



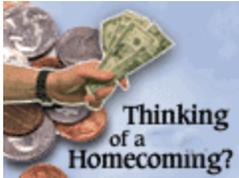
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## Ontonagon officials learn about Ottawa National Forest plan

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By **LISA SUNDBERG**

Special to the Globe

ONTONAGON -- "Overall, I am very pleased with the (Ottawa National Forest) plan," said county commissioner Dave Schmidt, following a presentation by U.S. Forest Service District Ranger Darla Lenz.

Lenz reviewed the process that led to the Forest Service plan and highlighted the major changes from the previous plan at the Ontonagon County Board's meeting on Tuesday afternoon.

"By law, we are required to update the plan every 15 years," Lenz said. "Work on the revisions began in 2003, a draft was presented for public input in 2005, and after hearing the public's concerns, the final plan was completed."

Lenz said the plan was signed in May and there are 30 days remaining in the appeal period. "As of today there are no appeals," she noted.

The plan establishes goals for the forest and sets provisions for goods and services, like recreational opportunities and timber harvests. One of the concerns about the plan, according to Schmidt, is the regulations for all-terrain vehicle use.

"I and probably the rest of the board are not totally happy with the ATV portion of the plan," said Schmidt. It prohibits cross country travel, and identifies designated roads and trails for ATV use. Lenz said the increased number of off-highway vehicles and the desire to use them for recreation meant the new plan had to set some restrictions.

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Schmidt urged the Ottawa National Forest staff to identify approved roads and trails and produce a map for users. "It needs to be done soon," he said.

The plan increases the allowable timber sale quantity. "This will be a boost to our economy and the forest products industry if it can be implemented," said Schmidt. "This is a good plan, but no money has been appropriated to implement it. The Forest Service needs funds to pay for the bidding process. Without funds, nothing will happen."

The board agreed and authorized letters urging the appropriation of funds to implement the plan. Letters will be sent to Rep. Bart Stupak, Sen. Carl Levin and Sen. Debbie Stabenow, as well as Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

Schmidt also discussed the appeal process, indicating the County did not want to appeal the plan, but would want to respond to any appeals the Forest Service receives which might impact the county. The board requested Prosecutor Jim Jessup write a letter to Forest Supervisor Bob Lueckel requesting that the county be notified immediately of any appeals to the final plan.

Lenz briefly described other aspects of the plan, including wildlife protection, maintenance of old-growth areas, wilderness areas and primitive, non-motorized areas of the forest. A copy of the plan is available at the Ontonagon District office of the Ottawa National Forest.

In other action supporting economic development, the board agreed to write letters regarding the Ontonagon River Harbor. Terri Lukshaitis, administrative secretary of the EDC, requested several letters regarding the dredging of the harbor. She suggested a letter to the Corps of Engineers, asking for elimination of the 1 million ton requirement for the harbor. Currently, a harbor that off-loads less than 1 million tons of cargo per year is not funded for dredging.

A second letter seeks an appropriation in the Energy and Water Bill for 2008, and a third letter requests support for an extension of the commercial channel.

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