



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Eastern Region



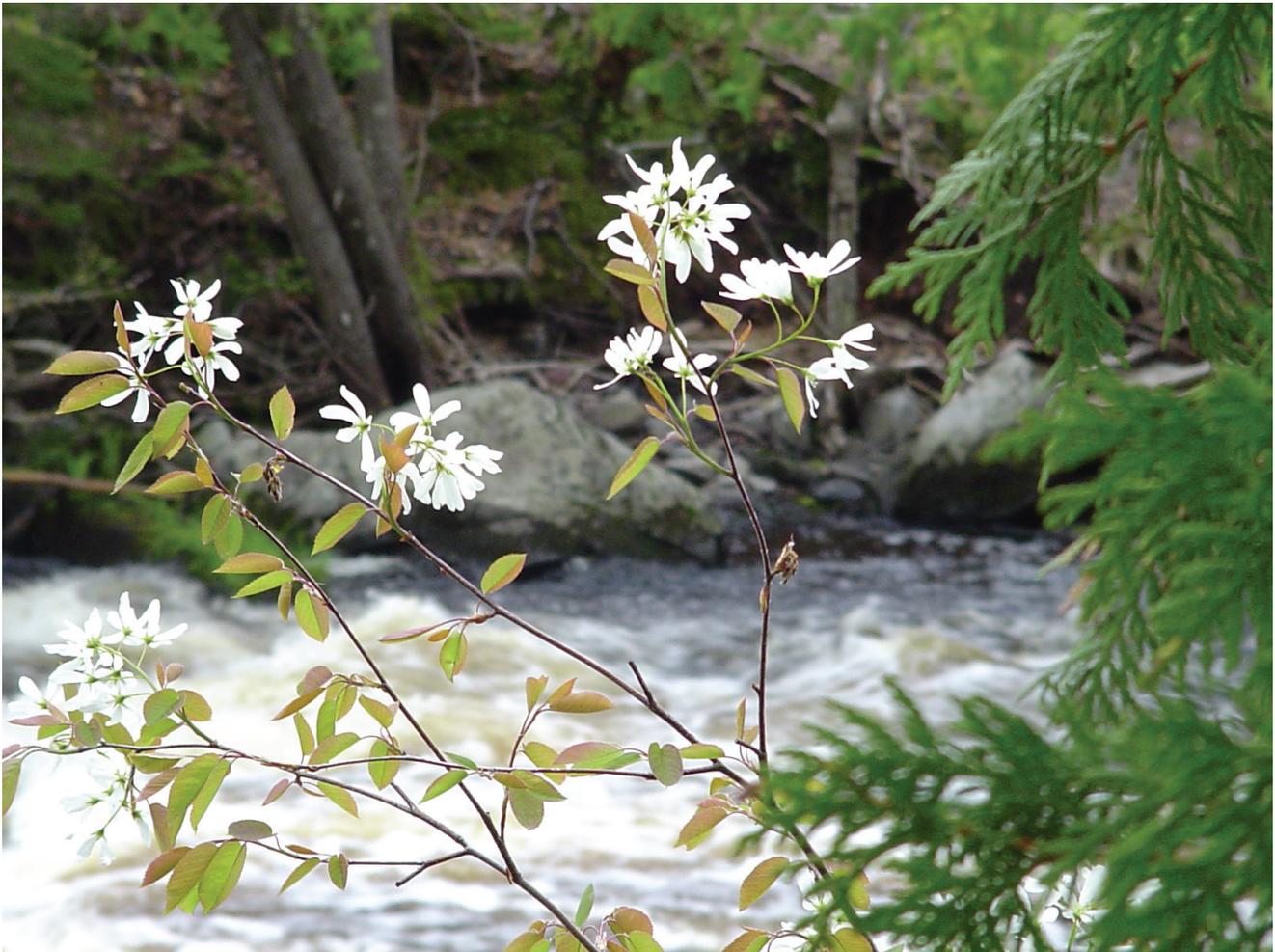
March 2006

Ottawa National Forest

Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement

*To accompany the Land and
Resource Management Plan*



Cover Photo: Burned Dam, Watersmeet Ranger District, Ottawa National Forest

Final Environmental Impact Statement

Record of Decision



O·T·T·A·W·A
NATIONAL FOREST

Baraga, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Marquette, and Ontonagon Counties

Responsible Official:

Randy Moore, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service
Eastern Region
626 E. Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202
414-297-3428

For Further Information Contact:

Ottawa National Forest
Forest Supervisor
E6248 US Hwy. 2
Ironwood, MI 49938
Phone: 906-932-1330
Fax: 906-932-0122
TTY: 906-932-0301

Table of Contents

PREFACE	I
RECORD OF DECISION	1
INTRODUCTION	1
THE OTTAWA NATIONAL FOREST	2
A VISION OF THE FUTURE.....	3
DECISION AND RATIONALE	4
NEED FOR CHANGE	4
DECISION OVERVIEW	5
DECISION SUMMARY AND RATIONALE.....	7
<i>Sustaining Ecosystems, Conditions, and Uses</i>	7
Invasive Species.....	7
Management Indicator Species	8
Vegetative Management	8
Research Natural Areas	10
Threatened and Endangered and Sensitive Species.....	10
Off-Highway Vehicle Management.....	11
<i>Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Recommendations</i>	13
<i>Special Designations</i>	13
Water Resources	14
TRIBAL RIGHTS	14
CHANGES BETWEEN THE DRAFT AND FINAL EIS	14
OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE MANAGEMENT	15
HARDWOOD MANAGEMENT	16
<i>Management Areas 2.1 and 2.2</i>	16
ASPEN MANAGEMENT	16
<i>Management Areas 1.1a and 3.1a</i>	16
SHORT-LIVED CONIFER MANAGEMENT	17
<i>Management Areas 4.1a and 4.2a</i>	17
MONITORING AND EVALUATION	17
ALLOWABLE SALE QUANTITY (ASQ)	18
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT	18
MEETINGS AND OPEN HOUSES	18
<i>Special Meetings Requested by Groups</i>	20
INFORMATION SHARING	20
<i>Formal Correspondence/Personal Contacts</i>	20
<i>Revision Newsletters/Briefing Papers</i>	21
<i>Ottawa National Forest Website</i>	21
<i>News Releases</i>	21
<i>Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA)</i>	21
CONSULTATION WITH FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES	21
LEGISLATIVE CONTACTS	21
CONSULTATION WITH TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS.....	22
ALTERNATIVES	22
ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT.....	22
ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL	23
<i>No Harvest Alternative</i>	23
<i>Wilderness Alternative</i>	23
<i>National Recreation Area Alternative</i>	24
<i>No OHV Alternative</i>	24
<i>Aspen Alternative</i>	25
ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL	25

Alternative 1	25
Alternative 2	26
Alternative 3—Modified (The Selected Alternative)	27
Alternative 4	28
THE ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.....	29
CONSISTENCY WITH NATIONAL POLICIES, LAWS AND AUTHORITIES	29
NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT	30
NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT	30
<i>Net Present Value and Net Public Benefit</i>	31
ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (ESA).....	31
FOREST AND RANGELAND RENEWABLE RESOURCE PLANNING ACT (RPA) AND FOREST SERVICE STRATEGIC PLAN, 2004-2008.....	32
<i>Reduce the Risk from Catastrophic Wildland Fire</i>	32
<i>Reduce Impacts from Invasive Species</i>	32
<i>Provide Outdoor Recreation Opportunities</i>	32
<i>Help Meet Energy Resource Needs</i>	32
<i>Improve Watershed Conditions</i>	32
<i>Mission-related Work in Addition to that which Supports Agency Goals</i>	33
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (EXECUTIVE ORDER 12898)	33
HEALTHY FOREST RESTORATION ACT (HFRA)	33
NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT (NHPA)	33
MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT AND EXECUTIVE ORDER 13186	34
USDA FOREST SERVICE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT RULE (TMR).....	34
OTHER LAWS, POLICY, AND REGULATION	34
IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION	35
TRANSITION FROM THE 1986 FOREST PLAN	35
KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN FOREST PLAN IMPLEMENTATION	35
<i>Travel Management Rule</i>	36
FUTURE CHANGES TO THE FOREST PLAN	37
<i>Monitoring and Evaluation</i>	37
<i>Amending the Forest Plan</i>	38
ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL OF MY DECISION	38
CONTACTS.....	39

Preface

This Record of Decision (ROD) formally presents my decision to approve a modification of Alternative 3 as the Selected Alternative for the revised Ottawa National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (herein referred to as the 2006 Forest Plan). This ROD also explains my reasons for the changes made to the 1986 Forest Plan.

Creating a revised Forest Plan is not easy. Creating one that is supported by most members of the public is even more difficult. Forest management is a complex process. There are a myriad of 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 forest to provide, look like, and be managed for. The 2006 Forest Plan strikes a balance among the competing interests, opinions, and beliefs expressed by federal, state and local governments; tribes and businesses; as well as local, regional, and national interest groups; scientists and the general public. The 2006 Forest Plan also supports 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 2006 Forest Plan is, to a great degree, based on the outcomes of interactions with you. For almost four years, the Ottawa National Forest (the Ottawa) has worked with tribal, state and local governments, members of the public, elected officials, and other agencies to produce the 2006 Forest Plan. Nearly 2,000 letters were received during the development of the 2006 Forest Plan. These letters and comments helped guide the Ottawa's staff as they developed alternatives aimed at addressing your concerns, issues, and needs.

The 2006 Forest Plan focuses on outcomes; recognizing that what is left on the landscape is just as important as what is taken. 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.

Having said all of this, our work is not finished. In fact, it is just beginning. The challenge that remains before all of us now, is to continue our working relationship to implement the 2006 Forest Plan. It is an exciting time and I look forward to the prospects and possibilities as we move forward.

I thank you for your support, participation, and contribution to the revision process. I also invite your continued partnership in helping implement the 2006 Forest Plan.

Randy Moore

Regional Forester

Eastern Region, USDA Forest Service

Record of Decision

Introduction

The 2006 Forest Plan is a 10 to 15-year strategy for managing national forest resources on the Ottawa National Forest (the Ottawa). 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 2006 Forest Plan emphasizes different desired conditions and goals for various parts of the Ottawa. Management practices include such activities as maintaining campgrounds and trail systems; stream and lake restoration; invasive species control; forest restoration through timber harvest; maintaining and improving the Ottawa's road system; providing visitor information services; and monitoring Forest conditions. In this manner, multiple-use goals and objectives are achieved in a balanced, cost efficient and sustainable manner.

The Ottawa is an important recreation destination area in the State of Michigan and surrounding areas. The Ottawa will continue to provide unique forested and water-related developed, dispersed, and remote recreational opportunities, including wilderness, semi-primitive motorized and non-motorized recreation.

Six primary decisions were made for the 2006 Forest Plan:

1. Forestwide multiple-use goals and objectives;
2. Forestwide management requirements;
3. Management Area direction;
4. Lands suited/not suited for timber management;
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements; and
6. Recommendations of wilderness study areas to Congress.

The goals, desired conditions, and objectives in the 2006 Forest Plan can be accomplished from physical, social, ecological, economic, and administrative or legal perspectives. Management practices will be implemented and outputs will be produced as the Ottawa strives to meet the desired conditions called for in the 2006 Forest Plan. Annual budgets determine which and how many projects are planned and implemented during any given year.

The 2006 Forest Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) are programmatic in nature, providing a long-range strategy for the Ottawa. Through this decision, cross-country off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel, including all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use, will be prohibited (see the *Decision Summary and Rationale and Key Considerations in Forest Plan Implementation* sections of this document for more details).

Further site-specific analysis will occur for each project needed to implement this strategy. Any resulting documents will be tiered to the FEIS for the 2006 Forest Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

The 2006 Forest Plan was developed with input from various tribal entities, many agencies and individuals. For example, in comments submitted on the Proposed Forest Plan, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (Michigan DNR) shows support of the ecological restoration focus of the 2006 Forest Plan. Comments from the Michigan DNR included the following:

“In general, we are pleased with the strategic directions outlined in the document. Some of the revision topics detailed are strategies that the Department has been promoting for State land management in the form of sustainable ecosystems, watershed health, recreation and natural areas. Aligning management units with ecological boundaries, considering connectivity, patch size and cumulative effects on species viability are strategies that should help all large landowners to achieve biodiversity and sustainability goals.”

The 2006 Forest Plan may be amended or modified to respond to new information or management technologies, Congressional land designations, and/or changing needs and opportunities. Any action taken to amend or revise the 2006 Forest Plan will include public involvement, including tribal, federal agency, state and local government input.

The Ottawa National Forest

The Ottawa encompasses about one million acres within the western end of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The Ottawa is characterized by landscapes shaped by glaciers, which have created a variety of landforms from hilly glacial moraine to outwash sand plains. Rock outcrops, hills and ranges from past geologic events contribute to the ecological and scenic features of the Ottawa.

The Ottawa was largely created through the reforestation, financial assistance, and employment programs of the federal government during the Great Depression. The lands that comprise the Ottawa were almost completely cut over between 1870 and 1920 followed by large catastrophic wildfires. In 1929, there were extensive tracts of tax-delinquent land in each of the Lake States. The Forest Service purchased many of these clearcut, burned, and barren lands in cooperation with the states and counties. With the advent of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), large forest nurseries were developed and pine plantations were established. Establishment of the CCC and location of many camps in the region vastly increased the rate of reforestation by providing essential labor needed for planting trees and controlling wildfire. The result was to greatly accelerate renewal of the forest resource on what had become unproductive land.

The Ottawa is composed of predominantly northern hardwood tree species with associated plants and animals. Mixed stands of early successional (aspen/birch), and lowland and

upland conifer trees are also common. Much of the forest cover is less than 100 years old. Outstanding scenic beauty abounds in the Ottawa's steep to level terrain, rock outcrops and ledges. Most spectacular is the northern hardwoods autumn color display.

The Ottawa provides a sense of solitude that is unique and unexpected for the Upper Midwest. Located a day's drive away from Detroit, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Chicago and other large, metropolitan areas, the Ottawa is a frequent destination for people craving a natural and peaceful experience. The visitor gets an immediate perception of wildness and remoteness when entering the Ottawa and will enjoy miles of beautiful roadways with continuous natural scenery. The Forest is home to three unique and very different Congressionally-designated wildernesses.

The Ottawa provides a wide variety of canoeing, kayaking, and boating opportunities along with high quality warm and cold water fishing opportunities. The Ottawa encompasses over 500 lakes and 2000 miles of fishable streams. Under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Ottawa includes 300 miles of designated rivers and streams, and over 175 miles of Study Rivers. The Ottawa also provides access to Lake Superior at Black River Harbor.

Portions of the Ottawa generally receive over 200 inches of snow annually. Referred to as "Big Snow Country", winter sports enthusiasts enjoy alpine and nordic skiing, snowmobiling, snow shoeing, dog-sledding and ice fishing for several months of the year. There are over 450 miles of groomed snowmobile trails and numerous cross-country ski trails.

The Ottawa land base lies in the transition between the northern boreal forests and eastern deciduous forests. A great diversity of species, such as gray wolf, bald eagle, common loon, bobcat, fisher, various species of trout, lake sturgeon, unique aquatic species, and many kinds of ferns and flowering plants, are supported in this environment. Some species are common; others are relatively rare and/or exist on the "edge" of their most southerly or northerly ranges. In recent years, new non-native invasive species, such as glossy buckthorn, purple loosestrife, rusty crayfish and Eurasian watermilfoil have appeared on the Ottawa, creating new management challenges.

Native Americans have used the lands that make up the Ottawa for thousands of years and treaties ensure their continued use. Treaty rights are exercised by Native American tribes and tribal members in various ways, such as hunting, fishing, cultural practices and gathering of forest plants. The Forest Service recognizes treaty rights as a matter of national policy and more locally on the Ottawa through a "Memorandum of Understanding" with sovereign and federally recognized tribes of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians.

A Vision of the Future

Through the implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan, the Ottawa will provide a variety of resource uses, recreational opportunities, and services to the public, while ensuring protection of soil, water, cultural resources, as well as native and desired non-native plants and animals.

Resources on the Ottawa will be managed to conserve, protect, and produce what is desired by the general public; federal, state and local agencies; and local tribal governments, such as wild places, clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, diverse recreation, and wood products.

The mosaic of forested ecosystems that will continue to be restored across the landscape includes natural communities in early, mid and late-successional states. Healthy ecosystems are essential to providing a sustainable flow of goods and services requested by the public. These goods and services will also contribute toward maintaining economic vitality in the local communities near the National Forest.

In addition, healthy ecosystems will contribute to species viability and biological diversity. The management prescribed in the 2006 Forest Plan will continue to preserve and enhance habitat in support of the recovery of threatened and endangered species. Conservation and recovery of federally listed species remains a top priority in decision making.

A wide variety of recreational opportunities will be available on the Ottawa. Forest products will continue to be made available as a result of managing for healthy ecosystems. Recreation opportunities, wood products, and minerals will contribute toward the economic sustainability of local communities.

Decision and Rationale

Need for Change

The 1986 Forest Plan for the Ottawa has been amended six times over the past 20 years. The need to revise the 1986 Forest Plan became apparent through a combination of factors that included:

- new knowledge of ecological capabilities;
- results of monitoring and evaluation;
- changes in agency policies and priorities;
- changing conditions of the land; and,
- changing public demands.

Considering these factors, a comprehensive “need for change” assessment was completed in September of 2003. The findings of this assessment became the focus of the Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for revising the 1986 Forest Plan, which was also issued in September 2003.

The need for change assessment and the comments received on the NOI led to the development of revision topics. Chapter 1 of the FEIS describes the following revision topics as the areas where changes needed to be considered:

- Monitoring and control of invasive species
- Recommendations for the selection of management indicator species
- Align vegetation management goals with ecological capabilities

- Assess land suitability to support timber management
- Timber output based on vegetation and habitat objectives
- Management of stands adjacent to old growth
- Goals for management of permanent forest openings
- Forest fire management
- Identification of a new candidate Research Natural Area
- Habitat for the Canada lynx
- Management for water quality
- All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) opportunities
- Potential wilderness recommendation

Although all sections of the 1986 Forest Plan were reviewed, some aspects of the 1986 Forest Plan were working well and needed little or no change in this revision. The 2006 Forest Plan carries forward the management direction found in the 1986 Forest Plan for these sections.

Decision Overview

I have selected Alternative 3-Modified as the 2006 Forest Plan for the Ottawa. I selected this alternative because overall, in my judgment, it maximizes benefits to the public by:

- Contributing to restoring, enhancing, or maintaining ecological sustainability and biological diversity.
- Contributing to species viability.
- Contributing to the protection of watershed conditions necessary to support ecological functions in riparian and aquatic ecosystems.
- Contributing to the economic and social needs of people, cultures, and local communities.
- Providing sustainable and predictable levels of products and services.
- Providing direction that is more clearly defined to assist managers in making project level decisions in implementing broader social, economic, and ecological goals.
- Providing direction that reflects recommendations received through the public commenting process, and consultations with local tribes, state and local governments, and other federal agencies.
- Providing diverse motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, such as hunting, fishing and OHV access, particularly for ATVs.
- Maintaining the remote character of the Ottawa.

I used four criteria for evaluating the alternatives:

1. **Maintaining the Uniqueness of the Ottawa in Relation to Other Public and Private Lands.** The Ottawa is recognized for its unique ecological, cultural, geological, botanical and historical features. The Ottawa provides habitat for a variety of wildlife and rare plant communities. The remote setting of the Ottawa is valued by many for outdoor recreation. The wild and natural features of the Ottawa provide a scenic beauty that is appreciated by visitors to the area and local residents alike.
2. **Contributing toward Social Vitality.** Visitors to the Ottawa participate in a variety of activities across the Forest. Some of the most popular activities include: snowmobiling, visiting wilderness, viewing wildlife, hiking, fishing, hunting, driving for pleasure, and simply relaxing. Demands for public land recreation opportunities have increased over the years and are expected to continue to increase. The ability to continue to provide these opportunities is dependent upon our being able to manage use in a way that maintains forest health and ecosystem capabilities.
3. **Contributing toward Economic Vitality.** The Ottawa plays an important role in the regional economy. Of strong interest to area residents, business, and local governments is the ability of the Ottawa to provide timber products to area markets. In addition, local counties receive revenues generated on the Ottawa for their roads and schools.
4. **Providing for Ecosystem Resiliency/Sustainability.** A healthy forest has multiple benefits. Soil and water quality, diversity of forest vegetative communities, ecological capabilities and forest vitality help to provide a sustainable amount of goods and services to the public.

My decision also considered how the 2006 Forest Plan responded to public comments, tribal comments, internal management concerns, and national direction and policy. My decision to adopt the management direction in the 2006 Forest Plan was made in consideration of the analysis of effects disclosed in the FEIS, the Biological Opinion of the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, and is supported by the planning record in its entirety.

This decision applies only to National Forest System (NFS) land within the boundaries of the Ottawa. It does not apply to any other federal, state, county, municipal, or private lands. However, in making my decision, I considered how likely future management of other ownerships and nearby National Forests (i.e., Chequamegon-Nicolet, Hiawatha, Huron-Manistee, Chippewa and Superior) might contribute to environmental effects resulting from the management of the Ottawa.

As stated, this Record of Decision documents my selection of Alternative 3-Modified as the 2006 Forest Plan. It is important to note that this decision includes a prohibition on cross-country OHV use, which is a final agency action and will require no further NEPA environmental analysis. See the *Decision Summary and Rationale* section for more information.

A forest plan is a programmatic document that provides a framework of management direction that is used to guide future decision-making and is permissive in nature. As such, the 2006 Forest Plan does not authorize, fund or implement any site-specific activities.

Decision Summary and Rationale

From the very start of this revision effort, the Ottawa has sought to create a Forest Plan that is broad, strategic, and landscape-based. The analysis conducted recognizes that the Ottawa does not exist in isolation, but is a part of a larger landscape managed and influenced by many owners.

Sustaining Ecosystems, Conditions, and Uses

Addressing ecological sustainability and health was one of the most important areas for change to the 1986 Forest Plan. My decision will continue restoration of this relatively young forest.

The 2006 Forest Plan provides direction for the long-term sustainability and health of forest ecosystems. The Selected Alternative establishes land allocations, standards, guidelines and management area prescriptions designed to reduce risk to viability for species most at risk, increase success in maintaining species and ecosystems diversity, and maintain and/or restore components of the ecological systems important to their sustainability.

The 2006 Forest Plan incorporates a strategy for restoration of landscape ecological patterns, composition, and structure for both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. This strategy also contributes to the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes System (Executive Order 13340, Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Final Report 2005).

Invasive Species

Non-native species can alter natural ecosystems in several ways and affect forest health. Invasive plants and animals can cause changes in water conditions and fire regimes, changes in soils, displace existing wildlife food sources, and displace rare species. These changes can result in a shift from multiple-species communities into monocultures, and alter erosion and sedimentation processes. A number of non-native invasive plants and animals of growing concern on the Ottawa threaten plant composition and regeneration, as well as the availability of habitats for native terrestrial and aquatic species.

The 2006 Forest Plan includes standards and guidelines that outline a program for addressing threats from non-native invasive plants and animals that includes listing, inventorying, mapping, treatment and monitoring. The 2006 Forest Plan also provides guidelines that direct and prioritize non-native invasive species prevention and control. There was limited direction in the 1986 Forest Plan addressing the control of invasive species. Actions listed in the 2006 Forest Plan, when implemented, will contribute to forest health and complement the Ottawa's efforts to restore ecosystem components and function.

Management Indicator Species

The management indicator species (MIS) list for the 2006 Forest Plan consists of ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), American marten (*Martes americana*), mayfly-stonefly-caddisfly suite (e.g., *Ephemeroptera-Plecoptera-Trichoptera* families), and cutleaf toothwort (*Dentaria laciniata*=*Cardamine concatenata*). See FEIS, Appendix H – *Management Indicator Species* for additional information on the process used to recommend selection of these four species.

Under the 1986 Forest Plan, the Ottawa had monitored and managed for 13 MIS species. Early on in the process, I provided direction for the Ottawa's revision process to limit the number of MIS to a few that can reasonably and effectively be monitored. Species were chosen for consideration based on the ability of their population trends to reflect management impacts and to represent the trends of other species in similar habitats. It should also be noted that other species and habitats will be monitored, but not as MIS. These include federally threatened and endangered species, Regional Forester's Sensitive species, some game species, and other species of interest (see Forest Plan, Chapter 4 – *Monitoring and Evaluation*).

Vegetative Management

Management of northern hardwood, aspen/paper birch, short-lived conifer, and long-lived conifer forests was addressed through the revision effort. The role of old growth, white pine and hemlock forest components, permanent forest openings, and use of fire as an ecological tool were additional issues analyzed. The 2006 Forest Plan provides programmatic management direction for selecting the appropriate silvicultural activities at the project level to achieve desired conditions on the landscape. This new direction will provide greater flexibility in selecting the appropriate treatments and allow adaptive management to be practiced.

The 2006 Forest Plan identifies 488,000 acres of land suitable for timber production. These are lands capable of producing commercial volumes of timber on a sustained basis. The allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for the first decade of the planning period averages 90.1 million board feet (MMBF) per year. The estimated ASQ for the second decade averages 134.5 MMBF per year. ASQ is an upper limit on harvest, not a commitment to sell. The suitability analysis and ASQ calculations were derived using the best available mapping techniques, updated vegetation data, and knowledge gained from years of implementing and monitoring the 1986 Forest Plan (see FEIS, Appendix A – *Description of the Analysis Process* for more detailed information).

The FEIS prepared in conjunction with the 2006 Forest Plan provides a comprehensive environmental analysis, at the programmatic level, of the expected effects of vegetation management anticipated for the future. This analysis took into consideration, but moves forward from, the information contained in the FEIS for the 1986 Forest Plan and monitoring reports prepared over the past 20 years. The 2006 Forest Plan, FEIS and decision supersede the earlier vegetation management programmatic analyses, including but not limited to the supplemental information report prepared in conjunction with the 2003-2004 Monitoring and

Evaluation report. Through this new analysis, the Ottawa took a hard look at the potential environmental effects of vegetation management at the programmatic level.

The environmental analysis, documented in the FEIS and planning record, is the foundation for the design and application of management prescriptions based upon current resource conditions on the Forest and the best scientific information available (see FEIS, Appendix A – *Description of the Analysis Process*). The 2006 Forest Plan contains new estimates of probable timber harvest methods for the next 10 to 15 years, pursuant to NFMA, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1604(f)(2) (see Forest Plan, Appendix E – *Proposed and Probable Practices, Goods Produced and Other Information*). This forecast of possible harvest methods is a non-binding estimate and does not mandate use of any particular harvest method. The choice of harvest methods is determined at the site-specific level of analysis and decision-making after further environmental analysis and appropriate public involvement. The probable methods of timber harvest estimates are not limits, but rather projections of the methods of harvest that may be used. The comprehensive analysis of vegetation management was prepared with considerable public involvement (see FEIS, Appendix J – *Public Participation and Response to Comments*). Public input was carefully considered when determining possible harvest methods and addressing other vegetation management issues. Further site-specific environmental analysis and public involvement will occur prior to any ground-disturbing vegetation management projects.

In making my decision, I recognize there is a high level of concern from local communities and the timber industry that the Ottawa implement a program that achieves the ASQ level. While the Ottawa has consistently provided timber to local communities and industry for decades, the full ASQ level approved in the 1986 Forest Plan has not been achieved. Although many factors will continue to influence the actual timber harvest levels from year to year, I am confident that the improved suitability analysis and ASQ calculations gives the most reliable projection possible of the timber production capability of the Ottawa.

I believe the 2006 Forest Plan will provide the direction needed to have an effective timber management program that will continue to contribute to the economic stability of local communities and the wood products industry around the Ottawa and at the national level.

I also recognize that there are interest groups and individuals who believe that the Ottawa should stop all commercial timber sales. As a result of public comment, an alternative that would eliminate all commercial logging on the Ottawa was considered, however it was eliminated from detailed study (see the *Alternatives Not Considered in Detail* section of this document for rationale). The Ottawa's timber management program is the primary tool for restoring and providing a diverse range of sustainable habitats for many species, supporting forest restoration and health, and providing wood fiber. The sale of timber products is an appropriate use of National Forest System lands as authorized by various federal laws, including Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 and National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976. I made this decision recognizing the preferences of some groups and individuals, but also recognizing that commercial timber harvest on National Forest System lands is both legal and, in the case of the Ottawa, desirable.

The Selected Alternative will provide the opportunity to continue the restoration of the Ottawa's forests. Implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan will provide early, mid and late-successional forests, in turn creating a variety of wildlife habitats, resource uses, recreational opportunities and healthy ecosystems. Vegetative management serves to provide wood products to local markets resulting in social and economic benefits to local communities, and provides benefits for multiple resources.

Research Natural Areas

Research natural areas are part of a national network of natural areas designated in perpetuity for research and education and/or to maintain biological diversity on NFS lands. Research natural areas are designed for non-manipulative research, observation, and study. There is a designated RNA that currently exists on the Ottawa (the McCormick RNA located in the McCormick Wilderness). The 1986 Forest Plan identified two candidate Research Natural Areas (cRNAs), the Sturgeon River Gorge and Sylvania cRNAs. With this decision, I decided to continue to carry the Sturgeon River Gorge cRNA as a candidate and drop the Sylvania cRNA from further consideration.

The Sturgeon River Gorge cRNA resides within the Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness (Management Area 5.2), where the management prescription is consistent with RNA objectives. As the 2006 Forest Plan is implemented, the ecosystem features that define the cRNA will be maintained. Establishment of the Sturgeon River Gorge candidate as a RNA is not proposed concurrent with Forest Plan revision. My decision for maintaining this area as a cRNA is based upon the area's adequate representation of vegetative alliances, and the inventory and evaluation conducted during the revision process. The Forest Service Research branch will need to determine the priority of this candidate for establishment into the RNA system.

Evaluation of the Sylvania cRNA (located within the Sylvania Wilderness, MA 5.3) conducted during the revision process, showed that all species alliances observed within the Sylvania cRNA are found in existing RNAs or RNA-equivalents within the Ecological Subsection 212Jc (see FEIS, Appendix I – *Research Natural Areas* for additional information).

Threatened and Endangered and Sensitive Species

The direction in the 2006 Forest Plan will contribute to the conservation and recovery of threatened, endangered, and sensitive (TES) species through the mix of habitat conditions provided and improved standards and guidelines.

The 2006 Forest Plan includes management direction aimed at improving habitat for all species of concern including federal, regional, and state listed species. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service concurs that the 2006 Forest Plan's direction includes conservation measures that will provide habitat and contribute to the recovery of the bald eagle, gray wolf, Canada lynx and Kirtland's warbler.

The management direction in the 2006 Forest Plan reflects improved alignment of management prescriptions with ecological landtypes, consultation with USDI Fish and

Wildlife Service, improved standards and guidelines for riparian area management, and other features that will support healthy ecological conditions of the Ottawa's natural communities. This will contribute to species viability, ecosystem integrity and biological diversity on the Ottawa.

Off-Highway Vehicle Management

Off-highway vehicle use, and particularly ATV use, on the Ottawa and its roadways has changed over the past 20 years. Since the 1986 Forest Plan was developed, the use of ATVs (a subset of vehicles defined as off-highway vehicles) and demand for this type of motorized recreational opportunity has grown. Unmanaged recreation is one of the key threats facing the national forests and grasslands. The direction in the 2006 Forest Plan will address the threat of unmanaged recreation use by prohibiting cross-country use of OHVs and requiring that OHV use occur only on roads or trails designated for such use. These provisions of the 2006 Forest Plan are needed to protect soil and water resources, control the spread of invasive species, provide for public safety, and reduce conflicts with other multiple uses. Additionally, the Agency's Travel Management Rule (TMR) became effective in December 2005 (see the *Consistency with Other National Policies, Laws and Authorities* section of this document). The TMR requires the Forest Service to designate a system of roads, trails and/or areas that are open for motorized use. As a result of the TMR, the Ottawa will publish a map called the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM), on an annual basis to depict the Ottawa's designated motor vehicle road and trail system (including those for OHV use), and trails serving as recreational connector routes for ATVs.

I recognize that there is a high level of interest in the OHV policy for the Ottawa. Of the comments submitted after the release of the Proposed Forest Plan and DEIS, OHV use and access was among the most popular topics, with a diverse array of perspectives offered (see FEIS, Appendix J – *Public Participation and Response to Comments*). The comments included both support for and concerns about the Ottawa's consideration of prohibiting cross-country use and limiting OHV access to a designated system of roads and trails. Other commenters requested clarification as to the intent of the preferred alternative. As presented in Appendix J of the FEIS, comments supporting the restriction of OHV use to only designated roads and trails included the public's acknowledgement that such restrictions would promote a desired solitude on some portions of the Forest. Other commenters were not supportive of the Ottawa's proposal to restrict OHV use to a system of roads and trails designated for OHV use, stating that the preferred alternative's proposed designation process was too restrictive.

The Ottawa's transportation network is primarily in place. About 80% of the Ottawa's landbase is within ¼-mile of a system road (e.g., roads assigned an Objective Maintenance Level [OML] 1 through 5). Therefore, the vast majority of the Ottawa is currently accessible by motorized vehicles (see FEIS, Transportation section and Appendix B, *Roadless Inventory*). Under the 1986 Forest Plan, the Ottawa was generally open to OHV use on OML 1 and 2 roads, unless posted closed; and off-road or cross-country OHV use was also allowed in most areas of the Ottawa.

The 2006 Forest Plan defines the desired condition for management areas, which provides for designating OHV use on existing, low standard roads (e.g., OML 1 and 2 roads) for access into the Forest. This decision will not immediately change the type of motorized access allowed on OML 1, 2 and 3 roads, or on Forest Service trails designated for motorized use, nor for administrative use. The public will continue to have OHV access on an estimated 2,950 miles of the Ottawa's OML 1 and 2 roads, where appropriate for resource conditions and in compliance with state laws in regards to wetlands and stream crossings (see FEIS, Chapter 3, Water Resources and Transportation sections), pending completion of the MVUM required by the Travel Management Rule. The Selected Alternative includes management direction that will assist the Ottawa in completing the process to designate road routes and trails for OHV use. The 2006 Forest Plan includes a goal for a desired condition that will "promote diverse and quality recreation experiences within the capability of sustainable ecosystems, and consistent with the niche of the Ottawa, while minimizing impacts to natural resources". In addition, standards and guidelines have been incorporated to manage OHV access and recreational use with provisions for resource protection, public safety and reducing user conflicts. The management direction included in the 2006 Forest Plan will be utilized when preparing the MVUM required by the Travel Management Rule. This map will be updated annually to reflect future site-specific decisions to change OHV access (see *Key Considerations in Forest Plan Implementation* for more information).

This decision is the final agency decision to prohibit all cross-country travel by OHVs, including ATVs on the Ottawa, except for administrative use (e.g., law enforcement) and other written authorized purposes. This prohibition does not apply to snowmobile travel. Prohibition of cross-country use not only will ensure protection of several resources (i.e., soil and water resources), but also will provide consistency of OHV policies with nearby National Forests (including the Chequamegon-Nicolet, Hiawatha, Huron-Manistee and Superior) and consistency with the Travel Management Rule. I have based this decision on the analyses prepared for the FEIS, including incorporation of comments received by the public, tribes and other agencies (see FEIS, Appendix J – *Public Participation and Response to Comments*). The prohibition of cross-country OHV use is a final agency decision made with the 2006 Forest Plan, and therefore, no further NEPA analysis is required prior to implementing this decision (also see *Key Considerations in Forest Plan Implementation*).

I based my decision to prohibit cross-country travel, and to provide for a recreational designated OHV road and trail system on the environmental analyses of the FEIS, particularly in the Soils, Water Resources, Non-native Invasive Species, Recreation and Transportation discussions. Based on these findings, and the wide spectrum of values indicated through public input, I believe this decision will provide a balanced approach to OHV use on the Ottawa, with consideration for resource protection and public safety.

With about 450 miles of existing designated snowmobile trails, snowmobile use will continue to be an essential part of the Ottawa's recreation experience. Cross-country snowmobile use will continue to be allowed in most management areas unless prohibitions or restrictions are needed for resource protection and/or to meet management objectives (i.e., semi-primitive non-motorized areas). In general, the effects of such use are minimal and it was not identified as a critical and compelling issue for Forest Plan revision (see Forest Plan,

Appendix A – *Summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation*). The 2006 Forest Plan’s provision for snowmobile use is essentially the same as in the 1986 Forest Plan; therefore, snowmobile use is excluded from the following discussion.

Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness is an important management emphasis on the Ottawa. A decision that must be made when revising Forest Plans is whether to recommend additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). In making this decision, it is important to consider the wilderness context of the area, among other things. The Lake States (Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota) have 23 areas in the NWPS encompassing about 1.24 million acres. These areas are located on the Ottawa, Chequamegon-Nicolet, Superior, Hiawatha, and Huron-Manistee National Forests, as well as on lands owned by the National Park Service and USDI Fish and Wildlife Service. Michigan has fourteen NWPS areas, Wisconsin has six NWPS areas, and Minnesota has three NWPS areas.

I carefully examined lands throughout the Ottawa for their potential as wilderness and have determined that a single roadless area on the Ottawa meets the criteria for inclusion in the national roadless areas inventory (the Ehlco area). While the Ehlco area has been added to the roadless areas inventory, I found that the area had no features or conditions that warrant a recommendation for wilderness study. The Ehlco area has a low to moderate wilderness potential. Although the area is relatively remote, few people are attracted to the area and there are few recreation qualities. Logged over the past 40-70 years when under private ownership, the area is not particularly scenic due to the young dense forest growing on relatively flat terrain. There are opportunities for solitude, but it is affected by the noise and operation of the nearby White Pine industrial complex. Therefore, this proposed area will not be recommended to Congress for wilderness study (see FEIS, Appendix C – *Wilderness Evaluation* for more information).

Motorboat use in Sylvania Wilderness was addressed in an amendment to the 1986 Forest Plan, which was adopted in 1995. The direction of the revised plan for motorboat use remains unchanged from the 1995 Forest Plan amendment, as motorboat use within Sylvania Wilderness was not considered a critical and compelling topic for revision (see FEIS, Appendix J – *Public Participation and Response to Comments* for further information).

Special Designations

Special interest areas (SIAs) may be designated for scenic, geologic, botanic, zoologic, paleontological, archaeological/historic, or recreational values, or combinations of these values. A SIA designation allows the Ottawa to meet internal and public interest in recognizing special values of certain areas and to tailor land management direction to interpret, maintain, and enhance those special features.

Throughout the revision process, many people commented that the Trap Hills area of the Ottawa should be recommended for wilderness in order to protect its unique ecological conditions. While this area did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the roadless areas inventory, I recognize the unique geologic, scenic, recreational, and botanic features of the area. To ensure continued protection, maintenance, and enhancement of the special features

in the Trap Hills, the area has been designated as the Trap Hills Escarpment SIA. In addition to the Trap Hills area, six other areas were designated as SIAs (e.g., Bell-Bracken-Englesby Esker Complex, Divide Sand Wetland, Norwich Outcrop, Posse Podzol Terrace, Silver Mountain Ancient Volcanic Plug, and Sturgeon Headwater Wetland Complex). These seven areas encompass about 10,600 NFS acres. See FEIS, Appendix D – *Special Interest Areas* for more information.

Water Resources

The 2006 Forest Plan proactively manages watersheds and riparian areas for their inherent values and within the Great Lakes System (E.O. 13340, Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Final Report 2005). The 2006 Forest Plan includes objectives to protect, improve, and restore watershed and riparian area health in order to protect or improve water quality and soil productivity necessary to support ecological functions and intended beneficial uses. The 2006 Forest Plan direction for dam and impoundment management will assist the Ottawa's management of rivers and streams to move toward restoring natural flow patterns.

My decision is based upon the most current available scientific information on the important functions of riparian areas. It responds to the goal of improving watershed conditions listed in the *USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2004–2008*. The decision will improve management and ensure water quality and riparian ecosystems are maintained or improved during implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan.

Tribal Rights

I recognize the Forest Service's trust responsibility and treaty obligations toward Native American Indian Tribes. The Ottawa consulted directly with the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, as well as the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) throughout the revision process. I have considered treaty rights, the government-to-government relationship with the tribes, and comments of tribal members who use and enjoy the Ottawa. Management direction in the 2006 Forest Plan emphasizes the importance of tribal treaty rights and interests. Nothing in this 2006 Forest Plan is intended to affect the tribes' treaty-guaranteed hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. Tribal consultation is expressly emphasized as important to site-specific implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan.

Changes between the Draft and Final EIS

Alternative 1, the no action alternative, and Alternatives 2, 3 and 4 were developed to provide a range of choices for addressing the revision topics and issues. A substantial number of comments from local tribes, federal, state and local government agencies and the general public on the Draft EIS (DEIS) and Proposed Forest Plan were received and analyzed. Based on this analysis, I have made some modifications to Alternative 3 (the Preferred Alternative presented in the DEIS) and those modifications are now part of the Selected Alternative presented in the FEIS.

These modifications are within the range of alternatives presented in the Proposed Forest Plan and DEIS. The Selected Alternative falls within the range of alternatives and reflects a balance based on the extensive public comments received on the Proposed Forest Plan and Draft EIS (DEIS). The Selected Alternative is the basis for the 2006 Forest Plan.

Changes to the 2006 Forest Plan included clarifying the goals and objectives, and concurrent changes to the monitoring and evaluation direction, which is tied to the goals and objectives. For ease of reference, objectives were assigned alphabetical letters. Changes were also made to the standards and guidelines, primarily to increase clarity, improve the ability to adaptively manage the resources, and eliminate guidance that duplicated management direction already provided in laws, regulations, and/or agency policy. These changes were made in response to input from local tribes, government agencies and public comment. Forest Plan management area boundaries were adjusted to include the administrative Forest boundary and adjusted to somewhat better align with ecological capabilities, and the recreational opportunity spectrum settings in some areas.

Minor changes were made for the FEIS to increase clarity, update information, correct typographical errors and add further information in response to public concerns. Additional effects analysis for the modified Alternative 3 was conducted.

The most substantial changes to the 2006 Forest Plan were in the provisions for OHV use, and land allocations to those areas with modified silvicultural prescriptions, focusing on northern hardwoods, aspen, and conifer management. Less substantial changes were made in the monitoring and evaluation direction and the estimated allowable sale quantity of timber production. These changes are described in the subsections below.

Off-Highway Vehicle Management

The following elements, as presented under Alternative 3 of the DEIS, remain part of the OHV management proposal in Selected Alternative of the FEIS:

- Cross-country travel is prohibited.
- Provide for designated, recreational roads for OHV use using OML 2 roads that are open to passenger vehicles and OML 3 roads.
- Provide for designated recreational trail connectors for ATV use.

The following OHV management policy additions were made as a part of the modification to Alternative 3 as presented in the FEIS, and as such, will be part of the 2006 Forest Plan:

- Allow use of OHVs on designated OML 1 roads, and those OML 2 roads that are closed to passenger vehicles
- Terminology consistent with the Travel Management Rule has been incorporated

These changes respond to public concerns that insufficient access had been provided in the Proposed Forest Plan. The Selected Alternative allows for the development of new recreational connector trails for ATV use, and designation of trails in addition to OML 1,

OML 2 (roads open and closed to passenger vehicles), as well as OML 3 roads for OHV use. These designations are allowed, as appropriate, when consistent with the protection of physical resources (i.e., soil and water) and biological resources (i.e., spread of non-native invasive species), and compatible with the desired recreation setting.

Hardwood Management

The Ottawa is part of the largest contiguous block of northern hardwoods in the Lake States area. Heavy logging and numerous wildfires in the late 1800s/early 1900s altered the structure of the Ottawa into a much younger, less complex, more even-aged condition.

Management Areas 2.1 and 2.2

As part of the Forest Plan revision process, management area boundaries and prescriptions were redefined to better align prescriptions for northern hardwood management with the ecological capability on the Ottawa. As a result, a new management area (MA 2.2) was created, which emphasizes a more uneven-aged condition for the northern hardwood ecosystem.

Approximately 32,000 acres that were in MA 2.1 (an area emphasizing slightly more even-aged northern hardwood conditions than MA 2.2) depicted in the Proposed Forest Plan and DEIS were moved into MA 2.2 in the Selected Alternative. Commensurate with this increased emphasis on northern hardwoods in MA 2.2, the vegetation composition objective range for northern hardwoods in the desired condition for this MA was changed from 60-75% to 65-75%.

These changes addressed some comments received that supported more uneven-aged northern hardwoods on the landscape. These changes will allow for uneven-aged management of about 193,000 acres of northern hardwood forests across the Ottawa, which will better meet forest restoration objectives in the northern hardwood forest type. However, northern hardwood even-aged management may still be conducted where appropriate.

Aspen Management

Because aspen is an important species providing both ecological and social values, one emphasis of the 2006 Forest Plan is to maintain and regenerate aspen forest. Aspen is an early-successional tree species, which cannot regenerate under its own shade. Without disturbance, aspen will eventually convert to other forest types.

Management Areas 1.1a and 3.1a

In response to comments on the Proposed Forest Plan and DEIS, the Selected Alternative was modified so that the 2006 Forest Plan would maintain more aspen on the Ottawa through the following:

- The amount of acres in MA 1.1a, which emphasizes aspen regeneration, will be increased by moving acreage from MA 9.3 (a MA comprised of isolated areas of NFS ownership) to MA 1.1a.

- The desired condition for aspen species composition percentage in MA 3.1a (an area emphasizing a mix of hardwood and aspen types) was changed from 25-45% to 35-45%.
- The desired condition for aspen species composition percentage in MA 1.1a was changed from 50-70% to 60-70%.

As a result of these changes, the acres managed for aspen increased from 102,000 in Alternative 3 (as presented in the DEIS) to 109,000 acres of aspen in the Selected Alternative as presented in the FEIS.

Short-lived Conifer Management

Short-lived conifers provide habitat for a variety of native plant and animal communities. Short-lived conifers on the Ottawa are in three groups: jack pine, balsam fir, and lowland conifers. Many comments received showed support for a high percentage of jack pine management because this forest type provides breeding and nesting habitat for the Kirtland's warbler and habitat that supports prey species of the Canada lynx.

Management Areas 4.1a and 4.2a

The Selected Alternative is expected to create the best habitat conditions for Kirtland's warbler of any alternative. This alternative contains direction to maintain approximately 10,000 acres of jack pine. The 2006 Forest Plan will:

- Change the desired condition for jack pine species composition in MA 4.2a (an area emphasizing short-lived conifers with provision for permanent openings) from 40-60% to 50-60%.
- Change the desired condition for jack pine species composition in MA 4.1a (an area emphasizing a mix of aspen and conifer types) from 15-25% to 20-25%.
- Includes additional guidance specific to Kirtland's warbler for creating large patches (up to 550 acres) of densely stocked jack pine with small ¼-acre openings as nest sites.

As a result, the acres managed for jack pine will increase from 8,000 acres in Alternative 3 (as presented in the DEIS) to 10,000 acres in the Selected Alternative as presented in the FEIS.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Changes made for the final 2006 Forest Plan strengthens direction for monitoring and evaluation. The revised direction will better inform managers how resource management activities are affecting ecological health and whether activities are moving conditions on the Ottawa toward the desired conditions set forth in the 2006 Forest Plan.

My decision to alter the monitoring strategy of the 2006 Forest Plan places the focus on monitoring progress toward the desired conditions and objectives. The monitoring framework in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan embodies the strategic nature of forest plans by focusing on what is needed to monitor the implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan. The

monitoring framework poses specific questions that need to be answered through monitoring, identifies what activities will be monitored, and establishes timetables for reporting.

Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ)

The allowable sale quantity (ASQ) is the maximum quantity of timber that may be harvested from the landbase identified as suitable for timber production for any decade. The Ottawa is managed to maintain and restore forest health, improve vegetative diversity, and improve wildlife habitat while protecting other resources. Timber harvesting is used as a tool to meet these objectives. The ASQ, as an annual average, remains at 90.1 MMBF in the first decade. In the second decade, the annual average ASQ was increased from 132.1 MMBF/year to 134.5 MMBF/year due to changes made in MA prescriptions as described earlier in this document.

Public Involvement

From the very beginning of the revision process, the Ottawa implemented a thorough and active public involvement campaign. A variety of public involvement tools and methods were used including public meetings, open houses, newsletters, news releases, and meetings with various special interest groups as requested. The Ottawa maintained extensive consultation and communication with local tribal governments and other government agencies. The efforts of those people who participated provided valuable contributions to the development of the 2006 Forest Plan.

Meetings and Open Houses

Early in 2003, the Ottawa held seven public meetings before publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) to revise the Forest Plan in the Federal Register. Forest Service resource specialists made presentations and were available for a question and answer period. The following meetings were held:

- January 27, 2003 – Ontonagon, Michigan
- January 28, 2003 – Baraga, Michigan
- January 30, 2003 – Watersmeet, Michigan
- February 1, 2003 – Ewen, Michigan
- February 3, 2003 – Iron River, Michigan
- February 4, 2003 – Ironwood, Michigan
- February 7, 2003 – Ironwood, Michigan

Public input from these meetings was used to determine necessary changes, actions that should be taken, and issues to be reviewed in the revision process. From public input and internal evaluations, a proposed action was developed. The revision process formally began with the publication of the NOI in the September 18, 2003 edition of the Federal Register stating the intent to develop an Environmental Impact Statement.

After the NOI was published, six public meetings were held to allow the public a chance to meet the Ottawa's planning ID Team and other resource specialists, become more familiar with the planning process, and provide input on plan revision. The following meetings were held:

- October 6, 2003 – Ontonagon, Michigan
- October 8, 2003 – Ironwood, Michigan
- October 9, 2003 – Iron River, Michigan
- October 15, 2003 – Baraga, Michigan
- October 18, 2003 – Ewen, Michigan
- October 20, 2003 – Watersmeet, Michigan

In addition to these locally hosted meetings, the Ottawa participated with the Hiawatha and Huron-Manistee National Forests in four meetings in Lower Michigan. These meetings were held on the following dates:

- October 20, 2003 – Muskegon, Michigan
- October 21, 2003 – Grand Rapids, Michigan
- October 22, 2003 – Lansing, Michigan
- October 23, 2003 – Livonia, Michigan

In April 2005, after the release of the Proposed Forest Plan and DEIS, a series of open houses were held. The objective of these meetings was to explain the documents produced, answer questions about the analysis performed and the preferred alternative, and to take comments. These meetings were held on the following dates:

- April 4, 2005 – Grand Rapids, Michigan (joint Michigan National Forest meeting)
- April 5, 2005 – Lansing, Michigan (joint Michigan National Forest meeting)
- April 6, 2005 – Livonia, Michigan (joint Michigan National Forest meeting)
- April 12, 2005 – Ontonagon, Michigan
- April 14, 2005 – Iron River, Michigan
- April 16, 2005 – Ewen, Michigan
- April 19, 2005 – Watersmeet, Michigan
- April 20, 2005 - Baraga, Michigan
- April 21, 2005 – Ironwood, Michigan

Materials regarding processes being developed separately, but concurrently with the Ottawa's Forest Plan revision process, such as information about the 2005 Planning Rule and Travel Management Rule were made available to the public at the meetings and open houses. In addition, other materials were available: including briefing papers, newsletters, Forest Annual Reports, and fact sheets depicting the Forest Service Chief's identified threats (including unmanaged recreation).

Special Meetings Requested by Groups

Throughout this process, several meetings were held with special interest groups at their request to talk about specific issues.

- February 2003, Forest Plan revision update with Ottawa Sportsman's Club
- February 2003, Forest Plan revision update with Ontonagon Women's Club
- February 2003, Forest Plan revision update with Smurfit-Stone Container Enterprises
- August 2004, meeting with representatives of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) and Resource Stewards Association
- September 2004, meeting with MI Trale ATV Club
- March 2005, meeting in Iron River at the monthly Michigan Logger's Breakfast
- April 2005, presentation at the Western Upper Peninsula's Logger Jamboree
- June 2005, meeting with The Nature Conservancy in Marquette, Michigan
- June 2005, meeting with the Michigan Ruffed Grouse Society
- June 2005, meeting with the Trap Hills Conservation Alliance

Information Sharing

Forest Plan revision materials have been made available to interested parties and the public in a variety of methods designed to reach a diverse audience. These include formal correspondence and contacts, distribution of newsletters, news releases extended to western Upper Peninsula media outlets, and creation of a Forest Plan Revision website.

Formal Correspondence/Personal Contacts

Contacts were made to the following local governments and organizations notifying them of Forest Plan revision initiation:

- January 2003, personal contacts were made to local Township Supervisors providing information regarding upcoming public meetings and availability of Forest Plan revision documents.
- January 2003, announcements for public revision meetings were distributed to federal, state and local governments
- January 2003, additional personal contacts were made to local organizations including, Gogebic County Board of Commissioners, Houghton County Board of Commissioners, Iron County Board of Commissioners, Michigan's Logger's Breakfast, Iron County Timbermen's Association, Marquette County Board of Commissioners, Michigan DNR, Wildlife Division, Upper Peninsula Thunder Riders Snowmobile Club
- February 2003, additional meetings were held with the Ontonagon County Board of Commissioners, Ontonagon County EDC, Ontonagon County Planning Commission and Ontonagon Village President
- June 2003, Forest Plan Revision letter with attachments sent to the following organizations: Great Lakes Council of the Federation of Flyfishers, Great Lakes Fisheries Trust, Louisiana-Pacific Corporation, Michigan Council Trout Unlimited, Ruffed Grouse Society, Timber Producers Association of Michigan and Wisconsin, Timber Wolf Alliance, and the Upper Peninsula Travel and Recreation Association.

Throughout the process, Ottawa personnel and resource specialists participated in conversations with interested members of the public.

Revision Newsletters/Briefing Papers

Over the past three years, six issues of the Ottawa Forest Plan Revision newsletter and three briefing papers were sent to a mailing list of over 400 addresses. Each issue contained information about the Forest Plan revision and provided several ways for the public to get involved in the process. Each newsletter coincided with significant milestones in the process, such as announcing the publication of the NOI or availability of draft documents.

Ottawa National Forest Website

Forest Plan revision information and documents have been posted on the Ottawa's website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/ottawa>) since 2002. A direct link to this information was placed on the Ottawa's website homepage to provide public access to information about the Notice of Intent, public meetings, newsletters, and draft documents. Additional information was provided through links to the Hiawatha and Huron-Manistee National Forest websites.

News Releases

At every significant milestone, news releases were prepared and distributed to area newspapers and also to surrounding media outlets from the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, to Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Each news release informed the public of the status of the revision effort and gave them information on how to provide comments or obtain additional information.

Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA)

Forest Plan revision has been listed on the Ottawa's SOPA since spring 2003. The SOPA is distributed quarterly to approximately 200 addresses, as well as being available on the National Forest Service website.

Consultation with Federal, State, and Local Government Agencies

The Ottawa is responsible for establishing and maintaining contact with other government agencies during the revision process. All applicable agencies were incorporated into the Forest Plan revision mailing list. In addition, the Ottawa is legally mandated to consult and receive concurrence from other agencies at different junctures of the revision process. Consultations with the appropriate government agencies at all levels began in August 2002 and have continued throughout the entire revision process. For a complete list of meetings, see FEIS, Appendix J – *Public Participation and Response to Comments*.

Legislative Contacts

The Ottawa has maintained contact with appropriate legislative officials throughout the revision process. The Ottawa's Public Affairs Officer has kept local representatives informed through phone contacts when needed and at different junctures in the process. Other Ottawa representatives have met with legislators to provide plan revision information.

For a complete list of meetings, see FEIS, Appendix J – *Public Participation and Response to Comments*.

Consultation with Tribal Governments

The Ottawa consulted with local Native American tribal governments throughout the revision process. Representatives from the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians (LVD) Tribal Council, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (KBIC) Tribal Council, and Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) were consulted on a regular 1 to 2 month basis. Meetings were also held with the Voigt Task Force to provide updates on activities. For a complete list of meetings see FEIS, Appendix J – *Public Participation and Response to Comments*.

Alternatives

Alternative Development

The revision process for the 2006 Forest Plan was formally initiated through the September 2003 publication of the Notice of Intent. Public comments received during this initial comment period, along with management concerns identified during the need for change assessment, helped the ID Team develop a range of alternatives that would address significant issues. The process used to formulate the alternatives is described in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

Alternative 1 is the no-action alternative, which reflects the themes of the 1986 Forest Plan direction as amended. Although the effects analyses for Alternative 1 were based on this direction, the analyses also recognized that resource conditions on the Ottawa have changed during the 20 years since implementation of the 1986 Forest Plan.

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 were developed to provide a range of choices for addressing the revision topics and issues. The management direction offered under the Selected Alternative falls within this range. All alternatives adhere to the concepts of multiple-use and ecosystem management.

Perhaps no task was more important to the ID Team working on the 2006 Forest Plan than development of a reasonable range of alternatives. Based upon resource information, public comment, input from tribal, federal, state and local governments, and experience gained from many years of Forest Plan implementation, the ID Team crafted what I believe to be an excellent representation of alternative means to meet the purpose and need for revising the 1986 Forest Plan. The ID Team has solicited and reviewed alternatives submitted by the public and documented that analysis in the record. The range of alternatives is driven by different views of what is best for the land and the people that use it. Existing resource conditions and the role of the Ottawa (as embodied in the purpose and need statement) are the heart of the development of the alternatives. Development of a multiple-use resource

Forest Plan involves compromise and balancing of a myriad of biological, physical, and social factors. The range of alternatives reflects the trade-offs associated with this task.

To address the issues, the alternatives varied in the amounts of vegetation management (e.g. the desired conditions for northern hardwoods, aspen/paper birch, long-lived conifers and short-lived conifers) as well as the Ottawa's approach to OHV access on the Forest. The range of alternatives for these issues illustrates a sufficiently broad set of alternatives (see the *Alternatives Not Considered in Detail* and *Alternatives Considered in Detail* sections of this document for more information). This includes alternatives for OHV use ranging from no use on the Forest (alternative not considered in detail) to a no action alternative (1986 Forest Plan policy) to the Selected Alternative, which offers the most options in consideration of OHV roads and trails on the Ottawa (equivalent to Alternative 4; an alternative considered, but not selected).

Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

Federal agencies are required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives relevant to the purpose and need of the proposal and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). Comments from tribal governments, other government agencies and the public received in response to the Proposed Action, provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need.

Some of these alternatives were outside the scope of the proposed changes, duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail, or had components that would cause unnecessary environmental harm. Therefore, five alternatives were considered but dismissed from detailed consideration in the FEIS. These alternatives are summarized in the following section and more information is available in the FEIS (see Chapter 2, Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study).

No Harvest Alternative

The Ottawa received requests to consider an alternative that eliminated commercial logging on the Forest. This alternative would not meet the purpose and need stated in the NOI. Specifically, it would not: 1) promote the diversity of forest tree species, forest structure and function; 2) contribute to publicly desired habitat conditions for game species; 3) enhance favorable ecological conditions to sustain populations of many indigenous or desired species; or 4) supply wood products for local and regional needs. For these reasons, this alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis.

Wilderness Alternative

The Ottawa currently has three congressionally-designated wildernesses (Sylvania, McCormick, and Sturgeon River Gorge). During the public comment periods, requests were received for additional wilderness, with specific interest in the Trap Hills area.

As part of Forest Plan revision, the Ottawa completed a forestwide roadless area inventory following requirements in accordance with 36 CFR 219.17, Forest Service Handbook

1909.12, and the Eastern Region Guidelines for Completing Roadless Area Inventories during Forest Plan Revision (USDA FS 1997b).

The roadless area inventory process included review of the Trap Hills area and the Norwich area (the Norwich area was listed on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule inventory). The result of the roadless area inventory showed that only one area, known as Ehlco, met roadless area inventory criteria, so it was carried forward to the wilderness evaluation process (see FEIS, Appendix B – *Roadless Inventory* and Appendix C – *Wilderness Evaluation*).

The lands that make up the 16,000-acre Ehlco area were purchased in small parcels between 1937 and 1969 from lumber companies that had harvested the majority of the wood products. None of the lands in the Ehlco area were included in the RARE II Roadless Area Review and Evaluation of 1979, nor did it meet roadless area inventory criteria in the FEIS prepared for the 1986 Forest Plan. During the roadless area inventory process conducted for the 2006 Forest Plan, but prior to release of the 2005 DEIS, there was no public interest specific to this area as a roadless area or wilderness. However, the roadless area inventory conducted for Forest Plan revision showed the Ehlco area met roadless area inventory criteria. The public comment period on the DEIS revealed some interest in Ehlco as wilderness, and some opposition to any additional wilderness. The final wilderness evaluation of Ehlco is documented in Appendix C of the FEIS; however the analysis did not reveal compelling features or conditions to warrant its consideration as a wilderness study area. Therefore, no areas have been proposed to Congress for wilderness study.

National Recreation Area Alternative

During the Forest Plan revision process, the Ottawa met with members of the Trap Hills Conservation Alliance at their request, to discuss the Trap Hills area and opportunities to preserve it. The Trap Hills Alliance proposed that a portion of the Forest be considered for a National Recreation Area. The area would include lands adjacent to and east from the Porcupine Mountain Wilderness State Park, and encompass the Trap Hills. Their proposal would emphasize semi-primitive recreational opportunities and included areas they recommended for federal wilderness designation.

It was determined that this general area of the Forest does comprise features that would be managed for a similar type of recreational opportunity under the Selected Alternative. Specifically, this area would encompass portions of Management Areas 6.1 (semi-primitive non-motorized), 6.2 (semi-primitive motorized) and 8.1 (designated wild and scenic rivers). In addition, this decision authorizes implementation of management direction for the Trap Hills as a special interest area, which will maintain the special qualities and features of the area. This designation, along with the semi-primitive emphasis in adjacent portions of Management Areas 6.1 and 6.2 would create conditions similar to those sought by the Trap Hills Alliance. Therefore, this suggestion was dropped from further consideration.

No OHV Alternative

Some comments received requested a ban on all OHV use on the Ottawa. This alternative was considered, but eliminated from detailed study. This decision was primarily based on the Ottawa's Need for Change statement and the purpose and need for Forest Plan revision,

which identified the need for the Ottawa to consider OHV management that is better aligned with other jurisdictions in the area. OHV use has historically been permitted on the Ottawa and provides access to various portions of the Forest. Related to this, the local counties, the State of Michigan, and nearby national forests allow for OHV use. As a result, this alternative was dropped from detailed consideration.

Aspen Alternative

This alternative would have the Ottawa manage for a desired condition of maintaining 138,000 acres of aspen type on the Forest. This was the acreage to be managed for aspen under the management direction of the 1986 Forest Plan.

Development of this alternative began with evaluation of land suitability as defined by the NFMA. This suitability analysis was used to determine those acres that are tentatively suited for timber management (see FEIS, Appendix A – *Description of the Analysis Process* for more information). This analysis incorporated improved data about the Ottawa’s vegetative resources, refined ecological information and management experience based on nearly two decades of Forest Plan implementation. The results of the land suitability analysis determined that maintaining 138,000 acres of aspen on the Ottawa is not feasible, and that the maximum amount of aspen that could be maintained on the Forest was 120,000 acres. The no action alternative, which continues the management direction of the 1986 Forest Plan, was adjusted to reflect the 120,000 acres, rather than the 138,000 acres originally called for under the 1986 Forest Plan. Therefore, an alternative considering maintenance of 138,000 acres of aspen was eliminated from further consideration.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

The Ottawa developed four alternatives for detailed study. Each alternative stands alone as a potential Forest Plan. Although each of the alternatives has many things in common, they differ in the emphasis given to particular issues. Alternatives address NFS lands only and are not applied to lands in other ownerships within the Ottawa administrative boundary.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 is the “no action” alternative. NEPA requires that the Forest Service consider this alternative in detail when completing environmental impact statements (40 CFR 1502.14[d]). No action would mean that the management direction and management area allocations from the 1986 Forest Plan would be applied through the next planning period. Some adjustments to the management direction of the 1986 Forest Plan, including a new land suitability analysis and roadless area inventory were necessary to bring it into compliance with existing laws and current agency policy.

Desired Conditions: This alternative proposes to move the Ottawa toward the desired conditions and overall management themes in the 1986 Forest Plan. Some changes would have to be made to standards and guidelines and other direction to make them consistent with current laws. Specific levels of resource management treatments or yields have been adjusted to reflect the changes in Ottawa conditions since 1986. Alternative 1 would maintain or improve the habitat for a wide variety of game and non-game species, provide

diverse recreation opportunities, and provide for a mix of forest timber products. This alternative would not change OHV access from what is allowed in the 1986 Forest Plan. As such, most of the Ottawa would be open to OHV use, including cross-country travel.

Decision Rationale: During my evaluation of the four criterion listed in the Decision Overview Section of this document, I found that Alternative 1 would not adequately support management of some of the Ottawa's unique natural resources or provide conditions supporting the Ottawa's ecological capabilities to the extent of the Selected Alternative. In addition, Alternative 1 would contribute less to the vitality of the social and economic environments to the degree offered with the Selected Alternative.

Specifically, I find that Alternative 1 would not benefit the management of the Ottawa to the extent of the Selected Alternative for several reasons. As stated earlier in this document, the Ottawa, together with adjacent ownerships, encompasses one of the largest contiguous areas of northern hardwoods in the Lake States. Alternative 1 would result in the least amount of northern hardwood forest of all alternatives analyzed. It would also manage for less long-lived and short-lived conifer types, and less old growth than the Selected Alternative. Alternative 1 would provide the lowest, overall harvested volume during the next two decades, and therefore would not have the potential to provide as many timber products to area markets.

The reduced amount of northern hardwood management would provide fewer habitats for species that benefit from late-successional forest habitats, such as the cutleaf toothwort (MIS), red-eyed vireo and black-throated green warbler (neo-tropical migratory bird species). Alternative 1 would not include management direction developed to benefit TES, such as maintaining more short-lived conifer (jack pine). There is also no provision for designating special interest areas (MA 8.3) included in Alternative 1. In addition, this alternative does not include improved management direction for enhancing soil and water quality, preventing the spread of undesirable, non-native invasive species, providing diversity of vegetative communities, and managing the Ottawa's resources in closer alignment with ecological capabilities.

Alternative 1 would allow unregulated, cross-country OHV travel, as well as access on all OML 1 and 2 road segments. These activities lead to degradation of soil and water quality, spread of non-native invasive species, and decreased opportunities for solitude and feelings of remoteness that many Ottawa visitors value.

Alternative 2

Under Alternative 2, the Ottawa would be managed as a core part of the largest contiguous block of northern hardwoods in the Lake States. Vegetation goals address many forest conditions, but emphasize late successional forest conditions, with older and larger trees. Early successional forests would exist in moderate amounts.

Desired Conditions: Vegetation management would replicate disturbance factors typical of ecosystems of the western Upper Peninsula. These factors include individual or small scale tree blowdown and replacement along with relatively infrequent whole stand replacing wind

events. Hardwood selection harvest would replicate these small windfalls by creating small gaps in the canopy. Aspen acreage would be closer to the Forest's ecological capability, based on the Ottawa's wind, fire, and disease conditions. Access for OHVs would be on a modest system of designated roads and trails, with emphasis on recreational trail connectors for ATV use. No cross-country travel by OHVs would be allowed, except for administrative use or as authorized.

Decision Rationale: I did not select Alternative 2 because I determined that it would not provide conditions supporting the Ottawa's diversity of vegetative communities, and there would be less economic benefits to local communities.

Specifically, I find that Alternative 2 would not benefit the management of the Ottawa to the extent of the Selected Alternative for several reasons. The decreased emphasis on aspen and jack pine forests would result in less habitat and diversity of habitats for the Ottawa's wildlife and plant communities, especially for species reliant on early successional forest types. The reduced amount of aspen and early-successional forest types would decrease the amount of habitat for species, such as woodcock, ruffed grouse (MIS) and snowshoe hare; a primary prey base for several wildlife species, including fisher, northern goshawk, bobcat and Canada lynx. Alternative 2 would include additional management direction that was developed to benefit TES, such as maintaining more short-lived conifer (i.e., jack pine). However, the relatively smaller amount of jack pine offered under this alternative would result in providing the least amount of potential Kirtland's warbler habitat of any alternative considered in detail.

Alternative 2 would result in the least amount of early successional forest types (e.g., aspen and jack pine) and the most amount of late successional forest types (e.g., northern hardwoods). Alternative 2 would result in slightly fewer timber products available to area markets because of the increased emphasis on uneven-aged management when compared to the Alternatives 1, 3-Modified and 4. This would result in a lower volume of higher valued products or a decreased yield per acre of harvest. Alternative 2 has a higher ASQ in the first decade, a lower ASQ in the second decade and higher ASQ in the third and subsequent decades when compared to the Selected Alternative.

Although Alternative 2 would provide other benefits, such as increased protection of soil and water quality from no cross-country OHV travel, it would offer only minimal availability for OHV access on the Forest when compared to the Selected Alternative. This alternative's conservative approach would greatly limit general Forest OHV access on roads and trails, because this alternative's focus is on recreational trail connectors for ATVs.

Alternative 3—Modified (The Selected Alternative)

Alternative 3 was presented as the Preferred Alternative in the DEIS and was the basis for the Proposed Forest Plan. Comments received on the Proposed Forest Plan and the DEIS were viewed as critical in shaping the 2006 Forest Plan for managing resources on the Ottawa in a manner that supports the Forest Service's mission, legal mandates, the goals of both NEPA and NFMA, and the interests of the public as a whole.

Alternative 3 was modified between the Draft and FEIS to offer an alternative more responsive to public commenters' desire for more northern hardwood and aspen management, an increased amount of jack pine management for the Kirtland's warbler, and more latitude in the consideration of roads and trails designated for OHV use.

Like Alternative 2, the Selected Alternative will manage the Ottawa as a core part of the largest contiguous block of northern hardwoods in the Lake States. The Selected Alternative provides a greater diversity of forested types and conditions, and management that is better aligned with the ecological capability of the Ottawa than all other alternatives considered. OHV access would be promoted on designated OML 1, 2 and 3 roads, and trails. ATV access would be promoted on the recreational trail connectors. Priority for designation will be given where conflicts with other user needs do not exist.

Cross-country travel by OHVs would be prohibited, except for administrative use or other written authorizations. This prohibition is a final agency action, and no further NEPA environmental analysis will be required.

Desired Conditions: Vegetative conditions reflect the capability of the forest to provide variety in forest composition and structure, wildlife habitat, and overall species richness. Hardwood, conifer, and aspen forests exist in moderate amounts. In summary, the Selected Alternative will provide:

- more northern hardwood forest than Alternatives 1 and 4, but less than Alternative 2;
- more aspen forest than Alternative 2, but less than Alternatives 1 and 4;
- more short-lived conifer forest than Alternatives 1 and 2, and is equivalent to the amount provided in Alternative 4; and
- more long-lived conifer forest than Alternatives 1 and 4, but less than Alternative 2.

Provide access for OHVs on designated trails, and designated OML 1, 2 and 3 roads.
Provide for ATV access through designated recreational trail connectors.

Decision Rationale: My rationale for selecting Alternative 3-Modified as the 2006 Forest Plan is detailed in this Record of Decision. See the *Decision Summary and Rationale* section for more information.

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 would feature an increased emphasis on even-aged forest conditions. Management would include increased amounts of even-aged northern hardwood and aspen/early successional forests. Alternative 4 provides a similar approach to OHV management as the Selected Alternative, with provisions for use on designated road/trails, and ATV use on recreational trail connectors.

Desired Conditions: This alternative emphasizes early successional forests and younger tree species composition and structure within a diverse forest setting. It promotes wildlife habitats favorable to various game and non-game species. This alternative would generally continue the type of vegetative management practices and foster conditions on the Ottawa that have occurred over much of the last century. Access for OHVs would be on designated

trails and designated OML 1, 2 and 3 roads. No cross-country travel by OHVs would be allowed, except for administrative use or written authorization.

Decision Rationale: During my evaluation using four criterion listed in the Decision Overview Section of this document, I have found that Alternative 4 would not support management of the Ottawa's unique natural resources to the extent of the Selected Alternative.

Specifically, I found that Alternative 4 would not provide the same level of restoration for the northern hardwood ecosystem as is provided by the Selected Alternative. Alternative 4 manages fewer acres for an uneven-aged condition of northern hardwoods, and does not have the provisions included in the Selected Alternative for restoring northern hardwoods to the sites where ecological attributes, such as soil type and natural succession favor its growth. Alternative 4 would also result in a lower amount of long-lived conifer forests than the Selected Alternative. Although Alternative 4 would emphasize early successional forests, the resulting vegetative communities would not align as well with the Ottawa's ecological capabilities when compared to the Selected Alternative. Alternative 4 would provide a lower sustained yield of timber, lower net present value and lower overall ASQ in the second decade than offered under the Selected Alternative.

The reduced amount of northern hardwood management would provide fewer habitats for species benefiting from late-successional forest habitats, such as discussed under Alternative 1. The reduced amount of long-lived conifer management would result in fewer habitats for the American marten (MIS), Blackburnian warbler, and other species reliant upon these forest types.

The Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The Selected Alternative is the environmentally preferable alternative overall because it most closely aligns management with the Ottawa's ecosystem capabilities. This alternative will allow for the most appropriate mix of management direction to protect, preserve, restore and enhance the historic, cultural, and natural resources on the Ottawa. The Selected Alternative will provide for the best mix of management emphasis to areas to provide the highest degree of ecological sustainability within the social, economic, and ecological environments. This alternative places top priority on conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered species.

Consistency with National Policies, Laws and Authorities

The Forest Service manages the Ottawa in compliance with many laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies. The list provided here is not a complete list of all governing statutes that apply to Forest Plan revision, but it highlights the primary statutes guiding the preparation of this Forest Plan revision. In all cases, the 2006 Forest Plan is consistent with national law, policy, and direction.

National Environmental Policy Act

The Ottawa has compiled and generated an enormous amount of information relevant to the effects of each of the alternatives considered in the FEIS. I find that the environmental analyses 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:

- Considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives;
- Disclosing cumulative effects;
- Using the best scientific information available;
- Consideration of long-term and short-term effects; and
- Disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects.

This Record of Decision selects Alternative 3-Modified as the 2006 Forest Plan. It is important to note that this decision does not make decisions on any other actions or site-specific activities. Ground-disturbing activities and project decisions made subsequent to this decision will be subject to additional site-specific environmental analysis that will tier to the FEIS and follow applicable environmental analysis, public involvement, and administrative appeal procedures.

As stated, this decision includes the final agency action to prohibit cross-country OHV use (including ATV travel). The analysis documented in the FEIS provides sufficient basis to support this decision and the public has taken full advantage of ample opportunities to comment on the closure of cross-country motorized use throughout the Forest Plan revision process. No further NEPA environmental analysis will be required prior to issuing the closure orders needed to implement this decision.

The 2006 Forest Plan has adopted practicable means to design projects and avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing those ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity and Forestwide and Management Area-specific standards and guidelines. The 2006 Forest Plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to ensure needed adjustments are made over time.

National Forest Management Act

This Act and its implementing regulations specify a number of requirements for forest plan development. Congress has mandated that forest plans provide for multiple-use and sustained yield of products and services. Not every use can or should occur on every acre. The goal is to blend multiple-use of the Ottawa in such a way that it is sustainable and best meets the needs of the people.

The Ottawa developed an integrated Land and Resource Management Plan using a systematic, interdisciplinary approach to integrate physical, biological, economic, and other sciences. The 2006 Forest Plan maximizes the public benefit and contains strong conservation measures to protect, maintain, and improve soil and water resources, wildlife

habitat, and other forest resources within a multiple-use context. The 2006 Forest Plan complies with NFMA and its regulatory requirements, as explained elsewhere in this Record of Decision, the accompanying FEIS, and Appendices.

Net Present Value and Net Public Benefit

The Ottawa provides multiple economic benefits to Michigan and surrounding states. Economic benefits contributed to the region from National Forest System lands include market and non-market opportunities such as timber, tourism, sightseeing, snowmobiling, hunting, and fishing. Forest plan decisions, when implemented, can contribute to economic sustainability by providing for a range of uses, values, products, and services. At the same time, forest plan direction must be consistent with ecological sustainability.

The 1982 Planning Rule (as permitted by 36 CFR 219.14[e] of the 2005 Planning Rule) requires identification of the alternative that maximizes the net present value (NPV) and how the 2006 Forest Plan compares to this alternative. According to the economic analysis (estimated over a 100-year time frame) displayed in the FEIS, Alternative 2 would maximize the NPV due to the higher level of timber harvest predicted and revenue generated. The Selected Alternative has a NPV of \$2.018 billion, and ranked second among all alternatives. While Alternative 2 does have a slightly higher NPV calculation, the 2006 Forest Plan will provide the highest net public benefit. Many benefits associated with the 2006 Forest Plan are not captured in fees or revenues, nor are they necessarily quantifiable. For example, it is difficult to assign monetary value to the conservation of habitat for a variety of species. For this reason, the alternative that maximizes NPV may not be the alternative that has the highest net public benefit. I have determined that the 2006 Forest Plan has the highest net public benefit because it best balances multiple uses of the Ottawa and best fulfills the mission of the Forest Service.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

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 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.). This obligation is further clarified in the national Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) which states the agencies' shared mission to "...enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources."

The Selected Alternative does the best job of protecting threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. The 2006 Forest Plan was developed with the Agency's responsibilities concerning conservation of listed species [Section 7 (a) (1)] foremost in mind. Based on consultation with the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, their concurrence provided on March 2, 2006 for the Forest Service Biological Assessment, and the non-jeopardy finding in their Biological Opinion, I have determined that the Forest Plan is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Planning Act (RPA) and Forest Service Strategic Plan, 2004-2008

The 1982 Planning regulations (36 CFR 219.12 [f] [6]) were used for the development of this revised Forest Plan; as permitted by 36 CFR 219.14[e] of the 2005 Planning Rule. The 1982 Planning Rule requires 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 (GPRA) 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 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 2006 Forest Plan in compliance with the Forest Service Strategic Plan, and that this Forest Plan will contribute towards its goals, which are included in the following discussion.

Reduce the Risk from Catastrophic Wildland Fire

The 2006 Forest 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 2006 Forest Plan also focuses on treating vegetation in high hazard areas within wildland/urban interface areas to reduce risk from wildland fire.

Reduce Impacts from Invasive Species

The 2006 Forest Plan addresses the spread of terrestrial and/or aquatic non-native invasive species that pose a threat to native ecosystems through the establishment of forestwide direction as well as desired conditions on the ground that will foster native species.

Provide Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

As outlined elsewhere in this Record of Decision, the 2006 Forest Plan places emphasis on recreational use of the Ottawa. Specifically, it clarifies direction needed to better manage use of off-highway vehicles.

Help Meet Energy Resource Needs

There is one large biomass energy project under development in the area surrounding the Ottawa. It could create a market for smaller diameter trees and lower quality wood products that would contribute to the Ottawa's ability to meet vegetative objectives identified in the 2006 Forest Plan. Forest stands that could benefit from, but are not economical to treat under current utilization standards for pulpwood or sawtimber may become operable if biomass energy projects are developed.

Improve Watershed Conditions

The 2006 Forest Plan employs a proactive approach to the management of watersheds and riparian areas and incorporates a strategy for restoration of landscape ecological patterns, composition, and structure for terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. This strategy will

contribute to the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes System (E.O. 13340, Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Final Report 2005).

Mission-related Work in Addition to that which Supports Agency Goals

This goal deals mostly with processes. While the 2006 Forest Plan specifically focuses on desired conditions and objectives, and not the process to achieve them, the agency will improve productivity and efficiency as the 2006 Forest Plan is implemented.

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 FEIS (see Chapter 3, *Social* section), that the 2006 Forest Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

Based upon the analyses in the FEIS, I have concluded that impacts resulting from changes in recreation opportunities or motorized access to the Forest under the Selected Alternative would not be expected to have a disproportionate impact on any low-income or minority group.

Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA)

I find the 2006 Forest Plan is consistent with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act in that it provides for the protection of old growth when conducting 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 2006 Forest Plan also emphasizes protection and enhancement of riparian areas and watershed health as directed under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Projects undertaken in response to direction of the 2006 Forest Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The 2006 Forest 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 2006 Forest Plan does not mandate ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) under the NHPA is not required.

It is my determination that the 2006 Forest Plan complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186

The 2006 Forest Plan focuses on enhancing ecological health and plant and animal community diversity to the benefit of wildlife species, including migratory birds. The management direction in the 2006 Forest Plan is in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and was developed with full consideration of the broad objectives and intent of Executive Order 13186 (*Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds*).

USDA Forest Service Travel Management Rule (TMR)

The Travel Management Rule (70 Federal Register 68264), dated November 9, 2005 (36 CFR Parts 212, 261 and 295) revised regulations regarding travel management on National Forest System lands to clarify policy related to motor vehicle use, including off-highway vehicles. The TMR requires the Forest Service to designate a system of roads, trails and/or specific areas open for motorized use, and the TMR prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system, except for over-the-snow vehicles.

The 2006 Forest Plan was developed in consideration of the TMR. The Selected Alternative complies with the TMR through the decision to prohibit cross-country use of OHVs, and goals and objectives provide guidance for designating a road and trail system (see *Decision Summary and Rationale* for more information). Specific areas were not analyzed for OHV use, and therefore, this activity is not part of the Selected Alternative. Additionally, except for the semi-primitive non-motorized management area and wildernesses, over-the-snow-vehicles are still permitted to be used cross-country on the Ottawa.

The designated system must be published on the Motor Vehicle Use Map, which will also reflect the Forest Plan decision prohibiting cross-country OHV (including ATVs) use. See *Key Considerations in Forest Plan Implementation*, Travel Management Rule for more information.

Other Laws, Policy, and Regulation

I also find that the Final Environmental Impact Statement and the 2006 Forest Plan are consistent with the following body of policy and regulation: the Clean Air Act; the Clean Water Act; the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; the Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum #1827 for Prime Farmland, Rangeland and Forestland; Executive Order 13212 (an Order from the National Energy Policy to increase production and transmission of energy in a safe and environmentally sound manner); Executive Order 13112 (an Order establishing the National Invasive Species Council to prevent the introduction and provide control of invasive species to minimize economic, ecological, and human health impacts); Executive Order 11990 (an Order to avoid adverse impacts associated with the destruction /modification of wetlands); and the existing body of national direction for managing National Forests.

Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation

The 2006 Forest Plan becomes effective 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and FEIS is published in the Federal Register (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1), 1982 Planning Rule; as permitted for use in this Forest Plan revision by 36 CFR 219.14[e] of the 2005 Planning Rule).

Transition from the 1986 Forest Plan

The 2006 Forest Plan direction will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the effective date of this Record of Decision. Because this is a revision of the 1986 Forest Plan, many aspects and much of the management direction from the 1986 Forest Plan is carried forward relatively unchanged into the 2006 Forest Plan. Therefore, many existing projects and ongoing actions that were consistent with the 1986 Forest Plan will continue to be so with the 2006 Forest Plan. Many management actions decided prior to the issuance of the Record of Decision are routine and ongoing. Those decisions will generally be allowed to continue unchanged because the projected effects of these actions are part of the baseline conditions considered in the FEIS and Biological Assessments for the revision.

NFMA 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]). As the decision maker, I have the discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to modify pre-existing authorizations to bring them into compliance with the 2006 Forest Plan standards and guidelines. I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the 2006 Forest Plan. These contracts will be executed according to their terms, and the effects and conditions associated with those contracted timber sales were considered in the FEIS. Existing timber contracts, in most cases, will be completed within three to five years. The decision is left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other uses and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts. These uses and occupancy agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the 2006 Forest 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 2006 Forest Plan.

Key Considerations in Forest Plan Implementation

The 2006 Forest Plan provides broad, strategic, landscape-level direction for managing the Ottawa. The 2006 Forest Plan is permissive in that it allows, but does not mandate, projects and activities. Working toward the desired conditions and achieving the objectives in the 2006 Forest Plan will be accomplished through project decisions, using the appropriate analyses and processes to meet the requirements of the NEPA, and other laws and regulations. Projects will occur only after they are proposed, their environmental effects

considered, and a decision is made authorizing action. These project decisions will be tiered to the FEIS for the 2006 Forest Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

The FEIS for the 2006 Forest Plan considers and evaluates the total management program that likely would be necessary to implement the objectives of the 2006 Forest Plan as well as the potential effects of establishing the desired conditions envisioned for this Forest Plan. It also deals with those issues and concerns relevant at a larger landscape or forestwide level. Therefore, in essence, the FEIS is a cumulative effects document, because it analyzed the total of activities that may be expected in the first decade (and longer term) and disclosed the forestwide effects of those activities considered in total.

By tiering to the FEIS, the Ottawa will make use of this forestwide analysis to streamline environmental analyses for project-level decisions. Revisiting landscape or forestwide scale issues and effects will not be necessary, because those effects have already been considered and disclosed in the FEIS. This has applicability to a wide range of findings that are appropriately done at the forestwide level. Analysis and findings related to species viability and effects on threatened or endangered species should be greatly simplified when projects are within the parameters of the 2006 Forest Plan and the FEIS. Project-level analysis will not revisit Forest Plan decisions, but rather, will determine which management techniques (if any), practices and mitigations (beyond those in the 2006 Forest Plan) are best suited to each individual project.

Implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan is dynamic and depends on many factors. Appendices C (*Harvest Cutting Methods*) and E (*Proposed and Probable Practices, Goods Produced and Other Information*) of the 2006 Forest Plan contains information about proposed and probable management practices and projected outputs. This information is an estimate of what could occur over the life of the 2006 Forest Plan. However, actual implementation will depend on demand for products and uses, available funding, occurrence of natural events such as fire or windstorm, and many other factors. There is no certainty that the projected outputs will actually occur at the estimated levels. The closure of cross-country OHV use decision made in this ROD is a final agency action requiring no further NEPA analysis prior to implementation. A closure order will be issued following the effective date of the 2006 Forest Plan.

Travel Management Rule

The Ottawa's implementation of the Travel Management Rule will be a multi-staged approach. The initial stage will be a Forest closure order to prohibit cross-country OHV travel. This will be followed by preparation and publication of the first Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).

Cross-Country OHV Use: Prior to the publication of the MVUM, the first stage of Forest Plan implementation will consist of a Forest Supervisor's closure order to prohibit cross-country OHV use on the Ottawa. The Ottawa will inform and educate the public about this closure.

Cross-country use includes use off roads and trails. This closure order will not pertain to administrative use or other uses allowed by written agency authorizations. This prohibition will not pertain to use by OHVs on roads and trails available for use under the 1986 Forest Plan, pending further stages of the process.

Road and Trail System Designation Process: In the second stage of implementation, an interdisciplinary (ID) Team of resource specialists, using guidance in the 2006 Forest Plan and Travel Management Rule, will review the Ottawa's transportation network of roads open to OHV travel (i.e., OML 1 and 2 roads), and trail segments to prepare the initial MVUM. Unclassified roads or user-developed roads/trails that are not shown on the initial MVUM will be considered unauthorized for OHV travel.

Consistent with the Travel Management Rule, the MVUM will reflect the designated system of roads and trails available for motor vehicle use, by vehicle class (i.e., OHV, motorcycle, passenger vehicle, etc.) and if appropriate, by time of year. As explained in the *Decision Summary and Rationale* section, motor vehicle use off the designated system shown on the MVUM will be prohibited, except for administrative uses or by written authorization. The publication and distribution of the first MVUM is anticipated in fiscal year 2007.

As required by the TMR, the Ottawa will furnish a new MVUM on an annual basis. The public will be encouraged to provide suggestions on the MVUM to identify their desired routes for recreational purposes and general Forest access that may be added as the 2006 Forest Plan is implemented and the MVUM is updated over time. After publication of the first MVUM, projects developed to implement the Forest Plan (and compliant with NEPA), are anticipated to identify road and/or trail proposals for consideration of future MVUMs. Site-specific analyses and public involvement will be completed, as appropriate, when changing the transportation system in designating roads and trails, including unclassified roads and user-developed roads/trails open to motorized uses. Annual updates of the MVUM will reflect additions or deletions from the system of roads and trails open to motor vehicle use by vehicle class, and if appropriate, by time of year.

Future Changes to the Forest Plan

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is designed to answer questions regarding implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan. Monitoring and evaluation will tightly focus on determining whether there is a need to change the 2006 Forest Plan.

Evaluation reports will display how Forest Plan decisions have been implemented, how effective the implementation has proven to be in accomplishing desired outcomes, and what is 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 is displayed in Chapter 4 of the 2006 Forest Plan. This direction provides broad, strategic guidance and defines periodic monitoring and reporting.

Amending the Forest Plan

The 2006 Forest Plan will be shaped by a central idea: how the agency manages the Ottawa should adapt to changes in how the ecological, social, and economic environments are understood. In the Forest Service, this is called adaptive management. The 2006 Forest Plan is well structured for adaptive management to occur because it describes the desired conditions toward which the Ottawa will strive for during the implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan. In fact, those desired conditions are the very basis for the projects that will be accomplished during the life of the 2006 Forest Plan.

In making this decision, I am also deciding that this 2006 Forest Plan will be adaptive and subject to change as the Ottawa monitors, learns, and gains new information. The revision process used for developing the 2006 Forest Plan has incorporated much that has been learned since the 1986 Forest Plan. This 2006 Forest Plan is not cast in stone to be unquestioningly adhered to for the next 15 years. Progress toward reaching the desired conditions identified in the 2006 Forest Plan will be tracked, and modifications or reformulations of management actions in response to that progress may be made. 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 2006 Forest Plan will generally take the form of Forest Plan amendments and will follow the appropriate procedures specified in the NFMA and its regulations. The need to amend the Forest Plan may result from:

- Recommendations of an ID team based on monitoring and evaluation results;
- Review of relevant new information;
- Determinations by the Forest Supervisor that existing or proposed projects, permits, contracts, cooperating agreements or other instruments authorizing occupancy and use are appropriate, but are not consistent with elements of the Forest Plan's management direction;
- Planning errors found during forest plan implementation;
- Administrative appeal decisions;
- Changes in physical, biological, social, or economic conditions.

The correction of simple errors found in the 2006 Forest Plan may take the form of an errata statement or an administrative correction.

Administrative Appeal of My Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. This decision contains a final agency action for the prohibition of cross-country OHV use and implementation of this action will occur over time as described in the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation section of this document. No further NEPA documentation will

be prepared for the prohibition on cross-country OHV use, and therefore appeals addressing this action need to be submitted as instructed in this section.

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 Sentinel.

Regular Mail:

USDA Forest Service
Ecosystem Management Coordination
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Mailstop Code 1104
Washington, D.C. 20250-1104

Express Mail:

USDA Forest Service
Ecosystem Mgmt Coordination
201 14th Street, SW
3rd Floor, Central Wing
Washington, D.C. 20024
Phone: (202) 205-0895

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 Ave.
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 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 and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which the 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.

Contacts

More information on this Record of Decision, the 2006 Ottawa National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and/or the Final Environmental Impact Statement can be obtained by contacting Forest Supervisor, Ottawa National Forest, E6248 US Hwy. 2, Ironwood, Michigan, (906) 932-1330 or Forest Planner, Ottawa National Forest, E6248 US Hwy. 2, Ironwood, Michigan, (906) 932-1330.

Full sets of all official documents may be found in the following locations:

- Local college libraries: Gogebic Community College, Michigan Technological University and Northern Michigan University
- On the web: www.fs.fed.us/r9/ottawa
- On CD-ROM available at local Forest Service Offices

If you would like to request CD-ROM or hard copy versions of the full set of documents, or have questions regarding the Forest Plan and would like to speak with a Forest Service employee, see the following list of Ottawa National Forest offices:

Supervisor's Office

Forest Supervisor
Forest Planner
E6248 US Hwy. 2
Ironwood, MI 49938
906.932.1330

Bessemer Ranger District

District Ranger
500 North Moore Street
Bessemer, MI 49911
906.932.1330

Iron River Ranger District

District Ranger
990 Lalley Road
Iron River, MI 49935
906.265.5139

Kenton Ranger District

District Ranger
4810 E. M28
Kenton, MI 49967
906.852.3500

Ontonagon Ranger District

District Ranger
1209 Rockland Road
Ontonagon, MI 49953
906.884.2085

Watersmeet Ranger District

District Ranger
E24036 Old US 2 East
Watersmeet, MI 49969
906.358.4551



Randy Moore
Regional Forester, Eastern Region
USDA-Forest Service

March 20, 2006

Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider an employer.
