



Triangle Trail Association/Triangle Trail LLC, 3947 Huntingdon Drive, Minnetonka, MN 55305

February 12, 2025

Aaron Kania
Kawishiwi District Ranger
1393 Highway 169
Ely, MN 55731

RE: Triangle Trail Association Feedback on the Fernberg Plan

Mr. Kania,

On behalf of the Triangle Trail Association and its members, I am writing to provide feedback on the overall plan. The Triangle Trail Association is a group of landowners dedicated to increasing access to properties located on the south and east sides of Triangle Lake. Currently, these properties are only accessible by crossing multiple lakes and portages—an approach that may be sufficient for a single backcountry cabin but is inadequate given the number of new cabins and the future plans by the forest service. These properties are located at the center of the largest non-bwca fire mitigation and burn zone (Greenstone Lake East zone) within your plan. Enhancing access is essential, and collaborating on access accommodations would align with the Forest Service's mission, as well as its guiding laws and regulations.

Specific Comments

- **Fire Risk & Mitigation:**

All private properties behind Triangle and other lakes face extreme danger from prescribed burns described in the Fernberg Plan. The Forest Service has been clear on this in discussions with our members – we are at an extremely high wildfire risk due to the state of the current forest and an inability to change it due to the remote nature. Property owners currently have limited ability to mitigate fire risks, being restricted to using hand tools. As previously mentioned by the forest service during in person discussions an out-of-control fire could destroy all of our buildings and properties in a single afternoon.

- **Extension of Forest Route 439:**

We suggest that the Forest Service extend Forest Route 439 from the current BWCA/Kawishiwi boundary (which is unused), redirecting it southwest toward the fire-prone area south of Triangle Lake. Decommissioning the south portion of the road would mean there would be no net new roads in the area. By shifting the route, the Forest Service can better manage this section of the forest while enabling private landowners to take necessary precautions further protecting Forest land. It would allow landowners to bring in appropriate equipment for clearing and maintaining the forest to prevent wildfire. Additionally, this extension could create opportunities for new hiking, skiing, snowshoe trails, and other recreational opportunities for the broader public.

- **Roadless Area Boundary Adjustment:**

We request that the Forest Service move the Roadless Area boundary slightly south to allow for a reasonable connection between the at-risk properties and the extended Forest Route 439. Historically, this area has contained walking trails, snowmobile/ATV paths, and some roads. At some point over the last 20 years the Forest Service has administratively identified the area as a Forest Plan roadless area. The adjustment would likely require only a slight change but would allow the Forest service to correct this issue. The Triangle Trail Association will work with the Forest Service on necessary permits to establish connections with private property from road termination. One potential solution could be to use the old east-west snowmobile trail that ran south of Triangle Lake as the new boundary, which would provide property owners with access while maintaining a buffer with the BWCA. Another would be to create an administrative exception for the trail.

- **Coordination on Prescribed Burns:**

Any prescribed burns near Triangle/Ojibway must be coordinated with property owners and conducted only after they have had a chance to implement protective measures on their land. This is extremely important as any out-of-control burn would threaten land owners and the local community would have a very limited ability to fight the fire putting life and property at risk. This objection is for the triangle south area but would apply to any burn which may put private property at risk.

- **Watershed Health & Environmental Concerns:**

The increase in development around Triangle Lake, combined with the limited ability to install proper sewage and other preventative measures, places the water at long-term risk. As a top-tier lake feeding into Ojibway, Jasper, Moose Lake, and ultimately the heart of the BWCA, protecting Triangle Lake's water quality is essential. Failure to address this issue damages the future of the BWCA. It is imperative that access issues be addressed and incorporated into this plan.

- **Low Water Levels & Climate Change:**

The ongoing impact of climate change may be contributing to low water levels, further complicating access and environmental sustainability in the region. This past year was the second year in the 2020s that summer water levels were so low as to make it difficult to get even small boats across portages due to water receding from the shoreline. The access is extremely difficult in winter, and impossible in the shoulder seasons due to thin ice and now low water means that access is at times nearly impossible during dry months. This needs to be addressed quickly. While we agree that it not the primary responsibility of the Forest Service to solve for access issues, the Forest Service is required to provide permitted access when there are limited options. We look forward to working with you on this as a part of the Fernberg Corridor Project and beyond.

- **Access & Parking at Ojibway:**

The current parking area at Ojibway Lake is insufficient, particularly during the summer months when construction activity is high. Additional parking is needed to ensure landowners can reliably access their properties and others can continue to pursue recreational opportunities in the area. While improving access to Triangle Lake will help the issue, there are still too few parking spaces to meet demand. This is a minor change likely only requiring redesigning the current layout and perhaps pushing the edge 20 feet back. Please address this issue as a part of the plan

- **Portage Improvements:**

The portage between Triangle and Ojibway Lakes needs slight widening to accommodate current traffic (especially winter traffic) without damaging the roller portage or docks. In past years the portage has been damaged by people attempting to get UTVs across the area to ice fish on Triangle. These have typically been people who do not have properties in the area and do not know about the rollers. Without a clear path for ATV/UTV's the docks and rollers will continue to be

at risk. Improved access to Triangle should ultimately reduce traffic on the rollers, portage, and both lakes. Our group would look forward to collaborating with the Forest Service to ensure this unique feature remains for future generations. Please include this as a part of the plan

We may have other comments and objections as the project progresses. We appreciate your consideration of these concerns and look forward to working with the Forest Service to develop practical solutions that balance access, safety, and environmental stewardship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Troy Venjohn', is written over a faint, larger blue ink signature that is partially visible in the background.

Troy Venjohn

Manager

Triangle Trail Association / Triangle Trail LLC

Cc: *Scott Neff, Attorney, Trenti Law Firm*
Congressman Pete Stauber
Senator Tina Smith
Senator Amy Klobuchar
Congresswoman Robin Kelly
Congressman David Rouzer
Congresswoman Kelly Morrison
Congressman Brad Finstad
Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Congressman Mike Levin
Congresswoman Andrea Salinas
Congresswoman Ilhan Omar
Congressman Jerry Nadler
Vice President JD Vance
Members of Triangle Trail LLC