

**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 forestlands 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. Due to extensive public input, the original plan proposal was modified to reflect the public's concerns. Users should expect to find a well organized designated trail system, where quality of experience is foremost.

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 DNR and Hubbard County Field 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 forestlands in Hubbard County. The Field 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 1,107 miles of forest roads, motorized and recreational 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 28 miles of designated County Forest Roads. 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 recreational non-motorized trail primarily intended for hiking. Twenty miles of the North Country Trail have been signed in the Paul Bunyan State Forest extending from the Cass County/Hubbard County line to County Road 91.

Almost half of the forest access routes on DNR Forestry and county administered forestlands in Hubbard County currently have no designation as either a forest road or recreational trail. These non-designated routes include old logging roads, skid trails, and informal routes created by users. At present, most of these non-designated routes are open to both motorized and non-motorized uses. However, in the future these routes will be closed to motorized riding under the *Limited* classification.

Proposed Road and Trail Designations

Forest Roads

The planning team’s recommendation is to designate 88 miles as system forest roads. About 64 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 295 miles as minimum maintenance forest roads. About 232 miles of these minimum maintenance roads are on county-administered lands and 63 miles are on state-administered forestland. 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. Proposed designated recreational trails both motorized and non-motorized are listed below.

Paul Bunyan State Forest – South Unit ATV/OHM Trail System	60 miles
Round River Drive ATV/OHM Trail System (outside forest boundaries)	27 miles
Two Inlets Forest Riders ATV/OHM Trail System	42 miles
Lake George to Lake Plantagenette ATV/OHM Trail System	12 miles
Martineau Recreation OHM Trail System	100 miles
South Paul Bunyan State Forest ORV/ATV/OHM Trail System	9 miles
North Country Trail	20 miles
Gated Walking Trails	14 miles
Soaring Eagles Cross-Country Ski Trail	7 miles

Non-designated Routes

Approximately 617 miles of existing inventoried routes were not designated for any use. Three hundred and four (304) miles of the non-designated routes are on state-administered land and 313 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, so they will be closed for motorized trail riding. (refer to pg. 16 Non-designated Routes)

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 forestlands 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 forestlands within Hubbard County.
2. Consider the criteria for classification of forestlands 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 forestlands 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 forestlands 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 of 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 31,000 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 forestlands. 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 (7 miles) 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. Twenty miles (20 miles) of trail has been completed and certified in the Paul Bunyan State Forest extending from the Cass County/Hubbard County line to County Road 91. 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 1,107 miles of forest roads and motorized and recreational 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 28 miles of designated County Forest Roads. 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. The Forest Riders ATV Trail System extends into Becker County. While the trails are generally open to ATVs from May 1 to October 31 each year, temporary closures may be instituted to protect the treadway, avoid user conflicts and address safety issues.

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 1 to October 31 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 Paul Bunyan Trail Riders and the Northern Lites Motorcycle Club, 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 - Twenty miles (20 miles) of trail has been completed in the Paul Bunyan State Forest extending from the Cass County/Hubbard County line to County Road 91, with an

additional 8 miles awaiting inspection. 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.

Non-designated Routes - In 2003, DNR staff documented over 800 miles of non-designated routes on DNR Forestry and county administered forestlands 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 non-designated 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. (refer to pg. 16 Non-designated Routes)

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 County 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 forestlands 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, 2005).

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 forestlands 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. 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 is proposing the following five areas to be designated as *closed* to motorized use, including the 7,200-acre Gulch Lakes Non-Motorized Area that is approximately 75% State of Minnesota lands. By designating these areas as ‘closed’, the hunting exemption will **not** apply, thereby making the areas totally non-motorized. Based on the 2005 legislation (*MN Laws 84.926, Subsection 5*), the ‘closed’ designation proposal will be accomplished through a separate public review process and is not part of this plan.

The forestlands 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 forestlands in Hubbard County.

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 Halverson 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 including the Nelson Lake/Lake 21 boat accesses, which are open to HLVs only), 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 Mantrap Lake campground, day-use area, and water access site in the SW corner of the section. The State Forest Road that serves these recreational facilities is 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 forestland 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 Hill – No OHV trails are proposed for the state-administered forestlands 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 forestlands.

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 Non-designated 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 forestlands 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 88 miles as system forest roads. About 64 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 295 miles as minimum maintenance forest roads. About 232 miles of these minimum maintenance roads are on county-administered lands and 63 miles are on state-administered forestland. 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 forestlands. 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. Twenty miles (20 miles) of trail are open for use with additional mileage identified from County Road 91 to Itasca State Park.

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 non-designated routes, although these routes are not signed, mapped, or maintained for hiking or any other recreational use. The non-designated 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 forestlands.

Cross-Country Skiing

The Itascatur Run-Ski-Bike Club is satisfied that the 12 kilometer (7 mile) 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 forestland 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. These link trails to services and amenities located outside of state forest boundaries.

This plan recommends 419 miles of routes open to ATVs on state and county forestlands. One hundred forty-one miles will be managed as recreational ATV trails on state and county forestlands. 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 with connecting routes west to the Two Inlets Forest Riders System. 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. Additional parking/staging areas will be considered at strategic points south of Lake George, north of Nevis and near Benedict. The DNR Trails & Waterways Division in partnership with the Division of Forestry and Hubbard County will manage the ATV trails in this forest.

There are connecting trails proposed in this plan that will connect the loop trail system with existing trail systems, key entry points and proposed parking areas. The proposed major connecting trails west from this loop trail system are as follows.

- The north route utilizing portions of the Spur I State Forest Road, West Gulch State Forest Road, County Road 91 and Halverson State Forest Road will be signed and maintained for recreational ATV traffic.
- The south route utilizing the Refuge State Forest Road, several short spurs west of County Road 91 and parts of the Teepee Lakes trail will be signed and maintained for recreational ATV traffic.

Existing connections to Akeley and Nevis and a link between the two towns 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. 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 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 governmental agency.
- **Two Inlets Forest Riders ATV Trail** - This is an existing Grant-in-Aid (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 a mixture of county, township, forest access and 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 lands and industrial forestland. 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 forestland 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.

Seasonal Closures

All summer use recreational trails are open from May 1st to October 31st each year, unless safety issues or resource conditions dictate otherwise. These dates have been chosen for specific reasons and include the following:

- May 1st – trails and roads are generally frost-free and dry enough to avoid most, but not all, damages to trail and road surfaces. There is discretion from the land administrator to open trails sooner, should dry conditions prevail.

- May 1st – Opening of trails and roads to OHV use minimizes fire hazard conflicts. Note: Authority currently exists (MN Laws Chapter 88.22 Sub 1a) to close forest areas due to fire hazards.
- October 31st – Allows TAW time to correct damages to trails and road surfaces in preparation of the snowmobile season. In Hubbard County dual use trails exist between OHV use and snowmobile use.
- The time between the October 31st closure of trails and roads to OHV use and the December 1st opening of snowmobile trails, is a critical period for maintenance and upkeep for both systems. Many years, it is not possible to complete all spring work necessary due to weather, soil conditions and field crew workloads.
- October 31st closure is important to minimize user conflicts during the firearm and primitive deer seasons.
- Within the Paul Bunyan State Forest some of the designated forest system roads and adjacent lands, have winter use restrictions for wheeled vehicles, including loggers. These are roads that were mutually agreed to in the 1986 Park Rapids Area Unit Plan to be groomed snowmobile trails.
- The public should note that within the seasonal closing restriction, the hunting exemption still applies.

Trails and roads used by and groomed for snowmobilers are closed to OHVs from December 1st to March 31st. Dedicated snowmobile account funds are spent to provide quality recreation trails for this user group. Closure of trails and roads in the trail system is important in protecting the investment made to prepare trails for the snowmobile season. In the south unit of the Paul Bunyan State Forest, the unit snowmobile trail system utilizes a combination of State Forest Minimum Maintenance Roads and trails developed as snowmobile trails that are gated during the summer season. This trail system has been in place for nearly 20 years and is signed to prohibit motorized use other than snowmobiles. The public is asked to review trail data through the DNR for up-to-date information on status of trail use.

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. (Refer also to seasonal closures above).

- **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 Paul Bunyan Trail Riders, the club that manages the trail, in the future but they will be subject to the 7-step process for designating trails.

In addition to the designated Martineau OHM Trail there are additional routes that allow OHM use. These trails encompass an additional 473 miles on state and county lands. 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

A nine-mile ORV trail is proposed for the southern unit of the Paul Bunyan State Forest. An additional 380 miles are also open for ORV use on state and county lands. The ORV Routes map shows the roads and trails that are proposed to be open to ORV use. (Refer also to seasonal closures above).

- **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. One mile 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.

Non-designated Routes

Approximately 617 miles of existing inventoried routes were not designated for any use. Three hundred and four (304) of the non-designated routes are on state-administered land and 313 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, ORVs and HLVs on forest trails not designated for a specific purpose, but being used in conjunction with some big game hunting or trapping activities at certain times of the year, may be operated on these non-designated routes under the exception contained in existing State Forest Rules. These non-designated 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 and Mileages

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

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

**HUBBARD COUNTY RECREATIONAL MOTORIZED
& NON-MOTORIZED USE OPPORTUNITIES**
State Land Mileage

	2006 FINAL PLAN		
	ROAD	TRAIL	TOTAL
Inventory	128	408	536
Newly designated: Open to OHV	126	103	229
Closed to OHV	2***	305	307
Open to ATV	126	36	162
Exclusive Use ATV	0	18	18
ATV Shared with OHM & ORV	126	18	144
Closed to ATV	2***	372	374
Open to OHM	126	86	212
Exclusive Use OHM	0	66	66
OHM Shared with ATV & ORV	126	20	146
Closed to OHM	2***	322	324
Open to ORV	126	7	133
Exclusive Use ORV	0	1	1
ORV Shared with ATV & OHM	126	6	132
Closed to ORV	2***	401	403
*Non-motorized & hiking	0	75	75
*Cross-country ski	0	7	7
**Snowmobile	45	23	68

* **NOTE:** Non-motorized recreational trails will be designated through a separate process, in conjunction with the five proposed non-motorized recreational areas identified in this plan.

** **NOTE:** Snowmobile mileage has not been changed through this planning process. There are 320 miles of snowmobile trails in Hubbard County. Of these miles, 182 are located within state, county and township road rights-of-way and the Heartland and Paul Bunyan state trails.

*** **NOTE:** Mantrap Lake Campground (1mile) and Nelson Lake/Lake 21 boat accesses (1 mile) are open to HLV only.

**HUBBARD COUNTY RECREATIONAL MOTORIZED
& NON-MOTORIZED USE OPPORTUNITIES**
County Land Mileage– Inside State Forest

	2006 FINAL PLAN		
	ROAD	TRAIL	TOTAL
Inventory	92	56	148
Newly designated: Open to OHV	92	0	92
Closed to OHV	0	56	56
Open to ATV	92	0	92
Exclusive Use ATV	0	0	0
ATV Shared with OHM & ORV	92	0	92
Closed to ATV	0	56	56
Open to OHM	92	0	92
Exclusive Use OHM	0	0	0
OHM Shared with ATV & ORV	92	0	92
Closed to OHM	0	56	56
Open to ORV	92	0	92
Exclusive Use ORV	0	0	0
ORV Shared with ATV & OHM	92	0	92
Closed to ORV	0	56	56
*Non-motorized & hiking	0	0	0
*Cross-country ski	0	0	0
**Snowmobile	10	4	14

* **NOTE:** Non-motorized recreational trails will be designated through a separate process, in conjunction with the five proposed non-motorized recreational areas identified in this plan.

** **NOTE:** Snowmobile mileage has not been changed through this planning process. There are 320 miles of snowmobile trails in Hubbard County. Of these miles, 182 are located within state, county and township road rights-of-way and the Heartland and Paul Bunyan state trails.

**HUBBARD COUNTY RECREATIONAL MOTORIZED
& NON-MOTORIZED USE OPPORTUNITIES
County Land Mileage– Outside State Forest**

	2006 FINAL PLAN		
	ROAD	TRAIL	TOTAL
Inventory	164	259	423
Newly designated: Open to OHV	164	2	166
Closed to OHV	0	257	257
Open to ATV	164	1	165
Exclusive Use ATV	0	1	1
ATV Shared with OHM & ORV	164	0	164
Closed to ATV	0	258	258
Open to OHM	164	1	165
Exclusive Use OHM	0	1	1
OHM Shared with ATV & ORV	164	0	164
Closed to OHM	0	258	258
Open to ORV	164	0	164
Exclusive Use ORV	0	0	0
ORV Shared with ATV & OHM	164	0	164
Closed to ORV	0	259	259
*Non-motorized & hiking	0	5	5
*Cross-country ski	0	0	0
**Snowmobile	33	23	56

*** NOTE:** Non-motorized recreational trails will be designated through a separate process, in conjunction with the five proposed non-motorized recreational areas identified in this plan.

**** NOTE:** Snowmobile mileage has not been changed through this planning process. There are 320 miles of snowmobile trails in Hubbard County. Of these miles, 182 are located within state, county and township road rights-of-way and the Heartland and Paul Bunyan state trails.

HUBBARD COUNTY RECREATIONAL MOTORIZED & NON-MOTORIZED USE OPPORTUNITIES

State & County – Total Mileage

	2006 FINAL PLAN		
	ROAD	TRAIL	TOTAL
Inventory	384	723	1,107
Newly designated: Open to OHV	382	105	487
Closed to OHV	2***	618	620
Open to ATV	382	37	419
Exclusive Use ATV	0	19	19
ATV Shared with OHM & ORV	382	18	400
Closed to ATV	2***	686	688
Open to OHM	382	87	469
Exclusive Use OHM	0	67	67
OHM Shared with ATV & ORV	382	20	402
Closed to OHM	2***	636	638
Open to ORV	382	7	389
Exclusive Use ORV	0	1	1
ORV Shared with ATV & OHM	382	6	388
Closed to ORV	2***	716	718
*Non-motorized & hiking	0	80	80
*Cross-country ski	0	7	7
**Snowmobile	88	50	138

* **NOTE:** Non-motorized recreational trails will be designated through a separate process, in conjunction with the five proposed non-motorized recreational areas identified in this plan.

** **NOTE:** Snowmobile mileage has not been changed through this planning process. There are 320 miles of snowmobile trails in Hubbard County. Of these miles, 182 are located within state, county and township road rights-of-way and the Heartland and Paul Bunyan state trails.

*** **NOTE:** Mantrap Lake Campground (1mile) and Nelson Lake/Lake 21 boat accesses (1 mile) are open to HLV only.

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 were subject to public review and comment. A public notice of the proposed reclassification and designations was published in the *State Register* and the legal newspaper for Hubbard County. A statewide DNR news release also announced the availability of the plans. A public open house meeting was held 60 days following the public notice.

The DNR evaluated public input received at the public open house and in written comments. The classification remained the same with designation decisions 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. The orders are projected to be published early 2006, with the change to a *limited* classification occurring by December 31, 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 a separate public review and comment period.

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.

HLV. “Highway licensed vehicles” means 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-designated Trail. A non-designated trail is one that is not designated for a specific use and is, therefore, generally closed to motorized use in a *limited* forest.

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

OHV. “Off-highway vehicle” means 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.

Utilitarian Forest User. Forest users who use the forest for purposes such as hunting, trapping, baiting, harvesting, gathering and farm use.

Location Map

