

**Forest Classification**  
And  
**Forest Road and Trail Designations**  
For the  
**White Earth Unit**  
**Draft Plan**



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### E.1 PURPOSE

*Minnesota Laws 2003*, Chapter 128, Article 1, Section 167 as amended by *Minnesota Laws 2005, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session*, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 152 directs the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to review the recreational motor vehicle use classification of all state forest lands and to designate forest roads and trails. Following public review and comment, the Commissioner must change the status of state forest lands subject to the review to a classification of *limited* or *closed*, and the motor vehicle use classification and road and trail designations are to be adopted and implemented through the publication of written orders in the *State Register* for each forest.

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 plan covers a portion of State Forest lands in the West Central Forests planning unit in west-central Minnesota.

Given the intermingled private, county, and state land ownership pattern in the West Central Forests planning unit, the DNR coordinated its work with relevant County Land Departments and White Earth Natural Resources. State, county, and tribal land managers jointly developed the recommended classifications and designations. This draft plan documents recommendations for state-administered lands only. The Commissioner of Natural Resources will only designate roads and trails on DNR-administered lands.

### E.2 LANDS COVERED BY THIS PLAN

There are six named State Forests with statutorily-defined boundaries within the West Central Forests planning unit. These six State Forests have a gross acreage of about 302,761 acres, of which about 103,572 acres administered by the DNR Division of Forestry are covered by the complete review.

DNR has subdivided the West Central planning unit into Northern and Southern parts that are labeled as the North Unit and South Unit respectively. Lands subject to the planning effort are allocated to the north and south parts as follows:

The **North Unit** includes: 1) forest lands within the statutory boundaries of Mississippi Headwaters and White Earth State Forests, and 2) scattered State Forest lands in Becker, Beltrami, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties.

The **South Unit** includes: 1) forest lands within the statutory boundaries of Huntersville, Lyons, Smoky Hills, and Two Inlets State Forests, and 2) scattered State Forest lands in Clay, Douglas, Otter Tail, Pope, Todd, and Wadena Counties.

This plan addresses proposed forest classifications and road/trail designations for the ***White Earth State Forest and scattered State Forest lands in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties in the North Unit***. The White Earth State Forest has a gross acreage of about 155,390, of which 42,336 acres (or about 27.2%) is administered by the DNR Division of Forestry and 47,576 acres (or about 30.6%) is administered by Becker and Clearwater Counties respectively, with the Mahnomen County forest lands managed by DNR. Another 24,600 acres of forest land administered by the DNR Division of Forestry lies outside of State Forest

boundaries in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties. Therefore, a total of 66,936 net acres of DNR-managed forest lands were the focus of the draft plan for the planning unit.

See Table E-1 that summarizes forest land ownership in the White Earth Unit.

**Table E-1. Summary of DNR-Managed Forest Land Ownership in White Earth Unit**

Source: Forest Access Route Unpublished Data, 2008. DNR DRS. Generated Using ArcView Extension

State Forest	Statutory Acres	Land Administrator (Acres)			Inventory (Miles)
		DNR	County	White Earth Reservation	
White Earth	155,390	42,336	Becker 27,863 Clearwater 18,573 Mahnomen 1,140	12,018	102.5
<b>Totals</b>		42,336	47,576	12,018	
Outside-Forest Acreage & Inventory					
County		DNR-Administered Lands (Acres)		Inventory (Miles)	
Becker		9,806		38.6	
Clearwater		10,434			
Mahnomen		4,360			
<b>Total</b>		24,600			

### E.3 PROPOSED MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATIONS

The State Forests and/or associated scattered State Forest lands in the White Earth Unit located south of US Highway 2 must be reclassified as either *limited* or *closed* to comply with current Minnesota law; lands located north of US Highway 2 are to maintain a *managed* classification unless reclassified by the DNR Commissioner. The DNR West Central Forests Road & Trail Designation Team discussed alternative classification proposals and developed consensus classification recommendations for State Forest lands in the planning area. All criteria listed in Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subpart 2 must be considered under the prescribed classification review. The team recommends that the Commissioner of Natural Resources classify State Forest lands within the planning area as follows:

White Earth State Forest:	<i>Limited</i>
Scattered State Forest Lands	
Becker County:	<i>Limited</i>
Clearwater County:	<i>Limited</i>
Mahnomen County:	<i>Limited</i>

### E.4 FOREST ROUTE INVENTORY

In 2003 and 2004, DNR staff made an effort to inventory the location and condition of all existing routes that show evidence of ongoing human use on state- and county-administered forest lands. The inventory identified about 140.8 miles of routes on DNR Forestry-administered lands in the White Earth Unit. Approximately 102.5 miles of inventoried routes are located inside the

statutory boundary of the state forest and 38.6 miles are located outside the state forest boundaries. Routes have also been inventoried on county-managed lands inside the state forest; a total of about 182.6 miles of route occurs on Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen County lands.

## E.5 PROPOSED ROUTE DESIGNATIONS

DNR collaborated extensively with the Land Departments for Becker and Clearwater Counties, and White Earth Natural Resources, to develop recommendations for future forest road and trail designations. Table E-2 summarizes the proposed designations of the inventoried forest routes on DNR- and county-managed lands within the forest boundary.

**Table E-2. Forest Road and Trail Designation Summary of the White Earth Unit**

Source: Forest Access Route Unpublished Data, 2008. DNR DRS. Generated Using ArcView Extension

Within-Forest Inventory (Miles)					
Designation Category	Land Administrator				Total
	DNR	Becker	Clearwater	Mahnomen	
<b>Forest Roads</b>	36.4	N/A	15.7	0.0	<b>52.1</b>
System Forest Road	10.4	N/A	14.3	0.0	24.7
MMR	26.0	N/A	1.4	0.0	27.4
<b>Trails</b>	3.7	N/A	4.7	0.0	<b>8.4</b>
ATV/OHM Trail	1.7	N/A	4.7	0.0	6.4
Non-motorized Trail	2.0	N/A	0.0	0.0	2.0
Future ATV/OHM Trail	0.4	N/A	1.2	0.0	1.6
<b>Non-designated Routes</b>	62.4	N/A	62.1	0.0	<b>124.5</b>
Proactive Closures	2.6	N/A	0.4	0.0	3.0
In <i>closed</i> forests	0.0	N/A	0.0	0.0	0.0
In <i>limited</i> forests	59.8	N/A	61.7	0.0	121.5
<b>Undefined Becker County Routes</b>	N/A	61.1	N/A	N/A	<b>61.1</b>
<b>Total Inventoried Routes</b>	<b>102.5</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>246.1</b>
DNR-Managed Lands / Outside-Forest Inventory					
Designation Category					Total
<b>Forest Roads</b>					<b>1.2</b>
System Forest Road					0.6
MMR					0.6
<b>Trails</b>					<b>6.8</b>
Non-motorized Trail					6.8
<b>Non-designated Routes</b>					<b>30.6</b>
Proactive Closures					1.9
In <i>closed</i> forests					0.0
In <i>limited</i> forests					28.7
<b>Total Inventoried Routes</b>					<b>38.6</b>

## E.6 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The proposed classifications of State Forest lands for motor vehicle use and the proposed road and trail designations in this draft plan are subject to public review and comment. The DNR will

evaluate public input received at the public open houses and in written comments. The classification and designation proposals may be modified in response to comments. The Commissioner of Natural Resources will then issue Commissioner's Orders to change the motor vehicle use classification and designate forest roads and trails. The anticipated effective date for the classification changes and route designations is December 31, 2008.

# WEST CENTRAL FORESTS – WHITE EARTH UNIT DRAFT PLAN

## 1.0 BACKGROUND

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages over 4 million acres of State Forest land for the people of Minnesota. Minnesota's State Forests are managed to produce timber, protect watersheds, provide outdoor recreation, and perpetuate rare and distinctive species of native flora and fauna. State Forests are managed in a "sustainable" manner, in order to ensure that they remain healthy, vital, and productive for present and future generations. State Forests provide a variety of dispersed, unstructured outdoor recreation opportunities, such as hunting, trapping, berry picking, and nature observation. For more structured activities, many State Forests contain recreation facilities with campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails designated for various motorized and non-motorized purposes. Minnesota Statutes direct the Commissioner of Natural Resources to:

- Manage State Forests according to the principles of multiple use and sustained yield under M.S. Section 89.002, subd. 1; and
- Provide a system of forest roads and trails to access State Forest lands under M.S. Section 89.002, subd. 3.

Prior to the mid-1980s 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 by *Minnesota Laws 2005, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session*, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 152 directs the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources to review the recreational motor vehicle use classification of all state forest lands and to designate forest roads and trails. Following public review and comment, the Commissioner must change the status of State Forest lands subject to the review located south of US Highway 2 to a classification of *limited* or *closed*, or maintain a *managed* classification for State Forest lands north of US Highway 2 unless reclassified by the Commissioner. The motor vehicle use classification and road and trail designations are to be adopted and implemented through the publication of written orders in the State Register for each forest.

This draft plan documents the outcome of that evaluation, and identifies the proposed state forest classification and those forest roads and trails that DNR proposes to officially designate, or undesignate, for various access purposes, both motorized and non-motorized, within the West Central Forests – White Earth planning unit (Unit). If the recommendations are implemented, use of motor vehicles (e.g., All-Terrain Vehicles or ATVs, Off-highway Motorcycles or OHMs, Off-Road Vehicles or ORVs, and highway licensed vehicles or HLVs) in the White Earth Unit will be limited to only those roads and trails that are specifically signed and/or designated for their use. The plan also identifies those routes DNR proposes to designate as non-motorized trails within the prescribed planning unit.

## **1.1 PROCESS**

In July 2006, an interdisciplinary team with members from the DNR Divisions of Ecological Services, Enforcement, Fish & Wildlife, Forestry, and Trails & Waterways began working on 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 forest lands in the planning area.
2. Consider the criteria for classification of State Forest lands (M.R. part 6100.1950) and recommend an appropriate motor vehicle use classification.
3. Evaluate all inventoried forest access routes and propose (un)designation of forest roads and trails for specific motorized and non-motorized uses.
4. Present the team's recommendations for public review, discussion and comment.

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

1. Compile an inventory of forest access routes, which are defined as forest roads and trails, and other routes, showing evidence of ongoing motorized use. Prepare maps showing all travel 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 interagency working sessions to make preliminary designation and use recommendations based on inventory data, staff knowledge, and public input from the open houses.
4. Identify routes potentially suitable for designation as motor/non-motor recreational trails.
5. Prepare designation plans and maps for internal agency and public review and comment.

Given the mix of county, state, and tribal land ownership in the planning area, the DNR team sought to coordinate its work with county land management agencies from Becker and Clearwater Counties and White Earth Reservation. The goal was to develop a consistent, understandable and enforceable approach to vehicular access across public and private forest land ownerships. The team worked within existing mandates and guidelines for the management of State Forest lands, while respecting the management plans and policies for other forest land owners in the planning area.

## **2.0 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. This plan covers a portion of State Forest lands in the West Central Forests in west-central Minnesota.

## **2.1 PLANNING UNIT DEFINED FOR THIS PLAN**

The West Central Forests planning unit includes six (6) named State Forests and scattered State Forest lands administered by the DNR Division of Forestry in ten (10) counties.

DNR has subdivided the West Central Forests planning unit into Northern and Southern parts that are labeled the North Unit and South Unit respectively. Lands subject to the planning effort are allocated as follows:

The ***North Unit*** includes: 1) forest lands within the statutory boundaries of Mississippi Headwaters and White Earth State Forests, and 2) scattered State Forest lands in Becker, Beltrami, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties.

The ***South Unit*** includes: 1) forest lands within the statutory boundaries of Huntersville, Lyons, Smoky Hills, and Two Inlets State Forests, and 2) scattered State Forest lands in Clay, Douglas, Otter Tail, Pope, Todd, and Wadena Counties.

This plan addresses proposed forest classifications and road/trail designations for the ***White Earth State Forest and scattered State Forest lands in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties in the North Unit***. DNR has already completed the classification review and road/trail designation of State Forest lands for both the West Central Forests – South Unit and the Mississippi Headwaters Unit.

## **2.2 LOCATION, ACREAGE, AND OWNERSHIP**

The DNR's West Central Forests planning unit is located in the following counties: Becker; southwestern Beltrami; Clay; Clearwater; Douglas; Hubbard; Mahnomen; Otter Tail; Todd; and Wadena. The White Earth Reservation is also contained in the planning unit (see Figure 1: Study Area). The total planning unit covers approximately 4.8 million acres, including water-covered areas.

There are six named State Forests with statutorily-defined boundaries within the West Central Forests planning unit. These six State Forests have a gross acreage of about 302,761 acres, of which about 103,572 acres administered by the DNR Division of Forestry are covered by the complete review of the North and South Units.

### **2.2.1 STATE ADMINISTERED LANDS**

The State Forest lands located within the White Earth Unit taken together encompass a gross acreage of about 179,990 acres. The White Earth State Forest includes 155,390 acres within the statutory boundary, of which DNR's Division of Forestry administers 42,336 acres, or about 27.2%. Another 24,600 acres of forest land administered by the DNR Division of Forestry lies outside of State Forest boundaries in the White Earth Unit. Therefore, a total of 66,936 net acres were the focus of this planning exercise.

In addition to State Forest lands, there are 67 WMAs (23,402 acres) that occur in the three counties present in the planning unit.

### **2.2.2 COUNTY ADMINISTERED LANDS**

Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties manage forest lands within the statutory boundary of the White Earth State Forest. Becker and Clearwater Counties have a Land Department responsible for motor vehicle use on these ownerships. Becker County manages 27,863 acres, Clearwater County manages 18,573 acres, and Mahnomen County manages

1,140 acres respectively. No county-managed forest lands outside the State Forest's statutory boundary are addressed in this draft plan.

See Table 1, Summary of Forest Land Ownership in White Earth Unit.

**Table 1. Summary of DNR-Managed Forest Land Ownership in White Earth Unit**

Source: Forest Access Route Unpublished Data, 2008. DNR DRS. Generated Using ArcView Extension

State Forest	Statutory Acres	Land Administrator (Acres)			Inventory (Miles)
		DNR	County	White Earth Reservation	
White Earth	155,390	42,336	Becker 27,863 Clearwater 18,573 Mahnomen 1,140	12,018	102.5
<b>Totals</b>		42,336	47,576	12,018	
Outside-Forest Acreage & Inventory					
County		DNR-Administered Lands (Acres)		Inventory (Miles)	
Becker		9,806		38.6	
Clearwater		10,434			
Mahnomen		4,360			
<b>Total</b>		24,600			

### 3.0 PROPOSED MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATION

Minnesota Law requires the Commissioner of Natural Resources to complete a review of the classification of State Forest lands for motor vehicle use by December 31, 2008. The process and criteria for forest classification are contained in Minnesota Rules part 6100.1950. subp. 2. The State Forest motor vehicle use classifications are characterized as follows:

**Managed Forest Lands.** All state 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 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 recreational trails. ATVs may be operated on non-designated routes and off trail under the hunting and trapping exceptions. 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 forest lands north of US Highway 2.

**Limited Forest Lands.** Forest roads are open to motor vehicle use unless posted closed. Forest trails are closed to motor vehicle use, except where 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. ATVs may be operated on non-designated routes and off trail under the hunting and trapping exceptions. ORVs and HLVs may be operated on non-designated routes under the hunting and trapping exceptions.

**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). Snowmobiles may operate on designated trails. These lands are characterized by high susceptibility to damage by motorized use 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.

### **3.1 LANDS COVERED BY THIS CLASSIFICATION REVIEW**

This motor vehicle use classification review covers State Forest lands in the West Central Forests – White Earth Unit in west-central Minnesota. The White Earth State Forest is the only state forest evaluated. Scattered State Forest lands evaluated are only those located in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomon Counties. The planning unit covers approximately 1,957,056 acres, including water-covered areas.

#### **3.1.1 INSIDE STATE FOREST BOUNDARIES**

There are 4 named State Forests occurring whole or in part with statutorily-defined boundaries within the planning unit; these are: Mississippi Headwaters; Smoky Hills; Two Inlets; and White Earth. This Draft Plan addresses the White Earth State Forest, which has a gross acreage of about 155,390 acres with about 42,336 acres administered by the DNR Division of Forestry are covered by this review. M.S. Section 84.777 applies the State Forest classification and road/trail designation process to county-administered forest lands within the boundaries of State Forests unless the county board adopts a resolution that modifies restrictions on the use of OHVs on county-administered land within the forest.

The intentions of counties that administer lands inside state forest boundaries within the White Earth Unit are as follows:

- Clearwater County has adopted a policy that forest roads and trails are “open unless restricted” to highway licensed vehicles (HLVs) and off-highway vehicles (OHVs). The

County adopted a resolution modifying restrictions on county-administered forests lands within State Forests on July 10, 2007.

- Becker County has not notified DNR of intentions to modify restrictions on county-administered forest lands within the White Earth State Forest.

The motor vehicle use classification and related State Forest rules do not apply on federal, tribal, or private lands within State Forest boundaries. The classification and rules do not apply to the rights-of-way of public highways within State Forest boundaries, which are under the jurisdiction of state, county, or local public road authorities. The classification and rules do not apply to state lands administered by DNR divisions other than the Division of Forestry, such as State Parks, Wildlife Management Areas, Scientific & Natural Areas, or State Trails.

### **3.1.2 OUTSIDE STATE FOREST BOUNDARIES**

The White Earth Unit includes about 24,600 acres of State Forest land administered by the DNR Division of Forestry outside of the State Forest boundaries. These State Forest Lands occur in Becker County (9,806 acres), Clearwater County (10,434 acres), and Mahnomen County (4,360 acres). All of these lands are covered by this classification review.

County-administered forest land outside of State Forest boundaries occurs in all three counties in the White Earth Unit. This draft plan does not apply to any of these county-administered lands.

This motor vehicle use classification does not apply on federal, tribal, or private lands outside of State Forest boundaries. The classification and rules do not apply to state lands administered by DNR divisions other than the Division of Forestry, such as State Parks, Wildlife Management Areas, Scientific & Natural Areas, or State Trails.

## **3.2 CLASSIFICATION EVALUATION PROCESS**

DNR West Central Team members reviewed the classification criteria, collected data related to classification, and gathered input from other DNR staff, county land commissioners, other governmental units, and the public. Five public open houses were conducted over the period September 25 through October 5, 2006. DNR received written input from the public over this period; it took the form of comment forms, letters, and e-mails. Potential classification schemes were discussed that resulted in the proposed classifications discussed in this draft plan.

The planning team considered applying either a *limited* or *closed* classification for the White Earth State Forest. Both approaches presented management and enforcement challenges given the checkerboard, patchwork nature of public land ownership inside the forest. Consideration was also given to access afforded members of the White Earth Reservation engaged in traditional hunting and gathering activities. The preliminary recommendation was to classify all State Forest lands as *limited*. This set the stage for examination of routes on DNR-administered lands and development of recommended designations of inventoried routes as forest roads and trails.

Team members considered and developed recommendations for forest classifications and road and trail designations over the period August 2006 to March 2007. The DNR team and county/tribal land managers collaborated extensively to develop joint recommendations on proposed forest road/trail designations, including two Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and

Non-designated Trail Use. Route-specific recommendations are based upon statutory criteria, an evaluation of existing conditions, and review of current use levels and patterns. Team members sought to protect natural resources and further resource management objectives through these recommendations. They also sought to foster consistency across mixed public ownerships in terms of county/tribal access plans and travel management policies. Consistency of regulation across mixed ownerships is desirable because it fosters public understanding of vehicular use rules and facilitates effective enforcement.

### **3.3 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 classification for all DNR Division of Forestry-administered state forest land in the White Earth Unit is currently *managed*.

### **3.4 RECOMMENDED CLASSIFICATIONS**

The state forests and/or associated scattered State Forest lands in the White Earth Unit must be reclassified as either *limited* or *closed* to comply with current Minnesota law. The DNR West Central Forests Road & Trail Designation Team discussed alternative classification proposals and developed consensus classification recommendations for State Forest lands in the planning area. The primary reasons supporting the classification recommendation for the state forest lands in the planning unit are presented below. All criteria listed in Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subpart 2 must be considered under the final classification review.

The team recommends that the Commissioner of Natural Resources classify State Forest lands within the planning area as described in the following text.

#### **3.4.1 WHITE EARTH STATE FOREST - *LIMITED***

The White Earth State Forest is a mixture of state, county, tribal, and private lands located approximately 20 miles east of Mahnomon, MN, eight (8) miles south of Bagley, MN, and near the western boundary of Itasca State Park. The forest's statutory boundary encompasses 155,390 acres. The DNR Division of Forestry administers 42,336 acres of this total acreage. The forest occurs in three distinct units divided by counties, specifically Becker County (6,947 acres), Clearwater County (17,988 acres), and Mahnomon County (17,401 acres), with the balance of 65,478 acres in tribal or private ownership.

This state forest exhibits a landscape that is glacial in origin. It is characterized by rolling hills, potholes, and lakes. The rough terrain and rocky soils make much of the area unsuited to agriculture, thus it is primarily forested and undeveloped. Several significant lakes are present, including Elbow, Bad Medicine, Juglar, Tulaby, Snider, and Basswood. Forest types include northern hardwoods (mainly oak, maple, basswood, red oak, ironwood, elm, and aspen) and

conifers (red pine, white pine, and white spruce). About one-fifth of the area is lowland brush and marsh.

The pattern of land ownership varies across the three management "districts." In Becker County, DNR parcels are smaller and are interspersed within relatively consolidated blocks of county-managed forest lands. DNR manages somewhat larger, more consolidated blocks of forest land in Clearwater County; these acres are still somewhat dispersed among relatively large blocks of county-managed lands. DNR lands in Mahanomen County are more mostly found along the western border of the forest, with some intermixing among tribal or private ownerships. DNR controls about 27% of the forest land while the counties control about 31%.

The state forest provides numerous opportunities for dispersed recreation on public lands. Local, privately operated resorts are also present. Many of the lakes offer public water accesses. The North Country Hiking Trail is also planned to cross the forest. Grant In Aid snowmobile trails include the Aspen Hills Trail, Buckboard Trail, and Height O Land Trail. The Shuttlebug Nature Trail is also present. Hunting opportunities abound in the White Earth State Forest for both small and large game species, especially deer and black bear. Trapping is present too, including minnows, leaches, and fur bearing mammals.

A series of state, county, tribal, and township roads, coupled with a network of existing forest roads and trails, provide access to state forest lands inside the statutory boundary. State Trunk Highways 113, 200, and 92 cross the forest, with County Road 4, 7, and 39 providing more local interconnection. White Earth Reservation Highways are also present. Motorized use in the forest includes utilitarian and hunting-related activity by both HLVs and OHVs. Recreational ATV riding also occurs along roads and on forest trails, but no designated non-motorized recreational trails are currently present. The level of motorized use varies by location, with some areas receiving little or no use and others receiving higher use levels. As previously noted, GIA snowmobile trails are present.

DNR received input from the open houses and directly from individuals and groups throughout the preliminary designation process. Comments were both general and forest-specific. General comments ranged from strong support to strong concern for OHV trails on public lands in Minnesota, coupled with statements regarding trail: impacts, damage, sustainability, enforcement, funding, monitoring, and maintenance. Issues raised in public comments specific to the White Earth State Forest are generalized below:

- Multiple requests for DNR to adopt a *closed* classification.
- Concerns over impacts to community at Long Lost Lake from both permanent and seasonal residents.
- Need for continued motor vehicle access, especially for ATVs.
- Incompatibility of ATV/OHV use with local communities.
- Damage already present from OHVs.
- Concerns over ditch riding.
- Enforcement/monitoring problematic due to remoteness of area.
- Solitude and "quiet" recreation valued in the WESF.
- Forest not suited to motorized recreation.
- Designated trail systems needed for quality motorized recreational experience.
- Concern over loss of historic public access and potential route closures.

The planning team considered the appropriateness of a *closed* versus *limited* classification for the White Earth State Forest. Particular attention was paid to providing an enforceable scheme of public access while acknowledging differences in public access policies across DNR, county, and tribal ownerships. The team also recognized access rights on public lands afforded members of the White Earth Reservation engaged in traditional hunting and gathering activities. The Department, counties, and White Earth Natural Resources attempted to ensure that all planning-related recommendations recognized the range and variety of public access needs within the planning unit.

The DNR team proposes a *limited* classification for DNR Forestry-administered forest lands in the White Earth State Forest. A *limited* classification affords a better opportunity to align DNR, county, and tribal land management than would be available under a *closed* classification. Where possible, Clearwater County and White Earth Natural Resources have accommodated access to DNR Forestry-managed lands while recognizing some routes are not sustainable. Becker County also participated in the process, but has not established a motor vehicle access policy to date; the Department will work with Becker County to further coordinate public access opportunities once the county policy is determined. The *limited* classification also acknowledges that some degree of motorized access can be sustained on the existing trail inventory. Regardless of whether DNR lands are classified as *limited* or *closed*, a high level of coordination will be necessary on a continuous, ongoing basis to maintain access for all public lands located within the White Earth State Forest.

The planning team also considered the potential to provide more targeted motorized recreation opportunities in Clearwater County. To this end, Clearwater County is proposing 4.7 miles of ATV-OHM designation on existing routes that will be coupled with a possible 1.2 miles of newly constructed trail. DNR too proposes to provide ATV-OHM Trail designation to complement the set of county-managed routes for a total of 1.7 miles of existing corridor designation with 0.4 miles of potential future corridor development.

The planning team also identified an opportunity to improve hunter walking experiences in the northeastern part of the forest at Upper Rice Lake. Here, 2.0 miles of designated hunter walking trail is proposed in conjunction with an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use.

The planning team will consider all public comments on the proposed management scheme, forest classification, road and trail designations, and Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use.

### **3.4.2 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / BECKER COUNTY - LIMITED**

The DNR's White Earth Unit planning area in Becker County includes 40 complete public land survey townships (Townships 138N - 142N, Ranges 36W – 43W, inclusive). Part of the White Earth State Forest is located in the county while all of Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests are found there. There are approximately 9,806 acres of DNR-Forestry administered land in the county outside of State Forest boundaries that are managed as State Forest Land and thus need to be classified for motor vehicle use.

The scattered State Forest land parcels in Becker County occur as both Minnesota School Trust Lands and other non-trust parcels. Eighteen (18) tracts occur whole or in part as Section 16 or 36 parcels.

All state forest lands within the in Becker County are currently classified as *managed*. The planning team recommends a *limited* classification for the remaining scattered DNR Forestry-managed lands in Becker County. About 34.7 miles of inventory is present on DNR Forestry-administered state forest lands. The Draft Plan proposes approximately 0.6 miles of minimum maintenance roads on these parcels. The area in Section 16, T139N, R40W has both cross-country ski and hiking trails present and has historically been managed as a non-motorized area; this 6.8 miles of trail is proposed to retain a non-motorized status. The balance of 25.4 miles will have a non-designated status. A *limited* classification will allow historic big game hunting and trapping access as afforded under M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4, while protecting other resource values. Public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, on non-designated routes under a *limited* classification. Both HLVs and OHVs are permitted uses on forest roads.

### **3.4.3 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / CLEARWATER COUNTY - LIMITED**

The DNR's White Earth Unit planning area in Clearwater County includes 22 complete public land survey townships (Townships 143N - 149N, Ranges 36W – 38W, inclusive). Parts of three other townships are present at the north end of the county; these are Townships T150N – R37W, T150N – R36W, and T151N – R38W. Parts of both the White Earth State Forest and Mississippi Headwaters State Forests are in this county. There are approximately 10,434 acres of DNR-Forestry administered land in the county outside of State Forest boundaries that need to be classified for motor vehicle use.

The scattered State Forest land parcels in Clearwater County occur as both Minnesota School Trust Lands and other non-trust parcels. Ten (10) tracts occur whole or in part as Section 16 or 36 parcels, with two of these located inside Itasca State Park.

All state forest lands within Clearwater County are currently classified as *managed* except for those located in the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest, which was recently reclassified to *limited*. The planning team recommends a *limited* classification for the remaining scattered DNR Forestry-managed lands in Clearwater County. About 3.8 miles of inventory is present on DNR Forestry-administered state forest lands. The Draft Plan proposes approximately 0.5 miles of system forest road on these parcels. The balance of 3.3 miles will have a non-designated status. A *limited* classification will allow historic big game hunting and trapping access as afforded under M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4, while protecting other resource values. Public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, on non-designated routes under a *limited* classification. Both HLVs and OHVs are permitted uses on forest roads.

### **3.4.4 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / MAHNOMEN COUNTY - LIMITED**

The DNR's White Earth Unit planning area in Mahnomen County includes 16 complete public land survey townships (Townships 143N - 146N, Ranges 39W – 42W, inclusive). Part of the White Earth State Forest occurs in the county; the balance of state forest lands occur outside state forest boundaries. There are approximately 4,360 acres of DNR-Forestry administered land in the county outside of State Forest boundaries that are managed as State Forest Land and thus need to be classified for motor vehicle use.

No scattered State Forest land parcels in Mahnomen County occur as Minnesota School Trust Lands.

All state forest lands within Mahnomen County are currently classified as *managed*. The planning team recommends a *limited* classification for the remaining scattered DNR Forestry-managed lands in Mahnomen County. No inventory has been collected inside Mahnomen County. A *limited* classification will allow historic big game hunting and trapping access as afforded under M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4, while protecting other resource values. Public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, on non-designated routes under a *limited* classification. Both HLVs and OHVs are permitted uses on forest roads.

#### **4.0 FOREST ROUTE INVENTORY**

In preparation for this road and trail designation process, the DNR West Central Team compiled available information on the existing roads, trails, and routes that show evidence of continuing human use on all State 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 collected from the DNR and all three counties. Data on previously designated 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 forest access routes on state- and county-administered forest lands that show evidence of ongoing human use. Field crews inventoried most of the access 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 access routes 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.

While reasonable efforts were made to correct the travel routes data there are inherent limitations on the completeness and accuracy of the forest route inventory data. 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 access routes. Unused trails and routes re-vegetate, beavers flood routes, and what is a passable route in a dry year maybe impassable in wet years. The forest route inventory showed 141.1 miles of routes on DNR Forestry-administered State Forest lands in the White Earth Unit.

#### **5.0 ROUTE DESIGNATION POLICIES AND PROCESS**

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 the present and for 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 contain recreation facilities with campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails for

**Table 2. Summary of Forest Route Inventory**

Source: Forest Access Route Unpublished Data, 2007. DNR DRS. Generated Using ArcView Extension

<b>White Earth State Forest</b>	<b>Miles</b>
DNR	102.5
Becker	61.1
Clearwater	82.5
Mahnomen	0.0
Outside of State Forest / DNR-managed Only	38.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>284.7</b>

many State Forests contain recreation facilities with 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 under M.S. Section 89.002, subd. 1; and
- Provide a system of forest roads and trails to access State Forest lands under M.S. Section 89.002, subd. 3.

Minnesota Rules part 6100.1950 contains policies and regulations for public use of motor vehicles on State Forest land. It also provides a process for forest classification, including public notice and review requirements.

## **5.1 INTERAGENCY COOPERATION**

The complex and intermingled public land ownership pattern within certain parts of the West Central Forests planning area requires a collaborative effort by county, state, and tribal agencies to develop a motor vehicle management system that protects natural resources, serves public needs, and complies with existing laws and rules.

Becker, Clearwater, and Hubbard Counties have Land Departments that manage county forest lands in accordance with management plans and policies developed by their respective County Boards. The remaining counties in the greater planning unit, specifically Clay, Douglas, Mahnomen, Otter Tail, Pope, Todd, and Wadena, do not have Land Departments and entrust DNR with the management of county-owned forest lands. Most of the county forest lands are tax-forfeited lands and are managed in compliance with M.S. Chapter 282.

White Earth Reservation has a Natural Resources Department that manages tribal forest lands in accordance with an adopted Natural Resources Management Plan. White Earth Natural Resources also oversees traditional hunting and gathering rights afforded by treaty to tribe members.

The DNR team coordinates its work with county and tribal land management agencies as required in different parts of the planning area. The goal is to develop a consistent, understandable, and enforceable approach to vehicular access across public and private forest land ownerships. The team worked within existing mandates and guidelines for the

management of State Forest lands, while respecting the management plans and policies for other forest land owners in the planning area.

### **5.1.1 INTERAGENCY RECOGNITION OF FOREST ROAD DESIGNATIONS**

The DNR and each county Land Department have forest road designation and management policies. Given the complex land ownership pattern it is quite common for forest roads that are managed by one agency to cross lands administered by another agency. This allows one agency to be responsible for signing and maintenance of a road that serves lands administered by other agencies, and in some cases adjacent private land.

As part of the collaborative motor vehicle management effort for public forest lands in the West Central Forests planning area, the county, state, and tribal forest management agencies have agreed to mutually recognize forest roads that have been formally designated by each agency. For example, the DNR will recognize a county road that crosses State Forest lands and agrees that the county's policies will govern public use of the road.

In addition to formally designated forest roads there are non-designated routes that exist on public forest lands. The agencies have agreed that control, management, and public use of these non-designated routes will be governed by the policies of the underlying land owner.

## **5.2 DEVELOPMENT OF ACCESS PROPOSALS**

All inventoried routes on State Forest land have been proposed for designation 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 as described above.

The proposed 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 data, and the Natural Heritage Elements database. A work group consisting of DNR staff and representatives of the Clearwater County Land Department, and White Earth Natural Resources, developed the proposed designations on DNR- and Clearwater County managed lands. DNR consulted with the Becker County Land Department on the recommendations for DNR parcels occurring in Becker County. The workgroup met approximately two dozen times between October 2006 and September 2007 to evaluate the entire West Central Forests, including the White Earth Unit. Public open houses were held in September-October 2006 as another source of information to be considered by the team. For routes that had been managed as state forest roads or recreational trails in the past, the presumption was that 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 proposed 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.

## 6.0 PROPOSED FOREST ROUTE DESIGNATIONS

DNR's Forest Road & Trail Designation Team conducted a route-by-route review of the 2003 – 2004 inventory and developed a recommended future designation status for all 141.1 miles of routes on DNR Forestry-administered lands in the White Earth Unit. Another 143.6 miles of routes on county-administered lands are also provided in the draft plan consistent with the current status of county public access policies.

The draft plan provides proposed forest road and trail recommendations for both DNR- and Clearwater County-managed lands WITHIN the statutory boundary of the White Earth State Forest. Recommendations for scattered State Forest lands are offered ONLY for DNR Forestry-administered parcels outside the forest boundary. All parties are committed to a motor vehicle management system that protects natural resources, serves public needs, and complies with existing laws and rules. The routes that are proposed by DNR, Clearwater County, and White Earth Natural Resources, for each type of designation are shown on the maps that are part of this draft plan.

### 6.1 ROUTE DESIGNATION SUMMARY

The miles of routes proposed to receive various administrative designations are identified below. This draft plan addresses 102.5 miles of routes on DNR Forestry-administered State Forest lands within the forest's statutory boundary and 38.6 miles of routes on scattered State Forest lands in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties covered in this planning unit. The routes are also shown on the maps that accompany this plan.

See Table 3, Forest Road and Trail Designation Summary of the White Earth Unit.

### 6.2 FOREST ROADS

Forest roads are routes that are maintained by resource management agencies to provide access to public forest lands for resource management and public use. Forest roads range from unimproved, double track with a 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 determine 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 ..." (*M.S. Section 89.001, subd. 14*)
2. "The commissioner shall provide a system of forest roads and trails which provides access to state forest land ..." (*M.S. Section 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 ..." (*M.S. Section 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..." (*M.S. Section 89.71, subd. 5*)

**Table 3. Forest Road and Trail Designation Summary of the White Earth Unit**

Source: Forest Access Route Unpublished Data, 2007. DNR DRS. Generated Using ArcView Extension

Within-Forest Inventory (Miles)					
Designation Category	Land Administrator				Total
	DNR	Becker	Clearwater	Mahnomen	
<b>Forest Roads</b>	36.4	N/A	15.7	0.0	<b>52.1</b>
System Forest Road	10.4	N/A	14.3	0.0	24.7
MMR	26.0	N/A	1.4	0.0	27.4
<b>Trails</b>	3.7	N/A	4.7	0.0	<b>8.4</b>
ATV/OHM Trail	1.7	N/A	4.7	0.0	6.4
Non-motorized Trail	2.0	N/A	0.0	0.0	2.0
Future ATV/OHM Trail	0.4	N/A	1.2	0.0	1.6
<b>Non-designated Routes</b>	62.4	N/A	62.1	0.0	<b>124.5</b>
Proactive Closures	2.6	N/A	0.4	0.0	3.0
In <i>closed</i> forests	0.0	N/A	0.0	0.0	0.0
In <i>limited</i> forests	59.8	N/A	61.7	0.0	121.5
<b>Undefined Becker County Routes</b>	N/A	61.1	N/A	N/A	<b>61.1</b>
<b>Total Inventoried Routes</b>	<b>102.5</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>246.1</b>
<b>DNR-Managed Lands / Outside-Forest Inventory</b>					
Designation Category					Total
<b>Forest Roads</b>					<b>1.2</b>
System Forest Road					0.6
MMR					0.6
<b>Trails</b>					<b>6.8</b>
Non-motorized Trail					6.8
<b>Non-designated Routes</b>					<b>30.6</b>
Proactive Closures					1.9
In <i>closed</i> forests					0.0
In <i>limited</i> forests					28.7
<b>Total Inventoried Routes</b>					<b>38.6</b>

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, at any time, to some or all vehicular use due to public safety and/or natural resource protection considerations. State Forest Roads may be closed seasonally or temporarily to address specific road or fire conditions. The DNR divides State Forest Roads into two classes – System Roads and Minimum Maintenance Roads – based upon 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 public roads. 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 access 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” sign, and may be gated and closed during certain times of the year. Minimum maintenance roads are more likely to be subjected to travel restrictions than are higher standard system forest roads.

Forest roads maintained by County Land Departments and White Earth Natural Resources are typically similar to State Forest Roads in terms of maintenance levels and public use guidelines.

### **6.2.1 SYSTEM FOREST ROADS – PROPOSED DESIGNATIONS**

The proposal is to designate 10.6 miles of System State Forest Roads on public lands within the state forest boundary; another 0.6 miles is designated outside state forest boundaries. These roads will be managed by the DNR and will typically be open to HLVs and OHVs. Additional miles occur on private ownerships. Clearwater County maintains 14.3 miles of system forest road on county-managed land.

### **6.2.2 MINIMUM MAINTENANCE FOREST ROADS – PROPOSED DESIGNATIONS**

The planning team recommends the designation of about 26.0 miles of Minimum Maintenance State Forest Roads within the state forest boundary. These roads will be managed by the DNR and will typically be open to HLVs and OHVs but they may not be maintained to a level where low-clearance vehicles can routinely travel on them. Another 0.6 miles are proposed for designation by DNR outside the state forest boundary. One 1.4 mile-long segment occurring on DNR, Clearwater County, and White Earth Reservation lands is expected to be managed as a Minimum Maintenance Road and has been treated as such in the plan.

## **6.3 RECREATIONAL FOREST TRAILS**

M.S. 89.19, subd. 2 authorizes the Commissioner of Natural Resources to designate forest trails under prescribed procedures. Designated forest trails provide access to the State Forests for a range of purposes, both recreational and utilitarian. The Commissioner may designate motorized or non-motorized trails, and may align with or include local loop systems or regional corridor trails with associated support facilities (e.g., parking or staging areas, toilets, trailhead, day-use picnic sites). These trails have designated primary uses, are well signed, monitored, and maintained, and are mapped and listed in DNR publications.

This draft plan recommends designations for both motor and non-motor forest trails known as “unit trails.” No Grant-in-Aid (GIA) trail designations are offered.

### **6.3.1 NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS – PROPOSED DESIGNATIONS**

The planning team recommends the designation of 8.8 miles of non-motorized trail in the White Earth Unit. One designation of approximately 2.0 miles occurs near Upper Rice Lake, where the primary use for this trail is hunter walking. A second designation is proposed for a scattered DNR Forestry-administered parcel northeast of Detroit Lakes; about 6.8 miles are proposed to have an unspecified primary use with a general non-motorized designation at this location.

There are many opportunities for non-motorized recreation beyond the designated and maintained hunter walking and non-motorized 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 on DNR Forestry-administered lands are closed to motor vehicle use except that ATVs and HLVs may be used for certain big game hunting and trapping activities at certain times of the year (under a limited forest classification) outside the two Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use; this activity is prohibited inside these zones. Foot travel is also allowed off-trail on forest lands.

### **6.3.2 ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE (ATV) TRAILS – PROPOSED DESIGNATIONS**

ATVs are permitted to operate on forest roads, and on forest trails specifically designated for ATV use subject to seasonal road and/or trail closures. This draft plan recommends 39.3 miles of routes that are to be open to ATVs on DNR Forestry-administered lands. Of this amount, 1.7 miles are proposed as designated ATV/OHM trail on state forest lands with the balance of 37.6 miles available for ATV use being provided by system and minimum maintenance forest roads. Clearwater County also proposes about 4.7 miles. Another 1.6 miles of potential future connecting ATV/OHM trails are proposed on a mix of DNR and Clearwater County lands.

All proposed forest roads and ATV/OHM trails will be open to Class 1 ATVs. Operation of Class 2 ATVs will be permissible on all forest roads, while it is possible that some segments of designated ATV/OHM trail will not be available for Class 2 ATV use. This will be determined on a route-by-route basis during plan implementation.

### **6.3.3 OFF-HIGHWAY MOTORCYCLE (OHM) TRAILS – PROPOSED DESIGNATIONS**

OHMs are permitted to operate on forest roads and trails specifically designated for OHM use subject to temporary and/or seasonal closures. This draft plan recommends 39.3 miles of routes open to OHMs on state-administered lands. This includes 37.6 miles of system and minimum maintenance forest roads and 1.7 miles of ATV/OHM trail. All designations are applied to existing routes.

A total of 44.0 miles of routes open to OHMs (and ATVS) are proposed on existing routes on state- and county-managed forest lands. Also as previously noted, the draft plan recommends consideration of constructing 1.6 miles of new ATV/OHM trail on DNR and county lands in Clearwater County.

### **6.3.4 OFF-ROAD VEHICLE (ORV) TRAILS – PROPOSED DESIGNATIONS**

ORVs are permitted to operate on forest roads and trails specifically designated for ORV use. This draft plan recommends that 37.6 miles of forest roads be open to ORVs on state-administered lands. No ORV-only trail designations are proposed under the draft plan for either DNR- or county-managed forest lands. Both ORVs and HLVs may operate on state forest roads, subject to seasonal road and/or trail closures and/or weight restrictions.

## **6.4 NON-DESIGNATED ROUTES – IMPLICATIONS FROM CLASSIFICATION**

A total of 165.1 miles of existing routes will remain non-designated under this proposal (DNR and Clearwater County). While all of these routes are open to non-motorized recreation

regardless of land manager (e.g., DNR, county), and will not normally be signed or actively managed, whether they can be subject to motorized use varies by ownership. First and foremost, permitted motor uses of these routes on DNR-administered lands depend upon the motor vehicle use classification. The status of these routes on county-administered lands in turn depends on their respective public access policies. Consideration is also necessary for routes inside Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use, which are treated differently than routes outside these areas. Differences between the assignments of a *limited* versus *closed* forest classification on non-designated routes are highlighted below. Complete closure of trails is also discussed.

#### **6.4.1 NON-DESIGNATED ROUTES – LIMITED CLASSIFICATION**

*DNR Forestry-Administered Forest Lands.* Non-designated routes are closed to motor vehicle use, except pursuant to the provisions of M.S. Section 84.926. Under the exceptions provided by law, licensed hunters and trappers using ORVs/HLVs/ATVs may use these routes for big game hunting and trapping purposes during specified legal seasons. ATVs may use forest roads and non-designated routes, and may travel off-trail for these same purposes, subject to standard state forest land prohibitions on rutting, soil erosion, and vegetative damage. See Section 6.5 for use of non-designated routes in Areas with Limitations. This plan recommends a non-designated status for 88.5 miles of existing routes in the White Earth Unit.

Non-designated routes would be subject to this management scheme under this draft plan.

*Becker County-managed Forest Lands.* The status of non-designated routes in Becker County has not been determined. If the county does not exercise its authority under M.S. 84.777, subd. 1.B and adopt a motor vehicle public access policy that differs from DNR, then unsigned, non-designated routes would be subject to the same use restrictions as would occur on DNR-managed parcels. Becker County has about 61.1 miles of routes within the state forest boundary, some of which may have a non-designated status in the future.

*Clearwater County-managed Forest Lands.* Non-designated routes are “open unless restricted” to use by HLVs and OHVs on these ownerships. ATVs may operate off trail when engaged in lawful big game hunting and trapping-related activities. Approximately 61.7 miles of route meet this definition in Clearwater County.

*Mahnomen County.* No inventory is recorded for Mahnomen County.

#### **6.4.2 NON-DESIGNATED ROUTES – CLOSED CLASSIFICATION**

*DNR-managed Forest Lands.* Non-designated routes are closed to all motor vehicle use year-round. M.S. Section 84.926 does not apply. The only motorized uses permitted in *closed* forests are highway licensed vehicles on signed Forest Roads and snowmobiles on signed, designated snowmobile trails. OHVs may operate only on frozen waters.

This management scheme is not proposed to apply under this draft plan.

#### **6.4.3 PROACTIVE CLOSURES**

Those non-designated routes that are unsuited for motor vehicle use, or showing signs of damage, have been proactively closed. Closed routes will have signs, gates, or barricades to

clearly indicate that motor vehicle use is not permitted. These routes are also unavailable for motor vehicle use under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions provided under M.S. Section 84.926. DNR recommends about 4.5 miles of proactive closure on state forest lands under its jurisdiction.

## **6.5 AREAS WITH LIMITATIONS ON OFF-TRAIL AND NON-DESIGNATED TRAIL USE**

M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 5 empowers the Commissioner of Natural Resources to designate areas on State Forest lands that are not subject to the big game hunting and trapping exceptions detailed in M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 & 4. These areas are established for the purpose of protecting unique natural resource values, providing improved user opportunities, or other reasons. Off-trail travel by ATVs (subd. 2), and use of non-designated routes by ORVs, HLVs, and ATVs (subd. 4), is not permitted in this area.

Two such areas are recommended within the White Earth Unit. The Snider Lake Area covers approximately 3,360 acres on the western end of the state forest inside Mahnomen County. The second such area is at Upper Rice Lake and covers about 4,710 acres.

## **6.6 DESIGNATION MAPS**

The proposed forest road and trail designations for State Forest lands in the South Unit are depicted on a series of Route Designation Maps, which are incorporated into this draft plan by reference. The map is also available on the DNR website. A CD containing the map in a Portable Document Format (PDF) is available upon request.

Each route on both DNR- and county-managed lands has been assigned a unique Route Identification Number to assist in public comments.

## **6.7 PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT**

### **6.7.1 PUBLIC NOTICE REQUIREMENTS**

The proposed classification of the State Forest lands for motor vehicle use and the proposed road and trail designations in this draft plan are subject to public review and comment. A public notice of the proposed classification and designations will be published in the *State Register* on May 12, 2008. Legal notices will occur in newspapers for Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties. A statewide DNR news release will also announce the availability of the draft plan for public review.

### **6.7.2 PUBLIC MEETINGS**

One public open house meeting will be held not sooner than 60 days following the *State Register* notice.

**Public Meeting.** A public meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 15, 2008 from 6:00 to 8:30 PM at the Mahnomen High School, 209 First Street, Mahnomen, MN. DNR's Planning Team and Area Staff familiar with the White Earth State Forest, and scattered State Forest lands in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties will be attending.

Staff from Becker and Clearwater Counties and White Earth Natural Resources will also be present.

The first hour of each meeting will allow attendees to informally review the draft plan, maps, and other summary materials. DNR and other cooperating government agencies will be on hand to answer questions regarding motorized access planning in terms of forest classification and proposed designations for public forest lands in these counties. During the remainder of the meeting, DNR staff will present information, respond to questions, and receive public comment on the proposals. Written comments will also be accepted.

### **6.7.3 COMMENTING**

Reviewers should provide comment regarding the proposed: forest classifications; road/trail designations; Areas with Limitations on Off-Trail and Non-Designated Trail Uses; and other information deemed relevant to future DNR decisions. Comments should be specific to the state forest and/or scattered State Forest land parcels. Comments on specific routes should reference the unique Route Identification Number that is present for each route on the maps.

**DNR will accept public comment on the Draft Plan and Proposed Classification Review until 4:30 PM on July 25, 2008.**

**Written comments should be directed to:**

**Bill Johnson, Planner  
MnDNR Division of Trails & Waterways  
500 Lafayette Road, Box 52  
St. Paul, MN 55155-4052  
[bill.johnson@dnr.state.mn.us](mailto:bill.johnson@dnr.state.mn.us)  
fax: 651-297-5475**

Email Comments should be directed to [whiteearthunit@dnr.state.mn.us](mailto:whiteearthunit@dnr.state.mn.us).

Questions can be directed to Bill Johnson at 651-259-5643.

## **7.0 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

### **7.1 ADOPTION OF THE CLASSIFICATION AND ROAD/TRAIL DESIGNATION PLAN**

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

### **7.2 ROAD AND 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 forest roads and trails as proposed in the final plan prior to the effective date provided in the classification order.

### **7.3 EXPECTED DATE OF CHANGE IN MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATION**

The anticipated effective date for the change in classification, route designations, and Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use is December 31, 2008.

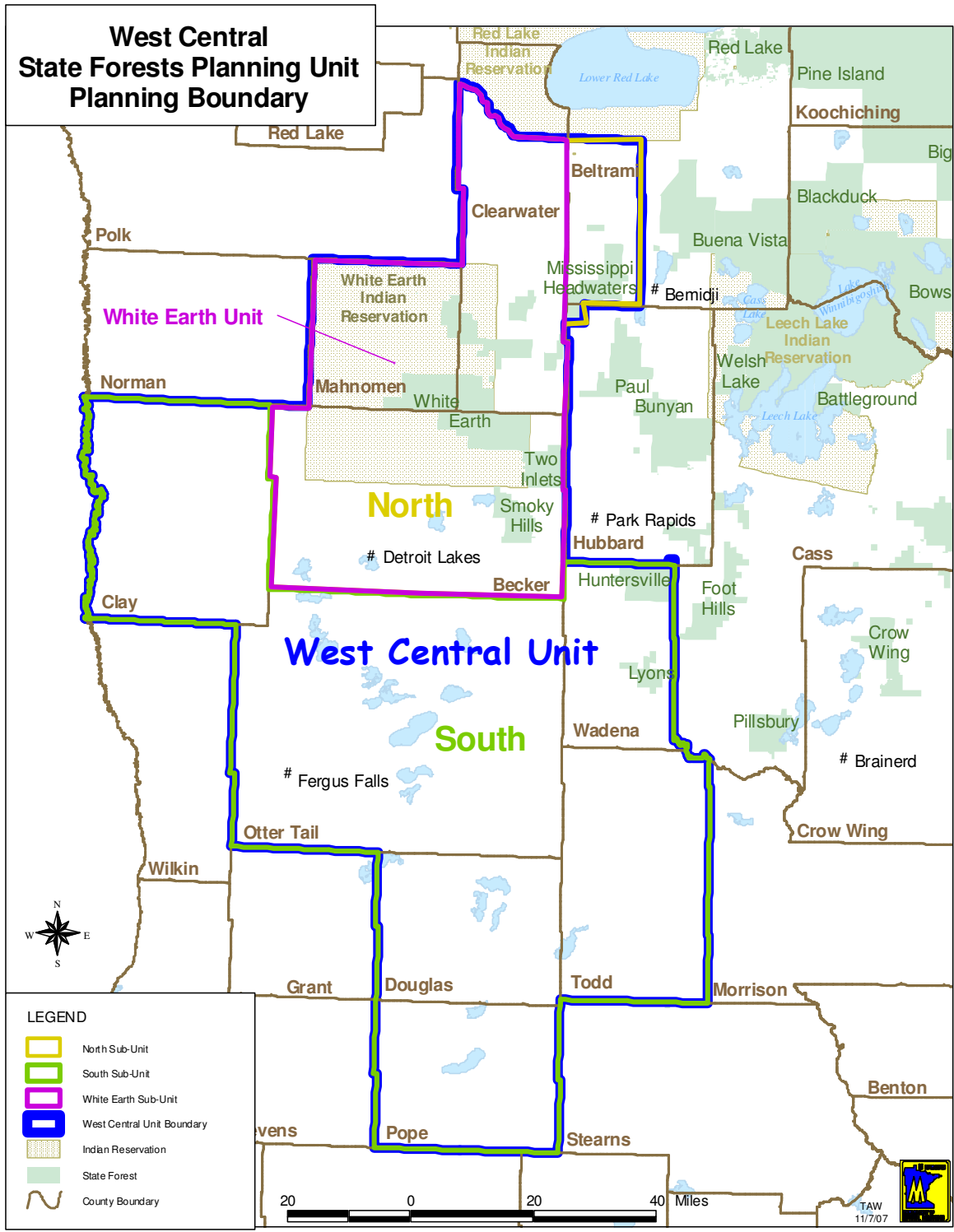
### **7.4 ONGOING MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT**

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, 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.

Figure 1: Planning Unit



## Appendices

### ***Minnesota Statutes and Rules Related to State Forest Classification***

*Minnesota Laws 2003, Chapter 128, Article 1, Section 167 as amended by Minnesota Laws 2005, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 152*

Sec. 167. [FOREST LAND OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE USE RECLASSIFICATION.]

Subdivision 1. [FOREST CLASSIFICATION STATUS REVIEW.]

(a) By December 31, 2006, the commissioner of natural resources shall complete a review of the forest classification status of all state forests classified as managed or limited, all forest lands under the authority of the commissioner as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 89.001, subdivision 13, and lands managed by the commissioner under Minnesota Statutes, section 282.011. The review must be conducted on a forest-by-forest and area-by-area basis in accordance with the process and criteria under Minnesota Rules, part 6100.1950. Except as provided in paragraph (d), after each forest is reviewed, the commissioner must change its status to limited or closed, and must provide a similar status for each of the other areas subject to review under this section after each individual review is completed.

(b) If the commissioner determines on January 1, 2005, that the review required under this section cannot be completed by December 31, 2006, the completion date for the review shall be extended to December 31, 2008. By January 15, 2005, the commissioner shall report to the chairs of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over natural resources policy and finance regarding the status of the process required by this section.

(c) Until December 31, 2010, the state forests and areas subject to review under this section are exempt from Minnesota Statutes, section 84.777, unless an individual forest or area has been classified as limited or closed.

(d) Notwithstanding the restrictions in paragraph (a), and Minnesota Statutes, section 84.777, all forest lands under the authority of the commissioner as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 89.001, subdivision 13, and lands managed by the commissioner under Minnesota Statutes, section 282.011, that are north of U.S. Highway 2 shall maintain their present classification unless the commissioner reclassifies the lands under Minnesota Rules, part 6100.1950. The commissioner shall provide for seasonal trail closures when conditions warrant them. By December 31, 2008, the commissioner shall complete the review and designate trails on forest lands north of Highway 2 as provided in this section.

Subdivision 2. [TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW.]

The requirements for environmental review under Minnesota Statutes, section 116D.04, and rules of the environmental quality board are temporarily suspended for each reclassification and trail designation made under subdivision 1 until the commissioner has met all requirements under subdivision 1, or December 31, 2008, if the commissioner has failed to complete those requirements as required by law.

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#### *Minnesota Rules Chapter 6100.1950, subparts 1 – 4*

#### **6100.1950 MOTOR VEHICLES AND SNOWMOBILES; FOREST LANDS.**

Subpart 1. **Classified forest lands.** The operation of motor vehicles and snowmobiles on forest lands classified by the commissioner for purposes of motor vehicle use according to subpart 2 and Minnesota Statutes, section 89.002, is regulated according to items A to C.

A. Motor vehicles may operate on forest lands classified as managed on forest roads and forest trails that are not posted and designated closed, subject to the limitations and exceptions in this part.

B. Motor vehicles may operate on forest lands classified as limited 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, subject to the limitations and exceptions in this part.

C. 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.

**Subp. 2. Criteria for classification.** The following criteria shall be 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.

**Subp. 3. Notice and public meeting.** Before changing the classification of forest lands for motor vehicle use, the commissioner shall provide notice and a public meeting according to items A to C.

A. A public meeting shall be held in the county where the largest portion of the forest lands are located to provide information to and receive comment from the public regarding the proposed classification change.

B. Sixty days before the public meeting, notice of the proposed classification change shall be published in legal newspapers that serve the counties in which the lands are located and in a statewide Department of Natural Resources news release and in the State Register. The notice shall include a summary of the proposed action, a request for public comment, and notice of the public meeting.

C. Twenty-one days before the public meeting, notice of the meeting shall be announced in a statewide Department of Natural Resources news release.

**Subp. 4. Commissioner's decision.** The commissioner shall make a decision about the proposed classification change after considering the criteria listed in subpart 2 and any public comment received and explaining how the nature and magnitude of the criteria and comments relate to the classification.

**Subp. 5. Nonmotorized trails.** No person shall operate a motor vehicle or snowmobile on forest lands on a designated nonmotorized trail, including ski, foot, horse, bike, or accessible trail, unless the trail is also posted open for a motorized use.

**Subp. 6. Lakes, rivers, and streams.** No person shall operate a motor vehicle on forest lands on or over the beds of lakes, rivers, or streams when ice is not covering the water body, except on a bridge, culvert, or similar structure or designated low water crossing.

**Subp. 7. Other prohibitions and exceptions.**

A. No person shall operate a motor vehicle or snowmobile on forest lands in a manner that causes erosion or rutting or injures, damages, or destroys trees or growing crops. The rutting prohibition does not apply on trails that are designated and maintained for motorized use.

B. No person shall operate motor vehicles or snowmobiles on forest lands within the boundaries of an area that is posted and designated as closed to the operation of motor vehicles or snowmobiles.

C. No person shall operate a motor vehicle or snowmobile in the Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest, except on forest roads that are not posted and designated as closed, and on forest trails or areas that are posted and designated to allow the use of motor vehicles or snowmobiles. The exception under item D does not apply.

D. Except as provided in item C, on forest lands classified as managed or limited, a person may use an ATV off forest trails in a manner consistent with this subpart when lawfully:

- (1) engaged in hunting big game or constructing hunting stands during October, November, and December;
- (2) retrieving big game during September; or
- (3) trapping during open seasons.

E. No person shall construct an unauthorized permanent trail on forest lands.

F. Subpart 1 does not apply to motor vehicles used to carry out silvicultural activities, including timber cruising, and the harvest and transport of forest products for commercial purposes.

G. The commissioner may grant a variance from the requirements of subpart 1 to private landowners and leaseholders when the only reasonable access to their land is across state forest lands.

#### Subp. 8. **Forest roads.**

A. A motor vehicle on a forest road shall travel at a speed that is reasonable and prudent. It is a violation of this part to exceed a posted speed limit.

B. All posted parking and traffic regulations, including signs designating speed limits, stop signs, one-way traffic, and do not enter, shall be obeyed on a forest road.

C. No person, passenger, or operator of a motor vehicle shall travel on or along a forest road that is designated as closed with signs, barricaded, or blocked with a gate.

D. Removing snow from a forest road is prohibited when the road is posted for no snow removal.

E. No person shall operate, nor shall an owner permit the operation of a motor vehicle, on a forest road or trail in a manner that causes damage to the road, land, or other natural resources.

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### *Minnesota Statutes 2005, Section 84.777*

#### **84.777 Off-highway vehicle use of state lands restricted.**

(a) Except as otherwise allowed by law or rules adopted by the commissioner, effective June 1, 2003, notwithstanding sections [84.787](#) to [84.805](#) and [84.92](#) to [84.929](#), the use of off-highway vehicles is prohibited on state land administered by the commissioner of natural resources, and on county-administered forest land within the boundaries of a state forest, except on roads and trails specifically designated and posted by the commissioner for use by off-highway vehicles.

(b) Paragraph (a) does not apply to county-administered land within a state forest if the county board adopts a resolution that modifies restrictions on the use of off-highway vehicles on county-administered land within the forest.

HIST: 2003 c 128 art 1 s 21