

CC: STEVE
LEVI
AMY B.

File Code: 1950; 2300
Date: April 11, 2017

Dear Friend of the Chippewa National Forest:

Please accept this letter as an invitation to share your thoughts about the Norway Beach Recreation Area Rehabilitation Project. Enclosed you will find information on the purpose and need for this project and the activities being proposed.

Introduction, Location, and Features

The Norway Beach Recreation Area is located within the Blackduck Ranger District of the Chippewa National Forest, approximately four miles east of Cass Lake, Minnesota off U.S. Highway 2. The facility is located in Township 145 North, Range 30 West, in Sections 8, 17, and 18, in Cass County. The recreation area is located on the south shore of Cass Lake and is served by Norway Beach Road (Forest Road 2171).

The existing Recreation Area includes four campground loops offering 171 camping sites, and includes: interpretive trails, beaches, a paved bike trail, boat ramps, a picnic shelter, and the Norway Beach Visitor Center. The campground is open seasonally from mid-May through Labor Day weekend. (See map enclosure at end of this document.)

The recreation area is one of the most popular recreation areas on the Chippewa National Forest and has long been a special place for many visitors and Forest Service employees alike. The campground has been the setting for countless foundational outdoor experiences and the backdrop for generations of fond memories for families and friends. The recreation area has the most visitation on the Forest and generates the highest amount of campground receipts. However, the site was last redeveloped in the late 1970s and is aging rapidly.

The Norway Beach Recreation Area infrastructure is over 40-50 years old and has reached its life expectancy. Major infrastructure components are falling into significant disrepair, especially the wastewater and septic systems, and existing toilets. Every year, significant repairs are required before normal start-up procedures can be accomplished and the campground re-opened for the summer season. These repairs are expensive and can cause delays to campground openings.

Additionally, there is a question whether the Norway Beach Recreation Area is providing a variety of amenities that are expected and appreciated by today's campers and day users that still align with the traditional character of the campground and recreation area.

Use or occupancy of the four campground loops have decreased by 40 percent over the past 20 years including the use of non-electric sites. Revenues generated from the Norway Beach Recreation Area, have declined approximately 33 percent over the years. Meanwhile costs to maintain and operate the Norway Beach Recreation Area have increased over this same time period.



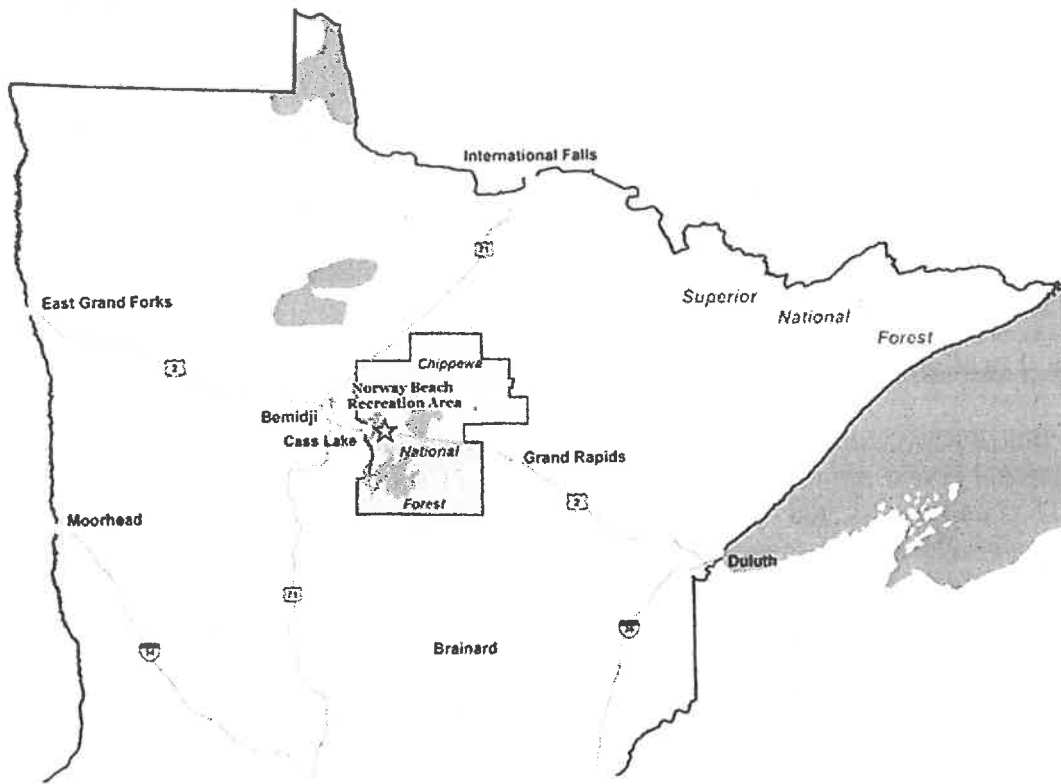


Figure 1 Norway Beach Recreation Area Project Location Map

Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the action is to:

- Provide high-quality developed camping opportunities in a scenic and historic location
- Afford the opportunity to improve overall District operations of the site

The need for action is driven by:

- The poor condition and age of the wastewater treatment systems
- Federal requirements to improve the campground sites and bathroom facilities to meet accessibility and modern standard
- Public desire for an upgraded and improved recreation facility
- Our commitment to improving the visitor experience within the recreation area

What is the Blackduck Ranger District Proposing?

The Blackduck Ranger District of the Chippewa National Forest is proposing to perform a comprehensive rehabilitation of the Norway Beach Recreation Area. The proposed action would:

- Replace 4 vault toilets
- Update/remodel bathrooms at Chippewa Loop Campground
- Install 5 new septic systems
- Decommission the dump station and convert the area to a group site
- Decommission and remove the existing wastewater treatment facility, once the new septic systems are operational, and rehabilitate the site
- Decommission sites in Cass Lake and Wanaki Campground Loops that have non-mitigatable resource concerns or receive low use
- Remove shower and toilet building in Cass Lake Campground Loop
- Design and construct group sites in Norway Beach Campground Loop
- Install electricity for sites in Norway Beach Loop
- Rehabilitate the former Wanaki Boat Access location

The proposed action has been developed to reduce staffing and operational costs related to the operations and maintenance of the campground and wastewater treatment facility. It aims to provide a high-quality recreation experience by updating and modernizing sustainable facilities that are adequate to meet current public recreation and accessibility demands. In addition, the updated facilities will reduce wastewater treatment and improve visitor experiences within the recreation area

Management Direction

This proposal does not fall within the definition of actions requiring preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15_20.6) or those categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or an environmental assessment (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15_31); therefore an environmental assessment will be prepared.

The desired conditions of the Norway Beach Recreational Area, as described in the Chippewa National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), page 2-39 (USDA Forest Service 2004) is to:

- D-REC-3 "...provide developed sites, facilities, trails, water access sites, and other recreation opportunities within health and safety, resource protection, cost and maintenance requirements.
- D-REC-4 "Universally accessible facilities that fit with site and program characteristics are offered. User convenience, visitor satisfaction, and anticipated visitor interactions are also considered when providing recreation opportunities."

Environmental Assessment

The interdisciplinary team for the project will consider all comments and analyze the effects of project activities on water, federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Additionally, traditional cultural resources and access will be analyzed as part of the desired condition in all proposed activities (Forest Plan, D-TR-1 -3, pp 2-35).

At this time I anticipate the project analysis will be completed in an environmental assessment, and the decision will be supported by a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The FONSI will consider (40 CFR 1508.27):

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes the effect will be beneficial.
2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.
3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.
4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.
5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.
7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.
8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.
10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

What Decision Will Be Made?

After conducting and reviewing the environmental analysis, including public involvement and resource specialists' input, the District Ranger of the Blackduck Ranger District will decide whether or not to implement this project, or investigate another suitable management action.

The Blackduck District Ranger, as the Responsible Official, will decide:

- Whether to select an alternative that rehabilitates the Norway Beach Recreation Area both by addressing deferred maintenance and adding certain additional amenities

- Whether the alternative selected would result in significant environmental impacts to the quality of the human environment and whether preparation of an environmental impact statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is warranted
- Whether the decision and alternatives considered meets all applicable federal, state and local laws and policies, including consistency with the Forest Service Manual and Forest Plan.

How Can You Comment?

Please submit site specific comments about the proposal along with supporting information you believe will help identify issues, develop alternatives, or predict environmental effects of our proposal. Indicate the project you are commenting on: Norway Beach Recreation Area Rehabilitation Project.

To focus your comments on this Proposed Action, please consider the following questions:

1. Are there alternative ways to meet the purpose of the project other than the proposed action we offer, which you would like the Forest Service to consider and analyze?
2. Is there any information about the project area, which you believe is important in the context of the proposed activities, which the Forest Service might have overlooked?
3. For you or the group you represent, what are the potential effects of this proposal that you are particularly concerned about?

Postal or hand delivered comments must be submitted to:

Karen Lessard, District Ranger
Blackduck Ranger District
417 Forestry Drive
Blackduck, MN 56630

The office hours for submitting comments in person are 8:00 am - 4:30 pm, M-F, excluding holidays. Comments may be faxed to: 218-835-3132.

Electronic comments should include an identifiable name and must be submitted as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), Word (.doc) or portable document format (.pdf) document to comments-eastern-chippewa@fs.fed.us.

In order for your comments to be considered in the next stage of analysis, they should be received no later than 30 days following the after publication of a legal notice in the Newspaper of Record (*The Blackduck American*), on or by May 15, 2017. [NOTE: Because of a late mailing date of this letter, comments will be considered for eligibility to object through May 18, 2017.]

In addition to serving as a scoping opportunity, this time period will also serve as a designated opportunity for public comment that may provide a commenter with eligibility to object to the proposed project or activity under 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 218. Comments received and postmarked after May 18, 2017, are welcome and will be considered to the extent

time allows, but will not provide the commenter with eligibility to object. Those wishing to establish eligibility to object based on scoping comments must submit postmarked comments between the postmarked date of this letter and May 15, 2017, and the comments submitted must meet the requirements identified in 36 CFR Part 218. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

This project is a non-HFRA project and subject to parts A and B of 36 CFR Part 218 (Section 218. 7). At this time I intend to prepare an environmental assessment, and I would anticipate, at the earliest, a signed decision in the summer of 2017.

This document is available for review at:

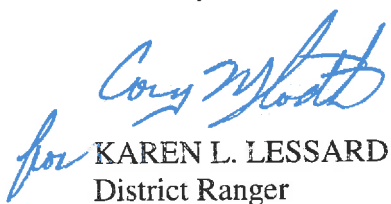
- Blackduck Ranger Station, 417 Forestry Drive, Blackduck, MN 56630
- On our website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/chippewa>

For further information contact:

Karen L. Lessard, District Ranger
Blackduck Ranger District
417 Forestry Drive
Blackduck, MN 56630
Phone: 218-835-3104, Fax: 218-835-3132
Email: klessard@fs.fed.us

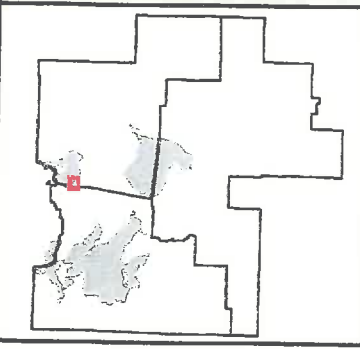
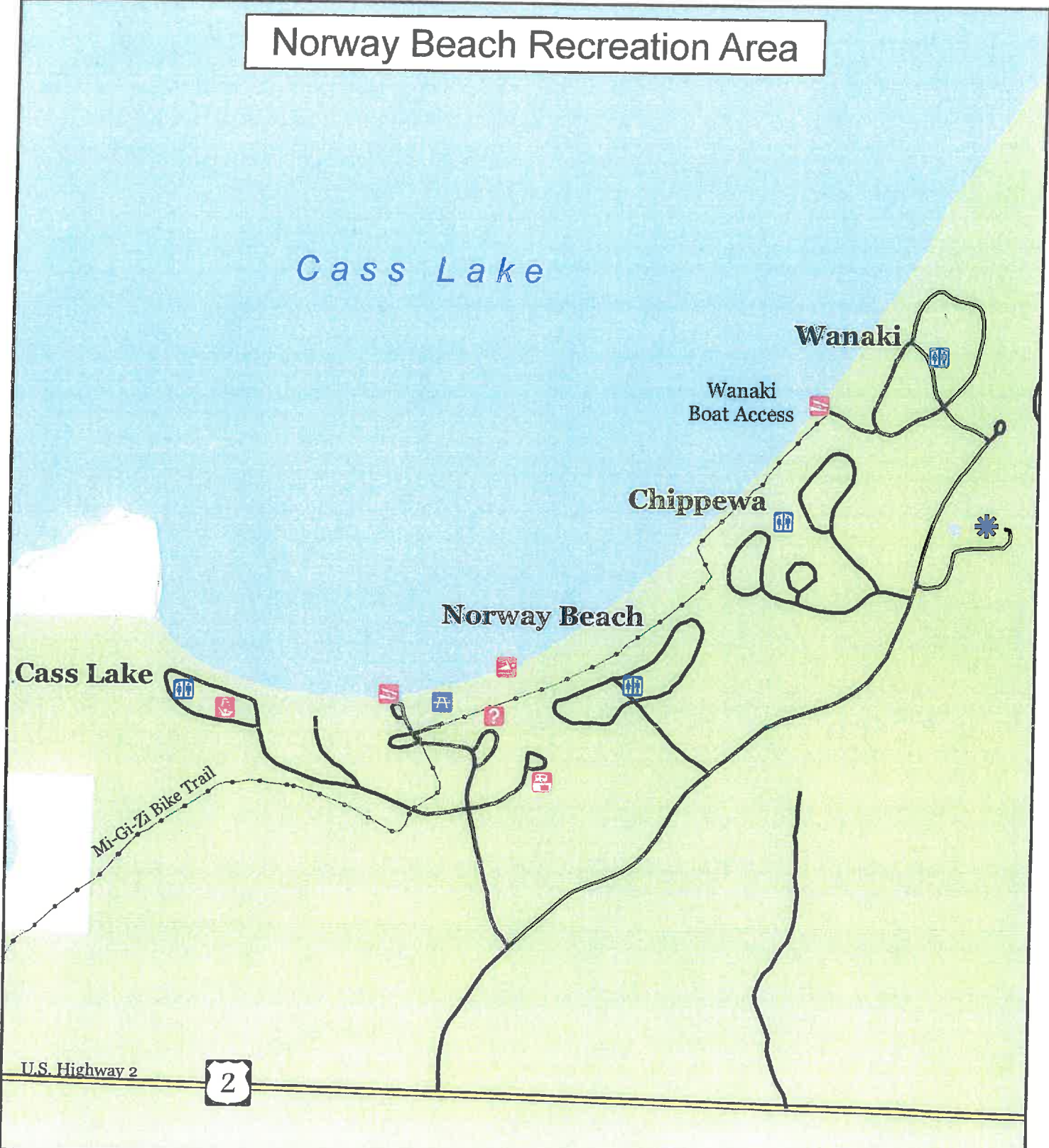
Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).










Sincerely,


for KAREN L. LESSARD
District Ranger

Enclosure: Map of Norway Beach Recreation Area

Norway Beach Recreation Area



 Boat Access	Roads	Chippewa National Forest Norway Beach
 Picnic Area	— Forest Service	
 Visitor Information	— US Highway	
 Swimming Beach	--- Trail	
 Dump Station	Ownership	Rehabilitation Project
 Shower Buildings	Other	
 Vault Toilet	Forest Service	
 Wastewater Treatment Facility		

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Date: 3/30/2017

