

Op-Ed from Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Supervisor Jeanne Higgins about the Travel Management Project

Our nation's population has tripled since the Forest Service was founded. With this increase in population recreation use on national forests has vastly grown. Over the years the way people access their forests has dramatically changed as new types of motorized vehicles are being used. As a result the Forest Service established new regulations in 2005 to require a designated route system for wheeled motorized vehicle use. These regulations are known as the Travel Management Rule (TMR).

In 2006, The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF) began the process of designating this route system. The result of our efforts to gather input and comments from the public has brought us to the eve of the first decision for this on-going effort. I realize there has been confusion about what the end result will look like. I am taking this opportunity to help forest visitors understand what may or may not change.

The tangible product from our efforts and decision will be a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM), the first to be available in January 2009. The MVUM will be the tool for you to use to know where you can go, what type of wheeled vehicle you can use and when you can travel on roads and trails in the forest. This effort is solely focused on the use of wheeled motorized vehicles and does not affect snowmobile use or other types of access (including administrative access to manage the forest and suppress wildfires, etc.). The MVUM will change over time as it will be updated annually to incorporate roads of interest. The second map will be available March 31, 2010.

I have heard the concern that once the first MVUM is produced it will be a "done deal." I assure you, no roads will be physically closed as a result of this decision. In the future, any roads that are physically closed by gate or berm would go through a separate site specific environmental analysis and decision that would include public involvement.

One specific point of confusion has been which roads would be available or unavailable for wheeled motorized use. Most of the roads that will become unavailable are not part of the managed road system (known as unauthorized roads). These are most often old logging roads or roads created and maintained by forest users. Many of these roads are overgrown and no longer accessible by vehicle.

I recognize people are currently using some of these unauthorized roads. Our message has been and will continue to be, if you would like to continue using a particular road, please let us know. When we receive specific information about the road it will be evaluated through our roads analysis process. If a road will have minimal environmental impact, and is important for public access, it will likely be added to the map.

Many roads analyzed have been added to the map since we started this process. Please be aware that roads brought to our attention to be considered for taking off the designated

system will also be evaluated using the same process. The list of the roads that have been evaluated so far will be available on the CNNF web-site at the end of Sept.

Even though we have received over 1,000 comments over the last two years I know there will likely be many visitors to the CNNF who may not know about this effort until after the MVUM has been produced. I pledge to you that we will continue efforts to reach all users of the CNNF. The first year we will focus our efforts on education, but you will have the responsibility to know where you are in relation to what is shown on the map as available for your use. We intend to assist with this effort by posting all system roads with road number signs to aid in orientation.

I truly am interested in hearing from everyone. Continued collaboration will be the key to the success of the Travel Management Project. For more information please visit us on the web at www.fs.fed.us/r9/cmf or you may call Joan Marburger, Travel Management Coordinator at (715) 762-5178.