

Forest Classification
and
Forest Road & Trail Designation
for
State Forest Lands
in
Koochiching and Eastern Itasca Counties
December 23, 2008



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Purpose

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

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

Given the intermingled private, county, tribal, and state land ownership pattern in the planning area, the DNR coordinated its work with County Land Departments, major industrial forest land owners, and other participants. State, county, and forest industry land managers jointly developed the recommended classifications and designations.

1.2 Lands Covered by this Plan

This project covers state forest lands located in Koochiching and eastern Itasca counties in northern Minnesota. The project area covers over 3 million acres. There are over 1.1 million acres of state forest land in the project area. There are 1,031,000 acres of state forest land in Koochiching County and 134,000 acres in eastern Itasca County. There are five State Forests in the project area – George Washington, Golden Anniversary, Koochiching, Pine Island, and Smokey Bear. There are also about 106,000 acres of state forest land located outside of the statutory boundaries of the five forests.

Itasca County administers about 255,000 acres of tax-forfeited county forest lands in the portion of Itasca County located in the planning unit. Koochiching County administers about 288,000 acres of tax-forfeited county forest lands.

1.3 Motor Vehicle Use Classifications

The majority of state forest lands in the planning unit will retain the *managed* classification. Current state laws require that state forest lands located south of US Highway 2 be classified as *limited* or *closed*. The [motor vehicle use classification map](#) shows the classification of state forest lands in the Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning unit.

Koochiching County

All state forest lands in Koochiching County will retain the *managed* classification.

Itasca County South of US Highway 2

State forest lands in Itasca County that are located south of US Highway 2, including the Golden Anniversary State Forest, will be classified as *limited*.

George Washington State Forest

The majority of the state forest land within the George Washington State Forest will retain its current *managed* classification. An area around Larson Lake will be classified as *limited* and four areas containing existing hunter walking trails will be classified as *closed*.

1.4 Forest Route Inventory

In preparation for this road and trail designation process, the planning team compiled available information on the existing roads, trails, and routes that show evidence of continuing human use on state and county forest lands in the planning area. The planning team reviewed over 3,400 miles of routes in the Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning unit during the route designation process. These routes are primarily located on state- and county-administered forest lands but there were some routes on other ownerships.

1.5 Route Designations

[Table 1](#) summarizes the designations of the inventoried forest routes.

1.6 Implementation and Monitoring

The Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning team considered public comments and modified the public review draft proposal in response to the comments. The Commissioner of Natural Resources issued Commissioner's Orders to change the motor vehicle use classification and to designate forest roads and trails on state forest lands. The orders were signed on December 23, 2008. The DNR is committed to substantially completing the development and signing of designated roads and trails prior to the effective date of the classification orders. The effective date for the classification changes and route designations will be December 31, 2009.

The DNR will monitor roads and trails for maintenance needs and sustainability. 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.

Table 1. Route Designations – Koochiching and Eastern Itasca Counties

Route Designation*	Miles on State Forest Land		Miles on County Forest Land		Miles on Other Lands	
Forest Road		236.0		198.8		88.7
System Forest Road	158.5		136.9		62.0	
Minimum Maintenance Forest Road	77.5		61.9		26.7	
Recreational Trails		72.1		129.2		13.4
ATV Trail	16.9		37.8		5.5	
OHM Trail	2.7		11.8		2.4	
Horse Trail	14.2		23.7		2.5	
Hunter Walking Trail	18.5		34.9		0.8	
X-C Ski Trail	19.8		21.0		2.3	
Non-designated Routes		1118.1		1557.0		100.3
Access Route (Non-designated route on forest land classified as <i>managed</i>)	813.5		1233.1		63.0	
Access Route – (Not suitable for motor vehicle use unless frozen or very dry)	223.0		244.3		12.5	
Access Route – Gated (Seasonally closed to motor vehicle use)	18.0		39.8		0.7	
Proactive Closure – (Closed to motor vehicles, except snowmobiles)	13.4		27.0		1.8	
Other Non-designated (Mostly routes on forest land classified as <i>limited</i>)	50.2		12.8		22.3	
Mileage Designated (eliminating multiple designations) = 3,448.9*						

* Some routes receive multiple designations. For example, there are portions of the Thistledew Trails that are designated for ATV, Horse, and X-C Ski use. The Balsam Lake Trail is designated for both ATV and OHM use. There is some overlap between hunter walking trails and x-c ski trails. A small mileage of minimum maintenance road is also part of the designated recreational trail system. Thus, adding the designations in the table will result in a higher total than the mileage of routes that exist. There are 3,448.9 miles of routes that were designated when all of the multiple designations are eliminated.

2 BACKGROUND

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

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

Prior to the mid-1980's recreational motor vehicle use was generally allowed in most state forests. As the number of Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs) increased, the DNR closed some forests to OHV use and began developing trails and other facilities for OHV use in other state forests. In late 1996, the DNR began to reassess its OHV management programs. The DNR proposed classifying state forests as *managed*, *limited*, or *closed* with respect to recreational motor vehicle use. In 1999 the DNR revised the rules governing recreational use of state forests.

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

2.1 Process

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

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

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

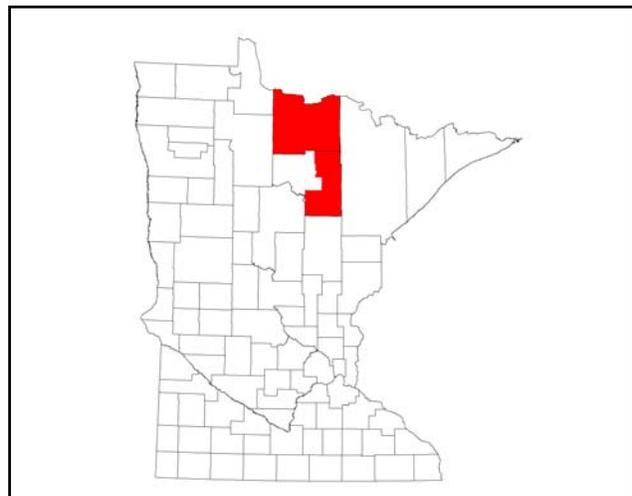
1. Compile a comprehensive inventory of forest routes – roads, trails, and other routes showing evidence of ongoing human use. Prepare maps showing the routes.

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

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

3 DESCRIPTION OF LANDS COVERED BY THIS PLAN

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



This project covers state forest lands located in Koochiching and eastern Itasca counties in northern Minnesota. The project area covers over 3 million acres. There are over 1.1 million acres of state forest land in the project area. There are 1,031,000 acres of state forest land in Koochiching County and 134,000 acres in eastern Itasca County. There are five State Forests in the project area – George Washington, Golden Anniversary, Koochiching, Pine Island, and Smokey Bear. There are also about 106,000 acres of state forest land located outside of the statutory boundaries of the five forests.

State Forest	Gross Acreage within Boundary	DNR Division of Forestry Acreage
George Washington	321,000	95,076
Golden Anniversary	7,000	1,874
Koochiching	568,000	318,592
Pine Island	900,000	632,190
Smokey Bear	12,000	11,637
Other	---	106,139
Total	---	1,165,508

Itasca County administers about 255,000 acres of tax-forfeited county forest lands in the portion of Itasca County located in the planning unit. Koochiching County administers about 288,000 acres of tax-forfeited county forest lands.

The motor vehicle use classifications and route designations in this plan apply only to DNR-administered state forest lands and county-administered forest lands within the statutory boundaries of State Forests. The motor vehicle use classification does not apply to private lands, to lands of the Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe, the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe, to lands within the rights-of-way of public highways, or to county-administered forest lands outside of state forest boundaries. The classification also does not apply to state lands administered by DNR Divisions other than the Division of Forestry, such as State Parks and Recreation Areas, Wildlife Management Areas, or Scientific & Natural Areas.

4 MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATION

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

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

Managed Forest Lands. All existing routes are available for motor vehicle use unless posted closed. These forest lands are characterized by a low intensity of use by OHVs, a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities, widely dispersed use, and little competition among visitors for recreational use of the land. Signing and enforcement restrict motor vehicle use in sensitive resource areas and on designated non-motorized recreational trails. Class 1 ATVs may be operated on non-designated routes and off-trail under the hunting and trapping exceptions. Class 2 ATVs, ORVs and HLVs may be operated on non-designated routes under the hunting and trapping exceptions. When using motor vehicles on non-designated (unsigned) routes it is illegal to operate the vehicle in a manner that causes erosion, rutting, or damage to trees. The *managed* classification can only be applied to state forest lands north of US Highway 2.

Limited Forest Lands. State forest roads are open to motor vehicle use unless posted closed. Other existing routes are closed to motor vehicle use, except on trails that are designated and signed to permit specific motorized uses. These forest lands are characterized by moderate to high levels of motorized and non-motorized recreational use. It is necessary to designate OHV trails so that OHV use occurs only in suitable and sustainable locations. Class 1 ATVs may be operated on non-designated routes and off-trail under the hunting and trapping exceptions. Class 2 ATVs, ORVs, and HLVs may be operated on non-designated routes under the hunting and trapping exceptions.

Closed Forest Lands. State forest roads are open to motor vehicles licensed for highway use. No OHV use is permitted, except that OHVs may operate on frozen public waters (e.g., across lakes for ice fishing). These lands are characterized by high susceptibility to damage by motor vehicles or have a history that precludes motorized use. Areas closed to motor vehicle use by statute or regulations (e.g., State Forest lands within the BWCA Wilderness) are automatically classified as '*closed*.' The hunting and trapping exceptions do not apply in *closed* forests.

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

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

4.1 Existing Motor Vehicle Use Classification

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

4.2 Future Classifications

The DNR planning team reviewed the motor vehicle use classification of all state forest lands in the planning unit. The team considered the eight criteria for classifying state forest lands. The team recommended that the majority of state forest lands in the planning unit retain the *managed* classification. Current state laws require that state forest lands located south of US Highway 2 be classified as *limited* or *closed*. The [motor vehicle use classification map](#) shows the classification of state forest lands in the Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning unit when the Commissioner's Order becomes effective on December 31, 2009.

Koochiching County

All state forest lands in Koochiching County will retain the *managed* classification.

Itasca County South of US Highway 2

The state forest lands in Itasca County that are located south of US Highway 2, including the Golden Anniversary State Forest, be classified as *limited*.

George Washington State Forest

The majority of the state forest land within the George Washington State Forest will retain its *managed* classification. An area around Larson Lake will be classified as *limited* and four areas containing existing hunter walking trails will be classified as *closed*.

Larson Lake Limited Area

The Larson Lake area in the George Washington State Forest will be classified as *limited*. The Larson Lake State Forest Campground has been designated as an ATV accessible campground. Most state forest campgrounds prohibit the operation of ATVs within the campground, requiring ATV users to trailer their ATV from their campsite to a trailhead. ATVs are allowed to operate on the campground road at Larson Lake so that campers can ride their ATV from their campsite to nearby forest roads and trails. Thus the Larson Lake campground and surrounding area is a popular recreational ATV site. Rutting in the past has damaged some undesignated routes. The *limited* classification will keep recreational ATV riders on signed and managed roads and trails as they enter or leave the campground area to ride in other portions of the George Washington State Forest, including the Thistledeew ATV Trail located northeast of the proposed limited area.

The Larson Lake limited area covers 10,300 acres, including 2,080 acres of state forest land and 300 acres of county forest land. A significant portion of the limited area, located east of Larson

Lake, is industrial forest land managed by Forest Capital Partners. The DNR recently acquired a Forest Legacy easement on some of this private forest land. The industrial forest land is an area with intensive timber harvest and other forest management activities that will continue for a few more years. Forest Capital Partners has indicated a willingness to have a selected portion of the routes currently being used as timber haul roads designated as an ATV trail when the current timber management activity concludes. Local ATV clubs have also expressed an interest in developing a designated trail through this area. Existing roads that would be signed for ATV/OHM use include the Larson Lake SFR, Bass Lake County Forest Road, and minimum maintenance forest roads east of Larson Lake.

The Larson Lake limited area is bounded by the Larson Lake SFR and Circle L Snowmobile trail on the north; forest access routes, streams, and Piel, Klingendiel, and Wilson lakes on the east; forest access routes on the south; and the west shore of Coon Lake and streams on the west.

Hartley Lake Closed Area

The Hartley Lake closed area surrounds an existing 4-mile network of hunter walking trails located east of Hartley Lake in T59N – R23W. The closed area covers 640 acres, of which 569 acres are county forest land and 14 acres are state forest land.

The Hartley Lake closed area is bounded by County Highway 53 (Wolf Lake Trail), forest access routes, and private lands.

McDougall Closed Area

The McDougall closed area surrounds an existing hunter walking trail in T59N – R23W. The area covers 340 acres, of which 173 acres are state forest land and 163 acres are county forest land.

The McDougall closed area is bounded by the Taconite State Trail, Day Brook Snowmobile Trail, minimum maintenance forest roads, and forest access routes.

Peloquin Closed Area

The Peloquin closed area surrounds an existing hunter walking trail network near the Peloquin WMA in T60N – R22W. The proposed area covers nearly 3,700 acres of which 1,170 acres are state forest lands and 2,380 acres are county forest lands.

The Peloquin closed area is located south of the Link Lake State Forest Road. It is bounded by forest roads, streams, access routes, and private lands.

White Porky Closed Area

The White Porky closed area surrounds an existing hunter walking trail in the area around White Porky Lake in T59N – R25W. The area covers about 1,630 acres, of which 815 acres are state forest land and 775 acres are county forest land.

The White Porky closed area is bounded by county forest roads, forest access routes, streams, township lines, and the north shore of Hunters Lake.

5 FOREST ROUTE INVENTORY

In preparation for this road and trail designation process, the planning team compiled available information on the existing roads, trails, and routes that show evidence of continuing human use

on state and county forest lands in the planning area. Geographic information system (GIS) data on public highways was obtained from the MN Department of Transportation. GIS data on previously designated forest roads was obtained from DNR databases. Available data on previously designated motorized and non-motorized recreational trails was collated.

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

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

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

The planning team reviewed over 3,400 miles of routes in the Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning unit during the route designation process. These routes are primarily located on state- and county-administered forest lands but there were some routes on other ownerships.

6 FOREST ROUTE DESIGNATIONS

All routes on state and county forest lands have been designated as 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 motor vehicle use classifications described above.

The designations were developed using the forest route inventory data, local land managers' knowledge of the routes, and data from other sources such as soils maps, wetland maps, forest inventory, the Natural Heritage Elements database, and public comments received at the initial open houses. A collaborative work group consisting of DNR and county land department staff developed the designations. Private industrial forest land managers also contributed to the development of the designations. For routes that had been managed as forest roads or recreational trails in the past, the presumption was that the previous designation and uses would be continued unless there was a compelling reason to propose changes. The work group developed recommendations for designations of entire routes. Some routes cross land ownership boundaries. Therefore the route designation summary includes some mileage on ownerships

other than state forest or county forest lands. This ‘other’ ownership is usually industrial forest lands. While the other land owners concurred with the route designation, they retain the right to manage use of routes on their lands including closing of the route to public use. The DNR Commissioner’s Orders designating forest roads and trails will only cover roads and trails on state forest lands and lands where the DNR holds an easement or other legal right to manage the road or trail for public use.

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

6.1 Summary of Designations

[Table 1](#) summarizes the designations of the inventoried forest routes. The project team reviewed data on over 3,400 miles of routes. The routes that are proposed for various designations are shown on the *Forest Road and Trail Designation Maps* that are part of this plan.

6.2 Forest Roads

Forest roads are routes that are maintained by natural resource management agencies to provide access to public forest lands for resource management and public use. Forest roads range from unimproved double track with native soil surface to two-lane gravel roads with improved drainage. Forest roads are not considered ‘public highways’ and the resource agencies are not ‘road authorities.’ Each agency sets public use rules and 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 ...” (*MN Statutes 89.001, Subd.14*)
2. “The commissioner shall provide a system of forest roads and trails which provides access to state forest land ...” (*MN Statutes 89.002, Subd. 3*)
3. “... the commissioner is not a road authority under chapters 160 to 168, and chapters 160 to 168 do not apply to forest roads ...” (*MN Statutes 89.71, Subd.7*)
4. “The commissioner may designate a state forest road as a minimum-maintenance forest road to be maintained at a level consistent with the intended use...” (*MN Statutes 89.71, Subd. 5*)

State forest roads are generally open to use by both highway-licensed vehicles (HLVs) and off-highway vehicles (ATVs, OHMs, and ORVs). Some forest roads on county and private forest lands have gates that are typically closed to restrict access by HLVs but still allow access by ATVs. 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. The DNR divides state forest roads into two classes – system roads and minimum maintenance roads – based on their condition, intended use and planned maintenance level.

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

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

6.2.1 System Forest Roads

There will be 158.5 miles of System State Forest Roads in the project area. Most of these routes were previously managed as forest roads. There are additional system forest roads maintained by county land departments (136.9 miles) or other owners (62.0 miles).

6.2.2 Minimum Maintenance Forest Roads

There will be 77.5 miles of Minimum Maintenance State Forest Roads in the project area. There are also 61.9 miles of county minimum maintenance forest roads and 26.7 miles maintained by other owners.

6.3 Recreational Trails

Some routes on state forest lands are designated, signed, and managed for specific recreational uses. When a route is designated as a recreational trail, various uses or activities can be *primary* uses, *permitted* uses, or *prohibited* uses. Primary uses are the uses for which the trail is designed, maintained, and promoted. Primary uses are often included in the trail name, e.g. Little Moose Hunter Walking Trail. Permitted uses are uses that are allowed on the trail and do not significantly detract from the primary uses. Hiking would be considered a permitted use on trails that have horseback riding or ATV use as the primary designated uses. Permitted users should yield to primary users of a trail. Prohibited uses are uses that are unsafe or significantly detract from the primary uses of a trail. Motorized uses are often prohibited on trails designated for non-motorized uses.

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

6.3.1 Non-motorized Trails

There will be trails where horseback riding, hunter walking, or X-C skiing is the primary non-motorized recreational use. Many of the trails were previously signed and managed for these recreational uses. Some of the designated trails will allow mixed non-motorized and motorized uses (e.g., ATV use permitted on horse trails). Where mixed use is allowed, the trails will be signed to indicate permitted uses.

Non-motorized trails are **not** open to motor vehicle use for hunting- and trapping-related uses typically allowed by MN Statutes 84.926 on state forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited*.

6.3.1.1 Horse Trails

There will be 40.4 miles of horse trails on county (23.7 miles), state (14.2 miles), and other (2.5 miles) lands near Thistledew Lake in the George Washington State Forest. The horse trails are located near the Togo Horse Campground and the Stony Brook Horse Campground. These trails are signed to allow ATV use. The horse trails are closed to HLV and OHM use.

6.3.1.2 Hunter Walking Trails

There will be 54.2 miles of designated and maintained hunter walking trails at several different locations in the project area. This includes 18.5 miles on state forest land, 34.9 miles on county forest land, and 0.8 miles on other ownerships. Motor vehicle use is prohibited on designated hunter walking trails. Hunter walking trails are **not** open to motor vehicle use for hunting- and trapping-related uses typically allowed by MN Statutes 84.926 on state forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited*.

State and county forest lands around four of the hunter walking trail systems in the George Washington State Forest are proposed to be classified as *closed*. See the descriptions of the proposed Hartley Lake, McDougall, Peloquin, and White Porky closed areas above.

In addition to the formally designated hunter walking trails, an additional 58.5 miles of non-designated routes have gates that are seasonally closed to provide additional walking routes for small game hunting. The gates on these routes are typically closed to restrict motor vehicle use in September and October during the peak small game hunting period. The gates are opened and motor vehicles are allowed to use the routes during the firearms deer season.

6.3.1.3 X-C Ski Trails

There will be 42.1 miles of x-c ski trails at several different locations primarily on state and county forest lands. About 5.4 miles of ski trail near Thistledew Lake are signed to allow horse and ATV use when the trails are not groomed for skiing. Motor vehicle use is prohibited on designated x-c ski trails (with the exception of seasonal ATV use on the portion of the Thistledew Trail). Ski trails are **not** open to motor vehicle use for hunting- and trapping-related uses typically allowed by MN Statutes 84.926 on state forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited*.

6.3.2 OHV Trails

The Iron Range OHV Recreation Area near Gilbert provides riding opportunities for ORVs, ATVs, and OHMs. Currently designated ATV trails in the planning area include the Blue Ox Trail in Koochiching County and the multi-use horse and ATV trails near Thistledew Lake in the George Washington State Forest. Forest roads and non-designated access routes on forest lands classified as *managed* provide additional OHV recreational riding opportunities in Koochiching and Itasca counties. Non-designated (unsigned) routes will not be shown on user maps and may not be suitable for use by OHVs. When riding on non-designated routes it is illegal to cause ruts, erosion, or damage to trees.

6.3.2.1 ATV Trails

The Blue Ox Trail is located on an abandoned railroad grade that runs from Bemidji to International Falls. The grade is owned by the MN Dept. of Transportation. The portion of the trail in Koochiching County parallels US Highway 71 from Northome to International Falls. The Blue Ox trail in Koochiching County is signed, mapped, and managed for ATV and snowmobile use.

There are 40.4 miles of multi-use horse and ATV trails located near Thistledeew Lake in the George Washington State Forest that are signed to allow use by Class 1 & 2 ATVs. These trails are closed to OHM, ORV, and HLV use. The Larson Lake Forest Campground has been designated as ATV-accessible so that ATVs can be ridden directly from campsites to forest roads and trails in the surrounding area. Most State Forest campgrounds do not allow operation of ATVs within the campground so ATVs have to be trailered from the campsite to trailheads.

Forest roads provide additional ATV riding opportunities. Forest roads are signed and are included on user maps. Forest roads are shared-use and are open typically open to HLVs, OHMs, ORVs, and non-motorized users as well as ATVs.

Non-designated routes on forest lands classified as *managed* (access routes) are available for ATV use unless signs or gates clearly prohibit motor vehicle use. These non-designated routes are not mapped, signed, or managed for any particular use. They are available for use in an as-is condition. Not all access routes are suitable for ATV use. When riding on non-designated access routes it is illegal to cause ruts, erosion, or damage to trees.

6.3.2.2 OHM Trails

There no existing or proposed designated single-track OHM trails on state or county forest lands in the planning area. There are designated OHM trails at the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area near Gilbert. OHM use will be permitted on the Balsam Lake ATV Trail.

Forest roads provide OHM riding opportunities. Forest roads are signed and are included on user maps. Forest roads are shared-use and are open typically open to HLVs, ATVs, ORVs, and non-motorized users as well as OHMs.

Non-designated routes on forest lands classified as *managed* (access routes) are available for OHM use unless signs or gates clearly prohibit motor vehicle use. These non-designated routes are not mapped, signed, or managed for any particular use. They are available for use in an as-is condition. Not all access routes are suitable for OHM use. When riding on non-designated access routes it is illegal to cause ruts, erosion, or damage to trees.

6.3.2.3 ORV Trails

There are no existing or proposed ORV trails on state or county forest lands in the Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning area. There are designated ORV trails at the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area near Gilbert.

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

6.4 Non-designated Routes

Most of the inventoried routes on state and county forest lands in the Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning area will not be designated as either forest roads or recreational trails. These routes will not be actively managed. Nearly 2,800 miles of routes will remain non-designated. Some of these routes have been damaged by previous motor vehicle use and will be signed as

closed to public motor vehicle use. The majority of the non-designated routes will be ‘access routes’ on forest lands classified as *managed* with respect to motor vehicle use.

6.4.1 Proactive Closures

These routes are not suitable for public motor vehicle use and most have been damaged by motor vehicle use in the past. Proactive closures are proposed for 42.2 miles of existing routes (13.4 miles on state forest land, 27.0 miles on county forest land and 1.8 miles on other ownerships). These routes will be signed as closed to all motor vehicles (except snowmobiles). These routes will **not** be open to motor vehicle use for hunting- and trapping-related uses typically allowed by MN Statutes 84.926 on state forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited*.

6.4.2 Access Routes on Lands Classified as *Managed*

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

About 2,600 miles of routes on state and county forest lands will be non-designated access routes. The Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning team identified 479.8 miles of these access routes that should only be considered for motor vehicle use under frozen or very dry conditions. These ‘frozen access routes’ will be damaged if used when the soil is not frozen. Past winter use has not caused damage that would warrant proactive closure at this time. Some of these frozen access routes have been used for furbearer trapping in the past. There are 58.5 miles of routes located beyond gates that are seasonally closed to restrict motor vehicle use on the route. These seasonally gated access routes are intended to provide additional hunter walking opportunities during a portion of the upland small game hunting season. The gates on these routes are typically closed in September and October to provide walking-only access for hunters. The gates are opened before the firearms deer season begins to allow motor vehicle access. All of the gated access routes have been managed in this manner in previous years – there are no new gated access routes proposed in this plan.

6.4.3 Non-designated Routes on Lands Classified as *Limited*

Routes on forest lands classified as *limited* are closed to motor vehicle use unless posted open. Forest roads and designated OHV trails will be mapped and signed to indicate that they are available for use by motor vehicles. Non-designated routes will not be signed and are closed to public motor vehicle use. The only exception is that *MN Statutes Chapter 84.926* allows some motor vehicle use for certain big game hunting and trapping related uses on forest lands classified as *managed* or *limited*. Class 1 ATVs may be operated on non-designated routes and off-trail under the hunting and trapping exceptions. Class 2 ATVs, ORVs, and HLVs may be operated on non-designated routes under the hunting and trapping exceptions.

6.4.4 Private and Tribal Forest Lands

State and county forest lands are often interspersed with private and tribal lands. Those using unsigned (non-designated) routes are responsible for knowing the ownership of the land and for complying with laws, regulations, and the landowners’ policies governing the use of the lands and routes.

There are tribal lands of the Red Lake Band the Chippewa in northwestern Koochiching County. The Bois Forte (Nett Lake) Band of the Chippewa is the major land owner in the Bois Forte Indian Reservation in southeastern Koochiching County. Tribal lands are not posted in any unique way. Non-band members who enter tribal lands without permission could be cited for trespass.

There are significant acreages of industrial forest land in Koochiching and eastern Itasca counties. Hunting rights on some industrial forest lands have been leased to private parties. Private landowners and occupants have varying policies regarding access and use of routes crossing their lands. Avoid trespassing by knowing where you are and the landowner's policies.

6.5 Designation Map

The forest road and trail designations are depicted on the *Forest Road and Trail Designation Maps*, which are incorporated in this plan by reference. The designation maps will be available on the DNR website until updated public user maps are available. A compact disc containing the maps in Portable Document Format (PDF) is available on request.

7 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

7.1 Adoption of the Classification and Road / Trail Designation Plan

Following public review and comment on the draft forest classification and route designations, the Koochiching and Eastern Itasca planning team considered comments received and modified the proposal in response to the comments. The Commissioner of Natural Resources issued Commissioner's Orders to change the motor vehicle use classification and to designate forest roads and trails on state forest lands. The Commissioner's Orders were signed on December 23, 2008 and published in the *State Register*.

7.2 Road & Trail Development and Signing Projects

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

The DNR is committed to substantially completing the development and signing of designated roads and trails on state forest lands prior to the effective date of the Commissioner's Orders.

7.3 Date of Change in Motor Vehicle Use Classification

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

7.4 Ongoing Monitoring and Management

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

The DNR will monitor designated roads and trails for maintenance needs. Education and enforcement will be used to ensure compliance with road and trail use designations. The level of

user satisfaction and user conflicts will be monitored and future adjustments in the motor vehicle use classification and trail use designations may be proposed.

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