Appendix E: Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

The President’s Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) defined “cumulative impact” in regulations implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA as follows: ‘Cumulative impact’ is the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or nonfederal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time. (40 CFR 1508.7)

The Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act procedures (36 CFR 220) also define reasonably foreseeable future actions at 36 CFR 220.3. “Those Federal or non-Federal activities not yet undertaken, for which there are existing decisions, funding, or identified proposals. Identified proposals for Forest Service actions are described in 220.4(a) (1). 36 CFR 220.4 (1): “The Forest Service has a goal and is actively preparing to make a decision on one or more alternative means of accomplishing that goal and the effects can be meaningfully evaluated (see 40 CFR 1508.23)…”

Members of the Mesabi Project interdisciplinary team met on January 13, 2016 and several other times during project development to create this summary of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. This appendix summarizes current knowledge of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within and adjacent (as appropriate) to the project area. Resource specialists used this information where applicable in their analyses to describe potential cumulative effects that may occur with the alternatives.

Federal Past, On-going, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions within Project Boundary – Federal Land

Completed management actions from vegetation projects have been accounted for in the existing condition of the Mesabi Project Area.

**Harvests:** Currently there are no timber sales operating in the project area and none planned besides those analyzed in this environmental assessment.

**Release and Plant/Seed:** The following activities are planned as part of the Virginia Project: 1,792 acres of tree release and 168 acres of planting and seeding.

**Fuel Reduction and Prescribed Burning:** The Mesabi Project Area is located within the St. Louis County community wildfire protection plan (CWPP). The project area is located within four wildland urban interface (WUI) areas out of the 14 WUIs in the county. The CWPP did not identify any fuel hazard reduction units on all ownerships within the project area.

**Wildfires:** Historically, fires occurred in the area with regularity, as evidenced by the frequency of pine types within the project area and the presence of fire scars and char throughout. From 1988 to 2013, there have been 202 fires, totaling 403 acres in the project area. Ten fires were caused by lightning, which totaled 22 acres. The rest of the fires were human caused. Burning debris caused the most fires (45); the largest being 28 acres. The last debris fire occurred in 2013. A railroad fire and an escape campfire were the largest fires in the project area. Both fires burned 40 acres each in 1991.
Recreation: In partnership with local volunteers, five miles of single-track mountain bike trail was constructed at the Lookout Mountain Trail in 2014 and an additional two miles in 2015 and 2016 for a total of seven miles. There are currently no trail projects planned or being constructed at the Lookout Mountain Trail other than the single-track trail mileage proposed with this project.

Special Use Authorizations: There are currently 13 existing temporary special use authorizations within the project area. Permitees include St. Louis County, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, KGM Contractors, and a private landowner. All permits are for land management activities on State, county, and private, with the exception of KGM, which is for storage of mineral material. Current activities on permits vary with some almost complete and others not started. There are currently no new requests in the project area.

There are currently 19 existing private special use permits to access private land, Arcelor Mittal Minorca Mine lands, or St. Louis County leases in the project area. Term dates on these permits vary. Access is by full size vehicles on all the permits except for one where the access is by ATV. Most of these permits are gated due to location near large populations and the issue of theft.

There are 18 easements in the project area. Fifteen are for private landowners; the others are for MN DNR and two for Great Scott Township roads (Sullivan & Williams).

There are numerous other special use permit not associated with linear right-of-ways. St. Louis County operates a transfer station off Highway 73. Great Scott Township operates a service building for the fire department. Arcelor Mittal Minorca Mine is issued two permits for a powerline and water transmission line as a connection between the mine and the mill ponds north of the mine.

There are four approved communication sites with the project area. Lookout Mountain Communication site has five towers with service buildings and one separate service building. The tower’s house AT&T Mobility, St. Louis County 911, Access Wireless, and other local business communication services. Laurentian Divide Communication Site has two towers with service buildings. These tower’s house the CN Railroad and Arrowhead EMS communications. Virginia Communication Site has one tower operated by Verizon Wireless. The Sand Lake Communication Site is the tower and service building for the Forest Service communications. It also houses Access Wireless equipment. Paul Bunyan has a permit for fiber optic that runs along Highway 53 from Cook to Virginia and to the Lookout Mountain Communication Site. Qwest and Lake County Power also have permits for telephone and power lines that cross federal lands.

All permits existing permits have been inspected in accordance with manual direction. No new requests have been received at this time from State and county forestry offices.

Land Exchanges:

School Trust Land Exchange: Land exchanges would not have the potential to contribute cumulative effects unless a change in land use after exchange results in physical impacts to resources. The pending School Trust land exchange would have limited and localized changes to physical resources.

St. Louis County land exchanges include:

Moose Lake Land Acquisition: USFS acquired 28 acres of private land on Moose Lake through the Outdoor Heritage Fund with Ducks Unlimited as a partner. Past land exchanges are
incorporated into effects analysis' by consideration of the present land ownership status and condition in the EA.

Northmet Land Exchange: The Hay Lake tract land is inside the Mesabi boundary and would be managed according to the forest plan if the Northmet land exchange occurs. No site-specific projects are reasonably foreseeable on the Hay Lake tract at this time. Change in land ownership does not represent a physical change to forest resources and would not contribute cumulative effects to the project.

NNIP: The Non-Native Invasive Plant Management Project EA (USDA 2006a) describes an integrated pest management approach for managing noxious weeds on National Forest System land and potential environmental effects. In 2014, 137 sites totaling 24 acres of non-native invasive plants were treated in the Mesabi Project Area. Most of these treatments occurred along easily accessible roadsides. There is a need for more treatments on OML 1 roads and old road corridors.

Gravel: There are currently 39 existing or potential pits in the Mesabi Project Area. The project proposes to approve the extraction of gravel from 26 existing gravel pits and to close and reclaim 12 pits. The remaining pit, Jammer Lake, is a “Preference Right” pit to Seppi Brothers Concrete Products. Seppi Brother’s has proposed to conduct mineral material exploration on approximately 360 acres of land around the current pit area (D-MN-1).

Travel Management: The Superior National Forest completed a Forest-wide Travel Management Project in November 2009, in coordination with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, St. Louis, Lake, and Cook Counties, 1854 Authority, and the Grand Portage Band. The project addressed off-highway vehicle (OHV) use and the use of unclassified roads. This analysis determined which roads and trails would be open for motorized use and which unclassified roads would be decommissioned or designated as trail or roads.

Table e-1 summarizes changes that occurred in the project area based on the Travel Management Project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Miles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Converted to ATV trail</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decommissioned</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to OHV</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to ATV/OHV</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to Snowmobile Trail to OHV</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Past, Ongoing, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions of State, County, and Private Lands within Project Boundary

State lands encompass approximately 17 percent of the project area. Based on the Department of Natural Resources forestry’s shapefiles, approximately 555 acres are planned for treatment. Approximately 14,494 acres have been treated in the past 15 years, with zero acres planned for 2016. The MN DNR has used herbicide on approximately 62 acres over the last three years. They do not plan on spraying additional acres in 2016.
St. Louis County encompasses approximately three percent of the project area. There are approximately 1,178 acres being considered for harvest. The county has completed 1,786 acres of harvest in the past 15 years. St. Louis County has completed 15.5 acres of herbicide treatment in the last three years and zero acres are planned for 2016.

Private land encompasses approximately 40 percent of the project area. Fourteen percent (13,565 acres) of private property is owned by the Potlach Corporation. Projecting the amount of harvest activity that may take place on private ownership is nearly impossible, and proposals for harvest activity land are not available. Therefore, there are no reasonably foreseeable future projects on private land to consider. Those harvests would add a minimal amount of acres to the young age class based on harvest activity from the recent past, and studies that have shown that timber production is a low priority for private forest landowners (Baughman and Updgraff 2001). A decision memo for the realignment of the Folsom Road has been approved and will be moving forward in 2016. The McNiven Road is a reroute of the road and was completed in 2013. In early 2016 an operating plan was received for the upgrade of the Birch Knob Road.

U.S. Steel – In 2012 Minntac proposed a 483-acre extension of its existing open pit mining facilities in Mountain Iron. The extension will extend mine life and taconite production to 2031. Taconite produced from the extension will continue to be processed at the existing Minntac facility at the current levels of production.

The Taconite State Trail has an existing master plan, approved by the Minnesota Legislature in 1980-81. The MN DNR started the process of revising the master plan in 2015. Several public meetings have been held and future public meetings are anticipated to solicit input about future trail uses and alignment for an updated master plan. Several miles of the Taconite State Trail are located on National Forest System lands within the project area. The Forest Service will continue to be an engaged partner with the State during their planning process to guide current and future use, as well as continued management of the trail.

**Management Activities outside Project Area Boundary**

**Forestwide Landscape Ecosystem Analyses**

Effects of the Superior National Forest vegetation management projects with specific proposed actions or decisions are included in the Forestwide landscape ecosystem (LE) analyses. These actions are reflected in this EAs LE tables for age class, species composition, management indicator habitats, and other analyses as described in the various resource sections. The following list of projects are those considered in current Forestwide analyses for the Mesabi Project. Some of these projects are in LEs that are NOT in the Mesabi Project Area; they are included in this list to be complete and as a Forestwide reference.