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Hiawatha
National
Forest

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Final Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Smithers Rubber and Plastic Research Association (Smithers RAPRA) Special Use Permit Reissuance Project

**Hiawatha National Forest
Sault Ste. Marie Ranger District**

Chippewa County, Michigan

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I. Introduction

This final Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) document my decision to issue a 20-year Special Use Permit (SUP) to Smithers Rubber and Plastic Association (Smithers RAPRA) for use of the abandoned National Guard airbase in Racoon, Michigan, as analyzed in the Modified Permit Reissuance alternative, the proposed action, in the March 2015 Environmental Assessment (EA). The draft DN/FONSI was sent directly to those commenters who submitted comments during the 30-day comment period held for the draft EA, which ended on April 16, 2015.

The project area is located within the Sault Ste. Marie Ranger District of the Hiawatha National Forest (HNF) and is approximately 18 miles west of Sault Ste. Marie (Township 46N, Range 4W, Section 26 (Figure 1-1)).

A. Objection Process

I prepared a draft DN/FONSI for your review as part of the pre-decisional, administrative review process that is required for EAs as outlined in 36 CFR 218 (Federal Register, Volume 73, No. 59, pp. 18481 to 18504).

Eligible parties were able to seek resolution of their unresolved concerns based on the actions outlined in the draft DN/FONSI through filing an objection prior to a final decision being made. A legal notice was published on May 11, 2015, to announce the release of the draft DN/FONSI, which initiated a 45-day objection period. Individuals who submitted a comment regarding the proposed project during any designated opportunity for public comment, e.g. the scoping period or the EA comment period, and whose comment contains the required elements outlined in 36 CFR 218.8, were eligible to file an objection for this project. No objections were received.

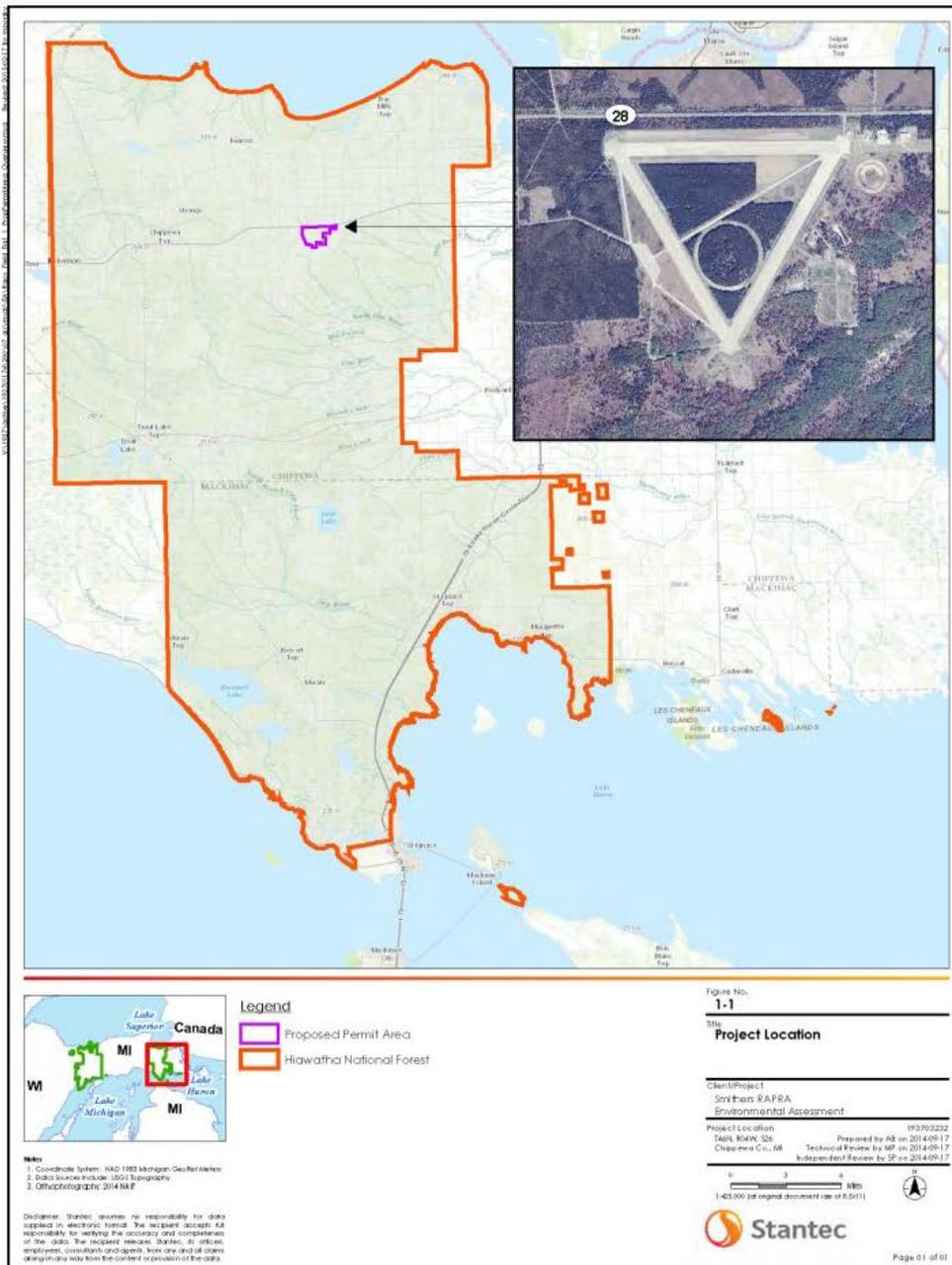
B. Background Information

In preparation of this final decision, I have taken into consideration the analyses performed in the March 2015 EA as well as the associated documentation in the project file. The EA documented the results of the effects analysis for two alternatives: the No Action alternative and the Modified Permit Reissuance Alternative (proposed action). Development of the EA was performed in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), National Forest Management Act (NFMA), and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508. The EA is available at the following website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/hiawatha/landmanagement/projects>.

Public Involvement and Tribal Consultation

Public involvement for the Smithers RAPRA project was sought during scoping and the comment period for the EA. These phases of public involvement allowed the Forest Service to inform interested and affected parties about the proposed actions and the interdisciplinary team's (ID Team) environmental analyses. The information prepared by the ID Team during project planning has permitted me to make this final decision with an understanding of the actions proposed and their environmental consequences.

Project scoping was initiated on September 22, 2014, to identify potential issues of concern related to the project and to identify potential alternatives requiring analysis in the EA. A scoping letter, describing the project's purpose and need and the proposed action, was mailed to approximately 190 individuals, groups, tribes, and public agencies. The comment period extended through October 22, 2014. Notification of the project's scoping period was published through a legal notice in the Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan's *The Evening News* on September 22, 2014. Documentation for the Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance project was posted to the HNF's internet site, and proposed activities were listed in the



Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning in the October 2014 edition. Copies of the SOPA are available at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110910>.

Comments received during the scoping period were used by the ID Team to identify potential issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. Four comments were received during the scoping period that consisted of requests for paper copies of the EA, requests for additional project information and general support for the project. Additional information requested by the commenters included clarification of project maps as provided in the scoping package (EA, Figure 2-1), potential effects to timber stands (EA, pp. 30-31), and specific socioeconomic and workforce data (EA, pp. 58-61). One comment referred to reclassification of the land that would no longer be suitable for timber production as part of the proposed action, so the project-specific Forest Plan amendment was developed and analyzed as part of the proposed action in the EA. The project-specific Forest Plan amendment DN/FONSI must be signed by the Forest Supervisor and will be published for a separate objection period (36 CFR 219.5) under a separate legal notice. No other potential issues were identified during the scoping period.

One comment letter, sent from the Executive Branch of Tribal Government for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, indicated no recorded sites of religious or cultural importance to this tribe are known from the project site. This letter is included in the Administrative Record for this EA.

The legal notice beginning the 30-day comment period for the draft EA was published in the March 18, 2015, edition of the Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan's *The Evening News*. The draft EA was also sent to three interested parties who commented during project scoping. One comment was received in support of the proposed action and implementation of the project-specific Forest Plan amendment (see Appendix A, Public Comments).

I carefully reviewed the comments received during these comment periods and evaluated the basis for developing all issues and how the concerns comprising the issues were addressed by each alternative.

II. Final Decision and Rationale

A. Authority

As District Ranger I am authorized to make site-specific decisions to manage the HNF in accordance with applicable laws, regulations and policies that govern National Forest System lands. This authority is granted to me through agency policy found at Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1236.51.

B. Final Decision

Based on the analysis documented in the Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance Project EA and comments received during initial scoping and the EA comment period, I have decided to issue to Smithers RAPRA a modified SUP that will allow them to continue operations as permitted in the existing SUP as amended (Appendix B of the EA) and to implement additional activities as described in Section 2.2 of the EA (pp. 7-11).

A separate DN/FONSI will be published regarding the site-specific Forest Plan Amendment as described in the EA (pp. 7-11).

C. Rationale for the Final Decision

I weighed several factors in making my decision, including compliance with federal and state laws (EA, Appendix A), environmental impacts on the social, economic, and biological environment, and the public comments and concerns raised during scoping and the EA comment period. No single factor was solely responsible for my decision. The proposed action, hereinafter referred to as the selected alternative (SA), was selected as the alternative that will best meet the purpose and need for the Smithers RAPRA

SUP Reissuance Project, respond to public comments and provide net public benefits, while providing an acceptable level of effects to the environment.

I believe the implementation of the SA will best achieve the specific needs identified in the EA (pp. 3-4). All practicable means have been employed to avoid and/or minimize environmental harm.

I believe this decision addresses the minor comments received during the scoping period (EA, pp.4-5) and the comment received during the EA comment period (project file).

My rationale is organized to document the degree to which the SA does the following:

- Meets the purpose of and need statements as described in the *Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance Project EA* (EA, pp. 3-4).
- Addresses or resolves public issues and responds to public comments (EA, p. 5).
- Meets and complies with the Forest Plan.

As with all land management decisions, the overall goal is to achieve the project objectives while avoiding substantial harm to other resource values. With this goal in mind, I identified the following criteria that I used to make a decision between the alternatives.

1. How the SA addresses the Purpose of and Need for action for the Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance Project and responds to public comments.

Both alternatives result in progress towards desired conditions established in the Forest Plan. However, I selected the SA because it best meets the purpose and need stated in the EA and addresses public comments. I have reviewed the SA in terms of the direction, goals and objectives, and standards and guidelines specified in the Forest Plan. The purpose and need for the project was to consider and respond to Smithers RAPRA's request to reissue a 20-year SUP for use of the site. Smithers RAPRA requested that, in addition to the currently permitted activities, the Forest Service issue a modified SUP that will allow them to meet the competitive industry testing requirements, adapt their testing methods to meet client needs and expectations, meet standard testing surface requirements, and perform surface maintenance and increase lighting at the site to meet safety requirements. The SA will allow the Forest Service to increase management efficiency and move the HNF toward Forest Plan vegetation goals (EA, p. 7), while allowing Smithers RAPRA to continue and expand their operations at the site.

2. How the SA Complies with the Forest Plan.

My decision is based on a review of the record that shows consideration of relevant scientific information, needed actions to meet law, regulation, and policy, and all points of view articulated by the public. As required by the NFMA section 1694(i) I find this project to be consistent with Forest wide goals, the physical, biological and social desired conditions and objectives, and the standards and guidelines included in the Forest Plan. I affirm we have used the best reasonably available science in completing the environmental analyses and disclosing the effects of project actions to the public.

The rationale for my decision has been focused on the purpose and need for this project and the relevant issues brought up by the public. In addition, I have fully considered the environmental and social effects of all the affected resources and have fully reviewed the analysis presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. The effects of the Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance Project on all resources will be within the standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan for all resources.

Smithers RAPRA has used the former Raco Airbase for vehicle testing activities under a series of SUPs since 1972. Given the types of activities that occur under the existing SUP and the activities proposed as part of the SA, in my judgment, any negative or detrimental effects are minimal and acceptable given

the conditions that currently exist at the site, the types of activities proposed at the site (EA, pp. 7-11), and the design criteria that will be implemented (EA, pp. 11-13):

- The site is already disturbed as a result of past military uses and Smithers RAPRA vehicle testing activities. Implementation of the SA will allow Smithers RAPRA to continue their operations at the site while providing an economic benefit to Chippewa County and surrounding areas.
- Potential effects to soil, vegetation, and heritage resources will be minimized by implementation of design criteria during construction activities (EA, pp. 11-13).
- There are no known occurrences of federally listed threatened or endangered plant species in the project area and no suitable habitat for these species is present (EA, pp.28 and 34-31).
- Suitable (unoccupied) habitat for 12 RFSS plant species is present within the project area; however, none of these species were documented during botanical surveys conducted at the site in 2012 and 2014 (EA, p. 31). A determination of “no impact” was made for three of these species and a determination of “may impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing” was made for the remaining nine species (EA, Table 3-3 and p. 31).
- There are known populations of non-native invasive plants (NNIP) at the site, and proposed activities pose a risk to the spread of NNIP. However, implementation of the SA will include NNIP treatments and design criteria meant to limit the introduction and spread of NNIP at the site.
- Occupied habitat for the gray wolf (federally endangered) and the northern long-eared bat (federally threatened) and unoccupied habitat for the Canada lynx (federally threatened) is present within the project area. A determination of “not likely to adversely affect” was made for these three wildlife species (EA, pp. 39-40).
- Occupied habitat for two RFSS wildlife species, little brown bat and sharp-tailed grouse, is present within the project area (EA, pp. 39-40). A determination of “may impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing” was made for these species.
- Unoccupied habitat for eight RFSS wildlife species is present within the project area. A determination of “no impact” was made for three of these species; the determination for the remaining five species is “may impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing” (EA, p. 41).
- The SA affects Management Indicator Species (EA, pp. 38 and 41) when compared to no action as follows:
 - o American marten – project area does not contain habitat
 - o Ruffed grouse – project area does not contain habitat
 - o Sharp-tailed grouse – may reduce available nesting habitat but increase areas for lek sites
 - o Brook trout – project area does not contain habitat

Cumulative effects are woven into each resource section in Chapter 3. I have considered those effects and also reviewed past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future projects in section 3.1.3 Cumulative Effects (EA, pp. 16- 18). Those projects identified in that section were used by the ID team to facilitate their consideration of cumulative effects.

III. Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Therefore, I have determined that an environmental impact statement is not required. I base my findings on the following factors:

A. Context

In the case of site-specific actions, significance depends on the effects in the project's locale rather than the world as a whole. Both short and long-term effects are relevant (FSH 1909.15, 65.1, Part 02).

This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide, or state-wide importance. Discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the intended action and is within the context of local importance in the area associated with the Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance Project area. Chapters 1 and 2 in the EA describe the locations and current conditions of the various resources. The resource effects sections in Chapter 3 reveal that most of the environmental effects are confined to the project area.

The cumulative effects of past management, combined with the current proposal, and reasonably foreseeable future actions for each resource are described in the EA (Chapter 3). These analyses were reviewed in consideration of the CEQ guidance on cumulative effects analysis and results were disclosed in the EA. I am considering these effects for making the following determinations. This decision is consistent with the management direction and Standards and Guidelines outlined in the Forest Plan. Therefore, it is my determination that the effects of implementing the SA will not be locally, regionally, or nationally significant.

B. Intensity

This refers to the severity of impact and the following areas should be considered in evaluating the intensity of the actions. Discussion is organized around the ten significance criteria described in the NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1508.27).

1. Consideration of both beneficial and adverse impacts. I am considering both beneficial and adverse impacts associated with the alternatives as presented in the EA. Overall impacts of implementing this decision will have both beneficial and adverse impacts to resources within the project area; however, the EA's effects analyses found that no significant impacts will occur.

Benefits of this decision include, but are not limited to economic benefits and treatment of NNIP species at the site. The decision will result in an economic benefit to the Chippewa County tax base, including direct and indirect expenditures by Smithers RAPRA and their clients and the addition of up to 10 local jobs as a result of expanded Smithers RAPRA operation at the site.

The HNF has been developing a program to control populations of NNIP across HNF. The Smithers RAPRA project site is highly disturbed as a result of past and present activities at the site, and NNIP populations are present at this location. Both alternatives evaluated in the EA would include design criteria and treatment measures (as directed by the Forest Service) that would be implemented to limit the introduction and spread of NNIP (EA, pp. 12-13), as well as monitoring that would be required (EA, p. 32). I find that design criteria and mitigation measures are in place to discourage introduction of new populations of NNIP, activities are prescribed to reduce or eradicate some of the existing NNIP populations, and that my decision to implement the SA is reasonable.

The potential for adverse impacts from this decision includes impacts to habitat for sensitive plant and animal species, including Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS). Suitable (unoccupied) habitat for 12 RFSS plants (EA, p. 31) and eight RFSS wildlife species (EA, p. 41) is located within the proposed permit area. My choice of SA will result in a determination of No Impact to three RFSS plants and three RFSS wildlife species; however, the SA is not likely to contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability for the remaining species. There are other adverse impacts I am taking into

consideration, which include the effects to threatened and endangered species (see below), potential effects to the soil resources, and potential effects to heritage resources. Some impacts will be minimized and/or avoided using the design criteria as disclosed in the EA (EA, pp. 11-13).

Impacts resulting from the SA are not unique to the HNF or to this project. In consideration of the EA and its associated project file, I have evaluated the beneficial and negative impacts of my decision and have made a determination that these impacts are not significant.

2. Consideration of the effects on public health and safety. The SA will not significantly affect public health and safety. The public uses the site for recreation throughout the year. The effects analyses for recreation (EA, pp. 53-54) and the Forest Service transportation system (EA, pp. 54-56) demonstrate that no changes will occur to these resources over the existing conditions. In addition, the effects analysis for air quality (EA, pp. 61-63) and water resources (EA, pp. 42-49) demonstrate these important resources for public health will not be unduly affected. Based on these discussions, I find that there are no significant impacts to public health and safety.

3. Consideration of the unique characteristics of the geographic area (e.g. such as historic features, park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers or wetlands). There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or wetlands in the project area. However, the project area does include one historic feature/cultural site. This site will be avoided and protected through implementation of mitigation measures found in Chapter 2 of the EA (pp. 51-53). Based on this discussion, I find that there are no significant impacts to any of the unique characteristics of the geographic area.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. I interpret controversy criteria in a FONSI to be the degree to which there is scientific controversy relative to the results of the effects analysis, not whether one favors or opposes a specific alternative. All actions proposed for implementation are similar in type and intensity to activities that have occurred as a result of Smithers RAPRA activities at the site since 1972.

Based upon previous implementation of similar projects, I find the effects of the SA actions on the quality of the human environment as displayed in the EA and supporting documentation in the project file are not considered highly controversial.

5. Consideration of the degree to which effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The human environment is the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people with that environment (40 CFR 1508.14). This decision is similar to many past actions in this analysis area, and its effects upon the human environment are expected to be similar. The project file demonstrates a thorough review of the best available and relevant scientific information, and, where appropriate, the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Activities that will be covered by issuance of a modified SUP are similar to the types of activities that have been implemented by Smithers RAPRA at the site continuously since 1972 under a series of SUPs.

The effects of climate change on this decision and the effects of this decision on climate change do have a level of uncertainty. However, the decision is extremely small in the global atmospheric greenhouse gas context. Project-level effects are not significant when other variables are taken into consideration, including how much greenhouse gas concentrations will change globally, the sensitivity of the earth system to a unit change in greenhouse gases, and how global temperature changes will lead to regional climate impacts. See Section 3.13 (pp. 61-63) in the EA for more discussion on the effects of the project to air quality and greenhouse gases.

There are no unique or unusual characteristics about the area or that the SA would indicate an unknown risk to the human environment. Based on this discussion, I find that no significant effects will result in, or from, highly uncertain or unique risks.

6. The degree to which this action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about future considerations. As previously stated, this decision includes issuance of a SUP that authorizes activities similar to many past actions in the project area. Therefore, the effects are expected to be similar. The associated effects analyses are site-specific to the Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance Project area and are consistent with the Forest Plan. There are no precedent-setting actions proposed in the EA. Based on this discussion, I find that this decision is not a decision in principle about future considerations and does not establish a precedent.

7. Consideration of the action in relation to other actions within individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant effects. Cumulative effects analysis for the project area, by resource, was conducted in the EA (EA, Chapter 3). The EA analyzed multiple federal, state and local projects that have been implemented in Management Area 4.4, “openings,” and Stage 1 in the past, as well as ongoing projects and those proposed in the future. Cumulative effects of this decision, when considered in conjunction with other past, ongoing and reasonably foreseeable activities are not expected to be significant due to timeframes for implementation, protective measures developed in the proposed design criteria, and application of Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines. Based on this discussion, I find that there are no expected cumulatively significant effects.

8. The degree to which the action may affect listed or eligible historic places. This project will meet federal, state and local laws for protection of historic places. A project-specific inventory of the area has been conducted. As described in the EA (pp. 51-53), all known sites will be protected. Heritage resource protection measures will ensure protection of heritage resources in accordance with federal laws and regulations. Based on this discussion, I find that there are no significant effects to eligible historic places or other heritage resources.

9. The degree to which the action may affect an endangered species or their habitat. The action will not adversely affect any proposed, endangered or threatened species or its habitat.

The analyses conducted for wildlife (EA, pp. 33-42) and plant species (EA, pp. 37-33) showed that no suitable habitat is present within the project area for the following federally listed threatened and endangered species: piping plover, Kirtland’s warbler, Hine’s emerald dragonfly, rufa red knot, American Hart’s-tongue fern, pitcher’s thistle, dwarf lake iris, and Houghton’s goldenrod. Therefore, a “No Effect” determination was made for these species and no further effects analyses were conducted in the EA. These species were evaluated fully in the BE.

Given the presence of occupied habitat for the gray wolf (federally endangered) and the northern long-eared bat (federally threatened), and unoccupied habitat for the Canada lynx (federally threatened), a determination of “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” was made for these three species. The Forest Service conducted section 7 (Endangered Species Act [ESA]) consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the USFWS concurred with the Forest Service’s determination of effects to federally listed species in their letter dated June 5, 2015, which is located in the project record.

There is no indication that implementing the proposed Smithers RAPRA activities will increase a currently threatened or endangered species’ present federal listing. If any federally proposed or listed animal or plant species are found at a later date or, if any new information relevant to potential effects of an activity on these species becomes available, the activity would be stopped and the section 7 consultation process, per the ESA of 1973 as amended, would be initiated.

Based on this discussion, I find that there are no significant effects on endangered species or their habitat.

10. Whether the proposed action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The SA is consistent with the Forest Plan. Actions to be implemented under this decision will not threaten a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection laws. Project design criteria listed in the EA (pp. 11-13) will assure compliance with these laws. Documentation associated with the Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance Project does meet National Environmental Policy Act disclosure requirements.

IV. Findings Required by Other Laws, Regulations and Policy

Numerous laws, regulations and agency directives require that this decision be consistent with their provisions. I have determined that this decision is consistent with all laws, regulations and policy. The following summarizes findings required by major environmental laws.

National Forest Management Act (16 USC 1600 ET SEQ.)

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and accompanying regulations require that several specific findings be documented at the project level as follows.

1. **Consistency with Forest Plan (16 USC 1604[i]):** The EA discusses the Forest Plan and the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines applicable to the Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance Project. The decision to implement this project-specific amendment is a separate decision and has been published as a separate DN/FONSI. The project-specific amendment as described in the table below is consistent with 36 CFR §219.11(b) and §219.13. The project-specific amendment to the Forest Plan will be implemented to increase management efficiency and move the HNF toward Forest Plan vegetation goals (EA, p. 7). The amendment includes a reclassification of lands within and adjacent to the proposed permit area as indicated in the following table:

Land Reclassification - Project-specific Forest Plan Amendment

Acres	Change in Total Acreage HNF	Reclassification	Description/Justification
291	From 28,531 acres to 28,240 acres (1.0% decrease) in HNF openings and from 216,227 acres to 216,518 acres (0.13% increase) in Stage 1	Reclassify unsuited openings to unsuited administrative use (Stage 1) - SUP	This is a highly disturbed area under SUP that contains marginal wildlife habitat. Opening composition would remain within Forest Plan vegetation goals.
393	From 121,425 acres to 121,032 acres (0.32% decrease) in HNF MA 4.4	Reclassify timber (suitable) to unsuited administrative use (Stage 1) - SUP	Most of the trees would be removed from the proposed project area to enable use for SUP purposes.

All of the expected impacts from implementing this analysis are consistent with the expected impacts disclosed in the HNF Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the HNF 2006 Forest Plan.

2. ***Suitability for Timber Production (16 USC 1604(g)(2))***: All lands treated by timber management are being converted to unsuitable for reasons explained in section ii. C Rationale for the Final Decision in the Final DNFONSI Smithers Project-specific Forest Plan Amendment.
3. ***Optimality Determination and Appropriateness of Even-aged Management (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(f)(i))***: Even-aged management is not being used in this project.
4. ***Vegetative Treatments - (16 USC 1604 [e] [ff])***: All proposals that involve vegetative treatments of tree cover for any purpose must comply with the following requirements. Based upon my review of the EA, along with the BE and project record, the vegetative treatments will partially meet the seven requirements discussed below. The purpose and need of this project is to consider and respond to the Smithers RAPRA request to reissue the SUP for use of the Raco Airbase. The Smithers RAPRA Special Use Permit Reissuance Project - Project-specific Forest Plan Amendment Final DN/FONSI describes the reclassification of the lands to unsuitable for administrative use Stage 1, so the land will no longer be managed for timber.
 - a) **Be best suited to the multiple-use goals stated in the Forest Plan.** Development of the EA and subsequent analysis were completed in an integrated fashion using an ID Team and public input. The purpose and need section in the EA (Chapter 1) discusses the link to one of the goals of land use management set forth by the Forest Plan to provide and maintain SUPs in accordance with resource management direction and to meet identified Forest and public needs.
 - b) **Assures that technology and knowledge exists to adequately restock lands within five years after the final harvest.** The land is being partially cleared for the reasons outlined in the EA and will not be regenerated.
 - c) **Not to be chosen primarily because they will give the greatest dollar return.** This decision is based on a variety of reasons as discussed earlier, and not solely on economics.
 - d) **Be chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.** In this decision, I am considering the effects on residual trees and adjacent stands. Based on the analysis disclosed in the EA, BE, and project record, the SA provides the best balance of management practices to meet the project purpose and need.
 - e) **Be selected to avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and to ensure conservation of soil and water resources.** The SA will impair site productivity because of the installation of additional asphalt runways, however, it is being reclassified as lands unsuitable administrative use, Stage 1.
 - f) **Be selected to provide the desired effects on water quality and quantity, wildlife, regeneration of desired tree species, forage production, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.** This decision meets the purpose and need of the project. Project design criteria, as well as application of Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, will be used in concert with vegetative management to meet the purpose and need of the project. This criterion does not fully apply to this project. The Permittee has requested the changes to meet their activity needs.
 - g) **Be practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements and total costs of preparation, logging and administration.** The ID Team assessed the existing transportation system within the project area and proposed changes only when necessary to meet SUP objectives. This decision's transportation system will meet the objectives of the SA. This criterion does not fully apply to this project. The Permittee has requested the changes to meet their activity needs.

5. ***Sensitive Species:*** Federal law and direction applicable to RFSS include the National Forest Management Act and the Forest Service Manual 2670. In making this decision, I have reviewed the analysis and projected effects on all RFSS plant and animal species listed as occurring or possibly occurring within the project area. There is no indication that the SA will cause effects different than those disclosed in the BE. For all RFSS species indicated in the BE, either a no impact, or may impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or loss of viability determination was made. These determinations serve as the basis for the decision regarding sensitive species.

I concur with the findings documented for these species in the BE.

The Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Standards

No lakes, ponds, or streams are located within the decision area; in addition, no wetlands, riparian corridors or floodplains are present within the decision area (EA, pp. 42-49). Supporting information in the project record indicates that implementation of this decision will not produce appreciable impacts on aquatic resources; therefore, the Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Standards will be met.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 USC 1531 ET. SEQ.)

As required by the ESA, a Biological Assessment, included in the project's BE was prepared addressing the potential effects to proposed, threatened or endangered species. Evaluations resulted in a finding of "No Effect" for the following federally threatened (THR) species and federally endangered (END) species: piping plover (END), Kirtland's warbler (END), Hine's emerald dragonfly (END), rufa red knot (THR), American Hart's-tongue fern (THR), pitcher's thistle (THR), dwarf lake iris (THR), and Houghton's goldenrod (THR). Evaluations resulted in findings of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" for the following federally threatened and endangered species described in the BE: gray wolf (END), northern long-eared bat (THR) and Canada lynx (THR). The USFWS concurred with Forest Service determinations of effect in a letter dated June 5, 2015.

National Historic Preservation Act

One archaeological site was identified within the project area. This site will be avoided and protected following Forest Plan direction and implementation of proposed design criteria (EA, pp. 51-53) that are included as part of this decision to protect heritage resources.

Consultation with the Michigan State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) was conducted and two letters were received that expressed the opinion of the SHPO that no historic properties are affected from this decision and that the Raco Airbase does not meet the criteria for listing on the NRHP (Appendix E of the EA). If any unknown sites are found within the area of potential effect during project implementation, the project would be redesigned to avoid the site or measures would be designed to mitigate the effects of the project on the site and submitted to the Michigan SHPO as required by law for their review and consultation. Based upon analysis in the project record, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to heritage resources from implementation of the proposed alternative are anticipated (EA, p. 53); therefore this decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers within the project area for this decision.

Compliance with Other Regulations and Policies

Executive Order 12898 was signed on February 11, 1994, and requires that, "federal actions address environmental justice in minority populations and low-income populations to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, and consistent with the principles set forth in the report on the National Performance Review, each federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human

health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States . . .” Public involvement occurred for this project and no adversely impacted local minority or low-income populations were identified that will be affected by this project (EA, pp. 58-61). I have considered the effects of this project on low income and minority populations and concluded that my selection of the Proposed Action Alternative will be consistent with the intent of Executive Order 12898. The local community was notified of this project through the public participation process (project file).

Summary of Findings

My review of the analysis prepared by the ID Team indicates that this decision is consistent with Forest Plan management direction, compliant with other applicable laws, and responds to public comments. After thorough consideration, I have determined that this decision will not constitute a major federal action, individually or cumulatively, and the SA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The site-specific actions of the SA, in both the short and long-term, will not be significant. Therefore, I have determined that preparation of an environmental impact statement is not needed.

Implementation

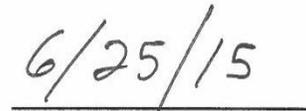
Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.12, this final decision can be implemented on, but not before, the fifth business day following the end of the objection filing period. Depending on workload, the SUP will be issued on July 31, 2015, and will extend until July 31, 2035.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Ginger Molitor, NEPA Coordinator, at (906) 428-5835, TDD (for hearing impaired) (906) 789-3337; or me at (906) 643-7900, ext. 113 TDD (906) 643-7611.



ROBERT WEST
District Ranger



DATE

Errata

These changes are to the March 2015 EA.

Erratum # 1:

Table 2-1 (EA, p. 7) of the draft EA states:

Table 2-1 Land Reclassification - Project-specific Forest Plan Amendment

Acres	Reclassification	Description/Justification
543	Reclassify unsuited wildlife habitat (openings) to unsuited administrative use (stage 1) - SUP	This is a highly disturbed area under SUP that contains marginal wildlife habitat. Changing the classification would allow for HNF resources to be used for improvement of other openings with better habitat. Opening composition would remain within Forest Plan vegetation goals.
144	Reclassify timber (suitable) to unsuited administrative use (stage 1) - SUP	Most of the trees would be removed; therefore, the area could be used for other purposes under SUP as described below.

Following publication of the draft, an error was discovered in the shapefiles used to determine the acreages of the proposed land reclassification. Therefore, Table 2-1 was modified to describe the reclassification and correct the acres as shown in the **corrected** table below:

Table 2-1 Land Reclassification - Project-specific Forest Plan Amendment

Acres	Change in Total Acreage HNF	Reclassification	Description/Justification
291	From 28,531 acres to 28,240 acres (1.0% decrease) in HNF openings and from 216,227 acres to 216,518 acres (0.13% increase) in Stage 1	Reclassify unsuited openings to unsuited administrative use (Stage 1) - SUP	This is a highly disturbed area under SUP that contains marginal wildlife habitat. Opening composition would remain within Forest Plan vegetation goals.
393	From 121,425 acres to 121,032 acres (0.32% decrease) in HNF MA 4.4	Reclassify timber (suitable) to unsuited administrative use (Stage 1) - SUP	Most of the trees would be removed from the proposed project area to enable use for SUP purposes.

Erratum #2:

Section 3.4.5, Timber Resources (p. 30), **currently** states:

The conversion of land classification within the proposed permit area would require a site-specific amendment to the Forest Plan. As a result of this proposed amendment, land within the existing and proposed permit area would be reclassified as follows:

- Approximately 144 acres of timber (including the 131 acres proposed to be cleared) within the proposed permit area would be reclassified from suitable for timber production to unsuitable for timber production administrative opening (Stage 1). Following reclassification of the timber stands and subsequent timber sale, no future timber sales would occur.
- Approximately 543 acres of land classified as unsuitable for timber production wildlife openings would be reclassified to unsuitable for timber production Stage 1 administrative use.

The two bullets **should** state

- Approximately 393 acres of timber (including the 131 acres proposed to be cleared) within the proposed permit area would be reclassified from suitable for timber production to unsuitable for timber production administrative opening (Stage 1). Following reclassification of the timber stands and subsequent timber sale, no future timber sales would occur.
- Approximately 291 acres of land classified as unsuitable for timber production wildlife openings would be reclassified to unsuitable for timber production Stage 1 administrative use.

The difference is due to incorrect shapefiles used to create Table 2-1 (see Erratum #1 above).

Addenda

Addendum #1:

Section 3.5.3, page 34, includes a list of federally listed animal species whose ranges include Chippewa County. The bullet for the northern long-eared bat **currently** states:

- Northern Long-eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) – Proposed Endangered (Federal)

The northern long-eared bat was listed as threatened by the USFWS on April 2, 2015. The effective date of the listing is May 4, 2015. Therefore, the bullet for the northern long-eared bat **should** state:

- Northern Long-eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) – Threatened (Federal)

Addendum #2

Appendix C of the EA includes a table entitled, “Wildlife species identified on the list of Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS), Hiawatha National Forest.” In addition to identifying the northern long-eared bat as an RFSS, it also **currently** lists the federal designation as Proposed Endangered (PE).

The northern long-eared bat was officially listed a federally threatened on April 2, 2015 (see Addendum #1 above). Therefore, this table was modified to show the updated federal status as shown in the **corrected** table below:

**Wildlife species identified on the list of Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS)
Hiawatha National Forest**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status ¹			Habitat
		Federal	State	FS Region 9	
Occupied Habitat²					
Northern Long-eared Bat	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	T		SS	Forest habitats; interspersed wetlands and field edges for foraging
Sharp-tailed Grouse	<i>Tympanuchus phasianellus</i>			SS	Grasslands, shrub lands, and woodland edges.
Little Brown Bat	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>			SS	Man-made structures; general forest habitats
Unoccupied Habitat³ – Wildlife Species					
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		SC	SS	Boreal and northern hardwood forests.
LeConte’s Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus leconteii</i>			SS	Wet grasslands and grassy meadows
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>		E	SS	Open areas (marshes, grasslands, pastures, and peatland).

**Wildlife species identified on the list of Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS)
Hiawatha National Forest**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status ¹			Habitat
		Federal	State	FS Region 9	
Prairie Warbler	<i>Dendroica discolor</i>		E	SS	Open woodlands, scrublands, and overgrown fields – no doc in EUP.
Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus migrans</i>		E	SS	Open, agricultural areas interspersed with shrub lands.
Nabokov's Blue	<i>Plebejus idas nabokovi</i>		T	SS	Rocky outcrops in sandy openings w/dwarf bilberry
Connecticut Warbler	<i>Oporornis agilis</i>			SS	Spruce bogs and moist woodlands.
Black-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides arcticus</i>			SS	Conifer stands especially following fire.
Species Without Suitable Habitat⁴					
Lake Sturgeon	<i>Acipenser fulvescens</i>		T	SS	Freshwater lakes and rivers
Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>		T	SS	Large tracts of mature lowland forest
Land Snail	<i>Catinella exile</i>			SS	Cobble beaches and fen.
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>			SS	Inland lakes and marshes
Yellow Rail	<i>Coturnicops noveboracensis</i>		T	SS	Large wet meadows dominated by mat-forming sedge.
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>		T	SS	Large, shallow lakes
Blanding's Turtle	<i>Emydoidea blandingii</i>			SS	Ponds, marshes, swamps, lake inlets and coves of central UP
Land Snail	<i>Euconulus alderi</i>			SS	Fens, cobble beach, tamarack sedge wetlands, and white cedar wetlands
American Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i>		E	SS	Areas with high cliffs overlooking large openings
Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>		T	SS	Inland lakes
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>		SC	SS	Various habitats near large bodies of water
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>		T	SS	Sand-gravel, sparsely vegetated beaches of large bodies of water
Green-faced Clubtail	<i>Gomphus viridifrons</i>			SS	Habitats adjacent to streams and small rivers
Black-crowned Night-heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			SS	Wetlands generally on Great Lakes shorelines

**Wildlife species identified on the list of Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS)
Hiawatha National Forest**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status ¹			Habitat
		Federal	State	FS Region 9	
Land Snail	<i>Planogyra asteriscus</i>		SC	SS	Fens and white cedar wetland communities
Incurvate Emerald Dragonfly	<i>Somatochlora incurvata</i>			SS	Sphagnum bogs
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		T	SS	Sand-gravel, sparsely vegetated beaches of large bodies of water
Lake Huron Locust	<i>Trimerotropis huroniana</i>		T	SS	Sparsely vegetated, high-quality coastal sand dunes
Land Snail	<i>Vallonia albula</i>			SS	Carbonate cliffs and outcrops
Land Snail	<i>Vertigo bollesiana</i>			SS	Carbonate cliffs, outcrops, and lakeshore ledges
Land Snail	<i>Vertigo morsei</i>			SS	Calcareous fens
Land Snail	<i>Vertigo paradoxa</i>			SS	Carbonate cliffs and outcrops
Ebony Boghaunter	<i>Williamsonia fletcheri</i>		SC	SS	Bogs, fens and hardwood swamps
Ringed Boghaunter	<i>Williamsonia lintneri</i>			SS	Sphagnum bog pools

¹ E = Endangered (State and Federal); T = Threatened (State and Federal); PE = Proposed Endangered; (SS = Forest Service Region 9 Sensitive Species; SC = Michigan State Special Concern Species

² Species whose presence has been reported in the general permit area or were identified during current field studies.

³ Species whose presence has not been reported but which have suitable habitat within or immediately adjacent to the Action Area.

⁴ Species whose presence has not been documented and which do not have suitable habitat in the Action Area, or species not present and whose known range does not extend into the Action Area

Appendix A – Public Comments

From: [Dave Slater](#)
To: [FS-comments-eastern-hiawatha](#)
Subject: Smithers RAPRA SUP Reissuance
Date: Monday, March 30, 2015 3:16:47 PM

Robert West, District Ranger:

We are in support of the Modified Permit Reissuance Alternative in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Smithers RAPRA Special Use Permit Reissuance.

If necessary, please move forward with the Site-Specific Forest Plan Amendment to reclassify lands within the proposed permit area. Then reissue a 20-year Special Use Permit (SUP) to Smithers Scientific Services Inc., dba (Smithers RAPRA) for this proposed project.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment and for moving this project forward towards fruition.

Sincerely:

David F. Slater

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