



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Hiawatha National Forest
Supervisor's Office

2727 N. Lincoln Rd
Escanaba, MI 49829
906-786-4062

File Code: 1570-1

Date: March 1, 2004

CERTIFIED RECEIPT REQUESTED

Mr. Frank Jeff Verito
350 1/2 Ridge Street
Marquette, MI 49855

RE: Appeal of the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Lake Superior Highlands Project Environmental Assessment, St. Ignace and Sault Ste. Marie Ranger Districts, Hiawatha National Forest, Appeal 04-09-10-0011 A215

Dear Mr. Verito:

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.18, I have reviewed the appeal record for District Ranger Stevan J. Christiansen's Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Lake Superior Highlands Project Environmental Assessment signed on December 3, 2003. I have also considered the recommendation of the Appeal Reviewing Officer (ARO) Harv Skjerven, regarding the disposition of your appeal. The Appeal Reviewing Officer's review focused on the decision documentation developed by the Responsible Official, District Ranger Stevan J. Christiansen, and the issues raised in your appeal filed on December 15, 2003. The Appeal Reviewing Officer's recommendation is enclosed with this decision for your information.

The Appeal Reviewing Officer found no evidence that the Responsible Official's decision violated law, regulation or policy. He found that the decision responded to comments raised during the analysis process and comment period, and adequately assessed the environmental effects of the selected action. In addition, he found that the issues raised in your appeal were addressed, where appropriate, in the decision documentation. Based on his review, the Appeal Reviewing Officer recommended that the decision be affirmed.

After careful review of the Project File and the appeal, I concur with the Appeal Reviewing Officer's analysis and findings regarding your specific appeal issues. To avoid repetition, I adopt his rationale as my own and refer you to the enclosed Appeal Reviewing Officer recommendation for further detail.



DECISION

It is my decision to affirm District Ranger Stevan J. Christiansen's Decision Notice for the Lake Superior Highlands Project Environmental Assessment, Hiawatha National Forest. Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.18(c) this decision constitutes the final administrative determination of the Department of Agriculture.

Sincerely,

/s/ Thomas A. Schmidt
THOMAS A SCHMIDT
Appeal Deciding Officer

Enclosure

cc:
Responsible Official, Stevan J. Christiansen
NEPA Coordinator, Steve Bateman
Hiawatha NF, Lyn Hyslop
ARO, Joel H. Skjerven
Regional Office, Patricia R. Rowell



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Chequamegon-Nicolet
National Forest

Lakewood-Laona Ranger District
Lakewood Office
15085 State RD 32
Lakewood, WI 54138
715-276-6333 Voice
715-276-3594 FAX
715-674-4481 TTY
Laona Office
4978 Hwy 8 West
Laona, WI 54541
715-674-4481 Voice & TTY
715-674-2545 FAX

File Code: 1570-1
Route To:

Date: February 23, 2004

Subject: Appeal of the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Lake Superior Highlands Project Environmental Assessment, Eastside Administrative Unit, St. Ignace Ranger District, Hiawatha NF, Appeal 04-09-10-0011 A215

To: Appeal Deciding Officer

This letter constitutes my recommendation for the subject appeal filed by Mr. Frank Jeff Verito for the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Lake Superior Highlands Project Environmental Assessment on the St. Ignace Ranger District, Hiawatha National Forest. District Ranger Stevan J. Christiansen was the Responsible Official for this decision. His Decision Notice was signed on December 3, 2003.

My review was conducted pursuant to 36 CFR 215, amended June 4, 2003. To ensure the analysis and decision are in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policies and orders, I have reviewed and considered each of the points raised by the Appellant and the decision documentation submitted by the Hiawatha National Forest. My review recommendation is based upon review of the project file and appeal record, including but not limited to the scoping letter, public comments, Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

Appeal Issues

Although the Appellant set forth many of his personal opinions (i.e. "The line officer ignored environmental effects, ignored public opinion and did not make the right decision"), he did not raise any specific issues.

The EA adequately evaluated environmental effects. Specifically, there was substantial discussion on the effects of the project on soils (EA 3.1), water and wetlands (EA 3.2), air (EA 3.3), vegetation (EA 3.4), non-native invasive species (EA 3.5), old growth (EA 3.6), wildlife (EA 3.7), fisheries (EA 3.8), visual resources (EA 3.9), transportation (EA 3.10), recreation (EA 3.11), minerals (EA 3.12), socio-economics (EA 3.13), heritage resources (EA 3.14), and environmental justice (EA 3.15). Under each section, the issues identified during scoping were addressed under direct, indirect, and cumulative effects discussions.

The Forest conducted adequate public involvement. The project was first identified in the January 1999 issue of "Project Planning," the Hiawatha National Forest's (HNF) quarterly report of upcoming projects. In January, 2001 scoping was conducted, with approximately 760 letters being sent to landowners in and adjacent to the project area, interested citizens, local governments, organizations, tribes, and industry, explaining the project and requesting comments on the proposed action. An ad was also placed in the Sault Ste. Marie *The Evening News* on



January 30, 2001, asking for the public's comments and concerns. A public meeting was held on February 15, 2001 at the Strongs Corner Town Hall to further inform the public and to provide a forum for commenting. Team members interacted by phone, fax, and e-mail throughout the scoping period.

The District Ranger considered three alternatives in detail and selected Alternative 2 for his decision (DN). He based his decision on the decision criteria (including purpose and need) and how well the alternative resolved public issues. Some of the reasons the District Ranger selected Alternative 2 were: 1) it consolidates old growth into larger contiguous blocks, 2) it harvests 29.1 mmbf of timber while reducing stocking densities and improving vigor on approximately 2,400 acres, 3) it improves access and reduces erosion at the Avery Lake recreation site, and 4) it benefits Regional Forester's sensitive species such as the red-shouldered hawk and northern goshawk.

While I realize the Appellant disagrees in general with Forest Service management activities, I find that I would have made the same decision as the District Ranger.

Recommendation

After reviewing the appeal record for the Lake Superior Highlands Project and considering the Appellant's personal opinions and experiences, I recommend that District Ranger Stevan J. Christensen's December 3, 2003 Decision Notice be affirmed.

/s/ Joel H. Skjerven
JOEL H. SKJERVEN
Appeal Reviewing Officer

cc: Thomas J Eiseman, Patricia R Rowell