



QUETICO-SUPERIOR COUNTRY



FROM THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION • FALL 1973

Blazing a New BWCA Management Trail

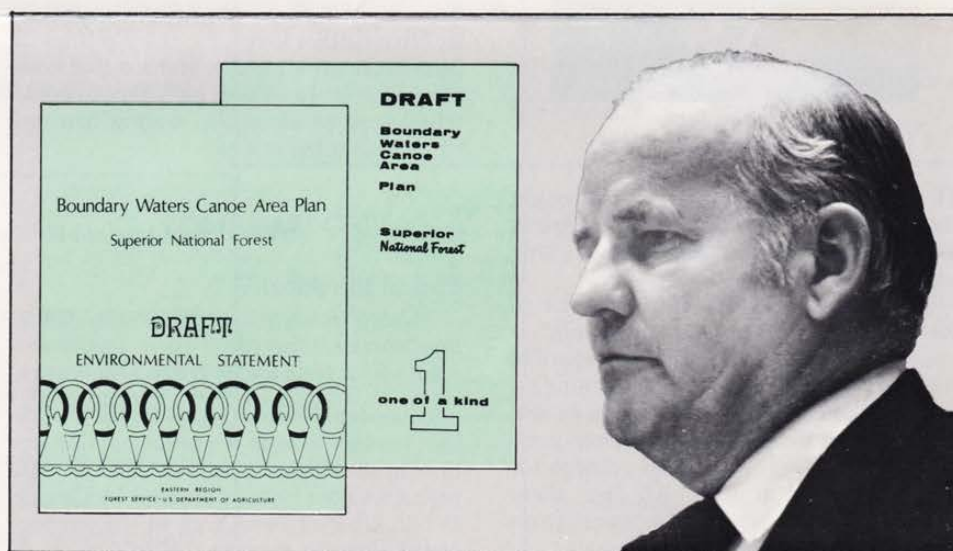
Preserve and Perpetuate

Less logging, no mining, less powerful motorboats, no snowmobiles, less freedom for visitors, more for timber wolves. These are some of the ways the U.S. Forest Service proposes in the next few years to "preserve and perpetuate the primitive character" of Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA), one of the largest remaining bits of wilderness in the nation.

Over the past 50 years man has marshalled an impressive parade of plans to protect the BWCA against its most relentless foe — man himself. The latest plan, a "draft" of 52 pages with six maps, was quietly released last August. It was accompanied by a 47-page environmental statement, as required by the National Council of Environmental Quality. This statement estimates that the proposed policies would have 237 favorable effects on the environment and 110 temporary or permanent adverse effects. The two documents, weighing 25½ ounces, are expected to be officially adopted next spring after everybody has had a chance to take shots at them.

Preview. Because of the way the plan was put together major changes are not anticipated. While hearings are commonly held by those making BWCA management recommendations — as in the case of the Selke committee in 1964 — this is the first time actual regulations have been exposed to a searching public preview. More than 500 individuals have made known their opinions through interviews, mailings and workshop discussions. The plan also ran the gamut of some 200 federal, state and local agencies, key congressmen and legislators and more than 100 industrial, business, recreation and conservation groups.

To complicate matters the Forest Service cannot treat the BWCA as merely a family affair. It must also keep an eye on the Park Service soon to open the new Voyageurs National Park at BWCA's



THE PLAN AND ITS SPONSOR, FOREST SUPERVISOR ANDERSEN
Traffic is getting thicker all the time.

western gate. This event, leading to an anticipated influx of tourists, "will require continued inter-agency cooperation." Also required is coordination with Quetico Provincial Park which abuts the BWCA along the Canadian border, and with Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources which controls much of the area's surface waters, fish and wildlife.

Paradox. Explaining the need for a new management plan, Harold E. Andersen, supervisor of Superior National Forest, points out that the BWCA is the most heavily used member of the nation's wilderness system, and that the traffic is getting thicker all the time. Last year, for example, 163,120 people flocked to the area — an increase of 15 percent over 1971 and double the number in 1961. The one aim of these visitors is recreation, but the paradoxical question that plagues the Forest Service is: How much recreational use can the BWCA provide while still assuring a high level of quality for the environment and for the visitor's experience?

As the naturalist, Aldo Leopold, once put it, "All conservation of wilderness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish."

Outlook for the BWCA according to Andersen: "Use pressures, both in terms of intensity and variety, will continue to increase in future years. Because of this, management problems will become more complex from a human and environmental standpoint." Regional Forester Jay H. Cravens of Milwaukee has another explanation of why the BWCA is so hard to manage. Speaking to Duluth's Kiwanis Club he said: "Basically we're dealing with a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, but existing laws, regulations and past practices permit activities that are normally prohibited in other national forest wilderness units."

For highlights of the plan and an examination of two controversial subjects — logging and mining — see following pages.

LOGGING

Business as Usual?

If the Forest Service concludes that logging destroys the primitive character of the BWCA it must act to halt such logging.

Thus ruled Federal Judge Miles W. Lord when earlier this year he ordered a moratorium on most timber cutting in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA).



JUDGE LORD

He ruled against logging.

His action, stemming from a suit brought by the Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG), reduced the logging area from 3,000 to 600 acres.

Now that the Forest Service has written its new plan, what does it conclude? It concludes that logging is "incompatible with primitive experience opportunities" and that BWCA visitors don't like to see, hear or smell such operations. (Both present and proposed regulations provide for buffer strips of at least 400 feet along waterways to screen loggers from canoeists.)

Little Change. Despite unfavorable environmental factors the new plan calls for little change in logging laws already laid down by Orville Freeman when he was Secretary of Agriculture in 1965. His regulations, based on recommendations of the Selke Committee, assured a substantial enlargement of BWCA's "no-cut" zone to 612,000 acres by 1976. Because of earlier survey errors, the present proposal adjusts this addition to 618,000 acres. But this still leaves 412,000 acres where timber may be commercially harvested in the BWCA.

The plan also schedules for 1974 a reclassification of the so-called Portal Zone (where timber cutting has been permitted) as "Unregulated Commercial Forest Land" — a step which removes timber volumes there from the forest's allowable harvest. "The net effect," explains the Forest Service, "is that harvesting of sawlogs and pulpwood may continue, but will not exceed the sustained yield capacity of the commercial land in that zone." At the same time the no-cut Interior Zone would be reclassified as "Productive Reserved Forest Land."

Protests. As for the region's economy, the Forest Service says "the adverse effects are expected to be minimal." But that's not what timber men say. In the words of the industry's spokesman, Russell Allen of Duluth, "The glaring omission of the plan is the lack of any reference to the economic impact on the local economy. The plan is a sellout to absentee, infrequent users of the area." On the other hand, the Sierra Club objects to all commercial or even non-commercial timber cutting anywhere in the BWCA. Charles K. Dayton, legislative counsel for the club's Minnesota chapter, issued a 23-page protest in which it is asserted that the Wilderness Act has been "subverted to the incorrect philosophy of the Forest Service." Another environmental group, the Nature Conservancy, has also registered a protest.

In any case the plan hardly fulfills Judge Lord's prediction that there is a "strong possibility and in fact a probability" that further logging in the BWCA will be entirely prohibited or restricted to non-virgin forest. Lord says he will not decide whether to continue the logging ban until the final plan is filed.

MINING

End of the Affair?

Mineral development by its very definition cannot take place in a wilderness area; else it is no longer a wilderness area.

So saying, Federal Judge Philip Neville last January issued a permanent injunction against mining in the BWCA. His ruling resulted from an attempt by George W. St. Clair of New York to tap copper-nickel deposits in some 150,000 acres of inherited mineral rights. He was opposed in Duluth's U.S. district court by the Izaak Walton League (WILDERNESS NEWS, Winter 1970). Unless appealed, the landmark decision appears to write finis to "The St. Clair Affair."

The new BWCA management plan goes along with the judge. It pledges to "prohibit insofar as legally possible all commercial mineral exploration and extraction." Since this actually represents a continuation of present policy the Forest Service offers no environmental evaluation of mining as such, but does reserve the right to dig up sand and gravel for patching trails and portages.

Irreversible. Citing the 1964 Wilderness Act, Judge Neville said: "The BWCA was established by Congress to secure for future generations the beauty, pristine quality and primitiveness of one of the few remaining [wilderness] areas of this country. Any use of the surface for the exploration or extraction of minerals becomes unreasonable because the surface is no longer wilderness and is irreversibly and irretrievably destroyed for generations to come."

Mining outside the borders of the BWCA is another story. Six years ago International Nickel Co. (INCO) started probing for copper-nickel near Ely. It is still casting a hopeful eye in Minnesota's direction. After an inspection this fall of the company's operations at Shebandowas Lake, about 35 miles north of the border, Gov. Wendell Anderson and Rep. John A. Blatnik voiced optimism about mining prospects here. Said Blatnik: "I feel that

MINNEAPOLIS TRIBUNE



JUDGE NEVILLE

He ruled against mining.

INCO is very definitely interested in developing copper-nickel mining in north-eastern Minnesota, similar to that now under way in Ontario."

HENRY T. McKNIGHT, director and past president of the Quetico-Superior Foundation, died at 59 last December 30. A resolution by the Foundation's board said in part: "He was an active, energetic leader in conservation matters. His ideas and accomplishments in the education activities of the Foundation, particularly in its newsletter, WILDERNESS NEWS, and in its public institutes were very significant." The Minneapolis Tribune commented editorially that Mr. McKnight "worked untiringly for environmental and conservation legislation during his career as a state senator — a career that was crowned by his sponsorship of the landmark Omnibus Natural Resources and Recreation Act of 1963."

Wilderness News

Published by Quetico-Superior Foundation
2400 First National Bank Building
Minneapolis, Minn. 55402

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HIGHLIGHTS OF PROPOSED BWCA PLAN

LOGGING

In 1975: add 150,000 acres to Interior (no-cut) Zone.

Continue logging in Portal Zone.

Continue to prohibit logging in Interior Zone.

In 1974: reclassify Portal Zone as "Unregulated Commercial Forest Land" and Interior Zone as "Productive Reserved Forest Land."

MINING

Prohibit exploration and extraction of minerals.

Permit removal of sand and gravel for trails and portages.

SNOWMOBILES

In 1980: abolish snowmobiles except for special access to Canada.

Until 1980: continue to permit snowmobiles on 21 routes.

MOTORBOATS

In 1975: limit size of motors to 10 horsepower.

Continue to permit motorized watercraft on 19 routes.

VISITORS

In 1975: regulate visits and distribute visitors more widely.

Limit groups to 10.

CAMPING

Close campsites when necessary to rehabilitate them.

Limit occupancy of most campsites to 14 days.

Provide latrines and firegrates.

PORTAGES

Regulate mechanized portages more strictly.

Discontinue some mechanical portages.

ROADS

Permit construction of temporary roads in Portal Zone for logging, fire-fighting, disease control.

WILDLIFE, FISH

Continue ban on taking of timber wolves.

Help provide permanent timber wolf sanctuary of 2,350 sq. miles.

Continue to permit hunting, trapping, fishing for legal game.

Discourage taking unprotected wildlife and fish.

Stock and control faunal species to improve composition of aquatic communities.

VEGETATION

Permit administrative cutting of certain vegetation, including trees.

Maintain variety of vegetation communities by cutting, fire control, seeding, planting.

FIRE

Permit prescribed burning under some conditions.

Continue wildfire prevention program.

SOIL

Reduce deterioration by use of natural barriers such as trees, rocks, logs.

WATER

Reduce pollution by building sanitary facilities.

Restore shorelines to control erosion.

Maintain control structures to retain historical water levels.

RESEARCH

Require authorization for research.

Prohibit removal of artifacts without permit.

Identify, preserve and protect important historical/archeological sites.

CUTTINGS

Duluth newspapers do not always see eye to eye with their neighbor, the U. S. Forest Service. But in the case of the new BWCA plan, an editor told WILDERNESS NEWS, they are going along with the whole package. These excerpts are from an editorial in the Sunday News-Tribune of August 19.

Unwelcome but Necessary

Proposed regulations for the BWCA should be viewed as unwelcome but necessary.

Predictably the plan has been criticized by the timber industry. On behalf of the Forest Service, however, it should be noted that this is hardly an arbitrary, quick decision. The regulations have been under study for 18 months.

Also, the BWCA represents only about one-third of the entire 3-million acre Superior National Forest.

It would seem that the more attractive the BWCA is to visitors, the more it will serve as a strong economic stimulus for the area.

Granted, canoeists don't drop bundles of money the way people do in Las Vegas and Miami Beach, but they do need supplies, and must use restaurant and hotel-motel accommodations as they move into and out of the area. And their numbers keep rising each year. If the BWCA were allowed to deteriorate and cease to be the kind of wilderness that attracts these people, that too could hurt the area's economy.

The BWCA would seem to have potential for being an even greater economic stimulus if somehow more use of the area could be encouraged in winter. Perhaps snowmobile restrictions will keep some people out. But winter cross-country skiing trips might be developed to complement the summer canoe trips, so that there is more balanced use of the BWCA throughout the year.

In an even larger perspective, these kinds of restrictions will probably become more and more a way of life. We must begin by protecting wilderness areas from being destroyed to a point of no return. Then the restrictions may have to be moved closer and closer to settled areas. There will be more restrictions on use of cars and fuel, on disposal of solid waste and sewage.

Preserving the wilderness is merely one step in trying to preserve the entire environment we need to live.



ANATOMY OF A WILDERNESS

The Forest Service's proposed management plan begins with a description of the BWCA, setting forth a number of physical facts which should be of special interest to our readers. For example:

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area is the second largest unit of the National Wilderness Preservation System*, and the nation's only canoe wilderness.

It is located in the counties of Cook, Lake and St. Louis in northern Minnesota, and occupies 1,030,000 acres of the Superior National Forest.

Water makes up approximately 175,000 acres, or 18 percent, of the area, and allows for 1,200 miles of canoe routes.

The BWCA is 104 miles long and averages 16 miles from south to north. Its northern border follows the waters and portages of the international boundary for 145 miles.

The BWCA is rocky and broken as compared with the smoother topography common to most of the lake states. Elevations range from a low of 1,119 feet at Crane Lake to a high point of 2,248 feet near Winchell Lake.

The topography of the BWCA reflects its history of repeated glaciations, the last of which ended some 11,000 years ago.

Annual precipitation varies from 25 to 31 inches, of which about 60

percent falls during the period between April 1 and November 1. The rest occurs as snow averaging about 65 inches annually and covering the ground for about 153 days.

The annual growing season ranges from 100 to 123 days. The last killing frost can be expected between May 22 and June 5. Killing frost in the fall usually occurs between September 10 and 27. Temperature extremes range from -45 to +103 degrees.

Unique feature of the BWCA is the great abundance of lakes of all shapes and sizes, most of which are connected by meandering or cascading streams.

More than 1,000 lakes larger than 10 acres dot the area. Largest lake is Lac La Croix—25 miles long; deepest is Saganaga—240 feet.

Many of the larger lakes are so broken by peninsulas and islands that each in effect forms a group of smaller lakes. Distribution is relatively uniform, and even where there are no connecting navigable streams, portages allow convenient travel between the lakes. Thus the water pattern is ideal for canoe travel.

The adjacent Quetico Provincial Park in Ontario is also primarily a canoe area. The two areas provide opportunities for canoe travel in natural, primitive surroundings unequalled elsewhere in North America.

*Largest is the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness Area in Idaho and Montana (1,270,585 acres).