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Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Chequamegon-Nicolet
National Forests



Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

Fiscal Year 2005 Monitoring and Evaluation Report

September 2006





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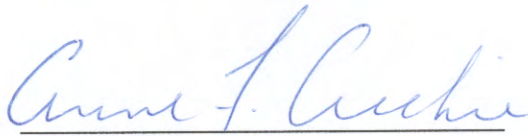
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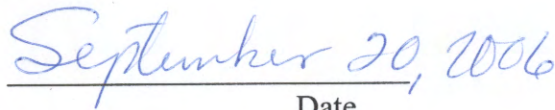
APPROVAL AND DECLARATION OF INTENT

I have reviewed the FY2005 Monitoring and Evaluation Report for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests that was prepared by an interdisciplinary team during the spring and summer of 2006. I am satisfied with its findings and intend to consider recommendations made therein as we revise our Forest Plan. The Monitoring and Evaluation Report meets the intent of both the Forest Plan (Chapter IV) as well as the regulations contained in 36 CFR 219.

This report is approved:



ANNE F. ARCHIE
Forest Supervisor



Date

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Executive Summary

Implementation and monitoring of the 2004 Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests (CNNF) Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) began immediately after its approval. The primary purposes of monitoring Forest Plan implementation are to:

1. Evaluate how well the direction in the Forest Plan is being implemented.
2. Determine whether the application of standards and guidelines is achieving objectives, and whether objectives are achieving goals.
3. Determine whether the assumptions and predicted effects used to formulate the goals and objectives are accurate.

This report describes monitoring items by Forest Plan goals and objectives, provides data pertaining to the effects and effectiveness of Forest Plan management direction, and discusses various resource management efforts in which the CNNF engaged during the Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004-September 30, 2005), hereafter referred to as FY 2005.

This report evaluates the results of the monitoring accomplished during the Fiscal Year 2005. The Monitoring and Evaluation Report documents no significant changes to the Forest resources that occurred in FY 2005.

Key Events in 2005

Gray wolf and bald eagle population levels continued to rise in FY 2005. Both species are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, but are currently thriving locally in Wisconsin's Northwoods. A significant portion of these populations occur on the National Forest, suggesting Forest habitat and protection goals are working as anticipated. In fact, this year was the second consecutive year the gray wolf population has exceeded its management goal established by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR).



Timber harvest levels during FY 2005 were nearly 38% lower than projected in the Forest Plan. However, revenues paid out to local counties during FY 2005 totaled \$1,908,071, representing a 32% increase over FY 2004 and the third highest total ever. The primary explanation for this total is the demand and value of products sold was higher than in the past.

The Nicolet National Forest Bird Survey celebrated its 19th anniversary during 2005, and continued its streak as the longest-running volunteer monitoring program on any U.S. national forest. Nearly 100 volunteers participated again in this year's monitoring effort. Over the years, the survey has documented 178 different bird species, making a significant contribution to the analysis of regional population trends of bird-habitat associations.



During FY 2005, the Heritage Program efforts included surveys of approximately 29,000 acres of CNNF lands, resulting in the discovery of 37 heritage resources. Further, 81 previously recorded properties were investigated to determine current condition compared to site condition when initially inventoried. Monitoring results show no damage or disturbance to these resources has occurred, indicating our protective measures are working as anticipated.

An overriding concern of the Forest Service is the safety of the public and its employees. Therefore, when we conduct dangerous but necessary tasks like prescribed burning or wildfire suppression, a year without injury is always a success. The Forest had 61 fires (wildfire and prescribed burns combined) during FY 2005, none of which exceeded 10 acres or caused injury. Additionally, 2,360 acres of hazardous fuel reduction was accomplished in the wildland urban interface, making our neighbors safer in the process. The efforts of the CNNF fire crews are to be commended yet again.

Future Challenges

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth names the four threats that face our nation's forests and grasslands in this 21st century as:

- fire and fuels;
- non-native invasive species (NNIS);
- loss of open space; and
- unmanaged recreation.

One mission of our monitoring program is to keep a watchful eye on these threats as they encroach upon the CNNF. As already mentioned, the CNNF Fire Program is active. Fire and fuel reduction has a long history with the Forest Service and we are well prepared for the challenge. The remaining three threats are relatively new to the Forest Service, though not unforeseen.

On the CNNF, the primary focus of our invasive species control program during FY 2005 was completing the NNIS control environmental documentation, which is being used as a partial strategy for NNIS treatment. FY 2005 marked the first year herbicides were used to control NNIS. All types of treatments in FY 2005, totaling 312 acres, were recorded in a multi-agency database. The CNNF was the first and only Forest in the nation to do so, and we expect other Forests will follow our lead. Our more comprehensive NNIS strategy will address prevention, early detection, rapid response, and education. This more complete strategy is expected to be finished during FY 2006.

Loss of open space is another threat that transcends the boundaries of our Forest. As rural communities are converted to suburbs, traditionally private recreation areas will disappear, and we expect a growing reliance upon public lands like CNNF for recreation.



The picture on the left, taken near Clam Lake on the Great Divide District, identifies two of the four threats facing our National Forest system. This ATV trail was not planned or created by Forest Service employees. It is an illegal trail developed by users. Additionally, in the middle of the road grows spotted knapweed, a non-native and invasive species. After discovering this NNIS occurrence, CNNF employees recorded the extent of the population with a geographical positioning system (GPS) unit, transferred that information to our NNIS database, treated the spotted knapweed with herbicides, and notified law enforcement and district leadership about the unauthorized trail creation and ATV use.

What humans generally call “open space” is often, more specifically, habitat for plants and animals. As a result, the loss of open space means National Forest lands, which play an important role in providing habitat, are under greater pressure. For example, the Nicolet National Forest Bird Survey is revealing similar patterns seen throughout the world--song bird populations are in a general decline. As bird habitat dwindles or changes due to natural vegetative succession, the importance and expectations of National Forests will be magnified. Highlighting this importance is the fact that the CNNF is home to an especially diverse assemblage of avian species. We will maintain our commitment to protecting and creating bird habitat on the CNNF, and will simultaneously work through new and existing partnerships to understand what is at the root of the disturbing trend.

A major draw to the CNNF is its diversity of recreation opportunities. While revising our Forest Plan, impacts associated with particular recreational activities were carefully considered and accounted for. However, to maintain or enhance the diversity and quality of recreation experiences within acceptable limits of change to ecosystem stability and condition, it is imperative that the recreation use does not exceed its planned boundaries. Because policing every corner of the CNNF is neither desirable nor practical, we must rely on educating recreational users, and expecting they will comply with the policies of the forest. There are multiple ways to reach out to recreational users including forming partnerships with recreation groups, posting signage, and planning properly. As part of the National Visitor Use Monitoring project, during FY 2005 the Forest participated in the pre-work for the second round of recreation use monitoring survey. Exit points were identified for the random selection process to determine where actual user counts and surveys would occur in FY 2006. The CNNF will conduct the counts and surveys in FY

2006 and prepare the summary report during FY 2007. The efforts should provide us with a better understanding of visitor use patterns and expectations, enabling more effective management of recreation activities.

Overall, FY 2005 was a very good year for the CNNF:

- Our most imperiled species continue on their road to recovery;
- The value of our forest products is reaching historic high levels;
- We are aggressively combating the invasion from non-native species; and
- Wildfires were extinguished before personal injury or significant property damage could occur.

All of this was accomplished while providing unique recreation opportunities in the Northwoods of Wisconsin that millions of people have come back for through the generations. FY 2006 certainly promises many challenges, but we are confident that we will be up to the task.

