

Access and Recreation Opportunities

Wilderness

Introduction

The Wilderness Act of 1964 emphasizes the protection of Federal lands that have maintained their primitive character. Under the Act, designated areas became part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Wilderness areas provide solitude in a relatively primitive and unconfined environment. They also may contain features of ecological, scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

The ecological value of Wilderness is discussed in the “Biological Diversity” section of this chapter. This section addresses Wilderness as a Forest recreation resource and the evaluation of the wilderness potential of roadless areas.

Current Condition

There are five congressionally designated Wilderness areas on the Forests. They are shown, along with the year of designation and appropriate acreage, in Table 3-40.

Table 3-40. Wilderness Acres on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests

Year Enacted	Wilderness	Forest	Acres
1975 Eastern Wilderness Act	Rainbow Lake	Chequamegon	6,583
1984 Wisconsin Wilderness Act	Porcupine Lake	Chequamegon	4,235
		Chequamegon Subtotal	10,818
1984 Wisconsin Wilderness Act	Headwaters	Nicolet	20,104
1978 Enactment	Blackjack Springs	Nicolet	5,886
1978 Enactment	Whisker Lake	Nicolet	7,345
		Nicolet Subtotal	33,258
Combined Rounded Total			44,000

Current Management Direction

Current management direction allows natural forces to shape designated Wilderness areas. Wilderness areas are places where natural processes, not the hand of man, determine the course of forest development. Wildfires on the CNNF, however, are extinguished because of the small size of most Wilderness areas and the presence of private land near or within the boundaries. Although wildfires are relatively infrequent on the Forests, avoiding the potential threat to private property is given higher priority than allowing any fires to run their course.

Managing these areas includes scientific monitoring, managing recreation impacts on campsites and trails, and removing non-conforming structures. The Rainbow Lake Wilderness is a Class 1 air quality area and is monitored periodically to ensure Class 1 status.

Proposed Changes and Range of Changes

During forest plan revision, the Forests are required by the Wisconsin Wilderness Act of 1984 and by the 1982 National Forest Management Act (NFMA) to evaluate all areas on the Forests that meet roadless criteria for possible Wilderness designation.

The Forests identified eight potential new Wilderness areas in the “Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Forest Plan Revision Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Evaluation, June 17, 2002.” The document is summarized in Appendix C of the FEIS. Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative recommend some or all of the areas identified in the Forest inventory for designation as Wilderness areas (Management Area 5B). Acres of Management Area (MA) 5B in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative range from a low of 6,349 acres (Alternative 2) to a high of 56,063 acres (Alternative 4). Alternative 1 maintains current management direction provided by the 1986 Plans and therefore does not recommend any additional Wilderness areas.

Two areas from the 2002 Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Evaluation were also mapped as roadless areas in the FEIS for the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This rule is now under injunction and is not considered implementable. The section called “Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study” in Chapter 2 of this document addresses this situation.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Descriptions and Inventory

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) system is a method used by the Forest Service to zone recreation opportunities on National Forests and Grasslands. This system classifies land areas based on physical, social, and managerial attributes. Land classifications range from the most remote and undeveloped (“primitive” classification) to the most developed settings (“urban” classification).

The full spectrum includes the following:

- Primitive
- Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)
- Semi-Primitive Motorized
- Roaded Natural Remote
- Roaded Natural
- Rural
- Urban

Existing CNNF Wilderness areas are classified SPNM, the second most primitive classification. ROS criteria for SPNM areas were used to identify additional roadless areas for Wilderness recommendation. For the most part, the ROS physical setting criteria for SPNM areas were strictly followed during the roadless area inventory and wilderness evaluation. However, 1,700-acre Porcupine Lake Addition and 6,300 acre Flynn Lake were considered for MA 5B designation even though each had an estimated core area that was smaller than the 2,500-acre ROS criteria.

Recommended Wilderness Study Areas

For each of the alternatives, roadless areas recommended for Wilderness status (MA 5B) are displayed in Table 3-41. Recommended Wilderness study areas are also shown on maps in the Map Packet titled “Recreation Management Emphasis, Open Road Density and Special Land Allocations” for Alternatives 1-9 and on the “Road Density” map for the Selected Alternative.

Table 3-41. Roadless Areas Recommended for Wilderness (MA 5B) by Alternative

Roadless Area	Acres	Alt.1	Alt.2	Alt.3	Alt.4	Alt.5	Alt.6	Alt.7	Alt.9	SA
Flynn Lake	6,300		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Porcupine Addition	1,700			*	*	*		*	*	* 1400 ac
Iron River	8,300				*					
Hungry Run	7,400				*	*	*			
Spring Brook	7,800				*		*	*	*	*
Schmuland/Popple	7,100				*					
Mud Lake	10,000				*			*		
Stony Creek	7,500				*		*			
Total Acres		0	6,300	8,000	56,100	15,400	29,000	25,800	15,800	15,500

Only Alternative 4 recommended all eight of the areas that were identified in the Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Evaluation for MA 5B designation. Potential Wilderness areas were assigned other Management Area designations such as MA 1A, 1C, 2A, 2B, 2C, 6B, and 8C if they were not selected as potential Wilderness in an alternative. Of these, Management Area 6B (Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, moderate disturbance) provides the potential for the least amount of impact from other resource uses. Limited timber harvest is allowed in this MA, and any road corridors present are closed to the driving public. Table 3-42 shows, by alternative, areas with Wilderness potential that are not designated as MA 5B and the percent of those areas that are most likely to retain their undeveloped character (i.e. designated as MA 6B).

Table 3-42. Areas with Wilderness Potential that are NOT Included as Recommended Wilderness Study Areas in Each Alternative and Percent of that Area that is Most Likely to Retain its Undeveloped Character as MA 6B.

	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5	Alt 6	Alt 7	Alt 9	SA
Acres of Recommended Wilderness Study Areas included in each alternative	0	6,300	8,000	56,100	15,400	29,000	25,800	15,800	15,500
Area with Wilderness Potential but NOT Included as MA 5B	56,100	49,800	48,100	0	40,700	27,100	30,300	40,300	40,600
Percent of Area with Wilderness Potential Most Likely to Retain Undeveloped Character (MA 6B)	11%	16%	47%	N/A	19%	6%	0%	22%	0%

Direct and Indirect Effects

Effects on Opportunities for Non-Motorized Semi-Primitive Experiences from Recommended Wilderness Study Areas and Roadless Area Management

Non-motorized, semi-primitive recreation activities include hiking, canoeing, hunting, fishing, primitive camping, and nature viewing. Opportunities for non-motorized, semi-primitive activities increase in all alternatives except Alternative 1, where existing Wilderness areas are maintained but no new areas are proposed. Alternative 4 includes all eight roadless areas as proposed Wilderness for a 56,063-acre increase over existing conditions. Table 3-41 displays the areas and acreages by alternative.

The Selected Alternative recommends three of the eight roadless areas—6,300 acre Flynn Lake, 1,400 acres of the Porcupine Addition, and 7,800 acre Spring Brook—for Wilderness designation. Two of these, Flynn Lake and the Porcupine Addition, were recommended for Wilderness designation in the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5) as well. Hungry Run, the third and final potential Wilderness area in the Preferred Alternative, is not recommended for Wilderness in the Selected Alternative.

With these changes, the Selected Alternative recommends more potential Wilderness than Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, less potential Wilderness than Alternatives 4, 6, and 7, and about the same as Alternatives 5 and 9 (Table 3-41). The five roadless areas not selected as potential Wilderness areas in the Selected Alternative were assigned other Management Area designations as follows: Iron River—2C; Hungry Run—2B; Schmuland/Popple Creek—8C and 1A; Mud Lake—2A and 1A; and Stony Creek—2C and non-motorized with full vegetation management.

Effects on Dispersed and Developed Campsite Use from Recommended Wilderness Study Areas and Roadless Area Management

Developed campsites are in designated campgrounds and have improvements such as spurs, fire rings, picnic tables, drinking water, and rest rooms. Designated campgrounds average about 30 campsites, with the smallest having 6 campsites and the largest, 99. Designated campgrounds often include picnic areas and beaches and some offer interpretive programs and/or trails. All are easily accessible from well-maintained roads. Since there are no developed campgrounds within roadless areas, campground use will be unaffected by proposed changes in recommended Wilderness study areas and Roadless Area management.

There are 196 dispersed campsites on the Forests. A dispersed site may have some improvements such as designated parking, fire rings, picnic tables, and rest rooms. Dispersed sites are usually single isolated sites. However, a few dispersed sites have four to six campsites grouped together. Some dispersed sites are located off of well-maintained roads while others are not. Dispersed sites are not part of a designated campground and usually do not include picnic areas or beaches.

There are 3 vehicle-accessible dispersed campsites within the eight potential Wilderness areas. Two of these, one in Schmuland/Popple and one in Stony Creek, are either on or very near the perimeter road that forms the boundary of the Roadless Area. Since perimeter roads will remain open to motorized traffic even if the areas are designated as MA 5B, vehicle access to these sites is not likely to change. The third site (Flynn Lake) is accessible from an interior road that will be closed due to potential wilderness designation; use of the Flynn Lake campsite will shift to those who prefer more primitive means of travel.

Table 3-43 shows the number of dispersed campsites on both perimeter and interior roads by alternative. In Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, access to one currently vehicle-accessible dispersed campsite within the Flynn Lake Roadless Area will be closed to motorized use (Table 3-43). Use of this site will shift to non-motorized users once the access road is closed to motorized vehicles. Campsites on perimeter roads will remain vehicle accessible. In all alternatives, including the Selected Alternative, there are no developed or improved campsites within recommended Wilderness study areas. Therefore, changes in recommended Wilderness study area allocations are not expected to affect developed campsite access in any of the alternatives.

Table 3-43. Dispersed Campsites within Proposed Wilderness by Alternative

	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6	Alt. 7	Alt. 9	SA
Dispersed Campsites, on Perimeter Road	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
Dispersed Campsites, on Interior Road	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total Dispersed Sites within Proposed Wilderness	0	1	1	3	1	2	1	1	1

Effects on Hunting Access from Recommended Wilderness Study Areas and Roadless Area Management

Vehicle hunting access in recommended Wilderness study areas would be restricted to perimeter roads and trails. No full-size vehicles, All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV), or snowmobiles would be permitted on interior roads or trails. Hunting access in all recommended Wilderness study areas would change from some level of vehicle access to no interior vehicle access. Table 3-44 shows the estimated miles of improved system roads that would no longer be available for car, truck, ATV, or snowmobile use within recommended Wilderness study areas. This analysis is based on the assumption that all interior roads currently closed to street-legal cars and trucks are currently open to ATVs or snowmobiles as per the 1986 Chequamegon National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

In general, Maintenance Level 3-5 roads—roads maintained to the standards required for passenger car traffic—were considered “improved” in the Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Evaluation. In addition, some Maintenance Level 1 (closed to vehicle use) and Maintenance Level 2 (maintained for high-clearance vehicles) roads with improvements such as non-native surfacing, crowned travelways, or drainage structures were also identified as “improved” (FEIS, Appendix C p C6).

As shown in Table 3-43, miles of improved roads to be closed in recommended Wilderness study areas ranges from a low of 0.5 miles in Alternative 2 to a high of 14 miles in Alternative 4 depending on MA 5B acreage allocations. Vehicle-assisted hunting access will decrease from current levels in all alternatives except Alternative 1, which does not recommend any Roadless Areas for Wilderness status. Alternative 9 and the Selected Alternative both require the closure of an estimated 3.6 miles of improved road. Hunters are likely to find slightly fewer opportunities for motorized access to hunting grounds in the Selected Alternative than in Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 5 but more opportunities than Alternatives 4, 6, and 7.

Table 3-44. Improved Roads to be Closed in Potential Wilderness (MA 5B) Areas

	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6	Alt. 7	Alt. 9	SA
Improved Roads to be Closed, Estimated Miles	0	0.5	0.8	14	2.2	6.7	6	3.6	3.6

Effects on Motorized Trails due to Wilderness Recommendations

Motorized trails within recommended Wilderness study (MA 5B) areas will be relocated when acceptable alternative routes have been found outside the area. Use of the trails may continue until that time. The Forest Service will work with local communities in order to facilitate the relocation process. The relocation of motorized trails from MA 5B areas will increase recreation opportunities for people who enjoy more primitive forms of recreation like hiking, nature viewing, biking, and canoeing. Over time, those who prefer motorized recreation will find fewer opportunities in these areas.

Figure 3-47 shows estimated miles of motorized trails that will need to be relocated due to Wilderness recommendations in all alternatives. As shown, approximately 14 miles of motorized trails will need to be relocated in Alternative 4, compared to about 8 miles in Alternative 6, 5 miles in Alternative 7, 3 miles in Alternative 5, and 2 miles in Alternatives 3 and 9. Alternatives 1, 2, and the Selected Alternative would not require the relocation of any existing motorized trails. For this reason, Wilderness recommendations in the Selected Alternative are expected to cause fewer disruptions to motorized trail users than those of Alternatives 3-9.

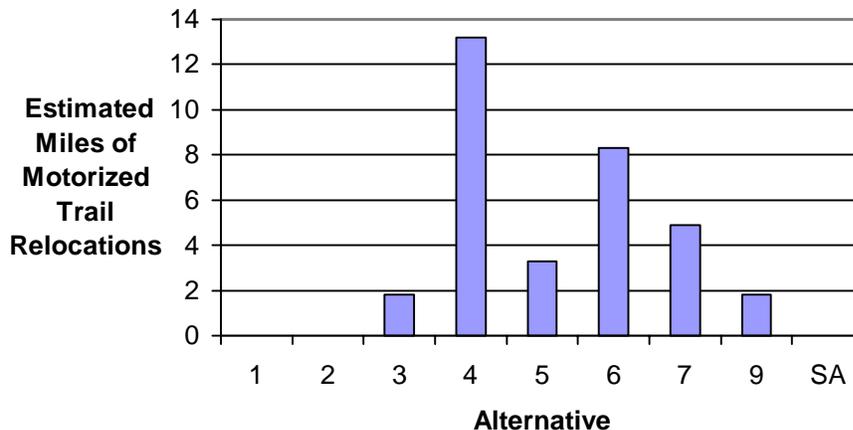


Figure 3-47. Estimated Miles of Motorized Trail Relocations due to Recommended Wilderness Study Area (MA 5B) Designations

Cumulative Effects

The state of Wisconsin and much of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan are considered the Cumulative Effects Area for Wilderness opportunities.

Most National Forests in the Lake States, including the Chequamegon-Nicolet, are crisscrossed by a complex web of old road corridors and narrow gauge railways that were constructed in the late 1800s when forests in the region were severely cut over. Many are still in use today by motorized recreationists. Temporary logging roads and more

permanent access roads have also been added to the Forests’ network of roads through the years. Therefore, few areas on the Forests met the criteria of the 1975 Eastern Wilderness Act. Appendix C of the “2002 Forest Plan Revision Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Evaluation” includes a more detailed assessment of the criteria used to evaluate potential Wilderness areas.

Under the Wisconsin Wilderness Act of 1984, the Forests are required to evaluate the Wilderness potential of all areas meeting certain roadless criteria during forest plan revision. As part of the 2002 Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Evaluation, 18 of the potential Wilderness areas identified in the second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) of 1979 were reevaluated along with 49 other areas, including those identified in the recent Roadless Area Conservation Rule Final Environmental Statement (RACRF). Eight of the 67 areas considered, including one of the original RARE II areas (Flynn Lake), were identified as prospective Wilderness areas. The others were eliminated because of past road construction and insufficient core size. The eight potential Wilderness areas are listed in Table 3-41.

In National Forests, State Forests, National Parks, and National Wildlife Refuges in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, more than 350,000 acres are managed for wilderness characteristics (USDA FS 2002; WDNR 2003e). Wilderness studies are currently underway on the Apostle Islands and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshores as well. The CNNF, with 44,000 acres of Wilderness, currently provides about 12% of the total for Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (Figure 3-48).

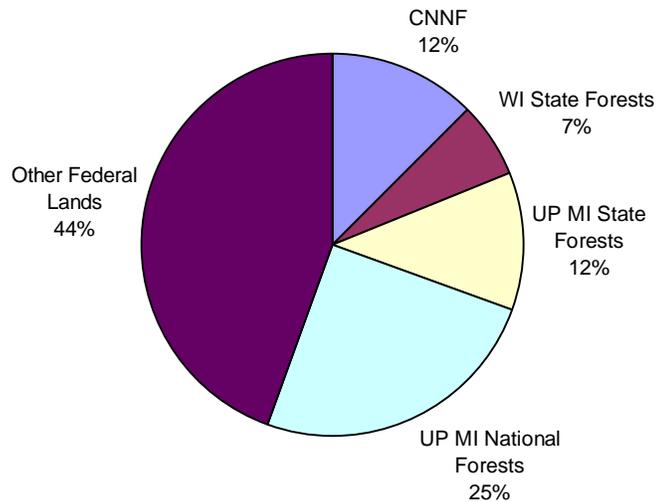


Figure 3-48. Ownership of Public Lands Managed for Wilderness Characteristics in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (353,000 acres, total)

The 2004 Forest Plan will expand the CNNF’s Wilderness system and provide more opportunities for those who enjoy the isolation, seclusion, and challenge of a wilderness experience. While roads and motorized trails that border recommended Wilderness study areas will remain open and will continue to provide access for hunting, camping, or non-motorized forms of recreation, all interior roads will be closed. Therefore, reaching more

remote parts of proposed Wilderness areas far from perimeter roads will require some degree of physical challenge and risk but will reward the visitor with exposure to some of the wildest and most remote areas in the State.

Like Alternatives 5 and 9, the Selected Alternative will provide close to 16,000 additional acres of potential Wilderness, bringing the Forests' Wilderness/Recommended Wilderness Study Area system to 60,000 acres—4% of the Forests' 1.5 million acres and a 36% increase over existing Wilderness acreage (Figure 3-49). The other alternatives call for a minimum 14% increase over existing Wilderness acreage in Alternative 2 to a maximum 127% increase in Alternative 4. The expansion of the Forests' Wilderness System called for in the Selected Alternative will create more opportunities for the enjoyment of a variety of non-motorized and non-mechanized recreation activities and protect some of the wildest and most remote natural areas in the State.

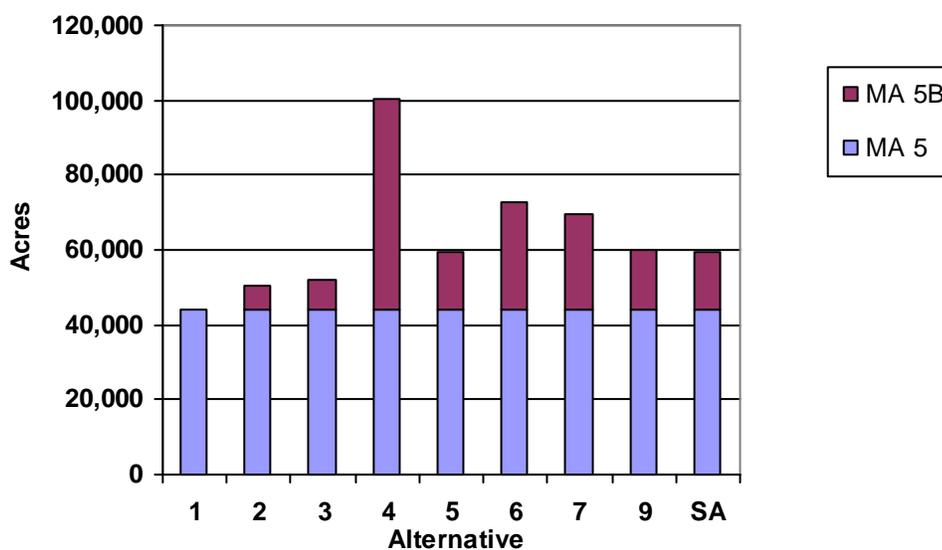


Figure 3-49. Acres of Wilderness and Recommended Wilderness Study Areas by Alternative

Since the eight Roadless Areas considered for Wilderness designation contain few roads that are regularly traveled by passenger vehicles, designating these areas as recommended Wilderness study areas would have little impact on vehicle access. A maximum of nineteen miles of road in potential Wilderness areas would be closed in Alternative 4 while only one mile of road would be closed in Alternative 2. About 3.6 miles would be closed in the Selected Alternative. Road closures may adversely affect local access opportunities for hunters, fishermen, and other forest visitors seeking motorized recreation opportunities. They would, however, increase opportunities for visitors interested in more remote, physically challenging hunting, camping, hiking (etc.) experiences. As roads are closed, access to the recommended Wilderness study areas would shift to those who prefer non-motorized forms of recreation.

Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized

Introduction

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests provide a range of recreation opportunities, including non-motorized activities. Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) areas are specifically intended to provide the forest visitor with a remote, secluded experience, free from the sounds and presence of motorized vehicles. The Chequamegon-Nicolet is one of the few places in Wisconsin with a land base large enough and contiguous enough to provide opportunities for solitude or for relatively primitive, unconfined types of recreation.

Current Condition

Table 3-45 shows existing SPNM areas on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests designated in the 1986 Chequamegon and Nicolet Forest Plans.

Table 3-45. Forest SPNM Areas

Name	Forest	Acreage
Star Lake	Chequamegon	5,070
Flynn Lake	Chequamegon	6,655
Big Brook	Chequamegon	4,740
Marengo	Chequamegon	2,890
Brunswailer	Chequamegon	3,490
Rock Lake	Chequamegon	2,960
Spring Brook	Chequamegon	7,600
Round Lake	Chequamegon	3,400
Elk River	Chequamegon	4,350
Ice Age	Chequamegon	5,520
Bear Creek	Chequamegon	5,420
Jones Spring	Nicolet	1,800
Ed's Lake	Nicolet	2,000
Anvil Lake	Nicolet	1,300
Lauterman Lake	Nicolet	4,400
Catwillow	Nicolet	4,100
Total SPNM Acres Rounded		69,000

Current Management Direction

All SPNM areas designated in the 1986 Chequamegon and Nicolet Forest Plans were available for timber management. Some of the Chequamegon SPNM areas had no timber management scheduled during the current plan cycle while other areas were treated with several timber harvests. The Nicolet SPNM areas had some timber harvest in the early part of the planning cycle but have not had any harvest since. One of the concerns raised in the Notice of Intent (NOI) was that harvest activities within the SPNM areas resulted in levels of human disturbance that were much the same as the rest of the forests, limiting the recreational value of some of the areas.

Recreation management of SPNM areas is geared toward non-motorized recreation activities, including hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing, dispersed camping, fishing, observing nature, and hunting. However, there are opportunities for motorized recreation within or near several existing SPNM areas. One snowmobile trail currently crosses Ed's Lake SPNM area. Snowmobile trails also exist along (or very near) the perimeters of Lauterman, Spring Brook, and Rock Lake SPNM areas. These trails existed

prior to 1986 when the areas were first designated SPNM. The Forest Service uses motorized equipment to groom ski trails in six of the current SPNM areas.

Proposed Changes and Range of Changes

In response to legal mandates, public concerns, and internal concerns about existing non-motorized and SPNM management, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests has proposed a five-tiered approach for managing areas for non-motorized recreation. The purpose is to offer a wide range of non-motorized recreation opportunities in a variety of settings from designated wilderness (very little or no evidence of human presence) to intensively managed areas. It includes the following categories:

- **Existing Wilderness** (Management Area (MA) 5)
- **Proposed Wilderness** (MA 5B)
- **Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM), Low Disturbance** (MA 6A) where no scheduled timber harvests will occur
- **Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM), Moderate Disturbance** (MA 6B) where timber harvests are scheduled but where additional harvest restrictions apply.
- Areas where full timber management will occur but where all interior roads will be closed to public use (**Non-Motorized with Full Vegetation Management**; sometimes called NM or XX.0, with the Xs referring to the management area vegetation emphasis (MA 1-4) and the zero representing zero open road density).

One of the concerns raised in the NOI was that management of existing SPNM areas made them appear no different from the rest of the Forests. In response, the Forests offered the above range of non-motorized recreation areas so the public will know what to expect when entering a specific area. The purpose is to offer a wide range of options—from very low levels of human disturbance to highly disturbed settings—to people seeking a non-motorized experience.

Tables 3-46, 3-47 and 3-48 show the name and acreage of MA 6A, 6B and Non-Motorized areas with full vegetation management by alternative. Locations of these areas are shown in the Map Set on the “Recreation, Management Emphasis, Open Road Density and Special Land Allocations” maps for Alternatives 1-9 and on the “Management Areas” maps for the Selected Alternative.

SPNM areas in the Selected Alternative are quite similar to those listed in Tables 3-46 and 3-48 for Alternative 5. However, 7,775 acre Spring Brook, allocated as MA 6B in Alternative 5, is a recommended Wilderness study areas in the Selected Alternative. In addition, Star Lake changes from MA 6A in Alternative 5 to MA 6B in the Selected Alternative and Marengo and Anvil Lake both change from MA 6B in Alternative 5 to MA 6A in the Selected Alternative.

Table 3-46. Management Area 6A: Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, Low Disturbance

Area Name	Acres	Alt.1	Alt.2	Alt.3	Alt.4	Alt.5	Alt.6	Alt.7	Alt.9	SA
Star Lake	5,510			*	*	*	*	*		
Eight Lakes	1,431			*	*			*		
Flynn Lake Addition	416		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Big Brook	6,083				*					
Porcupine NW	2,760			*	*			*		
Marengo	3,232			*	*			*		*
Brunswailer	3,913			*	*					
St. Peters Dome	4,631		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Beaver Lake	4,608			*	*					
Rock Lake	3,150		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Rock Lake II	5,691				*					
Wabasso	2,028		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Elk River	4,486			*	*			*		
Lost Lake	7,471				*					
Leroy Creek	14,495			*	*					
Bailey Lake	8,145				*					
Jones Spring	3,385			*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Wabikon-Riley	1,104		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Anvil Lake	2,184			*	*			*		*
Lauterman Lake	7,321			*	*			*		
Rounded Totals		0	11,300	64,600	92,000	20,200	20,200	41,700	14,700	20,100

NOTE: Acre figures for some areas included in 1986 plans have changed due to boundary changes and recent land acquisition.

Table 3-47. Management Area 6B: Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, Moderate Disturbance

Area Name	Acres	Alt.1	Alt.2	Alt.3	Alt.4	Alt.5	Alt.6	Alt.7	Alt.9	SA
Star Lake	5,510									*
Eight Lakes	1,431						*			
Flynn Lake	6,765									
Big Brook	6,083		*	*		*	*	*	*	*
Porcupine NW	2,760		*			*	*		*	*
Porcupine South	1,679						*			
Marengo	3,232		*			*	*		*	
Brunswelier	3,913		*			*	*	*	*	*
Beaver Lake	4,608							*	*	
Rock Lake	3,150									
Rock Lake II	5,691		*	*		*	*	*	*	*
Black Lake	7,543				*					
Spring Brook	7,775		*	*		*				
Hungry Run	7,363			*					*	
Round Lake	3,133			*	*	*		*	*	*
Elk River	4,486		*			*	*		*	*
Ice Age	5,887									
Lake Eleven	1,674				*					
Bear Creek	5,420									
Stony Creek	7,498			*					*	
Lost Lake	7,471			*				*		
Leroy Creek	14,495							*		
Bailey Lake	8,145			*				*		
Jones Spring	3,385		*							
State School Trust	10,358			*	*			*		
Lilypad	13,174			*	*					
Popple River	8,839			*	*					
Peshtigo River	7,974				*					
Ed's Lake	2,198		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Honey Creek	2,705		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Bear Lake	7,891			*	*				*	
Rose Lake	7,862				*					
McComb Lake	4,301		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Bear Paw Lake	5,587			*	*				*	
Anvil Lake	2,184		*			*	*		*	
Lauterman Lake	7,321		*			*	*		*	*
Catwillow	5,100									
Rounded Totals		0	56,000	108,200	83,200	55,800	48,000	73,100	81,000	48,000

NOTE: Acre figures for some areas included in 1986 plans have changed due to boundary changes and recent land acquisition.

Table 3-48. Non-Motorized Areas With Full Timber Management ((NM or XX.0)

Area Name	Acres	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6	Alt. 7	Alt. 9	SA
Star Lake	5,510		*						*	
Eight Lakes	1,431								*	
Cut Across	2,927			*	*		*	*		
Porcupine South	1,679		*							
St. Peters Dome	4,631									
Beaver Lake	4,608					*	*			
Tea Lake	7,915		*	*	*		*	*	*	
Christy Lake	9,509				*	*	*	*		
Little Moose	9,637			*	*	*	*	*		*
Black Lake	7,543			*			*	*	*	
Round Lake	3,133		*				*			
Wilson Flowage	7,586	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ice Age	5,887			*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Kidrick Swamp	6,217			*	*		*	*		
Lake Eleven	1,674			*		*	*	*	*	*
Schmuland/Popple Creek	6,260				*		*	*		
Stony Creek	7,498		*			*		*		*
Lost Lake	7,471						*		*	
Leroy Creek	14,495						*		*	
Bailey Lake	8,145						*		*	
Jones Spring	3,385								*	
State School Trust	10,358								*	
Lilypad	13,174									
Popple River	11,900									
Atkins	6,396				*					
Peshtigo River	7,974			*				*		
Bear Lake	7,891					*	*	*		*
Bear Paw Lake	5,587					*				
Waupee	4,602			*	*	*		*		*
Rounded Totals		7,600	33,300	62,000	66,900	64,500	110,900	93,100	78,000	42,500

NOTE: Acre figures for some areas included in 1986 plans have changed due to boundary changes and recent land acquisition

Alternative 5 calls for the designation of 10 NM areas—a total of 64,500 acres. The Selected Alternative includes 7 of these areas but drops three—4,608 acre Beaver Lake, 9,509 acre Christy Lake, and 7,891 acre Bear Lake—from consideration, bringing total NM acres in the Selected Alternative to 42,500 acres.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Descriptions and Inventory

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) system is a method used by the Forest Service to zone recreation opportunities. This system classifies land areas based on physical, social, and managerial attributes. The land classifications range from the most remote and undeveloped (“primitive” classification) to the most developed settings (“urban” classification).

The full spectrum includes the following:

- Primitive
- Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)
- Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)

- Roded Natural Remote (RNR)
- Roded Natural (RN)
- Rural (R)
- Urban

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests used the ROS criteria as a guide when identifying potential new SPNM areas. Primarily, the Forests considered how well the potential SPNM areas met the size and isolation requirements set by ROS for designated SPNM areas. However, since some of the potential areas did not meet the minimum ROS physical criteria, the Forests also considered other recreation quality factors such as the amount of topographic relief; the presence of fishable lakes, streams, long-lived tree species, or large diameter trees; and the management and ownership of adjoining private lands.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Effects on Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized and Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunities (Full Veg. Mgt.) from Alternative SPNM and Non-Motorized Designations.

SPNM low disturbance (MA 6A), SPNM moderate disturbance (MA 6B), and Non-Motorized Areas with Full Vegetative Management (NM) provide opportunities for recreation activities that may include hiking, canoeing, hunting, fishing, primitive camping, biking, and observing nature. Opportunities for SPNM and non-motorized activities increase in all alternatives except Alternative 1, which maintains existing SPNM and non-motorized areas but does not propose any new areas.

Increased SPNM area provides a) more opportunities to recreate in more natural, less-disturbed settings; b) less contact with other visitors; c) less contact with the sights and sounds of civilization, including engine noise and motorized vehicles; and d) somewhat more demanding physical challenge. The limitations and restrictions on vegetation management activities within MA 6A and MA 6B areas further enhance these characteristics.

As in SPNM areas, less contact with other visitors, increased physical challenge, and less exposure to the sights, sounds, and smells of motors are expected in NM areas. However, because they are available for full timber management, NM areas are likely to show more evidence of human disturbance than SPNM areas.

As shown in Figure 3-50, Alternatives 2, 5, 6, and the Selected Alternative all call for roughly the same amount of SPNM areas; little or no difference in effects is expected between these alternatives. Alternatives 9, 7, 3, and 4 all have considerably more SPNM acreage than the Selected Alternative, with 95,700 acres, 114,800 acres, 172,600 acres, and 175,200 acres, respectively. The Selected Alternative calls for less NM acreage (42,500 acres) than Alternatives 3-9 but more than Alternatives 1 and 2. As a result, the Selected Alternative will provide fewer opportunities for non-motorized recreation than Alternatives 3-9 but more than Alternatives 1 and 2.

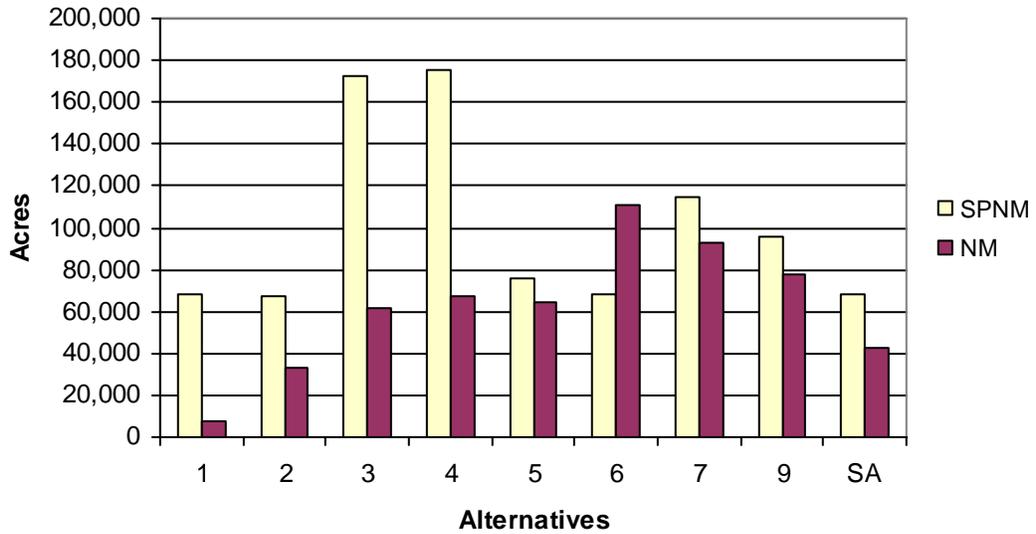


Figure 3-50. Acres of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) and Non-Motorized with Full Vegetation Management (NM) Areas by Alternative.

Acres of SPNM Low Disturbance (MA 6A) and SPNM Moderate Disturbance (MA 6B) are shown in Figure 3-51. Of the two SPNM management areas, levels of human disturbance are expected to be lower in MA 6A than in MA 6B, leading to more natural settings with less evidence of forest management activities. Other characteristics, such as the level of physical challenge and contact with other visitors and with the sights and sounds of civilization, are likely to be similar between MA 6A and MA 6B areas.

As shown in Table 3-47 and Figure 3-53, Alternative 3 has the most acres of MA 6B of all alternatives, with 108,200 acres. Alternative 3 is followed by Alternative 4, 9, 7, 2, 5, and the Selected Alternative and Alternative 6. In terms of MA 6A allocation, Alternative 4 has the most, with 92,000 acres. Alternative 4 is followed by Alternatives 3, 7, 5 and 6, the Selected Alternative, 9, and 2. No new SPNM areas are proposed in Alternative 1.

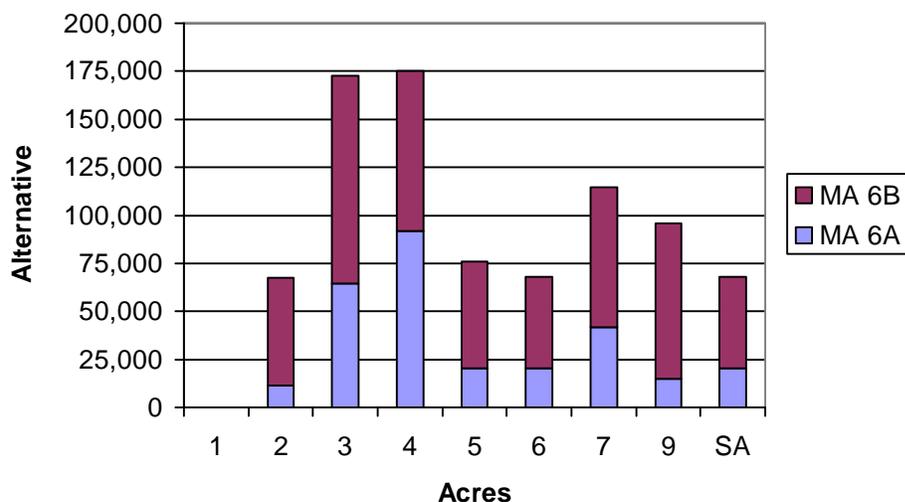


Figure 3-51. Acres on Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized area by Alternative

Effects on Dispersed and Developed Campsite Use from SPNM and Non-Motorized Area (Full Vegetation Management) Designations

Developed campsites are in a designated campground and have improvements such as spurs, fire rings, picnic tables, drinking water, and rest rooms. Designated campgrounds average about 30 campsites but range from a minimum of 6 campsites to a maximum of 99. Designated campgrounds often include picnic areas, beaches, interpretive programs, and/or trails. They are easily accessible off of well-maintained roads.

Developed campsites will be unaffected by new SPNM and NM designations in all alternatives. Four of the five developed campsites in potential SPNM/NM areas are serviced by perimeter roads or town-maintained roads that will remain open even in newly-designated non-motorized areas. The fifth site, the Bear Lake campground on the Lakewood-Laona District, is accessible from a high standard road about ½-mile from the perimeter of the proposed non-motorized area. The Bear Lake area was not included as a potential SPNM or NM area in the Selected Alternative.

There are 196 dispersed campsites on the Forests. Dispersed sites are not part of a designated campground and usually do not include picnic areas or beaches. Dispersed sites sometimes have improvements such as designated parking, fire rings, picnic tables, and rest rooms. Although most dispersed sites are single isolated sites, some have four to six campsites grouped together. Some dispersed campsites are located along well-maintained roads while others are accessible only by foot or horse travel.

There are 63 dispersed sites within the 50 existing and potential SPNM and Non-Motorized areas. Of these 63 sites, 54 are accessible by roads or motorboat. The remaining 9 sites are accessible by hiking or horseback. Of the 54 vehicle accessible sites, 26 are on the perimeter roads of the SPNM and NM areas. Because perimeter roads will remain open, these sites will continue to be vehicle accessible even if the area is designated as SPNM or NM. The 28 remaining vehicle accessible sites are located adjacent to interior roads—roads that will be closed to public vehicle traffic in SPNM/NM areas. Only those using non-motorized means of transportation will be able to access these sites.

Figure 3-52 shows the number of existing vehicle accessible dispersed campsites that would no longer be vehicle accessible due to SPNM/NM allocations. As in Alternatives 4 and 5, access to twenty-eight dispersed campsites in proposed SPNM/NM areas will change from motorized to non-motorized in the Selected Alternative. As the roads to these sites are closed and motorized use of the sites is eliminated, non-motorized users will find more opportunities for primitive camping opportunities at these sites.

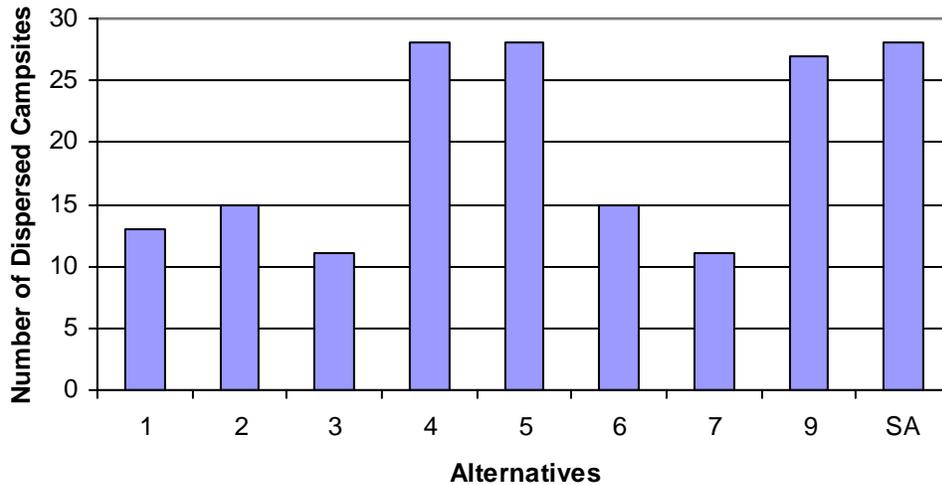


Figure 3-52. Currently Vehicle Accessible Dispersed Campsites that will be Closed to Motorized Vehicles Due to SPNM/NM Designations

Effects on Hunting Access from Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized and Non-Motorized Area (Full Veg. Mgt.) Designations

Vehicle hunting access in SPNM and NM areas will be restricted to perimeter roads/trails. No public motorized vehicles, including ATVs and snowmobiles, will be permitted on interior roads or trails. Figure 3-53 shows the estimated miles of road (Maintenance Level 2-5) that would no longer be available for car, truck, ATV, or snowmobile use within SPNM and Non-Motorized areas. Since some motorized trails, especially snowmobile trails, follow existing road corridors for part or all of their length, there may be some overlap in estimated miles of roads and trails.

Estimated road closures range from a low of approximately 100 miles (Alternative 1) to a high of 650 miles (Alternative 4). In the Selected Alternative, there will be approximately 270 miles of road in SPNM/NM areas that will gradually be closed, compared to about 390 miles in Alternative 5. Motorized access will decrease in all alternatives from current levels. Hunters looking for vehicle access to hunting areas will have fewer opportunities over time as roads within non-motorized areas are closed. At the same time, hunters looking for a hunting experience that requires more physical challenge, less interaction with other hunters, and some separation from motorized vehicles will find more opportunities.

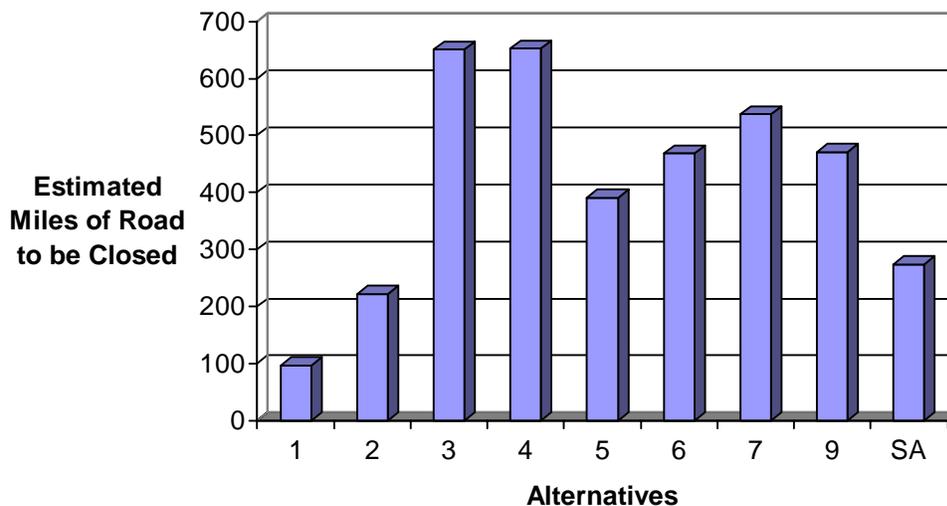


Figure 3-53. Estimated Miles of Road Closures Due to SPNM/NM Allocations

Effects on Motorized Trails from Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized and Non-Motorized (Full Vegetation Management) Area Designations

Motorized trails within designated SPNM/NM areas will be relocated when acceptable alternative routes have been found outside non-motorized areas. Use of the trails may continue until that time. The Forest Service will work with local communities in order to facilitate the relocation process. The relocation of motorized trails from SPNM/NM areas will increase recreation opportunities for people who enjoy more primitive forms of recreation like hiking, nature viewing, biking, and canoeing. Those who prefer motorized recreation will find fewer opportunities over time.

Figure 3-54 shows estimated miles of motorized trails that will need to be relocated due to SPNM/NM designations in all alternatives. Since some motorized trails, especially snowmobile trails, follow existing road corridors for part or all of their length, there may be some overlap in estimated miles of roads and trails. As shown, approximately 50 miles of motorized trails will need to be relocated in the Selected Alternative, compared to 45 miles in Alternative 2, 65 miles in Alternative 5, 90 miles in Alternative 6, 100 miles in Alternatives 7 and 9, 110 miles in Alternative 3, and 120 miles in Alternative 4. Alternative 1 would not require the relocation of any existing motorized trails. Because SPNM/NM designations in the Selected Alternative will require the relocation of fewer miles of trail than Alternatives 3-9, there will be fewer disruptions to motorized trail users.

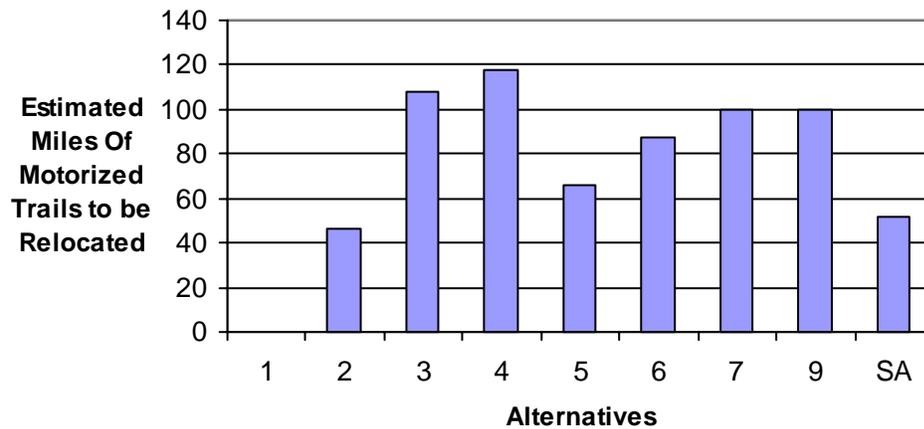


Figure 3-54. Estimated Miles of Motorized Trails to be Relocated Due to SPNM/NM Designations

Cumulative Effects

The State of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan are considered the Cumulative Effects Area for Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized and Non-Motorized with Full Vegetation Management opportunities.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests, with almost 125,000 acres of designated Wilderness and SPNM/NM areas, are among the few places in Wisconsin where people can go to enjoy quality primitive or semi-primitive non-motorized recreation experiences. Although historic logging activity left the forest riddled with roads and abandoned railroad grades, the Forests' designated SPNM/NM and Wilderness areas ensure that there are places where the sounds of motors and the whine of engines are absent or attenuated. SPNM/NM and Wilderness areas are managed to preserve the solitude and isolation so rare in our everyday lives.

In Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, roads and motorized trails within SPNM/NM areas will be gradually relocated to suitable locations outside non-motorized areas. Those trails open to summer ATV traffic will have the highest priority for relocation. Use of existing motorized trails may continue until that time, so visitors to newly designated SPNM/NM areas may still encounter motorized vehicles, at least in the near future. Over time, as roads and motorized trails within these areas are closed or relocated, access to campsites, trails, and hunting grounds will shift to non-motorized users. While enthusiasts of motorized forms of recreation will find fewer opportunities within these areas, opportunities for those who enjoy non-motorized forms of recreation like hiking, biking, hunting, and primitive camping will increase over time.

In National Forests, State Forests, National Parks, and National Wildlife Refuges in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, more than half a million acres are managed for wilderness, primitive, semi-primitive, or non-motorized opportunities (USDA FS 2001a; WDNR 2003e). The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests, with almost 125,000 acres of Wilderness and SPNM areas, currently provide about 24% of the total for the region (Figure 3-55).

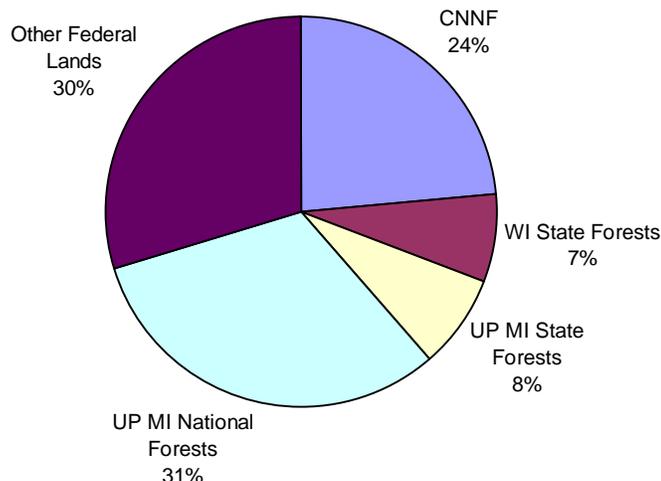


Figure 3-55. Wilderness, Primitive, Semi-Primitive, and Non-Motorized Opportunities by Ownership (major public landowners) in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (total 528,000 acres)

Opportunities for Wilderness, Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, and Non-Motorized with Full Vegetation Management experiences on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests will increase under Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, as shown in Figure 3-56. In the future, the CNNF could potentially supply as much as 45% of the region’s wilderness, semi-primitive, and non-motorized opportunities (Alternative 4). Under the Selected Alternative, the Forests will provide about 29% of the region’s non-motorized recreation opportunities.

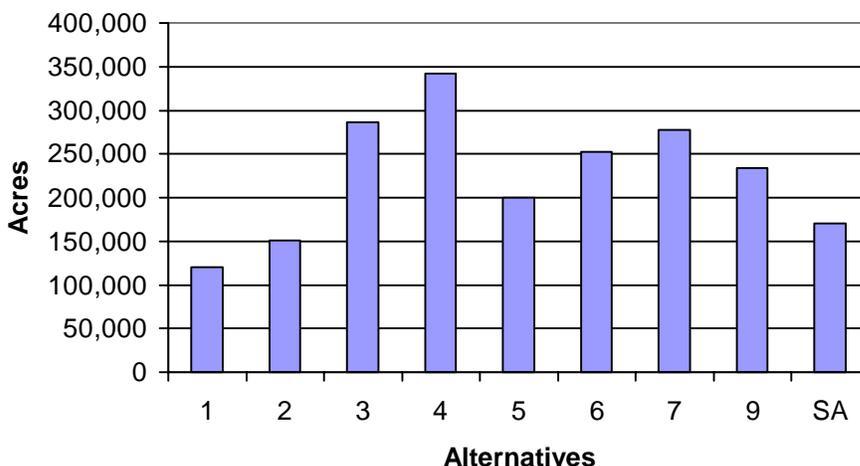


Figure 3-56. Cumulative Acres of Existing Wilderness, Potential Wilderness, SPNM, and NM areas by Alternative

Currently, there are almost 81,000 acres of SPNM/NM areas and 44,000 acres of designated Wilderness on the CNNF. Opportunities for non-motorized recreation increase in all alternatives over the existing condition (Alternative 1). Alternative 4 calls for the largest increase in Wilderness and SPNM/NM acreage—a 176% increase in non-motorized setting over current conditions—followed by Alternatives 3, 7, 6, 9, 5, the Selected Alternative, and 2. Over time, SPNM/NM designations in the Selected Alternative will not affect motorized access to the same degree as Alternatives 3-9, as fewer roads and motorized trails will need to be closed due to SPNM/NM designations. Under the Selected Alternative, more than 11% of the Forests' 1.5 million acres will be accessible only by those who use non-motorized forms of transportation. Compared to current levels, the Selected Alternative will add another 46,000 acres of Wilderness, Potential Wilderness, SPNM, and NM areas—a 37% increase in the amount of area closed to motorized vehicles on the Forests. Over time, as roads and motorized trails within these areas are closed or relocated, access to campsites, trails, and hunting grounds will shift to non-motorized users. Motorized recreation enthusiasts will find fewer opportunities in these areas and will find opportunities for vehicle-assisted hunting, camping, pleasure driving, and motorized trail-riding elsewhere on the Forests.

ATVs and Off-Road Vehicles

Introduction

The current Chequamegon and Nicolet Forest Plans (1986) do not provide a consistent policy for the use of All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and other Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs) on the Forests. This section describes the existing opportunities for ATVs (including motorcycles; see Appendix G for definition), snowmobiles, and four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles on the Forests as well as effects of all proposals in Alternatives 1-9 and the Selected Alternative.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests participated in the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) project from October 2001 through September 2002. The NVUM project provides statistical national forest recreation use information at the forest, regional, and national level (NVUM, 2003). Of the visitors interviewed for the project, 10.2% and 8.0% indicated that the primary reason for their visit to the Forests was participation in snowmobile and off-highway vehicle (4-wheelers, dirt bikes, etc.) activities, respectively. When asked about the types of constructed facilities and special designated areas used during their visit to the National Forests, 35.9% of those interviewed said that they used designated Off-Road Vehicle areas, 8.2% used designated snowmobile areas, and 7.1% used developed motorized trails.

All-Terrain Vehicles

ATV use on the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests has increased dramatically since both Forest Plans were signed in 1986. Wisconsin ATV registrations have increased dramatically since the plans became effective, growing from 25,600 in 1987 to 176,087 in 2002 (WDNR 2003d). In northern Wisconsin, virtually every large landowner—public and private—has come under increasing pressure to provide ATV recreation opportunities.

The 1986 Chequamegon and Nicolet Forest Plans established quite different ATV policies. The ATV policy on the Chequamegon National Forest is that all Forest lands are open to ATV use unless posted closed (Chequamegon LRMP, IV-26). Currently, ATV

use on the Chequamegon is permitted off-road and off-trail as well as on the 284 miles of designated ATV trails. Designated Wilderness and non-motorized areas, however, are closed to ATV use.

The current ATV policy on the Nicolet is that all Forest lands are “closed unless posted open”. ATV access is prohibited throughout the Nicolet except for administrative use, for people with disabilities (special use permit required), and on short segments of town-maintained roads that have been opened to ATV use by local township governments (Nicolet LRMP, 43). After the two forests were merged in 1993, the different ATV policies created considerable confusion among the public. One of the primary issues addressed during the forest plan revision process was the creation of a consistent ATV policy.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has split ATV users into two broad categories (WDNR 1997c). In the first category, ATVs are ridden for sport, such as trail riding or hill climbing. This rider is most likely to use an ATV trail system. In the second, the ATV provides transportation for another activity, such as trapping, hunting, or firewood or bough collection. This user is likely to take the most direct route to the destination, following town roads, forest roads, and traveling off-road/off-trail. Fitting into a possible third category are disabled people who rely on ATVs for access to the Forests. However, these users typically fall into one or both of the other categories.

Public input on the issue of ATV use on the CNNF, as well as internal comment, established two broad ATV areas of concern (USDA FS 1996a). The first concern is the impact of ATVs on natural resources, specifically soil disturbance, stream sedimentation, and threatened and endangered species. The second concern is the social impact of ATV use, particularly regarding conflicts with other forest users.

Snowmobiles

Snowmobile use has become a major economic factor in northern Wisconsin over the past decade (Davidson-Peterson 1998), leading to rapid growth in the region’s winter tourism industry. The continued success of the snowmobile industry is directly related to the quality and quantity of snowfall received each winter.

Wisconsin has developed one of the most extensive snowmobile trail networks in the nation (WDNR 1991). Local user groups or snowmobile clubs have established partnerships with public and private landowners in order to improve and maintain the trail network. Inspired by the success of the snowmobile trail network, ATV and other Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) users have formed groups or clubs to establish similar partnerships with landowners to gain access to and maintain trail networks or “play” areas.

Generally, snowmobile use raises fewer concerns than the use of other ORVs. Snowmobiles usually operate on snow, causing less immediate resource damage than other ORVs. However, long-term soil compaction and wildlife disturbance, as well as the fact that frozen conditions allow snowmobile users to travel virtually anywhere on the Forests, are all potential impacts that should not be ignored. Of greater immediate concern are the social impacts of conflicts with other user groups, as well as safety and liability issues.

Four-Wheel Drive Vehicles (4WD)

ORV users with full-sized four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles also desire more recreation opportunities on the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests. Although use of 4WD vehicles has not increased as dramatically as that of ATVs and snowmobiles, 4WD operators are actively seeking more opportunities to use their off-road vehicles on National Forests across the country (based on comments received during the revision process). Natural resource damage and social impact concerns for 4WDs are similar to those for ATVs.

Current Condition

The Chequamegon and Nicolet currently have different Off-Road Vehicle policies, summarized below.

Nicolet ORV Policy

Under state laws, vehicles operated on roads must be licensed (street-legal) or legally exempted. Street-legal off-road vehicle use is permitted on all roads on the Nicolet open for public travel, provided the vehicle and operator comply with State motor vehicle laws. Vehicle travel off roads is forbidden. Off-road vehicles that are not street-legal or exempted, such as dirt bikes and ATVs, are not allowed on the Nicolet. Snowmobiles, however, are allowed on designated snowmobile routes and on unplowed roads.

Townships retain the right to designate town-maintained roads as ATV routes, provided they fulfill the requirements of the state of Wisconsin. In response to demands for more ATV recreation opportunities, several townships within Nicolet Forest boundaries have opened town roads to ATV use. ATV travel is not allowed on Forest-maintained roads adjacent to or connecting to the township roads.

The Nicolet Plan essentially prohibits all ATV use on the Forest, although ATVs may be used for administrative purposes and special use permits may be issued for disabled persons (Nicolet LRMP, 43). Snowmobiles are allowed on designated snowmobile routes and on unplowed roads.

Chequamegon ORV Policy

The Chequamegon policy for non-street legal ORVs is “open, unless posted closed,” meaning off-road vehicle activity is permitted throughout the Forest, except where specific trails and areas have been closed to such use. Licensed street-legal ORVs are the exception. Their use is limited to open roads and they are not allowed beyond trail closure devices where non-street-legal ORVs like ATVs, motorcycles, and snowmobiles are allowed. Like the Nicolet, several townships within the boundaries of the Chequamegon have designated town-maintained roads as ATV routes, offering legal ways for ATV users to access the Forest. On the Chequamegon, snowmobiles are allowed on roads, designated trails, and off-road/off-trail except in areas posted and signed as closed to such use.

Current ORV Access Opportunities, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests

4WD Vehicles

Although the use of 4WD vehicles is becoming more popular, it has not increased as dramatically as the use of ATVs and snowmobiles. Currently, street-legal 4WD vehicles

have access to nearly every roaded area in both the Chequamegon and Nicolet Forests. Even though 4WD vehicles have access to open forest roads, many users complain of the lack of challenging off-road experiences on national forest land. Although, the Nicolet currently has one designated 4WD challenge route open to street-legal vehicles, four-wheel-drive operators are actively seeking more opportunities in the National Forests.

The Forests have not inventoried roads by level of off-road challenge but recognize that the most challenging roads are often those most susceptible to damage; the Forests closed some of these roads for resource and road protection purposes. A need to reduce overall road density on the Forests has led to additional road closures as well. Managing road density on the Forests while trying to satisfy the need for challenging off-highway driving has become a serious management problem.

Snowmobiles

Within their boundaries, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests have an estimated 1,000 miles of groomed snowmobile trails on public and private land. Some of the Chequamegon snowmobile trails serve a dual function as seasonal or year-round ATV trails. Additionally, snowmobiles have legal access to hundreds of miles of unplowed roads. Use of unplowed roads, especially old logging roads, has long been a popular way for snowmobile enthusiasts to explore the Nicolet. The policy on the Chequamegon is more liberal, allowing off-road/off-trail snowmobile use. Most users, however, stay on designated trails or routes.

ATVs

With the Nicolet essentially closed to ATVs, use of ATVs on the Forests is confined to the Chequamegon. With more than 13% of the state-designated ATV trails and the largest and most contiguous land base available for off-road/off-trail ATV use, the Chequamegon has become a more common destination point for ATV users than any other single landowner in Wisconsin (WDNR 1998). Virtually all of the Chequamegon's 858,000 acres are currently open to ATV use, except for 63,000 acres of Wilderness and semi-primitive non-motorized areas and other areas subject to closure orders. The Forest offers 284 miles of ATV trails, most of which (268 miles) are also open and groomed as snowmobile trail in winter (dual use trails).

In the 1930s, users developed an off-road/off-trail play area for motorized vehicles on the Washburn District of the Chequamegon National Forest that took advantage of the area's steep, sandy hillsides and open terrain. This same area, although considerably expanded, is now known as ATV Play Area "Open 26". In the years since its creation, use of the play area has shifted from motorcycles and full-size vehicles to ATVs and snowmobiles.

Because of its location approximately ¼ mile north of the Iron River ATV Trail (Trail 505) and the unique recreation opportunities it provides, Open 26 receives a disproportionate amount of ATV traffic. Through the years more user-developed hill climb routes have been established, expanding the size of the play area to approximately 35 acres. Excessive use of the area has caused erosion of the sandy soils and destruction of vegetation, creating deep and unstable trail chutes. In addition, the play area is located just south of the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Management Area, a management area established to protect the rare Pine Barrens vegetative community. Forest managers are concerned that continued expansion of the play area by users could threaten this globally imperiled community.

ATV use on the Chequamegon, and demand for ATV access on the Nicolet, has continued to rise since the Forest Plans were signed in 1986. For many people, ATV use is one of the main reasons they live or recreate in the vicinity of the Chequamegon. The demand for ATV opportunities comes from 1) utilitarian users (e.g., bough collecting, berry picking, hunting), who tend to travel off-road and off-trail; 2) persons with disabilities who rely on motorized vehicles for access to the Forest; and 3) recreational riders, who tend to seek out trails and designated use areas. Trails through the Nicolet are sought as connectors to ATV use areas on adjacent local, state, private, or federal land.

Increasing ATV use on the Chequamegon has created several management problems. The most notable are conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users and between ATV operators and operators of other ORVs. Other problems include resource damage resulting from unrestricted ATV use and, because of the conflicts and resource damage, an exacerbated law enforcement situation. On the Nicolet, the unmet demand for access is resulting in rising illegal ATV operation in the Forest.

Current Management Direction

The 1986 Chequamegon Forest Plan allows ATV use on 284 miles of designated ATV trails and off-road/off-trail ATV access to nearly 750,000 acres of forestland. ATV use is not allowed on the Nicolet, except on some town roads designated and signed as ATV routes. There is no specific mention of ATV play areas in either Plan, although one currently exists on the Washburn Ranger District. Street legal ORVs such as full-size 4WD vehicles are allowed on all roads open to the public on both Forests.

The following recreation goal statements from the 1986 Chequamegon Plan provide general direction for ORV management:

- Provide a range of quality year-round outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Minimize motorized and non-motorized recreation use conflicts.

The direction provided in the Chequamegon Standards and Guidelines (1986 Plan) recognizes the potential impacts of repeated motorized use and the need to protect Forest resources when damage occurs. Standards and Guidelines state that the Forest will “emphasize user satisfaction, resource protection, and public health and safety within motorized use areas. Designated areas, roads, and trails may be managed for specific kinds of motorized uses.” Further, Standards and Guidelines state that, where appropriate, the Forest will provide “separate opportunities for motorized and non-motorized use ([to] minimize the potential for user conflicts).”

Standards and Guidelines provide more specific direction for ORV use, permitting “off-road vehicle activity throughout the Forest except when specific trails and areas are closed to such use.” This is the “open, unless posted closed” policy that permits off-road/off-trail use (cross-country) of ORVs except in areas posted as closed. However, Standards and Guidelines also state that “ORV use may be prohibited on sections of trails, or areas, to prevent significant resource damage” (Chequamegon LRMP, IV-26). Full-size vehicles (greater than 48 inches) are prohibited from using motorized trails, thus limiting trail use to ATVs, trail bikes, and snowmobiles in an attempt to avoid conflicts between different types of ORV users.

In 1992, a Decision Memo that officially recognized Open 26 as an intensive use area (play area) for ATVs was published. The Decision Memo authorized the creation of a parking lot on the south side of Forest Road 242 to enable vehicles with trailers to park and access the play area. Signs and vegetation along the north side of the road discourage

users from crossing Forest Road 242 into the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Management Area, where motorized use is restricted to designated roads. The Decision Memo also authorized the creation of a trail connecting the play area with the Iron River ATV Trail. The trail was constructed to decrease inappropriate use of a nearby pipeline corridor as a travelway to reach the play area.

Since 1992 there has been an increase in the number of hill-climbs on steep slopes on the south side of the area. Hill-climbs are linear routes generally straight up a hill. As sand is pushed downhill by tires, the hill-climb becomes deeper and a ravine is formed. Once users find it too difficult to scale the hill, they often start a new climb.

Although formal monitoring plans are not documented, the Forest Service has visually monitored soil erosion, depth of ravines, number of hill-climbs, and safety at Open 26. As early as 1993, soil scientists predicted that hill-climb routes were “eroding and cutting deeper into the hillsides as time goes on” (Kempf and Olson, July 1993). By 1996, monitoring reports indicated that one “run which splits into 3 halfway up has reached the point where it is near beyond repair, and has become dangerous to users” (Olson, 1997). In the late 1990s, the Forest Service attempted to control erosion in some of the more badly damaged trail chutes by placing signs and bales to block access. These efforts met with minimal success. Because of the difficulties the Forest Service has encountered while trying to manage the play area, Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative call for its’ closure and rehabilitation.

There is no clear definition of “significant resource damage” in the 1986 Chequamegon Plan. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Plan addresses the effects of plan direction, but does not define acceptable or excessive resource damage. The 1995 Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 261.13) prohibits the operation of any vehicle off forest, state, or county roads in a manner that “damages or unreasonably disturbs the land, wildlife, or vegetative resources” or is “in violation of State law established for vehicles used off roads.” The 1997-98 Wisconsin Statutes (Chapter 30.29) prohibit the operation of any motor vehicle “in or on any navigable water or the exposed bed of a navigable water” unless at designated stream crossings or for agricultural activities. Other than the guidance provided by these regulations, interpretation of “significant resource damage” is at the discretion of the land manager.

According to the Nicolet Plan Standards and Guidelines, motorized vehicles that are not street-legal or exempted (such as ATVs) are prohibited from use on the Nicolet. Street-legal or exempted vehicles are permitted on all national forest roads except those closed by signs, gates, or other road closure devices. The policy prohibits off-road vehicle travel, with all trails that look like roads gated or otherwise closed to prohibit access by motorized vehicles. Snowmobile operation on the Forest is permitted on designated snowmobile trails and on unplowed roads. With a special use permit, off-road vehicle use by handicapped persons is allowed (Nicolet LRMP, 43). This policy was further clarified by a 1988 Order of the Forest Supervisor that specifically prohibits the use or possession of ATVs on national forest roads or trails (except for persons with a permit, any law enforcement person on duty, or for administrative use).

In the 1970s, operators of 4WD vehicles began driving on the cleared right-of-way of a gas transmission line to create a challenging riding experience. The 25-mile user-developed route is now being managed by the Forest Service for use by licensed street-legal 4WD vehicles. The Forest Service has closed sections of the route to improve safety and respond to resource concerns.

Proposed Changes and Range of Changes

ATV and ORV use on the Forests will be confined to designated travelways under the revised forest plan. These travelways are defined in **Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative** as follows:

Road Route – Forest road that has been posted open for use by specific off-road vehicles

Trail – Forest trail that has been posted open for use by specific off-road vehicles

Connector - Trails or road routes that connect geographically separate off-road vehicle trail systems. Applies to Alternatives 2-9 only.

Alternatives 1-9 propose a range of ATV riding opportunities depending on the emphasis placed on motorized recreation opportunities. The alternatives vary in terms of the miles of new trails that will be built, whether ATVs will be restricted to designated trails year-round or allowed access to open Forest roads for part of the year, and finally, whether or not additional 4WD challenge travelways will be constructed. In Alternatives 2-9, regardless of the emphasis placed on motorized recreation opportunities, a) ATV/ORV access will be limited to designated roads, trails, or connectors (no off-road or off-trail ORV use); b) the existing ATV play area (Open 26) on the Washburn District will be closed and rehabilitated and no new play areas developed; c) the existing 284 miles of ATV trails on the Chequamegon will be maintained; and d) street-legal ORVs will be allowed on all open roads in the Forests.

The following adjustments in ATV/ORV policy were made in the **Selected Alternative** in response to public comments:

- **4WD Vehicles:** The existing 25-mile 4WD Challenge Route on the Lakewood District will remain in place unless maintenance efforts have proven ineffective and monitoring confirms unacceptable resource damage or unsafe conditions due to continued use. If the existing route is closed, a new travelway up to 25 miles in length will be constructed elsewhere on the Forests (replacement route). Before the replacement route is constructed an agreement with a non-Forest Service entity must be developed to conduct route condition monitoring and maintenance.
- **ATV travelways will be called trails or routes.** The term ATV “connector” was defined in Alternatives 2-9 as a constructed trail, designated road route, or a combination of the two that links existing ATV trail systems. Project level analysis would determine what form the connector would take, so there was no way to predict how many miles of connectors would be constructed trails and how many miles would be road routes. Comments received on the DEIS and Proposed Plan indicated that respondents were confused by the distinction made between “connectors” and other travelways; respondents wanted a clear display of overall miles of new ATV travelways. In the Selected Alternative, ATV travelways are called “**trails**”, if they do not follow numbered forest system roads; and “**routes**”, if they follow designated system roads signed for ATV usage. This will have little, if any, effect on the total miles of trail constructed, although it will change how those miles are displayed.
- **More roads will be designated for ATV use and season of use has been extended.** In the Selected Alternative, the procedures used to determine which roads will be designated as ATV routes and opened to ATV/ORV traffic vary between the Chequamegon and Nicolet.

- ✓ **Chequamegon:** On the Chequamegon, ATV use will be permitted on all classified system roads except those closed by project level decisions. The agency will work with local townships and citizens in the determination of specific route closures.
- ✓ **Nicolet:** A recreation objective has been added that addresses ATV route designation on the Nicolet (Chapter 1, 2004 Forest Plan). The agency will work with township officials to identify existing classified system roads for designation as posted ATV routes in order to enhance the existing network of town-designated ATV routes. Total mileage of the route system will depend on many factors, including the number of problems experienced (violations, resource damage, conflicts with other users, etc.).

An Adaptive Management approach—in which actual ATV route designations and mileage will be determined by on-the-ground conditions—will be used forestwide to help find a level of ATV/ORV access that satisfies the demand for additional recreation opportunities without causing unacceptable resource damage or conflicts with other forest visitors.

Table 3-49 shows mileage of potential new ATV trails for Alternatives 1-9 and the Selected Alternative. As shown, miles of trails and connectors could increase by as much as 290 miles in Alternatives 2 and 9. Alternatives 2 and 9 are followed by the Selected Alternative (maximum of 185 miles), Alternatives 5 and 6 (maximum of 135 miles), Alternative 7 (maximum 100 miles), and Alternative 3 (maximum 40 miles). No new ATV trails or connectors would be constructed on either the Chequamegon or the Nicolet in Alternatives 1 and 4. As described above, the term “connector” is not used in the Selected Alternative.

Table 3-49. Maximum Miles of ATV Trails by Alternative

	Alternatives								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	SA
Miles of Existing Trails									
Chequamegon	284	284	284	284	284	284	284	284	284
Maximum Miles New ATV Trails									
Chequamegon	0	35	0	0	0	0	0	35	100
Nicolet	0	85	0	0	35	35	0	85	85
Maximum Miles New Connectors									
Chequamegon	0	75	20	0	50	50	50	75	N/A
Nicolet	0	95	20	0	50	50	50	95	N/A
Maximum Total Miles ATV Trails									
Chequamegon	284	394	304	284	334	334	334	394	384
Nicolet	0	180	20	0	85	85	50	180	85
Maximum Total Miles, Forestwide	284	574	324	284	419	419	384	574	469

ATV Suitability Inventory

Forest planners used the ATV Suitability process to determine the potential environmental impacts of ATV/ORV use on different parts of the Forests in order to identify those areas best suited for the development of motorized recreation opportunities. These areas were then mapped according to their suitability (either least, intermediate or most suitable for motorized recreation).

ATV Suitability Process

In 1997, an interdisciplinary team consisting of a Wildlife Biologist, Fisheries Biologist, Soil Scientist, Ecologist, Recreation Forester, and Archeologist rated Land Type Associations (LTA) on each unit of the Forests to evaluate the suitability of these units for both on- and off-trail ATV use.

The group used existing resource inventories of threatened and endangered plant and animal species, soils maps, wolf pack locations, potential Landscape Analysis and Design (LAD) sites, potential Alternative Management Areas (AMAs), streams, lakes, and archeological sites when evaluating ATV suitability. Based on the professional judgment of the interdisciplinary team, these areas were assigned a numerical rating and ranked from least to most suitable for each District. The District ranking was then compared with other units, and a forestwide ranking was determined. The results indicated that additional factors, especially topography and wetlands, needed to be incorporated into the analysis.

Soil and slope characteristics, which affect erosion and drainage, were given additional consideration in 1999 by the Forest Hydrologist, Fisheries Biologist, Soil Scientist and Recreation Specialists, resulting in new forestwide rankings and maps. Slopes were assessed using maps with 10-foot contour intervals, based on the assumption that steeper slopes have greater erosion potential. Soil characteristics were also assessed. In general, sandy soils drain well and are more suitable for ATV use on gentle or moderate slopes, but they are highly erodible and less suitable on steep slopes. Poorly drained soils, such as silt loams, are less suitable because they hold water and are susceptible to compaction and rutting, particularly near streams and wetlands.

An ATV suitability map is included in the Map Packet. Standards and Guidelines in the 2004 Forest Plan call for use of the map to assist in site-level decisions on new motorized trail construction.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Effects on Existing Motorized Trails from Recommended Wilderness Study Areas, and Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Designations

All ATV/snowmobile trails in Wilderness Study Areas, SPNM, and Non-Motorized areas will be gradually relocated. First priority for trail relocation will be given to ATV trails or to dual use ATV/snowmobile trails in order to decrease the sound of motorized vehicles during the summer when non-motorized use of the areas is highest. Existing snowmobile-only and dual use trails that permit ATV use only during winter months will remain until a reasonable alternative location can be found outside the area. However, all motorized trails will be closed within Congressionally-designated Wilderness areas.

The Selected Alternative calls for a total of 170,500 acres of non-motorized areas (MA 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, and NM), about 30,000 acres less than the 200,000 non-motorized acres identified in the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5). See Figure 3-56 for the range of non-motorized allocations across all alternatives.

There will be fewer miles of snowmobile trail relocations due to non-motorized allocations in the Selected Alternative than in Alternatives 3-9 (Figure 3-57). About 40 miles of trail will need to be relocated in the Selected Alternative, compared to 58 miles in Alternative 5, 82 miles in Alternative 6, 88 miles in Alternative 9, 89 miles in Alternative 7, 96 miles in Alternative 3, and 114 miles in Alternative 4. As these are relocations rather than closures, overall access to snowmobile trails will not be greatly affected.

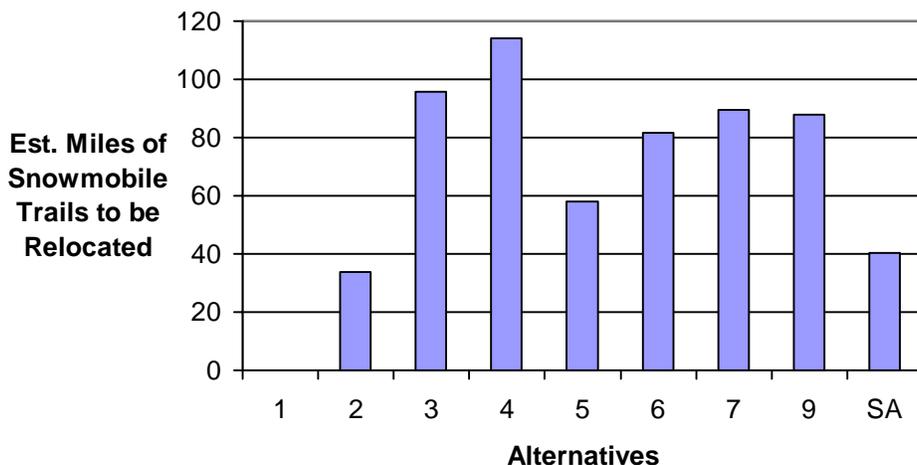


Figure 3-57. Estimated Miles of Snowmobile-only Trails to be Relocated Due to All Non-Motorized Designations (MA 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, NM)

Estimated miles of ATV and dual use (ATV/snowmobile) trails that will need to be relocated because of non-motorized designations are shown in Figure 3-58. In Alternatives 1, 5, and the Selected Alternative, non-motorized designations will not affect any existing ATV-only trails. In the remaining alternatives, approximately 2 miles of ATV only trails would be relocated.

Estimated miles of dual use trails that will need to be relocated ranges from a high of 17 miles in Alternative 4 to a low of 12 miles in Alternative 2 (Figure 3-58). Like Alternatives 3, 5, 6, and 9, 13 miles of dual use trails will need to be relocated in the Selected Alternative due to all non-motorized designations. Of those 13 miles, summer ATV use is permitted on about 6 miles of trail, while ATVs are permitted on the remaining 7 miles of trail only in winter.

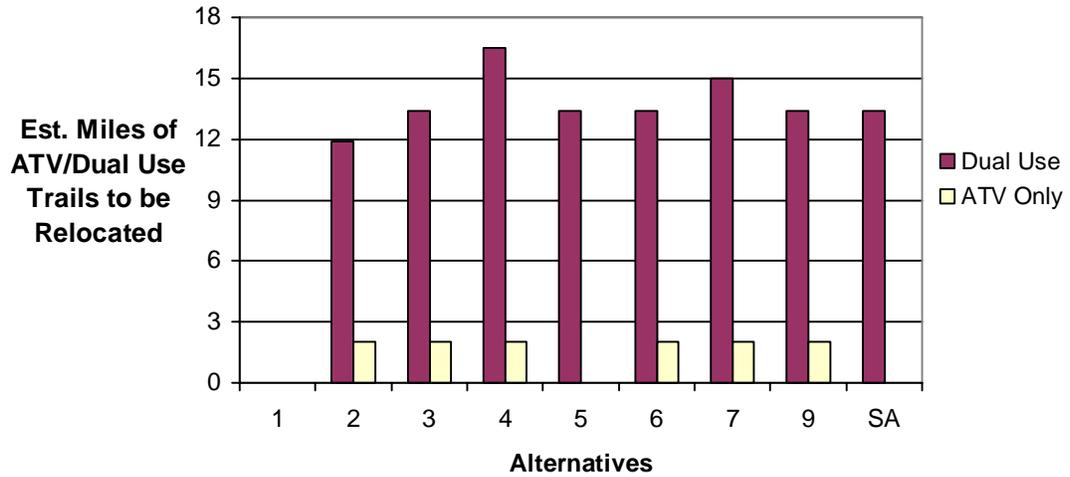


Figure 3-58. Estimated Miles of ATV-only and Dual Use ATV/Snowmobile Trails to be Relocated Due to All Non-Motorized Designations (MA 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, NM)

Effects on ATV/ORV Motorized Trail-Riding Opportunities from ATV/ORV Policies

Many of the existing trails currently available to ATV users are not on National Forest system land. The construction of additional trails on the Forests will increase opportunities for longer rides and allow ATV use both on the Forests and on adjacent lands. All designated forest trails will be open for use year-round except two months during spring break-up (approximately 3/15-5/15).

The following chart shows the maximum miles of new and existing ATV trails forestwide in each of the alternatives. To make comparison between Alternatives 1-9 and the Selected Alternative easier, Figure 3-59 combines connector and trail mileage figures shown in Table 3-49. Maximum miles of new trail in the Selected Alternative will be less than Alternatives 2 and 9 (290 miles) but more than Alternatives 1 and 4 (0 miles), 3 (40 miles), 5 and 6 (135 miles), and 7 (100 miles). However, depending on the number of problems encountered, actual miles of trail constructed in the Selected Alternative could vary considerably.

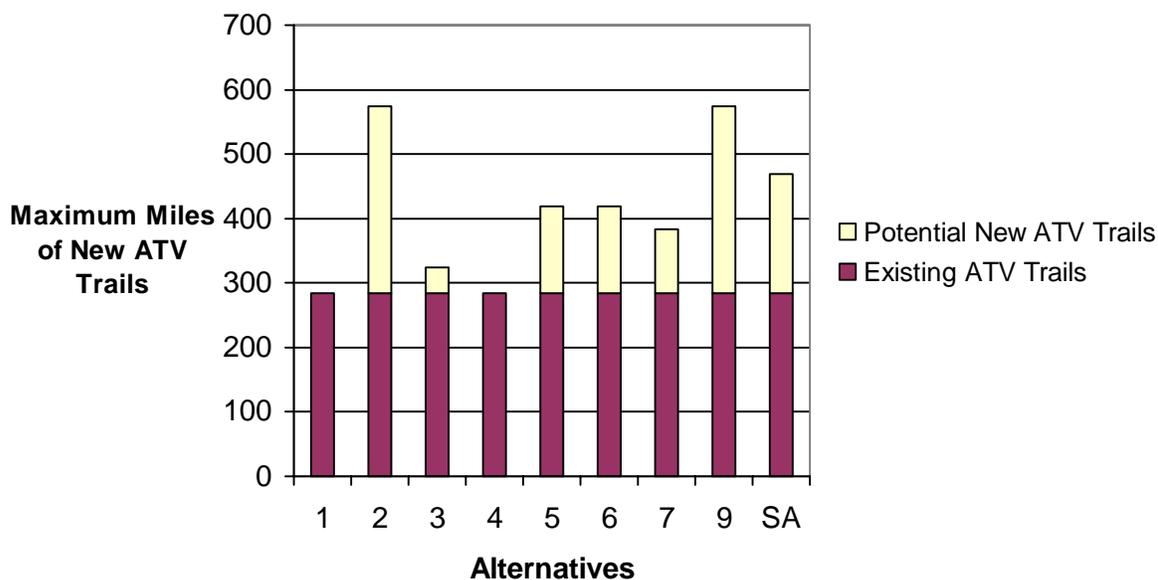


Figure 3-59. Miles of Existing and Potential New ATV Trails by Alternative

In the Selected Alternative, an Adaptive Management approach will be used to help smooth the transition from current levels of ATV access (i.e. “open unless posted closed” on the Chequamegon and “closed unless posted open” on the Nicolet) to those called for under the Selected Alternative. Trail construction will vary depending on the number of problems (illegal off-road travel, conflicts with other users, resource damage, etc.) encountered. All ATV trails will be open year-round except during spring break-up (timing determined locally by spring conditions each year).

Depending on the number of problems that are encountered (illegal use, unacceptable resource damage, conflicts with other users, etc.) as many as 100 miles of new ATV trails may be constructed on the Chequamegon under the Selected Alternative. As in the Preferred Alternative, up to 85 miles of trail will be constructed on the Nicolet under the Selected Alternative. Actual miles of trail constructed may be less than 85 miles depending on problems encountered as ATV use is introduced to the Forest.

Full size 4WD vehicles will have more challenging recreation opportunities than currently available in Alternatives 2, 5, and 6, which provide for the construction of a new 4WD challenge route (up to 25 miles long) in addition to the existing 25-mile route in the Pipeline area of the Lakewood-Laona District (Figure 3-60). However, the new 4WD route would only be constructed if an agreement with a non-Forest Service entity could be developed to conduct route condition monitoring and maintenance. In Alternatives 1, 3, 7, and 9, the existing 4WD challenge route would be maintained but no new travelways would be constructed. In Alternative 4, the Pipeline route would be closed and rehabilitated and no new travelways would be constructed.

The Selected Alternative includes a provision that allows for the construction of a replacement 4WD challenge route if the existing Pipeline route is closed because of unacceptable levels of resource damage or unsafe conditions. There will be no net gain in 4WD vehicle challenge riding opportunities, however. If the existing route is closed a replacement route up to 25 miles in length will be constructed elsewhere on the Forests—provided a monitoring and maintenance agreement can be established with a non-Forest Service entity.

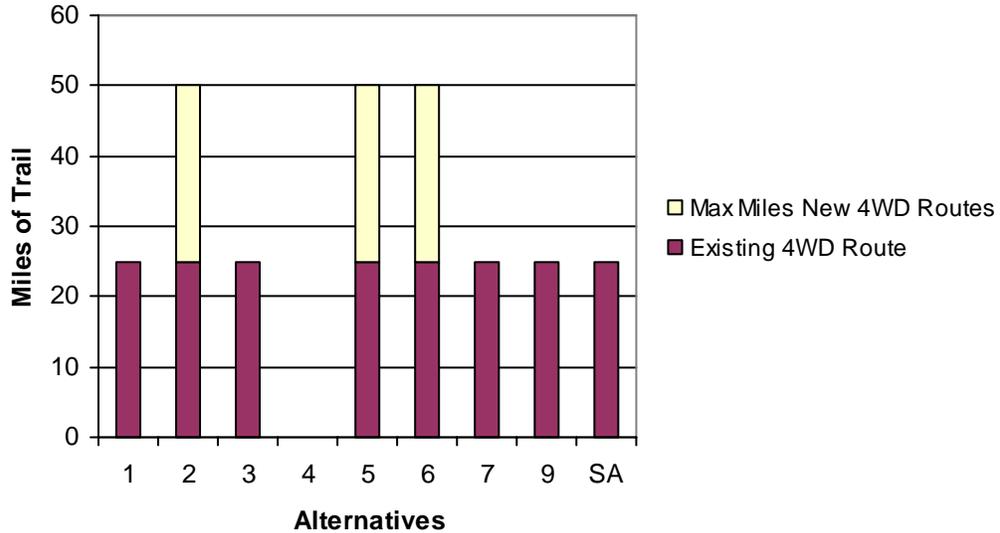


Figure 3-60. Miles of Existing and Potential New 4WD Challenge Routes by Alternative

Effects on ATV/ORV Road Riding Opportunities from ATV/ORV Policies and Non-Motorized Designations

Under the current Chequamegon National Forest Plan (Alternative 1), ATVs are allowed year-round on all Forest Service roads open to general vehicular traffic. In Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, road riding opportunities are restricted to roads that have been designated and clearly marked as ATV routes. In all alternatives, including the Selected Alternative, ATVs will be permitted on town roads within the Forests that have been designated by local townships as ATV routes.

Figure 3-61 shows the number of months per year that ATVs and other non-street-legal ORVS will be permitted on designated ATV routes for each of the alternatives. Currently (Alternative 1), ATV use on the Chequamegon is allowed year-round on all Forest Service roads open to general vehicular traffic except those closed for resource protection or other reasons. In the Selected Alternative, as in Alternatives 2-9, ATVs will be permitted on all town roads within the Forests that have been designated and signed as ATV routes.

Use of ATV routes in the Selected Alternative will be permitted year-round except during spring break-up. Seasonal closure of ATV routes that are closed to general vehicle traffic will be determined locally by spring conditions each year. ATV routes open to general vehicle traffic will be closed when town/county weight limits are in effect (approximately March 15-May 15). Road routes would be open to ATVs 3½ months a year during

hunting season in Alternatives 5 and 6. No ATV routes would be designated in Alternatives 3, 4, 7, and 9; ATVs and other non-street-legal ORVs would not be permitted on Forest roads for any part of the year.

Street-legal ORVs are allowed on all open forest system roads year-round in all alternatives. However, as roads within newly designated non-motorized areas are closed, road riding opportunities for non-street-legal 4WD vehicles may decrease. Miles of open roads available for use by ORVs may decrease as much as 20% (2,000 miles) across the Forests over the next few decades if road density objectives are met within all ROS classes. See the next section on “Transportation and Open Road Density” for more information. Such road closures could potentially reduce opportunities for ATV road riding as well, depending on whether or not the roads had been opened to ATV use in project level decisions.

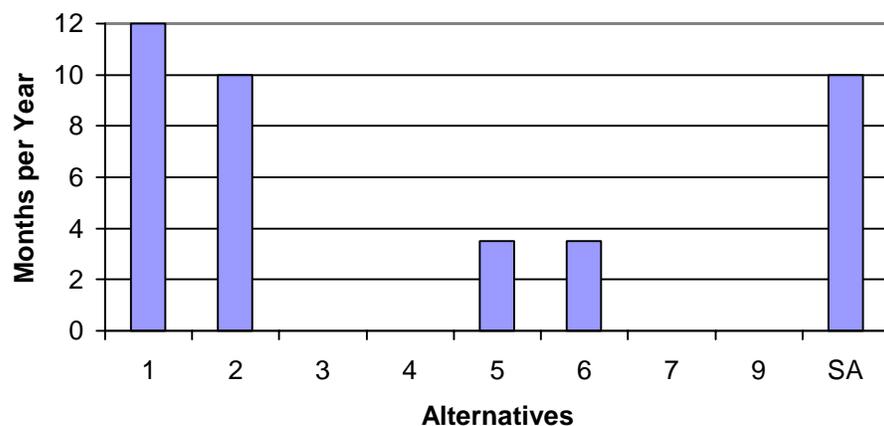


Figure 3-61. Number of Months per Year that ATVs and Non-Street Legal ORVs will be Permitted on Designated ATV Routes

As in Alternatives 2-9, forestwide policy for the Selected Alternative is that all roads and trails on the CNNF are to be considered closed to ATV use unless posted open. However, in the Selected Alternative an Adaptive Management approach will be used to help smooth the transition from current levels of ATV access (i.e. “open unless posted closed” on the Chequamegon and “closed unless posted open” on the Nicolet) to those called for under the 2004 Forest Plan. Trail construction and route designations will vary depending on the number of problems (illegal off-road travel, conflicts with other users, resource damage, etc.) encountered.

Adaptive Management Approach to Route Designation:

- **Chequamegon NF:** On the Chequamegon, ATV use will be permitted on all classified system roads that are currently open to ATVs except those closed by project level decisions. The agency will work with local townships and citizens in the determination of specific route closures.
- **Nicolet NF:** A new recreation objective has been added that addresses ATV route designation on the Nicolet. The agency will work with township officials to identify existing forest system roads for designation as posted ATV routes in order to enhance the existing network of town-designated ATV routes. Total mileage of the route

system will depend on many factors, including the number of problems experienced (violations, resource damage, conflicts with other users, etc.).

Effects on Potential Conflicts Between Motorized and Non-Motorized Use from ATV/ORV Policies and Non-Motorized Designations

ATV/ORV use on the Forests was identified as one of the ten major issues to be addressed during forest plan revision. In Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, forestwide Standards and Guidelines were developed that prohibit off-road/off-trail ATV use in order to limit interaction between motorized and non-motorized users and minimize the potential for conflicts. However, even with greater separation of motorized and non-motorized users, it is unrealistic to think conflicts will not arise.

Conflicts are most likely to occur in areas where motorized access changes due to plan decisions. For example, since the Nicolet has been closed to ATV/ORV use for many years, conflicts may occur if new ATV trails are constructed and/or roads are opened to ATV use. ATV use on new trails may displace other forest users who desire non-motorized recreation experiences. At the same time, motorized users may be displaced by new designations on the Chequamegon that reduce or eliminate ATV/ORV use in places where it was previously permitted.

An Adaptive Management Approach has been adopted in the Selected Alternative to help reduce potential conflicts during the transition from current levels of ATV access (i.e. “open unless posted closed” on the Chequamegon and “closed unless posted open” on the Nicolet) to those called for under the 2004 Forest Plan.

- On both Forests, actual miles of new ATV trail constructed will vary depending on the number of problems with illegal use, resource damage, and conflicts with other users that may occur.
- On the Chequamegon, public input will help guide agency decisions regarding the closure of specific roads currently open to ATV use.
- On the Nicolet, the agency will work with local townships and the public when determining which forest roads will be designated as ATV routes.

Use of the Adaptive Management Approach will allow the agency to respond to problems such as illegal off-road travel, conflicts with other users, and resource damage that are encountered during the transition period and will lead to informed decisions on trail construction and route designation.

Effects on ATV Riding Opportunities Due to Closure of Existing ATV Play Area

Under Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, the existing ATV play area (Open 26) on the Washburn District of the Forest would be closed to motorized use and rehabilitated. Closure of the play area may displace some forest visitors, especially those who come to the Chequamegon to experience the unique opportunities for hill-climbing available at this site. Opportunities for this kind of experience would no longer be provided by the Forests, forcing visitors to seek out similar opportunities on private or other publicly-owned lands. Because it has been in use since the 1930s, many ATV users, especially local residents, feel emotionally attached to the play area. They feel that the closure of this area would diminish their recreational experience, especially since similar opportunities are not currently available on other public lands in northern Wisconsin.

No effect on ATV play riding opportunities is expected in Alternative 1 since ATV/ORV policies would not change and the play area would remain open to use.

Effects on ATV/ORV Use Due to Timber Harvest Activities

Timber harvesting may have some minor effect on ATV/ORV use as some trails/routes may be temporarily relocated or closed due to harvest activities. Timber harvest activities are more likely in areas that have a high number of acres suitable for timber production. The higher the suitable acres the more likely some minor temporary relocations or temporary closures of trails or routes could occur. Alternative 1 has the highest amount of suitable acres—and hence the greatest likelihood that some ATV/ORV trails or routes would be temporarily closed or relocated—followed in order by Alternatives 2, the Selected Alternative, 5, 9, 6, 7, 3, and 4.

Effects on ATV/ORV Use from Old Growth, RNA, and SMA Designations

In designated Research Natural Areas (RNA; MA 8E), ATV/ORV use will be limited to existing roads that have been designated as ATV routes. Motorized use is not permitted on any trails within RNAs and the construction of new roads or motorized trails is prohibited. Currently (Alternative 1), there are 2,500 acres (0.1% of total Forest acreage) of designated RNA areas. RNA acreage increases in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative to 35,200 acres (2.3% of total Forest acreage). No ATV or snowmobile trails exist in any current or potential RNAs so the impact of additional RNA designations on ATV/ORV use is expected to be minimal.

Currently, there are 13,000 acres of Special Management Areas (SMA; MA 8F). SMA acreage increases to 64,000 acres (4% of total acreage) in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative. SMA Standards and Guidelines prohibit motorized trails if they interfere with SMA objectives and specify that any motorized trails that are constructed will be the minimum necessary. No ATV trails or snowmobile trails exist in current or potential SMAs. Additional SMA allocations should have little effect on ATV/ORV use as the total area is relatively small and the areas are scattered across the forests.

Currently, there are 67,600 acres of Old Growth on the Forests. Old Growth and Natural Feature Complexes (MA 8G) acreage increases to 92,600 acres in Alternatives 4, 7, and 9; 91,000 acres in Alternatives 3 and 6; and 85,500 acres in Alternatives 2, 5, and the Selected Alternative. Standards and Guidelines for MA 8G permit ATV/ORV use on roads and trails but prohibit the construction of new motorized trails unless they protect or enhance management area objectives. Since ATV/ORV use in these areas will follow the Forests' general ATV/ORV policy, road closures or obliteration could potentially decrease road and trail riding opportunities for ATV/ORV operators in Old Growth areas. However, MA 8G areas are widely scattered across the Forests and vary considerably in size, making it difficult to predict effects on ATV/ORV use.

Effects on ATV/ORV Use from Ecosystem Restoration Activities

There appears to be no effect on ATV/ORV use from ecosystem restoration activities. The description “ecosystem restoration” is specifically used to describe MAs 2B, 3B, 4B, and 4C. These MAs have no specific Standards and Guides that limit or restrict ATV/ORV use.

Cumulative Effects

The Cumulative Effects Area for ATV and Off-Road Vehicle use is the State of Wisconsin because most ATV/ORV users who recreate on the Chequamegon-Nicolet are Wisconsin residents and most information on use comes from statewide surveys.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests have become popular destinations in Wisconsin for those who favor motorized travel and recreation. The Chequamegon offers almost 500 miles of motorized trails as well as unrestricted off-road/off-trail access to much of the Forest. In addition, both the Chequamegon and the Nicolet offer hundreds of miles of designated ORV routes. Forest motorized trails also connect to trail systems on adjacent state, county, or private land, providing access to additional recreation opportunities.

ATVs

Today there are about 1,500 miles of state-designated three season (spring-summer-fall) ATV trails in Wisconsin, up slightly from 1,240 miles in 1990 (WDNR, 2003a). In addition, winter ATV use is permitted on another 2,000 miles of state-designated trails, bringing total ATV trail riding opportunities in Wisconsin to about 3,500 miles (WDNR, 2003a). Currently, 19% of Wisconsin's three season ATV trails and 8% of the total ATV trail riding opportunities in the state are located on the Chequamegon National Forest alone.

Although there are no ATV trails on the Nicolet, ATVs are currently permitted on short stretches of town-maintained roads that have been opened to ATVs by local Townships. Despite the fact that the Nicolet is effectively closed to ATVs, illegal use is common. Some citizens gladly pay fines for illegal ATV use in exchange for the convenience of motorized access.

Much of the ATV use on the Forests is concentrated on the Chequamegon's 840,000 acres. In addition to 284 miles of designated ATV trails, the Chequamegon is one of only two landowners in the north-central portion of the state to permit off-road, off-trail (cross-country) access for ATVs under an "open unless posted closed" policy. Off-road/off-trail ATV use is also permitted in some parts of Iron County. The Iron County ATV use plan also closes some parts of the County to ATVs and restricts ATV use to trails in others. Discussions with the Iron County Forest Administrator in 1999 indicated that more restrictions may be necessary as use (and conflicts) increase. Most other northern Wisconsin counties permit ATV use on designated trails and roads but do not allow cross-country access on county forestland. Bayfield County and Oneida County, which both permitted cross-country ATV use in the past, have since changed their policies and now restrict ATV use to designated roads and trails.

In 1991, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) published the "Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan" (SCORP). According to SCORP, 5% of Wisconsin residents (about 250,000 people) participated in off-road motor vehicle activities at least once over a 12-month period (WDNR, 1991). This total did not include snowmobile use, which had a 6% participation level.

The WDNR is currently compiling data for SCORP 2000-2005. Preliminary data indicates that participation rates in ATV activities averaged about 12% of all Wisconsin adults in the 1990s (WDNR, 2003b). There were more than 175,000 ATVs registered in the state for public use in 2002-2003, a 587% increase over the 25,600 ATVs registered in 1987 (WDNR 2003d). Estimates suggest that participation in ATV activities will continue to rise, increasing by about 4% over the next decade (WDNR, 2002b).

Despite the estimated 3,500 miles of trail, about 62% of respondents in a 1999-2000 WDNR survey stated that there were not enough trails in the state on which to ride their ATVs (WDNR, 2002b). Other concerns voiced by the respondents revolved around the conduct of other ATV users, such as use of an ATV while intoxicated, trespassing, unsafe

riding practices, and the negative press reports resulting from such behavior. Further, about 26% of respondents to the 1999-2000 ATV survey indicated that the different rules governing their sport throughout the state were a major source of confusion (WDNR 2002b). The adoption of the 2004 Forest Plan, which calls for a consistent ATV policy across both the Chequamegon and Nicolet land bases, may help alleviate some of the confusion.

The restriction of ATV use to designated trails and roads continues a trend toward increased control over ATV use that is seen elsewhere in the state. Combined with an emphasis on road density reduction forestwide and the designation of additional non-motorized areas in most alternatives, the prohibition on off-road/off-trail travel may lead to a net decrease in ATV and ORV access to the Forests. The inclusion of most classified roads on the Chequamegon as ATV routes in the Selected Alternative offsets some of this impact, especially for those who use ATVs while hunting or when training sled dogs in the summer.

Although the Chequamegon land base would be closed to off-road/off-trail ATV travel in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, the decrease in access would be offset somewhat by new trail riding opportunities on the Nicolet in all except Alternative 4. Because ATV use will be restricted to designated trails or routes in all alternatives, the likelihood of conflicts with other users and the potential for resource damage will be reduced. As it is today, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests will continue to be a major provider of ATV recreation opportunities for the state of Wisconsin in the future.

Commonalities in ATV Policy Between the Selected Alternative and Draft Alternatives

In Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative:

- There will be no off-road or off-trail ATV/ORV use;
- The 284 miles of existing ATV trails on the Chequamegon will remain open;
- Street-legal ORVs will be allowed on all roads in the Forests open to general vehicular traffic;
- All Forest system roads and trails will be considered closed to ATVs and other ORVs unless signed and posted open;
- ATV trails will be closed during spring break-up (approximately 3/15-5/15, with exact timing determined locally by spring conditions each year); and

There will be no intensive use or ATV play areas on the Forests and the existing ATV play area will be closed to motorized use and rehabilitated. Closure of the play area would displace forest visitors who come to the Chequamegon to experience the unique opportunities for hill climbing available at this site. Opportunities for this kind of experience would no longer be provided by the Forests, forcing visitors to seek out similar opportunities on private or other publicly-owned lands. Because similar opportunities are not currently available on lands near the Forest, people may have to travel considerable distances in the future. ATV play riding opportunities would remain at current levels in Alternative 1.

Summary of Important Differences in ATV Policy Between the Selected Alternative and Draft Alternatives

- Comments received on the DEIS indicated that the distinction made in the DEIS between “connectors” and other ATV travelways was too confusing. In the Selected Alternative and FEIS, ATV travelways will be called “trails”, if they do not follow

numbered forest system roads, or “routes”, if they follow designated system roads signed for ATV usage.

- An Adaptive Management Approach—in which miles of trails constructed or system ATV route designations will vary according to the number of problems experienced—will be used forestwide to help find a level of ATV/ORV access that satisfies the demand for additional recreation opportunities without causing enforcement concerns, unacceptable resource damage, or conflicts with other forest visitors.
- In Alternatives 2-9, system roads would be considered closed to ATV and other ORVs until designated as ATV routes in project level decisions. In the Selected Alternative, the procedures used to determine which roads will be designated as ATV routes and opened to ATV/ORV traffic vary between the Chequamegon and Nicolet as described below:
 - ✓ On the Chequamegon, all signed system roads will be considered designated ATV routes except those closed by project level decisions. The agency will work with local Townships and citizens in the determination of specific route closures.
 - ✓ On the Nicolet, the agency will work with Township officials to identify existing forest system roads for designation as posted ATV routes in order to enhance the existing network of town-designated ATV routes. Total mileage of the route system will depend on many factors, including the number of problems experienced (violations, resource damage, conflicts with other users, etc.).

Snowmobiles

Participation in snowmobile sports averages about 14% of the adult population for the years 1991-1998 (WDNR, 2000). There are now about 200,000 snowmobiles registered in Wisconsin (WDNR, 2003c). The snowmobile trail network in Wisconsin is extensive, with over 25,000 miles of groomed trails (WDNR 2003c). About 1,000 miles of that trail network is within the boundaries of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests.

Snowmobiles would be allowed on designated trails and on unplowed roads in all alternatives, including the Selected Alternative. Because the 1986 Chequamegon Plan allowed snowmobiles (except where signed as prohibited) on plowed and unplowed roads, designated trails, and off-road/off-trail, this will decrease snowmobile riding opportunities on the Chequamegon. This decrease would be relatively small compared to snowmobile use as a whole within Wisconsin and the number of participants who only use designated trails.

There will be fewer miles of snowmobile-only trail relocations due to non-motorized allocations in the Selected Alternative (40 miles) than in Alternatives 3-9. As these are relocations rather than closures, these changes are unlikely to affect net totals for snowmobile trails on the Forests.

4WD Vehicles and other ORVs

SCORP 2000 did not estimate participation rates for the use of other ORVs like 4WD vehicles. However, 4WD operators are actively seeking additional recreation opportunities on the national forests (USDA FS, ORV Comment Grouping) and it is expected that demand for additional 4WD opportunities will increase in the future.

The existing 25-mile 4WD challenge route on the Lakewood District of the Nicolet is the only publicly-funded 4WD challenge travelway in Wisconsin (WDNR, 2003a). 4WD

route mileage would increase in Alternatives 2, 5, and 6, which provide for the construction of up to 25 miles of new 4WD route. The existing 4WD route would be maintained in 3, 7, and 9, but no new opportunities would be offered. Alternative 4 calls for the obliteration of the existing route.

In the Selected Alternative, if efforts to maintain the 4WD route fail to contain resource damage within acceptable levels or alleviate safety concerns, the existing route will be closed and a new one up to 25 miles in length constructed elsewhere on the Forests (replacement route). Before the replacement route is constructed an agreement with a non-Forest Service entity must be developed to conduct condition monitoring and maintenance.

While street legal ORVs are permitted on all open roads year-round in all alternatives, general reductions in road density could decrease the overall availability of low standard unclassified roads for challenging 4WD opportunities.

In the 2004 Forest Plan and Alternatives, the Forests have taken steps to provide adequate access for motorized recreation enthusiasts while protecting resources, minimizing conflicts, and providing a consistent, enforceable forestwide policy. Off-road vehicle recreation opportunities have been, and will continue to be, accommodated on the Forests. As a result, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests will continue to be a major provider of off-road vehicle recreation opportunities for the state of Wisconsin.

Transportation and Open Road Density

Current Condition

Roads

Chequamegon National Forest, 1986 Forest Plan

According to the 1986 Chequamegon National Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement Summary (p. vii), the Forest Transportation System consisted of over 2,200 miles of Forest System roads with an additional 231 miles of state and county highways. Using these figures, the average forestwide road density was calculated as 2.0 miles per square mile.

However, more comprehensive inventories of sample areas indicated that approximately 3,600 miles of low standard roads—mostly primitive two-track dirt roads that require a high clearance vehicle to traverse—were not included in the roads inventory used for the 1986 Plan. Many of these roads were originally constructed as narrow gauge railway grades before the Chequamegon or Nicolet National Forests were established. Others were constructed more recently as logging roads that were intended to provide temporary access for timber management activities. Despite the fact that continued recreation use has kept many of these corridors drivable, such “temporary” roads were not included in the roads inventory.

Including the estimated 3,600 miles of uninventoried roads, average total road density for the Forest was estimated as 3.5 mi/sq. mi. in 1986. Total road density (TRD) measures the total miles of all open and closed roads (i.e. Maintenance Levels 1-5) per square mile of National Forest land. It includes roads under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service, as well as roads managed by State, County, Local, and other Federal authorities. Because it is an inventory of all roads, even those closed to the driving public or maintained by other jurisdictions, total road density gives a good sense of the complete network of roads that provide access to the Forests.

Of the 754,569 acres allocated as MA 1-4 in the 1986 Plan (Chequamegon Appendices for the FEIS p B-223), 156,100 acres were assigned a maximum total road density objective of 2.0 miles per square mile and 598,479 acres a total road density objective of 3.6 mi/sq. mi. (Chequamegon Forest Plan FEIS p II-55). Averaging the road density objectives assigned to the management areas produced a forestwide maximum road density objective of 3.0 mi/sq. mi.

Open road density (ORD) measures the maximum miles of Forest Service roads open to public vehicle traffic (i.e. Maintenance Levels 2-5) per square mile of National Forest land. As such, it is a more accurate indicator of the miles of system roads in an area that are regularly traveled by the public. The Chequamegon Forest Plan FEIS (p. II-55) lists 52,100 acres of zero open road density, most of which are designated Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) areas. Following implementation of the 1986 Plan, many roads in these areas were closed in order to provide more opportunities for non-motorized forms of recreation and to help move the Forest toward the desired maximum road density of 3.0 mi/sq mi.

Nicolet National Forest, 1986 Forest Plan

According to the Nicolet Forest Plan FEIS, there were 4,700 miles of road corridors on the Forest in 1986, including State, County, Forest Service System, and low standard roads. The road inventory, more complete than that of the Chequamegon National Forest, indicated that average total road density on the Forest was 4.6 miles/square-mile.

Like the Chequamegon National Forest, the 1986 Nicolet Forest Plan (p. 20) established a desired maximum total road density of 3.0 miles/square mile for the entire Nicolet National Forest.

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests—Forest Plan Revision

Since 1986, the development of more accurate road inventories has remained a priority for both Forests. Road closures, improvements, construction, and reconstruction are common across the Forests, making ongoing evaluation a necessity. The Chequamegon National Forest began collecting information in the late 1990s to complete its roads inventory in preparation for Forest Plan revision. Not only did the Forest need to collect data on low standard and non-system roads not included in the 1986 inventory, but information on previously inventoried roads had to be updated to reflect changes in road closures and the construction of new corridors.

Given that the original survey was fairly complete, the Nicolet did not have to collect as much new data as the Chequamegon when revising its inventory. Although the Nicolet had access to the technology before the Chequamegon, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was used by both Forests in order to facilitate completion of comprehensive databases.

Preliminary GIS coverage used in the DEIS for the Proposed Forest Plan (2003) indicated that there were about 5,670 miles of all types of road corridors on the Nicolet and 4,575 miles on the Chequamegon. Using those figures, the total miles of all roads per square mile of national forest land (total road density) was estimated in the DEIS as 5.6 mi/sq mi on the Nicolet and 3.5 mi/sq mi on the Chequamegon. Preliminary data available at the time the DEIS was prepared indicated that there were 3,113 and 4,432 miles of roads open to the driving public (open roads) on the Chequamegon and Nicolet, respectively. Open road density, the miles of open Forest Service roads per square mile of national forest

land, was estimated in the DEIS as 2.4 mi/sq mi on the Chequamegon and 4.4 mi/sq mi on the Nicolet.

Because of inconsistencies in the GIS coverage used in the DEIS, re-analysis of the roads data was required in preparation for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Current inventories are more accurate than at any time in the past, allowing for more precise estimates of road miles and density. Table 3-50 shows current total road density on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests based on the most recent roads data.

Table 3-50. Current Total Road Density¹ Estimates for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests.

	Chequamegon NF	Nicolet NF
Land Base	843,061 acres (1317.3 mi ²)	651,485 acres (1017.9 mi ²)
Miles of Road	4038.2 miles	4983.8 miles
Total Road Density¹	3.1 mi/mi²	4.9 mi/mi²
Forestwide Average Total Road Density	3.9 mi/mi²	

Note: Eighteen miles of road on the Chequamegon were not included in the analysis because of insufficient information in the inventory.

¹Total miles of all open and closed roads, regardless of ownership, per square mile of National Forest land.

The 2004 Forest Plan calls for a forestwide total road density of 3.0 mi/sq. mi. As shown in the table above, total road density on the Chequamegon land base is approaching that objective; decommissioning about 90 miles of road will help the Forest meet the objective. About 96% of those roads (86 miles) are under Forest Service jurisdiction.

Total road density on the Nicolet is estimated at 4.9 mi/sq. mi. Achieving the total road density objective on the Nicolet is likely to be more challenging, given that at least 1,900 miles of roads must be decommissioned in order to reduce forestwide total road density to 3.0 mi/sq. mi. About 90% of those roads, or 1,700 miles, are under Forest Service jurisdiction.

The estimated forestwide open road densities for the Chequamegon and Nicolet land bases are shown in Table 3-51. Open road density for non-motorized areas designated in the 1986 Plans is difficult to calculate because of changes in management area boundaries and recent land acquisitions.

Table 3-51. Current Open Road Density¹, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests

	Chequamegon NF	Nicolet NF
Land Base	843,061 acres (1317.3mi ²)	651,485 acres (1017.9 mi ²)
Miles of Open FS Roads	2997.3 miles	3064.1 miles
Open Road Density¹	2.2 mi/mi²	3.0 mi/mi²
Forestwide Average Open Road Density	2.6 mi/mi²	

Note: Out of a total of 9,040 miles of road forestwide, eighteen miles of road on the Chequamegon land base of the Forests were not included in the analysis because of insufficient information in the inventory.

¹Miles of Forest Service road open to the driving public per square mile of National Forest land.

Current Management Direction

The current Forest Plans are not consistent in the terminology used and amount of detail included in the transportation system inventories, making it difficult to compare total road densities on the Forests' two land bases. In the Chequamegon inventory, corridors considered were those identified as "system" roads; other "non-system" corridors were not included in the road system inventory. The Nicolet inventory was more all-inclusive, with State, County, Forest Service, and low standard roads included. Tables 3-52 and 3-53 display road density guidelines of the 1986 Plans.

Table 3-52. Existing Total Road Density Objectives Under 1986 Forest Plans

Management Area	Chequamegon NF		Nicolet NF	
	Total Road Density Objective (mi/sq mi)	Acres of road density assignment	Total Road Density Objective (mi/sq mi)	Acres of road density assignment
1.1 – 4.1	3.6	598,469	4.0	456,900
1.2 – 4.2	2.0	156,100	2.0	110,300
8.1 – 8.7	Ranges from no new to 2.0	27,123		
6.0	0.0 with exceptions	52,100		
6.2			Up to 4.0	13,600
6.3, 8.1, 9.1, 9.2			Rds only as needed	160,053

Table 3-53. Existing Open Road Density Objectives Under 1986 Forest Plans

Management Area	Chequamegon NF		Nicolet NF	
	Open Road Density Objective (mi/sq mi)	Acres of road density assignment	Open Road Density Objective (mi/sq mi)	Acres of road density assignment
6.0	0.0 with exceptions	52,100	N/A	N/A

Under current Forest Plans, both Forests have focused their road closures on non-motorized areas, low road density areas, wolf pack areas, and areas where roads were causing negative environmental impacts. For the most part, these closures have been successful. However, closures on some roads are consistently breached.

Recent budget allocations have not adequately supported the road maintenance efforts needed to keep an extensive road system drivable and safe. In 2000 the Forest Service adopted a new transportation policy to reduce the number of roads subject to costly maintenance efforts. The new policy requires an interdisciplinary Roads Analysis for any project level road management decision, as well as a forestwide analysis of higher standard roads. The Roads Analysis identifies resource problems related to the transportation system and recommends roads for decommissioning and closure in order to focus limited funds on fewer corridors.

Improved technology and consistent terminology have led to the development of more accurate estimates of total road density. Consistent terminology for both the Chequamegon and the Nicolet was developed as part of the Roads Analysis process, permitting more detailed corridor inventories. Advances in technology, such as use of Global Positioning Systems and spatial GIS databases, have improved accuracy as well.

Proposed Changes and Range of Changes

The Roads Analysis assigns all roads within the national forests a Maintenance Level that defines the level of service provided by the road and the level of maintenance required to retain the desired condition of the roadway. The Maintenance Level designations help identify roads for closure in order to focus limited funds on fewer corridors.

The Maintenance Level criteria are summarized below:

Maintenance Level 1: Applies to roads closed to the driving public for at least one year. Although most are low standard primitive roads, higher standard surfaced roads may also be closed and assigned Maintenance Level 1.

Maintenance Level 2: Applies to infrequently traveled, primitive roads that are drivable by high clearance vehicles or used for transporting timber. These roads are usually too rugged for passenger car traffic.

Maintenance Level 3: Assigned to roads that are drivable by standard passenger cars. Most are single lane roads designed for low speed travel. Part or all of the road may be surfaced with native or processed material.

Maintenance Level 4: Assigned to roads that are designed to be traveled at moderate travel speeds. Most are two-lane roads with aggregate surfacing; some may be paved or dust-abated.

Maintenance Level 5: Applies to roads that provide a high degree of comfort and convenience for users. Most are paved, two-lane roads that connect to public highways although some may have aggregate surfacing.

Like the 1986 Forest Plans, the 2004 Forest Plan calls for a forestwide maximum total road density of 3.0 mi/sq. mi. The current average total road density is 3.1 mi/sq. mi. on the Chequamegon and 4.9 mi/sq. mi. on the Nicolet. Achieving the forestwide total road density will require a 2% (Chequamegon) to 39% (Nicolet) reduction in overall road miles and a significant commitment of funds and time. The priority for decommissioning roads is as follows:

1. Resource Protection—where a road is contributing to the degradation of a particular resource.
2. Re-routing of an existing road with obliteration of the old corridor.
3. Meeting total road density upper limits.

Achieving the road density upper limits set for the forests will require targeted road closures and obliterations to gradually reduce the number of roads being traveled by public motorized vehicles. Road closures will affect only Forest Service roads; the Forest Service cannot close roads managed and maintained by State, County, or local authorities.

Description of Recreation Resources due to Road Changes in Action Alternatives

Road closures and obliterations will focus on lower standard roads (Maintenance Level 2). The higher standard roads that comprise the majority of the forest road network will be largely unaffected by road closures and many will remain open to licensed street vehicles. With this in mind, recreationists who enjoy driving lower standard roads will have fewer opportunities over time. At the same time, those who enjoy non-motorized forms of recreation, more physical challenge, and less exposure to the sights, sounds, and smells of motorized vehicles may find more opportunities under the 2004 Forest Plan than currently available. Although a less extensive road system could enhance non-motorized recreation opportunities like hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, and horseback riding, those who use low standard roads for non-motorized pursuits could also be negatively affected by road decommissioning.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Descriptions and Guidelines for Open Road Density

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Descriptions

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) system is a method used by the Forest Service to inventory and zone recreation opportunities of the land based on physical, social, and managerial attributes. The land classifications range from the most remote and undeveloped (“primitive”) to the most developed settings (“urban”). The descriptions of the classifications used on the Chequamegon-Nicolet—from “Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized” to “Rural”—are summarized below. There are no areas on the CNNF that can be classified as “urban” or “primitive” based on ROS criteria.

- **Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)** – predominately natural appearing setting with high probability of experiencing isolation, little or no evidence of primitive roads, minimum 2,500 acres (some exceptions). Existing and Recommended Wilderness study area recreation experiences on the CNNF could be described as SPNM.
- **Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)** – predominately natural appearing setting with moderate probability of experiencing isolation. Strong evidence of primitive roads/motorized use, minimum 2,500 acres.
- **Roaded Natural Remote (RNR)** – unique to Chequamegon-Nicolet, intended to represent a Semi-Primitive Motorized type of experience in a smaller setting (less than 2,500 acres).
- **Roaded Natural (RN)** – majority of CNNF. Predominately natural appearing setting with moderate evidence of sights and sounds of humans. Strong evidence of designed/constructed roads, no size restriction.
- **Rural (R)** – substantially modified natural environment where sights and sounds of humans are readily evident, may include pastoral, agricultural, intensively managed wildland, utility corridors.
- Roaded Natural is the predominant experience on the CNNF—few areas on the Forests have the potential for more remote experiences. Those areas with the potential for more remote experiences were allocated as SPNM (Management Areas 6A or 6B) or assigned more restrictive open road densities in the different alternatives in order to help preserve desired characteristics. In particular, some areas that fit the Roaded Natural description above were zoned for non-motorized access (Non-Motorized with Full Vegetation Management (NM)). This category is unique to Chequamegon-Nicolet and is

intended to provide non-motorized recreation in intensively-managed forestlands. NM areas will primarily be managed to maintain early-successional habitat for non-motorized hunting opportunities.

SPNM, NM, Semi-Primitive Motorized and Roded Natural Remote designations vary by alternative. Roded Natural and Rural designations are consistent across all alternatives.

Road Density Objectives

Road Density is defined and measured as follows:

Total Road Density—Describes the total miles of all types of roads—including those under the jurisdiction of Local, State, or Federal authorities—per square mile of national forest land. The total road density upper limits represent the *maximum* road density allowed in a specific area. If road density in the area exceeds the upper limit, roads will be gradually decommissioned to help achieve the objective. ROS designations have been grouped together based on the maximum total road density for each area:

- Maximum total road density of **0.0 mi/sq mi**: Applies to Wilderness (MA 5), recommended Wilderness study areas (5B), and SPNM Low Disturbance (MA 6A).
- Maximum total road density of **3.0 mi/sq mi**: Applies to SPNM Moderate Disturbance (MA 6B), Non-Motorized with Full Vegetation Management (NM), Riley Lake Wildlife Area and Moquah Barrens (MA 8C), Existing and Potential Wild and Scenic Rivers (MA 8D), Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM), Roded Natural Remote (RNR), and some large block northern hardwood areas (MA 2B).
- Maximum total road density of **4.0 mi/sq mi**: Applies to Roded Natural (RN) and Rural (R) ROS classes, which may be applied to polygons not already designated as described above.

Open Road Density – Describes the miles of Forest Service roads open to public use, per square mile of National Forest land. ROS designations have been grouped together based on the maximum open road density for each area:

- Maximum open road density of **0.0 mi/sq mi**: Applies to any non-motorized designation – Wilderness (5), Recommended Wilderness study areas (5B), SPNM (6A, 6B), and Non-Motorized Recreation Emphasis (NM).
- Maximum open road density of up to **2.0 mi/sq mi**: Applies to Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) and Roded Natural Remote (RNR). These ROS designations may be applied to planning polygons that have the potential to meet appropriate ROS criteria. In response to ecological concerns, some other areas, including MA 8C (Riley Lake Wildlife Area and Moquah Barrens), MA 8D (Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers), and three MA 2B areas identified for ecological connectivity, were included in this open road density class. Potential SPNM areas that were not allocated as MA 6A or 6B in a particular alternative were also included in this open road density class.
- Maximum open road density of up to **4.0 mi/sq mi**: Applies to Roded Natural (RN) (the most widely applied ROS designation for the CNNF) and Rural designations. These ROS designations may be applied to any general Management Area polygon.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Effects on Transportation Systems from Road Density Objectives and Non-Motorized Recreation Designations

Potential ROS classifications were assigned to different parts of the Forests in the action alternatives. Specific areas in the Forests have been assigned different total road density objectives—0.0 mi/sq mi (MA 5, 5B, 6A), 3.0 mi/sq mi (MA 6B, NM, SPM, RNR), and 4.0 mi/sq mi (RN, R)—to help guide future road management decisions. If road density in the area exceeds the objective, roads will be gradually decommissioned to reduce total road density of the area and achieve the objective. Vehicle access to Management Areas 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, and NM will be limited to perimeter roads and trails once interior roads are closed to public motorized traffic.

Figure 3-62 compares acreage of total road density upper limit zoning for the Alternatives. As shown, acres of 0.0 mi/sq mi maximum total road density vary across alternatives, from a high of 192,000 acres in Alternative 4 to a low of 44,000 acres in Alternative 1 (current condition). The Selected Alternative is within the range of the draft alternatives, with 79,600 acres of 0.0 mi/sq mi total road density objective—the same as the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5). Acres of 3.0 mi/sq mi total road density upper limits range from a low of 454,000 acres in Alternative 4 to a high of 584,000 acres in Alternative 2. The Selected Alternative identifies 566,000 acres of 3.0 mi/sq mi areas, the same as Alternative 5. There are 848,000 acres of 4.0 mi/sq mi total road density objective area in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative.

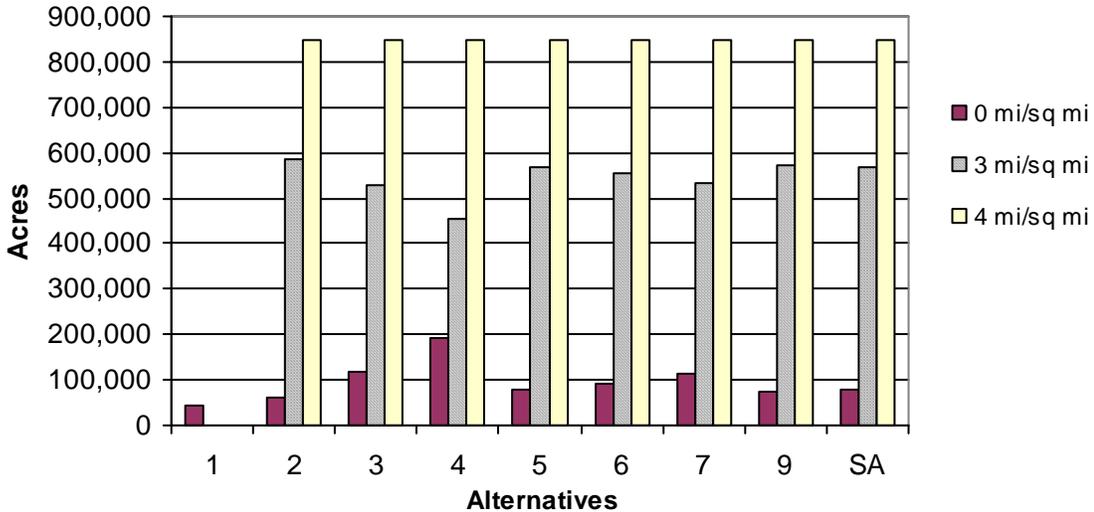


Figure 3-62. Acres by Total Road Density (TRD) Objectives

Within each total road density zone, roads will be decommissioned in order to meet the upper limit set for the area (either 0.0, 3.0, or 4.0 mi/sq mi). Decommissioning can be accomplished at several levels from a minimum of allowing natural re-vegetation to take place, to restoration of natural topography, scarification, and tree planting. See Chapter 2 of the 2004 Forest Plan for more details. Table 3-54 displays minimum miles of road that would be decommissioned to meet total road density upper limits within designated

areas. The 1986 Chequamegon plan did not specifically designate boundaries of 2.0 mile/square mile areas, making it impossible to compare Alternative 1 with Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative. Minimum miles of road that would need to be decommissioned in order to meet total road density upper limits ranges from a low of approximately 970 miles in Alternative 2 to a high of 1590 miles in Alternative 4.

Table 3-54. Minimum Miles of Roads (estimated) to be Decommissioned to Meet Total Road Density Objectives

	Alt.1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6	Alt. 7	Alt. 9	SA
Minimum miles of road to be decommissioned to meet all TRD objectives	N/A	970	1,230	1,590	1,060	1,120	1,210	1,040	1,060

In the 2004 Forest Plan and Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, open road density guidelines have been assigned to specific areas in the Forests. Management Areas 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, and NM have been assigned a maximum open road density (ORD) of 0.0 mi/sq mi, SPM and RNR designations have a maximum ORD of 2.0 mi/sq mi, and RN and R designations have a maximum ORD of 4.0 mi/sq mi. Vehicle access to Management Areas 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, and NM will be limited to perimeter roads once interior roads are closed to public motorized traffic.

The open road density guidelines establish the maximum miles of Forest Service-maintained roads per square mile that will be open to public motorized vehicles (i.e. Maintenance Levels 2-5). As with the total road density objectives, roads will need to be closed if the actual open road density of an area exceeds the guideline applied to that area. Those who enjoy primitive forms of recreation can expect a higher quality recreation experience in areas assigned 0.0 miles per square mile open road density while areas with 2.0 miles per square miles and 4.0 miles per square mile open road density generally offer more opportunities for motorized recreation.

Figure 3-63 shows the total acres assigned to each open road density guideline by alternative. Acres of 0.0 mi/sq mi maximum open road density vary across alternatives, from a high of 342,000 acres in Alternative 4 to a low of 120,600 acres in Alternative 1. In the Selected Alternative, acres of 0.0 mi/sq mi open road density will increase by almost 51,000 acres over current levels (Alternative 1) but decrease by almost 30,000 acres from the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5). The 30,000 acres not considered for non-motorized allocation will instead be designated as semi-primitive motorized or roaded natural remote (2.0 mi/sq mi open road density objective).

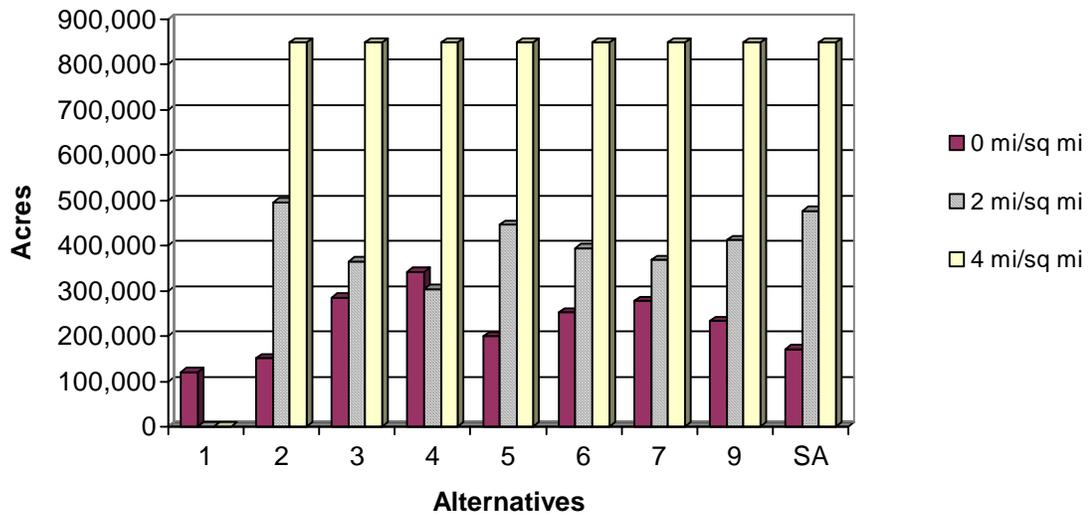


Figure 3-63. Acres by Open Road Density (ORD) Objective

Minimum miles of road that will need to be closed to meet all open road density objectives are displayed in Table 3-55. In Alternative 4, which calls for the highest acreage of 0.0 mi/sq mi designations, an estimated 1,160 miles of road would need to be closed in order to meet forestwide open road density objectives. Alternative 4 is followed by Alternative 3 (~1,000 miles), Alternative 7 (~980 miles), Alternative 6 (~910 miles), Alternative 9 (~890 miles), Alternative 5 (~780 miles), the Selected Alternative (~710 miles), and Alternative 2 (~670 miles). Since open road guidelines were not assigned to the Forests under the 1986 plans, comparing revision alternatives with the current situation (Alternative 1) is difficult at best.

In all alternatives, roughly 80% of the roads that would need to be closed are Maintenance Level 2 roads—low standard, primitive roads drivable by high clearance vehicles. Road closures to protect vulnerable resources, reroute corridors to less sensitive areas, or achieve road density objectives are likely to focus on these low standard roads.

Table 3-55. Minimum Miles of Road (estimated) to be Closed to Meet ORD Objectives and Percent that are Maintenance Level 2 (low standard) Roads.

Open Road Density Objective	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6	Alt. 7	Alt. 9	SA
Minimum miles of open roads to be closed to meet ORD objectives	120	670	1,000	1,160	780	910	980	890	710
Percent of roads that are ML 2	82%	81%	80%	80%	82%	81%	81%	80%	81%

Lakes/Fishing

Under forestwide standards there will be no net increase in vehicle access to the Forests' lakes, meaning that when a new road is built to a lake not previously vehicle accessible, a road leading to another lake will be closed or obliterated. Although decisions regarding the closure of specific access roads will be made at the project level, high standard paved or surfaced lake access roads are unlikely to be closed or decommissioned. Instead, any access roads closed are likely to be low standard Maintenance Level 2 roads.

Combined with the emphasis on reducing forestwide total road density, these goals and standards may lead to decreased vehicle access to some lakes and streams in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative. Fishing opportunities in these lakes and streams would shift to those who arrive by non-motorized forms of transportation.

Hunting

Non-motorized recreation opportunities increase over the existing condition in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative. Road density objectives applied to all non-motorized areas will require the closure of roads, especially low standard, primitive roads. Since vehicle access in non-motorized areas will be limited to perimeter roads, motorized access for hunters will decrease in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative. Because hunters tend to use low maintenance level roads to access hunting areas, road closures will affect vehicle-assisted hunting access to a higher degree than vehicle access for other purposes.

Driving for Pleasure

Increased non-motorized allocations in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative would lead to fewer opportunities for pleasure driving. Although most specific road closure decisions will be made at the project level, most of the roads closed are likely to be low maintenance level roads (Maintenance Level 2). Based on the assumption that pleasure drivers use predominantly higher maintenance level roads, the impact of road closures on those driving for pleasure is expected to be less than for those who utilize lower standard roads.

Dispersed and Developed Camping Using Motorized Vehicles

Developed Campgrounds will not be affected by reduced road density/road closures in any of the alternatives. All existing developed campgrounds will remain vehicle accessible. No new campgrounds are planned.

Nearly all dispersed campsites on the Forests are currently vehicle accessible. There are 66 dispersed campsites in existing or potential non-motorized areas (MA 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, and NM). Twenty-eight of the campsites are located on or very near perimeter roads that delineate the boundary of the non-motorized area. Since these roads would remain open to vehicle traffic, access to these campsites would be unaffected by road closures due to non-motorized designations. Access to the 9 hike-in sites would not be affected by road closures either. Access to the 29 campsites located on interior roads, however, would be restricted to non-motorized forms of transportation as those roads are gradually closed to public vehicle traffic.

As shown in Figure 3-64, fewer dispersed campsites will need to be closed due to non-motorized designations in the Selected Alternative than in any other alternative. Nine campsites are expected to shift to non-motorized use in the Selected Alternative, compared to about 29 campsites in Alternatives 4, 5, and 9, 16 campsites in Alternatives

2 and 6, and 12 campsites in Alternatives 1, 3, and 7. As a result, although dispersed campsites will be closed to motorized vehicles in all alternatives, dispersed camping opportunities for motorized recreation enthusiasts will not be reduced to the same degree in the Selected Alternative as in the other alternatives

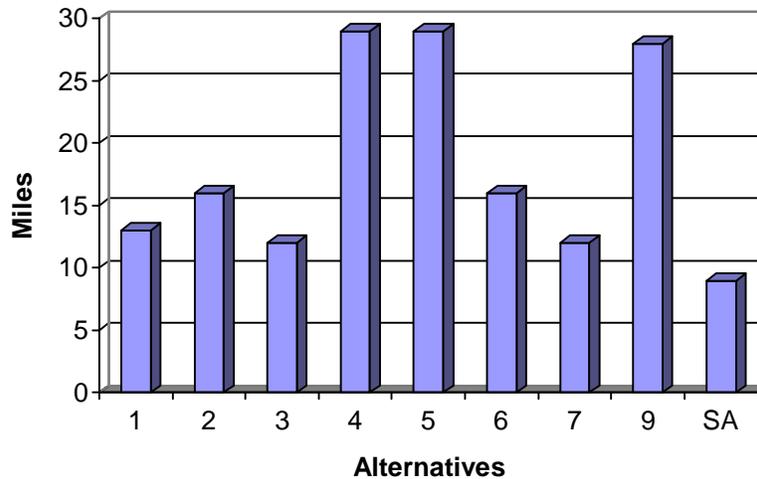


Figure 3-64. Dispersed Campsites that will be Closed to Motorized Vehicles due to all Non-Motorized Designations

The emphasis on forestwide reduction of total road density may lead to the closure of campsite access roads outside non-motorized areas as well. However, since such decisions would be made at the project level, it is impossible to predict which campsites might be affected.

Cumulative Effects

Only roads within National Forest boundaries are considered in the cumulative effects analysis for transportation.

Roads make our National Forests accessible to the public. They move people from place to place, allow for rapid response in emergency situations, facilitate management activities, and provide access to remote areas and recreational facilities. However, roads also bring engine noise—a sound that is grating to the ears of many who visit National Forests hoping to find solitude and isolation in quiet forests. Besides noise pollution, roads are costly to maintain, can create ecological barriers for certain species, and cause, directly or indirectly, unacceptable resource damage like sedimentation at stream/road crossings. The ecological impacts of road corridors are addressed at length in the “Wildlife”, “Species of Concern”, “Terrestrial Ecosystem Components”, and “Aquatic Ecosystems” sections of Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

In what is now the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests, logging done at the turn of the century resulted in an extensive network of roads and railroad beds, many of which still exist today. Over the years, road mileage has increased as roads were rerouted to less sensitive locations and new corridors were established to gain access to specific parts of the Forest. Some road systems still follow corridors built during the early logging era and are poorly located, have drainage problems, or lack properly sized culverts.

The controversy surrounding roaded access in the National Forests revolves around the issue of motorized versus non-motorized recreation. Demand for both forms of recreation has increased in recent years, leading to increased pressure on the Forests to provide adequate opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized recreationists. Because shared motorized/non-motorized access to the same trail or road can be unpleasant, frustrating, and dangerous for all, the Forests have attempted to resolve the conflict by closing parts of the Forests to all public motorized vehicle traffic. Non-motorized designations like Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, SPNM, and NM designations will increase opportunities for those who enjoy more primitive forms of recreation like hiking, biking, primitive camping and walk-in hunting. Motorized recreation enthusiasts who prefer to explore the Forests by ATV, snowmobile, or high-clearance vehicle, however, will find fewer opportunities over time.

Like the 1986 Forest Plans, the 2004 Forest Plan and Alternatives call for a gradual reduction in average total road density across the Forests. Currently, overall total road density for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests is 3.9 mi/sq mi. Reaching the forestwide total road density objective of 3.0 mi/sq mi. may take decades and will require the closure or decommissioning of approximately 2,000 miles of road forestwide. The minimum miles of road that will need to be decommissioned to achieve the different total road density upper limits of 0.0 mi/sq mi, 3.0 mi/sq mi, and 4.0 mi/sq mi ranges from approximately 1,590 miles in Alternative 4 to 970 miles in Alternative 2. In the Selected Alternative, like the Preferred Alternative, about 1,060 miles of road forestwide will need to be decommissioned, leading to fewer opportunities over time for motorized recreation like pleasure driving and vehicle-assisted hunting and camping. Conversely, non-motorized recreation enthusiasts will find more opportunities for camping, hiking, fishing, hunting and other primitive pursuits than under current Forest Plans. Most of the roads decommissioned will be little-used low standard roads, allowing limited road maintenance funds to be concentrated on the roads experiencing the most use. Consequently, access for those who currently use low standard roads for motorized activities will decrease over time while opportunities for those who enjoy non-motorized forms of recreation will increase.

Currently, forestwide open road density is 2.6 mi/sq mi. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum and Guidelines for Open Road Density have been used to identify those places on the forests best suited for non-motorized experiences. The same analysis was also used to assign maximum total road density objectives to different parts of the Forests that will guide site level decisions on road decommissioning. Depending on existing road density and other criteria, an open road density objective of 0.0 mi/sq mi has been assigned to various parts of the Forests in the alternatives to help maintain the natural appearance and semi-primitive character of these areas. More developed parts of the forest have been assigned open road density objectives of 2.0 mi/sq mi or 4.0 mi/sq mi to either maintain desired characteristics or, where appropriate, reduce road density to more acceptable levels. The minimum miles of road that would need to be closed in order to meet the open road density objectives ranges from a high of approximately 1,160 miles in Alternative 4 to a low of 670 miles in Alternative 2. At least 710 miles of roads, or 8% percent of existing system roads, will need to be closed to meet open road density objectives for the Selected Alternative

National Scenic and National Recreation Trails

Introduction

America's network of National Scenic and National Recreation (NSR) trails, developed under the authority of the 1968 National Trails System Act (Public Law, 90-543, 90th Congress), gives people nationwide the opportunity to explore the nation's heritage through its scenery, natural environment, and cultural and historical features. National Scenic Trails (NST) are long-distance (i.e. extended) trails that traverse hundreds or thousands of miles. National Recreation Trails (NRT) are generally shorter and are usually located reasonably close to urban centers. The National Park Service (NPS) is responsible for overall administration of the National Scenic Trails. National Recreation Trails are administered by various federal, state, and local agencies.

Currently, there are six NSR trails—the Ice Age NST, the North Country NST, Anvil NRT, Lauterman NRT, Ed's Lake NRT, and Rock Lake NRT—on the CNNF.

NSR Trails, Chequamegon National Forest

The North Country NST will traverse more than 4,000 miles when completed and connect National Forests in seven northern states from New York to North Dakota. At this time, approximately 1,600 miles of the trail have been completed. The original segment of the trail is the 61-mile stretch that runs through the Washburn and Great Divide Ranger Districts of the CNNF. The trail is managed primarily for hiking and backpacking although other non-motorized uses, such as cross-country skiing and dog sledding, are permitted as well. The North Country trail was added to the National Scenic Trail System in 1980 and became a designated State Trail (Wisconsin) in 1982 (s. 23.175 (2) (a) Stats and s. NR 51.73 Wis. Admin. Code).

The Ice Age NST traces the footprint left on the land by the most recent glacial advance 10-15,000 years ago. It explores outstanding examples of glacial features such as terminal and recessional moraines, drumlins, and eskers from Wisconsin's Door County in the east to the St. Croix River in the west. Eventually, the trail will stretch some 1,000 miles through 31 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. About half of the trail has been completed to date, linking many community greenways and five of the nine Ice Age National Scientific Reserve units. Almost fifty miles of the trail pass through the Forests' Medford/Park Falls Ranger District—one of the most remote and secluded segments of the entire trail.

Although not officially recognized as part of the NST, the 7-mile Ice Age Loop in the Ice Age Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized area is included in this analysis because it links two certified segments of the trail and allows for uninterrupted passage through the Medford Unit of the Forest. Hiking and backpacking are the primary uses of the trail, although horseback riding is currently permitted on a 12-mile segment south of Forest Road 116. The trail exists today because of the efforts of State, local, and private interests who began lobbying for its creation in the 1950s. Their efforts paid off in 1980 when the trail was authorized as a National Scenic Trail by congressional and Presidential action. In 1987 the trail was designated a State Scenic Trail by the state of Wisconsin (s. 23.17 (2), Stats).

Rock Lake, a National Recreation Trail (NRT) on the Forests' Great Divide Ranger District, offers 13 miles of trail through rolling, hilly terrain past several small, scenic lakes. More than half of the trail is in the Rock Lake Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized area, which is closed to motorized forms of recreation. The trail is groomed for cross-country skiing in winter and open to hiking the rest of the year. Mountain bikes were allowed on

the trail in the past but are now prohibited on the majority of the trail. Horseback riding is not allowed.

NSR Trails, Nicolet National Forest

There are three National Recreation Trails (NRT) on the Nicolet land base: Anvil and Lauterman on the Eagle River/Florence Ranger District, and Ed's Lake on the Lakewood/Laona Ranger District. All of these trails are groomed for cross-country skiing in the winter and include loops of varying difficulty for skiers of all ability levels. The rest of the year the trails are open to hikers and mountain bikers. Under the 1986 Plan, all three trails are located in MA 6.2, a management prescription that emphasizes a semi-primitive non-motorized recreation experience.

The 11-mile long Anvil NRT dates back to the 1930s when it was originally constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It was later expanded and was designated a National Recreation Trail in 1978. The trail is near several campgrounds and connects with another 15-mile trail system, providing additional opportunities for year-round recreation. Wildlife viewing opportunities along the trail are also excellent.

The 9-mile long Lauterman NRT provides an Adirondack shelter for rests or picnics as well as opportunities for fishing in Lauterman Lake and camping at several walk-in campsites. The trail connects to other trail systems to the north and south and to developed campgrounds at Pine River and Chipmunk Rapids.

Ed's Lake NRT, the most recent addition to the Forests' NSR trail system, follows historic railroad grades through several different forest communities. An Adirondack shelter with a view of Ed's Lake is a good place for a rest or picnic. The trail is six miles long, including three loops.

Current Management Direction

The Scenery Management System (SMS), described in more detail later in this chapter, protects the outstanding visual resources along the NSR trails by adjusting forest management practices to minimize their impact on visually sensitive areas. It replaces the earlier Visual Quality Objectives (VQO), which were used to set the standards and guidelines for the Chequamegon's Management Area (MA) 8.3. Under SMS, all six NSR trails on the Forests are designated High Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIO).

Chequamegon National Forest

Under the current Chequamegon Forest Plan, the "trail corridors" of the Ice Age NST, North Country NST, and Rock Lake NRT are designated as MA 8.3. Management direction for MA 8.3 is very broad, with little specific information about the types of uses and projects compatible with the general management direction. The standards and guidelines for MA 8.3 are designed to achieve Sensitivity Level 1 and a minimum Visual Quality Objective of Retention. Non-motorized recreation and the enjoyment of the exceptional scenic, geologic, historical, and cultural features along the nationally significant trail corridors are emphasized. Limited timber management that does not adversely affect the scenic qualities of the trail corridors is permitted.

Developed in 1994 by Chequamegon National Forest staff, the Ice Age NST Corridor Plan was intended to provide more specific management direction for development of the Ice Age NST than that provided in the 1986 Forest Plan. The Corridor Plan defined a minimum 600-foot wide trail corridor and identified the uses and management practices compatible with the original purpose and intent of the trail. It also called for improving

the existing semi-primitive experience along the trail, closing the trail to mountain bikes, and putting a conditional prohibition on horseback riding. The Corridor Plan recommended that future management direction for the trail include the closure of unneeded forest roads to minimize trail crossings and intersections, relocation of some parts of the trail to explore additional significant features, creation of scenic vistas, and continued use of big tree management in the trail foreground. No similar document was prepared for any of the other NSR trails on the Forests.

The 1999 memorandum of understanding (MOU) concerning the administration and management of the North Country NST delegates responsibility for the administration, operation, and maintenance of the trail to the National Park Service, United States Forest Service, and the private North Country Trail Association. According to the MOU, the North Country NST “will be administered and managed as a path whose use is primarily for hiking and backpacking.”

Nicolet National Forest

Except for part of Lauterman NRT, the NRT trails on the Nicolet land base of the CNNF are currently located in MA 6.2. This management prescription emphasizes development of wildlife habitat, fisheries, and recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive non-motorized setting. The Nicolet Plan provides little in the way of management direction for the trails other than stating that the standards set forth in the 1968 National Trails System Act and the trail management plan will guide management decisions and objectives for the Forest’s National Recreation Trails (Nicolet LRMP, p 42).

Proposed Changes and Range of Changes

According to the Forestwide Guidelines for “Recreation Facilities and Access Management” listed in Chapter 2 of the 2004 Forest Plan, the North Country NST and Ice Age NST will be managed and maintained primarily for hiking and backpacking. This is consistent with both the administrative decision of the 1994 Ice Age NST Corridor Plan and the desired future condition statement in the 1999 North Country NST memorandum of understanding (MOU). The 2004 Forest Plan also states that all non-motorized trails will be clearly signed and marked “Closed to Motorized Use” at major road crossings and motorized trail intersections and that the “North Country National Scenic Trail – A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance” will be used in the construction or maintenance of additional hiking trails.

Management Area 8.3, which was included in the 1986 Chequamegon National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, has been dropped in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative. This change is expected to have little effect on recreation opportunities on the NSR trails since all of the trails are now managed to maintain a high scenic integrity under the Scenery Management System (SMS). In most cases, SMS standards and guidelines are as rigorous as or more so than those of MA 8.3. However, SMS does not provide as much guidance for even-aged management as does VQO nor are the SMS requirements for slash removal and reduction as demanding as those of VQO.

The 1994 Ice Age NST Corridor Plan introduced several topics to be addressed during the Forest Plan revision process. The issues, along with how they have been addressed during the plan revision process, are summarized below.

1. The 1994 Corridor plan recommends that 28% of the trail corridor be formally designated as old growth.

Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative allocate areas of old growth as Management Area 8G (Old Growth and Natural Feature Complexes). Old growth areas include many different community types, including northern hardwood, hardwood/hemlock, and mixed conifer. Of the total length of the Ice Age NST, 19% passes through Management Area 8G in Alternative 6; 13% in Alternatives 4 and 9; 11% in Alternatives 2, 5, and the Selected Alternative; and 9% in Alternatives 3 and 7. There is no old growth management area in Alternative 1. Under the 1986 Plans, old growth is designated at the project level.

In addition to MA 8G, other management areas such as existing and potential Wilderness (MA 5, 5B), Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized low disturbance (MA 6A), existing and eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers (MA 8D), Research Natural Areas (MA 8E), and Special Management Areas (MA 8F) provide or have the potential to provide old growth conditions. Because of the limited human impacts in these areas, conditions are expected to progress towards those representing old growth communities. Including these management areas, 19% of the Ice Age NST passes through old growth or developing old growth in Alternatives 2 and 5; 22% in the Selected Alternative; 26% in Alternative 3; 30% in Alternatives 4, 6, and 7; and 32% in Alternative 9.

2. Rather than build new roads, the 1994 Corridor Plan recommends that short segments of the trail currently located on old logging roads be used for winter logging projects.

Short segments of the trail may occasionally be used for winter logging after an environmental assessment has been completed and the effects documented and analyzed. Decisions to open parts of the trail for logging activity are not programmatic but rather are made at the project-level.

3. Clearcuts of more than 5 acres should not be visible from the trail.

The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) system that was in use when the Corridor Plan was developed has been replaced with the Scenery Management System (SMS). In what amounts to little more than a change in terminology, SMS classifies areas as High, Moderate, and Low Scenic Integrity Objectives instead of the VQO of Retention, Partial Retention, and Modification. Because the Ice Age NST has been designated as a SMS High Scenic Integrity Objective (SIO) area, clearcuts will be at least 200 feet from the trail.

Description of Recreation Resources due to Trail Changes in Action Alternatives

No changes in the mileage or location of any segment of the NSR trails or trailheads were proposed in the forest plan revision topics identified in the 1996 Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Revision of Land and Resource Management Plans for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (NOI). NSR trails do, however, pass through new management areas, each with its own set of management objectives and directives, in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Effects on Recreation Experiences Due to Scenery Management

When the 1986 Forest Plans were developed, Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) were used to measure the degree of landscape modification compatible with visual resource management objectives. Five categories—Preservation, Retention, Partial Retention, Modification, and Maximum Modification—were used to describe the degree of human disturbance appropriate for a given area. The NSR trails on the Chequamegon National Forest were assigned VQOs ranging from Partial Retention (parts of Rock Lake NRT) to Preservation (parts of North Country NST). The National Recreation Trails on the Nicolet National Forest were assigned a VQO of Retention.

The VQO has since been replaced by the Scenery Management System (SMS) (FEIS Appendices, G-13). SMS identifies visually sensitive areas and sites on the Forests—places where the scenery and surroundings enhance the recreation experience—and adjusts management practices to help protect the sensitive nature of these areas. SMS provides managers with the means to inventory, analyze, and monitor scenic resources and helps them develop appropriate long-term goals and objectives for those resources. In what amounts to little more than a change in terminology, SMS classifies visually sensitive areas as High, Moderate, and Low Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIO) instead of the corresponding VQO designations of Retention, Partial Retention, and Modification. Management practices in High SIO areas are subject to more restrictions and modifications than those in Moderate or Low SIO areas. Implementing the SMS Standards and Guidelines will result in scenery complimenting the recreation experience in all alternatives.

Designated visually sensitive areas include the following:

- State and county highways
- Scenic byways
- Roads to campgrounds and other major use areas
- Roads that border Wilderness areas
- National scenic trails
- Hiking trails within ½ mile of campgrounds
- Campgrounds
- Major trailheads
- Major parking areas
- All natural lakes larger than 10 acres
- All eligible wild and scenic rivers
- All NSR trails on the CNNF will be managed as High SIO areas.

Effects on National Scenic and National Recreation Trails Due to Scenery Management

The CNNF's NSR trails pass through many different management areas, each with its own set of management directives guiding the scope, intensity, and frequency of forest management activities. Since all six NSR trails on the CNNF are designated High SIO areas, any timber harvest that occurs along the trails must adhere to the Forestwide Standards and Guidelines for High SIO Travelways. Effects on the visual resource due to Scenery Management are expected to be about the same in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative as in Alternative 1 (existing condition).

Standards and Guidelines for High SIO Travelways

Even-aged management that will result in temporary openings must be at least 200 feet from High SIO trails; temporary openings such as clearcuts are not expected to be visible from the trails. There are no restrictions on how far selective harvests must be from High SIO areas, however. Provided the other Standards and Guidelines are followed, selective harvest can occur alongside NSR trails. Harvests of northern hardwoods will follow Table 2-5 of the Forest Plan, a management prescription designed to encourage development of larger trees than those found in stands managed primarily for commercial timber value.

Any permanent openings are expected to follow the natural contours and characteristics of the landscape and scenic overlooks and vistas would be located to take advantage of existing natural openings when possible. Although natural reforestation is preferred, planting in random, non-linear patterns may be done within 100 feet of the trails if it is necessary to encourage growth of long-lived species. Standards and Guidelines for slash treatment reduce the likelihood that visitors will see evidence of timber management activities. Visible areas adjacent to the trails will receive treatment to reduce slash height and a 10-foot slash removal zone will be established along the trail. Trees selected for harvest, will be marked on the side facing away from the trail.

When openings are made in jack pine communities, it is suggested that red and white pine trees be retained or that a surrogate savannah be created in order to mitigate possible negative visual effects. If reforestation needs will not be compromised, management activities should be scheduled so as to minimize slash height and encourage growth of vegetation to conceal slash piles.

Use of road signs should be minimal and "natural" colors should be used so signs are as inconspicuous as possible. Overhead utility structures and rights-of-way clearings should not be visible from the trails, except when the structures would pass through Forest land for ¼ mile or less and all other locations have been deemed unsuitable.

When implemented, these Standards and Guidelines ensure that little evidence of vegetation management will be visible from High SIO areas and that forests will be natural in appearance, with a wide variety of tree sizes and species represented. Evidence of forest management activities along NSR trails will be mitigated but not eliminated entirely. Because of these guidelines, visitors to the NSR trails on the CNNF may encounter less evidence of forest management activities along the trails, especially in the size and proximity of clearcuts, than before SMS took effect.

Effects on National Scenic and National Recreation (NSR) Trails Due to Vegetation Management

While Scenery Management mitigation measures may minimize the negative visual effects associated with timber harvest and sale, visitors may still be exposed to evidence of forest management activity along NSR trails. Like those of the 1986 Forest Plans, each of the eight Management Areas developed as part of the Plan revision process have a general emphasis or theme that guides management of National Forest System lands.

Visitors are more likely to encounter the sights and sounds associated with logging activity in management areas that emphasize commercial timber production. Such activity may diminish the visitor's sense of solitude, isolation, and wildness. Visitors to segments of NSR trails that pass through actively managed areas may encounter evidence of timber harvest or other vegetation management during their visit. Intensive forest management activities are most likely to be encountered in Management Areas 1-4. Of those areas, MA 1 is the most aggressive, with clearcuts and shelterwoods used to maintain early-successional forest communities like aspen; management activities are frequent and intense. MA 2, which emphasizes uneven-aged management and selective harvesting of northern hardwoods and oak, is the least intensive of MA 1-4. Improvement and single tree selection harvest are the preferred management activities. MA 3 and 4 are somewhere in between, with MA 3 being slightly more aggressive than MA 4. Both MA 3 and MA 4 emphasize even-aged management, but since retention of long-lived species is desired, major silvicultural treatments will likely occur at less frequent intervals. MA 1-4 can also be assigned the additional designation of Non-motorized with full vegetation management (NM), which retains the existing management prescription but closes the area to motorized vehicles.

In many cases, the trails pass through management areas where timber production is not one of the primary goals and management directives of the management prescription. Management Areas 5 and 5B (Wilderness and Potential Wilderness) are closed to motorized use and timber harvest activities. Ecological processes dominate and determine the course of forest development in these areas. Very limited vegetation management can take place on rare occasions in MA 6A, 8D, 8E, 8F, and 8G in order to enhance or maintain management area characteristics. MA 6A (Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, low disturbance) is also closed to motorized vehicles. New road construction would not be expected in MA 8D (Wild and Scenic Rivers), MA 8E (Research Natural Areas), or MA 8F (Special Management Areas). Roads in MA 8G (Old Growth & Natural Feature Complexes) would be managed at Maintenance Level 2—low standard, primitive roads drivable by high clearance vehicles.

MA 6B (Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, moderate disturbance) can be overlain on top of management areas 1-4. The 6B designation adds certain restrictions to the existing management prescription and closes the area to public motorized traffic in order to enhance the non-motorized recreation experience. MA 6B areas are included with MA 5, 5B, 6A, and 8D-G in the table below since the primary purpose of these areas is not timber production but to provide non-motorized recreation opportunities.

As shown in Table 3-56, approximately 86 miles of NSR trails pass through management areas with an emphasis on commercial timber production (MA 1-4) in Alternative 1, more than all other Alternatives. Conversely, Alternative 1 also has the least trail mileage (61 miles) through areas with little or no harvest activity (MA 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, 8D-G). Alternative 4 has the most mileage in MA 5-8 (88 miles) and the least in MA 1-4 (59 miles) followed by Alternatives 7, 3, 9, 6, the Selected Alternative, 2 and 5.

Table 3-56. Estimated Miles of NSR Trails in Management Areas with an Emphasis on Commercial Timber Production (MA 1-4) and in Management Areas with Little or No Harvest Activity (MA 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, 8D-G).

	Trail	Alternative								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	SA
Miles of NSR trails in MA 1-4	Ice Age NST	37	38	35	32	38	35	33	33	38
	North Country NST	43	32	26	26	32	31	26	30	32
	All other NSR trails	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Total, MA 1-4	86	71	62	59	71	67	60	64	71
Miles of NSR trails in MA 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, 8D-G	Ice Age NST	10	9	12	15	9	12	14	14	10
	North Country NST	18	29	35	35	29	30	35	31	29
	All other NSR trails	33	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38
	Total, MA 5, 5B, 6A, 6B, 8D-G	61	76	85	88	76	80	87	83	76

Forest management activities in MA 1A, 1B, and 1C are frequent, intensive, and readily apparent even to casual observers. Management Area 1A is the most aggressive of the three in terms of the number and size of clearcuts. Management Area 2B is the least aggressive of the management areas open to commercial timber harvest. The management prescription for MA 2B emphasizes development of large contiguous tracts of interior northern hardwood forest. It features uneven-aged management, with most management practices designed to mimic natural disturbances like single treefall gaps. Logging is permitted only in winter. Clearcuts may occasionally be carried out but they will be small in size and infrequent. The current MA 2 (1986 Plans), although it features uneven-aged management of long-rotation northern hardwoods, does not share MA 2B's emphasis on restoration of landscape-scale interior forest. This makes it difficult to compare the present situation with Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative.

NSR trail miles in MA 1 (1A, 1B, 1C) and MA 2B are shown in Figure 3-65. Currently, 24 miles of NSR trails pass through MA 1. As shown, NSR trail mileage in MA 1 drops considerably from current levels in Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative.

Miles of NSR trails in MA 2B ranges from a high of approximately 80 miles in Alternative 9 to a low of 24 miles in Alternative 2. Like Alternative 6, approximately 68 miles of NSR trails pass through MA 2B in the Selected Alternative—20 miles more than in the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5).

The Selected Alternative was developed by modifying the Preferred Alternative to better address important issues like biological diversity and motorized access. One change was the allocation of additional Alternative Management Areas (AMA)—management areas that emphasize restoration of key ecosystem components, structure, and function—above and beyond what was called for in the Preferred Alternative. Because of the changes in AMA allocation, management activity along approximately 20 miles of National Scenic and National Recreation (NSR) trails will be less intensive and less aggressive than in the Preferred Alternative, further reducing the impacts of harvest activity on trail visitors.

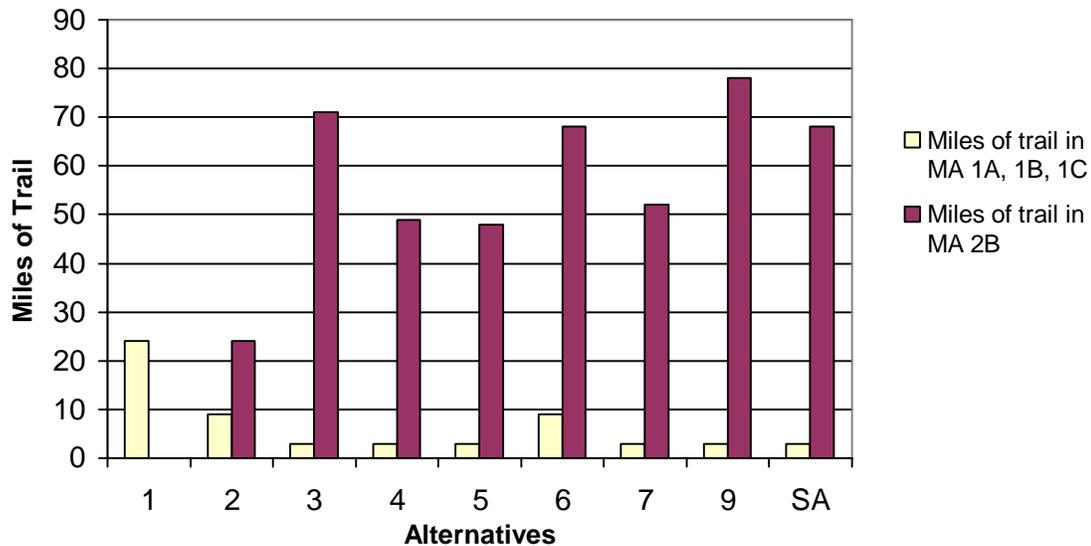


Figure 3-65. Miles of NSR Trails in Management Area 1A, 1B, 1C and Management Area 2B.

Effects on National Scenic and National Recreation Trails Due to Open Road Density Objectives

Direct encounters with motorized vehicle traffic at trail crossings and intersections can diminish feelings of solitude and remoteness for NSR trail users who seek isolation and personal challenge through primitive forms of recreation. Indirectly, noise pollution from nearby roads can also adversely affect the recreation experience for NSR trail visitors even when actual encounters between motorized and non-motorized users do not occur.

Recognizing that the density and proximity of roads can have a significant negative impact on the quality of recreation experience for many trail users, the 2004 Forest Plan applies different open road density upper limits—zero miles per square mile, two miles per square mile, and four miles per square mile—to various areas in the Forests in order to provide visitors with a range of recreational opportunities and experiences. Those who enjoy primitive forms of recreation can expect a higher quality recreation experience in areas assigned zero miles per square mile open road density while areas with 2.0 miles per square miles and 4.0 miles per square mile open road density offer more opportunities for motorized recreation.

The sounds of vehicle traffic are likely to be more noticeable to NSR trail visitors in areas with a maximum open road density of up to four miles per square miles and less so in areas with zero miles per square mile open road density. Occasional road crossings are to be expected along long-distance trails like the Ice Age and North Country National Scenic Trails, which traverse 47 and 61 miles of the CNNF, respectively. Avoiding existing transportation systems along the entire length of these trails is not possible. Actual encounters between motorized and non-motorized users are likely to be infrequent, however, especially when the trails cross roads with low vehicle traffic. The National Recreation Trails within the CNNF are shorter loop systems that have been, for the most part, deliberately located to avoid road crossings. One exception is Rock Lake National Recreation Trail, which crosses Forest Road 207 several times.

Although the 1986 Chequamegon Forest Plan included target total and open road densities as part of the management prescriptions for MA 1-4 (Tables 3-52 and 3-53), these road densities were never applied to actual land areas. Only Wilderness and SPNM areas were actually assigned a maximum road density, making it difficult to determine existing open road densities and to compare the current situation with Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative. The Nicolet did assign land areas target road densities; however, all NRT on the Nicolet land base pass through areas mismanaged for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation experiences.

Table 3-57 shows that Alternative 3, 4, 6, and 7 all have approximately 80 miles of trail in areas of zero open road density, while Alternative 9 has 77 miles, Alternative 5 has 75 miles, the Selected Alternative has 69 miles, and Alternative 1, 60 miles. Alternative 2 has the least with 57 miles of NSR trails in zero open road density areas.

Alternative 2 has the most NSR trail mileage (41 miles) in areas assigned two miles per square mile open road density. It is followed by the Selected Alternative (29 miles), Alternative 5 (23 miles), Alternative 9 (21 miles), and Alternatives 3, 4, 6, and 7 (all with 18 miles).

In Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative, there are 49 miles of NSR trail in areas with a maximum of four miles per square mile. Current (Alternative 1) NSR trail mileage in areas with road density objectives of 2.0 mi/sq mi and 4.0 mi/sq mi could not be calculated.

Table 3-57. Estimated miles of NSR trail in areas with open road density objectives of 0.0 mi/sq mi, 2.0 mi/sq mi, and 4.0 mi/sq. mi.

Open Road Density	Trail	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6	Alt. 7	Alt. 9	Sel. Alt.
0 mi/sq mi	Ice Age NST	10	0	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	North Country NST	18	20	30	30	25	30	30	27	19
	All other NSR trails	32	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
	Total, 0 mi/sq mi	60	57	80	80	75	80	80	77	69
2 mi/sq mi	Ice Age NST		13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	North Country NST		27	17	17	22	17	17	20	28
	All other NSR trails		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Total, 2 mi/sq mi	N/A	41	18	18	23	18	18	21	29
4 mi/sq mi	Ice Age NST		35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
	North Country NST		13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	All other NSR trails		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Total, 4 mi/sq mi	N/A	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49

Cumulative Effects

In 1968, the National Trails System Act was passed by Congress, paving the way for the designation of National Scenic and National Recreation (NSR) trails across the nation. On the CNNF there are two National Scenic Trails (Ice Age NST and North Country NST) and four National Recreation trails (Anvil NRT, Ed's Lake NRT, Lauterman NRT, and Rock Lake NRT).

The 1986 Forest Plans provide only very broad management direction for the trails. The 2004 Forest Plan clearly delineates the management prescriptions, recreation opportunities, road density upper limits, and desired vegetative communities emphasized on different land areas across the Forest. These designations give members of the public a better understanding of the recreation experience they will encounter during their visit to the Forests. Visitors to National Scenic and National Recreation trails (NSR) will have a better idea of the kind of recreation opportunities, roaded access, forest management activities, and vegetative communities they might encounter during their visit.

Permitted uses of the NSR trails are expected to remain much the same since neither the 2004 Plan nor the Alternatives contain specific language to the contrary. Guidelines for Recreation Management in the 2004 Plan specify that the North Country NST and Ice Age NST will be managed primarily for hiking and backpacking. Use of the Ice Age NST or North Country NST for mountain biking or horseback riding is expected to stabilize or decrease because of this primary use statement. Skiing in the winter and hiking in the summer are expected to remain the primary uses of the Forests' National Recreation Trails. Any changes in the preferred use of the NSR trails would have to be made at the site-specific level with associated public comment and environmental analysis.

Management practices and prescriptions of Alternatives 2-9 and the Selected Alternative are moving NSR trails toward a more remote recreation experience. In all of these alternatives, there are more NSR trail miles in proposed and recommended Wilderness study areas, SPNM, SMAs, RNAs, and Old Growth than at present. Alternatives 3-9 and the Selected Alternative would increase trail mileage in areas closed to public motorized traffic (0.0 mi/sq mi open road density) over current conditions. Revision Alternatives also call for less NSR trail mileage in management areas open to commercial harvest, particularly in those with the most aggressive and intensive management prescriptions. Combined with the High SIO designation assigned to all NSR trails on the Forest, NSR trail visitors are likely to encounter somewhat less evidence of forest management activity along the trails.

As in Alternatives 2 through 9, management practices and prescriptions of the Selected Alternative are moving NSR trails toward a more remote recreation experience. The list below highlights some of the most significant differences between the Selected and the Preferred Alternative as they affect the Forests' NSR trails.

1. Under the Selected Alternative, 68 additional miles of NSR trails will pass through MA 2B. This management prescription emphasizes species diversity and structural complexity within stands, regeneration of many species at maximum rotation ages to provide large diameter trees, and the retention or restoration of old growth characteristics like tip-ups, snags, and coarse woody debris. Over time, visitors to NSR trails in MA 2B will encounter less evidence of human disturbance, enhancing the natural appearance and sense of wildness in these areas.
2. In order to alleviate anticipated problems with motorized trail relocations, some of the ten Non-Motorized with Full Vegetation Management (NM) areas included in Alternative 5 will be assigned maximum open road density goals of 2.0 mi/sq. mi. in the Selected Alternative. If road density in these areas currently exceeds 2.0 mi/sq. mi., over time roads will be closed in order to move the maximum open road density of each area toward the objective. This affects a six-mile segment of the North Country NST in the Beaver Lake Management Area. Depending on current levels of access, vehicle access in the Beaver Lake area is expected to stabilize or decrease in the coming years.
3. Both the Marengo SPNM (Great Divide Ranger District) and Anvil SPNM (Eagle River Ranger District) areas change from MA 2B/6B in Alternative 5 to MA 6A in the Selected Alternative. Although both MA 6A and 6B are closed to motorized vehicles, human disturbance and forest management activities are more common in MA 6B than in MA 6A. Very limited vegetation management activities are permitted in MA 6A only to enhance or maintain desired management area characteristics, allowing natural ecological processes to shape forest development. The changes from MA 6B to 6A, which affect about 4 miles of the North Country NST and the entire 11-mile length of Anvil NRT, will further enhance the semi-primitive recreation experience along the trails.

About 300 miles of the Ice Age NST and 1500 miles of the North Country NST have been certified by the National Park Service as part of the National Scenic Trail System. About fifty of the wildest and most remote miles of the Ice Age NST—16% of the 300 certified miles—run through the CNNF. The CNNF's 61-mile North Country NST segment is about 4% of the current certified trail and is one of several segments that traverse National Forest System land. Other parts of the North Country NST travel through state parks, historic sites, and National Grasslands. Historically, the parts of the Ice Age NST and North Country NST on the CNNF have been among the longest and most remote continuous segments of the trails. They have been, and will continue to be, managed to ensure a high-quality semi-primitive recreation experience for outdoor enthusiasts.