



FROM THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION • WINTER 1996

CHALLENGES IN 1995

As reported in our Summer issue of *Wilderness News*, both Voyageurs National Park and Boundary Waters Canoe Area in 1995 have faced challenges to the concept of non-motorized and muscle-powered wilderness solitude. U.S. Congressional Representative of the Eighth District, James Oberstar, in March introduced legislation to relax rules governing Voyageurs National Park. He has indicated his intent to introduce in early 1996 legislation to ease management practices in the BWCA as well.

The idea of setting aside and preserving the Canadian border lakes first was proposed by the Minnesota Legislature in the 1890's. The National Park Service began thinking in terms of a park on the Canadian border in 1930 and the Park Service submitted a general plan for Voyageurs Park in 1962. The proposal of a park was condemned by local interests as a land grab.

Legislation to create the park was signed in 1972 and the park opened in 1975. The Federal government spent about \$50 million to purchase and remove family cabins and several resorts from inside park boundaries. The park was considered to have historic value for Native Americans and also for the legendary voyageurs, fur traders and loggers.

The idea of national park designation



Campsite on Kabetogama Lake in Voyageurs Park

has been viewed by many as the best way to preserve the park in its natural state and to enjoy the beauty and history of the area. A number of people, especially in the local area, disagreed that park designation was the highest and best use of the resource.

The economic boom usually attached to National Park status has never been realized by Voyageurs National Park, according to opponents. The park had been originally estimated to deliver 1.3 million tourists to the Kabetogama area each year, but attendance has totalled less than 250,000 annually. Some oppo-

nents agree that the park has kept Rainy Lake, Kabetogama Lake and Namakan Lake from becoming wall-to-wall cabins, but local interests feel that the International Falls area would be better served without the park.

Supporters of the park point to studies which show that the park and its 41 full-time employees bring more than \$20 million into the local economy each year and they feel that this is a good return on the park's \$2.3 million operating cost.

It appears likely that the author of the bill which signed Voyageurs into law in

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CHALLENGES IN 1995, CONTINUED

1971 intended the park to be at least part wilderness. Former U.S. Representative, John Blatnik, who drafted legislation for the park, in a 1974 article for *National Parks Magazine* wrote that people in the park would be able to experience the same solitude and wilderness that voyageurs experienced 200 years before.

Blatnik wrote, "The nation's thirty-sixth park will be a wilderness park, with emphasis on sports such as hiking, camping, canoeing and fishing in the summer and cross country skiing, snow shoeing and ice fishing in winter . . . motor boating in the summer and snowmobiling in winter—will be permitted on larger lakes, but motor vehicles will be entirely prohibited on the (Kabetogama) peninsula."

Representative James Oberstar whose district includes Voyageurs Park introduced H.R. 1310 in early March which will open all of Voyageurs National Park to motorized vehicles and will eliminate the wilderness designation which was a part of the park's original charter.

Oberstar's bill eliminates enforcement of The Endangered Species Act because it gives wolves and eagles rights that might prevent snowmobile traffic in their home range on the Kabetogama Peninsula.

The new superintendent of Voyageurs National Park, Barbara West, feels that the solution to the park controversy can be worked out in Minnesota and does not have to be dictated from Washington. She has said, "When people from the outside come to Voyageurs, we think they deserve a national-park-quality. Trying to find the balance between local interests and concerns and the national interests and concerns . . . that's the really hard part."

Environmentalists argue that Voyageurs is the most motorized national park in the country. Over 100 miles of snowmobile trails exist within the park, with 500 miles of designated snowmobile trails on the periphery.

Oberstar has emphasized that he opposes reclassifying Voyageurs Park as a national recreational area. Also, he does not want to open Voyageurs Park to hunting. Another Democratic Congressman, Bruce Vento representing the Fourth Congressional District in the House of Representatives said in an editorial which appeared in the *Star Tribune*: "Voyageurs is not another chain of resort lakes. It's natural, undisturbed qualities are what make it special

and these qualities must not be lost."

Vento continued, "Our National Parks have been judged by a stringent standard. To be considered for designation as a National Park, a natural, cultural or recreational area must, among other criteria, be a nationally significant resource of outstanding natural qualities which offer superlative opportunities for recreation and public use. Once designated, a National Park is managed, by law, to conserve the resource and to provide for the public enjoyment of the park in a manner that will leave the park unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Environmentalists believe that Voyageurs is a national, not a local park. They feel that the park needs to be maintained and its resources must be protected. They are against a mandated increase in motorized use at the expense of

resource protection. Congressmen in favor of continuing the protections on the park have included Jim Ramstad, Martin Sabo, Bruce Vento and B. Luther. Governor Arne Carlson has spoken in favor of continued protection for the park. Quetico Superior Foundation agrees with Governor Carlson and the Congressmen.

The debate on how to protect and manage Voyageurs Park and the BWCA and other Federal parks and wilderness areas typically divides local residents from much of the rest of the nation. Local residents feel that their concerns have been given too little weight in land-use decisions and that the Federal government too many times promises what it cannot deliver. In the case of

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Portaging at Horseshoe Lake in the BWCA

BWCA SUMMER SEASON PERMITS

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness reservations for 1996 summer season are now being accepted by mail or fax, and will be processed beginning January 15, 1996. Phone reservations will be accepted beginning Thursday, February 1, 1996. Reservations may be made for an overnight paddle, overnight motor, or a day-use motor trip for use during the May 1 through September 30 quota permit season.

"We encourage people to send in their reservations now, even though they won't be processed until January 15. This allows time to be sure the information entered is complete and accurate," said Barb Soderberg, USDA Forest Service Wilderness Specialist.

Permits (under the quota system) are required to enter the BWCA from May 1–September 30. To make a reservation by mail, you may obtain a reservation form at local Forest Service offices, or simply include the following, along with a \$9 reservation fee (check, money order, Visa,

Mastercard or Discover): the party leader's name, address and phone number; no more than three alternate party leaders; whether it's an overnight or day-use permit; mode of transportation (paddle, hiking or motorized watercraft); desired entry point; desired entrance date; an alternate entrance point and/or date, if desired; estimated party size (maximum of nine); and where the party leader or alternate will pick up the permit. If a location is not designated, the permit will be mailed to the Forest Service ranger district office closest to the desired entry point. Multiple reservation requests must be listed on separate sheets of paper; however, they may be mailed in a single envelope. The same details are required, along with credit card information, if reservations are faxed.

In addition, all reservations (both by and overnight) must indicate whether or not the trip will be guided. If it is a guided trip, the guide's name should be included, but the reservation must be made in the client's name.

Day-use motor reservations are valid

for any one day in a specified week (the week runs from Saturday through Friday). The day of actual use must be specified when you pick up the permit. Those planning to reserve a day-use motor permit for Fall, Moose or East Bearskin Lakes must specify their route (i.e., Newton-Pipestone, Prairie Portage or Alder Lake).

Please mail your reservations to: BWCA Reservation Service, P.O. Box 450, Cumberland, MD 21501. To fax in your reservation dial 1-301-722-9808. Plans should be firm before a reservation is made. Changes will require another \$9 fee.

Phone reservations will be accepted February 1, by calling 1-800-745-3399 between 8 AM and 4:30 PM CST. For the hearing impaired, the TTY number is 1-800-967-9376.

Any permits that have not been reserved are available on a walk-in basis (no reservation fee), on the day of your planned trip or the day before, from a Forest Service office or businesses that are official permit issuing stations.

CHALLENGES IN 1995, CONTINUED

Voyageurs Park, Koochiching County residents complain that Voyageurs Park is managed too much like a federal wilderness area. They say that snowmobile routes have been reduced, camping restrictions added and they believe that their rights to use the area are being continually curtailed.

Representatives of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources together with the House Committee on Resources, both of which oversee the National Park Service, held hearings in International Falls in mid-August and in the Twin Cities in late October. The hearings were well represented by groups representing both sides of the issue. On one side stood the advocates of motorboating and snowmobiling and on the other, environmentalists who oppose an increase in motor-

ized traffic in either Voyageurs or the BWCA. The Twin Cities meeting was attended by Republican Senator Rod Grams, Democratic Senator Paul Wellstone, and Democratic Representatives Jim Oberstar and Bruce Vento.

Jim Oberstar of the Eighth Congressional District is preparing a bill which may seek to eliminate motorboat restrictions on several large lakes in the BWCA including Lac La Croix, Basswood and Saganaga. Oberstar's bill will try to re-open three motorized portages. He proposes to set up management councils for Voyageurs and BWCA. The councils would have about 15 members and would give local interests as well as environmental interests a say in the management of the two areas. Oberstar has stressed that he does not plan to re-open the BWCA to snowmobiles.

Certain residents in the Ely area have been particularly troubled by the closing of three truck portages in the BWCA recently. They have been unhappy as well that the number of day motor and other permits was reduced approximately 25% in 1994. They feel that there is now a shortage of day motor permits at certain points in the BWCA.

Citizens who wish to express their views on the Voyageurs and BWCA debate are urged to contact Senators Wellstone and Grams and also their own representatives. They are also urged to write letters to the editor of their local newspaper. Letters may also be directed to Representative Jim Hansen, House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Lands, 812 O'Neill Building, Washington, DC 20515.

ST. CLOUD STATE AND STAR TRIBUNE POLLS

Two state-wide polls conducted in August and September indicated strong support for protection of the wilderness characteristics of Voyageurs Park and BWCA. The polls indicate support for protection even among residents of northeastern Minnesota. The *Star Tribune* poll determined that there is wide opposition among residents state-wide to proposed legislation which would compromise the wilderness character of the two areas.

The St. Cloud State poll contacted 514 randomly selected Minnesotans and found that 82% wanted wilderness protection for the BWCA and Voyageurs strengthened or maintained at current levels and only 13% wanted the protections weakened. In Minnesota's Eight Congressional District (northeastern Minnesota) the poll found 73% of those polled wanted wilderness protection strengthened or maintained at the current level and 26% wanted the protections weakened.

A Minnesota poll conducted in September by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and WCCO-TV found similar results in favor of protection for Voyageurs Park and the BWCA. The poll contacted 814 randomly selected Minnesotans and found that 70% of



Portage on the Granite River

those contacted oppose removal of restriction on motorized craft in Voyageurs National Park and 70% oppose allowing more motorized craft in the BWCA. 57% oppose it strongly. 58% oppose a bill that would keep Voyageurs Park from remaining a federally protected wilderness. The Minnesota poll found that there is slightly less opposition in the northern half of Minnesota to easing restrictions on

motorboats and snowmobiles. Even so, 62% of northern Minnesotans oppose lifting restrictions in Voyageurs Park, and 68% are not in favor of allowing more motorized traffic in the BWCA.

Quetico Superior Foundation is on record on these issues for concurring with the majority of Minnesotans statewide.



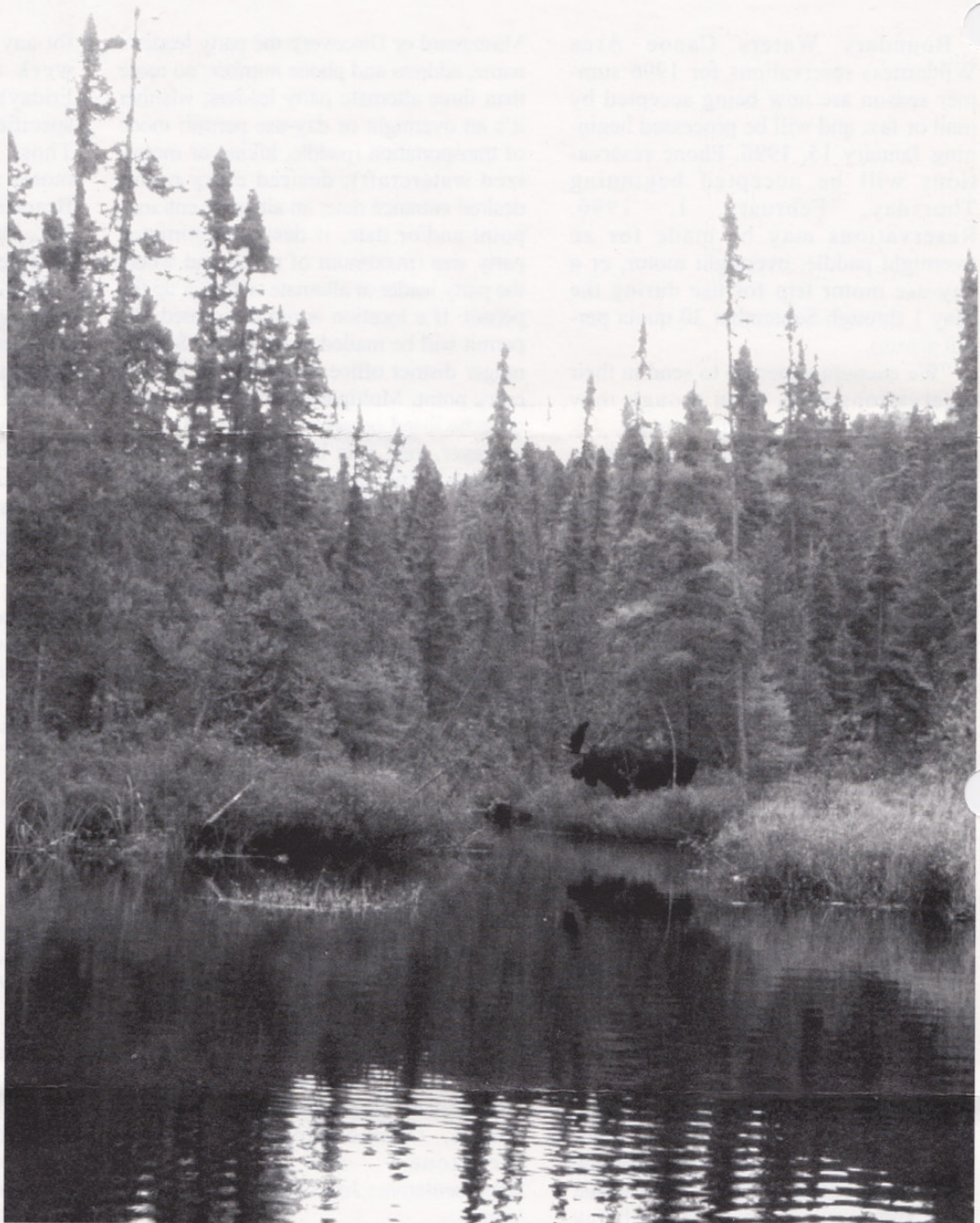
Gunflint Lake

A HOT AND FIERY QUETICO AND BWCA IN SUMMER, 1995

Summer, 1995 was dry along the Canadian/U.S. border and an extreme fire season developed. In early June fires swept through the BWCA and Quetico. A series of fires broke out the week of June 12, but by late summer the forest was even drier. Lightning storms in Quetico Park on August 9 ignited dramatic fire outbreaks. A fire started near Saganaga Lake in the BWCA and rapidly moved north toward Northern Lights Lake. The fire reportedly covered about 3,740 acres in Minnesota and under windy conditions spread to 5,750 acres in Canada. A report by Jay Leather, Superintendent of Quetico Park, gave an account of the fire on August 10 at Kawnipi Lake.

"It is perhaps worth reciting one set of comments from a Quetico canoe tripper camped on Kawnipi Lake when the Bird Lake fire first began. The following words were entered into the Cache Bay campers journal on their way out of the park:"

"Afternoon of August 10th very hot and windy on McKenzie Bay of Kawnipi. Noticed heavy smoke to the south. Tried to paddle to Kennebas Falls last night but stopped by fire at the falls. Spent the night on the beach watching the flames. Morning of the 11th began a trip down the Falls Chain with fires burning all around us. Trees crowning and covering the portage. The portage east of Kenny Lake completely burned with fires burning on both sides as we passed. No human in sight—felt very alone as we crossed the entire Falls Chain. Trees and ground burning the entire Falls Chain. Frightening to see live trees, campsites, portage trails burning."



Bull moose at Gaskin Lake just north of Winchell

SELF-ISSUING BWCA PERMITS

The Superior National Forest announced the start of a self-issuing permit system beginning September 30, 1995, for day use and overnight visitors who enter the BWCA Wilderness between October 1 and April 30. The self-issuing permits will also be valid for non-motorized day use during the summer season, or for any day use into the BWCA from Crane Lake to Little Vermillion Lake.

The permit system is designed to be convenient to wilderness visitors. Single or multiple copies of the permit form may be obtained by mail, phone or in person, from any Superior National Forest office and at major BWCA entrance points beginning September 29. Visitors will complete their own permit form each time they enter the BWCA. The original will be carried with the visitors during their trip, and a copy will be

dropped in a box at the entrance point, returned to the Forest Service by postage paid mail or in person.

The BWCA Plan, released in August 1993, set the policy for these permits with an implementation date of October 1, 1995. The permits will help the Forest Service better manage the wilderness resource by providing information on visitor activities, and providing greater opportunity for educating visitors who have previously not had contact with the Forest Service before entering the BWCA.

Wilderness visitors are encouraged to make use of the comment space on the bottom of the permit if they have suggestions for improving this permit-issuing process. For more information, please call the Superior National Forest at (218) 720-5324.

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