



Ottawa National Forest Forest Plan Revision Update

January 2004

Ottawa National Forest

Supervisor's Office
E6248 US Hwy. 2
Ironwood, MI 49938

Bessemer Ranger District
500 No. Moore Street
Bessemer, MI 49911

Iron River Ranger District
990 Lalley Road
Iron River, MI 49938

Kenton Ranger District
4810 E. M28
Kenton, MI 49967

Ontonagon Ranger District
1209 Rockland Road
Ontonagon, MI 49953

Watersmeet Ranger District
Old US 2, P.O. Box 276
Watersmeet, MI 49969

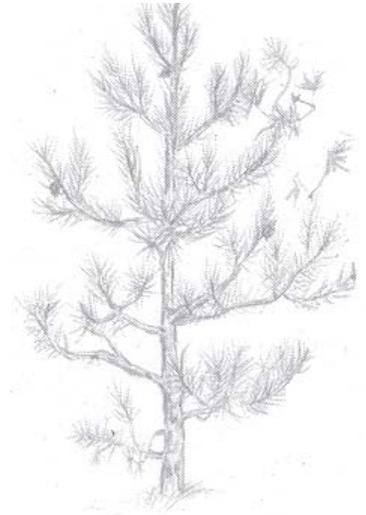
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A Note from the Forest Supervisor

Forest Plan Revision efforts on the Ottawa reached a major milestone recently with the publication of our Notice of Intent (NOI) in September 2003. The NOI marks the formal initiation of the Forest Plan Revision process. The NOI was produced using the input we received from the public, cooperating agencies and our employees during the Need for Change process.

During the coming months, Forest Plan Revision will be a priority on the Ottawa, with staff members from every resource area offering support to this effort. Our next goal is the completion of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Draft Forest Plan in March 2005.

The DEIS will define and analyze a range of alternatives that respond to the issues identified in the NOI. Our work now is to define a reasonable range of alternatives which meet the overall purpose and goal of achieving a balance between social, economic and ecological needs. Each alternative will provide for multiple use and a broad range of goods and services and will address the issues in different ways.



As we move forward with Forest Plan Revision, we look forward to working with you to ensure that our newly revised Plan is responsive to the public's needs and in line with the ecological needs of our Forest.

Our Notice of Intent

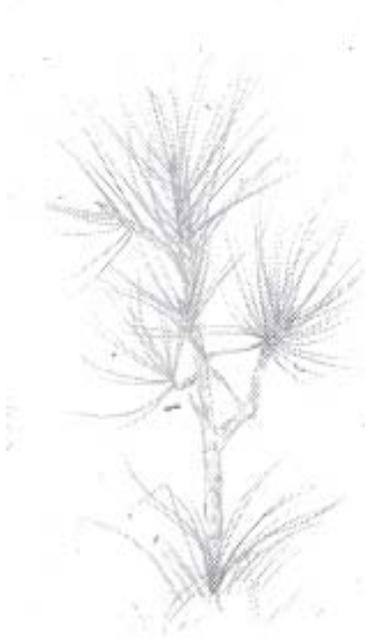
Our Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register in September of 2003. The Proposed Actions identified are a result of your expressed concerns and expectations for the future of the Forest, combined with the goals and objectives of the management of the Forest. Issues identified include: sustaining our ecosystems and uses, Forest access, water resources and wilderness areas.

In addition to the publication of our NOI, a Need for Change document was also created. This document provides additional information on the issues and gives insight into the process used to craft the NOI.

Working with our Public

Public participation is important in developing Forest Plans that are implementable and supported by the public. A major component of the Ottawa's revision effort is public involvement.

In October 2003, the Forest hosted six public meetings across the area to review the Notice of Intent and solicit public feedback. Nearly 60 people attended with a wide range of interests. Maps, informational handouts, reports and other documents were available and Forest staff were on hand to answer questions. A court recorder was present to accept oral comments.



In addition to these local meetings, a series of public meetings were held in lower Michigan. These meetings were aimed at providing information to some of our urban constituents. In addition to Ottawa employees, Huron-Manistee and Hiawatha National Forest employees were also present.

Written comments were also accepted during a 60-day comment period as published in the NOI in the Federal Register. The Forest received literally hundreds of letters from individuals, businesses, and governments, as well as other State agencies and large corporations. See page 3 to see what people had to say.

Other Interested Cooperators

We recognize that what happens on the Ottawa National Forest affects other owners of lands within and bordering National Forest system lands. To that end, we are actively working with State, County, and other government agencies to coordinate our planning efforts where possible, and to take into account activities of other land management agencies.

Working closely with our cooperators early-on in the process allows us to coordinate efforts and share information. It also allows us to tap into their expertise and help ensure a better product.

In addition to working closely with other land management agencies, we are also coordinating extensively with our local Tribes (Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and Keweenaw Bay Indian Community).

Because the land and resource management planning process determines how the lands of the National Forest System are to be managed, participation by stakeholders throughout the planning process is critical.

The Three Michigan National Forests

Beginning with the pre-Need for Change scoping and the notice of Forest Plan Revision, the three National Forests in Michigan have been working together.

Although each Forest will be producing its own Revised Forest Plan, there are opportunities for the three National Forests to work together to create efficiencies in the process and to maximize our resources.

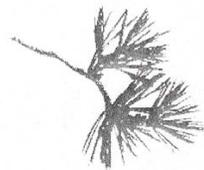
Some examples include: joint communication efforts, including public meetings and mailings in the summer and Fall of 2002, joint publication of the Notification of Intent in September 2003; joint public meetings in October 2003; coordinated analysis, including Species Viability and social and economic assessments; and coordinated time lines for completion of the Revised Forest Plans.

What We Heard

The Forest received nearly 200 comment forms, letters and postcards from individuals, State and County government agencies and other organizations during the formal NOI comment period. Planning Team members read each letter to better understand our stakeholders opinions. These comments are critical in the next step of the process as we develop alternatives for managing the Forest. A brief breakdown of comments received is below:

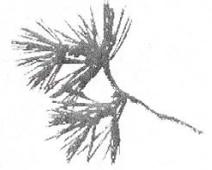
FOREST ACCESS: While some of the comments received focused on the elimination or decrease of roads within the Forest, there was also the recognition that access to large inholdings of land within the boundary need to be provided for. Balancing the needs of the public and the ability to preserve the remoteness of the Forest are considered to be paramount to those who commented.

RECREATION: One of the most common issues addressed by the public during the NOI comment period was ATV use on the Forest. This is also one of the most controversial topics. Many public comments supported keeping areas of the Forest open for ATV use; while others believed that designating motorized areas on the Forest should be a lower priority. A new National policy addressing ATV use on National Forest system lands is being drafted. We will monitor progress of this National policy while we work on Plan Revision.



WILDLIFE: Managing our forests to provide habitat for wildlife is a priority for many of our stakeholders. Many comments addressed measures which would improve habitat conditions and increase monitoring of wildlife species. Recommendations for species to be included on the Management Indicator Species (MIS) listing were also made. Almost all respondents encouraged the Forest to use the best scientific data when making decisions which affect our wildlife resources. Balance between community needs and productivity of the Forest was a strong caution when making decisions involving wildlife.

TIMBER: A healthy forest is important to all of our stakeholders. How to sustain a healthy forest over the next several decades receives debate nationally and locally. Many comments received urge the Forest to continue with its timber sale program (either maintain current numbers or increase the numbers of acres logged). Many comments talked to the benefits of timber sales to the local communities. The need to remove dead and dying trees from the Forest to help reduce the potential for wildfire using the timber sale program was also discussed. Uneven aged management, old growth, regeneration, and diversity of vegetation are all management issues which need to be addressed during the revision process. Analysis to determine forest capability, volume, demand and health of trees are needed to ensure our management proposals are moving us toward healthy forests. In addition to comments focusing on timber harvest, other comments would like to see the Forest move toward less (or no) timber being harvested on the Forest.



NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES: All comments received support proactive approaches to reducing the spread and introduction of invasive species (plant and animal species) across the Forest and bordering lands.

WILDERNESS: The need to preserve special areas across the Forest is a priority for many of our stakeholders. Identifying areas for wilderness designation and ensuring the Forest follows through with inventory and analysis was noted as important to many respondents. Balancing the number of wilderness acres that are on the Forest already with accessible areas for recreation, timber and mineral uses was also addressed.

If you would like to see a more in depth list of comments, please visit our web-site, call us at 906-932-1330, or stop by any of our offices.

We appreciate all of the comments received and would like to thank our stakeholders for taking the time to provide us with this valuable input.

USDA FOREST SERVICE

Ottawa National Forest
E6248 US Hwy. 2
Ironwood, MI 49938

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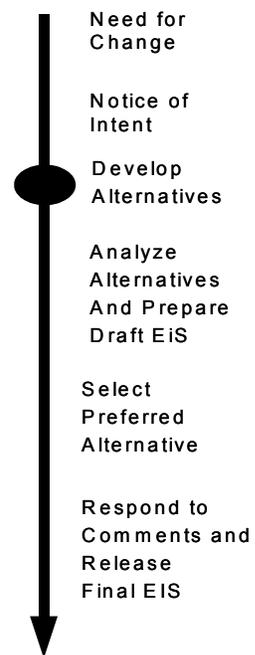
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Our Next Steps

Content Analysis: Content analysis is a systematic method of compiling, categorizing, and capturing the full range of viewpoints and concerns expressed in public comments. Comments that we received during the NOI comment period are being analyzed by our local Forest staff, as well as a Forest Service Content Analysis Team in Salt Lake City, Utah. The final report prepared by this Team will be used to help us develop alternatives.

Development of Alternatives: The National Forest Management Act requires the Forest Service to develop and analyze a range of reasonable alternatives that respond to the issues and concerns identified during the planning process. An alternative is an option for meeting the purpose and need of a proposed action as defined in the NOI. Over the next several months, Ottawa planning staff will be developing alternatives which would, if implemented, produce a range of outputs and outcomes and address issues raised by the public, Tribes and area governments.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement: The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will display and compare how each of the alternatives meets the overall goals and objectives of the management of the Forest. In March 2005, we will publish our DEIS and draft Plan built from our preferred alternative. This preferred alternative will then become the proposed (revised) Forest Plan. After the DEIS is published, there will be a 90-day comment period. At this point in the process, we will once again be asking the public for feedback.



Issue Record
Of Decision