



The Upper Peninsula *Environment*

Newsletter of the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition • October 1991

Old-growth ecosystems in Upper Great Lakes explored at conference

by Doug Welker

From August 13-15, Doug Cornett and I represented UPEC at the "Management of Old Growth Ecosystems" conference in Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin. The conference was sponsored by Ottawa National Forest, the Upper Great Lakes Biodiversity Committee, and Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute. It featured 2 days of sessions and a 1-day field trip to existing old-growth sites in the Sylvania Wilderness and to sites the Ottawa National Forest is attempting to manage for future old-growth conditions.

I came to the conference armed with a multitude of questions. I got many of those questions answered, but left with many new ones. I'll structure the rest of this article in a Q&A format.

What are old-growth ecosystems? Old-growth ecosystems are usually thought to be synonymous with old-growth forests, assuming one thinks of forests not just as trees but as trees plus all other components of forest ecosystems, including the rest of the flora, micro- and macrofauna, soil, water, etc. There is no universal definition of old-growth forests, and much controversy and frustration regarding old-growth forests centers around this fact. Some features common to classic old-growth forests (e.g., unlogged forests of the Pacific Northwest, and local unlogged examples, such as the hardwood/hemlock forests of Sylvania and the Porkies) are a wide variety of tree ages and size classes; a multilayered structure, consisting of a supercanopy (large white pines, etc.), canopy, midlayer, shrubs, and forbs; some very old trees; much standing and downed dead wood (snags and rotting logs); gap phase replacement (an ancient tree falls, and thousands of seedlings race sunward into the gap in the canopy, creating a thicket), and a relatively stable ecosystem.

In the Upper Midwest, what types of forests can be old-growth forests? Some forest types are non-controversial, especially northern hardwood, hemlock, and mixed hardwood/hemlock. Most people seem to feel that lowland conifers (spruce/fir and cedar) can also produce old-growth forests. More controversial are jack pine, red pine, tamarack, oak, alder, birch, and aspen. Birch and aspen, of course, are not climax species for any site, but some people feel that allowing a birch or aspen stand to die and for climax species to take their place, at least in some portion of the forest, may add an important old-growth element to the forest ecosystem.

Are old-growth forests only unlogged forests? Almost everyone would say "no," with qualifications. There are many places on the Ottawa, for example, where there are patches of old hemlocks and hardwoods, where the only trees to have been cut were the white pine, or perhaps some of the hardwoods. Other sites have some classic characteristics of old growth, but not others, but with proper management or no management, more pure old-growth conditions will eventually develop.

Why are old-growth forests important? Numerous reasons have been articulated, among them:

- increasing biological diversity
- preservation of wildlife dependent on such forests
- aesthetics
- recreation
- spiritual feelings people have while in them
- watershed protection
- improving soil characteristics
- providing high-quality sawtimber

How do old-growth forests enhance biological diversity? Before answering this question, let me make it clear that biological diversity does not equate to number of species. Genetic diversity, ecosystem diversity, etc., are equally important. Old-growth forests often harbor species prone to extinction (those with low population densities, large territories for home ranges, poor dispersal and colonizing activities, localized species, species of specialized habitats, some migratory species, and rare species). It is not only having old-

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ENVIRO CALENDAR

UPCOMING UPEC MEETINGS

- October: Tuesday the 8th at 7 pm ET, L'Anse Township Hall, downtown L'Anse.
- November: Sunday the 10th, 1pm ET, Ely Township Hall, West Ishpeming.
- December: Sunday the 8th, 1 pm ET, at 402 W. South Ave., Houghton (home of Board Member Marilyn Cooper). A cookie extravaganza! More details next issue.

OTHER EVENTS

- October 19-20: MEC Environmental Congress, Mystic Lake Camp, near the town of Lake (downstate). See story in "News & Notes," this issue.

growth forests that is important, but it is also important to have large enough contiguous acreages of such forests that significant areas of old growth undisturbed by the flora and fauna of adjacent forests and fields. This helps preserve genetic and ecosystem diversity as well as species diversity, since interior members of a species are less prone to genetic contamination from members of the same species more adapted to conditions in non-old-growth ecosystems nearby.

How much old-growth forest is necessary? How small a patch of old-growth is important from a wildlife and biodiversity standpoint? How can we best manage forests in the Upper Great Lakes for old-growth characteristics? To these related questions there is no obvious answer. The answer basically lies in looking at the forest as a whole. A large number of small old-growth patches may be aesthetically pleasing but biologically of little value, depending on their proximity to each other and to adjacent forest management practices. One general management policy which emerged from the conference would enhance old-growth ecosystems by buffering old growth with compatible forest management practices and by providing migration corridors among old-growth stands. In the ideal system, this would involve zoned management practices (think of a bullseye to help visualize this). In the center would be existing old-growth forest which may never have been logged. Surrounding that would be a ring of existing forest, probably having some old-growth characteristics, which will never again be logged. Surrounding that would be a ring of forest which will be selectively logged in a manner which will enhance old-growth characteristics. Next would be a ring of forest which will be selectively logged by conventional practices. Surrounding that would be other management practices (even-aged management, farms, etc.). Corridors of forest which would not be logged or be selectively logged for old-growth characteristics would connect these rings. Such a system might be practical in some areas but impractical elsewhere.

How is the Ottawa National Forest managing for old growth? The Ottawa's 1986 Land and Resource Management Plan spelled out certain broad objectives for old-growth management. Certain areas will be either left unlogged or actively managed for old-growth conditions. These include Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic River corridors, and three small Special Management Areas. On the rest of the Forest, where most acreage is managed for timber production (among other uses), management for old growth will be concentrated in areas managed as semiprimitive nonmotorized, semiprimitive motorized, and standard even-aged motorized. All in all, about 19% (189,000 acres) of the Ottawa will be managed for old growth. The exact figure is not available, but perhaps about half that acreage will not be logged, and about half will be actively managed for old growth by specified logging practices. Over half the old growth will be in upland hardwoods (sugar maple, yellow birch, hemlock) with the next largest percentage in lowland conifers (spruce, fir, tamarack, cedar). Significant old-growth upland conifer, lowland hardwood, and aspen-birch acreage are also planned.

In areas of active old-growth management through specified logging practices, certain percentages of super-canopy trees, main-layer (canopy) trees, snags (dead standing trees), culls (trees deemed of low quality for economic purposes), mid-story trees, shrubs, and forbs are called for. Longer than normal or variable cutting rotation schedules may also be prescribed.

To accomplish these objectives, the Ottawa is well into the process of designating old-growth candidate areas. Of necessity, they are involved in the "first pass" at this, because the Forestwide distribution of these areas, and not just their individual characteristics, is extremely important. Timber sales have taken place on some of these designated stands, a few of which we visited on the field trip. My reaction was generally favorable, though comments were expressed by myself and others about, among other things, whether monitoring procedures for old-growth conditions were adequate and about the long-term commitment to old growth on the sites. (A forest that looks like old growth and has enhanced habitat for some animal species which need old growth is not necessarily old-growth forest; it may take hundreds of years for all aspects of an old-growth ecosystem to develop.)

We heard several conflicting statements from representatives of the Forest Service as to the extent to which the Ottawa may rotate areas of the Forest into and out of the old-growth designation. If this is done, I feel it should only be considered for a specific areas of the Forest if the net effect is the Forestwide enhancement of old-growth ecosystems, not to facilitate timber cutting.

Representatives of the Ottawa admit that their old-growth management program is in its infancy, but I praise them for being in the forefront of old-growth management in the Upper Midwest. There is probably more potentially harvestable older forest on the Ottawa than on any other National Forest in the Upper Midwest. The Ottawa has demonstrated its intent to manage the Forest for old-growth attributes; the environmental and academic communities should be prepared to work with them to make sure that the job is done as well as possible.

U.P. NRC nominee draws fire; new DNR head named at last

Engler's controversial U.P. nominee to the Natural Resources Commission, David Holli of Ishpeming, was approved on September 17. Holli's nomination was sharply criticized by Democrats because he owns a logging business and holds numerous timber contracts with the DNR. During the confirmation hearings, Holli said this does not constitute a conflict of interest, that his company will still bid on DNR contracts, and that he will not disqualify himself from NRC decisions regarding timber sales. The vote to confirm Holli went along strict party lines, with the Republican majority on the committee affirming him.

Also in early September, Engler finally named a new DNR director. He is agency veteran Rollie Harmes, who moves up from being head of the DNR real estate division. Harmes was considered a dark horse by the political pundits and his appointment took Lansing by surprise.

Thank you!

UPEC wants to extend special thanks to Barbara Klungness for creating a 44x36" UPEC banner to be included in the Banner Project sponsored by Families for Environmental Awareness. Well done, Barbara!

**The Upper Peninsula
Environmental Coalition
P. O. Box 34
Houghton, Michigan 49931**

*dedicated to
preserving & maintaining
the unique environmental
quality of Upper Michigan*

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*UPEC is a member of the Alliance for a
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News & Notes

Welcome to CAR We are glad to have another new supporting organization in UPEC. Citizens Against the Road (CAR) is a group out of Grand Marais fighting the Park Service's plans to punch a paved road through Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. CAR is concerned about the effects such a road would have on the village of Grand Marais, which now can be reached via a single, dead-end stretch of paved highway, M-77 from Seney. CAR also believes that a Pictured Rocks road would be the first step in opening up to development the vast unpaved tract of Lake Superior shoreline running from Grand Marais to Whitefish Point. You can reach CAR at P.O. Box 11, Grand Marais 49839.

Amendment passes The UPEC constitutional amendment on limiting directors' liability passed overwhelmingly. Thank you to all who took time to vote on this.

We support UPPCO land sale We wrote a series of letters in early September to Michigan's congressional delegation asking them to support a \$5 million appropriation to buy over 30,000 acres of UPPCO-owned land in the Ontonagon River watershed. The land would become part of Ottawa National Forest. UPPCO's land is mostly along corridors of the East, West, Middle, South, and Cisco branches of the Ontonagon. Some 98 miles of river frontage is included. UPPCO announced its intention to sell the property last year. The Trust for Public Land is brokering the deal. The land in question is, of course, important ecologically, including 4 known bald eagle nesting territories, outstanding bear and wolf habitat, breeding areas for waterfowl, and prime fish habitat. It also has outstanding recreational potential for canoeing and whitewater kayaking. To date, Congress has recommended only \$3.2 million for the purchase—not enough to ensure that it takes place. If you want to see this property become public land, please drop a note asking Levin & Riegle to vote the full \$5 million. Also write to Reps. Dale Kildee, David Bonior, Robert Carr, and Bob Traxler. The address for Senators: U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510; for Representatives: U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

Beach swept Responding to Davis' idea of a day-long beach cleaning blitz, UPEC led a "beach sweep" of Stanton Township Park in Houghton County on September 21. All the trash we picked up was documented on a form and will become part of a database on Great Lakes pollution.

Enviro Congress slated The Michigan Environmental Council will be holding the 1st annual Environmental Congress in October. The purpose is to get activists together with others in the MEC network to coordinate action on the Council's agenda. Workshops will cover Air Quality, Air Toxics, and the Great Lakes; Forestry and Biodiversity; Solid Waste and Recycling; Toxics Use Reduction and the Great Lakes; Groundwater; and Combined Sewer Overflow and Funding for Environmental Programs. The Congress will be held at Mystic Lake Camp near the town of Lake (Clare County) October 19-20. For more info, contact MEC at 517-487-9539.

New copper mine eyed A Toronto company says it is planning to open a new copper mine near Gratiot Lake in Keweenaw County by the end of 1992. Great Lakes Minerals wants to go after chalcocite copper ore at the site. The company recently acquired a 100% interest in the mineral estate at five locations in Keweenaw County. The "543-S" site near Gratiot Lake is said to have proven, mineable reserves of 1.28 million tons grading 4.41% copper. The company's feasibility study says that the site could support a 500-ton-per-day mining operation, or 12.4 million tons per year, giving the mine an 8-year life span—though the potential for increasing reserves as mining progresses is considered "excellent." Great Lakes Minerals' preference is to truck the ore to Copper Range's smelter in White Pine, some 90 miles from the proposed mine site. Cheap haulage rates make this feasible, and the company would not have to build a new mill on site. Mining and milling costs are estimated at \$37-38 per ton. The company plans a stream of press releases in the coming months to boost the project. Needless to say, we will be formulating a strategy to deal with this project in the near future.

Little Presque Isle update Doug Cornett reported at the September meeting that the DNR has agreed to limit its timber cutting in the old-growth area near Little Presque Isle. The DNR will leave uncut a 30-acre parcel of second-growth that would have fragmented old-growth areas, and two of three harvests of second-growth on the edge of the old-growth area will be modified to leave characteristics

that encourage old growth. The campground dispute is now at an impasse; enviros want no campground built because of the increased traffic on beach, possible invasion by exotics, and uncontrolled fires. The DNR argues that they need a "presence" in the area and the campground will pay for that. Corbett, Don Snitgen, and Don Henson may go before the Natural Resources Commission in Lansing to discuss the issue.

Sylvania update UPEC's appeal has been filed, and the next move is to set up a meeting with Ottawa National Forest supervisor Dave Morton.

We endorse paving moratorium The board voted at the September meeting to endorse and join the Alliance for a Paving Moratorium, a group which calls for a national ban on new road and parking lot construction. Though this may sound like a pipe dream (no pun intended), the educational value of APM's work is considerable. Few human activities have such a pervasive impact on the environment as does road-building and automobile use. Large areas of the U.P. are distinguished by a lack of paved roads—one of the only places in the Midwest where this is so. APM is the first national road-fighting group; UPEC joins 25 other signatories in APM. The head of the group is Jan Lundberg—who formerly published the "Lundberg Letter," the leading oil industry newsletter! For more info—their newsletter is an eye-opener—write to APM, P.O. Box 8558, Fredericksburg, VA 22404. Also check out back issues of the Worldwatch Institute's annual book, *State of the World*. Several have good essays on the environmental and social impacts of the car.

Road stand modified In the wake of our discussions with Pictured Rocks personnel and CAR (see last month's *Environment*), UPEC passed a "sense of the board" resolution at the September meeting which modifies our stand on the proposed park road. It is the board's sense that the legal requirements for a "scenic shoreline drive" are already satisfied by the existing road through the Lakeshore. We will be enlisting the help of the University of Michigan Law School to interpret the Pictured Rocks enabling legislation and its legislative history—key components in determining just exactly what the "congressional intent" for the park was. The Park Service maintains that Congress intended that a new road be built as the price for creating the park. The board's resolution, in effect, challenges this interpretation.

Act to save wetlands! In August, Bush reneged on his '88 "no net loss" of wetlands promise by relaxing the official definition of wetlands. A bill pending before Congress, H.R. 1330, follows this lead by allowing development of wetlands even if they are federal wildlife refuges and cutting EPA out of the wetlands defense process. Three U.S. Representatives from our state, Guy VanderJagt, David Camp, and Bob Carr, are co-sponsors of this "wetlands destruction bill," as it has been dubbed by national enviros. Lurking behind this legislation is a coalition of big oil, big real estate, and big mining companies with the innocuous-sounding name "National Wetlands Coalition." They are lobbying hard in Congress to gut wetlands protection. A prompt letter to two key congressional chairs is needed to derail H.R. 1330 and two other similar bills, H.R. 404 and S. 1463. Please drop a note to Sen. Max Baucus and Rep. Robert Roe. (For congressional addresses, see p. 3 this issue.)

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☐ I belong to or represent an organization whose goals support UPEC's goals, and would like to get information on possible membership. Dues for organizations are \$15 annually.

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