



United States Department of Agriculture

Superior National Forest

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Permit and Visitor Use Trends 2009-2015

USDA Forest Service



Photo by Ann Schwaller



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Introduction

The following report displays permit and visitor use statistics for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) on the Superior National Forest from 2009 to 2015. The report is organized in six parts.

- Part 1** Displays an overview of quota permits and quota visitors from 2009 to 2015.
- Part 2** Displays the quota permit data by type of use and self-issue permit data during the quota season and during the non-quota season.
- Part 3** Displays quota and self-issue visitor data.
- Part 4** Displays information on the lottery from 2012 to 2016.
- Part 5** Displays detailed information on self-issue permits and visitors.
- Part 6** Displays exempt permit information and use trends.

Quota permits are required for overnight visitors and day use motor visitors (except day use motor visitors traveling from Crane Lake to Lac La Croix using self-issue permits) from May 1 to September 30. Quota season permit and quota season visitor data is retrieved from the National Recreation Reservation System. Visitors must pick up a quota permit the day of or the day before their trip start date. Quota permits are issued at Superior National Forest Ranger District offices and at select businesses who are under permit with the US Forest Service to issue BWCAW permits. Permits allow a group of up to 9 people with up to 4 watercraft to enter the Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness.

Self-issue permits are required for all non-motor day use visitors during the quota season (May 1 to September 30) and all visitors (day use visitors and overnight visitors) during the non-quota season (October 1 to April 30). Self-issue permits are available at Superior National Forest Ranger District offices and at all BWCAW entry points. It is the visitor's responsibility to fill out the permit accurately to reflect dates, location, and type of activity for the visit. Not all self-issue permits are filled out accurately or completely, and therefore, self-issue permit data is not as accurate as quota data.

For additional information on overall use on the Superior National Forest, check out the National Visitor Use report on our web page at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/>

For information on user fees that are raised through the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, or for additional information about the Superior National Forest, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, please contact the Superior National Forest at 218-626-4300.

Part 1. Overview of 2009 to 2015 Quota Permits and Quota Visitors

The majority of use in the BWCAW occurs during the quota season, defined as May 1 to September 30. During the quota season, overnight visitors and day use motor visitors must obtain quota permits. Quota permits have a limited number of permits by date and entry point. **Figures A and B** display the number of quota permits issued and the number of quota visitors from 2009 to 2015. **Table 1** displays the actual number of quota permits, quota visitors, and the average group size.

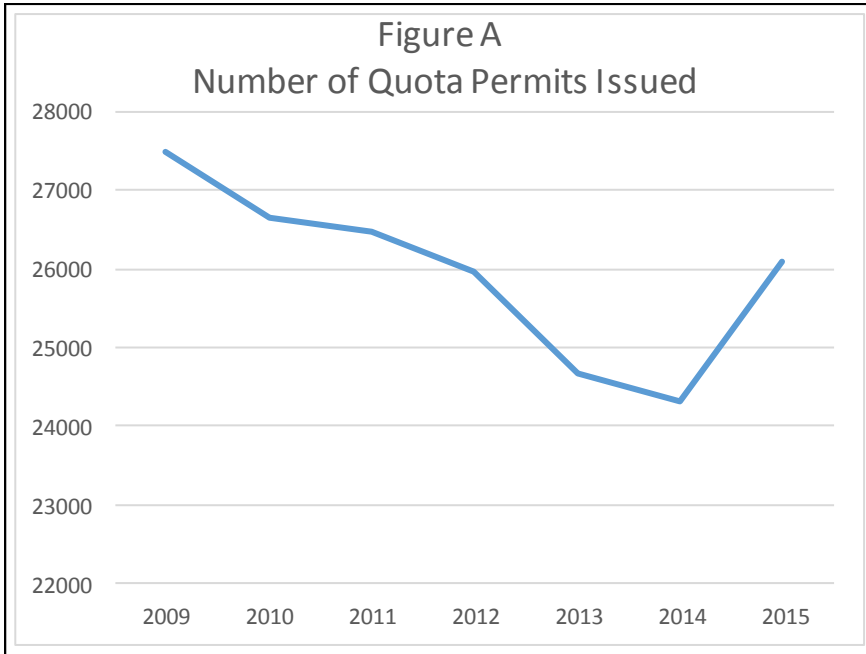
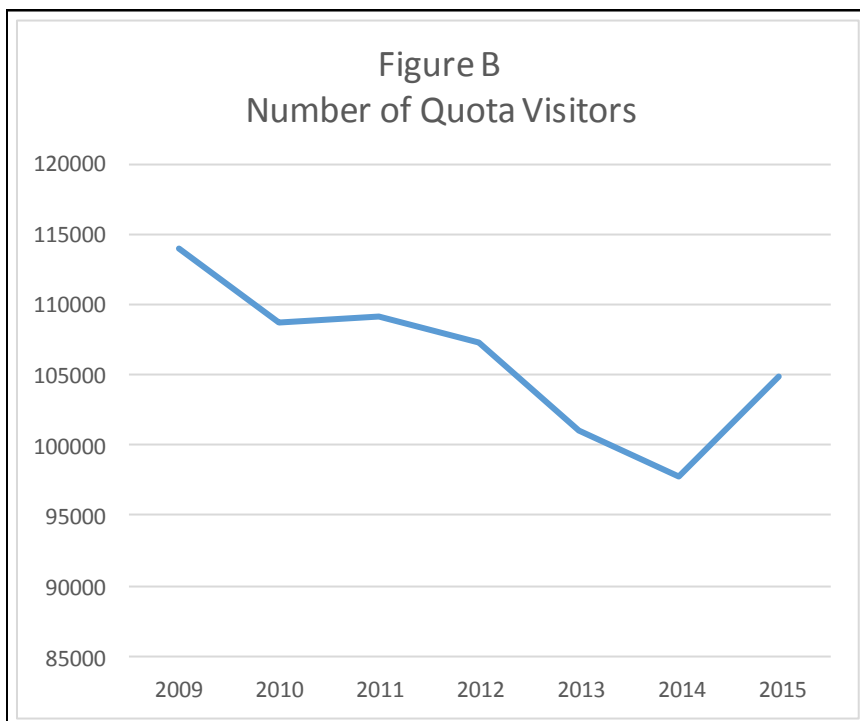


Table 1
Number of Permits and Visitors

| Year | Number of Quota Permits | Quota Visitors | Average Group Size |
|------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 2009 | 27502 | 114029 | 4.14 |
| 2010 | 26651 | 108781 | 4.08 |
| 2011 | 26480 | 109158 | 4.10 |
| 2012 | 25966 | 107257 | 4.13 |
| 2013 | 24670 | 100983 | 4.10 |
| 2014 | 24305 | 97731 | 4.02 |
| 2015 | 26096 | 104882 | 4.01 |



Part 2. Quota and Self-Issue Permit Information

Tables 2 and 3 display the data for both quota permits and self-issue permits. Adding the total quota permit data with the total self-issue permit data equals the total number of permits or groups that entered the BWCAW from 2009 to 2015.

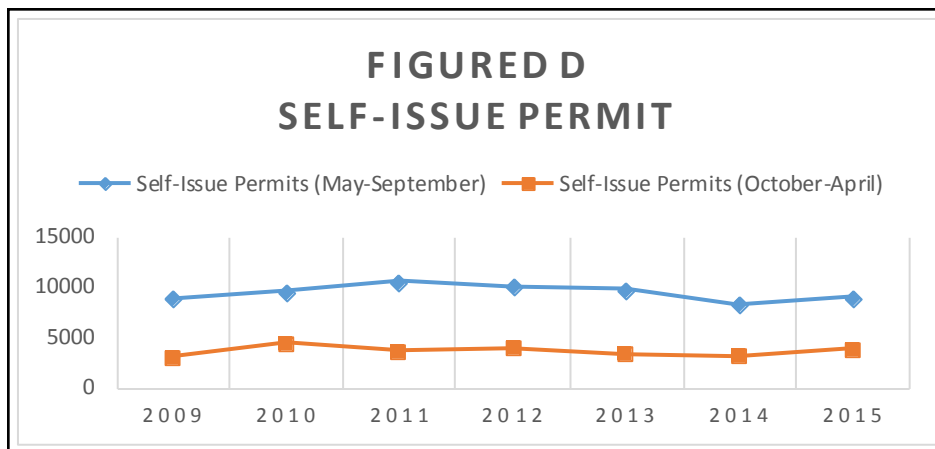
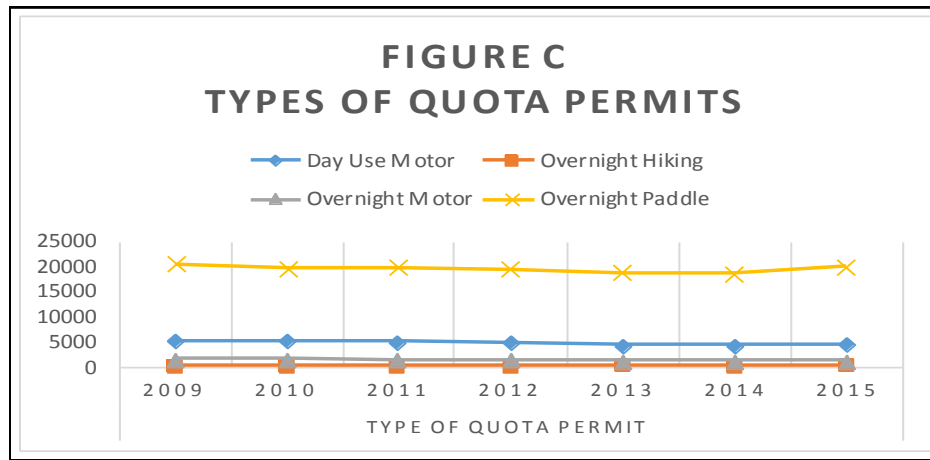
| Table 2 | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Quota Permits | | | | | | | |
| Type of Quota Permit | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| Day Use Motor | 5228 | 5285 | 5054 | 4789 | 4362 | 4367 | 4564 |
| Overnight Hiking | 244 | 240 | 236 | 259 | 266 | 230 | 355 |
| Overnight Motor | 1548 | 1487 | 1456 | 1398 | 1234 | 1197 | 1283 |
| Overnight Paddle | 20482 | 19639 | 19735 | 19520 | 18808 | 18511 | 19894 |
| Total Quota Permits | 27502 | 26651 | 26480 | 25966 | 24670 | 24305 | 26096 |

| Table 3 | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Self-Issue Permits | | | | | | | |
| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| Self-Issue Permits (May-September) | 8842 | 9503 | 10487 | 9990 | 9692 | 8178 | 8934 |
| Self-Issue Permits (October-April) | 3051 | 4342 | 3589 | 3914 | 3324 | 3081 | 3773 |
| Total Self-Issue Permits | 11893 | 13845 | 14076 | 13903 | 13016 | 11259 | 12707 |

Figure C displays the number of permits by type of quota permit from 2009 to 2015. The majority of permits are for overnight paddle followed by day use motor, then overnight motor. Overnight hiking accounts for the lowest number of permits.

Figure D displays the number of self-issue permits during the quota season and during the non-quota season from 2009 to 2015. Self-issue permit use during the quota season is greater than use during the non-quota season. See Part 5 for more information on self-issue permits.

Table 4 displays the number of quota permits issued, the number of quota permits that were cancelled and put back into the reservation system, as well as “no shows” (quota permits that were reserved, but not cancelled or used) from 2009 to 2015.



| Quota Permits | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Cancellations | 3085 | 3782 | 4611 | 4006 | 4699 | 4563 | 4284 |
| No Shows | 1369 | 1570 | 896 | 1859 | 1870 | 2029 | 1618 |
| Issued Permits | 27502 | 26651 | 26480 | 25966 | 24670 | 24305 | 26096 |

Part 3. Quota and Self-Issue Visitor Information

Table 5 displays the number of BWCAW visitors from 2009 to 2015. It shows the overnight quota season visitors, day use motor quota visitors, and self-issue permit visitors during the quota and non-quota seasons.

Figure E displays the number of overnight and day use motor quota visitors and self-issue permit visitors from 2009 to 2015. The majority of visitors are overnight quota permit visitors followed by self-issue permit visitors during the quota season, followed by day use motor quota visitors during the quota season. Self-issue visitors during the non-quota season account for the smallest group of visitors.

| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Overnight Quota Visitors | 91781 | 87490 | 87712 | 86078 | 81542 | 79437 | 85297 |
| Day Use Motor Quota Visitors | 22248 | 21291 | 21446 | 21179 | 19441 | 18294 | 19585 |
| Self-Issue Quota Season Visitors | 28618 | 29128 | 33357 | 32202 | 33817 | 26353 | 28764 |
| Self-Issue Non-Quota Season Visitors | 8994 | 12216 | 10725 | 11655 | 11292 | 9637 | 12531 |
| Total Visitors | 151641 | 150125 | 153240 | 151114 | 146092 | 133721 | 146177 |

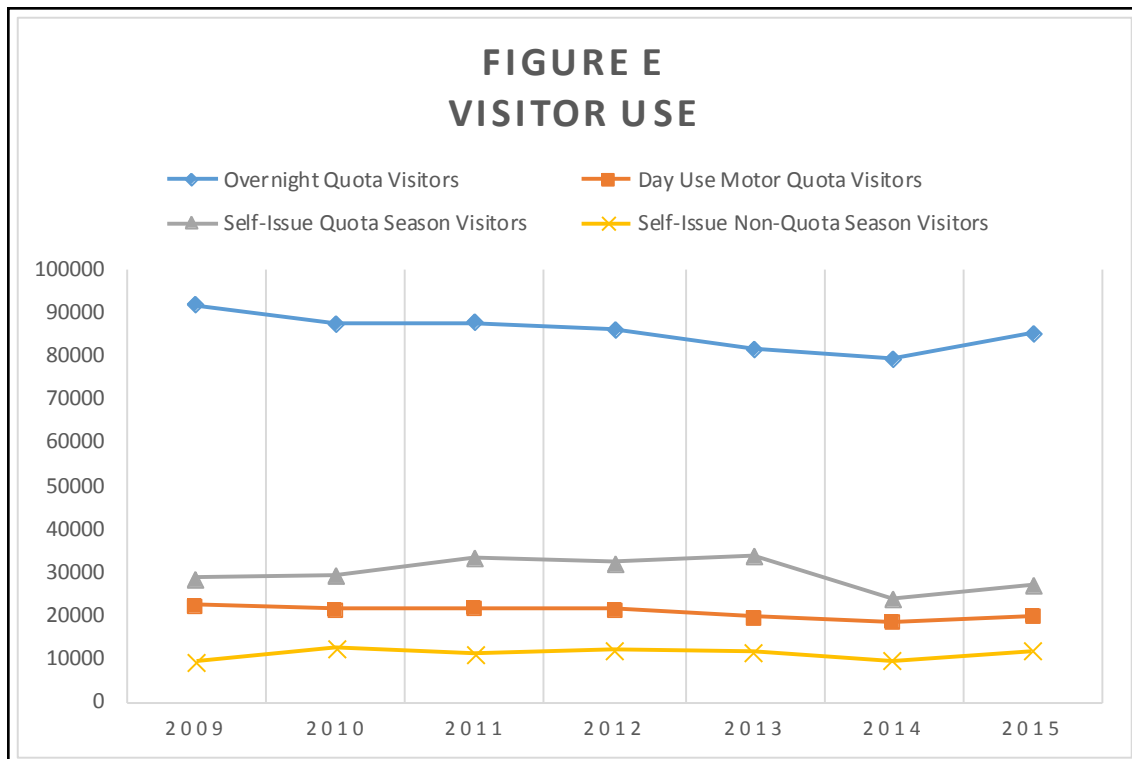


Table 6 displays the overnight quota visitor use demographics. This information is only collected from overnight quota permit reservations and not from day use motor or self-issue permit visitors. Interagency senior passes are lifetime passes for citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. age 62 or older. Access passes are lifetime passes for citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. who have a permanent disability regardless of age. The purchase of a BWCAW seasonal fee card fulfills the user fee requirements for the season, but does not eliminate the need for obtaining a quota permit for each trip. Tribal membership cards are available to local tribal members.

| | Adult | Youth | Pass Holders | | | | | Tribal Membership Cards |
|------|-------|-------|------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| | | | Interagency Pass | | | BWCAW Seasonal Fee Cards | | |
| | | | Senior | Access | Youth Access | Adult | Youth | |
| 2009 | 69749 | 20565 | 1016 | 85 | 2 | 336 | 14 | 14 |
| 2010 | 66722 | 19322 | 956 | 84 | 9 | 374 | 15 | 8 |
| 2011 | 66198 | 19941 | 1067 | 96 | 5 | 383 | 1 | 21 |
| 2012 | 65391 | 19128 | 1183 | 95 | 7 | 245 | 2 | 27 |
| 2013 | 61538 | 18465 | 1173 | 61 | 11 | 286 | 0 | 8 |
| 2014 | 60062 | 17710 | 1328 | 79 | 5 | 229 | 5 | 19 |
| 2015 | 64724 | 18588 | 1590 | 107 | 5 | 266 | 3 | 14 |

Part 4. Lottery Trends

Prior to 2012, the Forest Service ran a lottery system for all entry points. Visitors applied for quota permits for a specific entry date and entry point. They would then need to wait for the lottery to be run to find out if they were successful in obtaining a permit.

The Forest Service proposed to eliminate the lottery in 2011 because the current reservation system is capable of real-time reservations. Visitors can now see the entry points and dates that are available and make reservations for the date and entry point desired. The Forest Service eliminated the lottery for all entry points except for the five entry points where the demand for permits generally exceeds the number of permits available. The lottery continues to be used for day use motor entry points F (Moose to Newfound and Sucker), G (Moose to Basswood), D (Fall to Basswood), and overnight paddle or motor entry points 25 (Moose Lake) and 24 (Fall Lake).

| | Successful | Unsuccessful | Total |
|------|------------|--------------|-------|
| 2012 | 3845 | 3373 | 7218 |
| 2013 | 3699 | 4473 | 8172 |
| 2014 | 3848 | 5095 | 8943 |
| 2015 | 3867 | 6229 | 10096 |
| 2016 | 4209 | 7822 | 12031 |

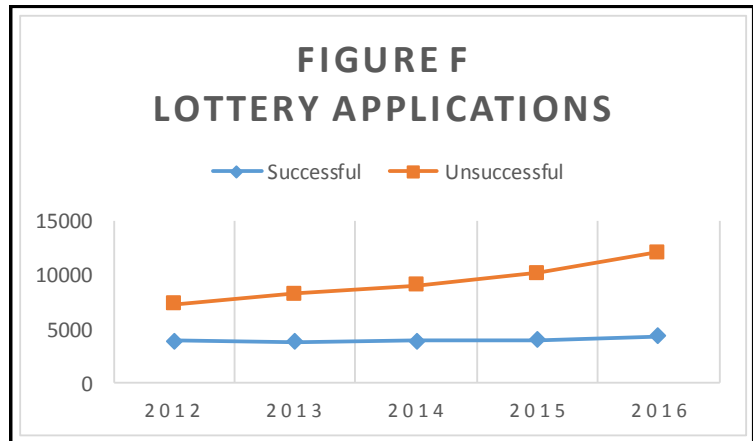


Table 7 and Figure F display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications from 2012 to 2016. Data shows that the number of successful lottery applications has remained fairly constant, whereas the number of unsuccessful applications has increased. During the lottery visitors can submit as many applications as desired. Successful applicants are encouraged to cancel permits they are unable to use. Cancelled permits are put back into the system and are then available to other visitors.

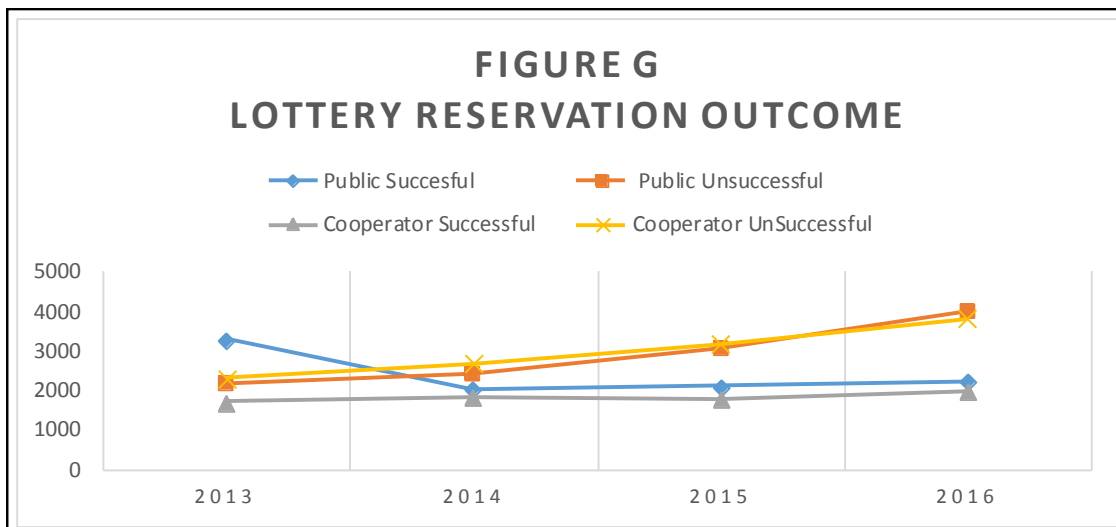


Figure G shows the successful and unsuccessful lottery reservations based on overall lottery applications that are submitted by the public and those submitted by cooperators. Cooperators are businesses approved to issue permits and they can also submit lottery applications for confirmed clients. Both the public and cooperators submitted more lottery applications during 2015 and 2016 than during 2013 and 2014.

Table 8 and Figure H display the number of successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for day use motor quota permits. Day use motor applicants account for the greatest number of lottery applications and nearly all of the available day use motor permits are obtained during the lottery. Day use motor applications have been increasing, resulting in an increase in the number of unsuccessful lottery applications.

| | Successful | Unsuccessful |
|------|------------|--------------|
| 2012 | 2257 | 2878 |
| 2013 | 2314 | 3827 |
| 2014 | 2508 | 4255 |
| 2015 | 2561 | 5222 |
| 2016 | 2717 | 6596 |

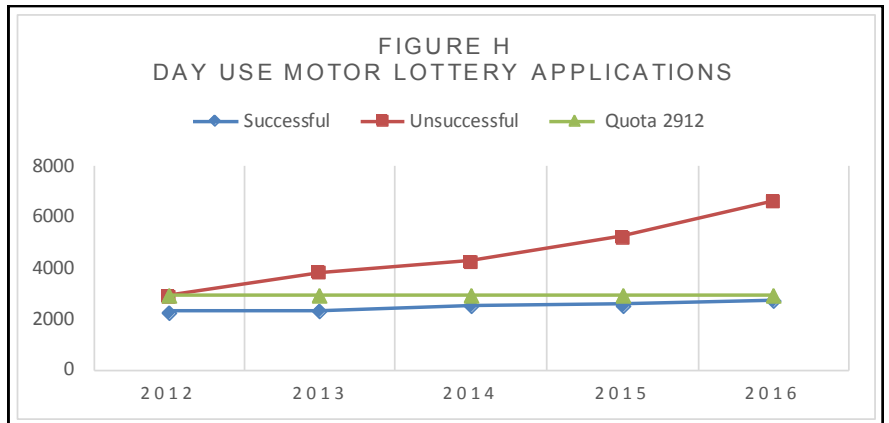


Table 9 and Figure I display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for overnight motor permits. Nearly all of the available overnight motor permits are obtained during the lottery. Since 2013, there has been an increase in the number of overnight motor lottery applications, resulting in an increase in unsuccessful lottery applications.

| | Successful | Unsuccessful |
|------|------------|--------------|
| 2012 | 687 | 464 |
| 2013 | 709 | 644 |
| 2014 | 710 | 840 |
| 2015 | 708 | 1007 |
| 2016 | 709 | 1225 |

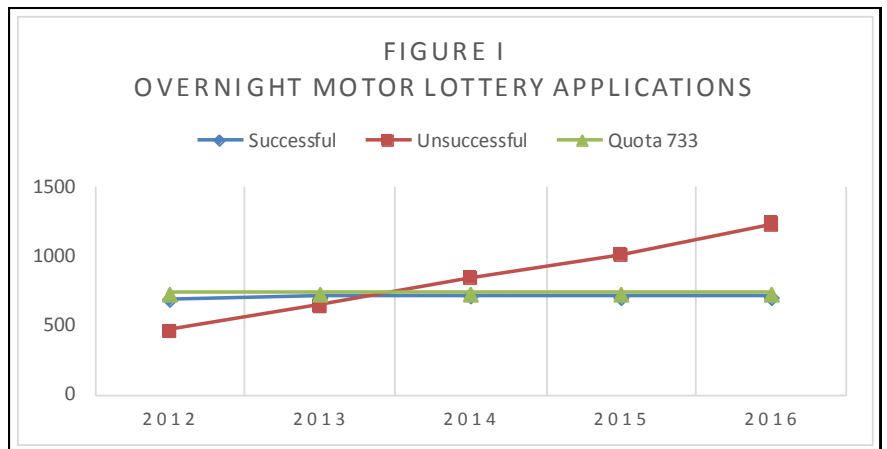
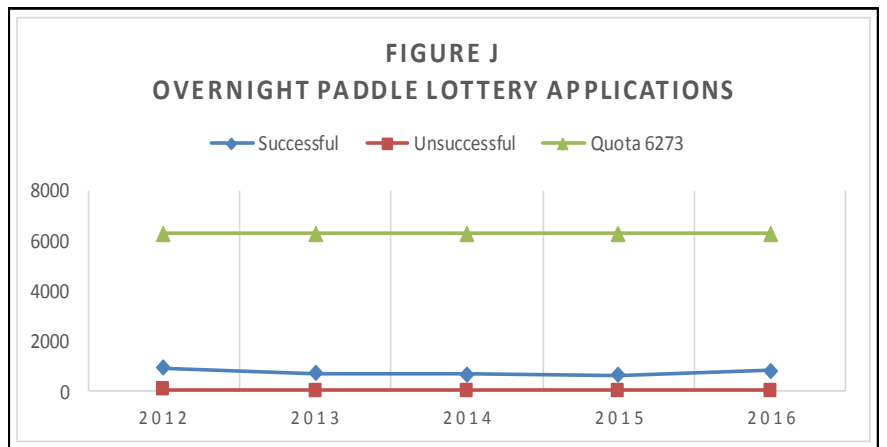


Table 10 and Figure J display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for overnight paddle permits. The data shows that nearly all overnight paddle applicants are successful during the lottery and that the number of permits available greatly exceeds the number of lottery applications.

| | Successful | Unsuccessful |
|------|------------|--------------|
| 2012 | 901 | 31 |
| 2013 | 676 | 1 |
| 2014 | 630 | 0 |
| 2015 | 598 | 0 |
| 2016 | 783 | 1 |



Part 5. Self-Issue Permit Use Trends

Self-issue permits are required for non-motorized day use visitors during the quota season and non-quota season, all overnight use (motorized and non-motorized) during the non-quota season, and any motorized day use on Little Vermilion, Loon, Lac La Croix (not beyond the south end of Snow Bay) and Loon River.

Self-issue permits are available at all entry points and visitors are required to fill them out before entering the wilderness and have them in possession while in the wilderness. Visitors might not always fill them out accurately. For instance, some permits claim snowmobile use during the quota season when such use would not be occurring. Data included in the following tables is based on what visitors record on the permits.

The self-issue permit lists eight different methods of travel and a fill-in space for other uses. Snowmobiles are permitted on the overland portages from Crane Lake to Little Vermilion Lake in Canada and from Seagull River along the eastern portion of Saganaga Lake to Canada. Hiking with stock on hiking trails is not permitted; horseback riding can occur off designated trails and portages.

Tables 11 – 18 display the number of self-issue permits during the quota season and during the non-quota season by type of permit from 2009 to 2015.

| Table 11 | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Self-Issue Permits and Visitors | | | | | | | |
| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| Total Self-Issue Permits | 11893 | 13845 | 14076 | 13903 | 12993 | 10331 | 11851 |
| Self-Issue Permits (May-September) | 8842 | 9503 | 10487 | 9991 | 9711 | 8179 | 8934 |
| Self-Issue Permits (October-April) | 3051 | 4342 | 3589 | 3914 | 3338 | 3081 | 4339 |
| Total Individuals | 37612 | 41344 | 44076 | 43855 | 45109 | 35990 | 41295 |
| Average Party Size | 3.17 | 2.99 | 3.14 | 3.16 | 3.47 | 3.22 | 3.26 |

| Table 12 2009 Number of Self-Issue Permits | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season | Totals |
| Canoe or Kayak | 5547 | 771 | 6318 |
| Ski | 0 | 366 | 366 |
| Boat (motor) | 749 | 137 | 886 |
| Snowshoe | 3 | 367 | 370 |
| Foot (hiking) | 2481 | 986 | 3467 |
| Dog Sled | 0 | 223 | 223 |
| Snowmobile | 2 | 180 | 182 |
| Boat (non- motor) | 10 | 3 | 13 |
| Hiking with stock (horses) | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Other (non-motor) | 49 | 16 | 65 |
| Other (motor) | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Totals | 8842 | 3051 | 11893 |

| Table 13 2010 Number of Self-Issue Permits | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season | Totals |
| Canoe or Kayak | 6578 | 1564 | 8142 |
| Ski | 0 | 476 | 476 |
| Boat (motor) | 333 | 216 | 549 |
| Snowshoe | 0 | 315 | 315 |
| Foot (hiking) | 2525 | 1344 | 3869 |
| Dog Sled | 0 | 329 | 329 |
| Snowmobile | 0 | 81 | 81 |
| Boat (non- motor) | 13 | 4 | 17 |
| Hiking with stock (horses) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other (non-motor) | 51 | 13 | 64 |
| Other (motor) | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Totals | 9503 | 4342 | 13845 |

| Table 14 2011 Number of Self-Issue Permits | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season | Totals |
| Canoe or Kayak | 7448 | 873 | 8321 |
| Ski | 3 | 464 | 467 |
| Boat (motor) | 566 | 171 | 737 |
| Snowshoe | 0 | 474 | 474 |
| Foot (hiking) | 2389 | 1240 | 3629 |
| Dog Sled | 0 | 211 | 211 |
| Snowmobile | 0 | 102 | 102 |
| Boat (non- motor) | 11 | 5 | 16 |
| Hiking with stock (horses) | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Other (non-motor) | 67 | 43 | 110 |
| Other (motor) | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| Totals | 10487 | 3589 | 14076 |

| Table 15 2012 Number of Self-Issue Permits | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season | Totals |
| Canoe or Kayak | 6771 | 1114 | 7885 |
| Ski | 2 | 494 | 496 |
| Boat (motor) | 525 | 244 | 769 |
| Snowshoe | 0 | 239 | 239 |
| Foot (hiking) | 2590 | 1587 | 4177 |
| Dog Sled | 0 | 166 | 166 |
| Snowmobile | 0 | 43 | 43 |
| Boat (non- motor) | 38 | 4 | 42 |
| Hiking with stock (horses) | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Other (non-motor) | 57 | 19 | 76 |
| Other (motor) | 6 | 4 | 10 |
| Totals | 9990 | 3914 | 13903 |

| Table 16 2013 Number of Self-Issue Permits | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season | Totals |
| Canoe or Kayak | 6749 | 817 | 7566 |
| Ski | 2 | 514 | 516 |
| Boat (motor) | 353 | 200 | 553 |
| Snowshoe | 0 | 377 | 377 |
| Foot (hiking) | 2533 | 1026 | 3559 |
| Dog Sled | 1 | 279 | 280 |
| Snowmobile | 0 | 109 | 109 |
| Boat (non- motor) | 33 | 1 | 34 |
| Hiking with stock (horses) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other (non-motor) | 20 | 0 | 20 |
| Other (motor) | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Totals | 9693 | 3324 | 13017 |

| Table 17 2014 Number of Self-Issue Permits | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season | Totals |
| Canoe or Kayak | 5690 | 723 | 6413 |
| Ski | 5 | 486 | 491 |
| Boat (motor) | 426 | 253 | 679 |
| Snowshoe | 2 | 323 | 325 |
| Foot (hiking) | 2032 | 1002 | 3034 |
| Dog Sled | 3 | 247 | 250 |
| Snowmobile | 0 | 32 | 32 |
| Boat (non- motor) | 9 | 6 | 15 |
| Hiking with stock (horses) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other (non-motor) | 38 | 7 | 45 |
| Other (motor) | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Totals | 8207 | 3080 | 11287 |

| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season | Totals |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Canoe or Kayak | 5912 | 710 | 6622 |
| Ski | 0 | 496 | 496 |
| Boat (motor) | 108 | 129 | 237 |
| Snowshoe | 0 | 288 | 288 |
| Foot (hiking) | 2846 | 1550 | 4396 |
| Dog Sled | 3 | 250 | 253 |
| Snowmobile | 0 | 88 | 88 |
| Boat (non- motor) | 10 | 2 | 12 |
| Hiking with stock (horses) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other (non-motor) | 49 | 23 | 72 |
| Other (motor) | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Totals | 8929 | 3537 | 12466 |

Part 6. Exempt Permit Information and Use Trends

There are three types of visitor uses that are exempt from both the quota and self-issue permit systems, and these visitors are issued exempt permits. The three exempt visitor groups include: 1) Day use motor visitors who are either an overnight homeowner guest or resort owner guest and are visiting a lake that is named in the BWCAW Act of 1978, are exempt from the day use motor quotas on that particular lake; 2) Authorized researchers with a government agency or researchers working in partnership with the Superior National Forest are exempt from overnight paddle quotas and possibly motor quotas depending on project need; and 3) Volunteers or other work groups with permission to work on a specific project are also exempt from paddle quotas and possibly motor quotas depending on project need. The number of exempt permits issued during the quota and non-quota seasons are displayed in Tables 19 – 25.

In addition to the exempt permits for guests of home and resort owners visiting a lake that is named in the 1978 BWCAW Act also provided that the homeowners and resort owners themselves on lakes named in the Act are also exempt from the day use motor quota on the particular lake where they own a residence or resort, and boat stickers serve as their exempt day use motor permit allowing residents to travel into the Wilderness on that particular lake without getting a separate permit. However, those use numbers do not show up in the tables below as they are not tracked.

| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Canoe or Kayak | 189 | 1 |
| Boat (motor) | 1061 | 0 |
| Foot (hiking) | 23 | 3 |
| Other | 4 | 0 |
| Totals | 1277 | 4 |

| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Canoe or Kayak | 229 | 0 |
| Boat (motor) | 1660 | 13 |
| Foot (hiking) | 24 | 0 |
| Other | 9 | 0 |
| Totals | 1922 | 13 |

| Table 21 | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 2011 Number of Exempt Permits | | |
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season |
| Canoe or Kayak | 48 | 0 |
| Boat (motor) | 674 | 0 |
| Foot (hiking) | 1 | 0 |
| Other | 4 | 0 |
| Totals | 727 | 0 |

| Table 22 | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 2012 Number of Exempt Permits | | |
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season |
| Canoe or Kayak | 63 | 0 |
| Boat (motor) | 725 | 0 |
| Foot (hiking) | 10 | 0 |
| Other | 7 | 0 |
| Totals | 805 | 0 |

| Table 23 | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 2013 Number of Exempt Permits | | |
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season |
| Canoe or Kayak | 57 | 0 |
| Boat (motor) | 1067 | 0 |
| Foot (hiking) | 8 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 1132 | 0 |

| Table 24 | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 2014 Number of Exempt Permits | | |
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season |
| Canoe or Kayak | 42 | 0 |
| Boat (motor) | 652 | 6 |
| Foot (hiking) | 11 | 0 |
| Other | 70 | 0 |
| Totals | 775 | 6 |

| Table 25 | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 2015 Number of Exempt Permits | | |
| Method of Travel | Quota Season | Non-Quota Season |
| Canoe or Kayak | 60 | 0 |
| Boat (motor) | 601 | 2 |
| Foot (hiking) | 5 | 0 |
| Other | 106 | 0 |
| Totals | 772 | 2 |

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