was received through telephone calls and meetings with concerned individuals and groups since the project analysis began. Public comment and agency concerns throughout the scoping process have been considered.

On November 1, 2002, a letter was sent to all of those people who had previously commented on or otherwise showed interest in the McCaslin Project. The letter asked each recipient which format of the McCaslin DEIS they preferred to receive.

On February 21, 2003, a copy of the DEIS, a summary of the DEIS, or a web address where it could be found was mailed to approximately 117 parties for comment. A Notice of Availability of the McCaslin DEIS was published in the Federal Register on March 7, 2003. Also published on March 7 was a legal notice in the Rhinelander Daily News.

Twelve responses were received during the 45-day comment period. Summaries of these comments and responses to the comments are included in Appendix I to the FEIS. Only minor changes to the FEIS were made as a result of the comments received. These changes are handled as corrections and clarifications in an errata sheet to the FEIS.

Consultation and Notification with Local Tribes: On April 12, 2000, local American Indian Tribes were notified by letter of proposed actions for the Deer Island Project. On January 3, 2001, letters describing the McCaslin Project and its proposals were sent to

local American Indian tribes, requesting comments. Phone conversations were made with a Lac Courte O'reille member during the DEIS comment period.

Other Federal and State Agency Consultation: Other agencies contacted during the initial scoping period included the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative 1 (No Action). This alternative was developed in response to NEPA requirements for a no action alternative and serves as a baseline for comparison to the action alternatives. This alternative proposes no new activities. The proposed action will not be implemented, although other actions independent of this proposal may continue to occur.

Current management plans will continue to guide management of the project area. Current ongoing activities will continue, such as dispersed recreation use, annual road maintenance, stream improvement activities, and some wildlife opening improvement. This alternative allows the current process of succession to continue.

I did not select Alternative 1 because it does not respond to the Purpose and Need for Action, does not respond to the Agency's Road Management Policy, nor does it address forest raptor nesting habitat or supply any timber product.

Alternative 2 (Original Proposal). This alternative was developed to attain the greatest amount of the Purpose and Need. It addresses all deficient forest types on an equal basis, and, therefore, does not give greater weight to aspen and hardwood, the dominant types in McCaslin. Instead of decommissioning all unneeded road, it addresses their environmental concerns by repairing problem areas (reconstruction). This serves to minimize impacts on access, but does not provide the highest consistency with the agency Road Management Policy.

I did not select Alternative 2 because it was considerably less responsive to my key factors of aspen and hardwood conditions and road management, and somewhat less responsive to forest raptors and MIS birds than was Alternative 5. These three factors outweighed the single factor of wood products supplied, (44 MMBF versus 41 MMBF in Alternative 5 – see FEIS Section 4.13.1, p. 144).

Alternative 3 (Interior Habitat). Some respondents were concerned the proposal will cause too much fragmentation of interior forest. In addition, some respondents favored a reduction in aspen management. Alternative 3 was developed to achieve the Purpose and Need while reducing the changes to forest interior habitat. This alternative favored longer-lived species. Road management was reduced and wildlife opening maintenance was not included. Design features that reduced effects to interior habitat, such as winter logging, were increased in this alternative.

Of the four action alternatives, Alternative 3 resulted in the highest reduction in open road density, and the least amount of forest fragmentation. It ranked best overall among the action alternatives in habitat improvement for MIS. It resulted in the greatest conversion of aspen to other species.

I did not select Alternative 3 because it was poorest in responding to my key factors of aspen and hardwood conditions and wood product supply compared to Alternative 5.

Alternative 4 (Aspen Emphasis). Some commenters were concerned that aspen has been steadily declining in Wisconsin and the national forest since the turn of the century. Alternative 4 was developed to achieve the Purpose and Need while maintaining and enhancing aspen and other young forest types throughout the area. Under this alternative, aspen stands at rotation age are widely regenerated. In concert with this, existing wildlife openings will be maintained, and prescribed burning conducted to maintain or enhance young forest conditions.

Although Alternative 4 resulted in the highest amount of wood products provided, I did not select it because it was considerably weaker in responding to the hardwood structural, density, and compositional components of the Purpose and Need, especially in MA 3, which emphasizes hardwood forest cover and comprises 75% of the McCaslin area. Alternative 4 had greater effects forest raptor habitat and was lowest in improving MIS habitat. It did not address road management as well as Alternative 5.

Table ROD-1. Comparison of decision factors for the McCaslin Project.

Decision Factor	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5
Vegetation DFC (from Section L Project Record; to nearest percent)					
Aspen objectives					
Lakewood MA1 (DFC = 63%)	14% low				
Laona MA1 (DFC = 52%)	5% low				
Lakewood MA3 (DFC = 28%)	4% high				
Laona MA3 (DFC = 29%)	2% low	2% low	3% low	1% low	3% low
Laona MA4 (DFC = 32%)	7% low				
Hardwood objectives (uneven-aged)					
Lakewood MA1 (DFC = 13%)	4% high	5% high	4% high	4% high	4% high
Laona MA1 (DFC = 37%)	2% high	2% high	3% high	1% high	3% high
Lakewood MA3 (DFC = 32%)	8% high				
Laona MA3 (DFC = 53%)	8% high	8% high	9% high	7% high	9% high
Laona MA4 (DFC = 4%)	12% high				
Stocking Objectives					
Thinning Acres	0	2,644	1,911	2,521	3,094
Selection Acres	0	4,686	4,989	3,788	4,706
Total	0	7,330	6,900	6,309	7,800
RS Hawk Habitat –Project					
Occupied (long-term)(hectares)	538	538	538	470	538
Vacant (long-term)(hectares)	2,918	2,918	2,918	2,756	2,918
Gosawk Habitat - Project					
Occupied (long-term)(hectares)	159	159	159	91	159
Vacant (long-term)(hectares)	2,373	2,373	2,373	2,211	2,373
Road Management (in miles, from FEIS table 2.5-11)					
New road built	0	3.0	0	4.0	2.9
Road reconstructed	0	14.3	1.2	11.0	6.6
Roads closed	0	1.2	2.2	2.2	2.2
Roads decommissioned	0	22.1	30.4	26.4	27.6
Wood Products Supplied – MMBF (from FEIS table 2.5-13)	0	44	31	51	41
Economic Efficiency (Benefit:cost ratio from FEIS Table 4.13-1)	N/A	2.37	2.45	2.18	2.38

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

Consistency with the Forest Plan: My selected action is consistent with Forest Plan direction and best suited to the multiple-use goals of the area (Forest Plan, pages 86-93 for MA 1.1/1.2; pages 102-109 for MA 3.1/3.2; and pages 110-117 for MA 4.1/4.2).

Consistency with Existing Laws: My decision is consistent with Federal, State, and local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Specifically, it is consistent with the following laws as listed below:

National Forest Management Act (NFMA): I find my selected action complies with the vegetative management requirements at 36 CFR 219.27:

Suitability (36CFR 219.27(c)(1)): The treatment activities selected result in harvest on lands suitable for timber production (FEIS, Section 4.5.2, p. 89).

All sites proposed for timber harvesting have been identified in the Forest Plan as suited for timber production. All sites to be harvested have been inventoried on the ground. Based upon a review of the on-the-ground inventories by a certified silviculturist, all have been determined to meet suitability pursuant to 36 CFR 219.27(c)(1). Reference FEIS Appendix A for a list of each stand and site specific information for each stand including proposed harvest by alternative. Further detail is found in stand database information which is located in the McCaslin Analysis file.

Vegetation Manipulation (36 CFR 219.27(b)): Vegetation manipulation treatments prescribed in all actions are consistent with Management Area prescriptions described in the Forest Plan. The Management Area prescriptions in the Forest Plan were found to be best suited for multiple use and diversity goals consistent with 36 CFR 219.27 in the 1986 Forest Plan ROD.

Even-aged management (36 CFR 219.27(d))

No timber harvests where even-aged management is prescribed will result in cut blocks exceeding 40 acres in size. I find timber harvest cut blocks have been designed consistent with 36 CFR 219.27 (d).

Clearcutting is Optimum (36 CFR 219.27(b)1 and USC 1604(g)(3)): For each site where the clearcutting method is prescribed, it has been compared to other silvicultural options by a certified silviculturist and determined to be the best method to achieve resource objectives (FEIS, p. 94 and Forest Plan, p. A-4 and A-6). This determination was not based solely on maximum economic return. I therefore find, where prescribed, clearcutting is the optimum method, consistent with 16 USC 1604 (g)3(F)(i).

Assurance of Restocking (36 CFR 219.27(c)(3)): A certified silviculturist has reviewed all timber harvest sites that are cut to achieve timber management objectives. Based upon this review, and the review of reforestation success on similar sites (FEIS Appendix A and Table 2-1), I have determined that the technology and knowledge exist to adequately restock the lands within five years after final harvest (FEIS Sec. 4.5.2).

Endangered Species Act: Pursuant to FSM 2670 governing threatened and endangered species consultation, and as required under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, we initiated consultation for this project with the USFWS on March 30, 2001. On May 1, 2001, we received a letter from the USFWS (see Biological Evaluation, and Agency Consultation; Project File) indicating proposed actions would have “No Effect” to Federally threatened, endangered, or proposed species and precluded the need for further consultation on this project.

Executive Order (EO) 12898 (Environmental Justice): I have reviewed this action in accordance with Executive Order 12898 (consideration of environmental justice, see FEIS Section 4.13.8). I find scoping was adequate to inform low income and minority populations that may be affected by this action. Based upon other agency consultation and internal and public scoping, no concerns of disproportionate health or environmental effects were identified. Adverse environmental 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”.

Clean Air Act: All actions will be in compliance with the Clean Air Act (FEIS, Section 4.4, pp. 85-6). There are no Class I airsheds within or adjacent to the Project Area. Effects from prescribed fire and road dust will not affect compliance with the Clean Air Act.

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act: Actions proposed are in compliance with the Clean Water Act (see discussion under FEIS Sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.5 (pp. 81, 84)). Any necessary permits will be obtained prior to implementing any stream work.

National Historic Preservation Act: All actions will be in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (see discussion under Sections 3.11 and 4.11 (DEIS, pp. 66-8, 142-4)).

Review of the DEIS by EPA: The US Environmental Protection Agency reviewed the McCaslin DEIS and surfaced concerns about forest fragmentation impacts, conflicts with current Forest Plan revision efforts, and impacts to golden-winged warbler. The EPA felt the DEIS did not provide enough information to fully address their concerns in these areas.

An in-depth analysis comparing the effects of fragmentation between alternatives (including cumulative effects) is found in the FEIS, Section 4.6.2. Although it identifies changes in fragmentation measures between alternatives, they are small. The alternative I selected will result in less fragmentation than the preferred alternative identified in the DEIS. From Table 4.6-1 of the FEIS, Alternative 5 decreases interior habitat only 3% (from 40% to 37% of the McCaslin area). Miles of edge actually decreases 1% (from 855 to 846 miles). The EPA had concerns that cumulative effects of adjacent trends of land development were not considered in the DEIS, but then recognized the DEIS as disclosing this trend of development (FEIS p. 109). Therefore, I find this effect was considered in the cumulative effects analysis. Because the FEIS predicted most of the Alternative 5 change in fragmentation measures to be temporary (less than 10 years) (FEIS p. 106), I do not find it appropriate to add them to very speculative changes in development that might occur after 10 years (FEIS pp. 109-110), as these effects would not overlap in time.

I have reviewed the analysis of potential conflicts between my decision and the Forest Plan revision effort. Since the release of the McCaslin DEIS, a Proposed Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan has become available for review. My review of the Proposed Plan still shows no conflicts between McCaslin and revision efforts. This is clarified in our response to EPA’s comments (Appendix I), and in Errata between the McCaslin DEIS and FEIS (attached).

EPA’s concern over golden-winged warbler arose from a typographical error in the DEIS. This error gave the appearance of a large effect on the warbler. This was discussed with the EPA over the phone and corrected in the FEIS through the Errata.

I find we have responded to, and adequately addressed, EPA’s concerns of inadequacies in the DEIS.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVES

The only individual or agency (outside of the McCaslin Interdisciplinary Team) to specifically comment on the topic of environmentally preferred alternatives was the EPA (EPA letter 04/21/2003, Project File). In its review of the DEIS, the EPA recommended Alternatives 1 and 3 as environmentally preferable. The EPA's preference was based upon their judgment that the smaller amount forest fragmentation in these alternatives would have less environmental impact on neotropical migratory birds.

I have considered the EPA's recommendation in my determination of environmentally preferable alternatives. I have adopted the EPA's recommendation for Alternative 3 in my determination of environmentally preferable alternatives, along with Alternatives 2, 4, and 5. I have not adopted Alternative 1 as an environmentally preferable alternative.

Although the McCaslin FEIS identifies small changes in forest fragmentation, the differences between alternatives show no clear advantage of one alternative over another in term of effects to forest birds (see FEIS Section 4.7.5.5, Tables 4.7-2a and 4.7-2b). None of the alternatives result in impacts that are unacceptable or outside of the range of desired habitats identified in the Forest Plan. All would provide adequate habitat for species of concern (FEIS Sections 4.7.1 to 4.7.4 and Appendix D).

On reviewing the environmental effects of each alternative in respect to damage to the biological and physical environment and protection of historical, cultural and natural resources (FSH 1909.15 §05), I find all of the action alternatives are essentially equal in minimizing environmental damage and protecting resources. The FEIS identified no significant, adverse effects from any of the action alternatives. The main differences between the alternatives are not the environmental impacts, but the differences in the values emphasized in attaining desired resource conditions. Therefore, I find all action alternatives to be environmentally preferable.

Alternative 1 (No Action) differs substantially from action alternatives by its inability to address existing road problems identified in the analysis. An important component of the Forest Service Road Management Policy is to minimize adverse impacts from roads (36 CFR 212). Road reconstruction and decommissioning analyzed in the action alternatives would result in less erosion and less open road density (concerns also surfaced by the EPA) than would occur with No Action. Therefore, I do not find Alternative 1 an environmentally preferable alternative.

APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7 (November 4, 1993). A written notice of appeal must be submitted within 45 days after the date the notice of this decision is published in the Journal/Sentinel, published in Milwaukee, WI, to:

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, Regional Forester Randy Moore
626 East Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 700
Milwaukee, WI 53202
(Facsimile number 414-944-3963)

Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14 (November 4, 1993). At a minimum, your Notice of Appeal must include:

- A statement that your document is an appeal filed according to 36 CFR part 215
- Your name, address, and if possible, telephone number
- The decision being appealed by title and subject
- Decision date and responsible official (below)

CONTACT PERSON

The FEIS and supporting documents are available for public review at the Lakewood Office, 15085 State Road 32 Lakewood, WI, 54138. For further information on this decision, contact John Lampereur at the Lakewood Office, phone (715) 276-6333 or (715) 276-3594 (fax).

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is filed, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of a decision on the appeal.

/S/ Laurie Tippin for
ANNE F. ARCHIE
Forest Supervisor
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

September 29, 2003
Date