

SUPPORTING THE PROTECTION OF QUETICO-SUPERIOR CANOE COUNTRY

Fall-Winter 2014



Wilderness News

State of the Boundary Waters

How will proposed mining, climate change, invasive species, nutrient loading, and algal blooms change the border lakes?

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QUETICO SUPERIOR FOUNDATION



The Quetico Superior Foundation, established in 1946, encourages and supports the protection of the wilderness, cultural and historical resources of the Quetico-Superior canoe country and region.

Wilderness News

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Changes for *Wilderness News*

In the last issue of *Wilderness News*, I shared the results of a strategic planning process designed to stay relevant and be effective in the face of new challenges to the wilderness and changes in the ways people communicate.

The Quetico Superior Foundation Board of Directors has identified three main goals: **connect to a broader base of people through our online publications; support grant activity to address current issues; and balance expenditures between our granting efforts and the news reporting that supports *Wilderness News*.**

After careful consideration, we have decided to transition *Wilderness News* into an online publication and reduce the scope of the printed publication. It is no secret that more and more information is being transmitted electronically, and we have seen a steady decline in our mailing list for the printed version of *Wilderness News*.

You will continue to receive this newsletter throughout 2015. However, beginning in 2016, only the online edition will be available for free. If you wish to continue receiving the print edition after that time, it will be available by subscription. We will provide subscription information for the print edition in upcoming issues of *Wilderness News*, and if you wish to sign up for the electronic version now, simply visit **www.wildernessnews.org/sign-up**.

We believe this transition will help us support several important initiatives:

- Expanding our audience through online channels
- Increasing public awareness of the issues affecting the Quetico-Superior region
- Engaging in more substantial grant making for issues like sulfide mining

We sincerely thank you for your past support. We believe our new initiatives will allow us to do an even better job representing the values that have always defined the Quetico Superior Foundation.

Sincerely,

Jim Wyman

On the Cover: Rebecca Falls on the BWCAW-Quetico Park border. Photo by and courtesy of Terry Schocke.

State of the Boundary Waters

By Alissa Johnson



Lake of the Woods. All photos courtesy the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

The Quetico-Superior region of Minnesota and Canada bring to mind lake country—a landscape characterized by glacier carved lakes filled with clear, cold and clean water. Yet the list of possible impacts on northern Minnesota water quality is long: proposed mining, climate change, invasive species, nutrient loading, and algal blooms to name just a few. In some places, like Lake of the Woods, evidence suggests that changes are already under way. The open water season is 28 days longer than it was during the 1960s, and public concern over algal blooms helped prompt water experts to rethink how issues are monitored. Yet even where water quality remains unimpaired, studies are underway, forming what some scientists call a defensible baseline—an understanding of what’s currently happening in the region so water can be protected in the future. Here’s a look at three studies underway:

Algal Blooms Help Spark Plan of Study

Algal blooms on Lake of the Woods have been getting a lot of media attention in recent summers. Area residents and visitors seem to disagree on whether the severity of the thick green slime is getting worse, but the 2014 Rainy-Lake of the Woods State of the Basin Report identifies the blooms as a significant concern. And Nick Heisler, Senior Advisor with the International Joint Commission (IJC)—an international organization charged with protecting waters along the Canadian and United States border—says that public unease helped drive the creation of a Plan of Study for the area.

“Basically, the public became aware that water quality is not as good as it used to be and said, ‘We want it restored,’” Heisler said. As public concern grew, the premiers of Manitoba and Ontario asked the Canadian government to get involved, which in turn asked the IJC to evaluate the governance of water quality in the Lake of the Woods basin and prioritize water quality issues. Of course, that wasn’t a simple task. Factors like climate change, the presence of heavy metals, and aquatic invasive species all factor into the state of the basin, not to mention the fact that several different government and non-governmental entities have a stake in the watershed. Lake of the Woods occupies parts of Minnesota, Ontario, and Manitoba, which mean that one state, two provinces, and two national governments are involved.

And until recently, two different IJC governing boards monitored water quality and water levels in Lake of the Woods.

According to Heisler, the IJC combined the boards and expanded its physical geography to include the entire basin, which is nearly 27,000 square miles. This new board began meeting in 2013, made up of an equal number of Canadians and Americans and, for the first time, an equal number of government and non-government individuals. In order to prioritize issues, the board updated the State of the Basin Report and identified several key concerns: algal blooms and algal toxins; climate change; nutrient loading; surface and ground water contamination; water levels and erosion; and aquatic invasive species. The knowledge gaps—the information they didn’t have—formed the basis for an International Lake of the Woods basin Water Quality Plan of Study.

“It creates a blueprint for a study that would then identify specific causes, solutions and remediation,” Heisler said. The IJC released a draft of the plan in July of this year. It recommends 32 different projects with a total estimated cost of \$7,228,000 to address five major areas: water quality monitoring and information gathering; nutrient enrichment and algal blooms; aquatic invasive species; surface and groundwater contamination; and international water quality management. The



Algae in Minnesota lakes. Algal blooms across the state—including Lake of the Woods—are getting more and more media attention. For Lake of the Woods, it helped spark a Plan of Study to understand the threats to the lake's health.

Study Team has recommended three options to fund the study, which fund varying degrees of the study. The IJC is collecting public comment on the plan of study's funding options through mid-December, after which the IJC will make recommendations to the governments of the United States and Canada to restore the quality of the water in the Lake of the Woods Basin.

"The big goal is identifying the knowledge gaps and helping both jurisdictions know what the other jurisdictions are doing. There is no point in one setting a whole section of parameters while the other jurisdiction does nothing," Heisler said. (Review the study at http://www.ijc.org/en_/LOWWQPOS).

The Envy of the Nation in Watershed Monitoring

This summer the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) completed the first of two years of intensive watershed monitoring in the Rainy River Headwaters Watershed—a tall order considering that the necessary equipment includes batteries weighing 50 pounds apiece and much of the watershed lies beyond the reach of motorboats. It includes most of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, almost all of Voyageurs National Park, and all of Quetico Provincial Park.

"We know that overall the water quality is very good," said Joel Peterson, MPCA Watershed Ecologist. "But there are a lots of things to look at." He explained that the MPCA was looking at water flows, contaminant loads at different rates of flow, and the variation between different parts of the watershed among other data. The information will help the MPCA model the

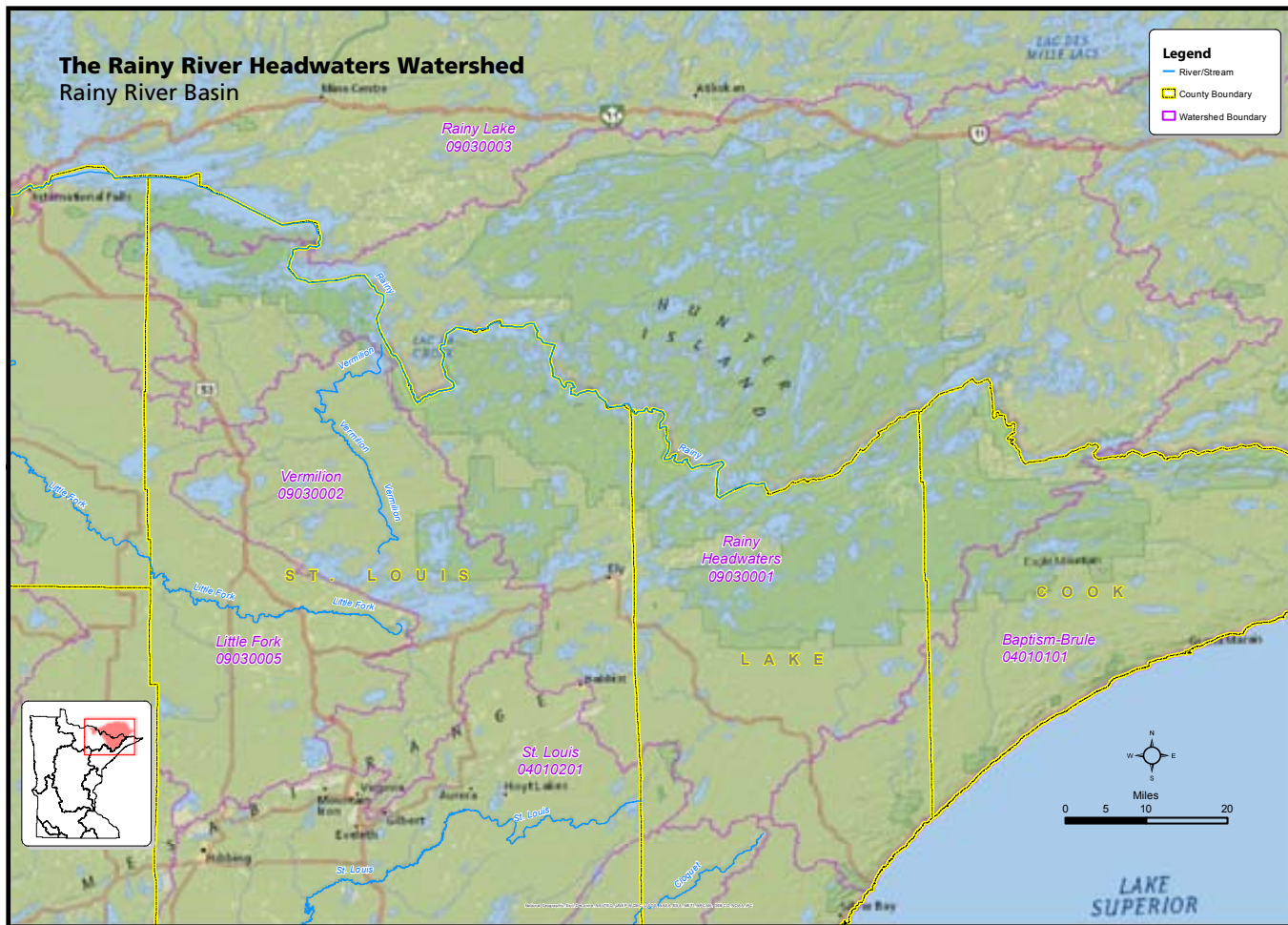
impacts of potential contaminants and development in the area.

"We'll get a very defensible base line—the general understanding of what's going on," Peterson said. "And if we do develop around a lake and start seeing changes in that baseline, and we can attribute it to what we're doing on land then we can fix it. We're obligated to fix it by federal and state law."

Funding for the project comes from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment passed by voters in 2008. The Amendment increased Minnesota sales tax for 25 years, and the "Legacy Dollars" directed toward water quality make it possible for the MPCA to up the ante when it comes to water monitoring across the state. In the past, the agency surveyed about 1% of the state's 81 watersheds each year and used a narrower approach to monitoring. If there was a problem with turbidity, Peterson says, scientists studied turbidity—even though there might be other factors at play.

"We started calling it the 100-year plan because it was not effective," Peterson said. Now, the MPCA surveys about 10% of watersheds each year and uses a more holistic approach. Teams survey the water for the biota present, and if it doesn't match expectations, they conduct a stressor identification process to determine the cause. It's a more holistic approach to monitoring that has made Minnesota the envy of the country among water monitoring experts and agencies. It's an exciting time for watershed ecologists, made even more exceptional because of inter-agency partnerships.

"We're actually talking to each other across federal and state agencies. Part of it is because (with the



The Rainy River Headwaters Watershed is unique because it includes most of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, all of Quetico Provincial Park, and almost all of Voyageurs National Park. Map courtesy of the the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

wilderness area, a provincial park, and a national park) it's such an exciting watershed to work in that people are more willing to share and want to protect it," Peterson said. A water quality report is expected this winter.

Understanding the Impacts of Mining

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is about a third of the way through a three-year study designed to understand metal concentrations in areas that could be mined. According to Perry Jones, USGS Hydrologist, the USGS set aside funds to look into the impacts of potential mining.

"We decided that if we're going to look at the impact of future mining, we have to understand what the background concentrations are in the watersheds," Jones said. To do that, the agency is assessing the influence of natural copper-nickel bedrocks in the Duluth Complex on water quality. The team has been collecting water samples and monitoring stream flow in Filson Creek and Keeley Creek near Babbitt, and on the headwaters of the St. Louis River near Hoyt Lakes.

"The objectives of our study are to assess copper, nickel, and other metal concentrations in surface water, rocks, streambed sediments, and soils in watersheds where the basal part of the Duluth Complex is present, and to determine if these concentrations are currently influencing regional water quality in areas of potential base-metal mining," Jones explained.

A geochemist is also collecting bedrock samples and soils in the parent glacial material to understand how the composition of the glacial material and the rock relates to the chemistry of the water. The goal is to provide information that regulators and mining companies can use in development and assessing mining proposals. Jones said the study's findings should provide valuable information for both mining companies and regulators.

"From our standpoint, we're collecting scientific data," Jones said. "That gives an unbiased credibility to our data because we don't have objectives. I think that will help the mining companies as well as the regulators in their evaluations."



Left: Dave and Amy Freeman portage their canoe "Sig" in front of the Washington Monument, photo by Nate Ptacek. Below: Paddling down the Mattawa River in Ontario. Photo courtesy Dave and Amy Freeman.



Paddle to D.C.

Ely Adventurers' Latest Expedition Carries Concerns About Mining

By Greg Seitz

A big storm hit the East Coast the day before Thanksgiving. An old-fashioned Nor'easter. Wet and windy, it forced Dave and Amy Freeman to abandon Chesapeake Bay, load their canoe on portage wheels, and pull it along the shoulder of roads to keep making progress.

Nineteen hundred miles or so behind them, another hundred to go, Dave sounded tired but confident over the phone. They would make it to Washington, D.C. by December 2—in time for scheduled welcome events—if they kept moving. They felt good about what the trip had accomplished: They had reached more people than they had hoped as they canoed and sailed from Ely to the capital. They knew thousands of people around the country cared about the Boundary Waters and would not let anything happen to harm it.

"Like Edward Abbey said, 'The idea of wilderness needs no defense, it only needs more defenders,'" Dave said.

The canoeing couple launched from the South Kawishiwi River on August 24, and paddled 160 miles through the Boundary Waters along the Border Route to the Grand Portage. There, they strapped their canoe on their sailboat and set off for Duluth, and then across Lake Superior and to Lake Huron. In Georgian Bay, they anchored the sailboat and set off by paddle again, winding their way through Canada and to Lake Champlain in Vermont. Their route took them down

the Hudson River and right through New York City, down the Eastern Seaboard to Chesapeake Bay, and finally to the Potomac River and Washington, D.C.

This epic expedition was inspired by what the Freemans see as an existential threat to a national treasure: mining. "The Boundary Waters is our nation's most popular wilderness area, it receives a quarter million visitors per year. Every year I guide people in the Boundary Waters from Texas and California and all across the country. We need to make sure people all across the country understand how special the Boundary Waters is and understand the threats it faces."

The Freemans make their living with adventure, and got their first tastes of it in the BWCAW. They met while working in Ely, and continue to make the town their base camp while guiding canoeing and dogsledding trips in between bigger expeditions. Their recent three-year-long North American Odyssey took them 11,000 miles across the continent from Seattle to Alaska to the Florida Keys by kayak, foot, canoe, dogsled, and sheer grit. Earlier this summer, Dave joined legendary Arctic explorer, Ely resident, and dogsled guide Paul Schurke on a descent of the Rio Roosevelt in Brazil—better known as the River of the Doubt, subject of an epic 1914 exploration by Teddy Roosevelt and a bestselling book of the same name.

Through their nonprofit organization Wilderness Classroom, the Freemans bring students along on their journeys with learning opportunities emphasizing



Top left: Camped on the French River as the Freemans followed the traditional Voyageur travel and trade route. Left: Attendees at a Paddle to D.C. event at the North Brooklyn Boat Club in New York City sign their names on the Freemans' canoe. Above: Paddling through New York City. Photos courtesy Dave and Amy Freeman.

science, technology, engineering and math. The couple was named *National Geographic's* 2014 Adventurers of the Year.

Paddle to D.C. was different, though. It would be a lot less wild, and it was more personal. They had gone on trail for three years and when they got back to Ely, discovered the wilderness where they first got bit by the adventure bug was in peril. Stepping into Sustainable Ely's action center on Sheridan Street, they learned about the proposals to mine copper, nickel and other metals near the Boundary Waters, and the potential for pollution that comes with such mines.

"If you look at their track record, you can't find an example of a sulfide ore mine that hasn't caused significant pollution," Dave says. "Just this summer, there was a mine in a sulfide ore body called Mount Polley in British Columbia, which was being touted as a poster child mine, and they had a huge retaining wall break that sent hundreds of millions of gallons of water and sediment rushing down a tributary into the Fraser River."

Inside the Sustainable Ely building was a Wenonah Minnesota III canoe covered in hundreds of signatures, a fitting petition calling for preservation of the canoe country. "They were going to drive it out to DC, and we said 'a canoe is meant to be paddled,'" Dave said, and they started planning a trip, ultimately connecting with a coalition of groups called Save the Boundary Waters, comprised of groups large and small, from The Wilderness Society to Sustainable Ely. The coalition helped the

Freemans organize the trip and get the word out.

The trip would celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Wilderness Act, and serve as an opportunity to educate people across the country about the threat mining poses to the clean waters of northern Minnesota. "To be putting that right on the edge of the Boundary Waters, this water rich environment, and looking at plans that would require continuous water treatment for hundreds of years after mining would close, it makes me very worried about the impacts mining could have on the Boundary Waters," Dave said.

Along their winding route east, the Freemans participated in about 35 events. They spoke about their trip, the Boundary Waters, the mining threat, gathered more signatures on the canoe—dubbed "Sig," after Sigurd Olson and for the growing number of signatures adorning its hull—and inspired a couple thousand people to explore and defend wilderness. Inspiration was a two-way street, and the Freemans were encouraged by the support they saw for the cause.

"In New York City we had a bunch of paddlers come out with us and paddled down the East River, past Manhattan, big skyscrapers next to us," Dave said.

The experience of paddling through the nation's biggest city with kindred spirits came as a reprieve from a difficult stretch several days earlier, on the Hudson River. That part of the trip provided what Dave says was the most profound, and dispiriting, experience of the journey.

'It was really cold and rainy and the days were getting really short so we had lots of times when we were getting up before it was light and were setting up camp in the dark. That's a challenge in itself, but then when you're paddling through this polluted place, it really wore us down. It was demoralizing to deal with challenging conditions and polluted water and depressing landscape," Dave says.

The famed river is 315 miles long, and the upper 200 miles of it are a designated Superfund site, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been leading efforts to clean up since 1977. For 30 years, General Electric and other battery manufacturers dumped up to 1.3 million pounds of toxic Polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, into the river. The river's sediment, water, and fish are still dangerous to human health.

Dave says he and Amy are determined to not let something like that happen to the northern Minnesota's lakes and rivers.

"Our overarching goal was to gather more defenders for the Boundary Waters from all over the country and show them why it's special and needs to be protected," he said. "I look forward to every chance I get to go into the wilderness and spend that time in nature outside in a quiet place, far from the hustle and bustle of the cities."

The day after they pulled their canoe along Chesapeake Bay area roads was Thanksgiving. Like many people, the Freemans' travel plans had been disrupted by the big storm. But while most folks would still sit down to supper with friends and family, Dave said the weather forecast was much better, and they were hoping to make it back on the water—down a local creek back to the bay and then within ten or fifteen miles of Annapolis, MD.

They had set out from Ely to transport a message about the special place they call their home, but its importance had clearly been elevated by their experiences along the way. Dave seemed profoundly affected by paddling down the polluted Hudson River, saying, "You don't even want to touch the water, but in the Boundary Waters you can dip your cup right in the water and drink out of it. It has given us a real appreciation for the pristine water of wilderness lakes."

The Freemans made it to D.C. on December 2 as scheduled, paddling the Potomac with members of the Washington Canoe Club on a morning when it was 39 degrees and raining. They spent the next few days touring the capital, talking with even more people about the wilderness and the mining threat, including government officials who are tasked with preserving the wilderness. Before they left Washington, Dave and Amy delivered their canoe to the U.S. Forest Service office, presenting it to agency head Tom Tidwell, where it will hang permanently as a testament to the Boundary Waters and the people who love it.



Amy Freeman and the Statue of Liberty. Photo courtesy Dave and Amy Freeman. Below: The Freemans and some of the 40 Minnesotans who joined them in Washington, D.C. to speak up for the BWCAW. Photo by Nate Ptacek.





PADDLING ON ROUTE 66

by Larry Christianson

Boundary Waters Calm. All photos by and courtesy of Norma Christianson.

Paddling season arrived for me with great personal meaning as this is the time where I planned to catch up to my age in the sense of arriving in autumn at boundary waters canoe trip number 66 at age 66. A long-term goal that has been lurking out there on my life horizon—defining the theme for this year 2014 as “Paddling on Route 66.”

I feel like a relic. An old guy still able to paddle and portage and sleep in a tent and catch fish and enjoy wilderness canoe trips. I can hardly drive a car anymore, yet can paddle with strength and confidence. All very ironic. Another good example of going the unhurried way with more enjoyment and meaning. The lure of wild places remains firmly embedded in my heart, even though at a slower pace and different style in the midst of mounting limitations and declining health. Just being on scene in the boundary waters matters to me big time. Drinking in the beauty along with morning coffee and evening happy hours, and all the relaxing stretched in between.

In reading *Paddling to Winter* by Julie Buckles, I learned about “duff days”—those much needed days of rest and renewal in camp. And it dawned on me that back in my younger days, duff days were not always welcome. They were seen as a necessary inconvenience

for avoiding the dangers of high winds, thunderstorms or lightning strikes, and for accomplishing basic camp tasks. But top priority was being in a canoe on the water, paddling and portaging to surrounding lakes, fishing sweet spots beckoning from the map, picnicking at memorable places from past trips, exploring more and more beauty of the boundary waters. Since significant health issues started in my late forties, occasional duff days became a very important part of a new physical reality. Now in my older years, they are an essential ingredient in remaining fit and able to enjoy wilderness canoe trips. And I have come to really appreciate our duff days as some of the best days. A change of attitude as well as style.

Paddling on Route 66 all the way to catching up with my age has been a goal pursued with increasing fervor as the years slipped by. Factors involved include maintaining a reasonable measure of strength and fitness; the desire to keep on paddling and portaging; trusted and willing companions; lighter weight camping equipment and canoes; eating less and lower on the food chain; scaled back expectations; retiring from the work world. More flexibility and freedom in the spirit of going slower and enjoying it more.

In a spin of serendipity, my trip number 66 appeared suddenly in a spur of the moment opportunity to take the place of three women who were lined up



Eagle Eyes.

to be going to the boundary waters with my wife and longtime paddling partner Norma. They all cancelled within a few hours span of time, each for separate and solid reasons. So with forty hours before departure for Ely, Norma asked if I wanted to go along on her canoe trip. An intriguing question which proved to be a good test for my often-stated claim “to be ready to head for canoe country on a one hour notice.”

Maybe not literally, but not far off the mark as I grabbed fishing poles, scrambled to pack clothes and added my sleeping bag and pad to Norma’s already assembled packing pile. We worked together to re-group food from four people to us two pescatarians, and arrived in Ely at Canoe Country Outfitters not forty-eight hours later.

Entry day was grand—warm air, calm water and light breezes—and a new camping destination in mind. The east end area of Lake Four. My old misty moose camp with friend Tom from back in 2000 was a real treasure in its vacancy. It is a first-time campsite for Norma, and we easily settled in to relax mode.

Our exploring included a memorable visit to nearby Picnic Rapids, which we could hear in the night as a Lake Four lullaby—humming, singing softly in melody for weary campers sleeping peacefully. The forest surrounding the rapids and along the short portage on the way deeper into the wilderness was completely burned in the Pagami Creek Fire we had escaped. For us the area is a sobering reminder of that smoky orange full moon night of danger nearly three years past, but still very fresh in our memories. New growth is an incredible witness to forest renewal and the resiliency of creation, as well as the relentless reality of destruction. A

living laboratory offering countless science lessons for decades to come.

We finally ventured into the north arm of Lake Four. After all our times in Kawishiwi country through the past three decades, we never bothered to paddle into the narrow, rocky channel seldom explored by campers. Out of the main numbered lakes traffic flow, the north arm is more secluded and feels wilder.

A short paddle to the scorched area west from our campsite resulted in fascinating sights of new growth pine and aspen, purple expanses of flaming fireweed and numerous varieties of other weeds already thick and chest high. Abundant patches of sweet raspberries invited us to enjoy a quick snack. Rocks burned black and dead trees standing, leaning and lying in tangles of destruction filled out a scene stark in panoramic view. All sprinkled with splashes of beauty offering glimpses of a hopeful forest future lurking far out on time’s horizon, but certainly not in our lifetimes.

A weariness hard to describe surfaced within me in the waning hours of each day. Too much sun. Too much humidity. Too much dealing with buzzing critters. Maybe even too much relaxation. All I know is fresh air and round-the-clock outdoor living are both tiring and invigorating. Aging takes its toll on my body as my spirit feels young and vigorous. Like James Garfield wrote in his presidential diary in 1881: “If wrinkles must be written upon our brow, let them not be written upon the heart. The spirit should not grow old.”

The weariness comes with the special bonus of better quality sleeping in a tent. All the tossing, turning and adjusting of positions of younger years have evolved into conking out fast with a peaceful evening of rest. Not even interrupted by night noises of a lively forest and moving lake water. Only by an inevitable biffy call.

Our last day before paddling in to Lake One landing and claiming the culmination of my long-time goal was a very relaxing duff day. A wonderful oasis along Route 66. My reflections circled around to Shell Lake and my inaugural boundary waters canoe trip in 1975—long ago and far away in terms of expertise and experience. Enough love for wilderness experiences must have seeped into my heart to keep me returning to canoe country as a deeply meaningful part of my life journey.

Arriving at my personal Route 66 is a landmark event for me in this same year as the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964. Congress created a national preservation system for designated



Pagami Creek Fire Forest Renewal, Lake Four.

wilderness areas—which included the Boundary Waters Canoe Area—and established the following legal definition of wilderness: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Not quite untrammelled in fifty years of reality, but close enough for a regular visitor like me. Precious enough to carry on as a treasure of creation nourishing the human spirit.

In reviewing my canoe journals stretching back to my first trip, I was able to add up the number of days spent in the boundary waters during the past thirty-nine years. And the result struck me as a pleasant surprise—334 days. Only a month short of a full year of my life. A thirty-one day canoe trip would round the total up nicely, but feels like too neat a conclusion, an ending not desired.

So the next goal is to at least keep up with my age as the years keep on rolling along. Or maybe even

paddle on ahead beyond Route 66. On to the future as an open horizon. On to more boundary waters wilderness canoe trips.



Duff Day, Larry Christianson.



Campers and staff play an old Voyageur game, Cat and Mouse, during free time at Base Camp. All photos courtesy of Laketrails Base Camp.



Left: After trip gear is all put away, it's time to clean up—campers share a few laughs during "swim-suds-sauna" time. Below: Scrubbing out the canoes after a canoe trip.



Below: Campers paddle back to camp after nearly a week on trail.



"...it never ceases to amaze me, the magic that happens on trail. They come back so cohesive as a team, and they're so happy and excited and full of crazy stories to tell about things they did on trail,"
– Sue Lemm

Laketrails Base Camp

By Alissa Johnson

When Laketrails campers arrive at base camp, costumed counselors greet them, singing and dancing, hooting and hollering, and banging on drums. “We’re famous for our welcomes of campers,” says executive director Sue Lemm. And it’s easy to imagine what a sight it must be, especially after the journey to get to Laketrails—simply arriving at base camp is no small feat. Campers typically travel by bus, riding all the way to northern Minnesota, into Canada and then back into Minnesota, into that tiny portion of the state that juts into Canada above Lake of the Woods. They travel the last six miles by boat, from Young’s Bay on Lake of the Woods to the island where Laketrails and the counselors await. For some campers, the journey takes several hours.

But the wild and crazy greeting is about more than giving travel-weary kids a bit of fun. From the moment campers arrive at Laketrails, the goal is to make them feel like they belong. Staff and counselors get to know every camper by name, and take the time to learn what kids like, what they don’t like, and take note of their accomplishments as they get ready for a five or six day canoe trip. “When we give affirmation to a kid, it is genuine. We recognize the accomplishments that they really do,” Lemm says.

She calls it a culture of unconditional acceptance, and believes it’s key to a canoe camp that serves middle school kids and teenagers. “There are a lot of teenagers that for one reason or another don’t feel good. We try to make kids feel good about themselves and feel a genuine confidence,” she said.

That kind of confidence is in many ways a natural byproduct of a program like Laketrails. Campers spend two days in camp planning for their canoe trips. They learn to paddle and carry canoes, pick out and prepare their equipment, and help plan every aspect of their trip. They even pick out where they want to go. On the second day of the session, the counselors do what Lemm calls selling the trips.

“If we have 40 kids that come to a session, we would send out five different canoe trips to different destinations and let the kids choose which trip they want to go on. The guides are in pairs and they will give humorous presentations about where they’re going to go and what they’re going to do, and then the kids choose where they want to go,” Lemm says. “It really helps instill responsibility and gives the kids ownership of the trip. They learn that it’s important to plan and talk together about how they’re going to do this.”

When the groups head out onto trail for five to six days, they take an active role in all parts of trail life—setting up camp, cooking, navigating, paddling, and portaging. Nearly every group returns to camp with the counselors in the duffers’ seats and the kids navigating from the stern. “One of my favorite things is watching kids leave and then fast forwarding to day seven of the session, when they come back to camp and it is just amazing. I’ve been hanging around camp for 18 years now and it never ceases to amaze me, the magic that happens on trail. They come back so cohesive as a team, and they’re so happy and excited and full of crazy stories to tell about things they did on trail,” Lemm says.

Camp staff and counselors are also intentional about helping campers grow in this way. They have three goals for every camper: to grow in his or her sense of self-worth; to grow in his or her appreciation for nature and the outdoors; and to grow in his or her



Lake of the Woods provides a perfect playground for Laketrails campers, who spend five to six days on trail.



Top left: Costumed counselors greet campers and chaperones at Young's Bay before heading to Laketrails by boat. Upper right: The Great Lodge houses the camp's dining center and is a favorite spot to watch stunning sunsets. Lower right: Middle school campers enjoy some beach activities on their last day in camp. Lower left: Happy campers unload their canoes after a successful adventure.

appreciation for community. To make this happen, Lemm says that camp staff are teaching from the moment kids arrive and it's an approach that keeps many groups coming back. In addition to general session campers, Laketrails also partners with schools and organizations like Eagan High School, Edina High School, and the St. Cloud Girls and Boys Club. Eagan High School has been coming to Laketrails for over 20 years.

"It proves that what we're doing is a legitimate program and we really are teaching," Lemm says. The schools customize their trips, adding science, history and other curriculums to the program so students can earn credits. It's just one more unique aspect of the Laketrails program. Yet if there's one thing that seems to bring people back again and again—even Lemm herself, who started her Laketrails experience on an adult canoe trip—it's the culture of unconditional acceptance. Time and again, campers tell Lemm that they come back because the people are just that nice.

One first-time camper in particular, who genuinely seemed to hate everything about camping and being

outside, shocked Lemm by coming back to camp the next summer. "(The first year), it was hard to get her out of the cabin to join in with anything," Lemm says. "The next year, I went over to greet the campers and who gets off the boat? This girl! I said, 'you came back! You hated this! Why did you come back?'"

The girl's reply was simple. "I loved the people," she said.

Lemm understands the draw. That first adult canoe trip she took 18 years ago? She just kept coming back. "What kept drawing me back was that I always felt like I was free to be a better person when I was at camp and in that culture of be nice to everyone and accept everyone. Even as an adult I felt that," she says.

Laketrails offers nine day sessions and campers must be 13 years old or have completed the 7th grade. There is a session for middle school students who have completed 6th through 8th grades. When there is enough interest, Laketrails also offers adult trips.

Learn more at www.laketrails.org



Dodd Cosgrove

Board member since... “It has been long enough that I have lost track. I would guess at least twenty years.”

Please tell us what your involvement with the Quetico Superior Foundation means to you:

Beginning with a trip to Trout Lake a month before the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964, I have travelled the Quetico-Superior region extensively. These experiences have impressed on me the importance of having wild, untrammelled places for everyone to enjoy. The Quetico Superior Foundation gives me an opportunity to insure that this place will remain special for future generations.

What other ways have you been active in the Quetico-Superior Region?

My wife, Ann, and I have owned a cabin outside Ely, Mn for the last 18 years. I am also on the board of the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness and am currently treasurer of the organization. As a cabin owner, I am involved in the Save the Boundary Waters Campaign headquartered in Ely, a coalition of regional and national environmental groups and concerned citizens led by Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness. Its goal is to prevent sulfide mining in the Boundary Waters watershed.

What is the most pressing issue you see in the region today?

There is no question that the attempt by international mining companies to mine copper in this water rich environment is the most pressing issue. Sulfide mining has never been done without significant environmental damage. The Boundary Waters Wilderness and the Quetico Provincial Park are international treasures. It would be foolhardy to permit copper mines in this area.

What’s one of your favorite memories from the Quetico-Superior Region?

In August 1991, the family took a memorable trip to Beaverhouse Lake in the Quetico. Our two children at the time were eleven and eight years old. The weather was perfect and the fishing was excellent. It was extremely satisfying for Ann and me to watch our two daughters create a permanent bond to this place. Both are avid wilderness paddlers today. I might add that our third daughter, who is also a paddler, has a degree in wildlife biology and is currently on a moose study in northeast Washington.

What’s your favorite spot or way to see the Quetico-Superior Region?

I have taken many memorable trips into this region right after ice-out in mid May. There is something special about this country when the water is high, the waterfalls and rapids are thundering, and even the minor streams are in flood stage. The forest is just beginning to come alive. Catching lake trout on the surface in early spring is a special occasion. It epitomizes the essence of a wilderness experience.

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Maligne River portage, Quetico Provincial Park.
Photo by and courtesy of Terry Schocke.

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