

**Forest Classification**  
And  
**Forest Road and Trail Designations**  
For  
**Northern Border State Forests**

December 22, 2008



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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## Acknowledgments

The DNR Northern Border Road & Trail Project Team gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following individuals to the forest road and trail designation process.

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# **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **1.1 Purpose**

*Minnesota Laws 2003*, Chapter 128, Article 1, Section 167 (as amended in 2005 and 2007) directs the Commissioner of Natural Resources to review the motor vehicle use classification of state forest lands. In conjunction with the classification review, the DNR identifies routes to be designated as forest roads and trails. Following public review and comment on the proposed classification and road/trail designations, the Commissioner of Natural Resources implements the classification and designation decisions by publication of written orders. The Commissioner's Orders provide the framework for management of public access to state forest lands.

Between 2003 and 2008, the DNR will review the motor vehicle use classification and designate forest roads and trails on all state forest lands in Minnesota. This document addresses state forest lands in nine counties in northwestern Minnesota.

Given the intermingled private, county, tribal, and state land ownership pattern in the planning area, the DNR coordinated its work with County Commissioners, the Red Lake Tribal Council, and other participants. The motor vehicle use policies for state, county and tribal-administered lands were considered when developing the classification and route designation proposals. The Commissioner of Natural Resources will only designate roads and trails on DNR-administered state forest lands.

## **1.2 Lands Covered by this Plan**

The Northern Border area includes all or parts of 9 counties in northwestern Minnesota. There are no state forest lands in Kittson County. Northern Clearwater, Marshall, Red Lake, Pennington, and Polk counties have relatively small acreages of state forest land. Most of the state forest lands in the Northern Border area are in Beltrami, Lake of the Woods, and Roseau counties

The Northern Border area includes 4 State Forests – Lake of the Woods, Lost River, Northwest Angle, and Red Lake. The Northern Border project will also address about 21,000 acres of state forest land located outside of these 4 forests. This project does not include the Beltrami Island State Forest, which was completed in an earlier project.

## **1.3 Proposed Motor Vehicle Use Classifications**

This project classified state forest lands within the Northern Border project area with respect to motor vehicle operation by the public and identified routes that will be managed as state forest roads or recreational trails. The classification and designation affects the operation of both Highway Licensed Vehicles (HLVs), such as cars and pickups and Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs) on state forest lands. OHVs are All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), Off Highway Motorcycles (OHMs) and Off Road Vehicles (ORVs), such as 4-wheel drive pickups and Jeeps. This project does not affect the operation of snowmobiles on state forest lands.

## 1.4 Forest Route Inventory

In 2003 and 2004, DNR staff made an effort to inventory the location and condition of all existing routes on state- and county-administered forest lands that showed evidence of ongoing human use. There are about 532 miles of inventoried routes in the project area. These routes may be designated as state forest roads, recreational trails, or left as non-designated.

## 1.5 Proposed Route Designations

The following table summarizes the proposed designations of the inventoried forest routes.

Route Designation	Miles
System State Forest Road	36.0
Minimum Maintenance State Forest Road	8.4
ATV / OHM Trail	1.8
Hunter Walking Trail	34.9
Access Route (Non-designated)	240.8
Frozen Access Route – not suitable for motor vehicle use unless frozen (Non-designated)	69.6
Proactive Closure – signed closed to motor vehicles (Non-designated)	29.0
Miscellaneous Non-designated – routes on private or tribal lands, school forests, or public highways	111.4
Total	531.9

## 1.6 Implementation and Monitoring

The Commissioner of Natural Resources issues Commissioner's Orders to establish the motor vehicle use classification and to designate forest roads and trails. The anticipated effective date for the classification changes and route designations is December 31, 2009.

## 2 BACKGROUND

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages nearly 4 million acres of state forest land for the people of Minnesota. Minnesota's state forests are managed to produce timber, provide outdoor recreation, protect watersheds, and perpetuate rare and distinctive species of native flora and fauna. State forests are managed to ensure they remain healthy, vital, and productive for present and future generations. State forests provide a variety of unstructured outdoor recreation opportunities, such as hunting, trapping, berry picking, and nature observation. For more structured activities, many state forests have developed recreation facilities such as campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails for various motorized and non-motorized uses. Minnesota statutes set broad direction for management of state forests by directing the Commissioner of Natural Resources to:

- Manage state forests according to the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. (MS 89.002, Subd.1)
- Provide a system of forest roads and trails to access state forest lands. (MS 89.002, Subd. 3)

Prior to the mid-1980's recreational motor vehicle use was generally allowed in most state forests. As the number of Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs) increased, the DNR closed some forests to OHV use and began developing trails and other facilities for OHV use in other state

forests. In late 1996, the DNR began to reassess its OHV management programs. The DNR proposed classifying state forests as *managed*, *limited*, or *closed* with respect to recreational motor vehicle use. In 1999 the DNR revised the rules governing recreational use of state forests.

*Minnesota Laws 2003*, Chapter 128, Article 1, Section 167 (as amended in 2005 and 2007) directs the Commissioner of Natural Resources to review the motor vehicle use classification of state forest lands. In conjunction with the classification review, the DNR identifies routes to be designated as forest roads and trails. Following public review and comment on the proposed classification and road/trail designations, the Commissioner of Natural Resources implements the classification and designation decisions by publication of written orders. The Commissioner's Orders provide the framework for management of public access to state forest lands.

## **2.1 Process**

A DNR interdisciplinary team with members from the DNR divisions of Ecological Resources, Enforcement, Fish & Wildlife, Forestry, and Trails & Waterways was established to complete the following tasks:

1. Collaborate with the public and other forest management agencies to develop a plan for the management of public motor vehicle use on state forest lands in the planning area.
2. Consider the criteria for classification of state forest lands for motor vehicle use and recommend appropriate classification(s).
3. Evaluate the inventoried forest routes and propose designation of forest roads and trails for various uses.
4. Present the team's recommendations for motor vehicle use classification and forest road and trail designations for public review and comment.

The major steps in developing the road and trail designation proposals were:

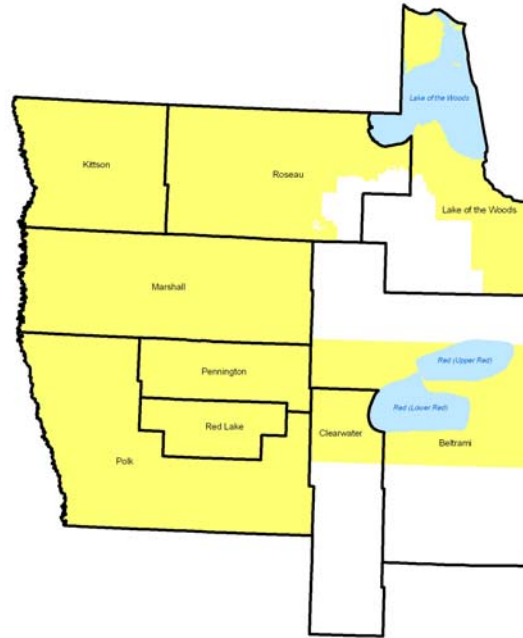
1. Compile a comprehensive inventory of forest routes – roads, trails, and other routes showing evidence of ongoing human use. Prepare maps showing the routes.
2. Host a series of public open houses to alert people to the classification review and road and trail designation process, to gain an understanding of how they use these access routes, how they use state lands generally, and to solicit ideas regarding the use of the forest lands and future designation of selected routes.
3. Conduct work sessions to make preliminary route designation and use recommendations based on inventory data, staff knowledge, and public input from the open houses.
4. Review preliminary designations for consistency with statutory direction and agency management guidelines.
5. Prepare designation plans and maps for internal agency and public review and comment.

The goal was to develop an ecologically sustainable and socially acceptable approach to manage recreational and utilitarian public access to state forest lands. The team worked within existing legal guidelines for management of state forest lands and current agency policies and management plans for the various types of public lands. Individuals have widely varying values and expectations related to the use of public forest lands and recreational motor vehicles. In our diverse society there is no public access management scheme that will fully satisfy all interests.

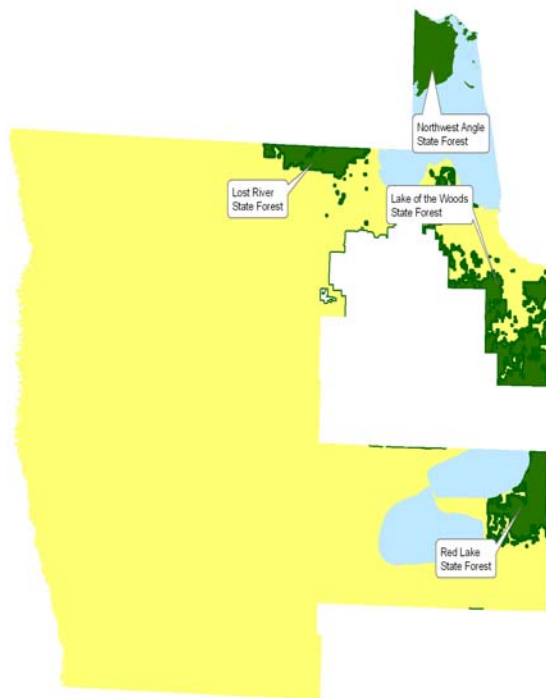
### 3 DESCRIPTION OF LANDS COVERED BY THIS PLAN

Between 2003 and 2008, the DNR will review the motor vehicle use classification and designate forest roads and trails on all state forest lands in Minnesota.

The Northern Border area includes all or parts of nine counties in northwestern Minnesota. There are no state forest lands in Kittson County. Northern Clearwater, Marshall, Red Lake, Pennington, and Polk counties have relatively small acreages of state forest land. Most of the state forest lands in the Northern Border area are in Beltrami, Lake of the Woods, and Roseau counties. There are over 300,000 acres of state forest land in the planning area.



The Northern Border area includes 4 State Forests – Lake of the Woods, Lost River, Northwest Angle, and Red Lake. The Northern Border project also addressed about 21,000 acres of state forest land located outside of these 4 forests. The Northern Border project area does not include the Beltrami Island State Forest, which was completed in an earlier project.



The motor vehicle use classifications and route designations in this plan apply only to DNR-administered state forest lands and county-administered forest lands within the statutory boundaries of State Forests. The motor vehicle use classification does not apply to private lands, to lands of the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe, to lands within the rights-of-way of public highways, or to county-administered forest lands outside of state forest boundaries. The classification also

does not apply to state lands administered by DNR Divisions other than the Division of Forestry, such as State Parks and Recreation Areas, Wildlife Management Areas, Scientific & Natural Areas, or State Trails.

#### State Forest Lands by County

County	Acres of State Forest Land
Beltrami (central portion only)	82,1585
Clearwater (northern portion)	5
Kittson	0
Lake of the Woods (excluding Beltrami Island State Forest)	154,804
Marshall	2
Pennington	2,340
Polk	419
Red Lake	2
Roseau (excluding Beltrami Island State Forest)	61,216
Total	300,946

#### State Forests

State Forest	Gross Acreage within Boundary	Division of Forestry Acreage
Northwest Angle	144,000	14,140
Lake of the Woods	142,000	140,095
Lost River	55,000	52,139
Red Lake	84,000	73,184
Other	---	21,388
Total	---	300,946

## 4 MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATION

Minnesota law requires the Commissioner of Natural Resources to complete a review of the classification of state forest lands with respect to motor vehicle use by December 31, 2008. The process and criteria for motor vehicle use classification of state forest lands are contained in [Minnesota statutes, laws, and rules](#).

The DNR classifies state forest lands as *managed*, *limited*, or *closed* with respect to public motor vehicle use. The state forest motor vehicle use classifications are characterized as follows:

**Managed Forest Lands.** All existing routes are open to 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 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 designated non-motorized recreational trails. Class 1 ATVs may be operated on non-designated routes and off trail under the hunting and trapping exceptions. Class 2 ATVs, ORVs and HLVs may be operated on non-designated routes under the hunting and trapping exceptions. When using motor vehicles on unsigned routes it is illegal to operate the vehicle in a manner that causes erosion or rutting or injures, damages, or destroys trees or growing crops. The *managed* classification can only be applied to state forest lands north of US Highway 2.

**Limited Forest Lands.** State forest roads are open to motor vehicle use unless posted closed. Other existing routes are closed to motor vehicle use, except on trails that are designated and signed to permit specific motorized uses. These forest lands 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. Class 1 ATVs may be operated on non-designated routes and off trail



under the hunting and trapping exceptions. Class 2 ATVs, ORVs and HLVs may be operated on non-designated routes under the hunting and trapping exceptions.

**Closed Forest Lands.** State 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 motor vehicles or have a history that precludes motorized use. Areas closed to motor vehicle use by statute or regulations (e.g., State Forest lands within the BWCAW) are automatically classified as '*closed*.' The hunting and trapping exceptions do not apply in *closed* forests.

The following criteria are considered when classifying forest lands for motor vehicle use:

- A. resource sensitivity and management objectives;
- B. resource impact by motorized and nonmotorized use, including erosion, rutting, and impacts on vegetation, wildlife, air, water, or natural habitats;
- C. motorized and nonmotorized recreational opportunity in area;
- D. user needs, such as trails, parking, signs, and access;
- E. the degree and trend of motor vehicle use in the area;
- F. the degree and trend of nonmotor vehicle use in the area;
- G. competing interests among different user groups; and
- H. public safety and law enforcement concerns.

#### **4.1 Existing Motor Vehicle Use Classification**

Motor vehicle use has generally been allowed in most state forests. As the number of OHVs increased, the DNR closed some forests to OHV use and began developing trails and other facilities for OHV use in other state forests. In late 1996, the agency began to reassess its OHV management programs. The DNR proposed classifying state forests as *managed*, *limited*, or *closed* with respect to motor vehicle use. In May 1998 a series of public open houses were held to discuss the proposed classifications of state forests for motor vehicle use. On September 3, 1998 the Commissioner of Natural Resources issued a memorandum establishing interim classifications for all state forests. The interim classifications became permanent on January 1, 2000. The existing motor vehicle use classification for all state forest lands in the Northern Border planning unit is *managed*.

#### **4.2 Recommended Classifications**

The Northern Border Planning Team reviewed the motor vehicle use classification of all state forest lands in the planning unit. The team considered the eight criteria for classifying state forest lands. Particular attention was placed on the criteria dealing with management objectives, resource impacts, and law enforcement concerns. Alternative classifications were discussed and evaluated for some of the state forests.

Most of the state forest lands in the Northern Border planning unit will retain the *managed* classification. Current state law requires that state forest lands located south of US Highway 2 be classified as *limited* or *closed*. There are 351.4 acres of state forest land located south of US Highway 2 in Polk County that will be classified as *limited*. Some trails will be designated and managed for non-motorized use thus precluding motor vehicles on those trails. The team also

recommends proactive closure of some non-designated routes where motor vehicle use has caused significant resource damage and where motor vehicle use is unsustainable. The team also recommends designation of ‘Areas with Limitations’ where the hunting and trapping exceptions permitted by *MN Statutes 84.926* will not apply.

#### **4.2.1 Areas with Limitations on Motor Vehicle Use (MN Stat. 84.926)**

*MN Statutes 84.926, subdivisions 2 and 4* provide exceptions that allow some hunting- and trapping-related motor vehicle uses on state forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited* that would otherwise be illegal. Specifically, a person may operate a motor vehicle on existing non-designated (unsigned) routes on state forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited* when:

1. hunting big game or transporting or installing hunting stands during October, November, and December, when in possession of a valid big game hunting license;
2. retrieving big game in September, when in possession of a valid big game hunting license;
3. tending traps during an open trapping season for protected furbearers, when in possession of a valid trapping license;
4. trapping minnows, when in possession of a valid minnow dealer, private fish hatchery, or aquatic farm license.

In addition, Class 1 ATVs (less than 800cc engine displacement and 900 pounds total weight) may be operated off of existing routes for the purposes listed above.

*MN Statutes 84.926, subdivision 5* authorizes the Commissioner of Natural Resources to designate areas of state forest lands where the hunting and trapping motor vehicle use exceptions described above do not apply. These ‘Areas with Limitations’ are intended to protect unique natural resource values and provide a balance of user opportunities.

There will be four ‘Areas with Limitations’ designated in portions of the Lost River State Forest and the Red Lake State Forest.

##### ***Sprague Creek***

The area where the hunting and trapping exceptions will not apply in the Lost River State Forest is located west of Highway 310 near the Sprague Creek Peatland SNA. This area is one of five known spring fens in the state and contains several relatively undisturbed native plant communities and rare plants, birds, and insects ([Sprague Creek Ecological Resources Report](#)). The proposed ‘Area with Limitations’ covers about 9,700 acres, of which about 6,200 acres are State Forest land and 920 acres are SNA land. The ‘Area with Limitations’ consists of the area from the intersection of MN Highway 310 and the US/Canada border, south along Highway 310 to Sprague Creek, southwest along Sprague Creek/Roseau River to the boundary of the Roseau Lake WMA, then northerly following the boundary of the Roseau Lake WMA to Roseau County Road 118 at the NE corner of Section 7, T163N, R40W, then north along County Road 118 and an unnamed road to the US/Canada border, then east along the US/Canada border to the point of beginning ([map](#)).

### ***Larson Lake***

The Larson Lake Area with Limitations includes the Larson Lake Natural Heritage Registry Site located south of Waskish in the Red Lake State Forest. The Area with Limitations covers about 2,200 acres, of which about 2,000 acres are state forest land.

The Larson Lake registry site is located in the S ½ of Section 29 and N ½ of Section 32 of T154N – R30W. A registry site is an area where the land manager (DNR – Forestry, Blackduck Area Office) has signed an agreement with the SNA Program (DNR - Ecological Resources) to manage the land with rare resource protection in mind. The Larson Lake registry site consists of dense lowland conifer forest, with several rare species including Ramshead Ladyslipper and Lapland Buttercup. The forest within the registry site is comprised of cedar, tamarack and black spruce. The native plant community is classified as Northern Cedar Swamp (FPn63). The area is unique in having assemblages of orchids and other rare plant species present. The site's proximity to Highway 72 makes it an easy area to access for viewing some of these rare floristic features.

The boundary of the Larson Lake Area with Limitations begins at the intersection of State Highway 72 and County Highway 111 located about 4 miles south of Waskish, then west along County Highway 111 for 1 mile, then continue west along Township Road 13 for 1 mile to the southwest corner of Section 31 – T154N – R30W, then north about 0.6 mile on the undesignated route and the township line to the shore of Upper Red Lake, then northeast about 0.5 mile along the shore of Upper Red Lake to the section line between sections 30 and 31, then east about 0.13 mile along the section line and a minimum maintenance state forest road to an intersection with Kansas City Road (Township Road 805), then northeast about 2.3 miles along Kansas City Road to the intersection with State Highway 72, then south about 2.6 miles to the point of beginning ([map](#)).

### ***Shotley***

The Shotley Area with Limitations surrounds the Shotley Hunter Walking Trail and covers about 1,900 acres, of which about 1,640 acres are state forest land. The habitat surrounding the hunter walking trail is managed to enhance ruffed grouse populations. The area is intended to provide opportunities for non-motorized hunting.

The boundary of the Shotley area begins at the intersection of Township Road 416 and a minimum maintenance state forest road located about 4 miles east of Shotley, then north about 0.8 miles to Shotley Brook following the state forest road and access route along the township line, then northwesterly along Shotley Brook to CSAH 23, then west along CSAH 23 for about 0.5 mile to a north-south ditch along the section line between sections 14 and 15, then south 2 miles along the ditch then the access route then the minimum maintenance forest road to the intersection with Township Road 416, then east along Township Road 416 to the point of beginning ([map](#)).

### ***Saum***

The Saum Area with Limitations surrounds the Saum Hunter Walking Trail and covers about 4,300 acres, of which about 1,800 acres is state forest land. The habitat surrounding the hunter

walking trail is managed to enhance ruffed grouse populations. The area is intended to provide opportunities for non-motorized hunting.

The boundary of the Saum area begins at the intersection of CSAH 23 and County Road 104; then west along County Road 104, north along county Road 104, and northwesterly along township and Indian Reservation roads to the crossing of the Battle River; then northeasterly along the Battle River to the confluence of the North and South Branches of the Battle River; then northeasterly along the South Branch of the Battle River to CSAH 23; then south along CSAH 23 to the point of beginning ([map](#)).

## **5 FOREST ROUTE INVENTORY**

In preparation for this road and trail designation process, the Northern Border state forests project team compiled available information on the existing roads, trails, and routes that show evidence of continuing human use on state and county forest lands in the planning area. Geographic information system (GIS) data on public highways was obtained from the MN Department of Transportation. GIS data on previously designated forest roads was obtained from DNR databases. Available data on previously designated motorized and non-motorized recreational trails was collated.

In 2003 and 2004, DNR staff made an effort to inventory the location and condition of all existing but previously undocumented routes on state- and county-administered forest lands that show evidence of ongoing human use. Field crews inventoried most of the routes using ATVs equipped with global positioning system (GPS) units. The location of some routes that were not passable with ATVs, for example winter use timber harvest routes, were digitized from aerial photos. Field crews recorded locations where the inventoried route intersected with routes that were too narrow or unsafe for ATV access. They also recorded locations where the routes ended. Inventory crews collected data such as tread width, apparent use, level of use, and surface condition. All forest route data was entered into GIS databases and was used in recommending forest road and trail designations.

DNR staff compiled all the highway, forest road, trail, and route data into a GIS database. Given the multiple sources of data, there was some duplication of information. For example a single route may be both a designated forest road and a snowmobile trail or an inventory crew member may have collected GPS location and condition data on a route that had previously been designated as a forest road and thus already existed in the database. A number of automated and visual checks were used to clean up the forest route inventory data and to remove obvious duplicates.

While reasonable efforts were made to correct the forest route inventory data there are inherent limitations on the completeness and accuracy of the database. Highway authorities are continually adding, rerouting, and abandoning highways. Public land ownership patterns change as lands are acquired, sold, or exchanged. Natural resource management activities, fires, and timber sales create or obliterate forest routes. Unused routes re-vegetate, beavers flood routes, and what is a passable route in a dry year may be impassable in wet years.

The cleaned forest route inventory data became the base layer (anchor segments) in the DNR's Wheels database. There are about 532 miles of routes in the Northern Border planning unit.

## 6 FOREST ROUTE DESIGNATIONS

All routes on state forest land have been designated as state forest roads, recreational trails, or left as non-designated routes. The designation determines what type of motor vehicle use is allowed and how the route will be signed and managed. The designations were developed to work within the framework provided by the proposed motor vehicle use classifications described above.

The designations were developed using the forest route inventory data, local land managers' knowledge of the routes, and data from other sources such as soils maps, wetland maps, forest inventory, the Natural Heritage Elements database, and public comments received at the initial open houses. A work group consisting of DNR staff developed the proposed designations. County Board representatives and county agency staff frequently participated in the development of the proposed designations. For routes that had been managed as state forest roads or recreational trails in the past, the presumption was that the previous designation and uses would be continued unless there was a compelling reason to propose changes.

Geographic information system (GIS) tools were used to map and document the road and trail designations. Each inventoried route on State Forest land was coded to indicate which types of motor vehicles (ATVs, OHMs, ORVs, HLVs) the public would be allowed to use on the route. The primary reason for each designation was also recorded. The challenge was to develop designations that comply with existing laws and policies, adequately protect natural resources, and balance competing public desires for the management of, and access to, forest lands.

### 6.1 Summary of Route Designations

The following table summarizes the designations of the inventoried forest routes. The project team reviewed data on about 532 miles of routes. The routes that are proposed for various designations are shown on the *Forest Road and Trail Designation Maps* that are part of this plan.

Route Designation	Miles
System State Forest Road	36.0
Minimum Maintenance State Forest Road	8.4
ATV / OHM Trail	1.8
Hunter Walking Trail	34.9
Access Route (Non-designated)	240.8
Frozen Access Route – not suitable for motor vehicle use unless frozen (Non-designated)	69.6
Proactive Closure – signed closed to motor vehicles (Non-designated)	29.0
Miscellaneous Non-designated – routes on private or tribal lands, school forests, or public highways	111.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>531.9</b>

### 6.2 Forest Roads

Forest roads are routes that are maintained by natural resource management agencies to provide access to public forest lands for resource management and public use. Forest roads range from unimproved double track with native soil surface to two-lane gravel roads with improved

drainage. Forest roads are not considered ‘public highways’ and the resource agencies are not ‘road authorities.’ Each agency sets public use rules and determines the types of vehicles allowed on the forest roads it manages.

The DNR develops and maintains state forest roads to access state forest lands. Various state statutes govern the development and use of state forest roads. Key concepts include:

1. “State forest road” means a road constructed, acquired, maintained, or administered by the commissioner for the purpose of carrying out forest resource management ...” (*MN Statutes 89.001, Subd.14*)
2. “The commissioner shall provide a system of forest roads and trails which provides access to state forest land ...” (*MN Statutes 89.002, Subd. 3*)
3. “... the commissioner is not a road authority under chapters 160 to 168, and chapters 160 to 168 do not apply to forest roads ...” (*MN Statutes 89.71, Subd.7*)
4. “The commissioner may designate a state forest road as a minimum-maintenance forest road to be maintained at a level consistent with the intended use...” (*MN Statutes 89.71, Subd. 5*)

State forest roads are generally open to use by both highway-licensed vehicles and off-highway vehicles (ATVs, OHMs, and ORVs). However, forest roads may be temporarily closed to some or all vehicular use due to public safety and/or natural resource protection considerations. The DNR divides state forest roads into two classes – system roads and minimum maintenance roads – based on their condition, intended use and planned maintenance level.

**System Roads** are the major roads in the forest that provide forest management access, recreational access, and links to state, county, or township highways. System roads are used on a daily or weekly basis, and are maintained to allow travel by highway licensed vehicles.

**Minimum Maintenance Roads** are forest management roads used on an intermittent basis. Recreational users may use them, but they are not promoted or maintained for recreational use. While open to public use, minimum maintenance roads will not be maintained to a level where low-clearance vehicles can routinely travel on them. They are signed with a “Minimum Maintenance Road” signs, and may be gated and closed during certain times of the year. Minimum maintenance roads are more likely to be subject to travel restrictions than are higher standard system forest roads.

### **6.2.1 System Forest Roads**

The proposal is to designate 36.0 miles of routes as system forest roads. Most of these routes were previously managed as forest roads.

### **6.2.2 Minimum Maintenance Forest Roads**

The proposal is to designate 8.4 miles of routes as minimum maintenance forest roads.

## **6.3 Recreational Trails**

Some routes on state forest lands are designated, signed, and managed for specific recreational uses. When a route is designated as a recreational trail, various uses or activities can be *primary* uses, *permitted* uses, or *prohibited* uses. Primary uses are the uses for which the trail is

designed, maintained, and promoted. Primary uses are often included in the trail name, e.g. Shotley Hunter Walking Trail. Permitted uses are uses that are allowed on the trail and do not significantly detract from the primary uses. Hiking would be considered a permitted use on trails that have horseback riding or ATV use as the primary designated uses. Permitted users should yield to primary users of a trail. Prohibited uses are uses that are unsafe or significantly detract from the primary uses of a trail. Motorized uses are typically prohibited on trails designated for non-motorized uses.

This project does not address snowmobile trail designation. Existing snowmobile trails are not changed by this plan. Route designations proposed in this plan are compatible with existing snowmobile trail designations. Snowmobile trails are shown on the route designation maps for orientation purposes only.

### **6.3.1 Non-motorized Trails**

The proposal is to designate 34.9 miles of routes for non-motorized recreational uses. The primary designated use on all of these trails will be hunter walking. All public motor vehicle use of these routes will be prohibited. These routes will **not** be open to motor vehicle use for hunting- and trapping-related uses typically allowed by MN Statutes 84.926 on state forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited*. The proposed non-motorized trails are shown on the *Forest Road and Trail Designation Maps*.

The proposed hunter walking trails are at various locations in the Lake of the Woods, Lost River, and Red Lake State Forests. Most of the routes to be designated as hunter walking trails are already signed and managed as non-motorized trails and the designation is simply a formal recognition of the current condition.

The Saum Hunter Walking Trail is located east of Lower Red Lake in the Red Lake State Forest. The habitat surrounding the hunter walking trail is managed to enhance ruffed grouse populations. The area is intended to provide opportunities for non-motorized hunting.

The Shotley Hunter Walking Trail is located southeast of Upper Red Lake in the Red Lake State Forest. The habitat surrounding the hunter walking trail is managed to enhance ruffed grouse populations. The area is intended to provide opportunities for non-motorized hunting.

The Carp Hunter Walking Trail is located in the Lake of the Woods State Forest west of the Carp Swamp WMA.

### **6.3.2 ATV and OHM Trails**

The flat topography, soil conditions, and distance from major population centers give most of the existing routes on state forest land in the Northern Border area a low suitability for designation as ATV or OHM trails. The only proposed ATV/OHM trail designation is 1.8 miles of existing non-designated route located off of the Campbell State Forest Road in the Lost River State Forest. This trail is not suited for HLV or ORV use. The proposed ATV/OHM trail might be incorporated into a future ATV trail from Roseau to Warroad that uses highway right-of-way and state forest roads.

The primary opportunity for ATV and OHM riding on state forest land in the Northern Border area is on designated state forest roads. Since the majority of the state forest land in the Northern Border area is classified as *managed* with respect to motor vehicle use, non-designated (unsigned) routes provide additional riding opportunities. Non-designated (unsigned) routes are not mapped and may not be suitable for use by ATVs or OHMs. When riding on non-designated routes it is illegal to cause ruts, erosion, or damage to trees.

### **6.3.3 ORV Trails**

There are no existing or proposed ORV trails on state forest land in the Northern Border area. The flat topography, soil conditions, and distance from major population centers give most of the existing routes on state forest land in the Northern Border area a low suitability for designation as ORV trails.

The primary opportunity for ORV riding on state forest land in the Northern Border area is on designated state forest roads. Since the majority of the state forest land in the Northern Border area is classified as *managed* with respect to motor vehicle use, non-designated (unsigned) routes provide additional riding opportunities. Non-designated (unsigned) routes are not mapped and may not be suitable for use by ORVs. When riding on non-designated routes it is illegal to cause ruts, erosion, or damage to trees.

## **6.4 Non-designated Routes**

Most of the inventoried routes on state forest land in the Northern Border area will not be designated as either forest roads or recreational trails. These routes will not be actively managed. About 450 miles of routes will remain non-designated. Some of these routes have been damaged by previous motor vehicle use and will be signed as closed to public motor vehicle use. The majority of the non-designated routes will be ‘access routes’ on state forest lands classified as *managed* with respect to motor vehicle use.

### **6.4.1 Proactive Closures**

These routes are not suitable for public motor vehicle use and most have been damaged by motor vehicle use in the past. Proactive closures will occur on 29.0 miles of existing routes. These routes will be signed as closed to all motor vehicles (except snowmobiles). These routes will **not** be open to motor vehicle use for hunting- and trapping-related uses typically allowed by MN Statutes 84.926 on state forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited*.

### **6.4.2 Access Routes on Lands Classified as *Managed***

Non-designated (unsigned) routes on *managed* forest lands are available for both non-motorized and motor vehicle use on ‘as is’ basis. These access routes will not be signed, mapped, or actively managed. These access routes may not be suited to use by vehicles. When operating a motor vehicle on an access route it is illegal to cause ruts, erosion, or damage to trees. These routes are also available for use under the hunting and trapping exceptions allowed by *MN Statutes 84.926*. Access routes are subject to proactive closure if motor vehicle use results in excessive rutting or erosion.



A total of 310.4 miles of routes on state forest lands will be non-designated access routes. The Northern Border planning team identified 69.6 miles of these access routes that should only be considered for motor vehicle use under frozen conditions. These ‘frozen access routes’ will be damaged if used when the soil is not frozen. Past winter use has not caused damage that would warrant proactive closure at this time. Some of these frozen access routes have been used for furbearer trapping in the past.

### **6.4.3 Miscellaneous Non-designated Routes**

The Northern Border planning team did not make recommendations on about 111.4 miles of routes in the planning area, primarily because the routes are not located on state forest lands. These routes are located on private or tribal lands, on school forests, within public highway rights-of-way, on ditch banks, or in other DNR management units such as Wildlife Management Areas, Scientific & Natural Areas, or State Parks. These routes often connect to routes on adjacent state forest land.

Roseau County identified about 40 miles of routes that were included in the forest route inventory that are located on ditch grades where the county has records indicating a public road has been established. The DNR and the county agreed that road authority for ditch grades is an open issue. These routes were not designated in this process (with the exception of portions of the Norland Forest Road). Ditch grades will be available for public use and any closures or improvements of ditch grades will be agreed upon by the Roseau County and the DNR.

The Red Lake Band of the Chippewa is a major land owner in the Northern Border area. The Red Lake Band lands are recognized as private lands by the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources. Red Lake Band lands are closed to non-band members except by special authorization of the Tribal Council. Tribal lands are not posted in any unique way. Tribal lands are often interspersed with state forest lands, especially in the Northwest Angle. As is the case with all private lands, those who enter tribal lands without permission could be cited for trespass.

Those using unsigned (non-designated) routes are responsible for knowing the ownership of the land and for complying with laws and regulations governing the use of the lands and routes.

## **6.5 Designation Map**

The proposed forest road and forest trail designations are depicted on the *Forest Road and Trail Designation Maps*, which are incorporated in this plan by reference. The proposed designation maps will be available on the DNR website as Portable Document Format (PDF) files until the designated forest roads and trails are signed on the ground.

## **7 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

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

The Commissioner of Natural Resources will issue Commissioner’s Orders to change the motor vehicle use classification and to designate forest roads and trails on state forest lands in accordance with this plan. The Commissioner’s Orders will be published in the *State Register*.

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

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

The DNR is committed to substantially completing the development and signing of roads and trails as proposed in this plan prior to the effective date of the classification order.

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

The anticipated effective date for the classification changes and route designations is December 31, 2009.

## ***7.4 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 periods, after extreme storm events) or while needed repairs are made. Permanent changes to the designated road and trail system (change in allowed uses, addition or deletion of routes) will be subject to public review and comment.