

# **Overview of Current Policy and Maintenance Protocol for Primary Infrastructure in the County Forest**

(M. Dahlby, County Forest Administrator, 10/11/2018)

## **Contents of Report**

- I. Introduction
- II. Issue Statement
- III. Background
- IV. General Condition Standards
- V. Description of Inspection and Maintenance Protocol
- VI. Protocol for Closures

### **I. Introduction**

Chapter 28 of Wisconsin State Statutes provides for a system of county forests in the State of Wisconsin with the purpose of “enabling and encouraging the planned development and management of the county forests for optimum production of forest products together with recreational opportunities, wildlife, watershed protection and stabilization of stream flow, giving full recognition to the concept of multiple-use to assure maximum public benefits.”

Chapter 16 of the Chippewa County Code of Ordinances prescribes the County’s rules and regulations relating the administration of the county forest. Chippewa County Board Resolution No. 33-11 assigned responsibility for county forest management to the Department of Land Conservation and Forest Management, which is carried out through its Forest & Trails Division.

Counties are required to develop and implement a 15-year comprehensive land use plan. Section 700 of the 2006-2020 Chippewa County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan establishes policy relating to public access to the County Forest.

The Chippewa County Forest is certified by 3<sup>rd</sup> party auditors to be in compliance with the Forest Stewardship Council-US Forest Management Standard (v1.0). Proper maintenance of all infrastructure is required to maintain sustainable forestry certification.

Public enjoyment of the County Forest is directly related to their intended use, individual expectations, and quality of experience. The intended use of infrastructure has a strong bearing on the type and extent of maintenance required to provide a positive user experience.

- II. **Issue:** Established standards, and the associated maintenance protocol, relating to the physical condition of county forest roads, recreational trails, and developed water access are routinely applied as part of ongoing operations but are not adequately documented.

Written documentation will:

- Clarify Operational Expectations
- Clarify Conditions the Public can Expect
- Improve Customer Satisfaction

### **III. Background**

The county forest road system consists of three types of roads that are accessible to the public: permanent primary roads, secondary roads, and temporary roads.

Permanent primary roads provide primary access to the County Forest and are designed and constructed for public use by all licensed vehicles. These roads meet Wisconsin Department of Transportation county forest road standards and receive annual aid payments. There are approximately 18.3 miles of permanent primary roads. The Deer Fly and O’Neil Creek Trails are examples of permanent primary roads.

Secondary roads are intended to be permanent. They are often narrower than permanent primary roads and are built and maintained to lower standards. Most secondary roads are located in areas where motor vehicle use is limited or restricted by gates due to concerns about wet soils, user conflicts, resource protection, and potential for erosion, maintenance expense, illegal dumping, and human safety. There are approximately 114 miles of permanent secondary roads. Many secondary road segments have been incorporated into the developed recreational trail system. The Hickory Ridge Ski Trails are examples of secondary roads that are used as recreational trails.

Temporary roads are designed and constructed for short-term use for a specific project, typically timber harvest operations. Motorized public use of temporary roads is prohibited. Most of these roads are accessed via secondary roads and are used for a short duration to facilitate single projects. These roads are revegetated (naturally or artificially) upon project completion and are often blocked by berms constructed from earthen materials. Skid routes are examples of temporary roads.

In addition to permanent, secondary, and temporary roads approximately 8.7 miles of county trunk highways and 22.8 miles of town roads are bordered by county forest land on one or both sides of the road right-of-way. These public roadways provide access to county forest land.

Other features that enable and enhance public use of the County forest include: boat launches and recreational trails (motorized and non-motorized).

*Table 1. County Forest Trails and Boat Launches: Overlap and Access from Roads*

County Forest Recreational Use Feature	Roads Utilized By County Forest Recreational Use Feature				
	Town Road	Permanent Primary County Forest Road	Secondary Access Road (Gated)	Temporary Road (Bermed)	Not on Road – Trail Constructed For Specific Use
Ice Age Trail	X		X		X
Hickory Ridge Trail					
Ski			X		
Mountain Bike and Snowshoe			X	X	X
CFSU: River Road Ski Trails/Harold Walters Memorial			X		
CFSU: Kempers Woods			X		X
CFSU: Gilberts Property			X		
CFSU: Pine Harbor Woods			X		
CFSU: Otter Lake			X		X
CFSU: Yellow River			X		
Co. Forest ATV Trail	X	X	X		
Co. Forest Snowmobile Trail	X	X	X		
Ruby Frozen Ground Access			X		
Hunter Walk-In					
Camp Lake Game Trail			X		
Tealey Creek Game Trail			X		
Bass Lake #2 Boat Launch		X			
Bass Lake #3 Boat Launch		X			
Hay Meadow Flowage #1 Boat Launch		X			
Horseshoe Lake Boat Launch	X				
Townline Lake Boat Launch	X				
Knickerbocker Lake Boat Launch	X				

Note: "CFSU" means County Forest Special Unit. These are relatively small units of the County Forest, ranging from 40 to 640 acres in size, that are geographically distributed throughout the county where greater emphasis is placed on recreational use than production of forest products. There are trails within all CFSU's.

All trails within the county forest are open to the public. Where compatible, multiple use occurs. For example, most of the Hickory Ridge Ski Trail is used as part of the Hay Meadow Horse Trail during time periods when the trail is not groomed for skiing. Most of the County Forest ATV Trail serves as groomed snowmobile trail in winter. Certain trail uses are considered to be incompatible, primarily due to speed and trail design/construction. For example, horse riding and mountain biking are considered to be incompatible.

Generally, all developed recreational trails are accessible for hiking, hunting, gathering, walk-in water access, trapping, and other non-motorized use. Table 2 on the following page lists mileage of trails and length of each trail that is designated as single use or open for multiple use.

#### **IV. General Condition Standards**

The following principles have been used by Staff to guide road and trail maintenance:

##### Permanent Primary Roads

Permanent primary roads will be maintained in a condition that retains eligibility for WisDOT County Forest Road Standards as established under Section 86.315(3) of Wisconsin Statutes, and in a manner which minimizes erosion from the roadway and prevents sedimentation in wetlands and waterways.

All intersections on permanent primary roads will be signed in accordance with WisDOT "Wisconsin Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices". The beginning and end of each permanent primary road will contain an informational sign containing the road name.

Wind throws and other storm-related road blockage will be removed from permanent primary roads, or otherwise corrected, as soon as practical.

Permanent primary roads will not receive routine snow removal or other winter maintenance.

##### Secondary Roads

Secondary roads will be maintained in a condition that minimizes erosion from the roadway and prevents sedimentation in wetlands and waterways.

All gate structures on secondary roads will be labeled with a unique identification number.

Approximately 20 miles of secondary access roads will be mowed on an annual basis to facilitate recreational use. (A list of mowed roads is included under the section heading "Maintenance of Secondary and Temporary Roads").

##### Temporary Roads

Temporary roads must utilize Wisconsin Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality while servicing active forestry projects and will be closed off with earthen materials, graded, and seeded as soon after project completion as site conditions allow. Motorized public use of temporary roads is prohibited.

##### Developed Recreational Trails

Developed recreational trails will remain passable and in a condition that minimizes introduction and spread of invasive plants, minimizes erosion from the trail surface, and prevents sedimentation in wetlands and waterways. Safety risks may be inherent to most recreational pursuits. All possible efforts will be made to keep trails free of known safety hazards. The rate of any required storm clean-up is dependent on the capacity of the responsible user group.

##### Developed Boat Launches

Developed boat launches will remain safely passable without causing damage to boat trailers and sedimentation in lakes. Boat launches will remain open to the public, except in circumstances involving urgent environmental damage and public safety risks as determined by the County Forest Administrator in consultation with the Wisconsin DNR Waterway Access Coordinator. Any proposal to permanently close or modify boat launches requires Land Conservation & Forest Management Committee approval and is subject to Section NR 1.92 of Wisconsin Administrative Code.

Table 2. Mileage of Dedicated and Multiple Use County Forest Access Trails

County Forest Recreational Use Feature	Approximate Total Mileage	Type of other uses allowed on Trail (listed in miles)										
		Hike	Bike	Ski	Snowshoe	Horse Use	Hunting	Trapping	ATV	Snowmobile	Non-Motorized Access To Water	
Ice Age Trail	22	22	0	22	22	0.2	22	See Note Below			Yes	
Hickory Ridge Trail												
Ski	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	8	16.7				Yes	
Mountain Bike and Snowshoe	15	15	15	0	15	0	15				Yes	
CFSU: River Road Ski Trails/Harold Walters Memorial	5	5	5	5	5	5	5				No	
CFSU: Kempers Woods	2	2	2	2	2	2					No	
CFSU: Gilberts Property	1	1	1	1	1	1	1				No	
CFSU: Pine Harbor Woods	1	1	1	1	1	1	No				No	
CFSU: Otter Lake	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5			0.5	No	
CFSU: Yellow River	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			1	No	
Co. Forest ATV Trail	30	30			30		30			30	15	Yes
Co. Forest Snowmobile Trail	15	15			15		15			15	15	Yes
Ruby Frozen Ground Access Roads	5	5	5	5	5	5	5			5	5	No
Hunter Walk-In												
Camp Lake Game Trail	4	4	4	4	4	4	4			4	4	Yes
Tealey Creek Game Trail	3	3	3	3	3	3	3			3	3	Yes
Secondary Access Roads Not Used as Developed Trails	75	75	75	75	75	75	75		75	75	Yes	

Notes:

- Most, if not all, trails provide access for trappers, although trapping on developed trails is discouraged.
- Disabled Access Permits are available to permit ATV use on secondary access roads under specific circumstances.
- Snowshoeing is discouraged on groomed ski trails – particularly on tracked trails.
- Chapter 16 of the Chippewa County Code of Ordinances specifically allows snowmobile use on secondary and temporary roads.
- There are limits on hunting and trapping in Kempers Woods.

## V. Description of Current Inspection and Maintenance Protocol

### Inspection of Permanent Primary Roads

The County Forest Administrator and a Highway Department Patrol Superintendent conduct comprehensive road inspection together after spring thaw to:

1. Identify immediate corrective maintenance needs, and
2. Initiate planning for preventative maintenance and improvements that provide greater public safety, environmental protection, and long-term maintenance efficiency.

Forest and Trails Division Staff travel many of the permanent primary roads on a daily basis. Signs of erosion are reported to the County Forest Administrator. The County Forest Administrator inspects reported issues and requests road maintenance by the Highway Department, when needed.

All permanent primary roads are patrolled by Forest and Trails Division Staff after substantial wind events. Forest and Trails Division Staff remove blowdown debris as needed. Much of the blowdown that occurs is salvaged by the public for firewood, often prior to discovery by Staff.

A culvert inventory and inspection was completed in 2017. Annual culvert inspections will be completed beginning in 2019.

### Maintenance of Permanent Primary Roads

All roads are graded at least two (2) times per year by the Highway Department at the request of the County Forest Administrator. These grading events typically occur as conditions allow in late April/early May and September. Roads subject to use by ATV's and UTV's are typically graded up to 3 additional times per year on an as-needed basis.

On average, approximately 6 loads of gravel are distributed as needed throughout the road system each year to facilitate appropriate drainage and road surface condition.

Road shoulders are mowed in late summer in odd numbered years by the Highway Department or Forest and Trails Division Staff, depending on staff and equipment availability as determined by the County Forest Administrator.

All culvert maintenance is completed on an as-needed basis by the Highway Department at the request of the County Forest Administrator. High priority, failing culverts that were identified in 2017, have been replaced. Systematic maintenance and replacements will be scheduled based on necessity and availability of funds.

Permanent Primary Roads are not plowed or sanded unless it is needed for timber hauling purposes. When needed as determined by the County Forest Administrator in consultation with logging contractors, snow plowing is typically conducted by the County Highway Department, Town, or logging contractor depending on the distance and location.

### Inspection of Secondary and Temporary Roads

Nearly all secondary roads are driven and inspected on an annual basis by Forest and Trails Division and Wisconsin DNR Staff for completion of assigned duties.

Secondary and temporary roads are monitored by the Assistant County Forest Administrator for erosion and function on a daily basis during timber harvest operations.

### Maintenance of Secondary and Temporary Roads

The majority of the secondary roads do not support plant growth that is sufficient to impede management or recreational use due to shade, compaction, and lack of topsoil. In these settings, maintenance demands are minimal.

Forest and Trails Division and Wisconsin DNR Staff removes downfalls as needed to facilitate use. Drainage and erosion issues are corrected by the Forest and Trails Division Staff or private contractors, depending on magnitude of the issue and availability.

Secondary roads are typically graded in advance of timber harvest operations. Culverts are replaced as needed to facilitate hauling. When possible, culverts that are in need of replacement are converted to at-grade rock crossings to minimize future maintenance needs.

Wisconsin Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality (DNR Publication Pub-FR-093) and applicable State Waterway and Wetland Regulations are followed.

When needed during timber harvest operations, maintenance is completed by Forest and Trails Division Staff, loggers, or excavation contractors depending on magnitude of the issue and availability, under the oversight of Forest and Trails Division Staff. Upon completion of timber harvest operations, roads are graded at the expense of the logging contractor. Final grading and soil preparation is typically completed by Forest and Trails Division Staff and planted with a seed mix that is beneficial to wildlife.

Forest and Trails Division Staff mows approximately 20 miles of secondary roads, on an annual basis after bird nesting season, to facilitate recreational use. Mowing sites include: (list below does not include mowed ski trails or Ice Age Trail).

1. Pine Harbor Woods – Special County Forest Unit (~1.0 mile)
2. Yellow River Woods– Special County Forest Unit (~1.0 mile)
3. Ruby frozen ground access on County Line (~0.5 miles)
4. Christmas Creek Trail and access easement (~ 1.8 miles)
5. Ruby Game Trail(~ 2.0 miles)
6. Mallard Flowage Road and embankment (~ 0.3 miles)
7. Klawiter Easement (~0.5 miles plus ditches)
8. Tealey Creek Game Loop (~3.2 miles)
9. Hwy M Access to former Charter Bank and Hanson Property (~ 2.0 miles)

Numerous secondary roads cross earthen embankments that contain mechanical water control structures which create impoundments (i.e wildlife flowages). The wildlife flowages and embankments are actively managed and maintained by volunteers from the Chippewa Rod and Gun Club for specific fishery or wildlife habitat benefit, under the oversight of the County Forest Administrator. Pursuant to Ch. 31.12, Wisconsin State Statutes, and Ch. NR 333, Wisconsin Administrative Code, each flowage has an individual “Inspection, Operation, and Maintenance Plan” and “Emergency Access Plan”.

#### Inspection of Recreational Trails

All developed recreational trails are routinely inspected by the associated user group, subject to periodic spot checks by Forest and Trails Division Staff.

All recreational trails are subject to intensive use. Trail conditions, including real and perceived maintenance needs, are continually reported on user group social media sites.

User groups notify the County Forest Administrator of maintenance needs on trails subject to multiple use.

#### Maintenance of Recreational Trails

All developed recreational trails are maintained by the associated user group. Forest and Trails Division Staff provides technical consultation upon request.

In situations where degradation is not directly attributable to a given user group, Forest and Trails Division Staff completes the required maintenance. In recent years, Forest and Trails Division Staff and associated user groups have been completing systematic improvements to alleviate conflict and issues that result from multiple use.

Abundant marking of trails prior to logging operations substantially minimizes the extent of impact to trails. Forest and Trails Division Staff and loggers complete restoration of developed recreational trails that are disturbed by logging operations. Loggers clear debris from trails and repair major rutting. Forest and Trails Division Staff provides final trail grading and seeding when needed.

#### Inspection of Boat Launches

Forest and Trails Division Staff inspects all boat launches listed above in Table 1 after spring thaw and all significant storm events to verify that launches remain safely passable without causing damage to boat trailers and for erosion issues.

Citizens commonly report maintenance issues to Forest and Trails Division Staff in between inspections. The most common citizen reports include dumping and ruts caused by spinning tires.

#### Maintenance of Boat Launches

LCFM staff completes routine and corrective maintenance including: addition of gravel and/or rock when needed to maintain the shape of the surface and ditches in a condition that is non-damaging to trailers and minimizes erosion and sedimentation; and garbage and litter clean-up.

It is the intent of the Forest and Trails Division to procure and install signage at each boat launch in 2019. Signs will identify the site and provide contact information, invasive species information, and an opportunity for DNR to provide information relating to fisheries.

#### Order of Priority for Storm Damage Restoration/Corrective Maintenance Efforts:

1. Permanent Primary Roads
2. Dam Infrastructure (in cooperation with Chippewa R&G)
3. Old Abe Trail
4. Riverview Conservancy Trails
5. Boat Launches
6. Active Timber Sale Sites (in close cooperation with logging contractors)
7. Developed Recreational Trails (Support of User Groups as needed)
8. Trails subject to mowing
9. Secondary Access Roads not used as part of developed recreational trails

Note user groups, including the Ice Age Trail Alliance, Friends of the Hickory Ridge Trails, Chippewa Valley Trailriders, Chippewa Valley ATV Council, and Chippewa Valley Snowmobile Organization have primary responsibility for storm damage cleanup on recreational trails.

## **VI. Protocol For Closures**

All roads and trails may be temporarily suspended, without advanced public notice, at the sole discretion of the County Forest Administrator, under the following circumstances:

1. Environmental damage to soil, vegetation, water resources or unauthorized dumping/ littering cannot be prevented with reasonable accommodations.
2. At the request of law enforcement personnel in response to immediate public safety concerns.

Boat launches may be closed to prevent environmental damage or public safety risks in consultation with the Wisconsin DNR Waterway Access Coordinator. Any proposal to permanently close or modify boat launches requires Land Conservation and Forest Management Committee approval and is subject to Section NR 1.92 of Wisconsin Administrative Code

All temporary closures will be posted on-site and on the County Website. The Land Conservation & Forest Management Committee will be notified of any closures. Committee approval is required for closures of greater than 30 days in length.