



FROM THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION • SPRING 1989

## MOTORIZED TRUCK PORTAGES

The controversy over three motorized truck portages in the BWCA was last reported in Wilderness News, Summer 1988. On March 10 the Forest Service's Associate Deputy Chief, David Unger ruled that two of the three portages would be closed this summer. The two portages are the Four Mile and Trout Lake motorized portages. A third portage into Basswood Lake, the Prairie Portage, would remain open. During the summer there would be a determination whether it is possible to haul watercraft across the portages on wheel and axle units without using motor vehicles.

Because of significant complaints from the Ely and Lake Vermillion areas, the Forest

Service on April 20 reversed itself and issued a new decision overturning Mr. Unger's decision. The Forest Service announced that the earlier decision to close two portages would be delayed pending studies to be done this summer. The announcement from the Forest Service explained that the change was being made because of the impact of the closing on visitors who had already received permits and made plans for the summer based on portages being opened to truck transport. The pressure from local communities had been intense. The Forest Service further advised that the determination on feasibility of non-motorized means must be accomplished by October 1, 1989. Unless the



An "old fashioned" non-motorized portage in the BWCA.

## WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

A conference to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the 1964 Wilderness Act is scheduled for September 11 through 14 in Minneapolis and September 14 through 17 as an organized field trip in Superior National Forest. The conference is sponsored by the University of Minnesota and four federal agencies responsible for management of America's National Wilderness Preservation System. The conference is expected to attract more than 500 participants nationwide.

The conference will highlight the value and benefit of an enduring resource of wilderness to the American public. It will identify challenges and opportunities which lie ahead in managing wilderness and adjacent lands outside of wilderness. Key speakers will include Congressman Bruce Vento, Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public

Lands; former Senator Gaylord Nelson, Chairman of the Wilderness Society; Dr. M. Rupert Cutler, President of Defenders of Wildlife; and Dale Robertson, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Topics will include managing resources and people within the wilderness, relationships between wilderness and adjacent lands, the link between tourism, wilderness and economic development, and wilderness and its meaning. Quetico Superior Foundation will fund the publication of the conference proceedings. This conference is open to the public. All individuals interested in the issues addressed in the conference are encouraged to attend. For information on the conference contact: Dr. David Lime, Department of Forestry Resources, University of Minnesota, 110 Green Hall, St. Paul, Minnesota 55108, (612) 624-2250.

study finds to the contrary, the motorized operations at Prairie, Four Mile and Trout Lake will close on October 1.

Environmentalists have argued that Congress required the termination of the truck portages because they blight the BWCA with roads, trucks, building and docks. Portage wheels can be rented in Ely and fishing parties use them frequently, especially on the Fall Lake — Newton Lake — Pipestone Lake Route. In challenging the Forest Service to fulfill its obligation to close the portages in accordance with the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act, environmental organizations submitted a videotape documenting the use of portage wheels on all three contested portages. The Forest Service has refrained from complying with the 1978 Act. Environmental organizations are now considering the need for legal action to require Forest Service compliance. The controversy is a hot issue both in the north country and in the environmental community.



# MINNESOTA'S FOREST PLANNING: IMPROVING MANGEMENT THROUGH CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

By Tom McGuigan  
Minnesota Representative National Audubon Society

The management of Minnesota's state forests has long been considered the realm of professional foresters working for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). While forests have provided benefits, such as wildlife habitat, soil conservation, and recreation, their main purpose has been the production of timber.

All that changed with the 1982 Minnesota Forest Resources Act. That law requires the DNR to manage state forests with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. In addition, the law requires the preparation of ten-year plans to guide forest management.

To its credit, the DNR has opened the forest planning process to groups and individuals outside the Department. In 1986, the Minnesota members of the National Audubon Society chose, as a long-term priority, participation in the forest planning process.

Those unfamiliar with the National Audubon Society often think the Society is interested only in birds. Although Audubon was started because of birds, the organization has branched out since its beginnings nearly 100 years ago. Today, the National Audubon Society is one of the oldest and most respected conservation organizations in the United States, with broad interest in wildlife habitat, pollution control, and energy policy.

In 1986, Audubon staff and volunteers began work on forest planning in the Orr area of northern Minnesota. With the financial assistance of the Quetico Superior Foundation, Audubon was able to help shape the way in which northern forests will be managed during the next decade.

Within the Orr area, the DNR manages nine state forests, covering a total of 375,000 acres. Because some of these forests are located within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and because of the special resource values in the area, Audubon wanted to ensure management that was consistent with the wilderness character of the region.

As with many government planning activity, Audubon was not entirely satisfied with the final product. Some issues raised were dealt with effectively; others were not. The biggest disappointment was the DNR's refusal to designate the Burntside State Forest as the first State-designated Wilderness Area. The Burntside is located within the Federal Wilderness zone, and the DNR has the authority to designate state wilderness areas, although it has never done so. The DNR, however was concerned about the reaction of legislators if it designated the Burntside as a wilderness area. Nevertheless,



An old growth cedar forest showing typical old growth characteristics: large standing trees, new growth in open areas, large dead logs on the forest floor.



Pennington Bog Scientific and Natural Area\*. Old growth cedar forests are important wintering areas for white-tailed deer.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES.

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the DNR has pledged to manage the forest as though it was a wilderness area.

Much to its credit, the DNR made decisions in the Orr area plan that were far-sighted and will have ramifications for other forest plans as well. The first of these was the decision to limit the number of roads in the area to protect Minnesota's threatened timber wolf population.

Research has demonstrated that when too many roads are built within wolf habitat, the accidental and illegal killing of wolves reaches such a degree that the wolves will no longer inhabit the area. The DNR has agreed to limit the amount of road construction so that wolves will be protected.

The second issue with which the DNR is grappling is the concept of "old growth" forests. Traditional forest and wildlife management has concentrated on keeping forests young by harvesting trees before they become old. New thinking in wildlife management stresses the need for greater diversity, and the management of forests that are allowed to grow old. Old growth forests typically have large living trees, dead trees that are permitted to decay, and new undergrowth where the old giants have fallen to the forest floor. These kinds of forests are important for wildlife, especially birds such as Great Gray Owls and Pileated Woodpeckers.

Unfortunately, Minnesota lost most of its old growth forests before we even had the chance to document its importance to wildlife. Much of the remaining old growth forest is scattered, and managers are not even certain where it is located.

Because of Audubon's comments in the forest planning process, the DNR has estab-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES.

**Pennington Bog Scientific and Natural Area\*.** Towering spruce trees are typical of old growth forests. Openings in the forest canopy allow sunlight to penetrate and stimulate plant growth below, leading to a diversity of plants and animals.

lished an Old Growth Task Force to investigate these issues and to identify old growth sites. In addition, the task force will recommend areas that should be allowed to become old growth sites by restricting timber harvest. Although the job is a difficult one, Audubon is confident that the DNR will develop a sound old growth management policy.

The 1982 Forest Resources Act opened the process by which forest planning decisions are made. The Quetico Superior Foundation, through its financial support of the

National Audubon Society's Forest Planning Project, enabled Audubon staff and volunteers to influence Minnesota's forest management in a positive, constructive manner.

\*In addition to its old growth characteristics, the Pennington Bog contains at least 15 species of orchids, including the showy ladyslipper. Although the bog is not located within the Orr area, it represents the type of old growth forest that could be discovered in that region through a comprehensive old growth policy.

## VOYAGEURS PARK CONTROVERSY

The National Park Service has sought to block the \$1.5 million condominium development plan by Vic Davis. Davis plans a twelve unit, 2-story condominium building on 12 acres of land across from the Visitors Center at Voyageurs Park. Concerning a second major issue, the Park Service has approved the development of 29 miles of snowmobile trails extending the entire length of Kabetogama Peninsula to the Kettle Falls Hotel at the eastern tip of the peninsula. The trails will actually be two parallel one-way snowmobile trails located 300 hundred feet apart.

On the issue of the Vic Davis condominiums, the National Park Service has sought help from the State of Minnesota to block the proposed condominium development. Park Service Superintendent, Russell Berry, said "we will utilize every administrative avenue available to us" to block the project. The Davis development plans 12 triplexes, 20 boat docks and a septic system. The development will be directly across a bay in Rainy Lake from the Park Service Visitors Center. The Park Service has been critical

of Koochiching County's approval of the project charging that the county "failed in its obligations to prepare an objective and comprehensive analysis of the environmental consequences of this project" as is required by state law. The Park Service said that it will ask the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board to require a study of the project's potential environmental effects before any construction begins.

Concerning the snowmobile trail decision, the Park Service had recommended in the early 1980's that 91,600 acres or about 69% of Voyageurs' land area be designated as wilderness or potential wilderness. Officials at the U.S. Interior Department, which is the parent agency of the Park Service, rejected the wilderness recommendation. The Voyageurs National Park Association had criticized the trail as being detrimental to the ecology of the park. The association had warned that snowmobiles reduce the park's attraction as a wilderness area and threaten the existence of the timber wolves in the park.

Voyageurs National Park is one of only

two national parks in the United States where snowmobiles are allowed off of dedicated roadways. Already in Voyageurs Park motorboats and snowmobiles are allowed on all four of the large lakes. Environmentalists argue that Voyageurs Park is already the most heavily motorized of all parks in the national park system.

The Vic Davis and the snowmobile controversy mirror conflicts in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area over motorized access and commercialization. The combat may continue for decades. The people in northern counties of Minnesota feel that their need to earn a livelihood has been subverted to the more powerful interests of the Twin Cities which have set aside significant areas in the Canadian border waters as wilderness and park lands. The Twin Cities "preservationists" have believed that these lands are a treasure of the United States as a whole. They argue that the beauty and unique characteristics of the border lakes should be preserved in their natural state for future generations.



# MILITARY OVER-FLIGHTS

In April a coalition of environmental organizations asked U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson to stop Air National Guard flights over the BWCA, at least until the potential environmental effect has been studied. An executive order signed by President Harry Truman in 1949 prohibits planes from flying at an altitude less than 4,000 feet above the BWCA. Jets even at that level are said to be too noisy.

The environmental groups were most ably represented by Faegre & Benson attorney Brian O'Neill. Jack Blackwell, Forest Supervisor of the Chequamegon National Forest in Wisconsin testified that jet over-flights harmed the wilderness and the wilderness experience. He put the Forest Service on record opposing the military jet flights as inconsistent with the goals of the Wilderness Act.

Attorneys for the Air Guard told Judge Magnuson that military planes have abided by Federal law in their flights over the BWCA. The Minnesota Air National Guard unit in Duluth converted to F-4D Fighter-interceptor jets in 1983. The number of military flights grew from under 200 in 1983 to 1,425 in 1986. Complaints from wilderness visitors have increased with the increase in the number of jet flights.

In 1988 the Forest Service mailed a survey form to trip leaders who visited the BWCA.



Phantom F-4D Fighter-Interceptor Jet.

U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO

One of the questions asked visitors whether aircraft over-flights had been a problem on the trip. Of the approximately 5,800 survey forms returned, 2,041 told the agency that the over-flights had been a problem.

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