

THE YEAR IN REVIEW



CHEQUAMEGON-
NICOLET
NATIONAL FOREST
2003

FROM THE FOREST SUPERVISOR



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Greetings! It is a pleasure to share our accomplishments in 2003 with you.

This report highlights our accomplishments in 2003 as we continue restoration efforts that first began when the forests were established in the 1930's. Forest employees were hard at work in activities that protected threatened and endangered species, provided restoration to our waterways, reduced hazardous fuels in areas at risk for wildfires, made available a sustainable

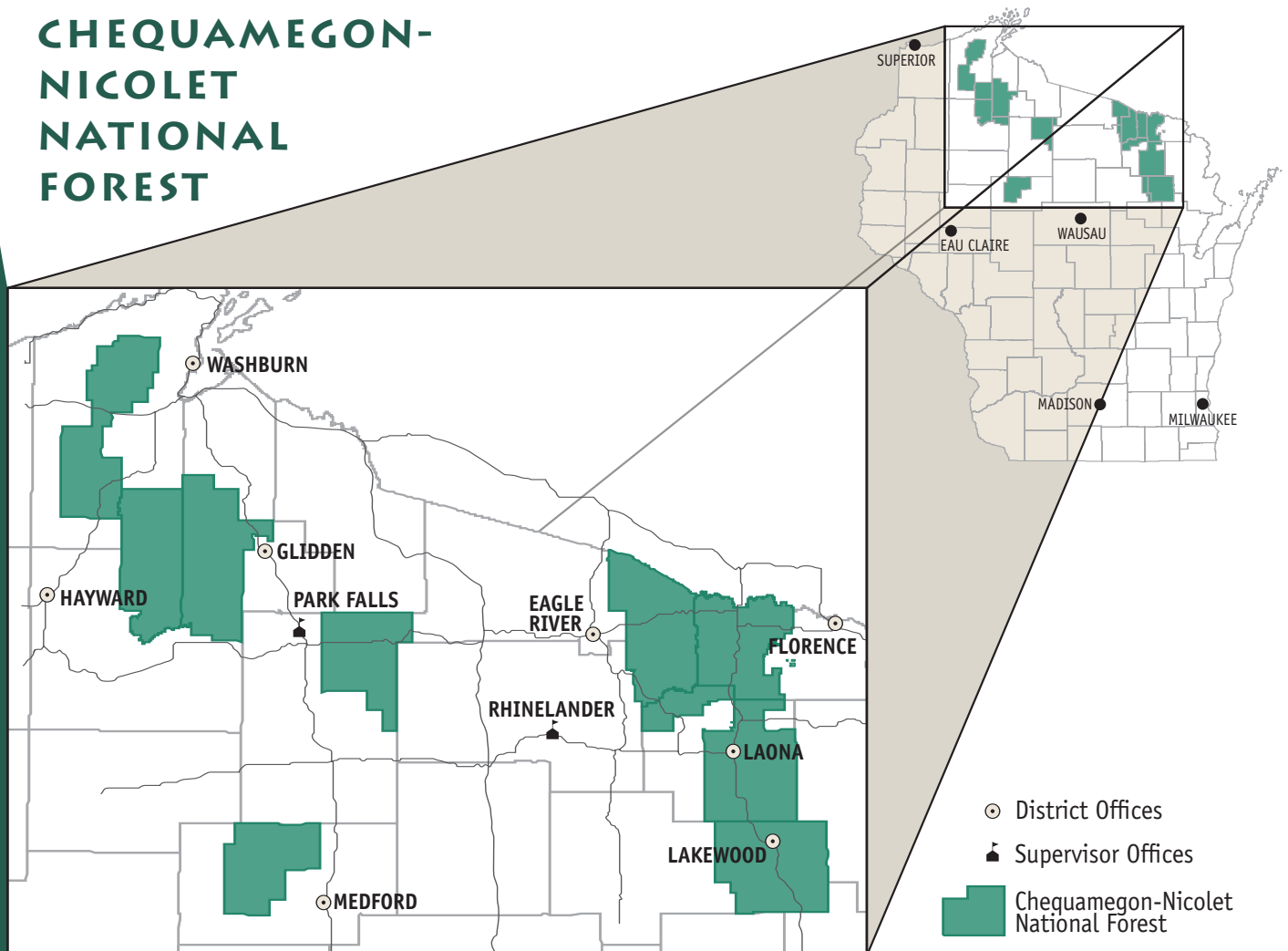
flow of forest products, and improved our recreational opportunities. We were able to provide these goals and services successfully while staying within our budget allocations.

We also reached a milestone this year with the release of our Draft Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. We met with many groups and individuals to ask them about what they wanted for the future management of the Chequamegon-Nicolet.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest will manage these public lands in a manner that will continue to supply healthy ecosystems for present and future generations. I hope you have an opportunity to visit us soon.

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CHEQUAMEGON- NICOLET NATIONAL FOREST



PROTECT THE NATURAL RESOURCES ENTRUSTED TO US.

THE 1.5 MILLION ACRE

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is a source of living and renewing natural resources. It is a collection of interrelated biological systems that contribute to local, State, regional, national and global scales of healthy and sustainable ecosystems.

The Forest has the largest contiguous land base in Wisconsin. This unique feature gives us the opportunity to provide ecosystem components that other lands in the state cannot provide. In 2003, over 600 additional acres of land, either surrounded by or adjacent to the National Forest, were acquired to enhance these features.

While employees were dispatched to incidents across the country, back at home, employees, partners, and volunteers were hard at work reducing hazardous fuels, controlling or eliminating undesirable species that threaten established and thriving ecosystems, and providing education to motorized recreation users in hopes of reducing the negative impacts of unmanaged recreation.

With the release of the revised Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Land and Resource Management plan in 2003, we affirmed our commitment to provide sound environmental management that protects our natural resources while providing goods and services to the American public.



TEAMING UP TO MANAGE RECREATION

As the numbers of All Terrain Vehicles continue to skyrocket, so do the amount of riders on National Forest System lands. On any given weekend, over 1,000 riders travel on 54 miles of trails on the Chequamegon-Nicolet's Washburn Ranger District. With the increased traffic, district personnel are faced with new challenges as ATVs stray from designated trails. In some areas on the Forest, it has been necessary to close areas to address serious resource damage.

Over a busy 4th of July weekend in 2003, Forest Service employees partnered with the Wisconsin ATV Association Trail Ambassadors. During the weekend, they made contacts with the public on the trails to ensure safe and responsible riding and to provide information and trail maps to riders. Since the July event was so successful, the partners held another volunteer trail patrol later in the summer.

FACT: Off-Highway vehicle ownership has increased from 5 million in 1972 to 35.9 million in 2000.

FIRES AND FUELS

In 2003, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest applied prescribed burning or mechanical treatments to 1,740 acres of high hazardous fuel areas. These treatments contributed to lessening the potential for catastrophic wildfires on the forest and near private residences.



Over 175 Forest employees were dispatched to incidents across the country, including wildfire suppression and protection, recovery efforts for the Columbia Space Shuttle, and Homeland Security. A total of 349 people were mobilized from the Wisconsin Interagency Center located in Minocqua. Personnel from the state and other federal agencies were also dispatched. Here at home, fire suppression took place on 51 forest fires.

FACT: An estimated 190 million acres of federal forests and rangelands in the United States, an area twice the size of California, face high risks of catastrophic wildfire.



Glossy buckthorn invades wetlands and spreads rapidly.



Leafy Spurge can overtake large areas of open land.

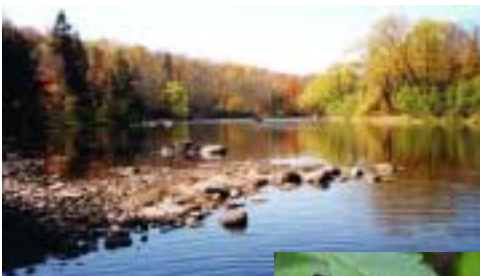
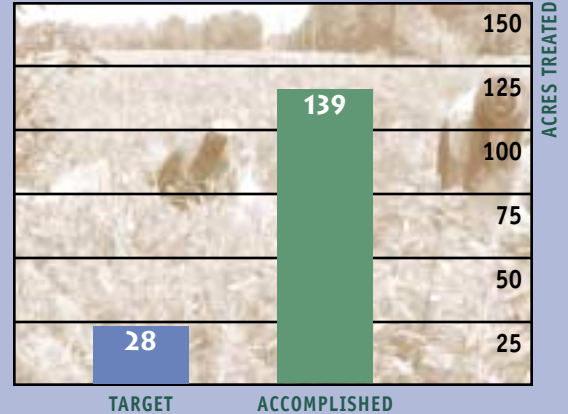
NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES

Non-Native Invasive Species threaten the survival of native species and contribute to the decline of endangered species. They are considered the single greatest loss of biological diversity on the landscape. Due to an increase in funding, the forest was able to exceed its target acres for treatment by 496%. Some of the species treated included: Garlic Mustard, Wild Parsnip, Buckthorn, Honeysuckle, Purple Loosestrife, and Leafy Spurge.

Methods of treatment ranged from hand removal to biological controls. The forest partnered with a variety of state, academic, and local organizations to assist in the removal of these species in 2003.

FACT: 3.6 million acres of National Forests are impacted by invasive species.

CONTROLLING NOXIOUS WEEDS



SECURING OPEN SPACES

Much of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is adjacent to or near private land parcels. Some private landowners have subdivided large tracts of forested land and sold them to people who desire to find their place in the woods where they can escape from the everyday stresses of city life. Converting these lands to private homes can sharply degrade wildlife habitat, as this can trend towards fragmentation of ecosystems.

In 2003, the Forest purchased 619 acres of land adjacent to or completely surrounded by National Forest land. Many of these properties also included frontage on lakes, rivers, creeks, and wetlands. The acquisitions will help to reduce fragmentation across the landscape and retain the pristine characteristics of waterways.

FACT: In the United States, land conversion for development contributes to the decline of 35 percent of all imperiled species.



Open houses gave the public an opportunity to speak one-on-one with Forest staff.

FOREST PLAN REVISION

In 2003, The Chequamegon-Nicolet released its Proposed Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for a 90-day comment and review period from April 11 to July 11, which was later extended to August 11. During the comment period, 10 open houses and 5 hearings were held throughout Wisconsin. The forest received a total of 2,941 oral and written responses during the comment period.



A final Forest Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, and Record of Decision will be released in early spring of 2004. The forest will begin to implement the revised plan shortly following the release.

RESTORE THE LAND TO CONSERVE OUR NATURAL HERITAGE.

ESTABLISHED IN 1933, the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests were made up of lands that experienced broad scale timber harvesting in the late 1880s and early 1900s.

In the early 20th century, these lands were viewed as sources of clean and plentiful water as well as future sources of timber. As that century progressed, green and thriving forests were restored under the stewardship of the Forest Service.

This restoration would not have been possible without the efforts of many members of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Work Progress Administration. From 1933 until the start of World War II, Corpsmen came to the northwoods of Wisconsin. Under the guidance of the Work Progress Administrators, these young men built fire towers, administrative buildings, campgrounds and recreation areas, planted trees, controlled erosion along waterways, and did all this for \$30.00 a month.

Now, visitors can witness restored vegetation as well as vestiges of the CCC work and structures. Today, many signs commemorating their existence can be found throughout the Forest. An interpretive trail explaining the everyday life of these individuals is located at the Former Wolf River CCC Camp on the Lakewood-Laona Ranger District.

We continued the legacy of restoration in 2003. Some of our accomplishments are highlighted here.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED AND SENSITIVE SPECIES: WHAT WE'RE DOING TO HELP

FEDERAL SPECIES	CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET NF ACTIVITIES
EASTERN TIMBER WOLF	Continued collaborative monitoring with state and federal agencies to determine distribution and abundance. Placed road closure gates where needed to protect wolf denning and rendezvous sites. Provide wolf conservation educational materials to the public annually. Work with the State on wolf depredation issues. Placed seasonal activity buffers around known denning or rendezvous sites. Continued implementing the recovery plan.
BALD EAGLE	Continued collaborative state and federal efforts to census and monitor active eagle nests on the Forest. Placed seasonal activity restrictions in areas with active eagle nesting, and nest buffers zones to maintain habitat quality. Established future nest trees through use of tree planting and vegetative management. Provided public information on bald eagle biology and conservation. Continued to implement the recovery plan.
FASSETT'S LOCOWEED	Continued to implement protective buffers around historic and current plant stations, and the species recovery plan.
REGIONAL FORESTER'S SENSITIVE SPECIES	CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET NF ACTIVITIES
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK AND NORTHERN GOSHAWK	Continued to survey and evaluate productivity of the species across the Forest. Worked with the State to develop population density and distribution information. Implemented protective buffers and activity restrictions in area with historic and active nests. Continued to work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, State, and Wisconsin Falconers Association on falconry take issues.
LAKE STURGEON	Continued to work with the State and US Fish and Wildlife Service on monitoring populations and fish movements on Forest waters where the species is present. Worked with the State on harvest regulations and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on in-stream flow issues in sturgeon waters.
SHARP-TAILED GROUSE	Continued to work with the State on habitat and harvest management. Conducted censuses of populations in the Moquah Barrens and Riley Lake complexes.
BLACK TERN	Conservation Assessment completed. Continued to census habitat areas to determine populations.
AMERICAN MARTEN	Worked in partnership with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to determine population sizes and recruitment into two reintroduced populations on the Forest. Conducted habitat enhancement for the species.

ANNUAL BREEDING BIRD SURVEY CONDUCTED FOR THE 17TH YEAR

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest was once again the host for the Nicolet Breeding Bird Survey in 2003. The first Bird Survey was held in 1987. It is the longest running volunteer breeding bird survey in any national forest.

The survey draws up to 100 birders and volunteers from all over Wisconsin and the upper Midwest. The participants come from all walks of life, from young to old, and with different degrees of birding skills.

Information gathered from this survey is the basis for several university level studies on birds that have added to the forest's knowledge of productivity and the effects of forest management practices.





PRESERVING THE LANDS OF THOSE WHO WALKED BEFORE US

The Butternut-Franklin lakes area includes a complex of 30 archaeological sites that represents 4,000 years of Native occupation. This area has been under investigation through a variety of partnerships for the past 15 years.

In 2003, an additional investigation was conducted in cooperation with Ashland's Northland College, Rhinelander's Nicolet College and Technical Institute, and Passport In Time volunteers. At that time, evidence of a previously unrecognized late prehistoric culture, referred to as Oneota, was discovered. Archaeologists previously thought the Oneota were horticulturalists who resided primarily to the south. Future investigations will focus on discovering why these people moved to the forests of northern Wisconsin.

The richness of aquatic and forest resources has drawn people to the Butternut-Franklin area for thousands of years.



The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest will return to the area in 2004 to continue investigations in the area. The Forest goal, through the endorsement of Native governments and the historic preservation community, is to establish a National Register of Historic Places District, and the Forest's first archaeological Special Management Area.

RESTORING FREE-FLOWING WATERS

With the help of our partners, an important restoration effort took place on Elvoy Creek, a premiere trout stream located on the Eagle River-Florence Ranger District, near the Wisconsin-Michigan border.

Elvoy Creek was experiencing constricted stream flow due to the remnants of an old logging dam constructed in the 1890s. A water impoundment causing warm water temperatures and sediment deposits were adversely affecting trout habitat.

Working with the Northwood's Chapter of Wisconsin Trout Unlimited, Michigan Tech's Keweenaw Research Center through Michigan Trout Unlimited, and a local landowner, Elvoy Creek was successfully restored and is once again a stream. Continued natural restoration to the area will result in improved habitat conditions, and restoration of the cold-water community in the area.

In addition to the Elvoy Creek project, 230 miles of fish streams were restored or enhanced in 2003. A beaver control program on the forest maintains miles of trout streams in free-flowing condition. Instream habitat improvements included brush bundles, and root wad and log placements.



PROVIDE FOR PEOPLE, NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE.

AS A MANAGED FOREST, the Chequamegon-Nicolet supplies the need for wild places and forest products that contribute to the social and economic well being of people.



The harvesting of timber and other forest products in 2003 continued to provide revenues and jobs to local communities. The Forest consistently produces some of the highest timber volumes sold from National Forests.

On the Chequamegon-Nicolet, located in northern Wisconsin, four-seasons of recreation opportunities and experiences abound:

- Motorized Recreation—over 800 miles of snowmobile trails; 285 miles of developed ATV trails; 11,500 miles of road
- Camping—41 campgrounds, most with picnic areas, boat landings, and swimming beaches
- Non-Motorized Recreation—20 ski trails; 49 hiking trails; 3 horse trails, 56 hunter-walking trails; 6 bike trail loops; 5 Wildernesses; over 68,000 acres of non-motorized areas
- Fishing—Over 1,800 miles of streams and 2,020 lakes larger than 10 acres

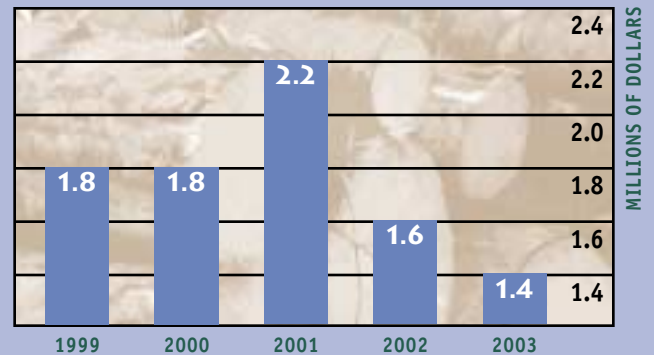
From a quiet walking trail, to wood products that are a part of our everyday lives, we have something for everyone.

It's all about people and the forest.

PAYMENTS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Eleven counties within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest received \$1.4 million in 2003 from National Forest receipts for timber, forest products, and other revenues.

HISTORICAL TRENDS



SPECIAL FOREST PRODUCTS

In addition to timber, other products on the Forest are gathered for commercial use such as Christmas trees, birch poles, and some types of mosses. In 2003, 289 tons of balsam boughs were harvested, enough to make 115,600 24-inch wreaths. If laid side by side, the wreaths would stretch for a distance of 40 miles!

CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET TREE GRACES THE CAPITOL ROTUNDA IN MADISON

A 40-foot high balsam fir tree found on the Medford-Park Falls Ranger District was chosen as the Capitol Christmas Tree in 2003.

The tree began its journey to the Capitol back in November, where an official cutting ceremony was held. Attending were representatives from the Governor's office, state legislators, township supervisors, Chequamegon-Nicolet employees, and members of the media. A local logger operating a whole tree harvester removed the tree, which was then transported to Madison with a lowboy by a trucking company from Medford.

At a lighting ceremony, the Forest presented the tree to Governor James Doyle on behalf of Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest employees. It was decorated with close to two thousand lights and ornaments that depicted school mascots across the state.



The tree as seen in the forest and the Capitol.

RECREATION FEE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM IN 2003

On the Chequamegon-Nicolet, recreation demonstration fees are charged at campgrounds, day use sites, and dispersed campgrounds. Most of the revenues come from camping fees and day use parking fees, where a user pays either a daily \$3.00 fee or an annual \$10.00 per vehicle, which allows parking at all day use fee demo sites and dispersed campsites.

In 2003, over \$500,000 of fees collected were used to improve a variety of recreation opportunities on the Forest:

- Hired a summer interpretive program employee
- Trail repairs
- New picnic tables
- New accessible fire grates
- Printed fishing guide and trail maps
- Installed accessible toilets
- Improved drinking water wells
- Purchased snowplow trailhead parking lots
- Installed solar well pump kits
- Replaced campground shelter floor
- Repaired vandalism
- Provided increased law enforcement
- Provided maintenance to 140 developed campsites
- Installed boat ramps
- Blacktopped accessible trail



About 2.4 million people visit the Forest annually, ranking it in the top 25% of all National Forests.



FOREST LODGE

The Forest Lodge estate and 872 acres of mature forest came to the USDA Forest Service in 1999 as a gift of Mary Griggs Burke with assistance from The Trust for Public Land. Now national forest land, the property outside of the 100-acre life estate is open for non-motorized recreational use. Beautifully reflecting one family's care for over 100 years, Forest Lodge will become a regional and national center for programs in conservation education, leadership, and the arts. Forest Lodge was listed on the Wisconsin State and National Register of Historic Places in 2002.



Forest Lodge Guest House, c. 1929

Planning for the future at Forest Lodge received more focused attention under full-time directorship and a Forest Service steering committee, both established in 2003. Accomplishing such plans now will provide for a seamless transition from private to public use once the life estate closes. This year's planning emphasized program development and partnerships.

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Forest Lodge photo, this page: Elizabeth Bouchard, Ashland, WI.



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