**Week 19- A Call for Action- USFS Recreation Program Public Input**

**Conservation Corner**

***Conservation Corner is a regular article produced by the Forest County Land &Water Conservation Department. For more information contact Al Murray, Land&Water Resources Technician at 715-478-1387 or by e-mail at*** ***lcc@co.forest.wi.us******.***

Last week I was assigned to attend a stakeholders meeting with the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest regarding recreational facilities on the National Forest. CNNF staff has been working to develop a sustainable recreation program with specific focus on campgrounds, boat landings, trailheads, picnic areas and beaches. As per their staff and the website, the Forest can no longer afford to finance aging facilities, underused picnic area, campsites, and recreation areas. At the meeting USFS staff presented draft proposed management actions in which 45 sites would hve no changes, 22 sites would be essentially eliminated by conversion to general forest area as infrastructure is removed and the remaining 126 sites would have varying proposed actions ranging from increased amenities to changes in the level of operation and maintenance. The comment period for this proposal is currently open.

This week I completed a review of the USFS proposed actions related to sites within Forest County or those in close proximity to our county line. Actions within these areas will have potential positive and negative impacts to our businesses, our residents and the visitors to our area.

To the benefit of Forest County businesses, residents, and visitors, improvements will be made at 8 campgrounds including those Ada Lake, Anvil Lake, Bear Lake, Franklin Lake, Kentuck Lake, Laura Lake, Pine Lake and Richardson Lake. **The people and businesses of Forest County must make their voices heard and show support for these improvements in USFS facilities, maintenance and improvement of facilities are critical to our county and our towns and our economy.**

Negative impacts of the proposal to Forest County businesses, residents and visitors include elimination of 7 recreational sites by conversion to forest areas. The proposed elimination includes the Big Joe Canoe Access and Campground, the Brule River Campground and Canoe Landing, the Burnt Bridge Canoe Access, the Burton Wells Campsites and Canoe Landing the Halley Creek Bird Trailhead, the Nicolet North Trailhead #3, and the Windsor Dam Campground. In addition, the proposal includes removal of toilet facilities at the Rat River Bridge dispersed site, the Burnt Bridge dispersed site, and the Highway 70 Wayside. Traditionally toilet facility removals have resulted in elimination of sites over time. This would bring the elimination number to 9 sites. **The people and businesses of Forest County must make their voices heard and provide negative comments for the elimination of these USFS facilities, it is critical to our county and our towns to maintain a maximum number of facilities for visitors and residents alike for our economy.**

I would like to express my opinion on elimination of canoe accesses and river sites in the USFS proposal. During my lifetime in Forest County the canoe accesses had good usage approximately 15-20 years ago. At that time the USFS made efforts to cut trees across the river routes between landings annually, usually utilizing students from the Blackwell Job Corps. The practice of maintenance of the river routes has since ceased. The result is that the canoe landings have little use. At this point when kayak use is becoming very popular by residents and visitors, it is a very poor time to eliminate stream facilities that could ultimately benefit Forest County. **I would recommend that users interested in canoeing and kayaking and businesses that benefit from these users comment on the online site or at the hearings.**

One other item that I found to be a negative impact is proposed reduced maintenance on sites including snowplowing. The particular concern I have is elimination of snowplowing at Butternut Lake, Franklin Lake, Halsey Lake, Kentuck Lake, Laurel Lake, Lost Lake, Lower Nine Mile Lake, and Stevens Lake. **This elimination of snowplowing will likely result in little or no access for ice fishermen on those lakes. I would recommend that ice fishermen comment on the online site or at the hearings.**

We all understand the impacts of the National Forest on our property tax base. It is time for us as residents, business owners and users to promote and retain recreational facilities and maintenance that benefit our economy and our forest use.

Increased access by ATV’s to sites was not addressed in this proposal, increased access to mountain bikes was not addressed in this proposal, increase access and maintenance of hunter walking trails was not addressed in this proposal.

Now is time for us all to act. Comments may be made on this proposal at:

<https://usfs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/CrowdsourcePolling/index.html?appid=83f07eb112884b8b945f4dc328a0fc58>

or by attending:

**Public Meetings/Open Houses:**

* October 29 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Best Western in Crandon, WI
* October 30 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Park Falls Ranger District Office in Park Falls, WI
* November 5 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Medford Library in Medford, WI
* November 7 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland, WI
* November 8 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Cable Community Center in Cable, WI
* November 13 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the North Star Lanes in Antigo, WI

While comments are usually limited by directed questions by the USFS, please include proposals to improve access to facilities across the forest. **Please maximize the number of comments that you make and comment often to insure that the voice of Forest County is heard! Businesses, make sure to mention economic impact, it will be important later in the NEPA process.**