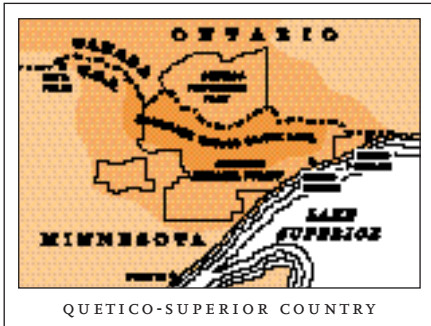


Wilderness News

FROM THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION FALL 2001



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

“This is the most beautiful lake country on the continent. We can afford to cherish and protect it. In the end, we turn to nature in a frenzied, chaotic world—there to find silence, oneness, wholeness...spiritual release.”

— Sigurd F. Olson



Wilderness News

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Directors

Jonathan S. Bishop	Walter E. Pratt
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Prescribed Burns Begin in and Near BWCA

By Diane Rose, Wilderness News Contributor

Stunning blue skies and calm, summerlike days prevailed across Minnesota in late September, creating ideal conditions to begin a series of planned burns designed to reduce fuel supplies that could feed uncontrollable Superior National Forest wildfires in areas affected by the July 4, 1999 blowdown.

“Conditions were perfect,” said Donna Hart, information assistant for the U.S. Forest Service’s Gunflint Ranger District office. Hart said that all went well as burning began on September 27 and 28 on several relatively small tracts.

On those days, 15 acres were burned near Mayhew Lake, approximately 30 miles north of Grand Marais, and 109 acres were burned in several small sections near Iron and Mash lakes. Those

areas were not within the BWCA, nor were they top priority on the burn list for this fall. On Sept. 28th, crews completed a burn of the high-priority, 192-acre Skipper Lake tract (40 miles north of Grand Marais and immediately west of Poplar Lake, including 60 acres within the BWCA). Also on Friday, September 28, Quetico Provincial Park officials conducted a 2,000-acre burn in the North Bay area of Basswood Lake. On September 30, another 300 acres of BWCA territory was burned along the Brule River.

However, wind and rain during the first half of October put further burns on hold. On October 15, Forest Service officials called a halt to prescribed burning until at least next spring. Hart said the decision was based on wet conditions at the time and the fact that each burn requires at least three full days without rain, and no rain predicted.

“The burns we did complete this fall went very well, and we burned a lot of brush piles – about 3,200 acres worth – that came from material cleared from private property,” Hart said. “We had teams from Montana here working with us and everyone used the old Top of the Trail resort buildings for housing.”

A total of 1,000 acres underwent prescribed burns this fall, 360 of which were within the BWCA. Plans called for burning more than 4,000 BWCA acres this year, and all areas not completed are now on hold until 2002. These include top-priority sections totaling 5,200 acres in the Magnetic Lake and Kekekabic Lake areas, as well as 300 acres near Dogleg Lake.

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Blind Ash Bay in Voyageurs National Park

Voyageurs Management Plan Completed

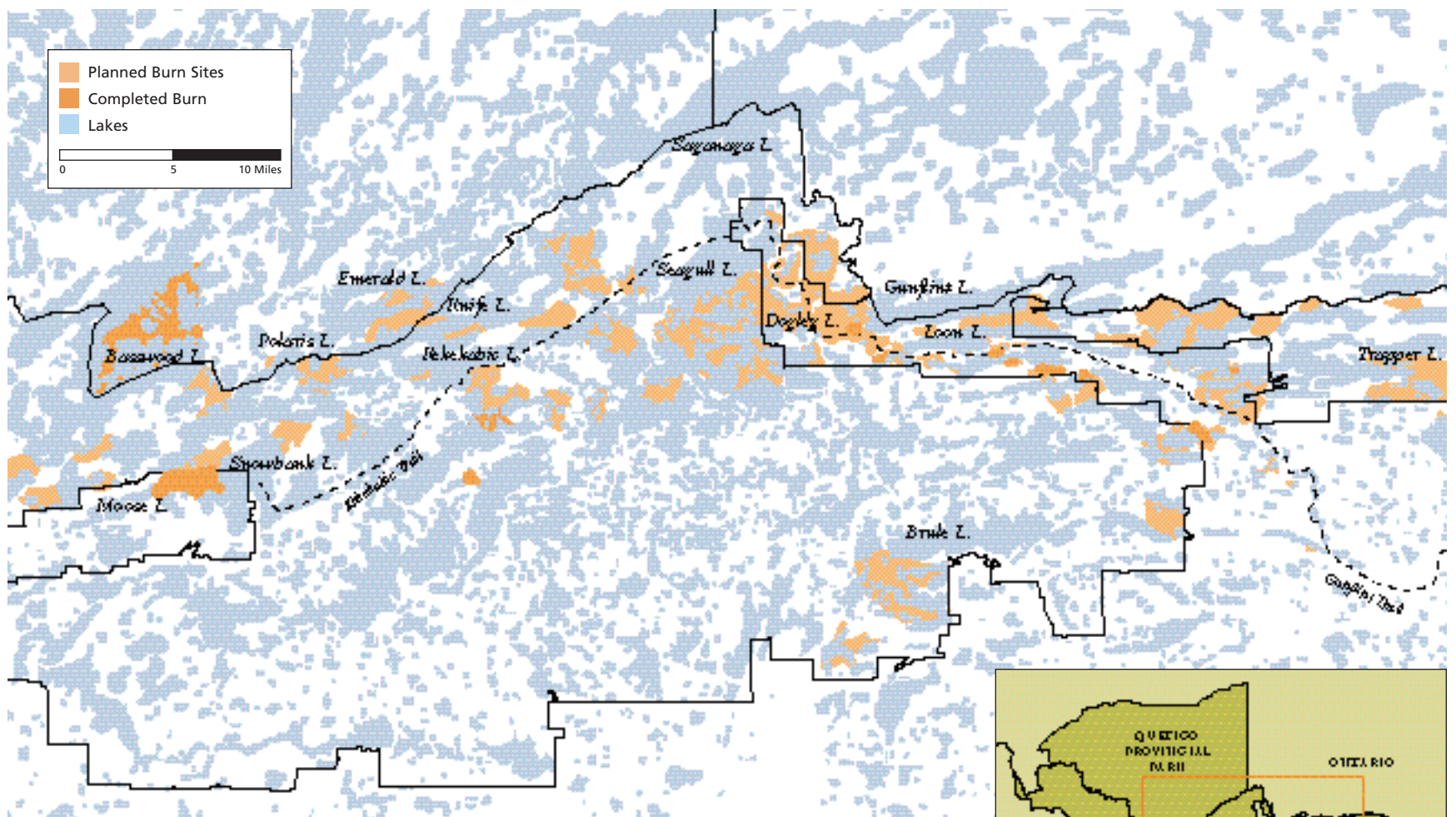
30-Day Comment Period Underway on Voyageurs Management Plan as Controversy Continues

By Diane Rose, Wilderness News Contributor

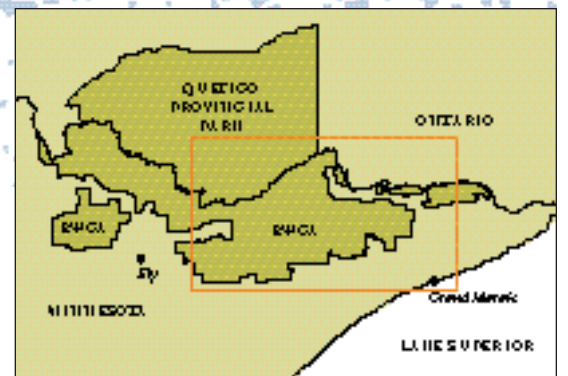
The journey down the long and winding road to implementation of the National Park Service’s new long-term management plan for Voyageurs National Park may finally be nearing an end, with proponents and opponents continuing to seek the attention and support of U.S. Senator Mark Dayton.

Minnesota-based Park Service officials, the Voyageurs Region National Park Association

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Over 75,000 acres are subject to prescribed burns over the next seven years as part of the Forest Service Fuel Treatment plan. Source: U.S. Forest Service



“Most of what we completed this year were areas along the edges of the BWCA,” said Tim Norman, fire management officer for the East Zone of the Superior National Forest. “We generally move from east to west and work our way downwind, so we’ll be getting further into the BWCA as the burns proceed. Also, we started with the highest resource value areas identified by the environmental impact statement, which are those with homes bordering the wilderness.”

Environmental Impact Statement

The Forest Service has been at work for the past year on the environmental impact statement and detailed plans for each burn. The total number of acres to be burned during a five- to seven-year period is 75,000 within the 375,000 acres (out of 1.1 million total acres in the BWCA) that were affected by the 1999 blowdown storm, in which straight-line winds over 90 miles per hour snapped and toppled a huge swath of trees. A total of 477,000 acres were affected across the entire Superior National Forest.

The prescribed burn plan that was selected last May, following work on a draft environmental impact statement report and a public comment period, calls for water and foam to be used to put out the fires. Burn areas also were adjusted to reduce the loss of stands of old-growth cedar and pine trees.

Since May, the Forest Service has been developing detailed plans for each prescribed burn tract. This work – which will continue over the coming winter – includes resource surveys, identification of ideal weather conditions for each burn, fire behavior predictions and plans for communication, public notification, logistics,

traffic, medical emergencies, traffic and post-burn monitoring.

On the day of a prescribed burn, the burn boss cannot proceed before determining current and expected weather conditions and fuel conditions and checking off each item on a detailed “go-no go” list. Hart explained that the Forest Service skips around on the priority list, executing each burn as weather, fuel conditions and suppression resources warrant.

“There are a number of steps that need to be completed for each burn, including public notification, and we have to monitor conditions very closely day-to-day as we decide when to burn,” said Barb Soderberg, wilderness program manager for the Forest Service in Duluth.

The overall burn plan comprises a mix of broadcast burns, patch burns and patch/understory burns. Broadcast burns are planned for large areas where the majority of the trees were blown down. In a broadcast burn, the fire is ignited and allowed to burn over the entire area, leaving a large burned area with islands of standing trees remaining. Patch burns are used to eliminate small, isolated concentrations of blown down trees in the midst of a standing forest, particularly in areas close to the wilderness boundary. A combination of patch and understory burning is used where patches of blown down trees occur within a standing forest of red and white pine. In these areas, small shrubs and trees and material on the forest floor are burned, so that the forest canopy can be protected from crown fires. After this type of burn, there will be small burned areas in the middle of a standing forest that has been opened up underneath. □

Learning From the Quetico Burns

Our Summer, 2000 issue reported the plan for controlled burns to be administered in Quetico Provincial Park in the fall of 2000.

The results of the burns at Polaris, Knife, and Emerald lakes appeared to canoers and visitors to have been successful. Fine fuels, which include needles, small branches and forest debris, have been significantly reduced by the burns. Living conifer trees have clearly been scorched; but the end result has been successful in diminishing the possibility of a forest fire conflagration in regions of Quetico Park which had been hit heavily in the wind storm July 4, 1999.

A U.S. Forest Service representative in Ely, MN commented that the Canadian forest overseers enjoy much more freedom to take action with controlled burns than is possible in the U.S. In our country the embedded regulations and bureaucracy require government employees to micro-study and fly speck from a dozen different angles the potential environmental impact of a controlled burn. The spokesperson said that the ability of the Canadians to take action and commence the controlled burns last autumn was positive. The U.S. Forest Service learned a lot from the experience of the Canadians.



A New Look for *Wilderness News*

With the Fall 2001 issue, *Wilderness News* is proud to launch a new look and a new format.

In 1960, the Quetico-Superior Foundation released the first issue of *Wilderness News*, to fill a significant gap in the publication of news pertaining to Quetico Provincial Park, Voyageurs Regional National Park, the BWCA, and Superior National Forest. We have incorporated many features to make the newsletter more informative and easier to use. In our continuing commitment to environmental responsibility, the newsletter is now produced using:

- 100% recycled paper, 30% post-consumer content
- 100% chlorine-free processed paper
- Soy-based inks

We welcome your feedback; if you have comments, or would like to request a subscription, please contact:

Quetico-Superior Foundation
2200 Pillsbury Center South
220 South Sixth St.
Minneapolis, MN 55402

Our Wounded Wilderness – The Great Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Storm

A new book covers the 1999 Independence Day wind and rainstorm that devastated parts the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and the Quetico Provincial Park.

Inside you'll find:

- personal stories
- the effect on local lodges and tourism
- details of the evacuations, search and rescues and campsite/portage clearing by the U.S. Forest Service and the DNR
- Expected ecological changes and future potential for forest fires in the area
- Detailed maps and photography of affected areas



Norway pines were felled by the storm on a south island in Kekekabec Lake. These downed trees and rapidly growing underbrush create fuel for wildfires in times of draught.

Travelers to the south shore of Kekekabec Lake in the fall of 2001 were surprised at the dense undergrowth of young poplar, alder and balsam trees which have sprung up throughout the blowdown lands. Profuse sunlight has suddenly penetrated to the ground after the July 4, 1999 blowdown. The Kekekabec Trail is overgrown and almost impossible to find as it intersects the portage from Kekekabec to Strup Lake. Dense brush rises as high as 8 feet in some sections.

The Fire Management Headquarters in the Fort Francis District Office of Quetico Provincial Park advised that on Friday, September 28th officials conducted a 2,000 acre prescribed burn in the North Bay of Basswood Lake and Burke Lake areas to reduce the hazard of future fire in Quetico Park.

The U.S. Forest Service planned several prescribed burns in the BWCA in late September. Autumn weather has been unusually wet and the conditions appear to be excellent for prescribed burning. The Forest Service also planned to burn

Autumn weather has been unusually wet and the conditions appear to be excellent for prescribed burning.

about 275 acres in the blowdown between Flash Lake and Snowbank Lake. Finally, the Forest Service planned to burn about 50 acres at Newfound Lake on Horseshoe Island in total, if all goes well.

Many residents in the Ely area and canoers applaud the move of the Forest Service to commence the controlled burning program. They hope that the Forest Service can reduce fuels in an area far greater than 1,500 acres. Conditions for burning have been absolutely ideal in the fall of 2001. □



Knife Portage after the prescribed burn in September, 2000. The area is clear of small branches, needles, and undergrowth debris. Asters are blooming in profusion, signalling that the burn was a success.



Strup Lake in the BWCA is much in need of a prescribed burn. Many trees are down and poplar and alders are springing up, closing in many portages.

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Wilderness News

Fall 2001

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(VRNPA), the Quetico-Superior Foundation and other environmental protection groups have supported implementation of the plan. On the other side of the issue, a group of Voyageurs area business owners and elected officials continues to push for fewer restrictions on motorized vehicles and guarantees that such access will not be limited in the future. They question whether the state government or the national park system has jurisdiction over waters within the park. The objectives they have cited include economic development and attracting more visitors to the park. The group has appealed to the Department of the Interior, the Park Service and other state and federal agencies, seeking even more citizen input, implementation delays and congressional hearings on the new plan.

The management plan was entered in the Federal Register on October 12, kicking off a 30-day comment period on the plan. After the comment period, the National Park Service will review the comments and decide whether the plan is ready to be forwarded for signing by Midwest Regional Director Bill Shenk, who is based in Omaha.

Management plan supporter Jennifer R.S. Hunt, who serves as executive director of the VRNPA, is working to schedule a November meeting with Senator Dayton to discuss the management plan's merits, the overall history of the park and what it has to offer. Joining her will be representatives from the VRNPA board and the National Park and Conservation Association.

"We hope to have a general discussion with (Dayton) about why Voyageurs is recognized as one of a very few crown jewels in the entire nation," Hunt said. "The senator hasn't taken any official position on the plan and we're concerned that he's just hearing from the people who want jet skis in the park. There's a history since the 1970s of a small number of 'vocal locals,' as we call them, pushing to remove restrictions within the park. These people – they've been basically the same individuals all these years – simply don't represent the majority of opinion in Minnesota. Everyone's voice needs to be heard."

The latest Voyageurs National Park General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement has been three years in the making. The process, led by the park's superintendent, Barb West, has involved dozens of meetings and consideration of hundreds of comments. General management plans, designed to identify the overall direction for future park management, are required by the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978. The Voyageurs plan's mission statement for the park states: "Voyageurs National Park preserves the landscape and scenic waterways that shaped the route of the North American fur traders and defined the border between the United States and Canada. The park and its diverse resources provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, scientific study, sport-fishing, education and appreciation of the northwoods lake country."

The completed plan, which is more than 2,000 pages long, identifies issues that need consideration over the next 10 to 20 years and contains many recommendations for further planning during that time period. For the present, the plan recommends the status quo: leaving in place current restrictions governing snowmobiles, seaplanes and houseboats, as well as the ban on personal watercraft.

The new management plan also calls for people to be asked to obtain free, voluntary permits when they enter the park, in order to more accurately know how heavily the park is being used. "Because the park is roadless and water-based, it's not a simple task to figure out how many people are entering each year," Hunt said. "The estimates say there are 250,000 visitors every year, but we really just don't know."

Voyageurs, encompassing 218,000 acres, became Minnesota's only national park in 1975. In 1996, U.S. Rep. James Oberstar, representing the 8th District in northeastern Minnesota, introduced legislation calling for removal of almost all restrictions on snowmobiles, motorboats and floatplanes within the park. The bill also sought to replace Park Service governance with a local management council for the park. At that time, statewide polls conducted by the news media and

St. Cloud State University indicated that two-thirds to three-quarters of Minnesotans opposed the lifting of restrictions on motorized craft in Voyageurs and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA).

The controversy has continued as the management plan has been developed, and the past year has been particularly volatile.

In February, a snowmobile club was denied a permit for a race in the park that would have been banned under the rules of the proposed management plan. In March, the Koochiching County Board held a snowmobile race without a permit on Lake Kabetogama.



The General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement and Visitor Use and Facilities Plan is available to the general public. To obtain a copy call Voyageurs National Park at 218-283-9821.

In July, the VRNPA conducted a postcard campaign asking its members to sign stamped, pre-addressed postcards to Senator Dayton, or to write their own letters asking him to support implementation of the management plan. In early September, Dayton attended a private meeting involving Fran Mainella, the new director of the National Park Service, and a group of the business people, local and county officials who have opposed the plan.

For copies of the management plan, people can contact the Voyageurs Park Service office, 218/283-9821. □