



FROM THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION • SUMMER 1987

## EDGE OF THE WILDERNESS ACQUISITIONS

The Quetico Superior Foundation made a lead grant of \$30,000 for the acquisition of key tracts along the Echo Trail corridor north of Ely to protect entry points into the Boundary Waters Wilderness Canoe Area in 1984. The Izaak Walton League of America Endowment and several individuals contributed an additional \$20,000 to bring the fund to \$50,000. The Nature Conservancy joined with the Boundary Waters Foundation to acquire seven key parcels. The Boundary Waters Foundation provided the expertise on which parcels to acquire in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service-Superior National Forest. The Nature Conservancy acquired the properties and managed the funds.

The Quetico Superior Foundation stipulated that the parcels acquired were sold to the U.S. Forest Service, the money received

from the sale would be put back in the account and used to buy other properties. By rolling the funds through the account, the Quetico Superior Foundation can leverage their dollars to increase protection of key parcels.

On June 28, 1984, The Nature Conservancy acquired one parcel on Meander Lake, two parcels on Moose River and three parcels on Hunch Lake for a total of 480 acres

of critical habitat on the edge of the Boundary Waters from U.S. Steel (now USX). These parcels provided protection for key entry points into the BWCA.

In January 1985, the U.S. Forest Service purchased the Moose River tracts from The Nature Conservancy and in December 1986, the Meander Lake and two of the Hunch Lake tracts were repurchased. These sales

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## NEW FIRE POLICIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED ON SUPERIOR NATIONAL FOREST

Lightning fires would be allowed to play a more natural role in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness according to a new plan approved last week by the U.S. Forest Service.

As the Superior National Forest prepares for the 1987 forest fire season, some new policy guidelines will be followed which may bring different results in the way fires are attacked.

"Since the early 1900's, all fires on the Superior National Forest have been suppressed as quickly as possible," commented Forest Supervisor Clay Beal. "This was done regardless of the costs or without consideration of the resource values involved," he noted. "In our recent planning effort, we developed some new procedures which are not only more cost effective, but place more emphasis on fire as means of accomplishing some management objectives."

The policy changes will be most noticed by the public in the one-million acre Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). "One of the national objectives for Wilderness," Beal said, "... is to allow lightning-caused fires to play a more natural role. We have developed some criteria where, under strictly monitored conditions, such fires may be allowed to burn without interference."

Years of research supports the new fire procedures and illustrates that exclusion of fire from the forest ecosystem has sometimes led to undesirable consequences. Periodic fires were credited with reducing fuel accumulations which, in turn, reduced the devastation from fires when they did ignite. Much of the northern forest vegetation and wildlife habitat resulted from fire.

But despite some positive benefits from fire, the Forest Service is approaching the new program cautiously. "Historically, about 100,000 acres of the BWCAW burned every decade," the Supervisor noted. "Although we have an average of 19 lightning fires a year, there is no way that we can manage a natural fire program approaching the historical acreage figure. The Wilderness receives heavy visitor use which would be affected and it would be difficult to keep such large fires confined to the BWCAW. Our plan is start small and build confidence in our ability to manage fire."

Fire suppression methods, both inside and outside the Wilderness are also addressed in the new fire plan. Forest Service officials are quick to point out that areas of improvements, private property, and other high resource values will still be managed under a strict control strategy. But fires in remote

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Hegman Lake



# FORESTS OF THE FUTURE

The Wilderness Society urges the Forest Service to adopt forest plans based on four major principles. First, the plans should prescribe forest management practices that enhance soil, watershed, and wildlife habitat productivity. Second, they should preserve a large portion of the remaining unprotected roadless lands on the national forests. Third, they should maintain biological diversity through the preservation of entire ecosystems. Fourth, they should protect cultural resources, amenities, and scenic beauty.

To achieve these goals, we encourage incorporation of the following recommendations into the forest plans:

- Build no new major access roads. No forest plan should schedule the construction of new "arterial" or "collector" roads. New local roads should be kept to a minimum and promptly obliterated after logging ceases.

- Phase out below-cost timber sales. By the end of the first decade, no forest plan should call for commercial logging of uneconomic timber. This objective can be achieved by removing from the timber base those lands that are not physically or economically suited for logging, as required by the NFMA.

- Decrease reliance on clearcutting. Forest plans should schedule logging through other, less damaging silviculture methods, such as shelterwood and selection cutting.

- Incorporate high standards for fisheries and water quality. Forest plans should achieve full habitat capability for fish through the protection of existing water quality and the restoration of degraded watersheds.

- Reduce overall timber sale levels. Within ten years, the combined timber sale levels for all national forests should not exceed five to six billion board feet, approximately one half of the current sale level. The remnant old-growth forests in the Northwest should be preserved, not logged.

- Provide strict environmental guidelines for petroleum exploration and development. No new oil and gas leases should be issued pending completion of suitability analyses and detailed, site-specific environmental assessments of the potential impacts of such activity.

- Stop excessive grazing and eliminate grazing subsidies. The Forest Service should reduce grazing to a level that can be sustained without damage to other resources, restore grazing lands, and work with the Administration and Congress to implement grazing fees that at least recover the government's costs of the grazing program.

## The North Woods

The North Woods region of the upper Midwest is home to eight national forests (administered as seven units): the Superior and Chippewa in north central Minnesota; the Nicolet and Chequamegon in northern Wisconsin; and the Ottawa, Hiawatha, and

Huron-Manistee in northern Michigan. Totalling seven million acres, these forests constitute 60 percent of the national forest land in the Eastern Region and the majority of the Midwest's federal public land.

Important issues in forest plans for the North Woods area include below-cost timber sales, maintaining biological diversity, and recommendations for wildlands on the forests.

### Below-Cost Timber Sales

The principal controversies over forest plans in the North Woods relate to logging and road development. Low demand for timber, high road building costs, and other factors prevent timber receipts on these forests from recovering the costs of selling the timber. Annual costs exceed annual receipts every year from 1979 through 1984 on each of the seven national forests. During this six-year period, losses from logging totaled \$87.6 million.

Despite consistent economic losses, the plans for the North Woods forests all call for major increases in timber production. Over the next ten years, the Forest Service will attempt to sell 41 percent more timber annually than the average annual harvest level between 1979 and 1984 (Table IX, page 33). The increases range from nine percent on the Huron-Manistee forest to 67 percent on the Nicolet. The plans call for even greater increases in logging over the next several decades, with logging projected to climb 124 percent above recent harvest levels.

The Forest Service has defended its logging programs for the North Woods by listing numerous "benefits" of timber sales, most of them questionable. For example, in its formal response to the conservationist appeal of the Superior plan on February 5, 1987, the Forest Service stated:

*[T]imber sales are the most effective method of improving visual quality. Sales*



*allow the creation or maintenance of desired condition along roads and trail corridors . . . Timber sales provide habitat for many species of wildlife needing vegetation in early successional stages including deer, moose, and grouse. Timber access roads often provide recreation access and enhance fire protection.*

The timber industry has appealed several forest plans in Wisconsin and Michigan for not allowing enough logging. The industry groups contend that the forest plans underestimate future demand for timber and that the Forest Service is not contributing its "fair share" of timber supply to the region's wood products industry.

TABLE IX: AVERAGE ANNUAL TIMBER HARVESTS AND ALLOWABLE SALE QUANTITIES IN FOREST PLANS, THE NORTH WOODS

Forest	Average Annual Harvest Level (1979-84)	Average Annual Allowable Sale Quantity		Change from Annual Harvest	
		1st Decade	5th Decade	1st Decade	5th Decade
		-Millions of Board Feet-		---Percent---	
Chequamegon (WI)	50.3	70.0	117.0	+39.3	+132.6
Chippewa (MN)	52.2	79.0	102.1	+51.3	+95.6
Hiawatha (MI)	44.7	70.0	133.0	+56.6	+198.7
Huron/Manistee (MI)	75.2	82.0	133.8	+9.0	+77.9
Nicolet (WI)	58.1	97.0	138.0	+67.0	+137.5
Ottawa (MI)	51.7	78.0	153.5	+50.9	+196.9
Superior (MN)	73.6	97.0	133.0	+3.8	+80.7
TOTAL	405.8	573.0	910.4	+41.2	+124.3

#### Sources:

"Summary of Timber Data From Forest Plans," U.S. Forest Service, Office of Timber Management, January 20, 1987.

U.S. Forest Service, draft and final forest plans.

U.S. Forest Service, Office of Timber Management, 1985 (for data on average annual harvest levels).



Conservationists, on the other hand, contend national forest logging is already excessive. They point out that selling large amounts of national forest timber below the cost of production artificially depresses timber prices and thereby discourages timber management on private lands — which comprise 60 percent of the commercial forestland in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. National forests account for only 14 percent of the forestland in the three states, while state and county forests account for much of the remainder.

#### *Biological Diversity*

Forest plans in the North Woods also provide inadequate protection of the forests' distinctive biological diversity. The plans generally emphasize habitat management for deer, grouse, and other game species through logging. In the appeal process, conservationists have charged that the plans fail to capitalize on the opportunity for the recovery of endangered wildlife and natural forest conditions.

**Endangered Species.** The eastern timber wolf, which is federally listed as threatened in Minnesota and endangered elsewhere in the lower 48 states, inhabits most of the national forests in the North Woods. Scientists have concluded that wolves need large areas — at least 100 square miles per pack — with minimal human disturbance. In order for the wolves to survive in an area, road densities cannot exceed one mile of road per square mile of land. Since the forest plans call for extensive logging road construction and reconstruction in wolf habitat, the plans may be violating the Endangered Species Act.

The Forest Service has made some changes in the forest plans for wolf recovery. For example, while the draft plan for the Ottawa National Forest proposed 80,000 acres of habitat for four wolf packs, the final plan designated a 256,000-acre tract in the southern half of the forest for wolf habitat. However, the Nicolet plan would eliminate 70 percent of existing wolf habitat and leave only two doubtfully suitable areas for wolves.

Moreover, all of the forest plans rely heavily on road closures to meet minimum road density requirements. But, according to state wildlife biologists in the region, closures are ineffective bars, particularly to off-road vehicles. The Forest Service have chosen to ignore or casually dismiss the off-road vehicle problem. In its response to an appeal of the Superior National Forest final plan, the agency argued:

*ORV use has been relatively low and has not resulted in any significant effects on the wolf . . . Should ORV use increase, . . . there will be no significant effects on the wolf, even from those few people who find their way around gates or barriers erected against motor vehicles.*

**Natural Forest Diversity.** In addition to protecting habitat for the restoration of endangered species, conservationists have

sought to restore natural forest conditions in large areas of the North Woods. As a consequence of late nineteenth and early twentieth century logging, the plant and animal communities in most of the North Woods bear little resemblance to their pre-settlement characteristics. Only on the national forests does the opportunity exist to restore natural forest diversity in substantial portions of the North Woods.

The natural diversity issue has been most controversial on the Chequamegon National Forest. In early 1986, local Forest Service officials decided to adopt a conservationist proposal to establish two "Diversity Maintenance Areas," totaling 140,000 acres, where no logging or road building would occur. However, the Forest Service's Regional Forester decided at the last minute to drop the areas from the final plan. Pursuing the issue on appeal, conservationists have gathered support from leading scientists around the country. The State of Wisconsin also filed an appeal urging the Forest Service to reinstate the diversity areas, but the appeal was withdrawn in early 1987 by the state's newly-elected governor.

#### *Wilderness and Recreation Areas*

Final plans in the North Woods contain important decisions concerning the designation and management of wilderness and semi-primitive areas. Responding to public input on the draft plans, the Forest Service has made several changes in its initial decisions.

Michigan is one of the few states in the

nation with no designated national forest wilderness. The three draft plans in Michigan recommended seven areas for wilderness, totaling 72,139 acres. After receiving substantial public comment in favor of additional wilderness, the Forest Service recommended nine areas containing 80,251 acres. However, the recommendations are still short of the eleven areas and 92,000 acres favored by conservationists and approved by the U.S. House of Representatives in early April 1987.

In Minnesota, management of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness has been a major forest planning issue. Conservationists have appealed the Superior plan for failing to remove motorized truck portages, dam sites, a road culvert, and private inholdings from the wilderness. The Forest Service has responded by agreeing to remove the dams and culvert but not the truck portages and inholdings.

Throughout the North Woods, conservationists have pressed for additional semi-primitive non-motorized management areas and for greater protection of those areas. All three forest plans in Michigan increased such areas — from a total of 63,742 acres in draft plans to 128,305 acres in final plans. Similarly, on the Chequamegon, semi-primitive non-motorized acreage increased from 24,000 acres to 50,000 acres between the draft and final plan. However, none of the final plans designated more than seven percent of any of the North Woods national forests for such management.

## **WILDERNESS ACQUISITIONS** *continued*



#### **Moose River**

restored the \$50,000 to the account and makes it possible to begin another round of acquisitions. There is still one tract on Hunch Lake which will be sold to the U.S. Forest Service.

The Boundary Waters Foundation has selected key tracts on three lakes near the Echo Trail for the next series of negotiations.

The Conservancy has made an offer to the owner, Potlach Corporation, and we are waiting for it to be accepted. Through this innovative partnership, begun by the Quetico Superior Foundation, potentially developable private lands along the periphery of the BWCA will be acquired. The wilderness character of the BWCA will be preserved.



## LOW LEVEL BOMBER FLIGHTS OVER BWCA APPARENTLY CANCELLED

The Strategic Air Command has apparently cancelled low level training flights over northeastern Minnesota and northern Wisconsin. Plans for the bombers which would fly as low as 300 feet at speeds of 450 to 580 miles an hour, five times each weekday, had been altered in March. Air Force officials said that for environmental reasons the planes would fly at 4,000 feet above sea level over parts of Superior National Forest and the BWCA. Cancellation of the controversial flights was announced in early June by Senator Dave Durenberger and Representative James Oberstar who with Senator Rudy Boschwitz lobbied for the Air Force to consider other routes or drop the plan entirely.

Strategic Air Command officials were surprised this spring when 800 people appeared at the public meetings in Duluth and Mora to discuss establishing the new routes. SAC officials reported that they had received more than 400 letters and calls opposing the route since it was proposed in January, 1987.

A spokesman for the Air Force said that it had not decided whether it was required by state law to provide an environmental impact assessment. The Air Force called the intense area opposition to the flights "unprecedented." The challenge to the proposed flights was led by The Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness. Opposition to the central Minnesota portion of the route began in April when residents learned of the plan from fact sheets and route maps sent out by Representative Oberstar. State of Minnesota agencies criticized the plan saying it could cause adverse impact by disturbing wildlife, farm animals and the tranquility which residents and tourists value in the area.

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## EXTREME FIRE DANGER IN SUPERIOR NATIONAL FOREST IN APRIL AND MAY LOW WATER LEVELS IN SPRING AND SUMMER

The U.S. Forest Service warned that the Superior National Forest had experienced its driest spring since weather measurements have been taken. The Service compared 1987 to the drought of 1936. Working together, the Forest Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources reinforced all available state firefighting resources. The DNR added six additional helicopters to their fleet. As the fishing season opener May 16 approached, fire officials were especially concerned. On Saturday, May 9, smoke from Canadian and U.S. forest fires cut visibility in the northern part of Minnesota. Five hundred firefighters including recruits from Maine and New Mexico battled blazes in northern Minnesota. On the evening of May 9, 180 fires were burning in Minnesota. The area of visibility was reduced to less than one mile in almost all of northern

Minnesota.

The worst Canadian fire burned more than 75 cottages and homes as it blazed through 30,000 acres of forest, 120 miles northeast of Winnipeg. Rains which quelled the fire danger arrived on the weekend of the fishing opener. Fire bans were lifted shortly thereafter. Mother Nature came to the rescue and called off the red alert on the driest spring since the drought of 1936.

Because of the lack of snow and spring runoff many lakes in northern Minnesota are at the lowest level in perhaps ten years. Resort owners said that water levels are as much as seven feet below normal on Kabetogama Lake and the Namakan Lakes chain. The only good news from the lakes has been that the fishing has been good and the state bird, the mosquito, has been sighted less frequently.

## FIRE POLICIES

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areas of low resource values where there is no threat to public safety or property, may come under more indirect methods of attack allowing fires to grow larger in order to utilize natural barriers in the suppression effort.

Fire Management Officer, Bob Joens, from the Duluth office of the Forest Service, is pleased with the new flexibility. "Under the old policy, we were required to spend money mopping up every spark of a fire on a low-danger day in areas where there was no possibility of a fire escape. Now we have flexibility to devote our limited fire fighting resources to those areas which really need priority for protection." Joens remarked.

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