



FROM THE QUETICO SUPERIOR FOUNDATION SUMMER 2010



The Quetico Superior Foundation, established in 1946, encourages and supports the protection of the ecological, cultural and historical resources of the Quetico Superior region.

May the Great Spirit  
Send his choicest  
Gifts to you

May the Sun Father  
And the Moon Mother  
Shed their softest beams  
On you

And may the four Winds  
Of Heaven blow gently  
On you and on those  
Who share your hearts  
And Wigiwams

— An Ojibwa blessing located  
in the dining area at Hub's Place

#### Wilderness News

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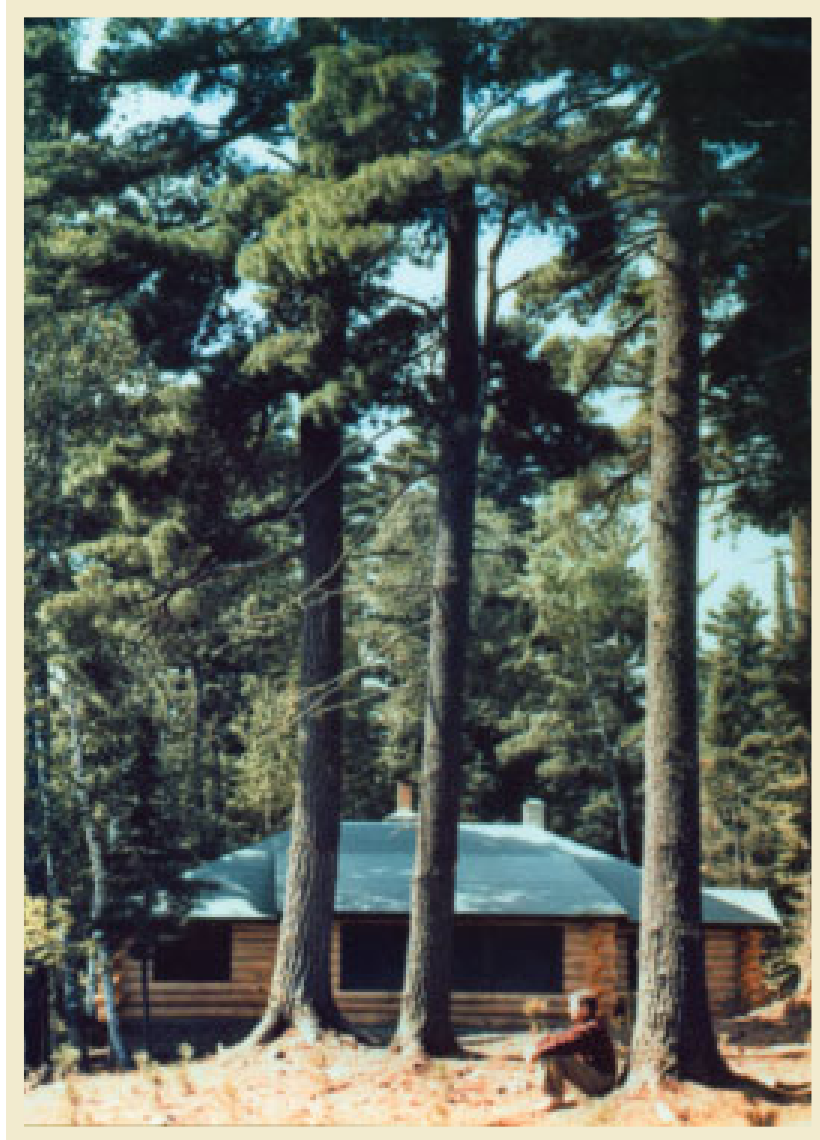
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Hub's Place on Basswood Lake, circa 1940. Historical photos courtesy Bill Hubachek.

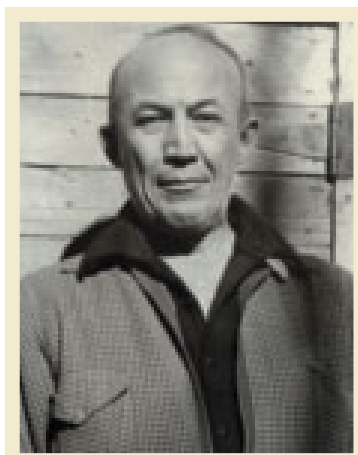
## HUB'S PLACE THE WILDERNESS RESEARCH CENTER

By Rob Kesselring

A crusty canoeist sat in front of his campfire and proclaimed: "Mines, lodges, lumber, pulp, vacation homes, roads, float planes, jet skis, hot tubs, drill baby drill, bah! It is easier to pull a bull moose through the grommet on a tarp than to find a wealthy man who truly supports keeping things wild up here." If the old camper knew the history of Quetico-Superior region, he would not have made that remark.

The landscape of northeast Minnesota would look different today if not for the efforts of a Harvard educated, Chicago lawyer by the name of Frank Hubachek. Born in 1894 to parents of means and influence, Hubachek spent his boyhood holidays in northern Minnesota and learned at a young age the need to experience nature in unspoiled, unfenced settings. It may be tempting to assume that rich people don't

get their hands dirty, that Hubachek's support was purely financial or legal and that the real firebrands of the wilderness preservation effort were the likes of Ernest Oberholtzer and Sigurd Olson, but you would be wrong. Hubachek was right in the thick of it, an outspoken advocate, a fighter, even when threatened with arson and violence to his family, even when the opposition pressured Hubachek's business clients to shun him and even when the success of his efforts would mean giving up his beloved camp complex on Basswood Lake. He was a man of integrity, energy, generosity, humility, and foresight. And, in fact, with his creation of the Wilderness Research Center and funds from its ongoing endowment, Hubachek's positive impact on the Quetico-Superior region continues to this day.



Frank Hubachek, circa 1940.

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At left: Frank Hubachek, 1971. Photo by Bruce Littlejohn. Above: Hub's Place on Fall Lake 2009. Photo by Tim Eaton.

*“There is a deep satisfaction in planting the seeds to nourish another generation.”*

– Frank Hubachek

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To understand the passion of Hubachek you have to imagine a man who interrupted his university studies to enlist in the French infantry and fight the Germans in World War I. After the Americans entered the war he volunteered to become one of the first pilots of the U.S. Navy's twin-engine flying boats. His courage was shared by his sister, Mary Reynolds, who moved to Paris after her husband died in the war and became an independent woman at the center of the Surrealist movement. Later, when Nazi Germany occupied Paris, Reynolds remained in the city, actively supporting the French Resistance until she was discovered. Reynolds made her escape by hiking across the Pyrenees just an eyeblink ahead of the Gestapo. The pugilistic, stand tough, attitude of the Hubacheks was just what the wilderness cause needed to fight the shortsighted interest of industrialists and developers typified by Edward Backus.

Hubachek's courage, blended with his legal knowledge and financial resources, made him and his law partner, Charlie Kelly, a powerful force in the formation of the Quetico-Superior Council in 1925 which led to the passage of the Shipstead-Newton-Nolan Act of 1930; it was the real beginning of a special level of protection for the area we call the BWCAW today. Hubachek's involvement in the preservation of the Quetico-Superior wilderness continued throughout his life.

Hubachek was an avid canoeist, hunter and outdoorsman frequently traveling the wilderness of northern Minnesota by canoe and snowshoe sometimes accompanied by an Ojibwa friend and guide. On a fishing trip in 1936 Hubachek was alarmed by the news that a lumber company was planning to clear-cut one of the last stands of old-growth timber on the shores of Basswood Lake. Hubachek immediately paid top dollar and bought the tract of land, which was to become the site of his lodge and the Wilderness Research Center. Hubachek once said, “There is a deep satisfaction in planting the seeds to nourish another generation.” That could be seen as a metaphor to his efforts to help set aside and protect the wilderness but the quote could also be taken literally. Hubachek and his crew planted over 500,000 trees, mostly red pine, on the shores and in the vicinity of Basswood Lake. Canoeists who enjoy some of these towering trees today, those that were spared from the epic blowdown, often mistake them for “virgin” growth. Politically Hubachek persevered, working to pass bills to restrict air travel into the wilderness and to eliminate inholdings – including his own property! By the early 1970's, Hubachek had donated over 2,700 acres of land to the Forest Service making him, at that time, the largest private individual land donor ever. As Frank Hubachek aged, his son Bill and daughter Midge continued their father's wilderness mission. They have both been active in conservation initiatives and taken a half-century of annual Quetico-BWCAW canoe trips. They too have been generous donors on both sides of the international border.

The origin of the Wilderness Research Center began shortly after Hubachek acquired property on Basswood Lake. His interest in reforestation, his enthusiasm for science and his generous hospitality attracted university professors to visit. Hubachek had hired a crew of Finns to build log cabins, a mess hall and a sauna. He created a marvelous retreat far from the cities and the madding crowds. At this time, although still remote from the highway network, there were more than a dozen commercial lodges on Basswood Lake and several private cabins, double-decker houseboats and outpost camps. Hubachek's place was elegantly rustic and although it was a perfect jumping off point for wilderness excursions it was also a splendid destination. What started as a “back porch” informal forums by visiting scientists and Hubachek's acquaintances crystallized in 1948 into a bona fide research center. First called the Quetico-Superior Wilderness Research Center and later the Wilderness Forest Research Center, it was often referred to as “Hub's Place”.

Facilities were made available to foresters, researchers, educators and students from all over the world. Hubachek hired Cliff Ahlgren, a then recent University of Minnesota grad and a partner on more than one wilderness trip to oversee the Center. In 1953 Ahlgren married Isabel Fulton a visiting botany instructor from Wellesley. They worked at “Hub's Place” for over thirty years. Two long-term research efforts distinguish the early years of the Center - an effort to develop a white pine hybrid resistant to the pine blister rust that had devastated white pine populations and early studies that revealed the surprising benefits of fire to the ecology of the forest. The location “Hub's Place”, in the heart of the wilderness region, made it a particularly compelling site for research.

Beginning in the sixties, as part of the restoration of the boundary lakes wilderness, first Hubachek's private lodge and cabins, and finally the entire research center was moved to a 360-acre parcel of land on Fall Lake abutting the BWCAW. Many of the buildings were pulled by trucks, in winter, down the 4-mile portage. The larger log structures were taken apart and reassembled log by log at the new site.

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2010 University of Minnesota research project and laboratory building at Fall Lake research center. Photos courtesy of Rob Kesselring.

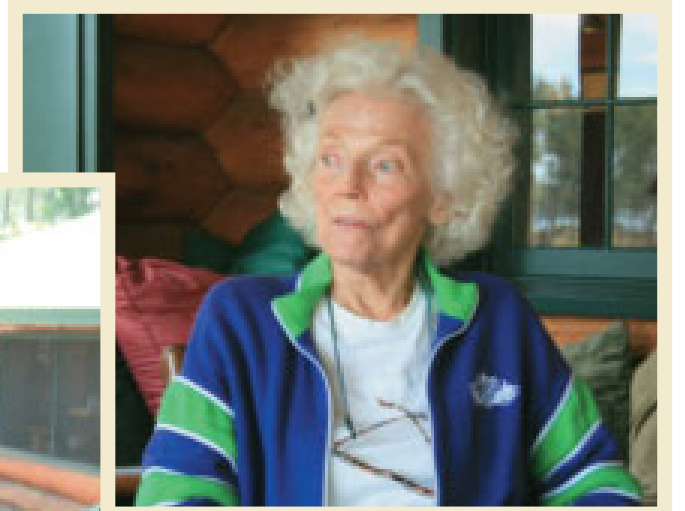


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Frank Hubachek died in 1986. In 1992 Peter Reich, who had been awarded an endowed chair at the University of Minnesota, that a year earlier had been established in Frank Hubachek's honor, spearheaded a new era of research at the Center. Reich and his colleagues continued the research Ahlgren began, especially the impact of fire, fire suppression and logging on forest ecology. In recent years, a focus of the research has been climate change and how warming of soil temperatures will impact the forest of the border lakes region.

Because of the sensitive nature of many of the ongoing experiments, the research center is not open to the public. But that too, is important. The Center adds another 360 acres of unmolested wilderness to the area and acts as a buffer between the BWCAW and the more congested and disturbed Superior National Forest and private land holdings. In that light it is impossible not to mention Bo and Bunny Wiersema, caretakers at the Center for over twenty years. Their tireless efforts to maintain both the natural and human history of the center are laudable. Respectful of the wishes of his father, and in a gradual process over the last decade, Bill Hubachek and his sister Midge, have relinquished control and assets of the Center to the University of Minnesota. Honoring Frank Hubachek's desire that the center not include his name, the 360 acres and 27 buildings on Fall Lake is officially called the University of Minnesota Wilderness Research Center. University branding is beginning to eclipse quaint signage and the artifacts of the Hubachek era are disappearing.

*We should never forget that the protected space we now call the Quetico-Superior region came to pass because of the tenacious and collaborative efforts of a spectrum of individuals: rich, poor, local, out-of-state, Canadian, American and aboriginal. People that although coming from different places and perspectives shared a passion to protect and restore a special slice of planet Earth. As work at the Wilderness Research Center continues to address challenges and changes in the wilderness ecosystem, the legacy of Frank Hubachek transcends science and reminds us that natural history and human history can weave together into a tight braid. Wisdom from that type of powerful synergy will be crucial to the future of the Quetico-Superior wilderness.*



Frank Hubachek's son and daughter; at left: Bill Hubachek, at right: Midge. Photos by Tim Eaton.

## From the Editor

### Wilderness News— Survey Results

The 2010 Spring issue of *Wilderness News* carried with it a questionnaire reply card surveying our readers with six questions pertaining to interests, age demographics, delivery systems, and desire to support the publication. We are grateful to the near 7% of our readers who answered the survey. If however, you did not receive a survey card, or misplaced yours, there is still time to respond. Your response matters to us and will be tallied into the final count.

The survey can be found online at [www.queticosuperior.org/blog/survey](http://www.queticosuperior.org/blog/survey).

Our primary goals in preparing the survey were to better understand our readers, by age, and by interest. And, in the world of increasing print and mailing costs, to survey our reader's willingness to financially support a continued print edition. With completion of the tallied survey, we plan to use your responses to help guide improved content, frequency, and delivery of both the print edition of *Wilderness News* and the news found online at [www.wildernessnews.org](http://www.wildernessnews.org)

#### **Here are a few of the preliminary findings from replies mailed back:**

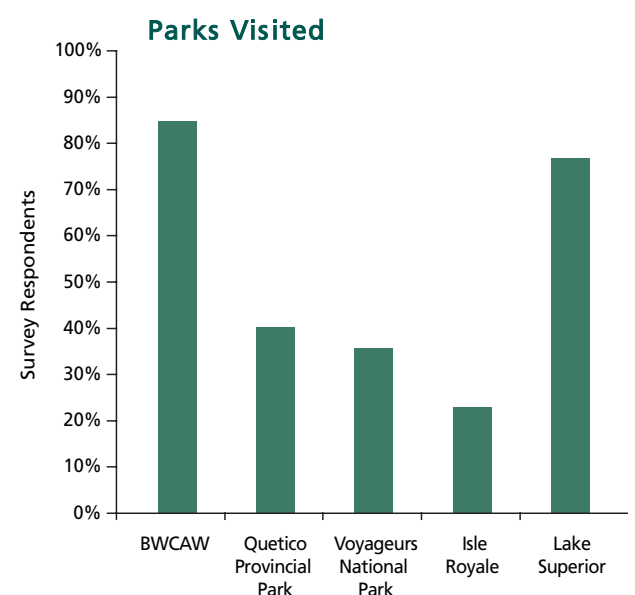
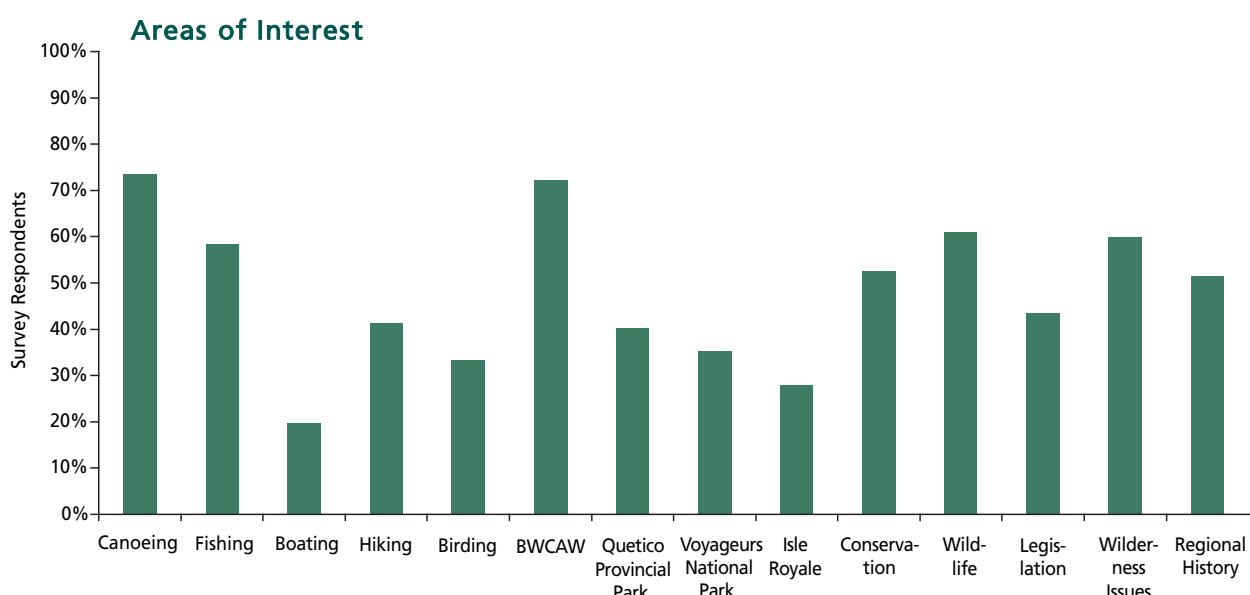
**Over half** of our readers are age 65 years or older with fewer than 2% under the age of 40. Age is an important factor to us as we continue our plans to deliver both a 'print edition' and the 'online' versions of the News.

**14%** responded by saying they'd be willing to switch from mail delivery to receiving the newsletter by email or by going online to read it.

**85%** of those who responded would like to continue receiving *Wilderness News* by mail with more than **60%** willing to support the publication with a small voluntary donation. Thank you to everyone who returned his or her survey with a donation.

In the coming issues we will report on changes. If you did not answer the survey by mail, there is still time to reply.

**Use the online submission form found at:** [www.queticosuperior.org/blog/survey](http://www.queticosuperior.org/blog/survey)



# The Changing Forest of the Quetico-Superior Region

By Rob Kesselring

**Last year we celebrated the 100th anniversary of Quetico Park and Superior National Forest. In reality, this anniversary commemorated the 100-year fight to protect this patch of earth. Throughout the twentieth century the assault of logging, mining, dams, roads, mechanized tourism and resort development all threatened, and, in some cases, wounded the area. With the special protection afforded the BWCA Wilderness and Quetico Park today, most of those threats have faded. But a new shadow looms over Quetico-Superior in the 21st century.**

Esteemed scientist Dr. Lee Frelich, spoke to a gathering of the Heart of the Continent Partnership in April 2010. He presented compelling evidence that, as a direct result of climate change, the BWCAW and Quetico Provincial Park will soon transform from a southern boreal forest biome to savanna. Two years ago Alissa Johnson interviewed Frelich for the *Wilderness News*. At that time his predictions were tentative. The intervening two years of research and data have solidified his opinions. Frelich believes the only questions are: What the savanna will look like. How many decades will it take? And, how “messy” will the transition be? Already there is scientific proof that a biological shift is taking place.

Frelich’s prediction is hard to accept, not so much because of the science but because of the emotion. People love the Quetico-Superior region as it is. They value its apparent timelessness. In the presence of giant white pines, portaging through a thicket of black spruce or paddling from lake to lake, we like to believe that this land is as it always was and will be, to eternity. It is that kind of thinking that resulted in a policy of fire suppression that, even without climate change, undermined the health of the boreal forest. Emotionally, it was just too hard to accept the awful power of a wildfire as a positive and natural force. It will be equally difficult to accept the coming savannification. But one cold summer does not a boreal forest make. Even so, lovers of the Quetico-Superior region, as it has been, have a lifetime of memories to feed the battle in their heads. When nostalgia wins out over fact, we look back instead of forward.

**How can Frelich be so sure?** Quetico-Superior is close to the prairie/forest border and this border is not permanent. More subtle climate changes in the past have resulted major biome shifts. This time, change is coming like a freight train, so fast that the thin strip of hardwood forest that separates the prairie from the boreal forest will likely be skipped or amalgamated into the predominate savanna.



Prairie Border Savanna. Photo by Layne Kennedy

Other factors are accelerating the rate of change. Earthworms that were introduced as bait for fishing have invaded Quetico-Superior landscape. Where they have established themselves they have eliminated the insulating forest duff layer raising soil temperatures and drying and stressing trees. Native and exotic bugs that would have been kept in check by 40 below zero cold snaps are instead attacking boreal trees. Whitetail deer are moving northward, increasing their numbers, and disrupting boreal succession.

**What about mitigating factors?** Increased CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere has made it easier for trees to survive on less water but this is so minor it hardly bears reporting. Frelich dismisses any collaborative international effort to curb carbon emissions as too little, too late, and too unlikely to arrest climate change in time to stop savannification.

**So what will a Quetico-Superior savanna look like?** Frelich hopes it will be an oak savanna: native grasslands interspersed with Burr Oak, and other interesting species such as the Kentucky Coffee tree. Perhaps, in microclimates caused by topography or in extraordinary soils, remnant stands of red or white pine might survive and groves of mixed hardwoods may thrive. Moose and spruce will be gone. Nevertheless, the thought of a two million acre savanna wilderness is intriguing. Imagine the combination of prairie grasslands, scattered oaks and the granite outcroppings with the glacial lakes of the border country. The savanna biome in its natural state is exquisitely beautiful and rare. Quetico and the BWCAW could become even more unique than they are today. And it is no longer a choice. The coming climate will be similar to northern Iowa’s climate of today. Pretending such a climate will continue to support a boreal forest or the animals that depend on a boreal forest is as wrongheaded as believing intensive fire suppression was a good idea last century. The scary news is that a future emergence of the graceful Burr Oak savanna woven into the border lakes is not guaranteed.

Frelich stated that even under ideal conditions transitions from forests to savannas are long and “messy”. In a changing climate existing forests are quick to blow down and burn, but it takes hundreds of years for new species to move in and fully establish themselves. This might be especially true in the Quetico-Superior region. Intensive agriculture has supplanted the Oak Savanna in almost all of southern Minnesota. As the climate zones shift north there may not be sufficient existing seed sources to replace the fast retreating boreal forests. Unfortunately, people wiped out the last of the Woolly Mammoths long ago and nature will not wait for the slow march of gravity-dispersed seeds. Frelich fears that instead of native species, savannification in the Quetico-Superior could be dominated by opportunistic exotics such as Buckthorn and European thistles. A campsite choked with waist deep thistle is a future scenario not nearly so appealing as a wayside in a native Burr Oak savanna.

Nature may need a helping hand. Currently the Wilderness Act prohibits the level of intervention necessary to facilitate a timely transition to a natural American savanna. Being proactive and modifying the regulations may be a better use of energy than nostalgically refusing to accept change. To be stewards of Quetico-Superior today will take a different approach than last century’s successful efforts to set aside, protect and preserve.

Frelich was not optimistic about international cooperation to reduce carbon emissions and other efforts to curb global warming, he does believe local action can help slow savannification and increase the chance of native plant recruitment. One suggestion is to stop using live bait for fishing. Although live bait has been banned in Quetico it is still legal in Superior National Forest. Current research proves this is an unconscionable choice. Owners of cabins in the region should not bring in potted plants, burlap balled nursery trees, firewood or any product that might be transporting bugs or worms. It takes a long time for a worm to wiggle from Chicago to Quetico-Superior but if they can hitch a ride they are in.

One last thing, we need to begin to reframe the way we think. Next time you plan to do a little canoeing in the BWCA Wilderness or Quetico Park – instead of calling it a canoe trip, call it a ‘canoeing safari’. □

# North Country National Scenic Trail to Cross the BWCAW

By Matthew Davis

## The National Park Service and North Country Trail Association (NCTA) are trying to obtain passage of legislation in Congress that would enact the “Arrowhead Re-route”— a proposal to route the nation’s longest hiking trail through the BWCA Wilderness.

This legislation, when passed, would bring the 4,600-mile long North Country National Scenic Trail to the Arrowhead region of Minnesota by linking the Superior Hiking Trail with the existing Border Route and Kekekabic Trails which cross through the BWCA Wilderness. The NCTA’s Arrowhead Chapter will build new sections of trail from the western end of the Kekekabic Trail near Ely to the existing North Country Trail segment within the Chippewa National Forest near Remer.

Identified as the preferred alternative in the National Park Service 2004 Northeastern Minnesota Route and Environmental Assessment, the re-route is supported by many Minnesota outdoors entities including the Superior Hiking Trail Association, Border Route Trail Association, Kekekabic Trail Club, Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Superior and Chippewa National Forests, as well as many local government units.

The Border Route Trail stretches 65 miles from Cook County Rd. 12 (the Gunflint Trail) to Otter Lake Road north of Hovland. Started in the 1970’s, the trail was completely finished by volunteers of the Minnesota Rovers Outing Club in 1993. The trail includes 35 miles within the

BWCA Wilderness and closely follows the US-Canadian border. Generally located on top of the ridges, the trail affords great views. As the *Border Route Trail: a Trail Guide and Map* published by the Minnesota Rovers says...

**“Towering cliffs. Pristine lakes. Waterfalls. The quavering call of the loon. Mud. These and more await you on the Border Route Trail. Its remoteness in the boreal forest lets you see an ungainly bull moose and realize it’s not ugly—but majestic. Lets you be as high as a raven often flies. Or lets you see the snoot of a black bear and not panic.”**

The Kekekabic Trail is a 38-mile long wilderness hiking trail that runs from Snowbank Lake Road near Ely to the Gunflint Trail near Round Lake. Originating as a forest fire fighting access trail from the 1930’s, the trail received its name from its original destination, Kekekabic Lake, now located along the central part of the trail. Most of the eastern half was cleared in 1949 by Boy Scouts while the eastern 2.5 miles follow the remains of a wagon road of a failed 1880’s iron mine. After falling into a state of disrepair from the lack of use and maintenance, the Kekekabic Trail Club re-opened the trail in 1990 and has maintained it since, working in close partnership with the Superior National Forest. Here is how one of the 1949 Boy Scouts described the ‘Kek’ as quoted in the Kekekabic Trail Club’s *Hiker’s BWCA Wilderness Companion: Kekekabic Trail Guide...*

“The Kekekabic Trail is one of the toughest, meanest rabbit tracks in North America. The trail struggles its way through swamps, around

cliffs, up the sides of bluffs, and across rocky ridges. It is choked with nightmarish patches of clinging brush. It is blocked with tangles of wind-falls and standing timber... It is the kind of trail that would break the heart of a man who didn’t have what it takes to go into the wilderness and try and ‘smooth it.’”

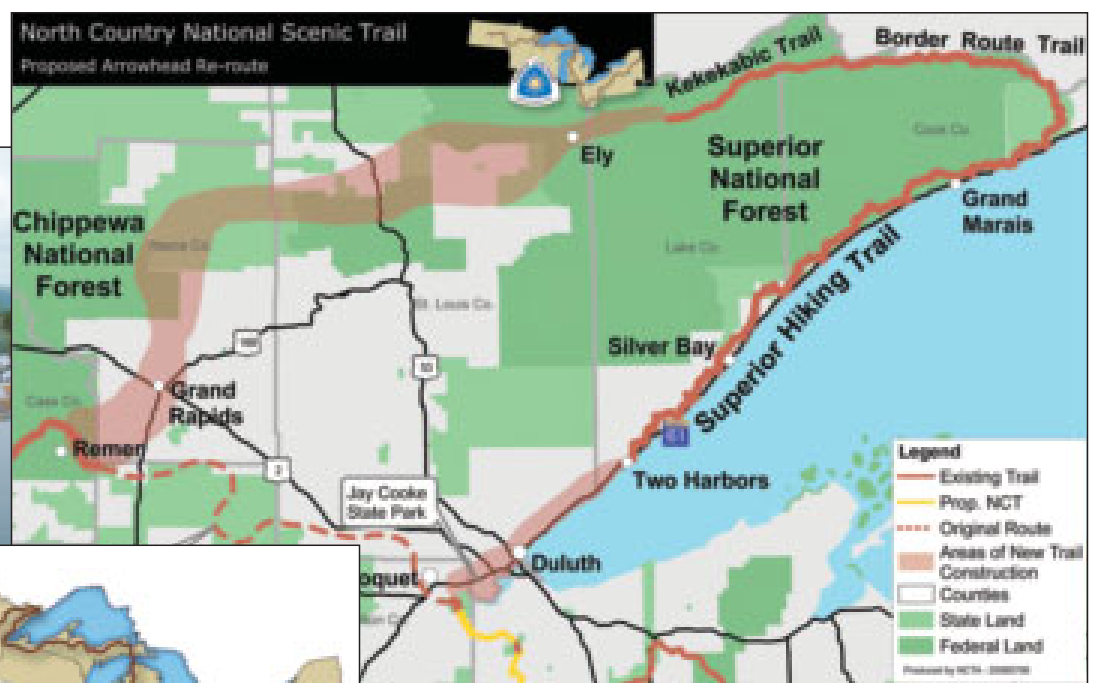
Since 99% of the BWCAW’s use is by canoe campers, hiking either of these two trails offers a fantastic way to experience the wilderness “via the back door.” The opportunity is yours to get above the landscape and see its beauty from the raven’s perspective. Of course, hiking these two trails is not for everyone. Hikers should be experienced backpackers and need to be prepared to deal with the true wilderness conditions found there.

Both the Border Route Trail Association and Kekekabic Trail Club organize trail clearing trips each spring to remove blowdowns and cut brush and both organizations are always looking for more volunteers. The Order of the Arrow Wilderness Voyage program of the Boy Scout’s Ely Canoe Base, Superior National Forest, and Conservation Corps of Minnesota/Iowa also help out annually with trail maintenance.

More information on the North Country Trail and the Arrowhead Re-route can be found online at [www.northcountrytrail.org/arrowhead.php](http://www.northcountrytrail.org/arrowhead.php) while the NCTA-Arrowhead Chapter’s online home is at [www.meetup.com/Arrowhead-NCT-hikers/](http://www.meetup.com/Arrowhead-NCT-hikers/). Specific information on the Border Route and Kekekabic Trails can be found at [www.borderroutetrail.org](http://www.borderroutetrail.org) and [www.kek.org](http://www.kek.org).



This photo of the Border Route Trail, by Nick Graham, epitomizes hiking in the BWCAW.



Above: map showing the Arrowhead Re-route  
At left: map showing the 7-state North Country Trail route

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## Mining Update

By Charlie Mahler

**Efforts to develop mines in the geologically rich area just south of the Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness are slowly moving forward as industry proponents highlight the jobs and needed resources the enterprises would provide and as environmental advocates express concern over water quality and the natural character of the Quetico-Superior region.**

PolyMet Mining Company's NorthMet Project, the most advanced of three proposed mining operations in the region, is having its Draft Environmental Impact Statement rewritten after the federal Environmental Protection Agency, in its official comments on the document, deemed the original Draft EIS, written by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Environmentally Inadequate-Unsatisfactory."

The Corps of Engineers, Minnesota DNR, and U.S. Forest Service are now jointly preparing a revised document, developing and incorporating additional project modifications, alternatives, and mitigation measures designed to minimize environmental impacts, considering the EPA's and other public comments and recommendations, and addressing a proposed land exchange between PolyMet and the U.S. Forest Service.

The NorthMet Project proposes an open pit mine on what is now Superior National Forest land

near Babbitt, MN. The ore from the mine would be milled at the former LTV Steel plant in Hoyt Lakes, MN. Sulfide-bearing waste rock, which can produce acid water drainage will be stored above-ground adjacent to the pits encased with linings and covers designed to prevent metals from leeching into the environment.

Media reports expect the new Draft EIS to take up to a year to complete.

As the PolyMet permitting process soldiers on, observers are eagerly watching the progress of Duluth Metals plans to develop a rich deposit of copper and nickel half a mile beneath the surface along Spruce Road near the South Kawishiwi River east of Ely, MN. An estimated \$1 trillion worth of copper, nickel, and precious metals have recently been discovered there.

Duluth Metals, a Toronto-based company, recently struck a \$130 million partnership with Chilean mining giant Antofagasta to develop the discovery. According to media reports, a deep-shaft mine would bore beneath the surface to extract the valuable ore. Duluth Metals expects its project to be ready to initiate the permitting process in three years. Environmental advocates are particularly concerned with mining in the South Kawishiwi area, since surface waters there flow across the BWCAW.

Mining proponents assert that the projects will bring high-paying jobs to the region and provide a domestic source for metals that are vital to modern life. Environmental advocates are concerned about the impacts the mines could have on water quality, since the sulfide rock in which the metals are deposited produce acid when it comes in contact with water and oxygen.

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Wilderness News Online is now on Facebook—follow our fan page and receive instant updates on the issues that affect the Quetico-Superior region.

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### What's New Online

- Cell Tower Dispute in the Boundary Waters Region
- Invasive Spiny Waterfleas Discovered Near Boundary Waters
- Gypsy Moth Caterpillar Found in Minnesota
- Forest Service May Demolish Historic Buildings
- VNPA Celebrates 45th Anniversary

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