

**Forest Road and Trail Designation Plan for DNR- and County-  
Administered Forest Lands in Hubbard County**

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**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
and  
Hubbard County Natural Resource Management Department**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### ***Purpose***

This plan identifies proposed forest road and trail use designations for state- and county-administered forest lands in Hubbard County, Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Hubbard County Natural Resource Management Department jointly developed the proposals in this plan.

Legislation enacted in 2003 restricts the use of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) on State Forest lands administered by the Commissioner to roads and trails specifically designated and signed for use by OHVs (2003 MN Laws, Chapter 128).

### ***Lands Covered by This Plan***

This road and trail designation plan covers all county- and DNR Division of Forestry-administered lands in Hubbard County. There are approximately 138,000 acres of county-administered land and 79,000 acres of DNR Division of Forestry-administered land in the county.

### ***Proposed Motor Vehicle Use Classification***

The DNR classifies State Forests as *managed*, *limited*, or *closed* with respect to motor vehicle use. All State Forest lands in Hubbard County are currently classified as *managed*. County land is currently managed as ‘*open unless posted closed*’ to motor vehicle use which is similar to the State’s *managed* classification.

The Work Team analyzed the eight criteria to be considered when classifying forest lands for motor vehicle use and recommends adopting the *limited* classification for state- and county-administered forest lands in Hubbard County. The team’s analysis of the classification criteria and its classification recommendation are contained in a document entitled *Review of the Classification for Motor Vehicle Use on State and County Forest Lands in Hubbard County* (MN DNR and Hubbard County, 2004).

If the proposed ‘*limited*’ classification is adopted and implemented the general rule for motor vehicle use will change from ‘*open unless posted closed*’ to ‘*closed unless posted open*.’

### ***Summary of Existing Routes***

In 2003, DNR staff documented over 1,100 miles of forest roads, motorized and non-motorized trails, and other access routes on DNR Forestry and Hubbard County administered lands that showed signs of ongoing human use.

In Hubbard County there are 72 miles of currently designated State Forest Roads. There are approximately 197 miles of County Forest Roads of which 28 miles are maintained and 169 miles are classified as unmaintained. There are 95 miles of existing designated ATV trail in Hubbard County. There are currently 115 miles of designated Off Highway Motorcycle trail in Hubbard County. There are no existing designated Off Road Vehicle trails in Hubbard County.

There are 320 miles of snowmobile trails in the county. The North Country Trail is a non-motorized trail primarily intended for hiking. Eleven miles of the North Country Trail have been signed in the Paul Bunyan State Forest extending from the Cass County/Hubbard County line to the Akeley Cutoff State Forest Road.

Almost half of the forest access routes on DNR Forestry and county administered forest lands in Hubbard County currently have no designation as either a forest road or recreational trail. These undesignated routes include old logging roads, skid trails, and informal routes created by users. At present, most of these undesignated routes are open to both motorized and non-motorized uses.

## ***Proposed Road and Trail Designations***

### **Forest Roads**

The planning team's recommendation is to designate 89 miles as system forest roads. About 65 miles are located on state lands and 24 miles on county lands. System forest roads will typically be graveled and maintained to a level that allows use by most highway-licensed vehicles.

The planning team's recommendation is to designate 484 miles as minimum maintenance forest roads. About 390 miles of these minimum maintenance roads are on county-administered lands and 94 miles are on state-administered forest land. Minimum maintenance roads will be open to motorized vehicles but not maintained to the level where low clearance highway vehicles can routinely travel on them.

### **Recreational Trails**

This plan does not recommend any changes to the designated non-motorized recreational trails or the snowmobile trail system in Hubbard County.

This plan recommends designation of 149 miles of ATV trails on state and county forest lands.

This plan recommends a 100-mile recreational OHM trail system, a reduction of 15 miles from the existing system.

An 8-mile ORV trail is proposed for the southern unit of the Paul Bunyan State Forest.

### **Undesignated Routes**

About 421 miles of existing inventoried routes were not designated for any use. Two hundred seventy miles (270) of the undesignated routes are on state-administered land and 151 miles are on county-administered land. These routes will be neither forest roads nor designated recreational trails. The routes have no designated uses and will not be signed, mapped, or actively maintained.

## ***Maps***

The routes that are proposed to be open to use by various types of motor vehicles are depicted on maps, which are incorporated in this plan by reference:

1. ATV Routes
2. OHM Routes
3. ORV Routes
4. Highway-licensed Vehicle Routes

## INTRODUCTION

Legislation enacted in 2003 requires the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to move toward a '*closed unless posted open*' management policy for off-highway vehicles (OHVs) on State Forest lands. In the future, the use of off-highway vehicles on State Forest land will generally be restricted to roads and trails that are specifically designated and signed for use by OHVs.

Off-highway vehicles include all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-highway motorcycles (OHMs), and off-road vehicles (ORVs), such as Jeeps and four-wheel drive trucks, but not snowmobiles (see the [Glossary](#) for further definition of vehicle types). This plan identifies the roads and trails that the MN DNR and the Hubbard County Natural Resource Management Department propose to designate for various motorized and non-motorized uses on state- and county-administered forest lands in Hubbard County.

## Process

In August 2003, an interdisciplinary team of staff from the DNR divisions of Forestry, Trails & Waterways, Ecological Services, Fish & Wildlife, and Enforcement, and the Hubbard County Natural Resource Management Department was established to complete the following tasks:

1. Inventory existing forest access routes on state- and county-administered forest lands within Hubbard County.
2. Consider the criteria for classification of forest lands for motor vehicle use and recommend changing the classification to either *limited* or *closed*.
3. Evaluate the forest access routes and propose which routes should be open to various motorized uses in the future.
4. Present the team's recommendations for road and trail use designations and forest reclassification for public review and comment.

Due to intermingled public ownership, Hubbard County Natural Resource Management and the DNR have a long-standing history of collaboration on issues that cross ownerships. Both agencies agreed that a plan would be more complete and acceptable to the public if it included both state- and county-administered lands. The Hubbard County Board of Commissioners concurred with the formation of a team of state and county resource managers to assess existing conditions and plan for future OHV use in the county.

To develop the proposal for road and trail designations on forest lands in Hubbard County, the planning team needed documentation of existing roads and trails. While both agencies have forest road inventories, neither showed a complete picture of all logging and user-created access routes. The first step was to ride or walk all routes within State Forest boundaries that showed evidence of ongoing human use. Global positioning system (GPS) equipment was used to record trail location and attributes. The access route inventory data were added to base maps. The base maps were overlaid with data showing existing recreation trails, national wetlands inventory, public waters inventory, forest cover-types, soils, special wildlife areas, and Natural Heritage elements to show relationships between natural and recreational resources. Hubbard County

Natural Resource Management provided DNR with their road and forest access inventory information.

The team then evaluated existing recreational trails and the inventoried forest access routes for opportunities to create a recreational OHV trail system generally removed from forest roads and sensitive natural resources. It is intended that these OHV trails provide a safe recreational riding experience. In addition, the team evaluated all documented access routes to determine those that can sustain continued motorized use. Those that cannot sustain continued motorized use were not designated as roads or trails and will be closed to most motor vehicle uses.

## **DESCRIPTION OF LANDS COVERED BY THIS PLAN**

### ***Location, Acreage, and Ownership***

This road and trail designation plan covers all County- and DNR Division of Forestry-administered lands in Hubbard County. There are approximately 138,000 acres of county-administered land and 79,000 acres of DNR Division of Forestry-administered land in Hubbard County. The [location map](#) provides an overview of state and county forest lands in the county.

There are two State Forests (Badoura, Paul Bunyan) located entirely within Hubbard County. Two additional State Forests (Huntersville, Mississippi Headwaters) are located partially within the county. The Paul Bunyan State Forest boundary encompasses about 105,000 acres, of which about 85,000 acres is state- or county-administered. The Badoura State Forest boundary encompasses about 16,000 acres in the southeastern portion of the county, of which about 9,000 acres is state or county land. The Huntersville State Forest is located primarily in Wadena County. There is one section (about 640 acres) of the Huntersville State Forest located in southern Hubbard County; the entire section is state land. The Mississippi Headwaters State Forest is located in Beltrami, Clearwater, and Hubbard counties. About 6,000 acres in the northwestern corner of Hubbard County are part of the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest; about 5,500 or the 6,000 acres are county or state land.

## ***Natural Resource Assessment***

### **Landforms and Soils**

Hubbard County is located in north central Minnesota. It is characterized by hilly glacial moraines and level to sloping till plains and outwash plains.

The Guthrie Till Plain, a nearly level to sloping ground moraine dissected by glacial melt water channels, dominates the northern one-third of the county. Glacial till materials in this area are predominantly sandy loam and the melt water drainage ways consist of sandy outwash soils. Local relief ranges from a few feet throughout most of the till plain to more than 90 feet along major drainage ways. Soils are dominated by well and moderately well drained, calcareous sandy loam and loam with an abundance of boulders, stones, and cobbles. The major soils in this area are relatively consistent and uniform and include Rockwood, Blowers, Nebish, and Beltrami soils.

The Itasca Moraine, characterized by steep, rugged hills typical of an end moraine, dominates the central part of the county. Local relief ranges from 30 feet in small swales to more than 100 feet between hilltops and small marshes. Soil materials are predominantly well-drained calcareous sandy loam and loam, with significant deposits of sand and gravel. Small closed depressional wetlands are common throughout this moraine. The soils in this area are complex and variable, and include Steamboat, Sol, and Two Inlets soils. The well-drained Steamboat soil with a sandy loam surface and the excessively well-drained Two Inlets soil with a loamy sand surface are often intermingled on the landscape and mapped as soil complexes.

The Park Rapids Sand Plain dominates the southern one-third of the county. This outwash plain is undulating and rolling in the lakes region north of Park Rapids to nearly level to gently undulating south of Park Rapids. The outwash is dominated by well-drained sandy and gravelly soils. The major soils in this area include Bootlake, Graycalm, Sugarbush, Two Inlets, Verndale, Nymore, Dorset, and Menahga soils.

## **Forest and Water Resources**

Mixed red and white pine was once a dominant forest community on the well-drained moraines. Aspen forests have largely replaced them and contribute to the forest products economy. Small to medium sized lakes are common on pitted outwash plains, and within the moraines. There are 313 lakes within the county, 68 that have a surface area greater than 150 acres. A segment of the Mississippi River flows through the northwest corner of the county and the Crow Wing River drains the southern portion of the county. The combination of hills, lakes, and streams is a potent draw to year-around tourism. Hiking, fishing, camping, trail riding, hunting, snowmobiling, and skiing are popular recreational activities.

## **Wildlife Features**

**Prairie Chicken and Sandhill Crane Special Management Areas** - Prairie chickens require a proper balance of wetland, brushland, and grassland. In southeastern Hubbard County there is a unique interspersed of brush land, sedge meadow, wetland and open upland areas that are presently supporting populations of sandhill cranes, prairie chickens and other species associated with a brushland complex. Management within this area will promote grassland and maintain the brushland in an early stage of growth. Non-motorized recreation is emphasized.

**Ruffed Grouse Special Management Areas** - Much of Hubbard County's mixed upland forest is good ruffed grouse habitat, however, two areas have been targeted for intensive management. Area managers work jointly in cutting area design and layout of timber accesses that are used as walking trails. In these two special management areas, all routes leading away from forest roads are closed to motorized travel.

## **Recreation Assessment**

**Developed Campgrounds** - Gulch Lakes and Mantrap Lake are DNR-managed forest campgrounds in the area. A number of private campgrounds are also located in Hubbard

County, providing additional opportunities for camping. Lake Itasca State Park, with over 32,000 acres and 100 lakes, extends into Hubbard County on the west. Here visitors find a range of camping experiences, miles of developed trails, interpretive centers and the headwaters of the Mississippi River. While the park is closed to OHV activities, it is a staging area for recreation in the Paul Bunyan and other State Forests in the area.

**Dispersed Camping** - Dispersed camping is permitted on forest lands. State Forest rules govern length of stay, waste disposal, firewood collection, and construction or improvement of a campsite. Certain areas within the forest are signed to prohibit camping.

**Mountain Bikes** - Mountain bikes are allowed to use forest roads and trails on state and county lands. In addition, they may use designated multi-use trails such as the Paul Bunyan State Trail, the Martineau Recreation Trail and the Heartland State Trail (including the earth surfaced portion). Mountain bikes are not permitted to use the North Country Trail.

**Cross-Country Skiing** - The Itascatur Run-Ski-Bike Club maintains and grooms the 12-kilometer Soaring Eagles Ski Trail located nine miles north of Park Rapids. Funding for maintenance and operation activities is provided through the Minnesota Trail Assistance Program. These trails are open to hiking but not to uses that would damage the trail surface.

**Hiking** - When completed, the North Country Trail (NCT) will be the longest hiking trail in the United States. Eleven miles of trail has been completed and certified in the Paul Bunyan State Forest extending from the Cass County/Hubbard County line to the Akeley Cutoff State Forest Road. Another completed segment is located in Itasca State Park and into the region west of the Itasca State Park known as the Gardner/Bad Medicine Lake Area. There are additional hiking opportunities available on the Heartland and Paul Bunyan State Trails, which are non-motorized corridors except for snowmobiles.

**Managed Walking Trails** - DNR Forestry has observed a policy of providing forest trails for non-motorized recreation such as hunting, hiking, skiing, nature study, and biking. Since the early 1990s, most newly constructed timber access trails that will be needed for future forest management have been seeded with clover and closed with a sign and/or barrier to restrict motorized use and encourage foot travel.

**Horses** - All roads and trails on DNR Forestry-administered lands and Hubbard County-administered lands are open to horseback riding, unless posted closed to such activity. A historically popular area for horseback riders has been the site of the old CCC camp along County Road 91 in the south unit of the Paul Bunyan State Forest. Horseback riders continue to use the site for camping and as a staging area for the trails in the vicinity. Two or three organized trail rides are staged from the CCC camp each year. The earth-surfaced trail within the right-of-way of the Park Rapids to Walker segment of the Heartland State Trail and the unpaved portion of the Paul Bunyan State Trail between Walker and Bemidji are also open to horseback riding.

## **EXISTING FOREST ACCESS ROUTE INVENTORY**

### ***Sources of Data***

In 2003, DNR staff and MCC (Minnesota Conservation Corps) field crews documented nearly 1,100 miles of forest roads and motorized and non-motorized access routes on DNR Forestry and Hubbard County administered lands that showed signs of ongoing human use. The inventory includes designated off-highway vehicle trails and other motorized and non-motorized routes.

Field crews used many sources of information, including the State Forest Road inventory, existing motorized trail inventories, various maps and aerial photos to plan and monitor their progress. Hubbard County Natural Resource Management provided DNR with their road and forest access inventory. Many of the access routes were traveled by ATVs equipped with global positioning system (GPS) units. Field crews walked trails that were not wide enough or were unsafe for ATV travel. Crews collected data such as trail width, apparent use, trail surface condition, and soil composition. For all trails not designated for a specific use, field crews documented the apparent uses. Trail width, surface condition, and tire track observations all aided in assessing apparent uses. The field crews did not inventory user-developed trails that were not visible because of vegetation or where signs of motorized use were not apparent.

### ***Designated Forest Roads***

In Hubbard County there are about 72 miles of previously inventoried State Forest Roads. There are approximately 197 miles of county forest roads of which 28 miles are maintained and 169 miles are classified as unmaintained. Usually, all types of motor vehicles may operate on state and county forest roads. However, some forest roads may be closed to some types of motor vehicles or at certain times of the year based on safety concerns or resource management objectives.

### ***Designated Recreation Trails***

**ATV** – There are 95 miles of existing designated ATV trail in Hubbard County. The Round River Drive ATV Trail is a 53-mile designated trail with 50 miles in the Paul Bunyan State Forest and 3 miles outside the state forest boundary. The Forest Riders ATV Club maintains an additional 42 miles of trail in Hubbard County; 41 of which are outside state forest boundaries. The Forest Riders ATV Trail System extends into Becker County. While the trails are generally open to ATVs from May 15 to November 1 each year, temporary closures may be instituted to protect the treadway.

**OHM** – There are currently 115 miles of designated OHM trail in the Martineau Recreation Trail system located entirely within or directly adjacent to the south unit of the Paul Bunyan State Forest. While the trails are generally open to off-highway motorcycles from May 15 to November 1 each year, temporary closures may be instituted to protect the treadway. The trail system was created by the Norseman Motorcycle Club and now is managed by the Akeley Trail Riders through the Minnesota Trail Assistance Program and is operated under a trail permit issued by the Division of Forestry.

**ORV** – There are no existing designated ORV trails in Hubbard County. All forest roads on state and county lands in the planning area are open to ORVs unless posted closed.

**Snowmobiles** - Within Hubbard County there are 320 miles of snowmobile trails. The Trails and Waterways Division manages 129 miles as unit trails, and snowmobile clubs manage 191 miles through the Minnesota Trail Assistance Program.

**North Country Trail** - Eleven miles of trail has been completed in the Paul Bunyan State Forest extending from the Cass County/Hubbard County line to the Akeley Cutoff State Forest Road. The North Country Trail is a non-motorized trail intended for hiking.

**Managed Walking Trails** - Field inventory documented approximately 64 miles of trails managed for non-motorized use. Some of these are the result of closing newly constructed timber access roads and others are trails created for the express purpose of foot access to recreational resources. Examples of these types of opportunities include trails in the Paul Bunyan Refuge south of the Gulch Lakes and access to Island and Crappie Lakes south of the Halvorson Trail forest road.

**Undesignated Routes** - In 2003, DNR staff documented over 400 miles of undesignated routes on DNR Forestry and county administered forest lands in Hubbard County. Some of these routes are based on data contributed by Hubbard County GIS rather than on direct field inventory using GPS. The undesignated routes include logging roads, skid trails, and informal routes created by users. At present, most of these routes are open to motorized and non-motorized use, however, a small percentage are closed with a sign or barrier and open only to non-motorized use.

## **PROPOSED MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATION**

The DNR classifies State Forests as *managed*, *limited*, or *closed* with respect to motor vehicle use. The classifications are characterized as follows:

**Managed Forest Lands.** Forest roads and forest trails are open to recreational motor vehicle use unless posted closed. These forest lands are characterized by a low intensity of use by OHVs, a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities, widely dispersed recreational use, and little competition among visitors for recreational use of the land. Signing and enforcement restrict motor vehicle use in sensitive resource areas and on non-motorized trails.

**Limited Forest Lands.** Forest roads are open to motor vehicles use unless posted closed. Forest trails are closed to motor vehicle use, except where designated and signed to permit specific motorized uses. These forests are characterized by moderate to high levels of motorized and non-motorized recreational use. It is necessary to designate OHV trails so that OHV use occurs only in suitable and sustainable locations.

**Closed Forest Lands.** Forest roads are open to motor vehicles licensed for highway use. No OHVs are permitted, except that OHVs may operate on frozen public waters (e.g., across lakes for ice fishing). These lands are characterized by high susceptibility to damage by recreational motor vehicle use or have a history that precludes motorized use. Areas closed to motor vehicle use by statute or regulation (e.g., State Forest lands within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness) are automatically classified as '*closed*.'

All State Forest lands in Hubbard County are currently classified as *managed*. County land is currently managed as ‘*open unless posted closed*’ to motor vehicle use which is similar to the State’s *managed* classification.

Recently enacted legislation (*MN Laws 2003, Chapter 128, Article 1, Section 167*) requires the DNR to review the classification of all ‘*managed*’ State Forest lands and to change the classification to ‘*limited*’ or ‘*closed*.’ The 2003 legislation also applies the ‘*closed unless posted open*’ policy to county-administered land within State Forest boundaries unless the county board adopts a resolution that modifies the restrictions on OHV use on county lands. The Hubbard Field OHV Team analyzed the eight criteria to be considered when classifying forest lands for motor vehicle use and recommends adopting the *limited* classification for state- and county-administered forest lands covered by this plan. The team’s analysis of the classification criteria and its classification recommendation are contained in a document entitled *Review of the Classification for Motor Vehicle Use on State and County Forest Lands in Hubbard County* (MN DNR and Hubbard County, 2004).

### ***Proposed Areas with Restrictions on Recreational Motor Vehicle Use***

The road and trail use designations proposed in this plan assume that the state- and county-administered forest lands will be classified as *limited* in the future. While the *limited* classification allows designation of trails for OHV use it does not require trails in all areas. To provide a diversity of recreational opportunities, this plan proposes some areas where OHV trails will not be designated. However, the exemptions that allow use of ATVs off of designated trails for certain big game hunting and trapping activities will still apply in these areas.

The team that developed this road and trail designation plan initially considered classifying the following areas as *closed* with respect to motor vehicle use. This would have meant that highway-licensed vehicles could use designated forest roads and that OHVs not licensed for highway use would be prohibited. The prohibition on OHVs would have applied to ATVs used in conjunction with big game hunting and trapping activities. However, the law directing the DNR to complete the forest reclassification and road/trail designation process (*MN Laws 2003, Chapter 128, Article 1, Section 167*) requires that the reclassification and designation be done on a ‘forest-by-forest and area-by-area’ basis and that the process must provide a ‘similar status for each of the other areas’ being reviewed. This was interpreted to mean that all lands within a single State Forest had to receive the same classification. The forest lands outside of State Forest boundaries were also treated as a single ‘area.’ Since the team was recommending a *limited* classification for the vast majority of lands, that classification will apply to all forest lands in Hubbard County.

The DNR will observe the level of ATV use in these areas under the exception in the State Forest Rules that allows use of ATVs off of designated trails for certain big game hunting and trapping activities. If the level of ATV use is significant based on the classification criteria (e.g. resource impacts, competing interests among different user groups, law enforcement concerns) the DNR may reconsider the classification of these areas in the future.

**Gulch Lakes Area** - The DNR and Hubbard County propose to manage a parcel of approximately 7,200 acres of state- and county-administered lands for non-motorized recreation opportunities. This area is located halfway between Bemidji and Park Rapids, southeast of Lake George in the south unit of the Paul Bunyan State Forest. The Gulch Lakes Area is bounded by West Gulch Forest Road, Spur 1 Forest Road, Beaver Lakes Trail, Teepee Lakes Trail, and Halvorson Forest Road. It will emphasize non-motorized recreation in a landform that is uniquely scenic and well suited for such use. Of particular interest are Island Lake and Crappie Lake (a managed trout lake) that are popular for walk-in fishing. The Gulch Lakes Recreation Area (campground and day-use) is located within the proposed area as is a portion of the Paul Bunyan Game Refuge, a popular small game, archery, and muzzleloader hunting location. In addition, plans are being made to route the North County Trail (NCT) through the vicinity. Hubbard County participation in this designation is key since the county administers nearly 25% of the land within the proposed area.

**Mantrap Lake Area** – Section 36 of T142N-R34W (Clay Township) is a portion of the Paul Bunyan State Forest located west of the south unit of the forest. There is a township road that enters the NW corner of the section and crosses state land to the west side of Mantrap Lake. None of the inventoried routes on state land in this section will be designated for OHV use. Another township road provides access to the forest campground, day-use area, and water access site in the SW corner of the section. The State Forest Road that serves these recreational facilities will be open to highway-licensed vehicles only.

**Crooked Lakes Area** – No OHV trails are proposed on state-administered forest lands south of the Crooked Lakes in sections 15, 16, and 22 of T141N-R33W (Mantrap Township). This area of about 400 acres is accessed from County Road 86. There is an access easement across state land from the County Road to private land. The access easement route is proposed as a minimum maintenance forest road that will be open to use by highway-licensed vehicles and OHVs.

**Soaring Eagle Trail** – The state-administered forest land adjacent to the Soaring Eagle X-C Ski Trail will be managed for non-motorized recreational opportunities. The ski trail is located on about 320 acres of land in the S½N½ and N½S½ of S16-T141N-R35W (Arago Township). Highway-licensed vehicles will be allowed to access the trail parking area from Highway 71. There will not be any designated motorized trails in this area. The minimum maintenance forest road in the S½S½ of section 16 will remain open to use by highway-licensed vehicles and OHVs to provide motorized access to county-administered lands in sections 17, 20, and 21.

**Crocus Hills** – No OHV trails are proposed for the state-administered forest lands located in the NENW section 36-T140N-R35W adjacent to County Highway 15 on the south side of the city of Park Rapids. This 40-acre tract is in an area of residential development.

## **PROPOSED ROAD AND TRAIL DESIGNATIONS**

The Hubbard County OHV Team evaluated each of the inventoried forest access routes and proposed a designation for future use of the route. For existing designated roads and trails the presumption was that the current designation and uses would be maintained unless there was a

compelling reason to propose changes. About half of the inventoried route mileage had not been previously classified as a road or trail and did not have designated uses.

Given the proposal to classify all State Forest lands in Hubbard County as *limited* (closed to motor vehicle use unless posted open) it was necessary to identify which routes should be open to use by various types of motor vehicles. The Hubbard County Natural Resource Management Department proposes to adopt a similar '*closed to motor vehicle use unless posted open*' policy for county-administered forest lands.

The work team was provided with the following guidance for developing its designation proposals:

1. Proposed designations will reflect consideration of the following screening criteria and other relevant issues:
    - a. Existing Designated Trails
    - b. Other Undesignated OHV Uses
    - c. Trail Need and Purpose for Public Access
    - d. Physical Suitability
    - e. Potential Environmental Impacts
    - f. Other Considerations
- Off-Highway Vehicle Route Designation/Trail Decommissioning Trail Evaluation Policy, Process, Criteria, and Outcomes* (MN DNR, 2003)

## **Forest Roads**

State and County Forest Roads provide access to forest lands for resource management and recreation. Forest roads are not public roads like federal, state, county, or local highways. Forest roads are typically open to use by both highway-licensed and off-highway vehicles but are subject to closure to some or all types of vehicles at various times for safety or resource management reasons.

Forest roads are classified as '*system*' or '*minimum maintenance*' depending on the frequency of use and intended maintenance standards. System roads are more frequently used and will typically be graveled and maintained to a level that allows use by most highway-licensed vehicles. Minimum maintenance roads are used for forest management access on an intermittent basis. Recreational users may use minimum maintenance roads but the roads are not promoted or maintained for recreational use. Minimum maintenance roads will be open to motorized vehicles but not maintained to the level where low clearance highway vehicles can routinely travel on them. Minimum maintenance roads may be gated and opened only during certain times of the year.

**System Forest Roads** – The planning team's recommendation is to designate 89 miles as system forest roads. About 65 miles are located on state lands and 24 miles on county lands. This is a slight reduction in mileage from the previously inventoried State Forest Roads and roads that the county had previously classified as maintained forest roads. Portions of these forest roads may also be designated as part of the recreational trail system.

**Minimum Maintenance Forest Roads** – The planning team’s recommendation is to designate 484 miles as minimum maintenance forest roads. About 390 miles of these minimum maintenance roads are on county-administered lands and 94 miles are on state-administered forest land. These roads will generally be available for use by both highway-licensed vehicles and all three types of OHVs. These roads are typically intended to provide access to forest lands. These roads may not be passable by low clearance highway vehicles. Portions of these minimum maintenance forest roads may also be designated as part of the recreational trail system.

## ***Recreational Trails***

### **Hiking**

Hiking is a designated use on the North Country Trail (NCT), the Heartland State Trail, and the Paul Bunyan State Trail. A proposed alignment of the North Country Trail has been identified that will connect the eastern segment on the Chippewa National Forest with the western segment of the trail leading into North Dakota. This section will be developed and maintained by NCT Association members.

There are many hiking opportunities in addition to the designated and maintained hiking trails. Hiking is allowed on forest roads and trails that are designated for other uses. Foot travel is also allowed on undesignated routes, although these routes are not signed, mapped, or maintained for hiking or any other recreational use. The undesignated routes are closed to motor vehicle use except that ATVs may be used for certain big game hunting and trapping activities at certain times of the year. Foot travel is also allowed off-trail on forest lands.

### **Cross-Country Skiing**

The Itasca Run-Ski-Bike Club is satisfied that the 12 kilometer long Soaring Eagles Trail located on DNR Forestry-administered land, nine miles north of Park Rapids is meeting current demand. Trails will continue to be open during the snow-free times of the year for trail running, hunting and other non-motorized uses that do not degrade the trail surface. This plan proposes emphasizing non-motorized recreation on the forest land surrounding the Soaring Eagles Trail. Recreational motor vehicle use will be discouraged in the area.

### **Snowmobiling**

There are no proposed changes in the 320 miles of trail currently designated for snowmobile use. Some portions of the existing designated snowmobile trails on state- and county-administered lands may be designated for additional uses during the non-snowmobile season.

### **ATVs**

There are recreational ATV trails inside and outside of State Forest boundaries. This links trails to services and amenities located outside of state forest boundaries.

This plan recommends designation of 149 miles of recreational ATV trails on state and county forest lands. The ATV Routes map shows the roads and trails that are proposed to be open to ATV use. Descriptions of key trails are as follows:

- **Paul Bunyan State Forest – South Unit** - A loop trail system is proposed. It is primarily located on existing forest roads and trails with a few short segments of new construction necessary to connect trail segments. It is coincident with some portions of the Martineau OHM Trail and the proposed Paul Bunyan ORV Trail. It will share the existing parking lot and trail head with the Martineau OHM Trail. The DNR Trails & Waterways Division in partnership with the Division of Forestry, Hubbard County, and local ATV clubs will manage the ATV trails in this forest. Existing connections to Akeley and Nevis and a link between the two cities would continue to utilize state, county and township roads and road rights-of-way and would continue to be managed through the Minnesota Trail Assistance Program by the Paul Bunyan Trail Riders ATV Club. To the west, north/south connections to Lake George and Emmaville would continue to utilize county road rights-of-way and would be managed through the Minnesota Trail Assistance Program by the Two Inlets Forest Riders ATV Club.
- **Paul Bunyan State Forest – North Unit** - The proposed ATV trail in this unit would provide ATV riders from northern Hubbard County connections to Lake George and trails to the south, west, and east. This trail would use existing state and county forest roads and currently undesignated routes. Management of this trail would likely be handled by a local trail organization or government agency. This could also connect with trails along County State Aid Highway #9 from the Lake Plantagenette area west to Becida.
- **Two Inlets Forest Riders ATV Trail** - This is an existing GIA trail system that, in Hubbard County, utilizes state, county and township roads and road rights-of-way, county forest roads and a trail on a parcel of Division of Forestry-administered land in Clover Township. The trail system, which extends into Becker County, connects Park Rapids, Emmaville, Lake George, Lake Alice and Two Inlets. The Two Inlets Forest Riders ATV Club manages this system through the Minnesota Trail Assistance Program.
- **Badoura State Forest.** The routes proposed as open to ATVs in this forest are primarily minimum maintenance forest roads. These routes could potentially be connected with the trails in the Foot Hills State Forest in west central Cass County to form a designated recreational ATV trail. Such a connection is not part of this plan and would require an agreement allowing the use of private industrial forest land. Management of this potential ATV trail would be by either a local trail organization or a governmental agency.

In addition to the designated recreational ATV trails described above, there are additional routes on state and county forest land that will be open to ATV use. Most of these ATV-allowed routes are system or minimum maintenance forest roads that are also open to highway-licensed vehicles and other type of OHVs.

## OHMs

This plan recommends a 100-mile recreational OHM trail system, a reduction of 15 miles from the existing system. The OHM Routes map shows the roads and trails that are proposed to be open to OHM use.

- **Martineau Trail** – The Martineau OHM Trail is the premiere OHM trail on State Forest land in Minnesota. About two-thirds of the mileage is exclusively designated for OHM use. The remaining mileage is shared with other types of vehicles. There may be trail modification proposals from the Akeley Trail Riders, the club that manages the trail, in the future but they will be subject to the 5-step process for designating trails.

In addition to the designated Martineau OHM Trail there are additional routes that allow OHM use. Most of these OHM-allowed routes are system or minimum maintenance forest roads that are also open to highway-licensed vehicles and other types of OHVs.

## **ORVs**

An 8-mile ORV trail is proposed for the southern unit of the Paul Bunyan State Forest. The ORV Routes map shows the roads and trails that are proposed to be open to ORV use.

- **Paul Bunyan ORV Trail** - The Paul Bunyan ORV Trail is a proposed newly designated trail. It will share the existing parking lot and trail head for the Martineau OHM Trail. The trail is located north of Akeley and west of Highway 64 in the southern part of the Paul Bunyan State Forest. The proposed trail utilizes a portion of the power line right-of-way along Highway 64 and other existing routes. The trail includes three loops – one located south of the parking area and north of Steamboat Forest Road and the other two south of Steamboat Forest Road. About 2 miles of the trail will be ORV only and other segments will be shared with other types of OHVs.

In addition to the proposed Paul Bunyan ORV Trail, system and minimum maintenance forest roads open to highway-licensed vehicles will remain open to ORVs.

## **Undesignated Routes**

About 421 miles of existing inventoried routes were not designated for any use. Two hundred seventy miles (270) of the undesignated routes are on state-administered land and 151 miles are on county-administered land. These routes will be neither forest roads nor designated recreational trails. The routes have no designated uses and will not be signed, mapped, or actively maintained. Under the proposed *limited* forest classification motor vehicles will generally not be allowed to use these routes. ATVs being used in conjunction with some big game hunting or trapping activities at certain times of the year may be operated on these undesignated routes under the exception contained in existing State Forest Rules. These undesignated routes will be open to non-motorized recreational uses but will not be maintained. Current funding does not provide for maintenance of all of these miles, however, occasional use for forest management may keep some of them in passable condition.

## **Maps**

The routes that are proposed to be open to use by various types of motor vehicles are depicted on maps, which are incorporated in this plan by reference:

1. ATV Routes
2. OHM Routes
3. ORV Routes

#### 4. Highway-licensed Vehicle Routes

### **ANTICIPATED IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

#### ***Adoption of the Classification and Road / Trail Designation Plan***

The proposed reclassification of the State Forest lands for motor vehicle use and the proposed road and trail designations are subject to public review and comment. A public notice of the proposed reclassification and designations will be published in the *State Register* and the legal newspaper for Hubbard County. A statewide DNR news release will also announce the availability of the plans. A public open house meeting will be held not sooner than 60 days following the public notice.

The DNR will evaluate public input received at the public open house and in written comments. The classification and designation decisions may be modified in response to comments. The classification and designation decisions may be modified in response to comments. The Commissioner of Natural Resources will publish Commissioner's Orders to change the motor vehicle use classification and to designate forest roads and trails.

#### ***Road & Trail Development and Signing Projects***

After the Commissioner publishes orders on the classification decision and road & trail designations, the DNR will implement the plan by developing and signing roads and trails that are open to motor vehicle use. Required permits will be obtained when site-level development projects are implemented.

#### ***Substantial Completion & Signing of Motorized Roads & Trails***

If the proposed reclassification is adopted, the motor vehicle use guidelines will change from 'open unless posted closed' to 'closed unless posted open.' The DNR is committed to substantially completing the development and signing of roads and trails proposed as open to motor vehicle use prior to changing the classification of State Forest lands in Hubbard County from *managed* to *limited*. Some of the routes proposed in the plan may be altered due to physical, time, or cost constraints. When the projects are completed, the DNR will publicize the change in classification.

#### ***Expected Date of Change in Motor Vehicle Use Classification***

The DNR will try to substantially complete the development and signing of roads and trails to be open to motor vehicle use within one year after publication of the Commissioner's Orders. If the orders are published in 2005 as anticipated, the change to a *limited* classification could occur by 2006.

## ***Ongoing Monitoring and Management***

The DNR is committed to providing both motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities on State Forest lands. A guiding principle for recreational trails is ‘managed use on managed trails.’ The intent is to provide quality recreational experiences on environmentally sustainable non-motorized and motorized trails. The DNR will use approved best management practices for forest roads and trails.

The DNR will monitor roads and trails for maintenance and sustainability needs. Education and enforcement will be used to ensure compliance with road and trail use designations. The level of user satisfaction and user conflicts will be monitored and future adjustments in the motor vehicle use classification and trail use designations may be proposed.

Roads and trails may be temporarily closed as warranted by weather conditions (for example, during Spring breakup, high fire hazard, after extreme storm events) or while needed repairs are made. Permanent changes to the designated trail system (change in allowed uses, addition or deletion of routes) will be subject to public review and comment.

## GLOSSARY

**Area OHV Team.** A team consisting of field level staff from both the Department of Natural Resources and the Hubbard County Natural Resources Department. The team will deal directly with on-the-ground trail siting and trail management and operation issues.

### **Classification.**

*Managed*—On forest lands classified as managed, a person may operate a motor vehicle only on forest roads and forest trails that are not posted and designated closed and in areas that are posted and designated to allow motor vehicle. *Minnesota Statute 6100.1950, subpart 1, A.*

*Limited*—On forest lands classified as limited, a person may operate a motor vehicle only on forest roads that are not posted and designated closed and on forest trails or areas that are posted and designated to allow motor vehicle use. *Minnesota Statute 6100.1950, subpart 1, B.*

*Closed*—No person shall operate a motor vehicle or snowmobile on forest lands classified as closed, unless on frozen public waters where operation is not otherwise prohibited. Motor vehicles that are licensed for use on public highways may be operated on forest roads that are not posted or gated closed. Snowmobiles may operate on designated trails. *Minnesota Statute 6100.1950, subpart 1, C.*

**Designated Trails.** Trails that are indicated on maps, and signed for specific uses.

**GPS.** GPS, which stands for Global Positioning System, is a satellite navigation system. GPS satellites, 24 in all, orbit the Earth. The satellites transmit signals that can be detected by a GPS receiver. Using the receiver, locations on the ground can be determined with precision.

**Licensed Highway Vehicles.** A motor vehicle as defined in 2003 MN Statutes Section 168.011, Subd. 4 that is currently registered for use on public streets and highways.

**Moraine.** Moraines are landforms created directly by the wasting glaciers. Often they are composed of glacial till--sediment of mixed character, with many rocks and stones, laid down as the ice rapidly melts. There are several different subtypes of moraines.

**Motorized uses.** Any form of recreation that uses a motor for mobility. Examples are ATVs, licensed highway vehicles, and OHMs.

**Natural Heritage elements.** A database entry documenting an occurrence of a rare Minnesota plant, animal, native plant community, or other rare natural feature.

**Non-motorized uses.** Any form of recreation that does not use a motor for mobility. Examples are hiking and cross-country skiing.

**Off-highway Vehicle.** A generic term used to refer to all terrain vehicles (ATV), off-highway motorcycles (OHM), and off road vehicles (ORV), e.g., 4x4 trucks.



**ATV.** “All-terrain vehicle” means a motorized flotation-tired vehicle of not less than three or more than six low-pressure tires, that is limited in engine displacement to less than 800 cubic centimeters and total dry weight less than 900 pounds. *Minnesota Statute 84.92, subd. 8.*



**OHM.** “Off-highway motorcycle” means a motorized, off-highway vehicle traveling on two wheels and having a seat or saddle designed to be straddled by the operator and handlebars for steering control, including a vehicle that is registered under chapter 168 for highway use if it is also used for off-highway operation on trails or unimproved terrain. *Minnesota Statute 84.787, subd. 7.*



**ORV.** “Off-road vehicle” means a motor-driven recreational vehicle capable of cross-country travel on natural terrain without benefit of a road or trail. Off-road vehicle does not include a snowmobile; an all-terrain vehicle; a motorcycle; a watercraft; a farm vehicle being used for farming; a vehicle used for military, fire, emergency, or law enforcement purposes; a construction or logging vehicle used in the performance of its common function; a motor vehicle owned by or operated under contract with a utility, whether publicly or privately owned, when used for work on utilities; a commercial vehicle being used for its intended purpose; snow-grooming equipment when used for its intended purpose; or an aircraft. *Minnesota Statute 84.797, subd. 7.*

**OHV Policy Committee.** An interdisciplinary team comprised of DNR managers that is responsible for developing OHV policies, and seeing that they are applied consistently around the state.

**Regional Management Team.** A team at the regional level of the DNR comprised of regional supervisors from each division and bureau. The team sets interdisciplinary, resource priorities for the region, and makes recommendations and decisions that affect multiple divisions.

**Sand plain.** A flat area of glacial outwash consisting of stratified sands.

**Snowmobile.** “Snowmobile” means a self-propelled vehicle designed for travel on snow or ice steered by skis or runners. *Minnesota Statute 84.81, subd. 3*

**Till plain.** An extensive flat to undulating area underlain by glacial till. Glacial till is an accumulation of unsorted, unstratified mixtures of clay, silt, sand, gravel, and boulders.

## LOCATION MAP

