UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

MAY 18 2011

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF:

E-19J

Joel Skjeven
District Ranger
Eagle River-Florence Ranger District
1247 E. Wall Street
Eagle River, Wisconsin 54521

Re: Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Phelps Vegetation and Transportation Management Project, Proposal to Implement Vegetation and Transportation Management Activities, Eagle River-Florence Ranger District, Vilas County, Wisconsin
CEQ #20110098

Dear Mr. Skjerven:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the above-mentioned project. Our comments are provided pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Implementing Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The Draft EIS presents proposed actions to implement the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest 2004 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and move forest resources toward the desired future conditions for the Management Areas (MA) located in the analysis area. The primary project-specific needs are to manage vegetation and reduce road density. Proposed actions include timber harvest, plantings and access management.

The Draft EIS analyzes three alternatives: the no-action alternative (Alternative 1) and two action alternatives (Alternative 2 and 3). Both action alternatives meet the purpose and need of the project; Alternative 2 is identified as the Agency Proposed Alternative. Alternative 2 includes 8,430 acres of timber harvest, 95 acres of fuel reduction, 0.8 miles of new road construction, 12 miles of road reconstruction, and 31 miles of road decommissioning. Alternative 3 was developed after scoping at the request of a commenter who believes the suggested activities would restore and improve key habitat for forest interior species of concern. It includes 1,978 acres of timber harvest, 95 acres of fuels reduction, 0.3 miles of new roads, 3.7 miles of road reconstruction, and 31 miles of road decommissioning.

The Draft EIS indicates that both action alternatives would have minimal adverse effects to the physical, biological, and economic environments with the implementation of management

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requirements and mitigation measures. Federally threatened and endangered species would not be impacted. The Draft EIS also concluded that while individuals of four Regional Forester Sensitive Species may be impacted, a trend toward federal listing would not result if this project is implemented. Those four species are the northern goshawk, red-shouldered hawk, West Virginia white butterfly and blunt-lobed grapefern.

Based on our review of this document, we have assigned the Draft EIS a rating of "Lack of Objections" (LO). We have no substantive comments on the proposed action. We find the action alternatives consistent with the Forest Plan. A summary of the rating system used in the evaluation of the document is enclosed.

We appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft EIS and look forward to reading the Final EIS. If you have any questions, please contact Elizabeth Poole of my staff at (312) 353-2087 or poole.elizabeth@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Kenneth A. Westlake
Chief, NEPA Implementation Section
Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance

Cc: Christine Brunner, District NEPA Coordinator
Jim McDonald, Regional Environmental Coordinator

Enclosure: Summary of Ratings Definitions