



FROM THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION • FALL 1992

A PORTAGE RUNS THROUGH IT

In a decision which was viewed with considerable surprise by some, the Federal Appeals Court ruled in early November that three portages in the BWCA must be closed to motorized vehicles.

A panel of the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the alternative of non-motorized transportation called portage wheels is feasible. Consequently, continued use of motorized transportation across Prairie Portage, Four Mile Portage and Trout Lake Portage violates the intent of the BWCA Wilderness Act of 1978.

The suit was brought by Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness and six other environmental groups. The attorney representing the groups, Brian O'Neill, performed brilliantly in winning the decision. The decision was viewed with shock by some commercial outfitters in Ely, Minnesota.

William Defenbaugh, attorney for the city of Ely said there is a high probability that supporters of the motorized portages will ask the U.S. Supreme Court for a review of the case. A district court had earlier ruled in favor of motorized portages. Some observers doubted that the Supreme Court would take the case on appeal.

The decision rested on the definition of the word "feasible" as to whether the word means "physically possible" rather than "practicable" or "likely." The court majority, Judges John Gibson and Theodore McMillan, concluded that feasible means "capable of being done."



QUETICO DECISION POSTPONED

The spring issue of "Wilderness News" featured proposed Quetico Park changes by the Lac La Croix First Nation. The recommendations were divided into a short term and long term plan. The proposal by the Lac La Croix First Nation would open up a new series of lakes to motorboat use of up to 10 horsepower. On a rotating basis the land would relinquish current motorized access to lakes in the northwestern corner of the park.

On May 29 the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources, Bud Wildman, announced

that he had postponed the decision on an amendment to the Quetico plan as proposed. In announcing the decision, Mr. Wildman advised that he had extended the use of 10 horsepower motorboats for the Lac La Croix First Nation on Cirrus, Jean, and Conk Lakes for an additional 6 months.

The Ontario Provincial Parks Council received more than 600 letters on the Lac La Croix First Nation proposed amendment during the public comment which ended in mid-March, 1992. The ultimate decision whether additional lakes in the Quetico Park

are opened will be critical to the wilderness preservation of the park. Letters to the Minister of Natural Resources, Bud Wildman, are encouraged until such time a final decision on the amendment is reached. The address is:

Mr. Bud Wildman
Ontario Minister of Natural Resources
6323 Whitney Block, Queen's Park
99 Wellsley Street West
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1W3
Canada

FOREST SERVICE PROPOSAL ON REVISED BWCA MANAGEMENT PLAN

In mid-November the U.S. Forest Service proposed new restrictions intended to protect the BWCA from overuse. The plan seeks to redistribute visitor groups during peak times which are mid-July to mid-August and on holiday weekends.

The U.S. Forest Service currently allows up to 382 groups each day. That number would be reduced to 276 groups. This total is still above the current average of 203 groups entering the BWCA each day. The plan calls also for reducing the maximum number of visitors allowed in each group from 10 to 6. The proposal has a slight reduction in a number of entry points and a reduction in the number of towboats to pull canoes across lakes.

The public involvement in planning in the proposed changes began in November, 1990 when people were invited to attend open house meetings held in a number of cities throughout Minnesota. In addition, news releases solicited written comments. More than 1,000 pages were received from 620 individuals and organizations. In the summer of 1992 more than 50 representatives from organizations and government agencies participated in citizens task force meetings to define issues and suggest alternatives. A copy of the plan is available from the Forest Supervisor, Superior National Forest, P.O. Box 338, Duluth, MN 55801. Written comments should be addressed to Forest Supervisor.

The U.S. Forest Service said that the plan would reduce soil erosion, crowding and harmful effects at campsites. About 200,000 people visited the BWCA in 1992, up from about 184,000 in 1991.

There will be a 45 day period for public comment on the proposal. The plan will not be implemented before May, 1994. David Filius, Superior National Forest Supervisor, said "This plan is our attempt to provide outstanding opportunities for solitude, freedom, challenge and risk, which will enhance primitive recreation experiences for visitors. It will also help us meet the objectives of the 1964 Wilderness Act, which requires that we manage the wilderness to protect the land and its natural systems." The Forest Service briefing paper follows:

U.S. FOREST SERVICE BRIEFING PAPER

Background

The Superior National Forest has completed a Draft Environment Impact Statement and preferred alternative (wilderness management plan and implementation schedule) which will define direction for management of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). This was undertaken as part of the normal planning process to implement the 1986 Forest Plan,



but the analysis is also responsive to a settlement agreement for an appeal of the Forest Plan. The negotiated agreement required the Forest to redetermine entry point quotas, project future use and improve methods for estimating use, along with several lesser issues. An amendment to the Forest Plan will be the outcome of this analysis, and will establish direction for the foreseeable future for the BWCAW.

Public involvement began in November 1990. The public was invited to attend open house meetings, and new releases solicited written comments concerning issues, concerns and opportunities. More than 1,100 pages of written comments from 620 individuals and organizations were received. During the next year, there were several meetings with interested parties to discuss the issue of crowding in the BWCAW and the social analysis that was being conducted by the University of Minnesota. This past spring and summer, more than 50 representatives from organizations and government agencies participated in a series of task force meetings to better define the issues, suggest alternative ways to resolve the issues, discuss the effects of these alternatives, and define mitigation measures for the effects. National, regional, and local groups were represented at the meetings.

Key Issues

Entry Point Quotas — The preferred alternative calls for a reduction in daily entry quotas of 382 per day to 276 per day during the summer use season. Although this is a reduction in quotas, it is still well above the current use of 203 per day. It will mean fewer permits available for high use entry points during popular holidays and vacation weeks. The reduction and redirecting of use to other entry points will mean that present crowding and off-site camping should be eliminated.

Party Size — Party size (people in a single party) is reduced from ten to six, providing

for a more appropriate wilderness experience and solitude for BWCAW visitors, and less impact on the resource at campsites and portages. Research indicates that large parties have more of a negative impact on other wilderness visitors than the total number of encounters per day. Party size is also the most significant factor in campsite deterioration. The present medium party size is four persons. Research indicates that 15% to 25% of all parties are larger than six persons.

Motor Quotas — Motor quotas in the preferred alternative are reduced at approximately the same level as all overnight quotas. The reduction in day-use motor quotas will be mitigated for some entry points by removing commercial towboat use from this quota. Towboats currently account for approximately 25% of all day-use motor quotas.

Administrative Issues:

- **Outfitter/Guide Permits:** We will conform to National policy by placing all guides under permit. Presently, only overnight guiding is included.

- **Permit and Reservation System in General:** Several changes to simplify the system and protect the resource, but reduces the flexibility for users.

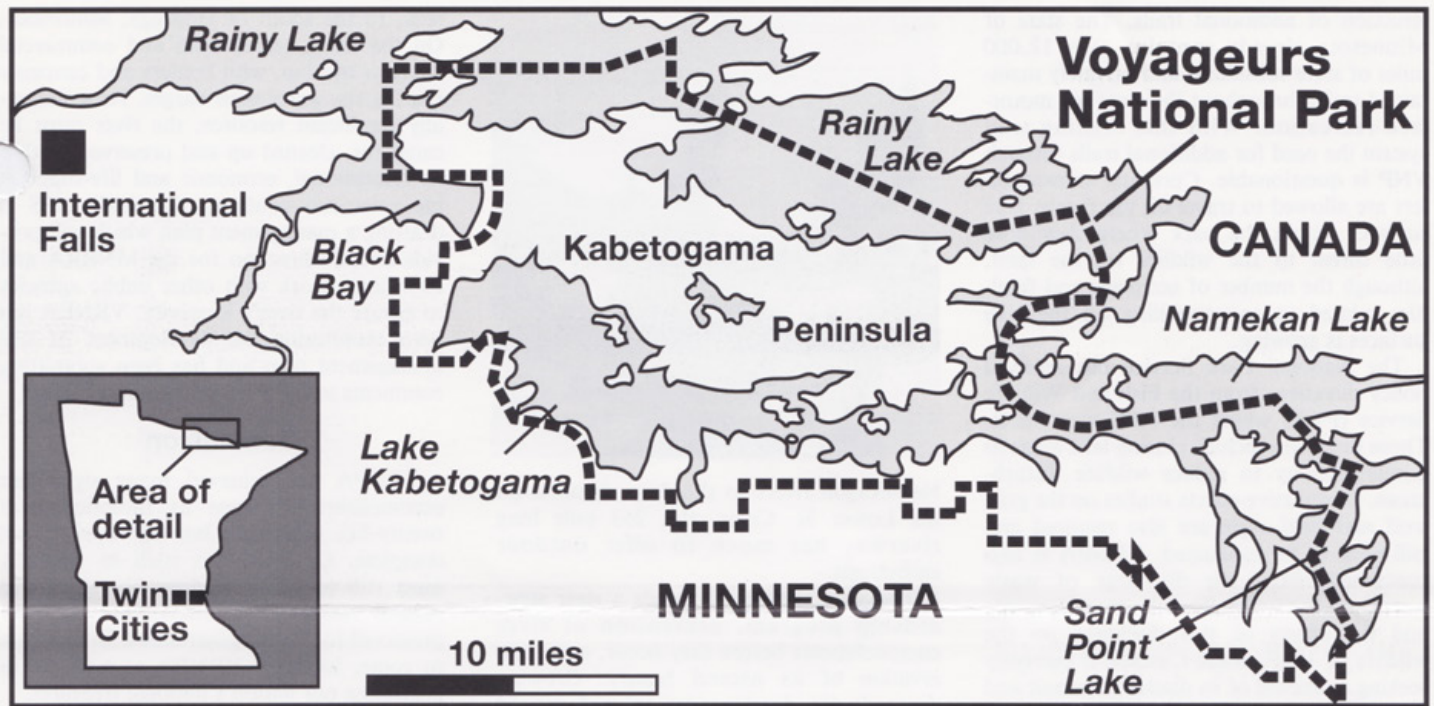
- **Towboats:** Will be allowed, but limited and regulated by special use permit.

- **Tent camps:** Will be allowed, but regulated by special use permit.

- **Ski Trail Grooming:** Those trails currently under permit will continue to be groomed by motorized/mechanized equipment as authorized in the BWCAW Act of 1978 (PL 95-495).

Summary

The public will have 45 days to comment on the draft before a final decision is made by the Forest Supervisor. Although some decisions will take effect immediately following the decision notice, many will not be implemented until 1994 and 1995 to allow time for visitors to adjust.



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Star Tribune map

VOYAGEURS REGION NATIONAL PARK ASSOCIATION

History of Voyageurs National Park

In the 18th century, Voyageurs National Park (VNP) was the site for fur trading as the Voyageurs paddled their canoes through this area in search of furs. Since the time of the Voyageur others have come to tap the natural wealth which the area offers: gold, timber, and fish. As Minnesota's only national park, VNP stands as a symbol of all the natural beauty and wealth which Minnesota has to offer this country. In 1971 Congress recognized the place in history this area occupies by establishing Voyageurs National Park. The National Park Service (NPS) pledged that its principal objective in the new park would be to restore the woodland scene to approximate the Voyageur era, and Congress ordered the NPS to study VNP for potential additions to the national wilderness preservation system.

Currently VNP consists of approximately 219,128 acres of which 85,506 are the surface waters of more than 30 lakes within the park. VNP is a water-based park with few access roads, thus making the water the lifeblood of the park. Although the primary landmass within the park, Kabetogama Peninsula, was heavily logged from 1900 until 1971, the area is returning to its natural state. Wildlife which had been in decline is making a comeback. VNP has been designated as an area of "critical habitat" for the gray wolf, a species listed as threatened in Minnesota and endangered in all other states in the lower 48. The park also supports a population of eagles, also a threatened species. VNP is still a developing park, however. Land acquisition is not complete, park

management plans are still pending and certain species, like the bald eagle, are still struggling.

Creation of Voyageurs Region National Park Association

Voyageurs Region National Park Association (VRNPA) has been instrumental in the success of VNP since its creation. In 1965 the Voyageurs National Park Association (VNPA) was formed for the purpose of establishing VNP. In 1971 this goal was realized when Congress authorized the creation of VNP. The organization's focus was expanded to include the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (StCNSR) in 1987 and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area in 1989, and the name of the organization was changed to Voyageurs Region National Park Association (VRNPA). Since the creation of VNP, VRNPA has assisted NPS in land acquisition and supportive services to the park, such as the construction and maintenance of trails and walkways.



Voyageurs National Park Issues

Regarding park management, VRNPA has been supportive of conserving the park's natural resources. In 1984 VRNPA won a lawsuit to keep 1,000 acres of the park's Black Bay shoreline free from trapping, which reinforced the park's commitment to wildlife preservation. VRNPA worked to have a 32 mile, 2 lane snowmobile trail eliminated from the center of Kabetogama Peninsula, and most recently, won a lawsuit which forced NPS to meet its Congressionally mandated duty to study VNP as a potential wilderness area. VRNPA also regularly researches and submits comments on NPS plans for studies and management of the park.

Voyageurs National Park is faced with numerous issues which require broad-based public assistance. Currently the bald eagle population of VNP has been subject to low reproduction rates. In 1989 a park eaglet was found to contain the highest levels of PCB's in all of North America. The exact source of this contamination has not been found and still poses a threat to not only the park's eagle population, but also to VNP's other wildlife. Other issues include illegal hunting taking place within the park and landowners clear cutting their property to coerce the government into buying them out. Visitation to the park needs to be diversified from the current fishing and snowmobiling base by emphasizing more low-impact and resource-conserving opportunities within VNP.

The motorized recreation industry has been pushing for expansion of motorized activity within the park through the con-

struction of additional trails. The state of Minnesota already contains over 12,000 miles of state subsidized and privately maintained trails throughout the state for motorized recreation. With this existing trail system the need for additional trails through VNP is questionable. Currently snowmobilers are allowed to travel on the frozen lake surfaces within the park where they pose little threat to the wildlife on the land, although the number of accidents and fatalities related to snowmobiling on the lake surfaces is growing.

The National Park Service has received policy directives from the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) which the NPS must meet. Those directives include closing lake areas to human activity to reduce wildlife disturbances. Cumulative effects studies on the gray wolf and bald eagle are also required and still need to be conducted. VRNPA is also concerned about the discharge of waste water into the Rainy River by Boise-Cascade and the effects of this discharge on the wildlife of VNP. Boise Cascade is currently seeking a renewal of its discharge permit and VRNPA has submitted comments to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency regarding this renewal.

In the winter of 1991-92 VRNPA worked with the NPS and a pro-motorized organization to attempt a negotiated settlement to the issue of how to balance the management of VNP's wilderness areas and provide the opportunity for motorized recreation. In January, 1992, a settlement was drafted, but was scuttled by people unwilling to accept a compromise.

St. Croix and Mississippi River Issues

The St. Croix River was one of the first rivers to be included in the national Wild and Scenic Rivers System and is unique because of its proximity to the Twin Cities and its wilderness-like attributes. From the swift rapids on the Upper St. Croix and



Namekagon rivers to the deep channels on the Lower St. Croix, this 252 mile long riverway has much to offer outdoor enthusiasts.

The St. Croix greatly needs a river stewardship program, prevention of river encroachments before they occur, and preservation of its natural beauty. Growing demands for development on and around the river are posing threats to the natural beauty of the St. Croix. High visitor use and increasing boat traffic pose erosion problems along the shore and safety concerns on the water. Transportation officials from Minnesota and Wisconsin are proposing the construction of a four-lane highway bridge on undeveloped river bluffs overlooking the river. VRNPA would like to take a more active role in monitoring StCNSR issues, but due to budget restraints, VRNPA has only been able to react to these pressures as they arise.

In November, 1988, Congress added the Mississippi River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) to the National Park System. This system consists of more than 350 parks representing important examples of America's natural and cultural heritage. The MNRRA includes 72 miles of the Mississippi and adjacent lands, from Dayton, Minne-

sota, to the south of Hastings, Minnesota. On the river, recreational and commercial interests overlap, with boaters and canoeists sharing the water with barges. As a nationally significant resource, the river must be cared for, cleaned up and preserved so that its recreational, economic and life-supporting roles can continue. Currently NPS is drafting a management plan which will provide overall direction for the MNRRA and coordinate work with other public agencies to ensure the river's longevity. VRNPA has been monitoring the development of this management plan and has been submitting comments to NPS regarding a final plan.

Conclusion

VRNPA has achieved many significant accomplishments since its inception over twenty-five years ago, but our work is not complete. Organizations such as VRNPA must still maintain a close watch on our natural resources to ensure that they are preserved for future generations. In the years to come, look for VRNPA as a leader in protecting our nation's national treasures.

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