

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



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

State Forest Classification & Road/Trail Designation

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Forest Classification & Road / Trail Designation

West Central – White Earth Unit

Executive Summary

Background

Minnesota Laws 2003, Chap. 128, Article 1, Sect. 167-169 (as amended in 2005 & 2007) requires the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to review the motor vehicle classification of all state forests and state forest lands by December 31, 2008. The Commissioner is to evaluate current forest classifications, on a forest-by-forest basis, according to criteria, public notice and public meeting requirements set forth in *Minnesota Rules Part 6100.1950*, and retain or modify this classification as appropriate.

Plan Scope & Limitations

This plan covers the White Earth State Forest that is located in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties, and scattered forest lands under the authority of the Commissioner located *OUTSIDE* of State Forest boundaries in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties. In total, just less than 67,000 acres of state forest land, and about 125 miles of roads, trails, and non-designated routes were evaluated with respect to motor vehicle use.

The plan specifically addresses EXISTING inventoried routes on state-administered forest lands. No new road or trail construction, or grant-in-aid trail proposals, are contemplated or discussed. For that reason, trail designations resulting from this process are legislatively exempted from Environmental Quality Board rules regarding environmental review requirements for recreational trail projects *Minnesota Laws 2003, Chap. 128, Article 1, Sect. 167, Sub. 2 (as amended in 2005 & 2007)*.

The plan also does NOT address Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) use of public road ditches or road rights-of-way, or operations on private lands, trails or roadways. Nothing in this plan is intended to endorse nor preclude any potential future grant-in-aid trail development proposals.

All inventoried state and county routes are depicted on planning maps. Informal, local-use routes, notably those located on private lands, were NOT inventoried nor depicted on final planning maps. County route data was incorporated to provide context and perspective. As cooperators in this process, County Land Department data and plans helped inform DNR decisions and fostered consistency across public lands.

Lands Covered by this Plan

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.

Table -1 summarizes forest land ownership both inside and outside of the White Earth State Forest, in the W-C White Earth Planning Unit.

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

Motor Vehicle Use Classifications

State Forest lands located south of U.S. Highway 2 must be reclassified as either *limited* or *closed* under Minnesota law. (Lands located north of US Highway 2 may retain their current managed classification unless reclassified by the DNR Commissioner). The DNR's West Central Planning Team evaluated criteria listed in *Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subpart 2* in their prescribed classification review. The team recommended and the Commissioner of Natural Resources agreed to classify State Forest lands within the planning area as follows:

White Earth State Forest: *Limited*

Scattered State Forest Lands

Becker County: *Limited*

Clearwater County: *Limited*

Mahnomen County: *Limited*

Areas with Limitations on Off-trail & Non-designated Trail Use

Under this plan, two areas totaling 8,070 acres (of state forest land) will be designated pursuant to *M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 5* which eliminates the seasonal big game hunting and trapping exceptions which would otherwise exist in the *limited* forest. These areas, the Snider Lake Site and Upper Rice Lake Area, have been created in order to protect unique natural resource values, and to enhance non-motorized hunting opportunities in these two special areas. Off-trail travel by ATVs, and the use of non-designated routes by ORVs, HLVs, and ATVs will be prohibited (year-round) upon this plan's effective date. Both areas are located inside the statutory boundaries of the White Earth State Forest.

Final Route Designations [Table 2]

The DNR collaborated with Land Department staff in Becker and Clearwater Counties, and with representatives from the White Earth Band's Natural Resources Department, to develop these final forest road and trail designations. **Table 2** summarizes the final route designations for inventoried routes (on both DNR and county-managed lands) within the White Earth Planning Unit. County designations are for inside the White Earth State Forest (only).

Table 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

Proposed Route Designation Summary (White Earth Planning Unit)	State Land Designations (miles)		County Designations (miles)	
Total Inventoried Routes	141.1		143.7	
System Forest Road	11.0 10.9		14.3	
Min. Maintenance Forest Road	26.6 27.8		1.4	
Non-designated Routes	89.6		123.3*	
Proactive closures	4.5	93.0	0.4	
In <i>closed</i> forests	0.0		0.4	
In <i>limited</i> forests	88.5 85.1		122.8*	
ATV & OHM Trail	1.7		4.7	
ORV Trails	0.0		0.0	
Non-Motor Trails	8.8 11.0		0.0	

* Total includes 61.1 miles of 'undefined' routes located in Becker County.

RED indicates changes to the draft proposal resulting from public and agency review.

Plan Implementation & Effective Date

Forest classifications and the road and trail designations are to be adopted and implemented through the publication of written orders as specified in *Minn Rules Part 6100.1950*. These decisions become official upon publication in the *State Register*; and they become effective on the *Plan Effective Date* listed on the published orders. This date is December 31, 2009.

Final Plan Maps

Final planning maps which accompany this plan are published and available for free download at www.mndnr.gov or at www.findthetrails.com. These maps, referenced herein, are hereby incorporated as part of this Final Forest Classification & Road/Trail Designation Plan for the West-Central Minnesota Group - White Earth.

Forest Classification & Road / Trail Designation

West Central – White Earth Unit

Final Plan

Background

Minnesota Laws 2003, Chap. 128, Article 1, Sect. 167-169 (as amended in 2005 & 2007) requires the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to review the motor vehicle classification of all state forests and state forest lands by December 31, 2008. The Commissioner is to evaluate current forest classifications, on a forest-by-forest basis, according to criteria, public notice and public meeting requirements set forth in *Minnesota Rules Part 6100.1950*, and retain or modify this classification as appropriate.

Plan Scope & Limitations

This plan covers the White Earth State Forest that is located in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties, and scattered forest lands under the authority of the Commissioner located *OUTSIDE* of State Forest boundaries in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties. In total, just less than 67,000 acres of state forest land, and about 125 miles of roads, trails, and non-designated routes were evaluated with respect to motor vehicle use.

The plan specifically addresses EXISTING inventoried routes on state-administered forest lands. No new road or trail construction, or grant-in-aid trail proposals, are contemplated or discussed. For that reason, trail designations resulting from this process are legislatively exempted from Environmental Quality Board rules regarding environmental review requirements for recreational trail projects *Minnesota Laws 2003, Chap. 128, Article 1, Sect. 167, Sub. 2 (as amended in 2005 & 2007)*.

The plan also does NOT address Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) use of public road ditches or road rights-of-way, or operations on private lands, trails or roadways. Nothing in this plan is intended to endorse nor preclude any potential future grant-in-aid trail development proposals.

All inventoried state and county routes are depicted on planning maps. Informal, local-use routes, notably those located on private lands, were NOT inventoried nor depicted on final planning maps. County route data was incorporated to provide context and perspective. As cooperators in this process, County Land Department data and plans helped inform DNR decisions and fostered consistency across public lands.

Lands Covered by this Plan

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.

Location, Acreage, and Ownership [Table 3]

State Administered Lands The State Forest lands located within the White Earth Unit together encompass a gross acreage of about 179,990 acres. The White Earth State Forest includes

155,390 acres within its' statutory boundary, of which DNR Forestry administers 42,336 acres, or about 27%. Another 24,600 acres of forestry-administered lands lie outside of state forest boundaries. In all, 66,936 acres of state forest lands were the focus of this planning exercise. Other state owned lands in the planning unit, Another 23,402 acres of DNR wildlife managed lands also occur within 67 Wildlife Management Areas located in the three-county planning unit. These are not addressed in this plan.

County-Administered Lands Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen Counties manage forest lands within the statutory boundary of the White Earth State Forest. 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. Table 3 summarizes forest land ownership both inside and outside of the White Earth State Forest, in the W-C White Earth Planning Unit.

Table 3. Forest Land Ownership in White Earth Planning Unit

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

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

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. Managed forests 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 recreational visitors. 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 pursuant to statutory 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 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*). Closed state forest lands are susceptible to damage by motorized use or have a history that precludes motorized use. 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.

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 in this planning unit. Scattered State Forest lands evaluated are only those located in Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnommen Counties. The planning unit covers approximately 1,957,056 acres, including water-covered areas.

Inside State Forest Boundaries

This 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 State Forest classifications adopted by the DNR Commissioner to county-administered forest lands within the boundaries of State Forests,

unless the county board officially 'opts out' by adopting an ordinance or resolution that modifies restrictions on the use of OHVs on county-administered land within the forest.

Motor vehicle use classification and related State Forest rules do not apply on federal, tribal, or private lands inside or outside of State Forest boundaries. Nor do they 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. Vehicle Use Classifications also do not apply to state lands other than those administered by the Division of Forestry, such as State Parks, Wildlife Management Areas, Scientific & Natural Areas, or State Trails.

Outside State Forest Boundaries – ‘Scattered Lands’

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

There are also county-administered forest lands located outside of State Forest boundaries in all three counties in the White Earth Unit. However, this plan does not apply to these county-administered forest lands.

Classification Evaluation Process

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 patchwork nature of public land ownership inside the forest. Consideration was also given to treaty rights that provide members of the White Earth Band with access for traditional hunting and gathering activities.

The DNR team and county/tribal land managers collaborated in developing the final forest classification and route designations, including the identification of two special areas which will have additional restrictions placed on motor vehicle use. Final decisions were based upon statutory criteria, an evaluation of current conditions, and a review of public comments on the draft proposal. The DNR believes that it can protect natural resources and further resource management objectives under this plan. It will also foster greater consistency across mixed public land ownerships in terms of vehicular travel management policies. Consistency of regulation across mixed ownerships is critical to public understanding of and compliance with vehicle use rules and regulations.

Current Motor Vehicle Use Classification

On September 3, 1998 the Commissioner of Natural Resources issued a memorandum establishing interim classifications for all State Forests. Following public hearings, the interim classifications were adopted on January 1, 2000. Under this order, all DNR-administered state forest lands in the White Earth Unit were classified as *managed*, per motor vehicle use. This classification will change on the plan's effective date, which is anticipated to be December 31, 2009.

Final Forest Land Classifications

State Forest lands in the White Earth Unit will be reclassified as follows: (effective 12/31/09)

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 Mahanomen, 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 Mahanomen County (17,401 acres), with the balance of 65,478 acres in tribal or private ownership.

Under this plan, the White Earth State Forest will be reclassified as *limited*, as per motor vehicle use. The *limited* classification provides for vehicle access, and a more consistent management framework for DNR, counties, and tribal land managers, than would a *closed* forest. Where possible, Clearwater County and White Earth Natural Resources have provided access to DNR Forestry-managed lands, and vice versa. The Department will work with county and tribal land managers, on a regular and continuing basis, to coordinate public access opportunities on public lands throughout the planning unit.

Scattered State Forest Lands / Becker County - **LIMITED**

The DNR's White Earth 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. 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. There are a total of 9,806 acres of DNR forestry-administered land in the county outside of State Forest boundaries. Some 34.7 miles of inventoried access routes are located on state lands.

All state forest lands outside of state forest boundaries within Becker County will be reclassified as *limited*. A *limited* classification will allow historic big game hunting and trapping access as per *M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4*, while protecting natural resources. Under this plan, summer vehicle access will only be possible by foot travel, or via other non-motorized methods, on non-designated routes on state lands. Both HLVs and OHVs may still legally operate on designated state forest roads.

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. 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. There are a total of 10,434 acres of DNR forestry administered land in the county outside of state forest boundaries. About 3.8 miles of inventoried access routes are located on state forest lands in the county.

Under this plan, all state forest lands located outside of state forest boundaries in Clearwater County will be reclassified as *limited*, per motor vehicle use. A *limited* classification will allow historic big game hunting and trapping access per *M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4*, while

protecting natural resource values. Under this plan, summer vehicle access will only be possible by foot travel, or via other non-motorized methods, on non-designated routes on state lands. Both HLVs and OHVs may still legally operate on designated state forest roads.

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. No scattered Minnesota School Trust Lands are located in Mahnomen County, and there are no inventoried access routes on scattered state forest lands in the county.

Under this plan, all state forest lands located outside of state forest boundaries in Clearwater County will be reclassified as *limited*, per motor vehicle use. A *limited* classification will allow historic big game hunting and trapping access per *M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4*, while protecting natural resource values. Under this plan, summer vehicle access will only be possible by foot travel, or via other non-motorized methods, on non-designated routes on state lands. Both HLVs and OHVs may still legally operate on designated state forest roads.

Forest Route Inventory [Table 4]

In 2003 and 2004, DNR staff inventoried all existing routes showing evidence of use on state- and county-administered forest lands. The preliminary inventory identified 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 White Earth State Forest, and 38.6 miles are located outside of state forest boundaries. A total of about 182.6 miles of routes were inventoried on Becker, Clearwater, and Mahnomen County lands inside the White Earth State Forest.

Throughout this exercise, efforts were made to correct the forest route inventory data. That's because public land ownership patterns change as lands are acquired, sold, or exchanged. Natural resource management activities too (*e.g., fires, timber sales*), can create or obliterate forest access routes. Little-used trails and routes also re-vegetate, beavers flood routes, and routes that may be passable route in a dry year may be impassable in wet years. The final forest route inventory shows 141.1 miles of routes on DNR forestry-administered state lands, and 143.7 miles on county-administered forest lands, in the White Earth Planning Unit;

Table 4. Summary of Forest Route Inventory

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

White Earth State Forest	Inventoried Routes (Miles)
DNR	102.5
Becker	61.1
Clearwater	82.5
Mahnomen	0.0
Outside of State Forest / DNR-managed Only	38.6
Total	284.7

Final Route Designations – Summary [Table 5]

The final disposition of the 141.7 miles of inventoried routes on DNR forestry-administered lands, both inside and outside of state forest boundaries in Becker, Clearwater and Mahanomen Counties is as follows. These routes are also depicted on final planning maps and in the Official Commissioner’s Orders, which are referenced herein and incorporated hereto as part of this plan. These materials are available at www.mndnr.gov or be contacting the DNR at 1-888-MINNDNR. See Table 5; “Forest Road & Trail Designation Summary of the White Earth Unit”.

Table 5. Forest Road and Trail Designation Summary of the White Earth Unit

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

<i>Proposed Route Designation Summary</i> (Wh Earth Planning Unit)	State Land Designations (miles)		County Designations (miles)	
Total Inventoried Routes	141.1		143.7	
System Forest Road	11.0 10.9		14.3	
Min. Maintenance Forest Road	26.6 27.8		1.4	
Non-designated Routes	89.6		123.3*	
Proactive closures	4.5	93.0	0.4	
In <i>closed</i> forests	0.0		0.4	
In <i>limited</i> forests	88.5 85.1		122.8*	
ATV & OHM Trail	1.7		4.7	
ORV Trails	0.0		0.0	
Non-Motor Trails	8.8 11.0		0.0	

* Total includes 61.1 miles of ‘undefined’ routes located in Becker County.

RED indicates changes to the draft proposal resulting from public and agency review.

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 divides State Forest Roads into two classes – **System Roads** and **Minimum Maintenance Roads** – based upon their condition, intended use, and planned maintenance level. 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.

System Forest Roads (SFRs) - are the major arterials that provide forest management access, recreational access, and links to state, county, or township public roads. SFRs are used on a daily or weekly basis, and are maintained to allow all-season travel by off-highway and highway licensed vehicles.

Minimum Maintenance Roads (MMRs) - 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. MMRs 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. MMRs are more likely to be subjected to travel restrictions than are higher-standard system forest roads.

System Forest Roads – Final Designations

Under this plan, 10.4 miles of System State Forest Roads will be designated on state lands inside the White Earth State forest; and 0.5 miles will be designated outside state forest boundaries. These roads will be managed by the DNR for both HLV and OHV use.

Minimum Maintenance Forest Roads – Final Designations

Under this plan, 27.2 miles of Minimum Maintenance State Forest Roads will be designated within the White Earth State Forest, along with 0.6 miles outside the forest boundary. These roads will be managed by the DNR and are open to HLVs and OHVs, but may not be maintained to a level where low-clearance vehicles can routinely travel on them. Another 1.4 mile-long segment located on a mix of DNR, Clearwater County, and White Earth Reservation lands will also be managed (by all three agencies) as an MMR, though this segment was not formally re-designated under this plan.

Recreational Trails

M.S. 89.19, subd. 2 authorizes the Commissioner of Natural Resources to designate forest trails. Forest trails, which are designated for a variety of specific or general purposes, provide access to state lands for recreational and utilitarian purposes. These trails are typically signed, mapped, monitored and maintained. Under this plan only DNR-managed (unit) trails are designated, no Grant-in-Aid (GIA) trails are authorized.

Non-Motorized Trails – Final Designations

Under this plan, a total of 11.0 miles of non-motorized trail has been designated, including 4.2 miles inside the White Earth State Forest and 6.8 miles outside the forest. The primary use for trail miles inside the Upper Rice Lake portion of the White earth State Forest will be for hunter walking access. The 6.8 miles of trail designated on scattered forest lands will be for a mix of general 'non-motorized' uses (e.g., hiking, mountain biking, collecting, bird watching, etc.).

Hiking is also allowed on forest roads and trails, and on non-designated routes, although these routes are not signed, mapped, or maintained for any particular recreational use. Non-designated routes in the '*limited*' forest are closed to motor vehicle use, except pursuant to *MS Ch. 84.926, subd. 2 & 4 (hunter/trapper exceptions)*. These vehicle-use exceptions will not apply within the two specially-designated areas with limitations on off-trail and non-designated trail use (i.e., Upper Rice Lake, Snider Lake) Foot travel is also permitted off of designated roads and trails (or cross-country) on state forest lands.

All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Trails – Final Designations

Under this plan, 1.7 miles of shared ATV/OHM trails will be designated on DNR forestry-administered lands. The entire 1.7 miles is located inside the White Earth State Forest.

All state forest roads and ATV/OHM trails will be open to both Class 1 and Class 2 ATVs, subject to the possible closure of certain segments of trail deemed unsuited to the heavier, wider Class 2 ATVs. This determination will be made on a route-by-route basis during plan implementation.

Off-Highway Motorcycle (OHM) Trails – Final Designations

Under this plan, 1.7 miles of ATV/OHM trails will be designated on DNR forestry-administered lands. The entire 1.7 miles is located inside the White Earth State Forest.

Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Trails – Final Designations

Under this plan, no trails have been designated specifically for ORV use. Both ORVs and HLVs may operate on state forest roads, subject to seasonal road and/or trail closures and/or weight restrictions.

Non-Designated Routes – Classification Implications

A total of 85.1 miles of existing routes will remain *non-designated* under this plan. Non-designated routes are closed to vehicle traffic in the *limited* forest, except pursuant to *MS Ch. 84.926 (seasonal hunter/trapper exceptions)*. Although these routes will remain open to non-motorized visitors, they will not be signed, mapped or actively managed. Non-designated routes inside the Snider Lake and Upper Rice Lake '*motor-restricted*' areas will be closed year-round to all vehicle use. The hunter/trapper exceptions do not apply in these special areas. The status of non-designated routes on county lands depends on their public access policies.

Proactive Closures

Under this plan, 4.9 miles of routes showing signs of damage, or otherwise unsuited for motor vehicle use, have been permanently closed. Closed routes will be signed, gated, and/or barricaded to prevent motor vehicle use. These routes are also unavailable for motor vehicle use under the seasonal big game hunting and trapping exceptions provided under *M.S. Section 84.926*.

Areas with Limitations on Off-trail & Non-designated Trail Use

Under this plan, two areas totaling 8,070 acres (of state forest land) have been designated pursuant to *M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 5* which eliminates the seasonal big game hunting and trapping exceptions which would otherwise exist in the *limited* forest. These areas, the Snider Lake Site and Upper Rice Lake Area, have been created in order to protect unique natural resource values, and to enhance non-motorized hunting opportunities in these two special areas. Off-trail travel by ATVs, and the use of non-designated routes by ORVs, HLVs, and ATVs will be prohibited (year-round) upon this plan's effective date.

The Snider Lake Area covers approximately 3,360 acres on the western end of the state forest inside Mahanomen County. The second such area is at Upper Rice Lake and covers about 4,710 acres. Both areas are located within the statutory boundaries of the White Earth State Forest. See Appendix B for a map of these areas, and an explanation of the factors that led to this special designation.

Plan Implementation and Monitoring

Road & Trail Development and Signing Projects

After the Commissioner publishes motor vehicle use classification and road & trail designation orders, the DNR will implement the plan by developing and signing roads and trails. Required permits will be obtained when site-level development projects are implemented. The DNR is committed to substantially completing the development and signing of forest roads and trails by the published plan effective date.

Final Designation Maps

The final forest road and trail designations for state forest lands in the West-Central – White Earth Planning Unit are depicted on a series of maps, which are discussed herein and incorporated into this plan by reference. Final planning maps and commissioner's Orders implementing this plan are available for free download at www.mndnr.gov or at www.findthetrails.com.

Plan Effective Date

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, 2009.

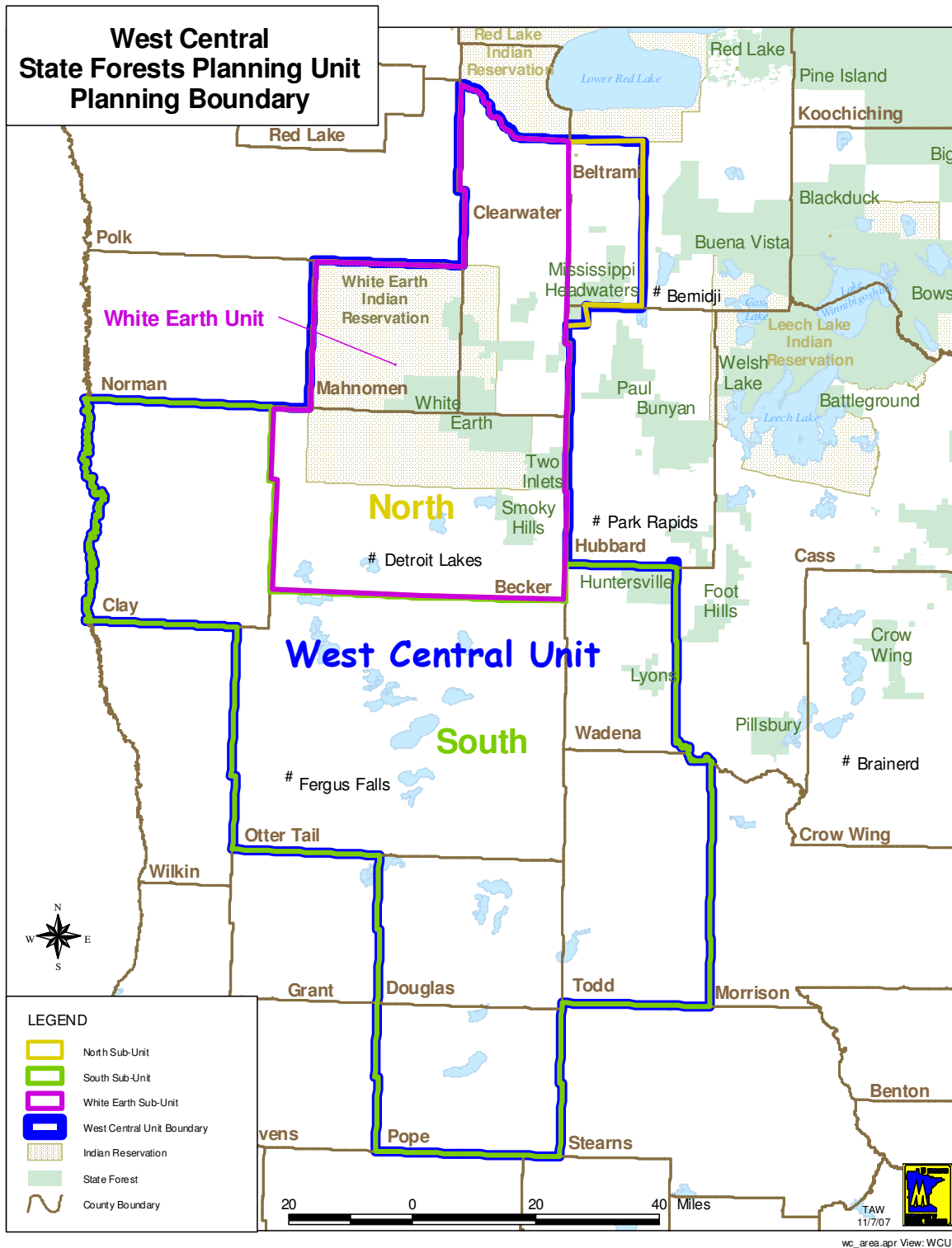
Ongoing Monitoring and Management

The DNR is committed to providing both motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities on state lands. The intent is to provide quality recreational experiences on environmentally sustainable non-motorized and motorized trails. The DNR will employ Best Management Practices when developing forest roads and trails.

The DNR will monitor roads and trails for maintenance and sustainability needs. Monitoring, education and enforcement will 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 (*e.g., spring frost-out, high fire hazard, following major storm events*) or while needed repairs are being made. Permanent changes to the designated trail system, however, will be subject to added public review and comment.

Figure 1: West-Central – White Earth Planning Unit



Appendix A

Minnesota Statutes and Rules Related to State Forest Classification

Minnesota Laws 2003, Chapter 128, Article 1, Section 167 as amended by Minnesota Laws 2005, 1st 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.

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.

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.

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Appendix B

Snider Lake / Upper Rice Lake Areas*

Rationale for Special Designation

(Per MS Chap. 84.926, Subd. 5)

Snider Lake Area

- Extraordinary natural resource values are undisputed by MCBS, TNC, others.
- Seasonal hunter/trapper use is heavy in this area, yet little vehicle damage reported to-date.
- History of primarily non-motorized hunting in this area. Site contains historic homestead.
- Lowlands are already off-limits to OHV, highlands (maple-basswood forest) are not protected.
- The White Earth Band supports restrictions on non-band members use of this area.
- Three MMRs will be designated into the area with parking facilities to allow for good motor access into the area for walking hunters.
- DNR designation will support Tribal Natural Resources' efforts to tighten trail monitoring and OHV enforcement to ensure that vehicle damage does not occur in conjunction with the exercise of traditional tribal hunting and gathering rights.
- This site will be a welcome addition to the 'Pine to Prairie Birding Trail', particularly following designation of the MMR in the SE portion of the site. (The birding trail is part of an international Watchable Wildlife Initiative.)

Upper Rice Lake Area

- Helps buffer, protect and promotes regulatory consistency with the adjacent Upper Rice Lake WMA (which is composed of three discontinuous blocks of land).
- Essentially unroaded and receives little vehicle use. History of predominantly non-motor use.
- Site contains many rare and unique features including bald eagles, trumpeter swans, and Forsters Tern breeding and nesting territories. It also contains a large, high-value tamarack wetland.
- Managed principally for wild rice and waterfowl production.
- Plans to expand and improve walking hunter access to complement adjacent WMA hunter opportunities.
- Extensive wetlands and clay soils which are subject to rutting, erosion and compaction.
- Surficial hydrology includes lakes, rivers, seeps, bogs and wetland complexes.
- *Both sites are located entirely within the statutory boundaries of the White Earth State Forest.*

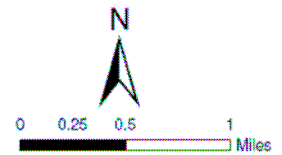
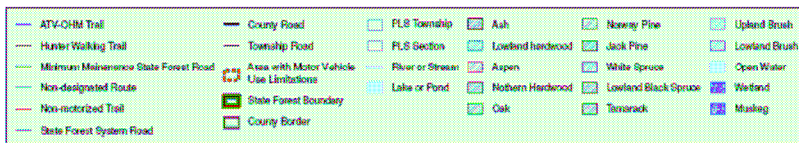
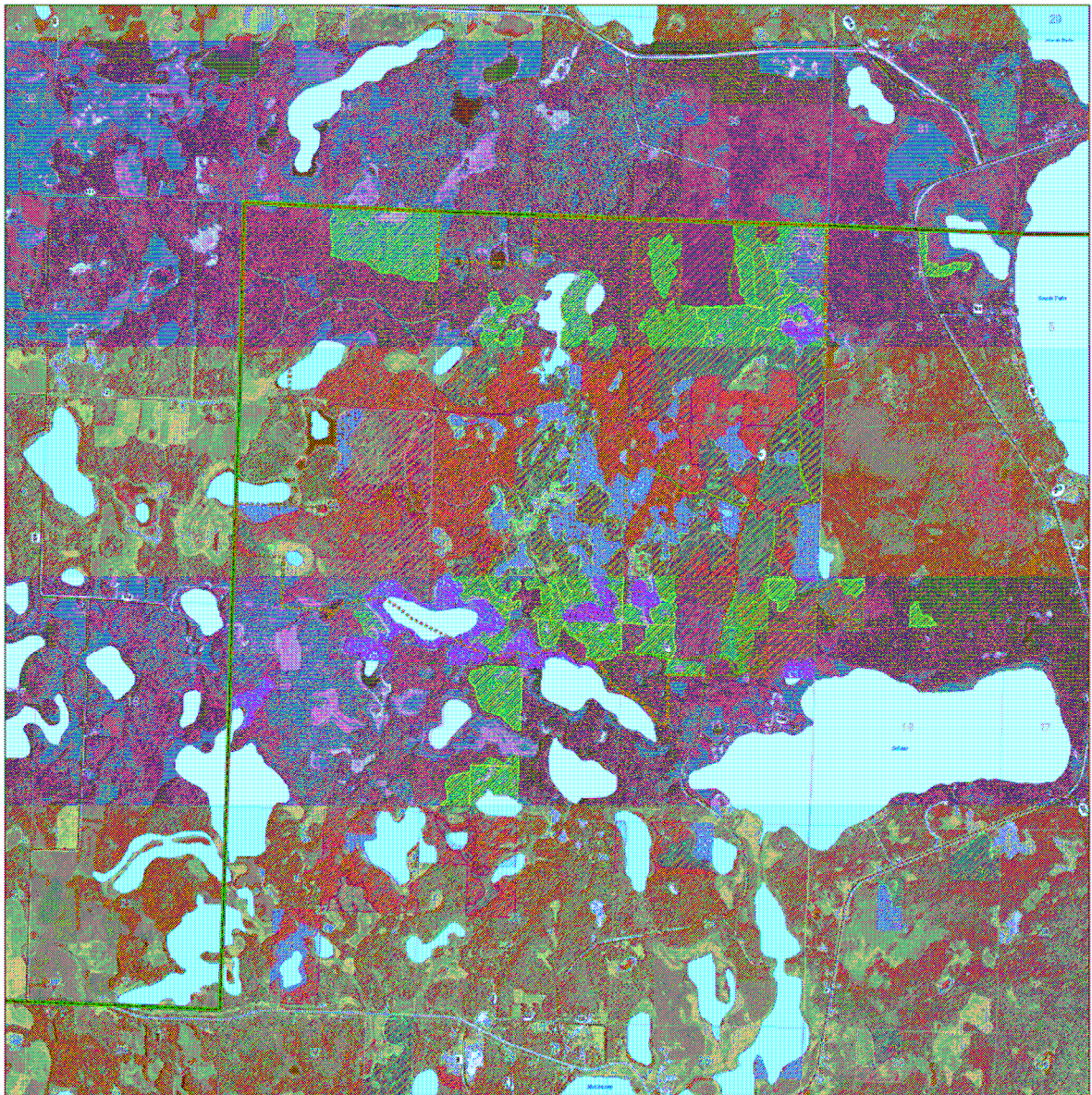
Snider Lake Area with Limitations

R40

R39

T146

T145



Upper Rice Lake Area with Limitations

R37

R36

T144

T143

