



QUETICO-SUPERIOR COUNTRY



FROM THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION • SUMMER 1995

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## KEEP THE BALANCE BY LEAVING BWCA AND VOYAGEURS ALONE

by Dave Durenberger

As a fisherman and hiker, private citizen and senator, I have taken an enthusiastic interest for 30 years in both the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA) and Voyageurs National Park. Both of these magnificent areas in northern Minnesota teach us much about the fragile balance in nature — and in politics.

For nearly 30 years, that balance has been maintained thanks to a balanced and flexible approach in managing these resources by federal agencies, elected representatives and local leadership.

Now, there are calls in the Legislature and in Congress to introduce trucks, snowmobiles and motorboats into the BWCA; strip Voyageurs of its national park status, or open Voyageurs to unlimited use by motorized vehicles.

I believe that any of these changes would be precipitous and unwise for Minnesota and for the nation.

The BWCA is the only major lakeland unit of the national wilderness system, and it has become the most visited wilderness in the nation. In fact, the level of use prompted the U.S. Forest Service wisely to move to avoid overcrowding that would

destroy the wilderness character of the area.

Meanwhile, Voyageurs, which was created as a compromise park, allows motorboat and snowmobile use on lakes that encompass nearly 40 percent of the park. None of the other national parks has so much area available for such motorized uses. While Voyageurs does not attract as many visitors as once predicted, a shift in emphasis away from the large lakes to other resources likely will lure more people to the park.

Regardless, our national parks and wilderness areas are not set aside for the purpose of generating economic development, although they often do. Rather, we set aside these special places for their intrinsic value in nourishing our spirit, reminding us of our place in the world and preserving examples of all that is unique about nature. We cannot and should not expect that we can manage these exceptional areas the way we would, say, manage the Treasury Department. We cannot manage these areas too rigidly, for nature is not rigid. We cannot be concerned with immediate results only; we must think of future generations and

preserving these resources to pass along to them.

In short, my decades of experience with the BWCA and Voyageurs, and in government, have taught me that the issues surrounding these areas are not always black and white and that administering unique resources cannot always be done by the book.

So far, informal partnerships between federal agencies, the people of northern Minnesota, wilderness and park supporters, and their representatives — sensitive to change and working in the best interests of the state and the nation — have served the BWCA and Voyageurs well.

It will take continued good will, patience, work, sensitivity and wise resource management to keep these treasures intact for those who will come after us.

I am not sure how we should manage these natural riches differently. But I do know that the legislative proposals I have seen recently will improve nothing.

*Dave Durenberger represented Minnesota in the U.S. Senate from 1978 to 1995.*



# PROTECTION OF VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK AND BWCA UNDER SCRUTINY

The sea change which occurred in Washington, D.C. last November has brought unexpected developments and challenges to Minnesota. The continuation of Voyageurs National Park as a national park and wilderness protection which the BWCA currently enjoys are under challenge from legislators on both sides of the political aisle.

The challenge is in the early stages and the possible outcome of the status review is difficult to evaluate. Environmentalists are lining up to gather support and speak for wilderness issues before the opposition's train begins to run down the track at top speed. Stopping the train at a later date may be much more difficult than slowing the speed in its early infancy. The chief engineers aboard the train are DFL Senator Bob Lessard, Eighth District Congressman Jim Oberstar, and Republican Senator Rod Grams.

Field hearings on the issue by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee are scheduled for International Falls on August 18. After objections were raised to a single hearing only in northern Minnesota, the committee agreed to have hearings at an unscheduled future date in the Twin Cities as well.

Northern Minnesota residents, particularly in the area of International Falls, have sought a reversal of national park restrictions on snowmobiling and houseboating. Twin Cities residents generally have supported the restrictions which are intended to protect the environment and wildlife within the park.

Representative James Oberstar who's district includes the Voyageurs Park introduced a bill in early March

requiring federal authorities to allow "access and use of motorboats, aircraft, hiking and skiing on all major lakes and bays within Voyageurs Park." Snowmobiles would also be allowed. His legislation would still keep the park as a national park after restrictions have been loosened.

State Senator Bob Lessard of International Falls appeared before the House Resources Committee in early March asking that Voyageurs National Park be downgraded to a National Recreation Area, or as an alternative, to be turned over to the residents near the park for them to manage with financing from the federal government. The House Resources Committee is controlled by the Republicans for the first time in 40 years. Federal regulations and Washington red tape has become a hot issue.

Two powerful Alaskan Republicans chair the important House and Senate resources committees which would hear any legislation. The men are Don Young and Frank Murkowski. Both have expressed their opposition to park and wilderness status for federal lands.

Voyageurs Region National Park Association's executive director, Jennifer Hunt, said that there are 53 national parks in the system and none has ever been declassified or removed from federal protection.

Senator Lessard has complained that when Voyageurs was created, the park service estimated that it would attract 1.4 million visitors a year. The visitor count has been 20% of that total according to Lessard. Lessard has expressed concern that the park service might issue more restrictive regulation on snowmobilers to further protect the park as a wilderness.

The Voyageurs Region National Park Association has asked their members to write their local newspaper and to send letters to their con-

gressional representatives urging that Voyageurs continue to be protected as a national park. When writing about the Oberstar bill, the specific legislation for reference is H.R. 1310. Members are urged to attend the field hearings in International Falls and the Twin Cities and present their position either orally or in writing.

The declassifying issue relative to the BWCA is still early and unclear until Congressman Oberstar introduces specific legislation dealing with the BWCA.

State Senators Doug Johnson of Cook County and Bob Lessard of International Falls and six colleagues from the Minnesota Legislature requested new legislation from Congressman Oberstar and Minnesota's two U.S. Senators to modify the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act. Among their requests for the BWCA were reopening three portages to trucks and jeeps, motorizing all of Basswood Lake and Lac La Croix, preventing the motorboat phase-out for most of Seagull Lake scheduled for 1999 and relaxing the visitor-permit quota system administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

If the position of Bob Lessard, Doug Johnson, James Oberstar et al is allowed to prevail, the national park designation for Voyageurs will be extinguished and motor incursion will be significantly expanded in the Boundary Waters Canoe Country. Most of Minnesota's recreational lands, northern Minnesota included, is heavily motorized and is wide open to commercial development. The appeal of Voyageurs and the BWCA, and the reason the commercial interests want to seize it, is because it has been protected until now in its natural heritage.



## MWTA

The Minnesota Wilderness Trails Alliance (MWTA) was formed in 1992 to restore and maintain hiking trails in the Superior National Forest, with priority given to several threatened wilderness trails in the BWCA. Today, the MWTA is a coalition of four Minnesota-based outdoor groups — the Kekekabic Trail Club, Minnesota Parks and Trails Council, Minnesota Rovers Outing Club, and the 3M Kekekabic Outdoor Club. MWTA volunteers have cleared the Border Route, the Kekekabic and the Sioux Hustler Trail.

The Border Route trail is a seventy-five mile wilderness trail that winds through Superior National Forest with a middle forty-mile section in the BWCA. It follows the high ridges on the US-Canada border and offers panoramic vistas. The twenty-six mile Sioux Hustler Trail located northwest of Ely was saved by the MWTA effort from being completely closed down. Volunteers donated 1,500 hours in 1994 to open the trail which had been neglected ten years. The Kekekabic Trail penetrates deeply into the BWCA. It is a thirty-eight mile one-time "fire path."

The MWTA is growing. The public is invited to become part of the new program. Membership in a trail clearing group is not required. Some trips span a weekend, three, five, or seven days. Certain trail clearing programs work out of resorts near the BWCA. On others, volunteers backpack or canoe and camp overnight. Participants are required to attend a two-hour training session before leaving on the trips. For more information call Bruce Anderson at 612-874-8563.



Norway Pine island campsite on Sarah Lake in Quetico

## OPEN LAKES IN QUETICO

Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources this spring posted the list of lakes open to motorboats and float planes under the revised park policy.

The following Quetico lakes have been opened for Lac La Croix Band guides for the 1995 season to motorboats, with a maximum of four boats per day per lake: Quetico, Cirrus, Wolsley, Tanner, Minn, McAree, Argo and Basswood. Other lakes opened to the Lac La Croix guides for motor-

boats up to 10 horsepower and permission to land aircraft are Beaverhouse and Crooked. New for 1995 are Argo, Basswood and Crooked.

Reduced quotas have been announced as a result in part from outfitters serving the northern reaches of the park. The new quotas reserve some allocations specifically for the use of independent Canadian canoe parties or Canadian outfitters.

The new quotas permit 63 parties entering Quetico Park per day. This compares with the new BWCA daily quotas which have been reduced from 382 prior to 1994 to 280 parties per day. Quetico and Boundary Waters are approximately one million acres each, though Quetico Park is slightly larger than its American counterpart. Both parks now limit the maximum group size to nine people.



# QUETICO REVISED POLICY FOR 1995

Our front page article of Wilderness News, Summer of 1994, titled "Quetico Park Agreement Signed," summarizes the culmination of negotiations which began in 1991 between the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Lac La Croix First Nation community.

A booklet headed "Revised Park Policy 1995" was issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario this spring. The policy will guide the management of the park over the next ten years. The new policy contains elements of an Agreement of Co-existence which was negotiated between the government of Ontario and the Lac La Croix First Nation. The booklet is a 26 page document. For a copy of the revised policy contact: Quetico Provincial Park, Atikokan, Ontario, Canada P0T 1C0. Excerpts from the 1995 Quetico Park Booklet follow.

"The Quetico Provincial Park Management Plan (now called Revised Park Policy) was approved in September, 1977. Its approval provided an expression of how the government intended the park to be planned, developed and managed over a 20 year period.

Reviews of the 1977 Quetico Management Plan were conducted in 1982 and 1988. A major amendment proposal by the Lac La Croix First Nation was reviewed in 1992. All public consultation was conducted jointly by the Provincial Parks Council and the Ministry of Natural Resources. Information packages outlined the review process, issues and/or proposals felt to be of interest or concern and suggested revisions or proposals.

## Park Classification

Quetico will be planned, managed and operated as a wilderness park in accordance with the Ontario Provincial Parks Planning and Management Policies (1978). This document defines wilderness parks as:

*'... substantial areas where the forces of nature are permitted to function freely and where visitors travel by non-mechanized means and experience expansive solitude, challenge and personal integration with nature.'*

As a wilderness park, Quetico's primary emphasis will be protection. Humans are not considered to be incompatible with Quetico's wilderness landscape; however, their presence is acceptable only within an ecological context whereby human numbers and technology participate rather than dominate.

## Park Goal

*To preserve Quetico Provincial Park which contains an environment of geological, biological, cultural and recreational significance, in perpetuity for the people of Ontario as an area of wilderness that is not adversely affected by human activities.*

## Park Objectives

Park objectives relating directly to the park goal provide specific direc-

tion to management and planning for the park. In addition to the principal objectives relating to Protection, the Lac La Croix First Nation, Recreation and Heritage Appreciation, a secondary objective for Tourism, is aimed at contributing to the continued visibility of area tourist industries.

## 1) Protection

*To protect the provincially significant elements of the natural and cultural landscape of Quetico Provincial Park from human influence or disruption by permitting the forces of nature to function freely, only taking action where necessary to preserve the environmental integrity of the park and its features.*

## Park Zoning

Two types of zones have been employed to guide management within Quetico — namely central wilderness zones and peripheral access zones. The opportunities available within the wilderness zone comprise the raison d'être of the



July in Quetico



park. Because of its dominance within the park, the wilderness zones are the focus of the detailed policy outline as contained in the following sections.

### **1) Wilderness Zone I (W1)**

The revered qualities of Quetico, as identified in the park's goal and objectives will be preserved in this zone. This wilderness zone will remain the domain of the natural process; the presence of the recreationist will be that of a privileged intruder, activities will be restricted to those not compromising the integrity of the biophysical base. Mechanized forms of recreational travel will not be permitted.

### **2) Wilderness Zone 2 (W2)**

The creation of this zone recognizes that power boat and aircraft access by the First Nation, in the short term, is critical for the First Nation to realize its economic development needs and viability.

This zone is designated as an area which will be co-managed with the Lac La Croix First Nation. Power boat and aircraft use by the First Nation on lakes and waterways for the purpose of guiding is acceptable. In every other way the zone will be managed in accordance with the wilderness values as set out in the balance of this management plan.

A co-management regime between the First Nation and the Quetico administration will be designed and implemented. It will include, but not be limited to:

- the development and implementation of a short-term power boat access plan including methods of compliance and enforcement for the First Nation to operate, for the purpose of guiding, powered watercraft by no more than 10 horsepower motors, on lakes and waterways within the Zone.
- the establishment of a process to work towards the elimination of power boat and aircraft use with-

in Quetico Provincial Park and until such time, the mitigation of the impacts of power boat guiding on the Park's wilderness values including the minimization and discrete location of aircraft landing sites and/or boat caches.

### **3) Access Zones**

Quetico is served by six entry stations. Beaverhouse Lake, French Lake and Nym Lake provide northern entry opportunities and are accessible by road. Cache Bay (Saganaga Lake), Prairie Portage (Basswood Lake), and Lac La Croix are located on the southern boundary and are accessible by water only.

Entry stations provide route information, interpretive information, permit issuing services and also serve as an emergency contact.

## **Operations Policies**

Recreational activities permitted within Quetico will include primitive travel (e.g. canoeing, hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing) as well as those activities that are associated and compatible with primitive travel (e.g. camping, fishing, photography, viewing). The types of primitive travel provided for will only be those that are consistent with the historical context of the park. For example, although horseback riding and sailing may be considered as primitive forms of travel, facilities for these activities will not be provided for within Quetico.

In keeping with its wilderness ideal, the recreational use of all mechanical forms of transportation will be ultimately prohibited. This ban includes motor powered watercraft, airplanes, snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles. Existing regulations ban motor powered watercraft from all waters within the park with the following exceptions:

- Watercraft powered by no more than 10 h.p. and used by a member of the Lac La Croix First

Nation who is also a member of the Lac La Croix Guides Association, may be operated for the purposes of guiding, subject to the annual operating strategy, in the W2 zone.

- Watercraft of unlimited horsepower and use by a member of the Lac La Croix First Nation who is also a member of the Lac La Croix Guides Association, may be operated for the purposes of guiding on Wegwagum Bay of Lac La Croix up to Twin Falls.
- The need for overnight guided trips may be considered by the Implementation Committee in light of the goal to eventually eliminate mechanized guiding from the park. Additional impacts on the resource and on other park visitors are significant considerations in arriving at a decision.

Aircraft landings required to facilitate day use guiding by a member of the Lac La Croix First Nation who is also a member of the Lac La Croix Guides Association, are permitted subject to the annual operating strategy of the W2 zone.

Beaverhouse Lake Entry Station will continue to be utilized as an aircraft landing location in the park. Parks staff will monitor potential conflicts this may cause following any improvement of road access to the Beaverhouse Lake access zone from Highway 11.

For a five year trial period, Cache Bay Entry Station will also be utilized as an aircraft landing location. Impacts on the resource and on other park visitors will be monitored and assessed. During this time period Canadian outfitters may conduct a market analysis to help determine the future viability of this service. At the end of the trial period the results will be used to determine whether or not Cache Bay should continue to be used as an aircraft landing location."



# FOREST FIRES

Drought conditions brought forest fires to Minnesota, southern Ontario and northern Minnesota in late June. A heat wave added to tinder dry conditions.

A forest fire which began with a lightning strike on June 6 at the edge of Little Gabbro Lake developed into the largest natural forest fire in the BWCA in many years.

The forest fire was watched but not extinguished. The fire started about thirteen miles southeast of Ely. Voyageur Outward Bound School on the Kawashiwi River was the closest human settlement, about four miles west of the fire.

By late June campfires and open burning were banned in four counties in northeastern Minnesota. Southern Ontario reported a number of wide burning forest fires. Skies across Minnesota were dimmed by forest fire smoke in late June. Two fires, the Swede Lake fire and the Winchell Lake fire were being fought by firefighters in late June, but the Little Gabbro Lake fire was allowed to burn within a 12,000-acre perimeter. Starting July 1, rain brought needed moisture to the area and fire bans shortly were lifted.

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