

Forest Classification
and
Forest Road and Trail Designations
for the
West Central Forests – South Unit

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Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E.1 PURPOSE

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

Between 2003 and 2008, the DNR will review the motor vehicle use classification and designate forest roads and trails on all State Forest lands in Minnesota. This plan covers a portion of State Forest lands in the West Central Forests in west-central Minnesota.

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

E.2 LANDS COVERED BY THIS PLAN

There are six named State Forests with statutorily-defined boundaries within the West Central Forests planning unit. These six State Forests have a gross acreage of about 302,761 acres, of which about 103,532 acres administered by the DNR Division of Forestry are covered by the complete review.

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

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

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

This plan addresses proposed forest classifications and road/trail designations for the **South Unit**. The four State Forests found in the South Unit taken together encompass a gross acreage of about 102,081 acres, of which 52,406 acres (or about 51.4%) is administered by the DNR Division of Forestry. Another 8,495 acres of forest land administered by the DNR Division of Forestry lies outside of State Forest boundaries in the South Unit; this amount excludes Becker County's scattered lands, which are allocated to the North Unit. Therefore, a total of

60,901 net acres were the focus of the final plan for the South Unit. See Table E-1 that summarizes forest land ownership in the South Unit.

Table E-1. Summary of Forest Land Ownership in South Unit

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

Within-Forest Acreages & Inventory				
State Forest	Statutory Acres	Administrator		Inventoried Route Miles
		DNR	County	
Huntersville	33,963	16,714	N/A	147.8
Lyons	14,789	6,650	N/A	23.9
Smoky Hills	25,278	15,074	Becker 40	67.1
Two Inlets	28,051	13,968	Becker 160	71.7
Total	102,081	52,446	200	310.5
Scattered Lands Acreages & Inventory				
County	DNR-Administered Lands		Inventoried Route Miles	
Clay	320		0.0	
Douglas	163		0.2	
Otter Tail	2,695		4.1	
Pope	80		0.0	
Todd	3,267		4.3	
Wadena	2,290		5.9	
Total	8,495		14.5	

E.3 MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATIONS

The State Forests and/or associated scattered forest lands in the South Unit had to be reclassified as either *limited* or *closed* to comply with current Minnesota law. The DNR West Central Forests Road & Trail Designation Team discussed alternative classification proposals and developed consensus classification recommendations for State Forest lands in the planning area. All criteria listed in Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subpart 2 were considered under the prescribed classification review. The Commissioner of Natural Resources classifies State Forest lands within the planning area as follows:

Huntersville State Forest:	<i>Limited</i>
Lyons State Forest:	<i>Limited</i>
Smoky Hills State Forest:	<i>Limited</i>
Two Inlets State Forest:	<i>Limited</i>
Scattered Forest Lands	
Clay County:	<i>Limited & Closed</i>
Douglas County:	<i>Limited</i>
Otter Tail County:	<i>Limited</i>
Pope County:	<i>Closed</i>
Todd County:	<i>Limited</i>
Wadena County:	<i>Limited</i>

E.4 FOREST ROUTE INVENTORY

In 2003 and 2004, DNR staff made an effort to inventory the location and condition of all existing routes that show evidence of ongoing human use on state- and county-administered forest lands. The inventory identified about 325.0 miles of routes on state-administered lands in the South Unit. Approximately 310.5 miles of inventoried routes are located within State Forests and 14.5 miles are located outside the state forest boundaries.

E.5 ROUTE DESIGNATIONS

See Table E-2 that summarizes the proposed designations of the inventoried forest routes.

Table E-2. Forest Road and Trail Designation Summary of the South Unit

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

Route Designation	State Forest Lands (miles)										Total (miles)
	Huntersville		Lyons		Smoky Hills		Two Inlets		Outside State Forests		
Forest Roads	45.4		15.3		28.6		27.3		0.4		117.0
System Forest Road	5.5		0.0		13.6		12.2		0.0		
Minimum Maintenance Forest Road	39.6		15.3		15.0		15.1		0.4		
Trails	72.2		2.3		16.1		15.7		4.5		110.8
ATV/OHM Trail	3.6		2.3		8.5		6.1		0.0		
OHM-only Trail	50.7		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		
ORV Trail	0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		
Non-motorized Trails	17.9		0.0		7.6		9.6		4.5		
Non-designated Routes	30.2		6.3		22.4		28.7		9.6		97.2
Proactive Closures	0.0		0.0		0.9		0.9		0.0		
In <i>closed</i> forests											
In <i>limited</i> forests	30.5		6.3		22.4		27.7		9.6		
Total Inventoried Routes	147.8		23.9		67.1		71.7		14.5		325.0

E.6 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The classifications of State Forest lands for motor vehicle use, and designations of forest roads/trails and Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use have been subject to public review and comment. The DNR evaluated public input received at the public open houses and in written comments in reaching final determinations. The Commissioner of Natural Resources issued Commissioner's Orders to change the motor vehicle use classification and designate forest roads and trails that were published in the December 24, 2007 edition of the *State Register*. The effective date for the Commissioner's Orders is December 31, 2008.

WEST CENTRAL FORESTS – SOUTH UNIT FINAL PLAN

1.0 BACKGROUND

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 PROCESS

In July 2006, an interdisciplinary team with members from the DNR Divisions of Ecological Services, Enforcement, Fish & Wildlife, Forestry, and Trails & Waterways began working on the following tasks:

1. Collaborate with the public and other forest management agencies to develop a plan for the management of public motor vehicle use on forest lands in the planning area.
2. Consider the criteria for classification of State Forest lands (M.R. part 6100.1950) and recommend an appropriate motor vehicle use classification.
3. Evaluate all inventoried forest access routes and propose (un)designation of forest roads and trails for specific motorized and non-motorized uses.
4. Present the team's recommendations for public review, discussion and comment.

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

1. Compile an inventory of forest access routes, which are defined as forest roads and trails, and other routes, showing evidence of ongoing motorized use. Prepare maps showing all travel routes.
2. Host a series of public open houses to alert people to the classification review and road and trail designation process, to gain an understanding of how they use these access routes, how they use state lands generally, and to solicit ideas regarding the use of the forest lands and future designation of selected routes.
3. Conduct interagency working sessions to make preliminary designation and use recommendations based on inventory data, staff knowledge, and public input from the open houses.
4. Identify routes potentially suitable for designation as motor/non-motor recreational trails.
5. Prepare designation plans and maps for internal agency and public review and comment.

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

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF LANDS COVERED BY THIS PLAN

Between 2003 and 2008, the DNR will review the motor vehicle use classification and designate forest roads and trails on all State Forest lands in Minnesota. This plan covers a portion of State Forest lands in the West Central Forests in west-central Minnesota.

2.1 PLANNING UNIT DEFINED FOR THIS PLAN

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

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

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

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

This plan addresses proposed forest classifications and road/trail designations for the ***South Unit***. It should be noted that although Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests occur in Becker County, DNR is deferring the classification review and road/trail designation of Becker County's scattered forest lands to the planning process for the North Unit concurrent with the classification review for White Earth State Forest, which also is located in part within Becker County. A small amount of Huntersville State Forest occurs in Hubbard County and is considered part of the South Unit for classification review and road/trail designation purposes.

2.2 LOCATION, ACREAGE, AND OWNERSHIP

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

There are six named State Forests with statutorily-defined boundaries within the West Central Forests planning unit. These six State Forests have a gross acreage of about 302,761 acres, of which about 103,532 acres administered by the DNR Division of Forestry are covered by the complete review of the North and South Units.

2.2.1 STATE ADMINISTERED LANDS

The four State Forests located within the South Unit taken together encompass a gross acreage of about 102,041 acres. DNR's Division of Forestry administers 52,406 acres, or about 51.4%, of the forest lands occurring within the statutory boundary. Another 8,495 acres of forest land administered by the DNR Division of Forestry lies outside of State Forest boundaries in the South Unit; this total excludes scattered forest lands in Becker County that will be considered with the North Unit. Therefore, a total of 60,901 net acres were the focus of this planning exercise.

In addition to State Forest lands, there are 3 State Parks (4,474 acres), 3 Scientific & Natural Areas (1,141 acres), and 131 WMAs (43,568 acres) that occur in the South Unit.

2.2.2 COUNTY ADMINISTERED LANDS

Becker County is the only county in the South Unit to have an established Land Department; it manages 200 acres of forest land in Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests. All other

counties in the South Unit do not have County land departments because they administer very little forested or other natural covertype acreages. Wadena County has approximately 20 acres of land in Huntersville State Forest that is managed under agreement with DNR Forestry.

2.2.3 WHITE EARTH RESERVATION

The White Earth Reservation boundary encompasses about 700,000 acres, all of which lies within the DNR's West Central Forests' planning unit. Approximately 3040 acres of the White Earth Reservation occurs within the statutory boundary of the South Unit's Two Inlets State Forest.

Table 1. Summary of Forest Land Ownership in South Unit

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

Within-Forest Acreages & Inventory					
State Forest	Statutory Acres	Administrator		Inventoried Route Miles	
		DNR	County		
Huntersville	33,963	16,714	N/A		147.8
Lyons	14,789	6,650	N/A		23.9
Smoky Hills	25,278	15,074	Becker	40	67.1
Two Inlets	28,051	13,968	Becker	160	71.7
Total	102,081	52,406	200		310.5
Scattered Lands Acreages & Inventory					
County		DNR-Administered Lands		Inventoried Route Miles	
Clay		320		0.0	
Douglas		163		0.2	
Otter Tail		2,695		4.1	
Pope		80		0.0	
Todd		3,267		4.3	
Wadena		2,290		5.9	
Total		8,495		14.5	

3.0 MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATIONS

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 1950. subp. 2. The State Forest motor vehicle use classifications are characterized as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

3.1 LANDS COVERED BY THIS CLASSIFICATION REVIEW

This motor vehicle use classification review covers State Forest lands in the West Central Forests South Unit in west-central Minnesota. The four State Forests evaluated in the South Unit occur in Becker, Hubbard, and Wadena Counties respectively. Scattered forest lands evaluated in the South Unit are located in these counties: Clay; Douglas; Otter Tail; Pope;

Todd; and Wadena. The planning unit, excluding Becker County, covers approximately 3.7 million acres, including water-covered areas.

3.1.1 INSIDE STATE FOREST BOUNDARIES

There are four named State Forests with statutorily-defined boundaries within the planning unit. These four State Forests have a gross acreage of about 102,081 acres, of which about 52,406 acres administered by the DNR Division of Forestry are covered by this review. M.S. Section 84.777 applies the State Forest classification and road/trail designation process to county-administered forest lands within the boundaries of State Forests unless the county board adopts a resolution that modifies restrictions on the use of OHVs on county-administered land within the forest.

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

- Becker County has notified DNR of its intention to adopt a resolution and/or ordinance possibly modifying restrictions on OHV use on county-administered forests lands within State Forests. No such resolution and/or ordinance has been adopted at this time.
- Wadena County does not propose to adopt a resolution modifying restrictions on OHV use on county-administered forests lands within State Forests.

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

3.1.2 OUTSIDE STATE FOREST BOUNDARIES

The South Unit includes about 8,495 acres of forest land administered by the DNR Division of Forestry outside of the State Forest boundaries; this total excludes scattered forest lands in Becker County. These lands are treated as State Forest land and are covered by this classification review.

County-administered forest land outside of State Forest boundaries occurs within the DNR's West Central Forests planning unit; the majority of these lands occur in Becker, Beltrami, and Clearwater Counties in the North Unit. This plan does not apply to any of these county-administered lands; they will be evaluated in a second draft plan specific to the North Unit.

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

3.2 CLASSIFICATION EVALUATION PROCESS

DNR West Central Team members reviewed the classification criteria, collected data related to classification, and gathered input from other DNR staff, county land commissioners, White Earth

Natural Resources, other governmental units, and the public. Five public open houses were conducted over the period September 25 through October 5, 2006. DNR received written input from the public over this period; it took the form of comment forms, letters, and e-mails. Potential classification schemes were discussed that resulted in the proposed classifications discussed in an earlier draft plan. Preliminary recommendations to classify all four State Forests and scattered forest lands as “limited” set the stage for an intensive route-by-route evaluation exercise that followed.

During the process of developing the preliminary road and trail use recommendations, team members agreed that opportunities to maintain existing, and create new, motor-limited areas were present. This takes the form of recommendations for existing non-motorized areas to retain this status, or proposals for the designation of Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use. The latter is where the legal exception that allows use of motor vehicles off-trail, or on non-designated routes, for specific big game hunting and trapping related activities does not apply. Designations of non-motorized trails, with the primary use being walking or horseback riding, are also offered in the plan. Examples of these areas include proposed designated walking trails in Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests, proposed designated horse trails in Huntersville State Forest, and Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use in Two Inlets and Smoky Hills State Forests.

Team members considered and developed draft recommendations for forest classifications and road and trail designations over the period August 2006 to February 2007; these were provided for public review and comment over the period May 14 – August 1, 2007. Draft and final recommendations are based upon statutory criteria, an evaluation of existing conditions, and review of current use levels and patterns. Team members sought to protect natural resources and further resource management objectives through these recommendations. They also sought to foster consistency across mixed public ownerships in terms of county access plans and travel management policies. Consistency of regulation across mixed ownerships is desirable because it fosters public understanding of vehicular use rules and facilitates effective enforcement.

3.3 EXISTING MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATION

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

3.4 FINAL CLASSIFICATIONS

The state forests and/or associated scattered forest lands in the South Unit must be reclassified as either *limited* or *closed* to comply with current Minnesota law. The DNR West Central Forests Road & Trail Designation Team discussed alternative classification proposals and developed consensus classification recommendations for State Forest lands in the planning

area. The primary reasons supporting the classification recommendation for each State Forest are presented below. All criteria listed in Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subpart 2 were considered under the classification review. The Commissioner of Natural Resources classified State Forest lands within the planning area as described in the following text.

3.4.1 HUNTERSVILLE STATE FOREST – LIMITED

The Huntersville State Forest is a mixture of state and private lands located approximately five (5) miles due east of Menahga, MN. The forest's statutory boundary encompasses 33,963 acres, of which 16,714 acres are administered by the DNR Division of Forestry. The balance of forest lands inside the forest are privately owned. Both the Shell and Crow Wing Rivers cross the forest, and it is rolling-to-flat and exhibits loamy sand soils. It is primarily Jack and Norway Pine mixed with Aspen, Spruce, Tamarack, and Northern Hardwoods. Some wetlands are present, and lakes include Finn Lake and Duck Lake.

State and private ownership is fairly intermixed with no large blocks of either ownership present. The forest has two campgrounds; one is the Huntersville Campground and the other is the Shell City Campground. The latter provides both camping and horse facilities, and serves as the trailhead for existing horse trails. The Shell and Crow Wing River Canoe and Boating Route provides both canoeing (with outfitter services) and riverside camping opportunities. GIA snowmobile trails are present. WMAs in the area include Huntersville, Burgen Lake Prairie, Crow Wing Chain, Menahga, and Yeager; Burgen Lake Prairie WMA is home to prairie chickens.

Huntersville State Forest has been used for organized special events for OHMs for many years. These activities were subject to a DNR special event permit issued by the Division of Forestry. Historically, courses were laid out on both public and private ownerships, but due to changes in corporate ownership(s) and related use policies, the special events are now restricted to only a mixture of DNR-administered lands and public road authority right-of-ways (ROWS). Additional OHM use occurs during other times of the season that is estimated to be generally light. Horseback riding-type use occurs in this forest. Utilitarian ATV and highway licensed vehicle use for hunting is also present; these levels are generally light, with little summer use.

All state forest lands within the Huntersville State Forest's statutory boundary are currently classified as *managed*. **The DNR will change the motor vehicle use classification for Huntersville State Forest to *limited*.** The lay of the land and soil types are suitable for motor vehicle use on designated, signed forest roads and trails as required under the *limited* classification. Minimum maintenance road designations afford public access for utilitarian and hunting activities consistent with historic patterns. Access afforded on forest roads will be coupled with both motorized and non-motorized trail designations, including: 1) ATV/OHM trail designation for two general locales, and 2) 50.7 miles of designated OHM-only trail. The former provides loop-type ATV riding opportunities while the latter provides a destination, family-oriented riding opportunity. Approximately 0.3 miles of non-designated route is proposed to be designated as minimum maintenance forest road to accommodate public access requests. The limited classification also allows for continuation of special events, subject to case-by-case review and approval. In addition, a total of 17.9 miles of existing and new horse trail are proposed for designation, including some routes developed historically from OHM-related special events. The mixed pattern of public and private ownerships will require effective: 1) on the ground measures (e.g., informational kiosks; signing; monitoring), and 2) user

education/compliance efforts, to reinforce Department commitments to provide for adequate public safety and enforcement.

The Department solicited and considered public comment at two points in the classification review and road/trail designation process for Huntersville State Forest. The first round of comments are generally characterized as stating:

- Support for a limited classification.
- Support for continuation of enduro-type special events for OHMs.
- Support for establishing designated OHM-only trails in the forest.
- Maintain quality canoe and horseback experiences.

The planning team addressed these issues in the Draft Plan, especially competing interests among user groups, by noting that the proposed OHM-only trail designations, and to a lesser degree the new miles of designated horse trail, constituted a departure from historic use patterns. Specifically:

- Because the proposed OHM-only designations reflect ongoing statewide demand for single-track trail riding opportunities, Huntersville State Forest will likely become a destination-type location for OHM riding. This demand was noted in comments submitted to the agency over the interim planning period.
- Huntersville State Forest is already a destination opportunity for horse users. The proposed network of horse trails represents a doubling (approximately) of this opportunity over historic conditions. Of note is that the “newer” miles of trail are further away from the horse camp, thus they may be potentially less accessible for use as a function of travel distance. This is because the time necessary to ride these trails may exceed user tolerances without additional staging areas.
- Huntersville State Forest is already a destination opportunity for canoeists. To limit potential recreation conflict, routes near the Crow Wing River are proposed to remain non-designated, and thus be unavailable for general motorized use.
- Because the forest could be a destination for horse, canoe, and motorcycle enthusiasts, the potential recreational conflict has been anticipated and avoided through grouping proposed horse- and OHM-trail designations to specific areas of the forest. To further manage potential recreation conflict, DNR also recommends that motorcycle use of the OHM-only trails occur from the Friday before Memorial Day through Labor Day each year. Forest roads and ATV/OHM trails would not be subject to this period and would remain open subject to seasonal and/or temporary closures.

The second opportunity for public comment occurred during the official notice period required under Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. Specific responses were developed for these comments submitted during the official comment period. See the *Responses to Comments* document that accompanies this Final Plan. These comments informed DNR’s final recommendation for a *limited* forest classification for Huntersville State Forest, which is to be coupled with designated forest: roads; ATV-OHM trails; OHM-only trails; and horseback trails.

3.4.2 LYONS STATE FOREST - LIMITED

The Lyons State Forest is a mixture of state and private lands lying due west of the Crow Wing River, approximately ten (10) miles northeast of Wadena, MN. The forest’s statutory boundary encompasses 14,789 acres, of which some 6,650 acres are administered by the DNR Division

of Forestry. While the surrounding area exhibits some extensive wetland complexes, the forest itself is mainly flat upland on sandy soils with modest to small wetlands present. Jackpine is the dominant forest type, with other conifers, Aspen, and hardwoods less represented.

The largest block of contiguous DNR-administered lands occurs in the south-central section of the forest. Non-road GIA snowmobile trail crosses this ownership. Two WMAs are associated with the Lyons State Forest; these are the Strike Lake and Dry Sand WMAs. Public use of the forest is considered relatively low. Existing OHV use patterns are mostly for forest access during hunting season, although utilitarian access for berry picking is also present. Non-motorized recreational use is considered low.

All state forest lands within the Lyons State Forest's statutory boundary are currently classified as *managed*. **The DNR will change the motor vehicle use classification of Lyons State Forest to *limited*.** Minimum maintenance road designations afford public access for utilitarian and hunting activities consistent with historic patterns; this access should be sustainable with proper monitoring, maintenance, and enforcement. A small amount of recreational ATV/OHM trail is provided to allow for some loop-type riding opportunity. This classification also permits historic uses of the forest to be retained. Enforcement and public safety issues are not expected to be problematic with effective on-the-ground management and user education/compliance efforts in place to reinforce Department commitments to adequate public safety and enforcement.

The Department solicited and considered public comment at two points in the classification review and road/trail designation process for Lyons State Forest. No comments were submitted during the first opportunity.

The second opportunity for public comment occurred during the official notice period required under Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. Specific responses were developed for these comments submitted during the official comment period. See the *Responses to Comments* document that accompanies this Final Plan. These comments informed DNR's final recommendation for a *limited* forest classification for Lyons State Forest, which is to be coupled with designated forest roads and ATV-OHM trails.

3.4.3 SMOKY HILLS STATE FOREST - *LIMITED*

The Smoky Hills State Forest is located approximately six miles (6) west-northwest of Osage, MN. The forest's statutory boundary encompasses 25,278 acres, of which 15,074 acres are administered by the DNR Division of Forestry; Becker County manages 40 acres inside the forest boundary. Minnesota Trunk Highway 34 bisects the forest in an east-west direction. It is predominantly state-administered land, intermixed with privately-owned land. The terrain of the forest varies from rolling to moderately steep slopes. Clay-type soils dominate in the southern part of the forest while loamy to sandy soils are present on the remaining acres. Numerous small lakes dot the forest and wetlands occur too. A large wetland complex is present east of Shell Lake along the Shell River. Forest cover includes Aspen, Jack Pine, Northern Hardwoods, and softwoods; designated old growth is also present.

State-managed lands are concentrated at the north and south ends of the forest respectively. The Wolf Lake GIA Snowmobile Trail occurs in the forest; about six of 17 total miles are present inside the forest. The forest offers exceptional deer and grouse hunting and the forest road

system provides access for hunters. The GIA Forest Riders ATV Trail connects Smoky Hills State Forest to Two Inlets State Forest along township roads. Dispersed camping is present.

All state forest lands within the Smoky Hills State Forest's statutory boundary are currently classified as *managed*. **The DNR will change the motor vehicle use classification for Smoky Hills State Forest to *limited*.** The configuration of state lands allows for retention of historic motorized access while enhancing opportunities for non-motorized recreation. Broad motorized access is retained through a combination of minimum maintenance road and ATV/OHM trail designations, especially in the southern part of the forest (south of TH 34). Non-motorized opportunities are enhanced through the designation of hunting walking trails, principally in the northern part of the forest, that are available for non-hunting use too. Although DNR ownerships are somewhat consolidated, the change in classification from *managed* to *limited* will require effective: 1) on the ground measures (e.g., informational kiosks; signing; monitoring), and 2) user education/compliance efforts, to reinforce Department commitments to adequate public safety and enforcement. Monitoring will be necessary to track user compliance with operating prescriptions, recognizing that closures (both temporary and/or permanent) may be necessary to address any potential concerns.

The natural resource profile (e.g., soils, slopes, water features), along with the commitment to enhanced non-motorized recreation opportunities, justified creation of an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use in the northern one-half of the forest. This area covers 6,590 acres out of a total 15,704 acres of DNR-administered forest lands. The hunting- and trapping-related motor uses permitted by M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 & 4 do not apply in this area. Motorized access is still provided via forest system and minimum maintenance roads. Non-designated routes are considered problematic for any motorized use, even under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions. Designation of this area addresses potential concerns for impacts to soils and vegetation while improving non-motorized recreation opportunities in that part of the forest.

The Department solicited and considered public comment at two points in the classification review and road/trail designation process for Smoky Hills State Forest. The first round of comments were generally characterized as stating:

- Support for either a closed or limited classification.
- Concerns over resource sensitivity, especially the presence of steep slopes and erodible soils.
- Concerns over enforcement, safety, off-trail travel, and private property trespass.
- Potential for motor versus non-motor recreational conflict.

These issues reflect public concern over relatively unplanned public access under a *managed* forest classification, or "unwarranted" future restrictions on motor vehicle use under a *limited* or *closed* forest classification. The Department considered this public comment in the Draft Plan by recommending a *limited* motor use classification that was coupled with specific designations for forest roads and trails, where each proposed route designation underwent specific planning team (and other DNR staff) review. The team also proposed an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use to further address resource sensitivity concerns and provide for improved non-motorized recreational opportunities (in terms of competing interests among differing user groups).

The second opportunity for public comment occurred during the official notice period required under Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. Specific responses were developed for these comments submitted during the official comment period. See the *Responses to Comments* document that accompanies this Final Plan. These comments informed DNR's final recommendation for a *limited* forest classification for Smoky Hills State Forest, which is to be coupled with designated forest: roads; ATV-OHM trails; hunter walking trails, and a designated Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-motorized Trail Use.

3.4.4 TWO INLETS STATE FOREST - *LIMITED*

Two Inlets State Forest is located approximately five (5) miles north of Osage, MN. The forest's statutory boundary encompasses 28,051 acres, of which 13,968 acres are administered by the DNR Division of Forestry; Becker County manages 160 acres inside the forest boundary. It is approximately one-half state owned land and one-half privately-owned land. Glacial action created a landscape that is gently rolling to hilly with scattered lowlands. The soils vary from loamy sand to better sands. Much of the forest was once farmed but was abandoned due to poor soil productivity. Two Inlets Lake and Boot Lake are largest-sized lakes in the forest, but smaller lakes and wetlands, some also large, are present. Indian Creek is also a significant water feature. Forest cover includes Aspen and Jack Pine, and lesser amounts of Northern Hardwoods and various softwoods.

DNR forest ownership can be generalized as occurring in the western and southern portions of the statutory boundary. The Two Inlets GIA Snowmobile Trail provides over 20 miles of winter riding opportunity. The Forest Riders ATV Trail connects Two Inlets State Forest to Smoky Hills State Forest. Hungryman Campground allows camping and boat accesses are provided on Hungryman and Cedar Lakes. There is excellent hunting for deer, ruffed grouse, and other small game. Two Inlets Lake has a good warm water fishery. White Earth and Two Inlets State Forests share a common border; it occurs along the northern border of Two Inlets State Forest.

All state forest lands within the Two Inlets State Forest's statutory boundary are currently classified as *managed*. **The DNR will change the motor vehicle use classification for Two Inlets State Forest to *limited*.** The configuration of state lands allows for retention of historic motorized access while enhancing opportunities for non-motorized recreation. Broad motorized access is retained through a combination of minimum maintenance forest road and ATV/OHM trail designations, especially in the southeastern part of the forest. Non-motorized opportunities are enhanced through the designation of hunting walking trails, principally in the northwestern part of the forest, that are available for non-hunting use too. Approximately 1.0 mile of proposed hunter walking trail is removed from the proposal to accommodate historic Grant In Aid trail access; this mileage will retain a non-designated status under the final plan. Although DNR ownerships are somewhat consolidated, the change in classification from *managed* to *limited* will require effective: 1) on the ground measures (e.g., informational kiosks; signing; monitoring), and 2) user education/compliance efforts, to reinforce Department commitments to adequate public safety and enforcement. Monitoring will be necessary to track user compliance with operating prescriptions, recognizing that closures (both temporary and/or permanent) may be necessary to address any potential concerns.

The natural resource profile (e.g., soils, slopes, water features), along with the commitment to enhanced non-motorized recreation opportunities, justified creation of an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use in the northern one-half of the forest. This area covers 6,288 acres out of a total 13,968 acres of DNR-administered forest lands. The hunting-

and trapping-related motor uses permitted by M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 & 4 do not apply in this area. Motorized access is still provided via forest system and minimum maintenance roads. Non-designated routes are considered problematic for any motorized use, even under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions. Designation of this area addresses potential concerns for impacts to soils and vegetation while improving non-motorized recreation opportunities in that part of the forest, which is consistent with the proposed limited classification.

The Department solicited and considered public comment at two points in the classification review and road/trail designation process for Two Inlets State Forest. The first round of comments were generally characterized as stating:

- Support for either a closed or limited classification.
- GIA ATV trail system already present makes more suited to ATV trail designations.
- Support for continued motorized access, especially for ATVs.

These issues reflect public concern over the relatively unplanned public access under a *managed* forest classification, or concern that motorized access would be unduly restricted (under a *limited* classification) or eliminated entirely (under a *closed* classification). The Department considered this public comment in the Draft Plan by recommending a *limited* motor use classification that was coupled with specific designations for forest roads and trails, where each proposed route designation underwent specific planning team (and other DNR staff) review. The team also proposed an Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use to further address resource sensitivity concerns and provide for improved non-motorized recreational opportunities (in terms of competing interests among differing user groups).

The second opportunity for public comment occurred during the official notice period required under Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. Specific responses were developed for these comments submitted during the official comment period. See the *Responses to Comments* document that accompanies this Final Plan. These comments informed DNR's final recommendation for a *limited* forest classification for Two Inlets State Forest, which is to be coupled with designated forest: roads; ATV-OHM trails; hunter walking trails, and a designated Area with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-motorized Trail Use.

3.4.5 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / CLAY COUNTY – MIXED *LIMITED* & *CLOSED*

The DNR's West Central planning area includes 30 public land survey townships in Clay County (Townships 137 - 142N, Ranges 44W – 48W, inclusive). No State Forests are located in the county. There are approximately 320 acres of DNR-Forestry administered land in scattered tracts outside of State Forest boundaries that are managed as State Forest Land and thus need to be classified for motor vehicle use.

Three tracts of scattered forest lands occur in Clay County, with two being Section 36 Minnesota School Trust Lands. These lands occur in the prairie transition zone where forest patches are small and isolated from other similar forest patches. The landscape is prairie pothole with land use typically agricultural, although aggregate (e.g., gravel) mining is also present.

All state forest lands within the in Clay County are currently classified as *managed*. The planning team originally recommended a *limited* classification for all three parcels, but with new

information the team later recommended a *closed* classification; see Draft Plan Errata 06/26/07. Because there are no inventoried routes on any parcel even under a *managed* classification, the pattern of little or no public use is expected to continue into the future. The principal difference between a *closed* versus *limited* classification is access afforded under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions (M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4) for a *limited* classification. Outside the hunting and trapping exceptions, public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, under either a *limited* or *closed* classification.

The Department followed the public notice requirements of Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. No public comment was submitted on the DNR Forestry-administered scattered forest lands in Clay County at any stage of the planning process. The parcel-by-parcel motor vehicle use classifications are as follows:

- **Parcel SW SW Section 36, T141N, R46W - LIMITED.** This tract is 40 acres once proposed for administrative transfer to the Division of Wildlife; may be transferred or sold at a future date. A mixture of upland and lowland vegetation is present, including some prairie remnants, with little or no opportunity for forest management. The parcel has no inventory and no road or trail designations are proposed. This means that motorized use is restricted to off-trail ATV access under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions. Little or no future motorized use is anticipated at this location.
- **Parcel NE Section 36, T142N, R46W - CLOSED.** This tract is 160 acres that is managed as part of Felton Prairie WMA. The parcel is proposed for administrative transfer to the Division of Wildlife. No inventory is present, and no forest road or trail designations are proposed. The *closed* classification aligns better with management of greater WMA than would be present under a *limited* classification.
- **Parcel SW NW Section 32, T142N, R45W & E½ SW Section 31, T142N, R45W – CLOSED.** This tract covers 120 acres that are part of an active gravel mine. The site currently posted no trespassing, thus public access is not provided. The mining plan requires site to be reclaimed as prairie at completion. The *closed* classification aligns better with current and future site management than the *limited* classification.

3.4.6 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / DOUGLAS COUNTY - *LIMITED*

The DNR's West Central planning area includes 20 public land survey townships in Douglas County (Townships 127N – 130N, Ranges 36W – 40W, inclusive). No State Forests are located in the county.

Three parcels of DNR Forestry-administered land covering approximately 163 acres occur in Douglas County, each of which is part of the Minnesota School Trust Lands. These lands are in the prairie transition zone in the Lakes Region around Alexandria. Land use is mixed between agricultural and water-recreation. Forest parcels are typically isolated from similar forest patches, often occurring in undeveloped riparian areas surrounded by private ownerships.

All state forest lands in Douglas County are currently classified as *managed*. The planning team originally recommended a *limited* classification for all three parcels, but with new information the team later recommended a *closed* classification; see Draft Plan Errata 06/26/07.

Because there are no inventoried routes on two parcels, with 0.3 miles present on the third, even under the current *managed* classification, the pattern of little or no public use of the parcels is expected to continue. The principal difference between a *closed* versus *limited* classification is access afforded under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions (M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4) for a *limited* classification. Outside the hunting and trapping exceptions, public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, under either a *limited* or *closed* classification.

The Department followed the public notice requirements of Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. No public comment was submitted on the DNR Forestry-administered scattered forest lands in Douglas County at any stage of the planning process. The Department recommends a uniform *limited* classification for all state forest lands in this county. The parcel-by-parcel motor vehicle use classifications are as follows:

- **Parcel NE NW Section 16, T128N, R38W & SWNW Section 16, T128N, R38W - LIMITED.** This parcel consists of 83 acres along the shoreline of Mina Lake. The southernmost part is under water, with the northernmost piece covering about 15 acres of high ground that is split into 11-acre and 4-acre parcels split/separated respectively by water. The .23 miles of inventory was a route created to access a Fisheries trapping structure on the flowage; this route is now gated to prevent non-sanctioned camping or parties and dumping. A public access is on the lake at another location. Opportunities for forest management are limited at this site. The only difference between a closed and limited classification would be access afforded under the big game hunting trapping exceptions for off-trail travel by ATVs. Any motorized access is considered incidental as a function of big game hunting/trapping activity, with little or no adverse effect expected, under the *limited* classification.
- **Parcel NE NW Section 36, T129N, R38W – LIMITED.** This parcel covers 40 acres along the shoreline of Charlie Lake, where all but 1.5 acres is under water. The upland present is in the shoreland district of Charlie Lake. No inventory is present. The opportunity for forest management is limited at the site. The only difference between a closed and limited classification would be access afforded under the big game hunting trapping exceptions for off-trail travel by ATVs. Any motorized access is considered incidental as a function of big game hunting/trapping activity, with little or no adverse effect expected, under the *limited* classification.
- **Parcel SE SE Section 36, T128N, R36W – LIMITED.** This is a 40-acre parcel located along an unnamed lake inside Osakis WMA. Most of the acreage is under water. No inventory is present. Opportunities for forest management are limited at this site. The only difference between a closed and limited classification would be access afforded under the big game hunting trapping exceptions for off-trail travel by ATVs. However, because the site is surrounded by WMA where OHV operation is not permitted, no motorized traffic is expected even under a *limited* classification. No adverse effects due to motor vehicle use are anticipated.

3.4.7 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / OTTER TAIL COUNTY - LIMITED

The DNR's West Central planning area includes 75 public land survey townships in Otter Tail County (Townships 130N, Ranges 36W – 40W, inclusive; Townships 131N – 136N, R36W –

44W, inclusive; Townships 137N – 138N, Ranges 36W – 43W, inclusive). No State Forests are located in the county. There are approximately 2,695 acres of DNR Forestry-administered land in scattered tracts outside of State Forest boundaries that are managed as State Forest Land and thus need to be classified for motor vehicle use.

The scattered forest land parcels in Otter Tail County occur principally as Minnesota School Trust Lands. Five (5) occur as Section 36 parcels and three (3) occur as Section 16 parcels. These forest lands occur in the prairie transition zone where forest patches are small and isolated (from other similar parcels). They occur in a prairie pothole type of landscape where the land use is typically agricultural.

All state forest lands in Otter Tail County are currently classified as *managed*. The planning team recommended a *limited* classification for the scattered forest lands in Otter Tail County. Seven parcels have inventoried routes present totaling approximately 4.1 miles; most of these tracts are too small to have designated forest roads or recreational trails, including non-motorized ones. All others have no inventory. Parcels with inventory are typically being accessed from public road and/or neighboring ownerships. Three are mostly upland, two are upland with some wetlands present, and two are riparian.

The Department followed the public notice requirements of Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. No public comment was submitted on the DNR Forestry-administered scattered forest lands in Otter Tail County at any stage of the planning process. The uniform classification of *limited* for all state forest lands in this county facilitates the public's understanding of motor vehicle access to state forest lands in Otter Tail County. The presence of inventory on some of these parcels indicates that some motor vehicle use is currently present under the *managed* classification. Under a *limited* classification, historic big game hunting and trapping access is still afforded under M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4. Impacts from this small amount of motor vehicle use should be sustainable while protecting for other resource values. Public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, under a *limited* classification.

3.4.8 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / POPE COUNTY - *CLOSED*

The DNR's West Central planning area includes 20 public land survey townships in Pope County (Townships 123 - 126N, Ranges 36W – 40W, inclusive). No State Forests are located in the county.

There are approximately 80 acres of DNR-Forestry administered land in scattered tracts outside of State Forest boundaries that are managed as State Forest Land and thus need to be classified for motor vehicle use, both as Minnesota School Trust Lands as Section 16 parcels. These parcels occur in the prairie transition zone in a prairie pothole type of landscape. Land use is typically agricultural, and if forest cover type is present at all, it's typically isolated.

All state forest lands in Pope County are currently classified as *managed*. The planning team originally recommended a *limited* classification for all three parcels, but with new information the team later recommended a *closed* classification; see Draft Plan Errata 06/26/07. Because there are no inventoried routes on any parcel even under a *managed* classification, the pattern of little or no public use is expected to continue into the future. The principal difference between a *closed* versus *limited* classification is access afforded under the big game hunting and trapping exceptions (M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4) for a *limited* classification. Outside the hunting

and trapping exceptions, public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, under either a *limited* or *closed* classification.

The Department followed the public notice requirements of Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. No public comment was submitted on the DNR Forestry-administered scattered forest lands in Pope County at any stage of the planning process. The parcel-by-parcel motor vehicle use classifications are as follows:

- **Parcel SW NE Section 16, T124N, R37W – CLOSED.** This is a 40-acre parcel that is three-quarters wetland and is accessed through Chippewa Falls WMA. It is being managed as part of the WMA and riparian conditions are present. Little or no opportunity is present for forest management. No inventory is present even under a *managed* classification. A *closed* classification aligns better with motor vehicle management in WMAs than that of a *limited* classification.
- **Parcel NW NE Section 26, T124N, R39W – CLOSED.** This is a 40-acre parcel immediately adjacent to Glacial Lakes State Park. It is not forested and is likely being managed as part of a prairie complex. Little or no opportunity is present for forest management. No inventory is present even under a *managed* classification. A *closed* classification is better aligned with state park management and prairie management.

The uniform classification of *closed* for all state forest lands in this county facilitates the public's understanding of motor vehicle access in Pope County. Public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, under a *closed* classification.

3.4.9 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / TODD COUNTY - *LIMITED*

The DNR's West Central planning area includes 28 public land survey townships in Todd County (Townships 127N – 133N, R32W – 35W, inclusive). No State Forests are located in the county. There are approximately 3,267 acres of DNR-Forestry administered land in scattered tracts outside of State Forest boundaries that are managed as State Forest Land and thus need to be classified for motor vehicle use.

All the scattered forest land parcels in Todd County are Minnesota School Trust lands. Two (2) occur as Section 36 parcels and seven (7) occur as Section 16 parcels. These forest lands occur in the prairie transition zone in a landscape that is primarily upland and dotted with wetlands and lakes. Land use is typically agricultural. Forest patches can be larger, but are still somewhat isolated from other similar patches.

All state forest lands in Todd County are currently classified as *managed*. The planning team recommended a *limited* classification for the scattered forest lands in Todd County. Five parcels exhibit motorized use to the degree that 4.5 miles of inventory are present. Parcels with inventory are typically being accessed from public roads and/or neighboring private ownerships. Of these parcels with inventory, one is mostly upland with the balance having some wetlands present. Non-motorized hunting opportunities are present in the area; WMAs are adjacent to two parcels.

The Department followed the public notice requirements of Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. No public comment was submitted on the DNR Forestry-administered scattered forest lands in Todd County at any stage of the planning process. The uniform classification of *limited* for all state forest lands facilitates the public's understanding of motor vehicle access in Otter Tail County. The presence of inventory on some of these parcels indicates that some motor vehicle use is currently present under the *managed* classification. Under a *limited* classification, historic big game hunting and trapping access is still afforded under M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4. Impacts from this small amount of motor vehicle use should be sustainable while protecting for other resource values. Public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized methods, under a *limited* classification.

3.4.10 SCATTERED STATE FOREST LANDS / WADENA COUNTY - LIMITED

The DNR's West Central planning area includes 16 public land survey townships in Wadena County (Townships 134N – 138N, Ranges 33W – 35W, inclusive; and part of Township T134N-R32W). Three (3) of these townships (T135N-R33W; T136N, R33 - 34W) contain portions of the Lyons State Forest. Two (2) of these townships (T138N, R33-34W) contain portions of the Huntersville State Forest. The remaining townships are completely outside any named State Forests. There are approximately 2,290 acres of DNR Forestry-administered land in scattered tracts outside of State Forest boundaries that are managed as State Forest Land and thus need to be classified for motor vehicle use.

Some of the scattered forest land parcels in Wadena County occur as Minnesota School Trust Lands. Three (3) occur as Section 36 parcels and two (3) occur as Section 16 parcels. Forest lands in Wadena County are in the forest-agriculture transition zone, thus land use is often agricultural. The landscape is primarily upland, but wetlands, streams, and rivers are present. Large patches of forest occur, but still are relatively isolated from other forest cover.

All state forest lands in Wadena County are currently classified as *managed*. The planning team recommended a *limited* classification for the scattered forest lands in Wadena County. Five parcels exhibit public use to the degree that inventory is present. The Division of Wildlife has historically provided hunter walking opportunities on two parcels; one of these has 0.4 miles of minimum maintenance roads to provide greater public access. The remaining three parcels have 1.0 miles of inventory proposed to remain non-designated. Parcels with inventory are typically being accessed from public road and/or neighboring ownerships. Non-motorized recreation opportunities in the area include WMAs as well as the Crow Wing River Canoe and Boating Route.

The Department followed the public notice requirements of Minn. Rules part 6100.1950, subp. 3B. No public comment was submitted on the DNR Forestry-administered scattered forest lands in Wadena County at any stage of the planning process. The uniform classification of *limited* for all scattered state forest lands facilitates the public's understanding of motor vehicle access in Wadena County. The presence of inventory on some of these parcels indicates that some motor vehicle use is currently present under the *managed* classification. Under a *limited* classification, historic big game hunting and trapping access is still afforded under M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 and 4. Impacts from this small amount of motor vehicle use should be sustainable while protecting for other resource values. Public access for other utilitarian purposes, such as berry picking, will only be possible by foot travel, or other non-motorized

methods, under a *limited* classification. Motor vehicle use will not be permitted on designated hunter walking trails.

4.0 FOREST ROUTE INVENTORY

In preparation for this road and trail designation process, the DNR West Central Team compiled available information on the existing roads, trails, and routes that show evidence of continuing human use on all State Forest lands in the planning area. Geographic information system (GIS) data on public highways was obtained from the MN Department of Transportation. GIS data on previously designated forest roads was collected from the DNR, counties, and White Earth Natural Resources. Data on previously designated recreational trails was collated.

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

While reasonable efforts were made to correct the travel routes data there are inherent limitations on the completeness and accuracy of the forest route inventory data. Highway authorities are continually adding, rerouting, and abandoning highways. Public land ownership patterns change as lands are acquired, sold, or exchanged. Natural resource management activities, fires, and timber sales create or obliterate forest access routes. Unused trails and routes re-vegetate, beavers flood routes, and what is a passable route in a dry year maybe impassable in wet years. The forest route inventory showed 325.0 miles of routes on State Forest lands in the South Unit.

Table 2. Summary of Forest Route Inventory

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

State Forest	Miles on State Forest Land
Huntersville	147.8
Lyons	23.9
Smoky Hills	67.1
Two Inlets	71.7
Outside of State Forest	14.5
Total	325.0

5.0 ROUTE DESIGNATION POLICIES AND PROCESS

Minnesota's State Forests are managed to produce timber, provide outdoor recreation, protect watersheds, and perpetuate rare and distinctive species of native flora and fauna. State Forests are managed to ensure they remain healthy, vital, and productive for the present and for future generations. State Forests provide a variety of unstructured outdoor recreation opportunities, such as hunting, trapping, berry picking, and nature observation. For more structured activities,

many State Forests contain recreation facilities with campgrounds, day-use areas, and trails for various motorized and non-motorized uses. Minnesota statutes set broad direction for management of State Forests by directing the Commissioner of Natural Resources to:

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

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

5.1 INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

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

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

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

The DNR team coordinated its work with county and tribal land management agencies. The goal was to develop a consistent, understandable, and enforceable approach to vehicular access across public and private forest land ownerships. The team worked within existing mandates and guidelines for the management of State Forest lands, while respecting the management plans and policies for other forest land owners in the planning area.

5.1.1 INTERAGENCY RECOGNITION OF FOREST ROAD DESIGNATIONS

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

As part of the collaborative motor vehicle management effort for public forest lands in the West Central Forests planning area, the county, state, and tribal forest management agencies have agreed to mutually recognize forest roads that have been formally designated by each agency.

For example, the DNR will recognize a county forest road that crosses State Forest lands and agrees that the county's policies will govern public use of the road.

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

5.2 DEVELOPMENT OF ACCESS PROPOSALS

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

The proposed designations were developed using the forest route inventory data, local land managers' knowledge of the routes, and data from other sources such as soils maps, wetland maps, forest inventory data, and the Natural Heritage Elements database. A work group consisting of DNR staff and representatives of the Becker County Land Department and White Earth Reservation developed the proposed designations. The workgroup met approximately one dozen times between October and December 2006 to evaluate the entire West Central Forests planning unit. Public open houses were held in September-October 2006 as another source of information to be considered by the team. For routes that had been managed as state forest roads or recreational trails in the past, the presumption was that previous designation and uses would be continued unless there was a compelling reason to propose changes. The team convened again in August 2007 to review the set of public comments and develop the final set of recommendations.

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

6.0 FINAL DESIGNATIONS

DNR's Forest Road & Trail Designation Team conducted a route-by-route review of the 2003 – 2004 inventory and developed a recommended future designation status for all 325.0 miles of routes in the South Unit.

The final plan provides DNR's proposed forest road and trail designations ONLY. DNR's primary cooperator in the South Unit, specifically Becker County, consulted with the Department during the development of DNR's recommendations. Becker County will propose road and trail recommendations consistent with its adopted forest classification scheme. All parties are committed to a motor vehicle management system that protects natural resources, serves public needs, and complies with existing laws and rules. The routes that are proposed by DNR for each designation are shown on the maps that are part of this final plan.

6.1 ROUTE DESIGNATION SUMMARY

The miles of routes proposed to receive various administrative designations are identified below. This final plan address 310.5 miles of routes on State Forest lands within the forest's statutory boundary and 14.5 miles of routes on scattered forest lands in 6 counties. The routes are also shown on the maps that accompany this plan.

Table 3. Forest Road and Trail Designation Summary of the South Unit

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

Route Designation	State Forest Lands (miles)										Total (miles)
	Huntersville		Lyons		Smoky Hills		Two Inlets		Outside State Forests		
Forest Roads	45.4		15.3		28.6		27.3		0.4		117.0
System Forest Road	5.5		0.0		13.6		12.2		0.0		
Minimum Maintenance Forest Road	39.6		15.3		15.0		15.1		0.4		
Trails	72.2		2.3		16.1		15.7		4.5		110.8
ATV/OHM Trail	3.6		2.3		8.5		6.1		0.0		
OHM-only Trail	50.7		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		
ORV Trail	0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		
Non-motorized Trails	17.9		0.0		7.6		9.6		4.5		
Non-designated Routes	30.2		6.3		22.4		28.7		9.6		97.2
Proactive Closures	0.0		0.0		0.9		0.9		0.0		
In <i>closed</i> forests											
In <i>limited</i> forests	30.5		6.3		22.4		27.7		9.6		
Total Inventoried Routes	147.8		23.9		67.1		71.7		14.5		325.0

6.2 FOREST ROADS

Forest roads are routes that are maintained by resource management agencies to provide access to public forest lands for resource management and public use. Forest roads range from unimproved double track with native soil surface to two-lane gravel roads with improved drainage. Forest roads are not considered “public highways” and the resource agencies are not “road authorities.” Each agency sets public use rules and determine the types of vehicles allowed on the forest roads it manages.

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

1. “State forest road” means a road constructed, acquired, maintained, or administered by the commissioner for the purpose of carrying out forest resource management ...” (*M.S. Section 89.001, subd.14*)
2. “The commissioner shall provide a system of forest roads and trails which provides access to state forest land ...” (*M.S. Section 89.002, subd. 3*)
3. “... the commissioner is not a road authority under chapters 160 to 168, and chapters 160 to 168 do not apply to forest roads ...” (*M.S. Section 89.71, subd.7*)

4. "The commissioner may designate a state forest road as a minimum-maintenance forest road to be maintained at a level consistent with the intended use..." (*M.S. Section 89.71, subd. 5*)

State Forest Roads are generally open to use by both highway-licensed vehicles and off-highway vehicles (ATVs, OHMs, and ORVs). However, forest roads may be temporarily closed, at any time, to some or all vehicular use due to public safety and/or natural resource protection considerations. State Forest Roads may be closed seasonally or temporarily to address specific road or fire conditions. The DNR divides State Forest Roads into two classes – System Roads and Minimum Maintenance Roads – based upon their condition, intended use, and planned maintenance level.

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

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

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

6.2.1 SYSTEM FOREST ROADS

The proposal is to designate 31.3 miles of System State Forest Roads within the planning area. These roads will be managed by the DNR and will typically be open to HLVs and OHVs. These roads can be located on multiple ownerships, but occur exclusively on DNR Forestry-administered lands in the South Unit.

6.2.2 MINIMUM MAINTENANCE FOREST ROADS

The planning team recommends the designation of 85.7 miles of Minimum Maintenance State Forest Roads within the planning area. These roads will be managed by the DNR and will typically be open to HLVs and OHVs but they may not be maintained to a level where low-clearance vehicles can routinely travel on them. These state-administered minimum maintenance forest roads are located on DNR ownerships only in the South Unit.

6.3 RECREATIONAL FOREST TRAILS

M.S. 89.19, subd. 2 authorizes the Commissioner of Natural Resources to designate forest trails under prescribed procedures. Designated forest trails provide access to the State Forests for a range of purposes, both recreational and utilitarian. The Commissioner may designate motorized or non-motorized trails, and may align with or include local loop systems or regional corridor trails with associated support facilities (e.g., parking or staging areas, toilets, trailhead,

day-use picnic sites). These trails have designated primary uses, are well signed, monitored, and maintained, and are mapped and listed in DNR publications.

This final plan recommends forest trail designations of both motor and non-motor according to M.S. 84.19. Although Grant In Aid trails are not authorized through this final plan, they have been considered during the process. All existing Grant In Aid trails, including any proposed changes, are reviewed annually; new applications are considered on a case-by-case basis according to Department processes and Grant In Aid Program criteria.

6.3.1 NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS

The planning team recommends the designation of 39.6 miles of non-motorized trail in the South Unit. Of this total, 17.2 miles will be designated in the Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests with hunter walking proposed as the primary use; this reflects a 1.0 mile reduction of designated trail in Two Inlets State Forest. Another 4.5 miles of hunter walking trail is proposed on two tracts of scattered forest land in Wadena County. The balance of 17.9 miles of non-motorized trail proposed for designation occurs in Huntersville State Forest, with horseback riding proposed as the primary use. All proposed non-motorized trail designations occur on existing routes.

There are many opportunities for non-motorized recreation beyond the designated and maintained walking and horse trails. Hiking is allowed on forest roads and trails that are designated for other uses. Foot travel is also allowed on non-designated routes, although these routes are not signed, mapped, or maintained for hiking or any other recreational use. The non-designated routes are closed to motor vehicle use except that ATVs and HLVs may be used for certain big game hunting and trapping activities at certain times of the year (under a limited forest classification). Foot travel is also allowed off-trail on forest lands.

6.3.2 ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE (ATV) TRAILS

ATVs are permitted to operate on forest roads and trails specifically designated for ATV use. This final plan recommends 137.5 miles of routes that are to be open to ATVs on state-administered lands. Of this amount, 20.5 miles will be managed as new, designated ATV/OHM trail on state forest lands with the balance of 117.0 miles available for ATV use being system and minimum maintenance forest roads. No ATV-exclusive trails are proposed for designation. Proposed ATV/OHM trail designations have been selected primarily to create: 1) loop-type riding opportunities in conjunction with forest roads; 2) connections across management units; or 3) motorized access in Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designation Trail Use where operation of HLVs cannot be sustained. ATVs are permitted to operate on state forest roads and designated ATV trails subject to seasonal road and/or trail closures.

The final plan also recommends consideration of constructing 1.6 miles of new ATV/OHM trail in the Smoky Hills State Forest; designation and implementation of this proposal, if pursued, will occur under a separate process.

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

6.3.3 OFF-HIGHWAY MOTORCYCLE (OHM) TRAILS

OHMs are permitted to operate on forest roads and trails specifically designated for OHM use. This final plan recommends 188.2 miles of routes open to OHMs on state-administered lands. This includes 117.0 miles of system and minimum maintenance forest roads, 20.5 miles of ATV/OHM trail, and 50.7 miles of OHM-only trail proposed for Huntersville State Forest. Therefore, a total of 71.2 miles of trail will be managed as new trail designated for OHM operation. All designations are applied to existing routes. OHMs are permitted to operate on state forest roads and designated trails subject to seasonal road/trail closures.

As previously noted, the final plan recommends consideration of constructing 1.6 miles of new ATV/OHM trail in the Smoky Hills State Forest; designation and implementation of this proposal, if pursued, will occur under a separate process.

6.3.4 OFF-ROAD VEHICLE (ORV) TRAILS

ORVs are permitted to operate on forest roads and trails specifically designated for ORV use. This final plan recommends that 117.0 miles of forest roads be open to ORVs on state-administered lands. No ORV-only trail designations were proposed under either the draft or final plans. Both ORVs and HLVs may operate on state forest roads, subject to seasonal road and/or trail closures and/or weight restrictions.

6.4 NON-DESIGNATED ROUTES – IMPLICATIONS FROM CLASSIFICATION

Some 97.2 miles of existing routes will remain non-designated under this proposal. These routes are open to non-motorized recreation under the proposal, but will not normally be signed or actively managed. Permitted motor uses of these routes depend upon the motor vehicle use classification of the lands where the routes occur. Differences between the assignments of a *limited* versus *closed* forest classification on non-designated routes are highlighted below. Complete closure of trails is also discussed.

6.4.1 NON-DESIGNATED ROUTES – LIMITED CLASSIFICATION

A total of 97.2 miles of non-designated routes are closed to motor vehicle use, except pursuant to the provisions of M.S. Section 84.926. Where routes are located outside Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use, licensed big game hunters and trappers using ORVs/HLVs/ATVs may use these routes for specified hunting and trapping purposes during specified legal seasons. ATVs may use forest roads and non-designated routes, and may travel off-trail for these same purposes, subject to standard state forest land prohibitions on rutting, soil erosion, and vegetative damage. This motorized access is not permitted inside Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use.

6.4.2 NON-DESIGNATED ROUTES – CLOSED CLASSIFICATION

No inventory is present on state forest lands classified *closed*.

6.4.3 PROACTIVE CLOSURES

Those non-designated routes that are unsuited for motor vehicle use, or showing signs of damage, were proposed in the draft plan to be proactively closed. This totaled 1.8 miles of route in Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests that is maintained in the final plan. These routes will be signed closed until the final plan becomes effective on December 31, 2008. Once the effective date passes, these routes will not be subject to future motorized uses because they are located in Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use. Motorized use by the public is never permitted on non-designated routes in such management zones.

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

M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 5 empowers the Commissioner of Natural Resources to designate areas on State Forest lands that are not subject to the big game hunting and trapping exceptions detailed in M.S. Section 84.926, subd. 2 & 4. These areas are established primarily for the purpose of protecting unique natural resource values and secondarily to provide a balance of user opportunities. One area of this type is proposed respectively for both Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests. Off-trail travel by ATVs (subd. 2), and use of non-designated routes by ORVs, HLVs, and ATVs (subd. 4), is not permitted in this area. Although motorized off-trail and non-designated route travel is prohibited, and designations of walking trails are proposed, it should be noted these two areas are not non-motorized. Both system and minimum maintenance forest roads provide motorized access in both forests, and designated ATV/OHM trail is proposed for this site in Two Inlets State Forest.

6.6 DESIGNATION MAPS

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

6.7 PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

6.7.1 PUBLIC NOTICE REQUIREMENTS

The proposed classification of the State Forest lands for motor vehicle use and the proposed road and trail designations in this final plan reflect public review and comment. A public notice announcing the availability of the proposed classification and designations was published in the *State Register* (May 14, 2007; Vol. 31: No. 46; p. 1681), and the legal newspapers for Becker, Clay, Douglas, Hubbard, Otter Tail, Pope, Todd, and Wadena Counties. A statewide DNR news release announced the availability of the draft plan for public review on May 15, 2007.

6.7.2 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Two public open house meetings were held not sooner than 60 days following the *State Register* notice. A second, reminder press release was issued on June 26, 2007.

Public Meeting One. The first public meeting was held on Tuesday, July 17, 2007 from 6:00 to 8:30 PM at the Menahga School, 216 Aspen Avenue SE, Menahga, MN 56464.

DNR's Planning Team and Area Staff familiar with Huntersville and Lyons State Forests, and scattered forest lands in the planning unit, attended.

Public Meeting Two. The second public meeting was held on Thursday, July 19, 2007 from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Detroit Lakes Middle School, 500 11th Avenue South, Detroit Lakes, MN 56501. DNR's Planning Team and DNR Area Staff familiar with Smoky Hills and Two Inlets State Forests, and scattered state forest lands in the planning unit, attended. Staff from Becker County Land Department and White Earth Natural Resources were also present.

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

6.7.3 COMMENTING

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

DNR accepted public comments on the Draft Plan and Proposed Classification Review through 4:30 PM on August 1, 2007.

The DNR considered both formal and informal public input during the forest classification review, the road/trail designation process, and process for designating Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use. Written comments were provided throughout the process. DNR's consideration of formal comments is documented in the Responses to Comments that are incorporated by reference into this Final Plan and associated classification review and designations of forest roads/trails and Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use.

6.8 CHANGES BETWEEN THE FINAL PLAN AND THE DRAFT PLAN

The following items constitute the changes made between the final and draft plans. These changes reflect: 1) corrections to the draft plan; 2) consideration comment(s) from the public; and/or 3) new information that became available since release of the draft plan.

- **Section 2.2.** Change total DNR Forestry-administered acreage from 103,572 to 103,532 due to 40-acre change in Huntersville State Forest.
- **Section 2.2.1.** Change net DNR Forestry-administered acreage from 52,446 to 52,406 due to 40-acre change in Huntersville State Forest.
- **Section 2.2.1.** Change total DNR Forestry-administered acreage from 60,941 to 60,901 due to 40-acre change in Huntersville State Forest.
- **Table 1.** Modify table entries to match 40-acre change in Huntersville State Forest.

- **Section 3.3.1.** Change net DNR Forestry-administered acreage from 52,446 to 52,406 due to 40-acre change in Huntersville State Forest.
- **Section 3.3.4.** Change in proposed hunter walking trail designation by approximately 1.0 miles to accommodate historic Grant In Aid opportunities. Routes to retain current non-designated status.
- **Section 3.4.1.** Change acreage in Huntersville State Forest from 16,754 to 16,714. 40 acres of private land were originally counted as public ownership. Correction results in 40-acre reduction in state-administered forest land acreage.
- **Section 3.4.1.** Change miles of OHM-only trail from 51.4 to 50.7. Results from reduction in 0.7 mile of proposed OHM-only trail designation due to ownership clarification.
- **Section 3.4.1.** Approximately 0.3 miles of non-designated route is designated as minimum maintenance forest road to accommodate public access requests.
- **Section 3.4.1.** References to “enduro-type” events changed to “organized special events for OHMs.”
- **Section 3.4.1.** See Responses to Comments, Huntersville State Forest, for route specific changes in response to public input.
- **Section 3.4.3.** Clarification provided on existing Grant in Aid snowmobile and ATV-OHM trail present in the forest.
- **Section 3.4.4.** Approximately 1.0 mile of proposed hunter-walking trail will retain a non-designated status under the final plan.
- **Section 3.4.5.** Draft Plan Errata released 06/26/07; changed recommendation from “*limited*” to “*closed*” classification. Final Plan recommends both *limited* and *closed* classifications for scattered DNR Forestry-administered parcels in Clay County.
- **Section 3.4.6.** Draft Plan Errata released 06/26/07; changed recommendation from “*limited*” to “*closed*” classification. Final Plan recommends *limited* classification for scattered DNR Forestry-administered parcels in Douglas County.
- **Section 3.4.7.** Distribution of inventory on scattered parcels clarified. Only non-designated routes present. Total inventory changed from 4.2 miles to 4.1 miles.
- **Section 3.4.8.** Draft Plan Errata released 06/26/07; changed recommendation from “*limited*” to “*closed*” classification. No change from errata.
- **Section 3.4.9.** Distribution of inventory on scattered parcels clarified. Only non-designated routes present.
- **Section 4.0.** Change total miles of inventory from 326.0 to 325.0 due to ownership change in Huntersville State Forest and inventory correction in Otter Tail County.
- **Table 2.** Modified to reflect mileage changes due to ownership change in Huntersville State Forest.
- **Section 6.0.** Change total miles of inventory from 326.0 to 325.0 due to ownership change in Huntersville State Forest and inventory correction in Otter Tail County.
- **Table 3.** Modified to reflect mileage changes due to ownership change in Huntersville State Forest.
- **Section 6.1.** Change total miles of inventory from 311.4 to 310.5 due to ownership change in Huntersville State Forest.
- **Table 3.** Modified to reflect mileage changes in Huntersville and Two Inlets State Forests.
- **Section 6.2.2.** Change total miles of Minimum Maintenance Forest Road designation from 85.0 to 85.7 to capture changes in Huntersville State Forest and inclusion of routes on scattered DNR state forest lands.

- **Section 6.3.1.** Change in total miles of hunter walking trail from 18.2 to 17.2 miles to capture approximately one (1.0) mile reduction in Two Inlets State Forest.
- **Section 6.3.2.** Change total miles of routes available to ATV-OHM use from 136.7 to 136.5 miles to capture new designation in Huntersville State Forest.
- **Section 6.3.2.** Change miles of forest roads available for ATV-OHM use from 116.2 to 117.0 to capture changes in Huntersville State Forest and inclusion of routes on scattered DNR forest lands.
- **Section 6.3.3.** Change total miles of routes available to OHM use from 188.0 to 188.2 to capture changes in Huntersville State Forest and inclusion of routes on scattered DNR forest lands.
- **Section 6.4.** Change in total miles of non-designated routes from 96.7 to 97.2 to capture changes in Huntersville State Forest and inclusion of routes on scattered DNR forest lands.
- **Section 6.4.1.** Change in total miles of non-designated routes from 87.7 to 97.2 to capture changes in Huntersville State Forest and inclusion of routes on scattered DNR forest lands.

7.0 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

7.1 ADOPTION OF THE CLASSIFICATION AND ROAD/TRAIL DESIGNATION PLAN

The recommendations contained in Final Plan are implemented through Commissioner's Orders that are published in the *State Register*. The following Notices of Commissioner's Orders were published in the December 24, 2007 edition of the *State Register* (December 24, 2007; Vol. 32: No. 26; pp. 1135 - 1171):

Huntersville State Forest

- Classification of State Forest Lands
- Designation of Forest Roads
- Designation of Forest Trails

Lyons State Forest

- Classification of State Forest Lands
- Designation of Forest Roads
- Designation of Forest Trails

Smoky Hills State Forest

- Classification of State Forest Lands
- Designation of Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use
- Designation of Forest Roads
- Designation of Forest Trails

Two Inlets State Forest

- Classification of State Forest Lands
- Designation of Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use
- Designation of Forests Roads
- Designation of Forest Trails

Clay County

- Classification of State Forest Lands

Douglas County

- Classification of State Forest Lands

Otter Tail County

- Classification of State Forest Lands

Pope County

- Classification of State Forest Lands

Todd County

- Classification of State Forest Lands

Wadena County

- Classification of State Forest Lands
- Designation of Forest Roads
- Designation of Forest Trails

7.2 ROAD AND TRAIL DEVELOPMENT AND SIGNING PROJECTS

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

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

7.3 DATE OF CHANGE IN MOTOR VEHICLE USE CLASSIFICATION

The effective date for: 1) the classification reviews of state forest lands, 2) the designations of forest roads and trails; and 3) designations of Areas with Limitations on Off-trail and Non-designated Trail Use, is December 31, 2008.

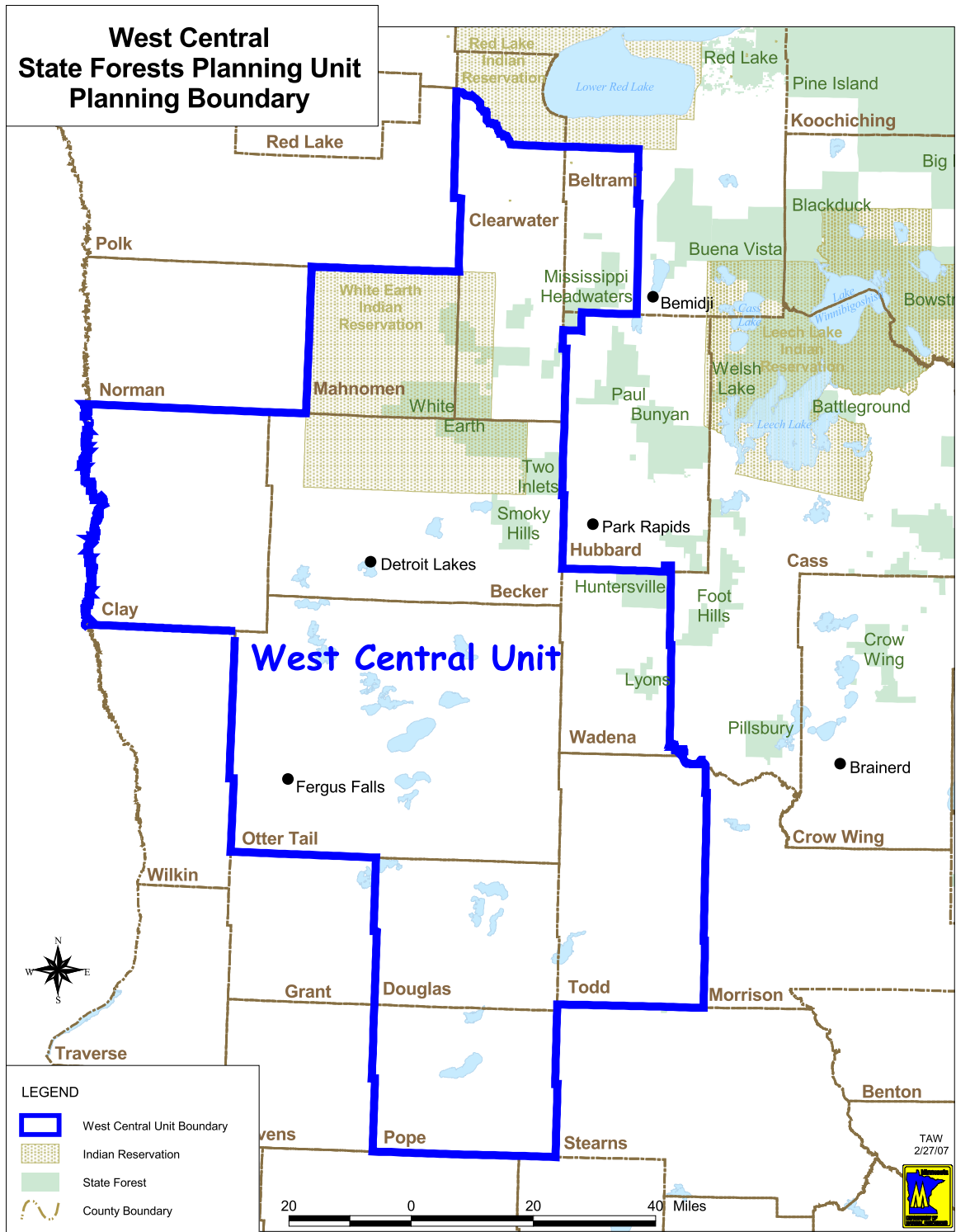
7.4 ONGOING MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT

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

The DNR will monitor roads and trails for maintenance and sustainability needs. Education and enforcement will be used to ensure compliance with road and trail use designations. The level of user satisfaction and user conflicts will be monitored and future adjustments in the motor vehicle use classification and trail use designations may be proposed.

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

Figure 1: Planning Unit



Appendices

Minnesota Statutes and Rules Related to State Forest Classification

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

HIST: 2003 c 128 art 1 s 21