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Superior  
National Forest

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**SUPERIOR** National Forest

# Superior National Forest

## Record of Decision

### Final Environmental Impact Statement

*To accompany the Land and  
Resource Management Plan*



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# **Final Environmental Impact Statement**

## **Record of Decision**

**Cook, Lake, Koochiching, and St. Louis Counties, Minnesota**

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## Preface

The document that you are about to read is called a Record of Decision. It describes my decision to select modified Alternative E as the revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Superior National Forest (Revised Plan), and why I made this choice.

The Record of Decision has two purposes: First, it is a legal document detailing a formal decision from a government agency; and second, and equally important, it explains the “why” of that decision.

Although this decision is mine, it has not been made alone. More than 7,000 letters were received during the development of the Revised Plan. These comments helped guide the Superior National Forest’s staff members as they developed the Revised Plan. For the past several years, Superior National Forest personnel have worked with tribal governments, members of the public, elected officials, and other agencies to produce the Revised Plan. I am pleased to make my decision based upon solid relationships that have evolved through coordination and cooperation to ensure sustainable conditions for the human and ecological environments on the Superior National Forest.

Creating a Revised Plan is not easy. Creating one that is supported by most members of the public is even more difficult. Forest management and the plan revision process is complex. There are myriad Federal laws, executive orders and policies that govern national forest management. The American people, for whom these forests are managed, often have divergent views and values when it comes to what they want the Superior National Forest to provide, to look like, and how it should be managed. The Revised Plan helps to meet the mission of the Forest Service, which is “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.” The Revised Plan evolved from alternatives formed from the best available science and the work of a dedicated interdisciplinary team of Forest Service employees. However, science does not always provide definitive answers to complex resource management topics, nor can any one field of science provide all of the answers. Yet science can offer insight into the effects of management decisions and actions. In other words, good science can clear the fog and let us see which choice best lets us reach our goals.

I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all the people who participated in the process - those who worked closely with the Forest Service staff in helping develop issues and identifying the need for change, in developing alternatives, and in providing substantive and helpful comments on the draft documents. Your participation in developing the Revised Plan has been critically important. Your continued interest and participation will be even more important as we implement, monitor and update the Plan in the years to come.

**Counties:** I express my appreciation to the commissioners of Cook, Lake, and St. Louis Counties for their assistance, counsel, comments, and pledge of future cooperation in managing forest lands as we implement the Revised Plan.

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources:** The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is a valued partner in managing public forest resources. Their land management expertise and helpful suggestions are reflected in this Revised Plan. I also consider them key cooperators in managing forestlands in northeastern Minnesota.

**American Indian Bands:** I thank the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac and Grand Portage Bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa, as well as The 1854 Authority. The federal government and the Forest Service have a unique relationship with these neighboring American Indian governments. Their participation in the revision process helps all of us ensure that specific rights and responsibilities within the 1854 Ceded Territories are fulfilled.

**Forest Service Employees:** Forest Service employees worked many long and hard hours developing this Revised Plan. Their knowledge, expertise, and dedication were invaluable. Their efforts and talents are very much appreciated.

**US Fish and Wildlife Service:** Close cooperation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service was essential in developing management direction that will ensure the protection and recovery of the lynx, bald eagle and wolf, which are federally-listed threatened species. I thank the Service for its guidance and review and look to a time when, through our cooperative actions, these species are recovered and removed from the list of threatened species.

**Minnesota Forest Resources Council:** I value the contributions of the members and task teams of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council. The Revised Plan adopts their site-level guidelines as a minimum and makes extensive use of the landscape-level information developed through the Council's efforts, so that we can truly manage northeastern Minnesota's forests on a landscape basis.

**University of Minnesota:** The University of Minnesota played an important role in developing, reviewing and modeling information used in preparing the Revised Plan. University staff and faculty at St. Paul, Grand Rapids, and NRRI-Duluth made substantial contributions. I value this relationship and see a role for greater cooperation as we implement the Revised Plan.

**Interest Groups:** Various interest groups provided key assistance in review and comment throughout the planning process, in making their desires known and in offering cooperation. My thanks go to The Nature Conservancy, Ruffed Grouse Society, Audubon Society, Minnesota Forest Industries, Sierra Club, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, Minnesota Timber Producers, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, and many other groups too numerous to mention.

**Federal Agencies:** Other federal agencies and divisions provided valuable review and comments. Much appreciated are the contributions of the North Central Forest Research Station, State and Private Forestry, and the US Environmental Protection Agency.

**Individuals:** I extend my thanks to the thousands of people who cared enough to attend meetings, read documents, and provide comments. Your suggestions helped to improve the Revised Plan. Please continue to enjoy your National Forest and provide your thoughts on how we can improve management.

We now have a Revised Plan that will guide the management of your Superior National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. But what does that really mean? The 1986 Forest Plan reflected public desires of 20 years ago when a primary focus was on what the land could produce.

The Revised Plan focuses on outcomes, recognizing that what we leave on the landscape is vitally important. At the same time, it recognizes how important forest management is to people and their social and economic well-being. The outputs and uses of the Forest that result from achieving the desired conditions and objectives will continue to provide jobs, products, and recreational uses for the American people. These lands can help maintain a quality of life, both for the people who live and work near the forest and those interested in visiting this American treasure. Together, I believe we have crafted a Revised Plan with a strong foundation for ecological, social and economic sustainability over the long-term.

Finally, where do we go from here and how do we get there? Our work is not finished; in fact it is just beginning. This Revised Plan is just a collection of words written on paper. We must transfer the ideas to the ground to make the desired conditions become real. The Superior National Forest is part of a vast and complex social, ecologic, and economic ecosystem in northeast Minnesota. It should not and cannot be managed without consideration and assistance from the various land managers, governments, and agencies that are part of the northeast landscape or the many people interested in that landscape.

The challenge that remains before all of us is to work together to implement the Revised Plan. I fully understand this can be difficult to achieve. At the same time, I am confident that cooperation will unite us, because I believe that the concern we all have for the Forest is our common bond—that these lands remain productive, ecologically healthy, and beautiful—for both the current generation and future generations.

Fortunately, Minnesota is well positioned for cooperation on a landscape level. Forest management plans of the State, the counties, and now the Superior's Revised Plan use common approaches developed through the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's site-level and landscape-level efforts. I am committed to working in partnership with all of those within the landscape and with interested individuals. The outcome of this partnership should be for all to complement the goals of others and help them to achieve their desired conditions and objectives on their land within the northeast landscape. With our combined efforts in implementing, monitoring, reviewing, developing new information, and adapting, we can truly integrate the management of forest resources.

It is an exciting time, and I am excited at the prospects and possibilities as we go forward. I believe this Revised Plan provides the springboard for managing the Superior National Forest and for working with others in managing the northeast Minnesota landscape.

I thank you again for your support, participation, and patience throughout this process. I invite your continued partnership in helping implement the Revised Plan and in keeping it fresh and relevant.

*Randy Moore*

Regional Forester  
Eastern Region, USDA Forest Service



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# Introduction

The *Superior National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan* (Revised Plan) is a 15-year strategy for managing National Forest resources. The strategy outlines environmentally sound management to achieve desired conditions and produce goods and services in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits. The Revised Plan emphasizes different desired conditions and goals for various parts of the Forest. As the Revised Plan is implemented, management practices such as building and maintaining roads, restoring streams, harvesting timber, and rehabilitating campgrounds will occur in some areas, but not in others. Multiple-use goals and objectives will be achieved in a balanced, cost efficient and sustainable manner.

This Revised Plan replaces all previous resource management plans for this Forest. It provides a fresh strategy for sound environmental management based on new information.

The Revised Plan may be amended or revised to respond to new information or management technologies, Congressional land designations, and changing needs and opportunities. Any action taken to amend or revise the Plan will include public involvement.

Six primary decisions are made within the Revised Plan:

1. Forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives.
2. Forest-wide management requirements.
3. Management Area direction.
4. Lands suited/not suited for timber management.
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements.
6. Recommendations of Wilderness Study Areas to Congress.

The Goals, Desired Conditions and Objectives in the Revised Plan can be accomplished from physical, ecological, economical, and legal perspectives. Management practices will be implemented and outputs will be produced as the forest strives to meet the desired conditions called for in the Revised Plan. The Revised Plan is implemented through site-specific projects, and annual budgets determine which and how many projects are planned and implemented during any given year.

The Revised Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement are programmatic in nature, providing a long-range strategy for the Forest. Site-specific environmental analysis will occur for each project needed to implement this strategy. Any resulting documents will be tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

## The Forest

Three million acres of land, water, rock, and trees cover the Superior National Forest, located in northeastern Minnesota. The Forest spans 150 miles along the United States-Canadian border. This three-million-acre Forest is a rich and varied resource.

The Superior National Forest is treasured for its abundant water resources. Within the forest boundaries are 445,000 acres of surface water, almost 2,000 lakes at least 10 acres in size, over 1,300 miles of major streams supporting cold water fisheries, and over 950 miles of major streams supporting warm water fisheries. Clean, clear, and productive water is a big reason that people come to the Superior National Forest to fish, swim, boat, camp, and enjoy scenery.

The northern forest community thrives with its pine, fir, and spruce trees and is home to numerous wildlife species including eagles, deer, moose, and black bear. Northern Minnesota is one of the last strongholds of the gray wolf in the lower 48 States.

The resources of the Superior National Forest provide for use and enjoyment by the American people. Forest lands are intrinsically connected to native peoples who live their traditions through forest products and maintain spiritual bonds to the land, water, trees, and wildlife. Visitors can enjoy a wide spectrum of recreation opportunities year round, including travel in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The Forest also provides economic opportunities in the form of pulpwood and saw timber for the forest products industry, and a highly desired vacation destination for the tourism industry.

## **A Vision of the Future**

This vision of the Superior National Forest ties together the social, ecologic and economic aspects of the environment. The beauty and solitude offered by the Forest also contributes to the economic well being of communities by drawing tourists into the area. The results of vegetation management on these national lands provide settings that tourists enjoy and return to year after year. The same forest management also contributes to restoration of ecological vegetation patterns and structure and offers a sustainable level of forest products. All these aspects are integral to a holistic view of the forest and define our management responsibility for such important resources.

The forest that exists today evolved as a result of the influence of both natural and human processes. Natural disturbance processes of fire, wind, tree mortality from insects and disease, and to a lesser extent, flooding, helped to shape vegetation, wildlife, and aquatic resources of the forest. American Indians introduced human influence into the forest, and human influence reached much larger effects during the mining, logging, and settlement era of the mid 1800's to early 1900's. Since 1909, when the Superior National Forest was established, the Forest Service has been charged with managing this vast landscape for the American people. During this time the forest has been restored to a productive condition, wildfires have been suppressed, and recreational facilities and opportunities have been developed.

The forest that exists today is different from the forest that evolved under natural processes. It is different from the forest that remained immediately following the logging era. It is also different from the forest that will exist in the future, as a result of implementing this Revised Plan. The vision of the future forest is changed in many ways from what was envisioned in the 1986 Forest Plan.

The Superior National Forest will sustain its health, diversity, and productivity to meet the needs of present and future generations. Forest management will continue to support the relationship between people and the forest. As the forest continues to mature it will

further contribute to the public's enjoyment as well as to the social and economic stability of human communities by providing a setting that retains a sense of place for people. Maturing forest will contribute to sustainable aquatic and terrestrial ecological health and will offer diverse forest products.

Forested ecosystems will include a greater mix of tree species, an increase in conifer, especially white and red pine, and greater representation of older and multi-aged forests. Representation of early successional systems and mid- to late-successional ecosystems will provide for species viability and diversity as well as continue to supply healthy populations of a variety of game species. Management will continue to provide habitat to support the recovery of the threatened bald eagle, gray wolf, and Canada lynx.

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness will continue to contribute to the ecological integrity of the Superior National Forest in terms of vegetative communities, old growth, and species habitat. These diverse forest ecosystems will support people's uses and enjoyment of the Superior National Forest.

The Superior is an important recreation destination area in the State of Minnesota, and the nation. The Forest will continue to provide unique forested and water related developed, dispersed, and remote recreational opportunities in northern Minnesota, emphasizing wilderness, semi-primitive motorized, and non-motorized recreation for those that travel here as well as those who live here.

People will be able to experience a wide variety of recreational opportunities. The Forest will continue to offer a natural setting with road access to many areas. Developed camping sites will remain similar to the present, although some sites may be restored or have upgraded facilities. Scenery management will be an especially high priority in areas with many resorts and recreational facilities such as the Gunflint and Fernberg corridors and the North Shore.

More of the Forest will be managed for a more remote setting than in the past. Recreation use will be managed to provide desired opportunities, reduce user conflicts, and avoid damage to the forest. Semi-primitive areas and areas with more remote character will enhance recreational experiences that the Superior is uniquely suited to offer.

The Superior will continue to be a significant contributor of forest products to the timber industry and contribute to the economic sustainability of local communities. Timber harvest methods will be designed to contribute toward the restoration of important components of healthy ecological systems. The production of timber will be monitored to ensure sustainable harvest levels over the long-term.

This vision would not be complete without recognizing that the Superior National Forest is part of a larger ecological, social and economic landscape. Achieving the vision outlined above will require working collaboratively with the public, tribes, other governments, and other land managers. The last, and perhaps most important aspect of the vision is one of people working together to accomplish shared goals for the Superior National Forest, so that future generations can enjoy an even more beautiful, productive and ecologically restored forest.

## Decision Overview

I selected Modified Alternative E as the Revised Plan for the Superior National Forest. The *Superior National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (Revised Plan) is based on Modified E (the selected alternative).

I chose Modified Alternative E because, in my judgment, it maximizes the net benefit to the public by:

- Maintaining or enhancing biological diversity and the long-term health of the Forest
- Contributing to economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities
- Providing sustainable and predictable levels of products and services
- Providing the best mix of benefits to address the needs for change identified in the Final Environmental Impact Statement
- Emphasizing adaptive management over the long term, and
- Providing consistent direction at the forest level to assist managers in making project decisions at a local level in the context of broader ecological considerations.

My choice also considered how the Revised Plan responded to public comments and internal management concerns and national direction and policy. My decision incorporates by reference the management direction in the Revised Plan, the analysis of effects disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, and the planning record in its entirety. This decision applies only to National Forest System land on the Superior National Forest. It does not apply to any other Federal, Tribal, State, county, municipal or private lands; although, in making my decision, I considered the effects on those lands.

## Management Area Allocations

The Revised Plan allocates national forest system lands to the following management areas:

Management Area	Acres	Percent of Forest
<b>General Forest Emphasis</b>		
General Forest	640,443	29.5%
General Forest-Longer Rotation	415,478	19.1%
<b>Recreation and Scenic Emphasis</b>		
Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape	155,412	7.2%
Eligible Wild, Scenic & Recreational Rivers	31,834	1.5%
<b>Semi-primitive Recreation Emphasis</b>		
Semi-primitive Motorized Recreation	69,018	3.2%
Semi-primitive Non-motorized Recreation	4,560	0.2%
<b>Conservation and Rare Features Emphasis</b>		
Unique Biological Areas	2,578	0.1%
Riparian Emphasis Areas	17,444	0.8%
<b>Research Emphasis</b>		
Research Natural Areas	3,184	0.1%
Candidate Research Natural Areas	19,448	0.9%

<b>Wilderness Emphasis</b>		
Pristine Wilderness	113,700	5.2%
Primitive Wilderness	299,760	13.8%
Semi-primitive Non-motorized Wilderness	345,233	15.9%
Semi-primitive Motorized Wilderness	51,916	2.4%

## **Biological Diversity, Forest Health, and Ecological Health**

The Revised Plan provides direction for long-term health of the land by actively managing ecosystems, through timber harvest, prescribed burning, and wildlife and watershed enhancement projects and in some areas allowing natural processes to dominate.

The Revised Plan addresses biological diversity at site-level and the landscape-level. Vegetation objectives for landscape ecosystems help to maintain or restore ecological processes and functions. The Revised Plan also addresses the spread of non-native invasive species with an approach designed to eradicate, suppress, or contain populations.

### ***Forest Vegetative Objectives***

The Revised Plan lists short-term (10-20 years) objectives and long-term (100+ years) goals for age, composition, and tree species diversity. In general, the objectives call for an increase in the amount of red, white and jack pine, spruce/fir, and northern hardwood vegetation communities. Lowland conifer and lowland hardwoods will generally be maintained at the current levels. Aspen vegetation communities will be decreased from current levels. The objectives also call for an increase of tree species diversity within stands. While maintaining a full range of age classes from young to old, the Revised Plan will increase the acres of old forest, old growth forest and multi-aged upland forest vegetation. Larger patches of both old and young trees will be encouraged. The maximum size limit for temporary openings created by timber harvest is increased to 1000 acres.

### ***Watershed Health and Fish Habitat Management***

The Revised Plan proactively manages watersheds and riparian areas for their inherent values. The Plan includes objectives to protect, improve, and restore watershed and riparian area health in order to provide water quality and soil productivity necessary to support ecological functions and intended beneficial uses. The Revised Plan maintains the overall integrity of the aquatic ecosystems, providing habitat for all aquatic species, while supporting sustainable populations of sport fish. The Revised Plan recognizes the important roles, authorities, and cooperative relationships that exist among the National Forests, American Indian bands, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources regarding fish habitat management.

## ***Wildlife Habitat***

The Revised Plan provides the direction needed to maintain viable populations of plant and animal species on the Superior National Forest. A few species have risks to their viability because they may be naturally rare or on the edge of their range. My decision recognizes that there are inherent limitations to the capability of the land to provide for these species. The Superior National Forest alone cannot ensure a decrease in the risk of viability, but the Revised Plan promotes protection and improvement of the species' habitat. The Revised Plan affords special attention to the conservation of the bald eagle, gray wolf and Canada lynx, which are federally listed as threatened species. We have worked closely with the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that the Revised Plan incorporates resource conservation measures and applicable species-specific measures from the Recovery Plans for eagle and wolf and from the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy. While the emphasis of the Revised Plan shifts toward managing for the entire spectrum of wildlife habitats, providing quality hunting experiences is an important objective in the Revised Plan.

## **Timber Harvest and Supply**

Timber harvest will be the primary tool for reaching vegetative objectives. While other tools such as prescribed fire and mechanical treatment may be used, timber harvest is often the most effective and economical tool. It also provides social and economic benefits to our communities. I have established the allowable sale quantity in the Revised Plan at 1.02 billion board feet for the first decade of Plan implementation. There are 944,908 acres classified as suitable for timber production.

## **Role of Fire**

We will increase the use of fire as a management tool to accomplish ecological, silvicultural, forest health, and public safety objectives. My decision strengthens standards and guidelines for fire use to ensure that soil, water, and air resources are protected.

## **Recreation**

### ***Facilities, Settings, and Opportunities***

Nearly all existing recreation facilities (non-motorized trails, developed and primitive campsites, picnic areas, swimming beaches, etc.) on the Forest will remain open and be maintained.

The Revised Plan increases the amount of National Forest System land that is managed with a primary emphasis on recreation: When compared to the 1986 Forest Plan, the Revised Plan provides:

- A 41,500-acre increase in Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape Management Areas
- A 4,500-acre increase in Semi-primitive Non-motorized Recreation Management Areas
- A 30,000-acre increase in Semi-primitive Motorized Recreation Management Areas.

Under the Revised Plan, the Superior National Forest will be managed for the following mix of recreational experiences:

- 5% of the Forest provides a primitive recreation experience
- 29% of the Forest provides a semi-primitive non-motorized experience
- 8% of the Forest provides a semi-primitive motorized experience
- 57% of the Forest provides a roaded-natural experience, (75% of these “roaded natural” areas have remote character)
- 1% of the Forest provides a more rural type of experience.

The Revised Plan provides for increased scenic quality in the ¼ to 3-mile area viewed from popular travel routes and use areas.

## ***Recreation Motor Vehicles***

### **All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), Off-Highway Motorcycles, and Four- Wheel**

**Drives:** The Revised Plan provides for up to an additional 90 miles of ATV trail to be designated. In most management areas, the Revised Plan generally allows ATV and off-highway motorcycle use on many existing low standard roads (called OML 1 and 2 roads) that are managed for use by high-clearance vehicles such as pick-up trucks. In addition, many existing unclassified roads may continue to be used by ATVs, off-highway motorcycles, and four-wheel drive vehicles until such time that a decision is made on the disposition of the unclassified road. Roads where use by ATVs, Off-highway motorcycles or Four-wheel Drives is inappropriate or would cause unacceptable resource damage will be closed to such use (example: summer use of winter use only roads). All cross-country travel by ATVs, off-highway motorcycles, and four-wheel drives is prohibited.

**Snowmobiles:** The Revised Plan provides for up to an additional 130 miles of snowmobile trail to be designated. Cross-country snowmobile use will continue to be allowed in most management areas unless prohibitions or restrictions are needed for resource protection to meet management objectives.

## ***Water Access***

The number of new water access sites will be limited to ten or less during the next ten years. Facilities at those lakes identified as “Natural Environment Lakes” and small bodies of water would be limited to low development levels, such as a footpath and carry-down access.

## **Special Designations**

### ***Wilderness Study Areas***

After reviewing public comments, I have decided to stay with my original proposal of not recommending any additional areas for wilderness study. Despite the continued high degree of public interest in potential wilderness additions, the analysis did not reveal compelling reasons that warrant my recommending wilderness study areas to the United States Congress.

### ***Candidate Research Natural Areas***

I have identified 11 areas (19,448 acres) as Candidate Research Natural Areas. These are in addition to the four existing Research Natural Areas (3,184 acres) on the Superior National Forest. As candidates, these areas will be further considered for their eligibility to become part of the national network of ecological areas designated in perpetuity for research and education and to provide important components of biological diversity for the Forest.

### ***Unique Biological Areas***

I have allocated three areas (2,578 acres) to the Unique Biological management area. These areas have unique ecological attributes not found elsewhere on the Forest.

## **Economic and Social Sustainability of Local Communities**

The Forest will continue contributing to a vibrant timber and tourism industry while meeting ecological restoration and vegetative goals. Although there will be some shift in the mix of goods, services and uses from the Superior National Forest, local communities will continue to enjoy the same types of settings, products, and uses that support community stability.

## **Tribal Interests and Treaty Rights**

The Superior National Forest is within the territory ceded in the Treaty of 1854, in which the Lake Superior Chippewa retained rights to hunt and gather. My decision fully supports Tribal Treaty Rights, and provides for other activities and uses deemed important by those tribal members using the forest for a wide variety of reasons. The Revised Plan will sustain those values held important by tribal members.

## **Monitoring**

My decision includes requirements that provide a strategic focus to monitoring so we can learn whether we are making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives called for in the Revised Plan.

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# Rationale for My Decision

## Management Area Allocations

From the very start of this plan revision effort, we sought to create a Revised Plan that was different in look, feel and purpose from the 1986 Forest Plan. We created a Revised Plan that is broad, strategic, and landscape-based. It recognizes that the Superior National Forest does not exist in isolation but is a part of a larger landscape managed and influenced by many owners and interests.

I looked at the desired conditions, goals and objectives as well as the standards and guidelines in the Revised Plan. I examined the mix of management area prescriptions and the environmental consequences disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement to see how each alternative provides for forest health and biological diversity and meets social needs. I concluded that the Revised Plan provides for the long-term health of the land using an appropriate balance between active management practices of timber harvest, prescribed burning, and wildlife and watershed enhancement projects, and in some areas allowing natural processes to occur. We took a landscape perspective in looking at ecosystems and were greatly aided by working with the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's Northeast Landscape Group and its many dedicated members. The Natural Resources Research Institute of the University of Minnesota-Duluth also played an important role in bringing new science and possibilities to the group.

The future image of the forest is described as the desired condition for each management area. I believe these allocations, along with forest-wide desired conditions and management direction, provide the best mix in addressing the issues that follow.

## Biological Diversity, Forest Health and Ecological Health

The Revised Plan incorporates approaches for addressing biological diversity at site and landscape-levels, rather than focusing primarily at site-levels (through standards and guidelines) as did the 1986 Plan. To provide for the maintenance and restoration of ecological processes and functions, we designed the vegetation objectives based on Landscape Ecosystems. The Revised Plan includes objectives to move toward older, more structurally complex forest conditions. The BWCA Wilderness, Shipstead-Newton-Nolan areas, Research Natural Areas and candidates, Unique Areas and areas not suited for timber production were also considered for their contribution when determining the vegetative objectives for older trees and old growth.

I realize that to achieve those objectives and to maintain older forest across the landscape, stands must be resistant to loss from catastrophic wild land fire. The Revised Plan provides the tools needed to treat unnaturally high levels of hazardous fuels so that the risk of catastrophic wildland fire is reduced while maintaining objectives for increased species diversity and older forest.

## ***Forest Vegetation Objectives***

The Revised Plan includes short-term (10-20 years) vegetative objectives and long-term (100+ years) vegetative goals for age, composition, and tree species diversity. These objectives are set for each of the six major landscape ecosystem, or native plant communities, that exist on the Forest. They address all forest resources in an integrated fashion, considering desired recreational settings, biological diversity, timber production, forest health, wildlife habitat, and aquatic and riparian values. The vegetative objectives in the Revised Plan are consistent with the desired future forest conditions outlined in the Northeast Forest Landscape Report of the Minnesota Forest Resource Council.

Managing toward these objectives will provide for the full diversity of desired wildlife habitats, with an increasing emphasis on providing habitat for species associated with conifer and older forests. The objectives also provide quality early successional and hardwood habitats that benefit popular game species through an active and sustainable timber program.

Larger patches of old trees and young trees are encouraged. The analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement indicates that while in the long-term both vegetation and spatial objectives can be met, it also seems to suggest there may be difficulty in meeting both objectives in the early decades. This analysis is based upon modeled, not actual results. I am confident that the Forest Supervisor and staff will use their knowledge and expertise during project development and implementation to minimize or eliminate any short-term conflicts while working to achieve the long-term objectives. I have decided to increase the maximum size limit, for temporary openings created by timber harvest, to 1000 acres. Larger harvest areas will better mimic the spatial design and extent of natural disturbances than smaller units. They will also help build larger patches of forest for the future. A one-thousand acre patch of young trees today will become a large patch of older trees in 80 to 150 years. Larger patches of older forest will increase habitat for those wildlife and plant species that favor interior forest conditions and will improve the ability of wildlife populations to move and interact.

## ***Watershed Health and Fish Habitat Management***

The Superior National Forest is treasured for its abundant water resources. These waters provide important ecological functions that contribute to biodiversity and fish and wildlife habitat. Maintaining and improving watershed health is vitally important in managing the Superior National Forest.

In choosing the Revised Plan, I elect to proactively manage watersheds and riparian areas for their inherent values. This means favoring long-lived tree species within riparian zones, improving road and trail crossings of streams to assure stable soils, fish passage, unimpeded water flow and sediment transport, and reconstructing or restoring stream channels on a selective basis where supported by strong principles of physical science.

The Revised Plan gives special attention to the St. Louis River, allocating its headwaters as a Riparian Emphasis Management Area, which focuses on actively restoring, protecting and enhancing riparian ecological functions. The headwaters and main stems of most other major river systems on the Superior are either located in the BWCA

Wilderness or are within areas allocated to Eligible Wild, Scenic and Recreation River Management Areas.

In reviewing the comments on riparian and watershed health, I note that several people and groups recommended that the Minnesota Voluntary Site Level Guidelines for riparian areas be used instead of the more proactive approach I have chosen. One concern was that our approach would reduce the amount of land available for timber harvest. Considering the abundance of lakes and streams on the Superior National Forest and the importance of those water resources to local communities and the nation, this emphasis is appropriate and can be accomplished while still providing a significant timber harvest.

The lakes, streams, and wetlands within the Superior National Forest make up a significant aquatic resource and provide habitat for many species of fish. Angling activities generate nearly \$1 billion to the Minnesota economy each year. The magnitude of the industry, along with the contribution of the National Forest in terms of water resources, underscores the importance of the Forest Service's role in managing fish habitat and lake access.

Regarding fish habitat management, the Revised Plan recognizes the important roles, authorities and cooperative relationships that exist among the national forests, American Indian tribes and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Based upon the analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, my decision in selecting the Revised Plan is made in part because it maintains the overall integrity of the aquatic ecosystem, while also supporting sustainable populations of sport fish. This is provided through objectives and standards and guidelines. By maintaining this ecological integrity, the Forest will provide habitat for all aquatic species including those that are threatened, endangered or of special interest. The watershed and riparian emphasis of the Revised Plan contributed in large part to my decision as it relates to fish habitat.

### ***Wildlife Habitat***

The Superior National Forest will continue to provide habitat for a vast array of wildlife species. Managing the wildlife and providing for wildlife habitat on the National Forest is accomplished through a cooperative partnership between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and, related to the Treaty of 1854, the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa.

**Viable Populations and Regional Forester Sensitive Species:** The Revised Plan provides assurances for maintaining viable populations of species that occur on the Superior National Forest within the capability of the land. For a few species that are naturally rare or on the edge of their range, the Revised Plan calls for protection and improvement of the species' habitat, but the Superior National Forest alone cannot ensure continued viability. The management direction in the Revised Plan will result in no species trending toward listing under the Threatened and Endangered Species Act.

Providing habitat for the northern goshawk, a bird of prey on my list of regionally-sensitive species with identified viability concerns, presented a particular challenge while meeting overall multi-use objectives and given the

inherent capability of the land. The Revised Plan is expected to reduce the suitability of foraging habitats for the goshawk in the short-term (2 decades). I recognize this, but approve the Revised Plan knowing that actions in this plan protect the most critical aspects of goshawk habitat (nest sites and post-fledging areas) through standards and guidelines, has objectives for increasing the number of breeding pairs, and increases the quality of goshawk habitat in the long-term over the next 10 decades as the forest ages. The Revised Plan will not result in a trend toward federal listing of this species. I have designated the goshawk as a management indicator species. Monitoring its habitat and populations is part of our strategy of evaluating the efficacy of our management for goshawk.

**Federally-listed Threatened Species:** The Revised Plan affords special attention to the conservation of bald eagle, gray wolf, and Canada lynx and the habitats upon which they depend. The Forest Service worked closely with the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that the Revised Plan works toward the recovery of these three species by incorporating conservation measures from federal Recovery Plans for the eagle and wolf and from the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy for the lynx. This close work with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and incorporation of conservation measures into the Revised Plan, helped lead to the Fish and Wildlife Service's concurrence that implementation of the Revised Plan would not adversely affect the bald eagle or critical habitat for gray wolf. It also helped lead to a Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion that issued the finding that implementation would not jeopardize the continued existence of the gray wolf and Canada lynx on the Superior National Forest.

**Other Species of Management Interest:** The Revised Plan establishes objectives for both proactive and protective management of the four management indicator species (bald eagle, gray wolf, northern goshawk, and white pine) as well as for management indicator habitats. These objectives help to address all animal and plant species and the habitats on which they depend.

Many people are concerned about maintaining populations of important game species such as deer, grouse, woodcock, and moose. Other people believe that populations of deer are at levels where they are causing problems with other resources. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has the authority for setting deer population objectives and for establishing hunting regulations. The Superior National Forest works with the State in managing game species habitat.

Over time, the Revised Plan will decrease the amount of aspen and young tree age classes and therefore may decrease the habitat for some game species. However, the increase in conifer and older forest also provides necessary and beneficial cover habitat. The actual change in habitat will occur over a long period of time, and will also be influenced by the habitat provided on intermingled State, county and private land. In the shorter term (next 10-20 years) there will be minimal effects on populations as a result of this slow change in condition, and game species habitat is expected to still remain fairly high during this period. In the Revised Plan, my decision is to gradually reduce the emphasis that the 1986 Plan placed on game species habitat, and turn the emphasis toward managing for a broader spectrum of wildlife habitats. The Revised Plan continues to recognize the social and economic importance of game

species. This is reflected in management direction that calls for providing quality hunting experiences.

## **Timber Harvest and Supply**

The Revised Plan's allowable sale quantity for the first decade is 1.02 billion board feet. This is the maximum quantity of timber that may be sold from suitable lands on the National Forest within the first decade. The allowable sale quantity was the result of meeting vegetation objectives within management area direction. These vegetative objectives are also largely responsible for determining the number of acres to treat, the harvest method to use, and what species are regenerated in harvested stands.

In the 1986 Plan, many thousands of acres were classified as not suitable for timber production because of a perceived lack of demand for timber products. Today, there is no lack of demand, and these acres have now been classed as suitable for timber production, which means they may be managed to produce timber products.

My decision provides for steady and predictable supplies of forest products from the Superior National Forest. The Revised Plan will ensure a mix of forest product species and sizes are available to local mills. The base sale schedule provides for a non-declining even flow of timber over time.

Several people commenting on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement requested a departure from non-declining even-flow (selling more timber in the first two decades and then less in subsequent decades). There are several justifiable reasons for doing so, and in fact, two alternatives that have a departure from non-declining even flow of timber were evaluated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. However, I have decided against a departure because of the resulting difficulty of maintaining key wildlife habitats in the first two decades and the difficulty of maintaining a full range of vegetation age classes in future decades.

I also heard from people who expect timber yields from National Forest System land to be equal to that of State, county, industrial and other private lands. I expect our yields from National Forest land to differ from other governmental, industrial, and private forest land because of our multiple use mandate and compliance with the many laws regarding habitat, species, water, air, and heritage resources to name a few. The outcomes and outputs for which we are mandated to manage simply differ from those of other governmental and industrial forests, and therefore, I fully expect that the yield estimates would be different.

As we manage toward a goal of improving forest health, we will harvest timber from areas with low value timber that in the past may have been regarded as economically marginal. Work in these areas is essential for improving forest health.

Several public comments questioned which was the controlling factor, the acres to be treated or the ceiling of the allowable sale quantity. This concern centered on the allowable sale quantity, and if it might artificially constrain the Forest's ability to treat the amount of acres called for in the Revised Plan. For example: If the Revised Plan called for treating 13,000 acres per year, but the allowable sale quantity was reached after only 11,500 acres were treated, then the Revised Plan could not attain the desired

vegetative objectives or conditions. There was concern that the allowable sale quantity, because it was a ceiling, may need to be adjusted so it did not constrain the Forest's ability to attain the desired vegetative condition.

In responding to this concern, we evaluated the timber yield assumptions used in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Revised Plan and compared projected model yields with those actually experienced in recent timber sales. We found that actual volumes from thinning treatments were very close to those we projected for the Revised Plan. We had few actual examples of partial harvest treatments, so we made no modifications to yield estimates for those treatments. The comparison of clearcut harvests, recent experience versus projected yields, indicated that clearcuts would produce greater volume than projected in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Therefore, for the purposes of determining the allowable sale quantity, we adjusted the timber volumes derived from clearcut treatments. This resulted in an allowable sale quantity change in several of the alternatives, with an approximate increase of 25 percent in the volume coming from clearcut treatments.

The various comments received on timber yield were useful as we reviewed, tested, refined, and validated our assumptions and data. In applying the yield models and in selecting an allowable sale quantity, I have been careful to not create a barrier to accomplishing an array of objectives and goals and to maintain a focus on outcomes.

## **Role of Fire**

The exclusion of fire in recent history has created areas of unnaturally high fuel loadings that pose an increased risk of catastrophic wildland fire. Priority areas for hazardous fuel reduction projects will be based on proximity to Urban Interface Areas and areas where Fire Regime and Condition Class create higher fire risk.

Concerns were raised about using stand replacement fire and burning up material that could be used commercially. Where areas are identified as suitable and available for timber harvest, commercial timber sales will be used as the primary management tool. The use of fire will complement mechanical treatments in achieving objectives.

In my decision, I am recognizing the increased use of fire as a management tool to accomplish ecological, silvicultural, forest health, and public safety objectives. My decision includes strengthened or refined standards and guidelines that will adequately protect soil, water and air resources in light of an increased use of fire as a management tool.

## **Recreation**

### ***Recreation Facilities, Settings, and Opportunities***

The Superior National Forest and northern Minnesota in general, are renowned locally, regionally, and nationally for the quality and variety of recreational opportunities they provide. The Superior is the eighth most visited national forest in the entire country.

Providing outdoor recreation opportunities is a public-private partnership in Minnesota, involving federal, State, county and local levels. Federal, State, and county levels focus

primarily on opportunities that require large land bases such as developed sites with few amenities, and primitive areas. Local towns and private owners provide a wide spectrum of recreation facilities and opportunities, including developed campgrounds, resorts, cross-country and downhill ski areas, and golf courses, as well as less developed facilities for activities such as hiking and bicycling.

With this decision I am putting greater emphasis on the recreation opportunities that are unique to the Superior National Forest. Many people come to or live in northern Minnesota to experience solitude and to enjoy our lakes and streams. The Revised Plan retains all existing developed and dispersed recreational sites and developments on the Superior National Forest. In addition, it places more emphasis on semi-primitive recreation and scenic landscapes by increasing the amount of the National Forest managed for those objectives. Because of the importance of protecting and enhancing scenic beauty on the Forest, the Revised Plan contains management direction that calls for an increase in scenic integrity.

However, all other management areas also provide recreation opportunities, including the General Forest, General Forest-Longer Rotation, and the BWCAW Management Areas. The Revised Plan contains direction that seeks to maintain the existing remote character that occurs within these management areas: General Forest, General Forest-Longer Rotation, and Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape Management.

### ***Recreation Motor Vehicles***

The Chief of the Forest Service has identified unmanaged recreation, especially the undesirable impacts from off-highway vehicles, as a major threat facing the national forests. Concerns include the amount of unplanned roads and trails, erosion, lack of quality riding opportunities, water degradation, and habitat destruction from off-highway vehicle activity.

Use of snowmobiles, ATVs, off-highway motorcycles and four-wheel drive vehicles are a legitimate use of National Forest System land, and this use must be carefully managed. In making this decision on recreation motor vehicles, I considered the many public comments and the need to provide opportunities for a very popular and growing recreational pursuit, as well as the need to protect resources and provide opportunities for non-motorized recreational uses. I believe my decision provides opportunities for off-highway vehicle use that is managed in a way that protects the forest's ecological resource and reduces conflicts among users.

**Off-highway Vehicle Designated Trails:** The Superior National Forest currently has 40 miles of designated ATV trails. The Revised Plan provides for up to an additional 90 miles of ATV trail to be designated. The purpose of this designated trail system is to provide a high quality riding trail for those who desire riding on a managed ATV trail. The location and exact amount of trail to be designated are not determined in the Revised Plan. We will coordinate closely with the Minnesota DNR as they develop their ATV trail system, so that the systems are compatible and interlink if possible. We will also work closely with local governments and various interest groups and individuals to determine the site-specific locations of the trails

**Off-Highway Vehicle Use on Existing Roads:** In most management areas, the Revised Plan generally allows ATV and off-highway motorcycle use on many existing roads (called OML 1 and 2 roads) that are managed to be traversed by high-clearance vehicles such as pick-up trucks. This will provide opportunities for those people who want to ride ATVs and off-highway motorcycles through the forest on existing roads. Approximately 1,700 miles of road may be available for this riding experience. In addition, many existing unclassified roads may continue to be used by ATVs, off-highway motorcycles and four-wheel drive vehicles until such time that a decision is made on the disposition of the unclassified road. Roads where use by ATVs, off-highway motorcycles or four-wheel drives is inappropriate or would cause unacceptable resource damage will be closed to such use (example: summer use of winter use only roads). Higher level forest roads (OML-3, 4, and 5) will continue to be generally unavailable for travel by ATVs and off-highway motorcycles for safety reasons. The planned trail system, in addition to the use on existing low standard roads, provides opportunities that result in various riding experiences without damaging the Forest.

**Off-Highway Vehicle Cross-Country Travel Prohibition:** All cross-country travel (public use of ATVs, off-highway motorcycles, and four-wheel drives off of a designated trail or existing road) is prohibited. This includes a prohibition on cross-country travel for big game retrieval and for furbearing trapping access. I reached this decision after considering public comments and conducting further environmental review. I believe this approach is necessary to avoid user conflicts and damage to the forest.

**Snowmobile Designated Trails:** With about 700 miles of existing designated snowmobile trails, snowmobile use will continue to be an essential part of the Superior National Forest experience. The Revised Plan provides for up to an additional 130 miles of snowmobile trail to be designated. The location and exact amount of trail to be designated are not determined in the Revised Plan. We will coordinate closely with the Minnesota DNR and local governments, trail clubs and other interest groups to determine the site specific locations of the trails. New designated snowmobile trails must meet the Revised Plan's management direction for Lynx recovery.

**Snowmobile Cross Country Travel:** Cross-country snowmobile use will continue to be allowed in most management areas unless prohibitions or restrictions are needed for resource protection to meet management objectives. Cross-country snowmobile use often involves access to lakes for ice fishing. The routes are often snow-filled drainages with little vegetation. Resource damage from cross-country snowmobile use has not been a major problem in the past, because the snow cover on the ground provides a buffer of protection to ground vegetation. The cross-country snowmobile policy is consistent with the policies on State Forests and county lands.

## **Water Access**

More than half of the Forest's lakes over 25 acres already have water access of some kind. The Forest continues to get requests for new or improved water access sites, many

of which involve development of facilities to accommodate the trend of larger boats and motors. The 1986 Forest Plan provided little direction with regard to the amount or level of development for new water access sites, therefore, it is important that the Revised Plan provide direction to help determine if new lake and river access sites are appropriate, and what level of development is appropriate for which sizes and types of lakes.

I have decided that the Revised Plan will limit the number of new water access sites to 10 or less for the first decade. I based this decision on current and projected demand, while also considering the need to keep some lakes without developed access. However, facilities at Natural Environment Lakes and small bodies of water would be limited to facilities such as a path and carry-down access. This decision provides for a variety of facilities, while still maintaining some lakes at the remote end of the development scale.

## **Special Designations**

### ***Wilderness Study Areas***

Wilderness is an important management emphasis on the Superior National Forest and in the area surrounding northeastern Minnesota. A decision that must be made when revising forest plans is whether to recommend additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System. In making this decision, it is important to consider the Wilderness context of the area. The Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness is over 1.086 million acres in size. Immediately to the north in Ontario, is Quetico Provincial Wilderness Park, which is 1.175 million acres in size. To the northwest and adjacent to the BWCA Wilderness, the Voyageurs National Park manages nearly 127,500 acres of park lands evaluated for wilderness study. Within and adjacent to the BWCA Wilderness, over 2.39 million acres (more than 3,700 square miles) are managed for wilderness values.

I have determined that the 30 areas (over 60,000 acres) on the Superior that met the criteria for roadless inventory did not add significantly to wilderness opportunities. Although they had the character of being essentially roadless, they did not have attributes that would justify my recommendation for wilderness study by Congress. In fact, many of these parcels were previously considered, but not recommended by Congress during the development of the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act and the 1997 BWCA Wilderness mediation. In my determination, none of these 30 areas enhanced or contributed extraordinary character to the BWCAW or national wilderness preservation system.

Many people commented that these areas should be recommended for Wilderness in order to protect their unique ecological conditions. We did an extensive survey for ecological features throughout the Forest and have identified several areas that merit protection. In a few instances (North Arm Burnside and Seven Beavers), these areas overlap with the inventoried roadless areas. In most other cases, they do not. Areas identified as having significant ecological features are designated as Candidate Research Natural Areas or as Unique Biological management areas.

I have also determined that these 30 areas do not add significantly to the recreational opportunities of the BWCA Wilderness. An important aspect of my decision is that several of these parcels (Big Lake, Cucumber Lake, East and West Greenstone Lakes, and an enlarged Brule Lake), although not being recommended for wilderness, provide

special opportunities for the public to recreate and enjoy the land in a non-wilderness setting while still enjoying a more primitive experience. These parcels are allocated to management areas that emphasize semi-primitive non-motorized recreation or semi-primitive motorized recreation. They will provide options for those that cannot use, or do not want to use the BWCA Wilderness, yet still seek a more primitive, backcountry experience.

This decision also helps to fulfill Section 18 of the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act, which requires that the Forest Service consider the need to provide additional areas outside the BWCA Wilderness where water travel is allowed under rules that are less restrictive than those within the Wilderness.

### ***Candidate Research Natural Areas***

With this decision I have identified 11 areas (19,448 acres) as Candidate Research Natural Areas. These are in addition to the four Research Natural Areas (3,184 acres) that already exist on the Superior National Forest. As candidates, these areas will be further considered for their eligibility to become part of the national network of ecological areas designated for research and education and to provide important components of biological diversity for the Forest. These 11 areas have been assigned to a management area that is consistent with Research Natural Area objectives. As we implement the Revised Plan, we will seek concurrence of the Director of the North Central Research Station and then complete the administrative steps required for considering designation.

My decision on presenting these 11 areas as candidates for further evaluation and possible establishment was based upon an extensive inventory and evaluation conducted during the revision process and provides for adequate representation of vegetative alliances.

### ***Unique Biological Areas***

The inventory for potential Research Natural Areas also included some areas that were ecologically unique on the Superior National Forest. I have decided to allocate three areas (about 2,080 acres) to the Unique Biological Management Area. These areas will also contribute to the alliance representation of the Candidate Research Natural Areas mentioned above. Unlike those candidates, these areas have unique ecological attributes not found elsewhere on the forest.

## **Economic and Social Sustainability of Local Communities**

My decision ensures that the Superior National Forest will continue to be an important contributor to the social and economic well-being of communities in Cook, Lake, Saint Louis, and adjacent counties. I recognize the Forest's role as "part of the neighborhood." I also know that the Forest is not the only factor driving the social and economic well-being of these communities.

We worked closely with State, county and Tribal officials in developing this Revised Plan. Coordination with the State of Minnesota, Cook County, Lake County, Saint Louis

County and the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage Bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa will be important as we implement the Revised Plan to insure that mutual goals and objectives are achieved.

My decision will allow the Forest to participate in keeping and maintaining a vibrant timber and tourism industry, while meeting various ecological goals. The Revised Plan provides a good blend of goods and services and sustains multiple use of the federal land while protecting and enhancing the health of the land.

Although my decision will not provide the highest return to counties, I believe it provides the best mix of the many resources that contribute to the local economies. My decision recognizes the incomparable value of the BWCAW, the many developed and dispersed recreation activities, and the contribution to local economies by those using the BWCAW and non-wilderness recreation opportunities. My decision provides a good blend of uses that contribute in broad ways to all economic sectors of the communities. Although there will be some shift in the mix of goods, services and uses from the Superior National Forest, local communities will continue to enjoy the same types of settings, products, and uses that support community stability.

## **Tribal Interests and Treaty Rights**

I want to especially acknowledge the Tribes' role in both the Revised Plan development and in its implementation. The Superior National Forest is entirely within the territory ceded in the Treaty of 1854, in which the Lake Superior Chippewa retained the rights to hunt and gather. The Superior National Forest has made a special effort to work with the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa that exercise treaty rights and interests affected by my decision. I've considered not only treaty rights and our Government-to-Government relationship, but also comments of tribal members who use and enjoy the Forest. Together, we've gone beyond meetings and have been action-based. My decision fully supports Tribal treaty rights, and as importantly, provides for other activities and uses deemed important by those using the forest for a wide variety of reasons. The plan will sustain those values held important by tribal members.

## **Monitoring**

I have decided to revamp the monitoring section (Chapter 4) of the Revised Plan, shifting the focus from addressing only the basic planning requirements, to a more strategic focus on monitoring the extent to which we are making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives called for in the Revised Plan. In strengthening the monitoring section of the Revised Plan, the Forest worked with the National Inventory and Monitoring Institute and my staff here in the Regional Office. The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 ties well with the strategic nature of a Forest Plan. More specific monitoring requirements will be developed as the Revised Plan is stepped down to specific projects. I also intend to provide opportunities for the public and agencies not only to help in developing a detailed monitoring guide, but also to become partners in conducting monitoring and helping interpret the results.

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## Changes between Draft and Final EIS and the Draft and Final Revised Plan

We received a great deal of public and internal comment on our Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Forest Plan. We listened to your comments, and based on them made several modifications to the selected alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and to the Revised Plan.

The changes ranged from minor editing for improved clarity to changes in management area allocations, desired conditions, objectives, and standards and guidelines. Some changes also resulted from data corrections or further vegetation modeling efforts. These changes are reflected in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Revised Plan for the Superior National Forest.

The summary below describes the most substantial changes made between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements and the Proposed and Revised Plans:

### Changes in Management Area Allocations

#### ***General Forest Longer Rotation and Recreation Use in Scenic Landscape Management Areas***

In the Proposed Plan, the Isabella Pines area was allocated to the “Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape” Management Area, because the area already had a series of recreation sites, campgrounds, boat landings, trails, and many small lakes.

Based upon comments made by our Rangers and by local government representatives, we took a closer look at this area and determined that this area did not have the same characteristics of all the other areas allocated to that management area. Those other areas (Gunflint Trail, the North Shore, Johnson Lake, Fernberg Corridor, etc) are along highly traveled roads, and are destination-type areas, with resorts, lodges, and highly developed recreational facilities. The Isabella Pines area has more dispersed recreation types of facilities and is along a much less traveled highway.

In the Revised Plan, I decided to allocate the area to the General Forest Longer Rotation management area, because the emphasis of this management area (older, larger trees) fits well with the preponderance of red pine in the area, and would continue to provide for and complement the existing recreational facilities in the area.

#### ***Semi-primitive Non-motorized Management Areas***

Cucumber Lake was an area that met the inventory criteria as a roadless area and it received much public comment as to whether it should be recommended for wilderness

study. The Preferred Alternative allocated this area to the Semi-primitive Non-motorized management area using the boundaries of the inventoried roadless area.

In reviewing public comments and in evaluating the lakes and setting in this area, I decided to expand the area (adding approximately 1000 acres) to include additional interconnected lakes and land areas that could provide a better semi-primitive non-motorized canoeing experience. Designating this larger area in the Revised Plan as a Semi-primitive non-motorized management area also helps meet the intent of a provision of the 1978 BWCA Wilderness act to provide additional areas outside the BWCAW where canoeing is allowed under rules that are less restrictive than those within the Wilderness.

The Wood Lake area is a 640-acre Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) area and also met the criteria for the new roadless inventory. The Preferred Alternative allocated this area to Semi-primitive non-motorized management area. Upon closer inspection, this area had few special characteristics that would provide quality semi-primitive recreational opportunities. Much of the area is lowland, with the only highland being a logical access to the one piece of private property in the northwest corner of the Section. Because its small size and lowland condition, I believe it makes sense to merge this small area in with the existing management area (Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape) that makes up much of the Fernberg corridor.

### ***Candidate Research Natural Areas & Unique Areas***

I decided to make some substitutions in the areas designated as Candidate Research Natural Areas. These substitutions increase the areas proposed as Candidate Research Natural Areas by about 1,000 acres.

One candidate area was dropped because of potential restrictions to Tribal rice gathering if it was designated as a Research Natural Area. Two other areas were added to substitute for the dropped area. Three other areas were dropped because they were located within ecological subsections of lower priority for representation, and two areas were added in areas that had higher priority for representation.

In reviewing the pool of potential RNAs, we identified three truly unique areas on the forest (Birch Bay, Fall River Pattern Fen, and Little Isabella River), totaling 2,064 acres, which are allocated to the Unique Biological management area in the Revised Plan.

### ***Technical changes to correct errors in BWCA Wilderness management area mapping***

We discovered errors in the mapping of Pristine Wilderness management area in the maps from the 1993 BWCA Plan Amendment, and these errors appeared in all alternatives in the Draft EIS. Also, some motorized lakes were phased out since the 1993 Plan Amendment, but these changes were never incorporated into the maps. In addition, the Transportation Equity Act of 1998 (PL 105-178) restricted the use of motors on Canoe and Alder lakes. These adjustments have been made in all alternatives in the Final EIS and in the Revised Plan. These are Administrative corrections, and therefore, they are not subject to the National Environmental Policy Act. We have already been

managing the BWCA Wilderness according to these changes for a long time. I wanted to be sure that people knew that as of now, we are formalizing these map corrections.

## **Changes in Addressing Tribal Rights**

Desired Conditions and Objectives were added to further clarify the Forest's role in maintaining treaty rights and coordinating with Bois Forte, Fond du Lac and Grand Portage Bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa.

## **Changes to Off-Highway Vehicle Policy**

The Revised Plan differs from the Proposed Plan in that all public cross-country off-highway vehicle travel is prohibited without exception. The Proposed Plan allowed an exception in most management areas for big game retrieval and furbearer trapping access. My decision considered public comments and the difficulty of managing and mitigating resource impacts. The Forest Service national concern about unmanaged recreation as a threat to national forests also weighed into my decision.

This decision may differ from the approach that the State of Minnesota is taking for many of the lands they manage. We will continue to work with the State to help recreation users understand the differences in policies.

## **Changes to Stand Replacement Fire**

I have decided that stand replacement fire (prescribed fire that is used to kill an entire stand of trees) will generally not be used as a management tool within parts of the forest classified as suitable for timber production. Timber harvest, often followed by prescribed fire, will be the primary tool used to meet vegetation age class objectives within these management areas. Prescribed fire will continue to be used to restore ecosystem function, treat hazardous fuels and for site preparation.

I have made this change because I have concerns about the intensity of fire needed to accomplish stand replacement, especially in certain timber types, the associated protection and safety of adjacent lands and properties, and the loss of timber resources that could be utilized if other stand replacement tools were employed.

## **Changes to Acres Treated and Treatment Methods**

There are only minor changes to the total number of acres treated between the Proposed Plan and the Revised Plan. The acres treated per year increased by about 200 acres (from 13,000 to 13,190). The amount of clearcutting proposed in the Revised Plan is reduced by about 830 acres per year (from about 9,200 to 8,370). The amount of thinning, predominantly in red pine, is increased by about 400 acres per year (from about 725 acres to 1,120 acres), and the amount of other treatments such as partial harvests is increased by about 600 acres. These changes in treatment acres are mostly a result of more-refined spatially modeling of the preferred alternative.

## **Changes to Management Direction for Forest Vegetation**

Vegetative Objectives in the Revised Plan are generally similar to those in the Proposed Plan. There is a slight increase in the short term objectives for white pine forest type to place more emphasis on white pine restoration. There is also a slight decrease in the objective for aspen forest types.

As a result of more refined spatial modeling of the preferred alternative, changes were made to the objectives and Standards and Guidelines for large patches, interior forest and mature upland forest. This change, to reflect a more implementable objective, is also reflected in a change to the Spatial Zone map in Chapter 2 of the Revised Plan.

## **Changes to Allowable Sale Quantity**

Based upon re-analysis and an adjustment in yields expected from clearcut treatments, the allowable sale quantity changed for several of the alternatives from that listed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The allowable sale quantity for the first decade changes from 820 million board feet in the Proposed Plan to 1.02 billion board feet in the Revised Plan. This change came about through a re-analysis of yields per acre compared to actual experienced with timber yields from recent timber sales.

## **Changes to Management Direction for Threatened Species**

The Forest worked closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to provide management direction that would contribute to the recovery of the bald eagle, gray wolf, and Canada lynx. A guideline was added to protect wolf dens. I have added and refined standards and guidelines to address concerns related to lynx. Changes in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Revised Plan were largely related to road and trail density, effective road closures and increases in over-the-snow routes.

## **Changes to Address the Healthy Forest Restoration Act**

In 2003, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) became law. I have added management direction to the Revised Plan for the maintenance of old growth characteristics when conducting HFRA covered projects in old growth stands. I have also prioritized areas proposed for treatments to reduce hazardous fuels based on fire regime and condition class.

## **Changes to Monitoring Strategy**

After considering the many comments received on monitoring, I have decided to revamp the monitoring section (Chapter 4) of the Revised Plan. In making this change, I am shifting the focus of the monitoring program from addressing only the basic planning requirements, to a more strategic focus of monitoring our progress toward the desired conditions and objectives called for in the Revised Plan. The Monitoring Framework in

Chapter 4 ties well with the strategic nature of the Revised Plan, with increasing specificity that will be identified during project design as the Revised Plan is implemented.

## **Other Changes**

Between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement, several other changes were made, including updating the stand data layer used in the analysis of Modified Alternative E, and recalculating the economic effects of all alternatives based upon the updated allowable sale quantity figures and new visitor use estimates from the National Visitor Use Monitoring report. In addition, habitat for some species of concern was re-analyzed for all alternatives using additional indicators.

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## Public Involvement

From the very beginning of the process to revise the Forest Plan, we looked for ways to actively and meaningfully engage the public. Early on, tribes, governments, agencies, groups and individuals were invited to become actively involved in crafting a Revised Plan with the goal of “a revised Forest Plan that the public supports.” The Revised Plan is stronger, better crafted, and the Superior National Forest will be better managed as a result of the public’s new ideas, new approaches, additional information, and review of draft documents. Active involvement by the public will continue to be needed to help implement the Revised Plan and to ensure it stays up to date.

A detailed description of the public involvement process is included in Appendix A of the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Key steps in revision where the public was involved in a major way include:

- **Helping determine the need for change** and the proposed scope of change to address in the revision process. We solicited public input to validate issue descriptions and to prioritize issues. We mailed issues packages to over 1,500 individuals and received 189 responses. We held public workshops for public review of reference papers and 60 participants attended. Nine Forest Service working groups, including members of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and tribal governments helped develop proposals to resolve issues. Based upon this work, 12 issues were proposed in the Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for revising the Chippewa and Superior Plans.
- **Commenting on the Notice of Intent:** The Notice of Intent, which listed need for change items and described a proposal for revising the Forest Plan, was mailed to 2,070 people and groups. Fourteen open houses were held to explain the proposal and to encourage comments. The normal 60 day comment period was extended by an additional 30 days. Over 460 comments were received, and as a result, 26 issues were carried forward in some form to be addressed in the environmental impact statement.
- **Development of Preliminary Alternatives:** We wanted to have the public actively involved in developing alternatives. We conducted three workshops that were attended by over 200 people. The workshop participants suggested 30 themes for alternatives. In addition to the workshop themes, several groups developed and submitted detailed alternatives to the Forest Service. The 30 themes and the submitted alternatives were combined and further developed to arrive at the range of seven alternatives considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.
- **Consultation with Tribal and other Governmental Agencies:** Throughout the revision process and continuing to the present, the Forest Service has worked with Cook, Lake and St. Louis counties, the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage Bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa, the 1854 Authority, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the University of Minnesota and University of Minnesota-Duluth, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the US Environmental

Protection Agency, Forest Service Research, State and Private Forestry and other governmental agencies to keep them apprised of the status of Forest Plan revision and to consult on common management concerns. Under the Federal Advisory Committees Act, national forests may consult with sovereign nations and representatives of elected officials differently than private citizens and organizations.

- **Review and Comment on Draft EIS and Proposed Plan:** Once the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and proposed Plan were completed, they were made available for public comment for an initial 90 day period, which was later extended for an additional 30 days (120 days total). Along with the Proposed Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement, we issued a “Reviewer’s Guide” to help reviewers navigate through the documents so they could provide substantive comments. The documents were mailed to about 425 people, groups, agencies, and governments. They were also made available at local libraries and through the Internet. The Internet site also included MAPSERVER, which allowed users to look at maps of how the various alternatives would allocate resources. We held a series of meetings in northern Minnesota and in the Twin Cities metro area where the public could meet with members of the planning team to ask questions and get information to help them in preparing public comments. The response to the draft documents was huge. Over 1,280 letters were received, resulting in over 26,900 comments on specific resources. Comments were well prepared, constructive, and greatly helped in crafting the Revised Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement.
- **Response to Comment and Preparation of Final Plan and Final EIS:** Appendix J of the Final Environmental Impact Statement contains the public comments summarized from the responses that we received during the comment period on the Proposed Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This appendix also includes an explanation of what the Forest Service did with each comment. Changes were made to the Final Environmental Impact Statement or the Revised Plan as a result of the comment, or an explanation was provided for why the requested change was not made.

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# Alternatives

## Alternative Development

In 1997, the Forest Service issued a Notice of Intent to revise the 1986 Forest Plan. The notice informed the public about the formal revision process. An initial proposal of how to change the current Forest Plan was made in the Notice of Intent. The Forest solicited comments or suggestions from the public on the proposal for revising the Forest Plan and possible alternatives for addressing the issues associated with the proposal. These public comments helped frame the alternatives and analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Preliminary themes for alternatives were developed for public and employee workshops in 1998. These themes were designed to address the issues and concerns identified early on in the planning process. Workshop participants further developed the themes, helping the National Forest formulate alternatives. While all alternatives provide a wide range of multiple uses, goods and services, they address the issues in different ways. The result was six alternatives in addition to the No Action Alternative, which would carry forward the emphasis of the 1986 Forest Plan. All alternatives would respect American Indians' rights to hunt, fish, and gather that were retained by treaty.

The National Forest Management Act requires the development and analysis of a broad range of reasonable alternatives that respond to the issues and concerns identified during the planning process. Alternatives must also address the purpose and need for change. The Superior National Forest considered a broad range of reasonable alternatives based on the following criteria:

- Alternatives are distributed between minimum and maximum benchmarks.
- Alternatives respond to the issues raised during the planning process.
- Alternatives respond to national and regional management direction.
- A range of outcomes and outputs would result from the alternatives.

## Alternatives Not Considered In Detail

Twenty-one alternatives were considered during the initial analysis process. Some of these alternatives had similar themes, so they were combined. While many of these were not considered in detail as stand-alone alternatives, they were considered in detail in that they made up parts of the seven alternatives considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Several alternatives were eliminated from detailed study for the reasons provided below. These alternatives are labeled by their major emphasis.

### ***Alternatives with Very High Timber Yield***

Several alternatives emphasized very high levels of timber harvest, in some cases maximizing sustainable timber harvest. These alternatives, as submitted, were eliminated from detailed consideration because they emphasized timber production to such an extent that management for other resources and resource protection would fall

below acceptable levels. Examples of this include scheduling harvest on all forested acres outside the BWCA Wilderness, rather than just acres classified as suitable for timber management. The National Forest Management Act, Multiple Use –Sustained Yield Act, Endangered Species Act, and other laws require that national forests be managed for a variety of uses and provide resource protections. Many aspects of these alternatives were used, in Alternative C, which was considered in detail.

### ***No-harvest Alternative***

An alternative was proposed that would essentially eliminate timber harvest on the Superior National Forest. The proposal called for a significant amount of restoration of pine forests and allowed for some harvest treatments in the first decade to provide for such restoration. This alternative, as submitted, was eliminated from detailed consideration for several reasons. It was not realistically possible to accomplish the envisioned levels of restoration within the first decade. In later decades, this alternative did not provide for representation of young age classes on the landscape. This alternative was modified to provide more active management in the first two decades to facilitate a higher level of ecological restoration. The modified alternative also included a continuation of harvest, albeit at low levels, in decades 3 through 10 to ensure representation of young age classes. The alternative with these modifications was considered in detail as Alternative D.

### ***Watershed Management Emphasis Alternative***

This alternative focused on protecting, enhancing, and restoring water, aquatic, riparian, and wetland resources. It was eliminated from further study because it focused only on the water or wetland portions of the National Forests and provided no management recommendations for the upland, terrestrial portions. It was not a complete alternative and did not address many aspects of the purpose and need for change and would not have responded to many of the issues raised during the planning process. Many of the watershed management proposals from this alternative were incorporated into the alternatives considered in detail.

## **Alternatives Considered In Detail**

### ***Selected Alternative***

The Selected Alternative is listed as Modified Alternative E in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Alternative E was modified between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement in response to public comments and to incorporate data corrections.

Modified Alternative E emphasizes a diverse economic base in local communities. Compared to the other alternatives, the Forest would be managed in a way that provides a variety of economic opportunities. This alternative would promote tourism and its associated revenues by emphasizing resources such as recreational opportunities, scenic landscapes, and diverse wildlife habitats. This alternative would provide a broad range of recreational opportunities. Developed and undeveloped motorized recreational opportunities in a scenic landscape would be emphasized. This alternative would provide the most opportunities for new ATV and snowmobile trails compared to other

alternatives. There would also be a focus on protecting, enhancing, and restoring riparian areas. Old growth forest would be provided through vegetative objectives and allowing natural processes to dominate within the BWCA Wilderness, Shipstead-Newton-Nolan areas, and Research Natural Areas and Candidate Research Natural Areas. Eleven areas are recommended as Candidate Research Natural Areas and 3 areas as Unique Biological Areas. Additional Semi-primitive motorized and Semi-primitive non-motorized management areas would be established. No areas are recommended for wilderness study. Alternative E emphasizes timber harvesting less than Alternatives C and A, but more than the other alternatives. The allowable sale quantity would be about 1.02 billion board feet in the first decade.

### **Alternative A**

Alternative A is the 'no action' alternative. In forest plan revision, 'no action' means that guidance for the next ten years would generally be the same as the management direction in the amended 1986 Forest Plan. Alternative A emphasizes managing the forest to provide early-successional vegetation (with an emphasis on aspen), emphasizes timber as well as deer and moose habitat, and developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities in both motorized and non-motorized settings. The allowable sale quantity (ASQ) in the first decade would be about 1.38 billion board feet. No additional special area designations would be made beyond those in the 1986 Forest Plan.

### **Alternative B**

Alternative B emphasizes restoring older, mixed forests and coniferous species. Protecting unique resources is also emphasized more in this alternative than other alternatives. Timber management and other commercial resource management objectives would be secondary to the objective of increasing the amount of older forest. Old-growth forest areas would be specifically designated and mapped. Twelve areas would be recommended as wilderness study areas, and 41 Candidate Research Natural Areas would be recommended. A variety of recreation opportunities would be provided, predominately semi-primitive settings. There would be fewer opportunities for new ATV and snowmobile trails than in most other alternatives. The allowable sale quantity would be about 626 million board feet in the first decade.

### **Alternative C**

Alternative C emphasizes producing timber and replicating large-scale natural disturbances, such as large fires or windstorms. Timber harvest would be the main tool used to create large-scale disturbance. To provide for older trees and wildlife habitat, extended rotations would be used in some situations. Under Alternative C, there would be more large patches of young forest than in Alternative A. Early successional species, such as aspen and birch, would be emphasized, although a variety of species would be provided. Developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities in both motorized and non-motorized settings would be provided. A large majority of the forest outside the BWCA Wilderness is in the General Forest management area. There would be no areas recommended for wilderness study, and only one area identified as a Candidate Research Natural Area. In the first decade, the allowable sale quantity would be 1.87 billion board feet. Harvest levels in the first ten years of implementation would be higher than subsequent decades in order to capture volume that would otherwise be lost to mortality

due to age imbalance in the forest (the alternative would depart from a sustained yield non-declining even flow of timber products).

### ***Alternative D***

Alternative D emphasizes semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation, and restoring conifers to create an old-tree character. The highest priorities for restoration would be establishing white pine forests. Alternative D would provide the greatest percentage of old forest and larger and more connected blocks of old growth compared to all the other alternatives. All areas that meet the inventory criteria for wilderness (30 areas) would be recommended for wilderness study. Alternative D recommended 41 Candidate Research Natural Areas. Recreation opportunities would primarily be provided in semi-primitive, non-motorized settings, where activities such as hiking, canoeing, and backpacking would be common. Under this alternative, vegetation management would transition from timber production toward ecological succession and some restoration. However, timber harvesting would be used in the first two decades as a tool to restore some cover types. After this 20-year period, a low level of timber harvest would be used to maintain a representation of all forest types and ages. The clearcut harvest method would generally not be used in this alternative. The volume of timber sold in the first decade would be expected to be about 370 million board feet. This alternative would maintain most, but not all of the existing higher standards roads while decommissioning many of the existing low standard roads. This alternative would depart from non-declining even flow of timber products because it would harvest more timber in the first two decades, and significantly less timber in later decades.

### ***Alternative E***

Modified Alternative E was selected as the Revised Plan and is described in detail in the earlier section of this Record of Decision titled "Decision Summary and Rationale". This alternative had several changes from the Alternative E that was described and analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Those changes are described in the previous section entitled Changes between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements.

### ***Alternative F***

Alternative F emphasizes managing National Forest System land to eventually achieve vegetative conditions that are within the range of natural variability. Timber harvest and prescribed fire would be used to mimic natural disturbances. Ecological processes would be maintained or restored by using a variety of timber harvest methods, management-ignited fire, and allowing natural processes to operate. Conifer and northern hardwood forest types would be restored. Areas that historically experienced high-intensity, stand-replacing events, such as wildfires and large-scale blowdowns, would be intensively managed. However, areas that experienced low-intensity, stand maintenance events, such as surface fires and minor wind throw, would be less intensively managed. No areas would be recommended for wilderness study and 41 Candidate Research Natural Areas would be identified. Developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities in both motorized and non-motorized settings would be provided. The current trail system would be maintained, and there would be additional opportunities for new ATV and snowmobile trails. In the first decade the allowable sale quantity would be 935 million board feet.

## **Alternative G**

Alternative G emphasizes managing vegetation communities in a way that distributes young forest, older forest, and old growth across the forest. Under Alternative G, the forest would be 'zoned' as young, mature, or older forests. Timber harvest and prescribed fire would be used to mimic natural disturbances. Ecological processes would be maintained or restored by using a variety of timber harvest methods, management-ignited fire, and allowing natural processes to operate. Conifer and northern hardwood forest types would be restored. Four areas would be recommended for wilderness study and 26 Candidate Research Natural Areas would be identified. Developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities would be provided in both motorized and non-motorized settings. The current trail system would be maintained, and there would be additional opportunities for new ATV and snowmobile trails. In the first decade, the allowable sale quantity would be 929 million board feet.

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## Consistency with the Plans of Others

It is important that the management direction within the Revised Plan for the Superior National Forest take into consideration and be generally consistent with the plans of other governments and agencies within the landscape.

### Chippewa National Forest Revised Plan

The Superior and Chippewa National Forests are both located in northern Minnesota, with a relatively short distance separating the two. These two Revised Plans are consistent, except where ecologic or social conditions would warrant a difference. The Superior and Chippewa National Forests have worked closely together throughout the entire process of revising the Forest Plans. A single interdisciplinary team conducted the analysis and prepared the two Plans. This team prepared a single Environmental Impact Statement covering the effects of alternatives on both Forests.

### County Plans

Throughout the revision process, the Forest Service has worked closely with commissioners from Cook, Lake and St. Louis Counties. The Forest Service reviewed and considered these county's comprehensive or land use plans in the development of the Revised Plan. I believe the Revised Plan will contribute toward the environmental, natural resource, recreation, transportation, and social and economic goals of these County Plans.

### Minnesota DNR Subsection Plans

Thus far, the Border Lakes Subsection is the only subsection plan that has been issued, and it is available as a draft plan. The Superior National Forest participated in reviewing and commenting on this draft document. I find the Revised Plan to be consistent with the Desired Future Forest Conditions specified in the draft Border Lakes Resource Management Plan.

### Minnesota Forest Resource Council Reports

The Superior National Forest was an active participant in the development of site-level guidelines and the northeast landscape desired outcomes report. The Revised Plan incorporates much of the site-level guidelines in its management direction. The landscape ecosystem and vegetation objectives in the Revised Plan are consistent with the Desired Future Forest Conditions and recommended goals and strategies of the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's Northeast Landscape Report.

### Lake Superior Lakewide Management Plan

Superior National Forest employees participated in the development of the Lake Superior Lakewide Management Plan (LaMP). In fact, this plan is referenced in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Many of the themes of the LaMP are similar and consistent with those of the Revised Plan, including terrestrial wildlife, aquatic communities, sustainability, and habitat.

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## Consistency with Other National Policies, Laws, and Authorities

The Forest Service manages the Superior National Forest in conformance with many laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies. The list provided here is not a complete list of all governing statutes that apply to the Forest Plan Revision, but it highlights the primary statutes guiding the preparation of this plan revision. In all cases the Revised Plan is consistent with national law, policy, and direction.

### National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The Forest has compiled and generated an enormous amount of information relevant to the effects of each of the alternatives considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. I find that the environmental analysis and public involvement process complies with each of the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508). These include 1) Considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives; 2) disclosing cumulative effects; 3) using best scientific information; 4) consideration of long-term and short-term effects; and 5) disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects.

The decision here does not directly authorize any new ground disturbing activities or projects, but rather ground disturbing activities and projects will be subject to additional site-specific environmental analysis that will tier to the Final Environmental Impact Statement and follow applicable environmental analysis, public involvement and administrative appeal procedures.

The Revised Plan has adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing those ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The Revised Plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

### ***Environmentally Preferable Alternative***

Regulations implementing NEPA also require the specification of "...the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable" (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). Based on the analysis of effects contained in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, I have determined that Alternative F is the environmentally preferable alternative. The main emphasis of Alternative F is an ecological approach which, over the long term, moves the vegetative condition of the Superior National Forest to within the range of natural variability. It was the only alternative considered in detail that took this approach. Unlike each of the other alternatives, which had themes that integrated ecologic, social and economic considerations, under Alternative F most resource outputs were provided only if they resulted from meeting the ecological management goals and objectives. An exception to this was the addition of some specific recreation decisions, such as motorized trail miles and water access sites. Management area allocations were

generally based solely upon ecologic considerations. Alternative F also identified all 41 areas as Candidate Research Natural Areas.

Alternative F was not selected as the Revised Plan because, while it addressed the ecologic aspect of the human environment, it focused little attention on the equally important social and economic aspects. I believe my choice of the Revised Plan as the Selected Alternative is the appropriate management approach for these Forests to provide the highest net benefit to the public over the long-term.

## **National Forest Management Act**

When the Superior's Plan revision effort began in 1997, the Agency's 1982 planning regulations were in effect. On November 9, 2000, new planning rules were adopted. However, the 2000 planning rule allowed ongoing revisions to be completed under the 1982 rule if the revision had begun before the 2000 rule was issued. The Superior National Forest met this criterion and therefore proceeded to completion under the 1982 planning regulations.

The NFMA planning regulations specifies a number of requirements that guide Forest Service planning. The Revised Plan complies with each of these management requirements, as explained in this Record of Decision, the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement and Appendices, and the planning record.

### ***Present Net Value and Net Public Benefit***

The 1982 Planning Rule requires identification of the alternative that maximizes the present net value (PNV) and how the Revised Plan compares to this alternative. According to the economic analysis displayed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Alternative C maximizes PNV due to the higher level of timber harvest predicted and the revenue generated as a result. Alternative C has a PNV of \$10,209 million. The Revised Plan, Modified Alternative E has a PNV of \$10,183 million, and ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> among all alternatives. While Alternative C has a slightly higher PNV, the Revised Plan provides the highest net public benefit. Many benefits associated with the Revised Plan are not captured in fees or revenues nor are they necessarily quantifiable. For this reason, the alternative that maximizes PNV is not the alternative that has the highest net public benefit. I have determined that the Revised Plan has the highest net public benefit because it best balances multiple uses of the Forest and fulfills the mission of the Forest Service.

## **Endangered Species Act**

The Endangered Species Act creates an affirmative obligation "...that all Federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened (and proposed) species" of fish, wildlife, and plants. This obligation is further clarified in the national Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) which states our shared mission to "...enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources."

Based upon consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, their concurrence with our Biological Assessment, and the non-jeopardy finding in their Biological Opinion, I have determined that the Revised Plan is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

## **Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act**

The Revised Plan is in compliance with the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act and its various provisions. The Revised Plan makes no changes to management direction for the BWCA Wilderness, except for the technical corrections in management area boundaries. It continues to protect and manage the BWCA Wilderness as called for in the Act. The Revised Plan also responds to direction in the Act for areas outside the BWCA Wilderness. It will increase the amount of reforestation and restoration to conifers (or softwoods), and increase the utilization of hardwoods through treatment of up to 13,000 acres per year of all vegetation types (Section 6.c.1). The Revised Plan increases emphasis on dispersed outdoor recreation development outside the BWCA Wilderness as directed by Section 18(a), by establishing additional semi-primitive areas. It provides for continued operation and maintenance of the many trails already built in response to Section 18(b).

## **Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) and Forest Service Strategic Plan 2004-2008**

Planning regulations (36 CFR 219.12(f) (6)) require that at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Resources Planning Act Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest as displayed in Regional Guides. The Forest Service Strategic Plan 2004-2008, in lieu of a Resource Planning Act Program, was completed in accordance with the Government Performance Results Act and the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. While forest plans should be consistent with the broad guidance provided in the Strategic Plan and should consider the information provided by the Resource Planning Act Assessment along with other available and relevant science, neither the Strategic Plan nor the Assessment contain recommended outputs to incorporate in specific forest plans. I find the Revised Plan to be in compliance with the Forest Service Strategic Plan, and to contribute toward its goals, which are:

### ***Reduce the risk from catastrophic wildland fire***

The Revised Plan contains management direction in the form of desired conditions and objectives to increase the amount of forest restored to or maintained in healthy condition to reduce risk and damage from fire. The Revised Plan also focuses on treating vegetation in high hazard areas within the wildland/urban interface areas to reduce risk from wildland fire.

### ***Reduce the impacts from invasive species***

The Revised Plan addresses the spread of terrestrial or aquatic non-native invasive species that pose a threat to native ecosystems.

### ***Provide Outdoor Recreation Opportunities***

As outlined elsewhere in this Record of Decision, the Revised Plan places additional emphasis on recreational use of the Superior National Forest. It increases allocations to management areas that have recreation as a primary emphasis and increases direction needed to better manage use of recreation motor vehicles.

### ***Help Meet Energy Resource Needs***

There are no large biomass energy projects currently in operation in the area surrounding the Superior National Forest. However, if a nearby biomass or energy project were developed, it could create a market for smaller diameter trees and lower quality wood products that would contribute to our ability to meet vegetative objectives identified in the Revised Plan. Stands not economic to treat under current utilization standards for pulpwood or saw timber may become operable.

### ***Improve Watershed Conditions***

The Revised Plan employs a proactive approach to the management of watersheds and riparian areas. It also allocates the headwaters of the St. Louis River to the Riparian Emphasis Management Area.

### ***Mission-related work in addition to that which supports agency goals***

This goal deals mostly with processes. While the Revised Plan specifically focuses on desired conditions and objectives, and not the processes to achieve them, we will improve our productivity and efficiency as we implement the Revised Plan.

## **Healthy Forest Restoration Act**

In 2003, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act was signed into law. I find the Revised Plan is consistent with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act in that it provides for the protection of old growth when conducting covered projects, provides for public involvement in assessing and conducting hazardous fuels reduction projects, and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuels reduction based on condition class and fire regime. The Revised Plan also emphasizes protection and enhancement of riparian areas and watershed health as directed under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

## **Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)**

Executive Order 12898 (59 Federal Register 7629, 1994) directs federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations. I have determined, from the analysis disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, that the Revised Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

## **National Historic Preservation Act**

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Projects undertaken in response to direction of the Revised Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The

Revised Plan contains direction for cultural resource management including direction to integrate cultural resource management with other resource management activities.

Several other laws apply to the preservation of cultural resources on federal land. Since the Revised Plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) under the NHPA is not required. Tribal consultation has occurred during the development of this Revised Plan.

It is my determination that the Revised Plan complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

## **Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Government, 1994.**

These policies support the Forest Service actions in establishing mutual and beneficial partnerships with American Indians and Alaska Natives and honoring treaty obligations. Forest Service policy is recorded in FSM 1563.

## **Other Laws, Policy and Regulations**

I also find that Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Revised Plan are consistent with the following body of policy and regulation: the National Energy Policy (Executive Order 13212), the Transportation Rule and Policy, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Energy Requirement and Conservation Potential, Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species, Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum #1827 on Prime Farmland, Rangeland and Forestland, Executive Order 1099 on the Protection of Wetlands and Floodplains, and the existing body of National direction for managing National Forests.

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# Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation

## Implementation Begins in 30 Days

The Revised Plan becomes effective 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement is published in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1)). Implementation of the Revised Plan will be accomplished and tracked through the management direction detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Revised Plan. The desired conditions and objectives in Chapters 2 and 3 will be used to help design the Forest's annual program of work and budget requests.

## Transition from 1986 Plan to Revised Plan

Revised Plan direction will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the effective date of this Record of Decision. Because this was a revision of the 1986 Superior Forest Plan, many aspects and much management direction from the 1986 Plan is carried forward relatively unchanged into the Revised Plan. Therefore, many existing projects and ongoing actions that were consistent with the 1986 Plan will continue to be so with the Revised Plan.

Many management actions decided prior to issuance of the Record of Decision are routine and ongoing. Those decisions are generally allowed to continue unchanged because the projected effects of these actions are part of the baseline analysis considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Biological Assessments for the revision.

The National Forest Management Act requires that "permits, contracts and other instruments for use and occupancy" of National Forest System lands be "consistent" with the Forest Plan (16 U.S.C. 1640(i)). In the context of a Revised Plan, the National Forest Management Act specifically conditions this requirement in three ways:

1. These documents must be revised only "when necessary;"
2. These documents must be revised as "soon as practicable;"
3. Any revisions are "subject to valid existing rights."

I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the Revised Plan. These contracts will be executed according to their terms, and these effects and conditions were considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Existing timber contracts will, in most cases, be completed within three years. The decision is left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other use and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts. These use and occupancy agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan. Recent project decisions that have not yet been implemented will be reviewed and adjusted by the decision maker, if necessary, to meet the direction found in the Revised Plan.

The decision maker has the discretion on a case-by-case basis, to modify pre-existing authorizations to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan standards and guidelines. I find that the statutory criteria of “as soon as practicable” and excepting “valid existing rights” useful in exercising that discretion.

## **Key Considerations in Plan Implementation**

The Revised Plan provides broad, strategic, landscape-level direction for managing the Superior National Forest. Working toward the desired conditions and achieving the objectives in the Revised Plan will be accomplished through site-specific project decisions, using the appropriate analyses and processes to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws and regulations. The Revised Plan, itself makes no project level decisions. One exception is the decision to prohibit public cross-country use (use off of designated trails and existing roads) by all-terrain vehicles and off-highway motorcycles. When the Revised Plan is implemented, closure orders will be issued as needed to prohibit this cross-country use. No further site-specific analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act will be required for this action, as the required analysis and disclosure has been accomplished through the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Plan did consider and evaluate the total management program that likely would be necessary to implement the objectives of the Revised Plan. It also dealt with those issues and concerns relevant at a larger landscape or forest-wide level. Therefore, in essence, the Final Environmental Impact Statement is a large cumulative effects document, because it analyzed the total of activities that may be expected in the first decade (and longer term) and disclosed the forest-wide effects of those activities considered in total.

By tiering to the Final Environmental Impact Statement, we will make use of this forest-wide analysis to streamline our environmental analysis for project-level decisions. We will not revisit landscape or forest-wide scale issues and effects because those effects have already been considered and disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. This has applicability to a wide range of findings that are appropriately done at the forest-wide level. Findings related to species viability and threatened species should be greatly simplified when projects are within the parameters of the Revised Plan and Final EIS. Project level analyses will focus, as they appropriately should, on the impacts and effects at the specific site. Project-level decisions will not determine whether implementation of the Plan is appropriate, but rather, which management techniques (if any) and mitigations (beyond those in the Revised Plan) are best suited to the site being analyzed.

### ***Roadless Area Conservation Rule***

Under the Revised Plan, areas listed in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule areas have been assigned to a variety of management prescriptions. There is considerable uncertainty about the future of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule due to pending litigation.

On January 12, 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) was published in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 294). The Roadless Rule prohibited with

certain exceptions, road construction and reconstruction activities; and the timber cutting, sale, or removal activities that could occur in the inventoried roadless areas identified in the Roadless Rule Final Environmental Impact Statement. The Roadless Rule in 36 CFR 294.12 and 294.13 identified the exceptions where road construction/reconstruction activities and timber cutting/removal activities would be allowed.

Subsequently, several groups and States filed lawsuits challenging the Roadless Rule. On July 14, 2003, the United States District Court, Wyoming District (Judge Clarence Brimmer) found the Roadless Rule to be in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wilderness Act, and permanently enjoined its implementation and set the rule aside. The effect of this ruling is that direction for inventoried roadless areas reverts to the direction provided in the Revised Plan. However, this issue is not settled. Appeals of the Wyoming District Court decision, other litigation, new rulemaking, or new Forest Service directives could result in a change in direction for the management of inventoried roadless areas.

In managing the areas identified as roadless in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, the Superior National Forest will follow the management direction contained in this Revised Plan and any Forest Service policy on roadless area management specified in the Forest Service directives. However, should the Roadless Rule become effective, it will supercede this Revised Plan for those inventoried roadless areas identified in the Roadless Rule Final Environmental Impact Statement that was completed in November of 2000. This would mean that some areas identified in the Forest Plan as available for road construction and timber harvest could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the Roadless Rule. According to 36 CFR 294.14(b), should the Roadless Rule become effective, an amendment to this Revised Plan would not be needed to implement its direction.

## **Future Changes to the Plan**

### ***Monitoring and Evaluation***

Monitoring is designed to answer questions regarding implementation of the Revised Plan. Monitoring and evaluation will tightly focus on decisions made in the Record of Decision.

Evaluation reports will display how Forest Plan decisions have been implemented, how effective the implementation has proved to be in accomplishing desired outcomes, and what we learned along the way. This will allow a check and review of the validity of the assumptions upon which this decision is based.

The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 ties well with the strategic nature of Forest Plans, with increasing specificity as the Plan is stepped down to specific projects. This monitoring framework has four key monitoring elements. The first element is the direction provided in Chapter 4 of the Revised Plan. The remaining three are implementation tools to ensure a common approach in monitoring Plan direction.

1. The Forest Plan (Chapter 4) direction that provides *broad, strategic* guidance.
2. A Procedural Guide that provides *specific, technical* guidance.
3. An Annual Monitoring Schedule that outlines *annual, specific tasks* for the current year.
4. An Annual Monitoring Evaluation Review that provides a forum to *review current year findings* and identify specific modifications if necessary.

### ***Amending the Forest Plan***

The revision of this forest plan is shaped by a central idea: how we manage the forest should adapt to changes in how we understand the ecological, social and economic environments. In the Forest Service, we call this adaptive management. The Revised Plan is well-structured for adaptive management to occur because it does a good job of describing the desired conditions toward which we will strive as we implement the Plan. In fact, those desired conditions are the very basis for the projects we will accomplish during the life of the Plan.

In making the decision on the Revised Plan, I am also deciding that this plan will be adaptive and subject to change as we monitor, learn, and gain new information. I hope that you choose to be partners with us in our monitoring, learning, and adapting. The revision of the Superior National Forest Plan has taken many years and has incorporated much that has been learned since the 1986 Plan and even as the Revised Plan was developed. However, as I have said before, this Plan is not perfect. Neither is it cast in stone to be unquestioningly adhered to for the next 15 years. We will track progress toward reaching the desired conditions identified in the Plan, and modify or reformulate management actions in response to that progress. If a particular management strategy, technique or practice is applied, its results will be monitored to see if the desired effect is occurring, and if not, a modified or new strategy will be developed and implemented. That new strategy will also be subject to monitoring, evaluation, and, if needed, change.

Changes to the Plan will generally take the form of plan amendments and will follow the appropriate procedures specified in the National Forest Management Act regulations. The correction of simple errors may take the form of an errata statement.

My decision in choosing this Revised Plan along with adaptive management will result in a cycle of learning and adjustment through which the Superior National Forest will be able to provide the most appropriate package of benefits to the American people.

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## Administrative Appeal of My Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service within 90 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the Milwaukee Journal. Appeals must be sent to:

<b>Regular Mail:</b> USDA Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination 1400 Independence Ave, SW Mailstop Code 1104 Washington DC, 20250-1104	<b>Express Mail:</b> USDA Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination 201 14 <sup>th</sup> Street, SW 3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor, Central Wing Washington DC 20024 Phone: (202) 205-0895
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A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:

Regional Forester of the Eastern Region  
USDA Forest Service  
Eastern Region  
626 East Wisconsin Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject.
- Date of the decision and name of and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.
- The reason for the appeal including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

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## Contacts

More information on this decision, the revised Superior National Forest Land and Resource Plan, and/or the Chippewa and Superior National Forests Final Environmental Impact Statement can be obtained by contacting:

Jim Sanders  
Forest Supervisor  
(218) 626-4302

or

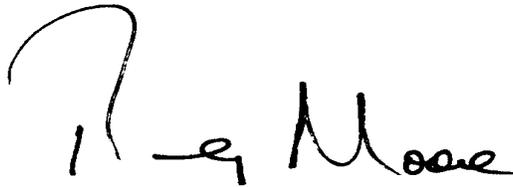
Duane A. Lula  
Forest Planner  
(218) 626-4383

or

Kristina Reichenbach  
Public Affairs Specialist  
(218) 626-4393

8901 Grand Avenue Place  
Duluth, MN 55808

Electronic copies of the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the Executive Summary, the Revised Plan or the Record of Decision can be obtained at: [www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior)



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**Randy Moore, Regional Forester**

July 30, 2004

**Date**

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