

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/22/2021 4:22:39 PM

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Organization: National Park Service, North Country National Scenic Trail

Title: Superintendent

Comments: The Trail Seasonality Forest Plan Amendment Project:

The proposed Forest Plan Amendment has the potential to affect the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT), a Congressionally Designated National Scenic Trail extending approximately 4,600 miles across eight states, and federally administered by the National Park Service.

I have reviewed and considered the proposed amendment and concur that the proposed changes would provide greater effectiveness and flexibility in Forest Officials' ability to make timely and appropriate decisions for trail closures to better protect resources. Timely decision making based on emerging on-the-ground conditions, rather than a fixed calendar date, will likely better serve trail users and enhance trail conditions through the primary use season.

Because the NCT transcends Wayne National Forest boundaries and is intended to provide a year-round, continuous hiking opportunity throughout its extent, the proposed Forest Plan amendment must maintain the existing Forest Plan exceptions that exclude foot travel from any seasonal closures that are issued for trails designated as the route of the NCT. Emergency trail closures that may affect the NCT must remain independent of the proposed Forest Plan amendment and shall continue to be coordinated in collaboration with the NCT Superintendent and primary partner organizations responsible for the maintenance and stewardship of the NCT.

The National Park Service, North Country National Scenic Trail leadership and staff value our partnership with the Wayne National Forest and greatly appreciate your efforts to provide exceptional trails, maximize access to recreation opportunities, and assure sound management, stewardship, and protection of Forest resources. My staff and I welcome the opportunity to provide any additional information or assistance we may offer to assist in the development and implementation of this and all other Forest initiatives. Thank you very much,

Chris Loudenslager

Superintendent, North Country National Scenic Trail