

## Cloquet Valley State Forest South St. Louis & Carlton Counties

### Response to Public Comment

#### Final Team Recommendations

##### **State Forest Classification – ‘Qualified Support’**

The Team will stick with their original recommendation to classify the Cloquet Valley State Forest as ‘managed’, although some members continue to support a switch to ‘limited’, particularly in light of comments received (many calling for a ‘limited’ classification). Team members do unanimously support classifying those state lands located outside state forest boundaries as ‘managed’ north of U.S. Hwy 2 and ‘limited’ south of Hwy 2 (including all of Carlton County), as per the original proposal.

The team also recommends that three sections of the forest (640 ac each) that lie within the proclamation boundaries of the Superior National Forest be reclassified as ‘limited’ consistent with the USFS travel management approach. State and county routes within these sections [T56N R12 – 13 & 14W, Section 36 (Total = 1,920 acres)] were re-evaluated and forest access routes changed to mostly ‘undesignated routes’, which are ‘closed unless posted open’ to summer season OHV use.

##### **Limitations on Off-Trail & Non-Designated Trail Use - ‘Change to Closed’**

Originally, five areas in the Cloquet Valley State forest totaling 16,416 (gross) acres were proposed for motor use limitations pursuant to MS Chap. 84.926, Subd. 5. Land ownership within these sites is mixed state and county. Upon reflection, Team Members would like to strengthen protections for these same areas by re-classifying them areas as ‘closed’. Forest access routes within these sites would also be proactively closed. This change will restrict OHV use year-round, which is what the team originally intended. St. Louis County Land Department representatives agree with this team recommendation.

Additionally, in response to public comments, the team recommends adding a sixth site – the Ruth Lake Site to the list of ‘closed’ areas. This 2,794 acre site, a popular hunting area, is comprised of two smaller sites previously considered for motor-use limitations. The new configuration would exclude the forest access route which bisects them. This addresses the team’s previous concerns regarding the need to maintain vehicular access through this area. County Land Dept. representatives concur with this change.

##### **Summary of Route Designation Recommendations**

###### **Change Recommended** *(In Response to Site-Specific Suggestions)*

- **Pequaywan Lake / Co. 44 Ditch Trails** – Approximately .75 miles of inventoried routes along the ditch of Co. Road 44 (NE of Pequaywan Lake) will be pulled from the DNR inventory and removed from planning maps. These ditch riding routes should have not been inventoried or added to the draft planning maps. Road ditch use (by ATVs) is subject to regulation by the local road authority.

# Draft - Subject to Change

- **Pequaywan Lake / Rossini Road** – A .5 mile route segment (SE of Pequaywan Lake) was mistakenly added to the draft planning maps along the road right-of-way in this location. It will be pulled from the inventory and final maps. There are no plans to develop a designated trail at this time through this area of private land ownership (both sides of the road). A portion of a nearby power line ROW, which was mistakenly shown as a forest access route, will also be closed. It traverses a natural drainage area.
- **Spring Lake Forest Road** – The final maps will be redrawn to more clearly reflect wetland issues and private property boundaries in this area on the north side of Spring Lake. This State Forest Road (SFR) was inadvertently left off of the draft planning maps. It will be added to the inventory and officially re-designated as a Minimum Maintenance SFR. About .25 mile of access route will also be closed due to private property, wetland and stream crossing issues. All routes mistakenly shown crossing private property will be pulled from the final inventory and planning maps, and will not appear on final visitor maps. There is no valid resource reason, however, to close the first .7 miles of Spring Lake Forest Road (up to the Public Water Access), or other routes that access public lands or waters. Beyond the PWA, posted signs will identify this as a private road closed to public use. Private property trespass, or the creation of permanent trails on state property, are unlawful and violators will be prosecuted.
- **Non-Motorized Area / East of Joker, King & Ace Lakes** – This 2,794 acre area, previously pulled from the draft proposal, will be returned to the list of areas to be reclassified as ‘closed’ to motor vehicle use [All 6 ‘motor-limited areas’ will be reclassified as ‘closed’]. The access route which bisects this area will be excluded from the area, and will remain open for vehicular use. All other forest access routes located within all six of the newly ‘closed’ areas will be permanently closed to vehicular travel.
- **Esswhter Lake / Site 4 (T53N R12W)** – The DNR will reclassify this 9,947 acre site as ‘closed’ to motorized use. The central portion is wet and unsuited to vehicular use. There are few county cabin leases in this area, and upland portions on the eastern and western portions are highly desirable for walking hunters. The boundary will be modified to follow a small creek along the South-Central portion of the area. An access route, previously missing from the DNR inventory, will be added to the inventory and extended to the private property boundary. The Pequaywan Snow Blazers’ GIA Snowmobile Trail will be unaffected by reclassification of this site. DNR and emergency personnel will also continue to enjoy unfettered motorized access into the area for official purposes.
- **Briar Lake / Lieuna / Logging Road & Access Trails** – (T53N R13W, Sec. 14 ,15 & 24) The logging road north of Briar Lake was incorrectly labeled as ‘Fox Farm Road’ on draft planning maps. This mistake will be corrected. Approximately 2.0 miles of forest access trails north and west of Briar Lake, and between Briar Lake and Lieuna, will also be closed due to wet, rutted route conditions and illegal water crossings.
- **Thompson Lake Road (Co. 274) / Carroll Trail** – The team suggests closing the route segment at the end of Thompson Lake Road, and removing the portion that crosses private land from planning maps and data files. Access routes beyond the gated end of the road will remain open north of the private property. These routes provide public access to a large block of county land, most of which is high ground suitable for OHV use. Access routes leading from the Carroll Trail will also remain open to vehicular use. The county road authority can regulate OHV use of county road rights-of-way (including ditches) if they choose to.

- **River Crossing Off Bear Lake Road** – This approximately 50-foot long (illegal) river crossing, which didn't appear on the original DNR inventory, will be permanently closed to vehicular traffic. Forest access routes in this area will remain.
- **Cloquet River Crossing / Bridge Site** (T55N R12W, Sec 16) – Approx. 2/10 mile of an illegal river crossing on the South Loop Road identified via public comments will be permanently closed to vehicular traffic..
- **Cloquet River Crossings / Barney's Canoe Landing** (T55N R12W) – There are no legal OHV crossings along this stretch of the Cloquet River. Soils in this area are sandy and unstable, and generally unsuited to vehicular use. Steep slopes are highly erosive. Consequently, most, but not all, state and county routes located within approximately ¼ mile of the river will be closed to protect water quality and wildlife habitat associated with this flowage. This is not a blanket closure, but a selective reduction of duplicative or problematic routes that parallel or dead-end into the river posing a threat to sensitive resources (including the Wood Turtle). The DNR planning team did seek to maintain river access wherever access could be sustained without causing unacceptable environmental damage.
- **Cloquet River Hunting Routes** (T54N R13W Sec. 20 & 21) – Those routes that parallel or dead-end at the river will be permanently closed due to wet conditions and because they pose a high-risk of river impacts. There are no legal river crossings at this location. Despite the access route closures, there is still good public motorized access into most areas along the Cloquet River.
- **Co. Road 44 & Cloquet River** – Missing segments, resulting from changes in the river course over time, will be added to the DNR route inventory. Illegal river crossings located on public lands within this area will be closed to vehicular use.
- **Forest Access Route Added** – Approx. ½ mile of inventoried route, formerly slated for closure, will be switched to forest access route (open for vehicular use) due to a recent upgrade which took place in connection with a nearby state land timber harvest. [Location?]

### No Change Recommended

- **Pequaywan / Smith Lake Access Trails / West Branch Road** (T54N R12W, Sect. 5 & 6) – These mostly high-ground forest access routes dead-end at County and Township Roads. They provide access to public lands and waters. They are bermed to limit HLV access, but OHV use is permitted on DNR and county tax-forfeited forest lands. Local road authorities may restrict OHV use of county or township road rights-of-way (including ditches). Trespass, illegal river crossings or wetland damage are enforcement issues that can and should be addressed by state and local authorities. No new trail designations are proposed in this area. Local access routes, spur trails or connectors will not appear on final visitor maps. County Land Dept personnel will investigate reports of an unauthorized ATV bridge crossing along a snowmobile trail in this area, and may temporarily close access routes needing repair, stabilization or improvement.
- **Pequaywan Lake Access Trails / Buzz Lake Fire Tower Road** – This .5 mile route off of Co. 44 will remain a forest access route, which provides for continued motorized access, but will not appear on final visitor maps.
- **Cloquet River / Bear Lake Road** – This State Forest Road, which parallels the Cloquet River in spots, will remain and not be relocated or reconstructed. This maintained forest road provides access to state

lands and waters, and is not a threat to the nearby Cloquet River. Modification or reconstruction of segments of this road would likely prove more deleterious than beneficial at this point.

- **Jim Ready Truck Trail / Bug Creek SFR / Marshall Trail** – These routes will remain open to vehicular use, except for the crossing at Civit Creek due to a sinkhole. No change is proposed.
- **Access Route Off Bear Lake Road / North of Cameron & Schubert Lakes** – The DNR will close this route as originally proposed because it traverses an unmapped wetland and is wet and rutted.
- **Mother Bear Ski & Snowshoe Trails** – Most of this area is already closed to OHV use, except for a Minimum Maintenance Forest Road which accesses several county cabin lease sites. The MMR will remain open to vehicle use. St. Louis County can restrict OHV use of county public road rights-of-way if so desired. No new road or trail designations are planned in this area.
- **Marshall Trail South / Site 5 (T54N R13W)** – The DNR will not modify the planned northern boundary of this 3,420 acre motor-limited area to accommodate hunting parties who currently access this area via motor vehicles. This area will be reclassified as ‘closed’, and the originally proposed and readily identifiable boundaries (i.e., Marshall Trail on NW, Snowmobile Trail & Cloquet River on SE) will be maintained. Winter roads in this low lying area are unsuited to vehicular use. Adjacent areas are better suited to motorized access and big game retrieval.
- **Upland Hiking Areas** – The planning team did provide for added upland (non-motor) hiking areas by reclassifying a total of 19,226 acres in six different areas of the forest as ‘closed’, as regards motor vehicle use. These areas contain substantial upland which is suitable for hiking or use by walking hunters.

## Forest Road & Trail Designation Summary for the Cloquet Valley State Forest, So. St. Louis County, Minnesota

Proposed Route Designations <u>Inside</u> Cloquet Valley SF	State Forest Land Designations (miles)		St. Louis County Designations (miles)	
Total Inventoried Routes	488.7 191.2		827.2 826.6	
System Forest Road	49.5 20.2		88.0 87.9	
Min. Maintenance Forest Road	48.7		204.3	
Non-designated Routes*	113.4		514.6	
Proactive closures	41.9 43.4	113.7	144.0 147.5	514.2
In closed forests	0.0		0.0	
In limited forests	0.0 3.5		0.0	
In managed forests (access routes)	71.5 66.8		370.6 366.7	
ATV / OHM Trail	0.0		0.0	
Hunter Walking Trails	8.6 8.1		20.3 14.0	
Ski Trails	0.5		6.3	

## Issues and Concerns

- **70-Mile ATV Trail / GIA Trail Proposals** – Fallout from St. Louis County’s failed bid to host the 70-mile ATV/OHM Trail, and from a pending ATV grant-in-aid trail proposal muddied the waters for the current planning effort, and helped mobilize local residents who oppose added OHV trail designations on public lands in the area. Both issues are beyond the scope of the current planning effort.
- **Pequaywan Lake / Ditch Riding / Access Routes** – Local road authorities currently permit Class 2 ATV operation within most County and Township road rights-of-way, pursuant to state law, and Class 1 ATV operation is allowed in road ditches. Many reviewers oppose such use citing public safety and enforcement issues, as well as damage to roadsides, driveways and public lands. Public road ROW use is subject to control by local road authorities (not DNR). It is therefore, beyond the scope of this plan.
- **Forest Classification** – Five townships and many of those who submitted written comments support a ‘limited’ classification for the CVSF. They contend that OHV use is heavy and growing, and that a myriad of social, economic, and environmental problems have resulted. Some Planning Team Members echo this sentiment. St. Louis County Officials believe that public vehicular access can and should continue under a ‘*managed*’ scenario. Most agree that the current proposal represents a substantial improvement over current (unmanaged) conditions.
- **Ruth Lake Site / Non-Motorized Area Designations** - Many reviewers asked why the 2,794 ac. ‘Ruth Lake Site’, which had appeared along with five other motor-limited areas on earlier planning maps, was been pulled from the team’s draft proposal. This site, originally proposed as two separate sites, was pulled due to established motorized use in the area, particularly by cabin lease holders and others (mostly hunters & trappers) who use the East-West forest access route that bisects this area. In response to comment, and continuing resource management concerns, this area will be re-classified as ‘*closed*’ to vehicular use, excluding the route that bisects this site. This will allow for motorized access into this area for walking hunters, but restrict motorized activity off of this traditional access route. All together, six sites totaling about 19,226 acres, are proposed to be reclassified as ‘*closed*’ to motor vehicle use.
- **Cloquet River Buffer / Illegal crossings** – The one-quarter mile ‘buffer’ observed by the team on either side of the Cloquet River was not a blanket ‘no motor’ zone, but rather an area within which added scrutiny was applied. All inventoried state and county routes within one-quarter mile of the river were carefully evaluated to ensure that they were indeed sustainable, necessary for public access (and not duplicative), and that they didn’t encourage illegal river crossings. Many routes were closed, but access to the river, and to private property adjacent to the river, is still readily available.
- **Mapping Errors / Bootleg Maps** - The DNR acknowledges the possibility of unauthorized map production by private parties using data generated and circulated during this planning process. However, this is public data which cannot legally be withheld. Published visitor maps will only display designated roads, trails and other legal travel routes – not (non-designated) forest access routes.

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