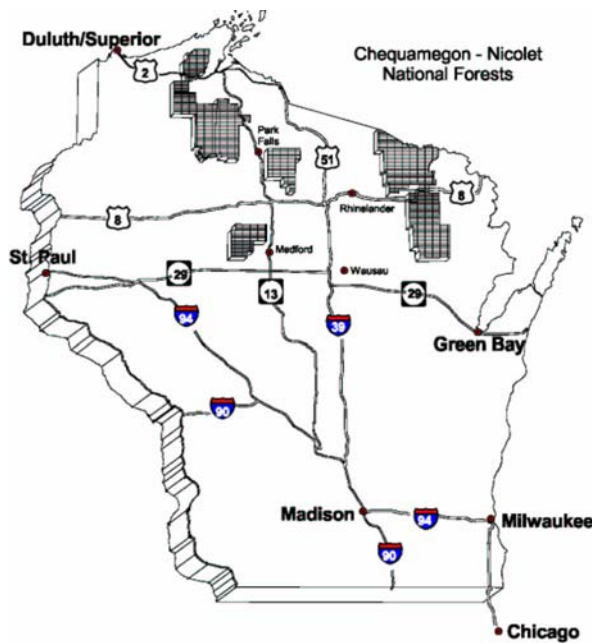


I. INTRODUCTION AND FOREST PLAN OVERVIEW

A. Introduction

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is located in Wisconsin's North woods, covering over a million and a half acres. Both Forests were established by Presidential proclamation in 1933, and in 1993, the two Forests were administratively combined. The CNNF boundaries encompass National Forest System lands within eleven different Wisconsin counties: Ashland, Bayfield, Florence, Forest, Langlade, Oconto, Oneida, Price, Sawyer, Taylor, and Vilas. The Forest has five Ranger Districts: Great Divide (Glidden and Hayward), Medford-Park Falls, Washburn, Lakewood-Laona, and Eagle River-Florence. The Argonne Experimental Forest and Oconto Seed Orchard are found on the Nicolet land base as well. Four Ranger Districts maintain offices in the communities with which it shares its names. The Great Divide District has offices in the communities of Glidden and Hayward.



The CNNF is composed of four non-contiguous units of land. The two largest units—The Nicolet National Forest, and the Washburn and Great Divide Districts of the Chequamegon—are 662,000 and 576,000 acres, respectively.

In April 2004, the CNNF released the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), which was a revision and combination of the Chequamegon Forest Plan and Nicolet Forest Plan both released in 1986. The Forest Plan provides guidance for all resource management activities on the CNNF. It establishes: forestwide multiple-use goals and implementing objectives; forestwide management requirements (known as

Forestwide Standards and Guidelines); Management Area direction, including area-specific standards and guidelines, desired future conditions and management practices; identification of lands suited/not suited for timber management; monitoring and evaluation requirements, and recommendations to Congress for additional Wilderness. To determine the efficacy of a Forest Plan, the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulations (36 CFR 219) have required regularly scheduled monitoring and evaluation.

B. Forest Plan Overview

Monitoring and evaluation are divided into three broad categories and are designed to answer the following basic questions:

1. *Implementation Monitoring* - Did we do what we said we were going to do? This question answers how well the direction in the Forest Plan is being implemented. Collected information is compared to objectives, standards, guidelines and management area (MA) direction.

2. *Effectiveness Monitoring* - Did it work how we said it would? This question answers whether the application of standards and guidelines is achieving objectives, and whether objectives are achieving goals.

3. *Validation Monitoring* - Is our understanding and science correct? This question answers whether the assumptions and predicted effects used to formulate the goals and objectives are accurate.

The aim of monitoring is adaptive management – the ability to respond to current conditions or make appropriate changes based on new information or technology. Depending on the answers to the above questions, the Forest Plan may be amended or revised to adapt to new information and changed conditions.

Because fiscal year (FY) 2005 was the first complete year we implemented the Forest Plan, the type of monitoring most commonly reported herein is implementation monitoring. We believe it is important to first ensure that we are properly following the objectives, standards and guidelines established in our Forest Plan. The other two types of monitoring will play a larger role in the near future when the results of proper Forest Plan implementation will be more apparent and valid. Similarly, on-the-ground changes to forest type composition, age structure, and other attributes within MAs were so minimal during FY 2005 that we will not report them this year. However, the data from this year will be reported in a future monitoring report as part of trend analyses.

Monitoring Strategy

Monitoring and evaluation are separate activities. Monitoring is the process of collecting data and information. Evaluation is the analysis and interpretation of the information and collected data. A key requirement of a monitoring strategy is that the public be given timely, accurate information about Forest Plan implementation. This is done through the release of an annual monitoring and evaluation report (Report). The monitoring program must be efficient, practical and affordable, and may make use of data that has been or will be collected for other purposes.

Monitoring tasks are scaled to the Forest Plan, program or project to be monitored. Each of these entails different objectives and requirements. Monitoring is not performed on every single activity, nor is it expected to meet the statistical rigor of formal research. Budgetary constraints will affect the level of monitoring that can be done in a particular fiscal year. If budget levels limit the Forest's ability to perform all monitoring tasks, then those items specifically required by law are given the highest priority. The Report provides the summary and, at scheduled intervals, an evaluation of the monitoring results.

Legally Required Monitoring

Minimum monitoring and evaluation requirements have been established through the NFMA at 36 CFR 219 (1982). Some requirements provide guidance for the development of a monitoring program, while others include specific compliance requirements. The minimum legally required monitoring tasks were identified in Table 4-1 of the Forest Plan and will be noted in this Report.

Monitoring Progress of Forestwide Goals and Objectives

Forest goals are broad statements describing conditions the CNNF will strive to achieve. They are not amenable to direct measurement and there are no specific time frames for achieving them. In other words, goals describe the ends to be achieved rather than the means to these ends. The three primary goals are: 1) Ensure sustainable ecosystems; 2) Provide multiple benefits for people; and 3) Ensure organizational effectiveness.

Forest objectives are time-specific statements of planned results or outcomes responding to established goals. Objectives generally are achieved by implementing projects or activities. Objectives either have a stated timeframe for achievement, or they will be accomplished during the life of the Forest Plan (10-15 years).

The Report summarizes the results of completed monitoring and (at predetermined intervals) evaluates the data. The evaluation process determines whether the observed changes are consistent with Forest Plan desired future conditions, goals, objectives and what adjustments may be needed. The Report may provide recommendations to the Forest Supervisor, who would use these findings either to certify the Forest Plan as sufficient for management in the coming year, or to decide that the Plan needs to be amended.

The Report provides summaries of data collected, and whenever appropriate, it evaluates the data, provides conclusions, and makes recommendations. Comparison of subsequent monitoring and evaluation reports will provide a means to track management effectiveness from year to year and to show the changes that have been made or are still needed.

The Report was accomplished through an interdisciplinary process involving Forest Service resource specialists and participation from our partners. We have relied on the efforts of other government agencies, academic researchers, private citizens, and non-profit organizations to complete some of the monitoring. We are grateful to those who have donated their time and energy by actively participating in the management of the CNNF.