Statement of
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U.S. Department of Agriculture
Before the
Subcommittee on Department Operations, Nutrition, and Forestry
Agriculture Committee
United States House of Representatives

July 20, 2009

Concerning

Review of Forest Resource Management in Northern Wisconsin

Thank you for the opportunity to come before this Subcommittee to discuss forest resource management in northern Wisconsin. I am Jeanne Higgins, the Forest Supervisor for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, the only National Forest in Wisconsin. The Forest Service collaborates with a wide range of interests to accomplish our mission of sustaining the health, resilience, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands for the benefit of present and future generations. Our partners include states, tribes, other federal agencies, local governments, and a host of non-profit and private entities. I would like to give you an overview of the National Forest offices in Wisconsin and then tell you about activities on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

The Forest Service in Wisconsin

The forested landscape of Wisconsin is a mix of ownerships: private, industrial, tribal, county, state and federal. The total forested land in Wisconsin is 16,000,000 acres. The Chequamegon-

Nicolet National Forest, headquartered in Rhinelander and Park Falls, is 1.5 million acres or 9 percent of the State total, with one-half-million acres of private property within its boundaries. The national forest spans across the north woods and is composed of land that was once logged over, burned over and abandoned. In the 1930's the Forest Service acquired the land primarily through Weeks Act authority. Since then the Chequamegon-Nicolet and numerous partners have worked hard to create the landscape we see today.

The Forest Service presence in Wisconsin also includes the Forest Products Laboratory located in Madison, the Northern Research Station in Rhinelander, the Eastern Region Regional Office in Milwaukee, and the Blackwell Job Corps Center in Wabeno. The State and Private Forestry branch of the agency that serves Wisconsin is located in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The Forest Products Laboratory is part of the Research branch of the Forest Service. For almost 100 years, the Forest Products Laboratory's mission has been to use our Nation's wood resources wisely and efficiently. Areas of research include nanotechnology, engineering properties of wood and wood-based materials, bioenergy, and durability and wood protection.

The Northern Research Station's Institute for Applied Ecosystem Studies in Rhinelander, Wisconsin is also part of the Research branch of the Forest Service. Among the research projects underway by Institute scientists is work focused on issues such as carbon sequestration, climate change, silviculture and forest productivity, land use change, effects of human population growth on ecosystem services and recreational opportunities and invasions of exotic species. Scientists are looking at ways to accelerate the growth of hybrid poplar to increase its use for bioenergy. Milwaukee, Wisconsin is the headquarters of the Eastern Region of the Forest Service. The Region oversees 14 national forests and one tall grass prairie within its 20-state boundary.

The Blackwell Job Corps Center opened on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in 1965. The mission of the Center is to teach eligible young people skills they need to become employable. Since 1965 when the Center opened, over 15,000 students have benefited from this Forest Service program.

The State and Private Forestry branch encourages and supports sustainable management of the region's non-federal forest land. In Wisconsin, the Northeastern Area's Field Office located in St. Paul, Minnesota, works with the Wisconsin State Forester to deliver programs such as fire management, forest health protection, forest legacy, forest stewardship, urban and community forestry, and watershed protection on non-federal forest lands. In 2008, Northeastern Area Office provided over five million dollars to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, and other partners for sustainable forest management activities.

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is managed for multiple purposes, including: recreation, wildlife habitat, heritage resources, timber and other forest products, water quality, and fire hazard mitigation. Sound science and public participation drive the management goals and objectives that comprise the 2004 Land and Resource Management Plan. The management goals describe conditions the Forest strives to achieve such as ecosystem restoration, recreation, and wildlife habitat improvement work. Projects are developed to meet a variety of resource objectives and accomplished through collaboration with stakeholders. I would like to give you an example.

On June 7, 2007 the Quad County tornado leveled 14,000 acres in Shawano, Menominee, Oconto, and Marinette counties. The tornado path was approximately 40 miles long and averaged a half mile across. As with all natural disasters, this one crossed many boundaries. Over 5,600

acres of National Forest System lands on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest were impacted by the tornado. Many small communities near the Chequamegon–Nicolet National Forest were heavily impacted; thankfully no lives were lost in this event. The aftermath of the tornado was significant. Roads were blocked, power lines and phone lines were down, and people were unable to get out of their own homes.

After any natural disaster it is important to assess and address safety and health issues first. The Forest Service, State and County governments worked together to swiftly ensure that people were safe. Then they moved to the important work of clean up and planning for the future.

The Forest Service assessment revealed whole stands of red pine and hardwoods were snapped and blown over. Although the tornado caused much damage to property, infrastructure, and to the Forest, it also provided some unique forest restoration opportunities. The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest staff collaborated with other government entities, Tribes, partners and community interests to determine how the restoration work could be designed to restore health to the forested ecosystems, improve wildlife habitat and help carry out the objectives of the land management plan. For example, within the impacted area were thousands of dead, standing snags. Forest biologists and some private stakeholders identified this as an opportunity to provide habitat for rare, disturbance-dependent species like the black-backed woodpecker.

The Forest Service and surrounding communities agreed that priorities included reducing fire hazard and limiting the likelihood of insect and disease infestations. Prompt removal of downed trees would satisfy these objectives, and local contractors were employed to do this. This work was accomplished in a manner that retained high numbers of dead trees for wildlife habitat and diverse tree species such as red pine and hardwoods would occupy the forest as it regenerates.

The Forest Service also worked within existing statutory authorities to streamline required reviews to expedite cleanup, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act as well as to ensure compliance with other environmental requirements and further our environmental stewardship of the Forest. Six existing timber sale contracts were immediately used to clean up about 700 acres; additionally 11 large salvage sale contracts, along with 10 smaller ones, were established. As a result, over 40 million board feet of hardwood and conifer timber were harvested from the tornado damaged area on the National Forest. Trust fund revenues collected from these sales has been used for regeneration and monitoring efforts. Approximately 10,000 tons of biomass were removed and used for bio-energy.

Because the community was involved early-on in deciding how to address the damage from the tornado, the idea of assisting the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest spread to other interested parties. Not long after the clean up began, a variety of stakeholders quickly began assisting. The Paul Bunyan Riders, Iron Snow Shoe Incorporated and the Chute Pond Snowmobile Club volunteered to clear approximately 15 miles of heavily damaged snowmobile trails, one of many examples of volunteerism. The Langlade Area Mountain Bike Association has been working over the past two years to clear and reconstruct the many miles of mountain bike trails on National Forest lands that were damaged. Other actions have contributed to the clean up and restoration efforts. The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest contracted with a local business owner to clear the Oconto River Barrier Free Fishing Trail. The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest also donated over 1,000 pine tree seedlings to local communities impacted by the tornado. Because of the dialogue about how to accomplish the clean up, a wide variety of interest groups came together and developed a broader range of possibilities to be considered. This resulted in community ownership in the outcomes and employment for local contractors.

To date approximately 3,000 acres of down tree removal and fuel reduction have been accomplished. Most of this area has naturally regenerated to a mixture of hardwood forest types. Pine replanting is scheduled to be completed over the next two springs. All of this work is helping to restore pine and hardwood forests to provide a healthy forest, habitat for wildlife species and recreational opportunities, while providing wood fiber to local communities. This example demonstrates that working closely with a wide range of stakeholders and industry is integral to sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the National Forest.

Challenges

As we design and implement projects to implement the Forest Plan, we find that not everyone agrees on the best means to accomplish forest landscape restoration work. As a consequence forest management projects on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest are sometimes appealed and litigated. Within the last six years, six vegetation management projects have been litigated on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. In two of the six cases, the decision of the District Court of the Eastern District of Wisconsin was to uphold the adequacy of the analytical models and methods, and affirm the soundness of the Forest Service's scientific approach, allowing the agency to implement projects that improve forest health and contribute to the local economies. In another case, the District Court affirmed dismissal of an administrative appeal on procedural grounds. These three cases are on appeal to the Seventh Circuit. One project subject to prior challenge has now been administratively resolved; two cases are still before the District Court.

The Forest Service is working with many stakeholders, including industry, during a stressful economic time. We are fully reviewing timber sale design criteria to ensure that projects are economically viable but still meet environmental standards. The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest has used several authorities to extend contract time periods. One is called market-related

contract term addition. On the Chequamegon-Nicolet, 13 contracts were given additional time using this authority. In addition, the Forest has relied on the Secretary of Agriculture's determination that the extension of certain specified contracts is in "substantial over riding public interest." Approximately 40 sales on the Chequamegon-Nicolet have received these extensions. Emergency Rate Re-determinations as authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill were also utilized to help timber purchasers.

Working towards the future

1. Stewardship Contracting

Congress provided the Forest Service with stewardship contracting authority as a tool to help manage National Forest System land while working to meet the needs of local and rural communities. Active public participation is a requirement and cornerstone of planning stewardship projects. The stewardship contracting authority allows the Forest Service to offset the value of goods for the cost of services received. For example, projects can be designed so that the value of the timber may be exchanged for services such as fisheries restoration work. Stewardship contracting benefits both the Forest Service and local communities.

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest sees the value in the use of Stewardship Contracting to accomplish Forest Plan objectives. Two projects most recently completed include the Day Lake Integrated Resource Timber Contract (IRTC) which reduced hazardous fuels around a busy campground and the Whiskey Oak IRTC which focused on slowing the spread of Oak Wilt. To date the Chequamegon-Nicolet has awarded nine stewardship contracts to reduce hazardous fuels, improve forest health, water quality, public safety, fish passage, and to help control invasive species.

2. Woody Biomass

Removal of woody biomass from the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is of interest to wood products industries and may provide for local economic development in northern Wisconsin. Woody biomass includes the tops and limbs of trees and other smaller diameter trees which are a byproduct of trees harvested to meet resource objectives. In some cases within the wildland urban interface, removal of this material is important to reduce fire hazards, but there is concern that removing too much of this material may have an impact on ecosystem objectives, especially within hardwood forests. To better understand the effects of removing this material, the Chequamegon-Nicolet is collaborating with researchers from the Forest Service's Northern Research Station and the University of Wisconsin on a woody biomass harvesting research trial in a hardwoods forest. This research project will increase understanding of sustainable woody biomass harvesting. The project will utilize timber sale contracts to remove the timber and woody biomass. In addition, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest has participated in the development of woody biomass Best Management Practices harvesting guidelines within Wisconsin.

3. Responding to Climate Change

It is important to learn how to help forests adapt to changing climate conditions as well as play a role in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is participating in a pilot project with Dr. Tom Gower of the University of Wisconsin- Madison that will produce a model managers can use to analyze different land use scenarios and determine the potential for carbon sequestration. The Forest is also participating in an assessment that will involve identifying ecosystem components that are most vulnerable to change under a variety of future climate scenarios. It will also include an assessment to describe options to increase carbon

stocks in forests and wood projects, as well as increase the use of wood for biofuels and will include stakeholders across the landscape in the process.

4. Water

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest plays a role in providing clean drinking water for communities, healthy habitat for fish and wildlife and recreation opportunities. Northern Wisconsin is rich in lakes, streams and wetlands. The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest works with a wide cross-section of interests to restore and protect water resources. Since completing the Forest Plan in 2004, 290 miles of stream have been restored and 1,100 acres of lake habitat improvement work has been accomplished. Aquatic habitat has been greatly improved through partnership efforts the Forest Service has done in collaboration with the State and other partners to restore the natural flow of streams, prevent erosion, and replace culverts as well as 57 problem road and trail stream crossings since 2004.

<u>Conclusion:</u>

Mr. Chairman, healthy forests that provide clean drinking water, carbon sequestration, quality recreation and beautiful scenery can be accomplished and will require everyone working together. I would be happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee Members may have.