Should we Dig?

Proposed mining projects in lands adjacent to the BWCAW stir controversy Page 3

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Together, We’re Making a Difference

In this issue of Wilderness News, you’ll find the names of more than 200 readers who have made financial contributions to this newsletter—it’s our way of saying thank you. Your financial contributions do so much more than support Wilderness News. They help us continue and expand our granting efforts.

In 2012, the Quetico Superior Foundation awarded grants that helped commemorate the history of the Quetico-Superior region and raise awareness about the issues unfolding there today. We helped the Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation undertake a commemorative tour of the communities Ernest visited during his epic 1912 journey from Winnipeg to Hudson Bay and back. The Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness raised public awareness on the sulfide mining issues in the region, and they secured the 2013 Sigurd Olson Lecture Series, which provides free lectures on natural resource issues. We look forward to bringing you more information on these grants in the coming year.

In this issue, you’ll find an update on copper and nickel mining, get a glimpse of life at Charles L. Sommers Canoe Base in Ely, MN, and meet a young writer who has dedicated her career to inspiring people to get outdoors. We hope you’re inspired and informed, and that you’ll continue to support us as we work to preserve the history, culture, and character of a treasured region.

Sincerely,
Jim Wyman
Board President, Quetico Superior Foundation

On the Cover:
A Duluth Metals exploration drill rig, located off Highway 1, near the South Kawishiwi River. Photo courtesy Greg Seitz.

Tell us what you think and keep up with canoe country issues:
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Mining Update

By Greg Seitz

The Twin Metals copper mine proposal has been described by supporters as an “underground city,” a “juggernaut,” a “monster deposit,” and possibly the “largest mine in Minnesota history.” Opponents talk about the short-term proposed gains versus the long-term environmental damage of the mine; mining’s history of “boom, then bust” in Minnesota; and ask what, if any, price should be put on preserving our state’s largest and most beloved natural area, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.
The conversation has taken on new urgency recently, as the company is progressing rapidly on developing a full-fledged proposal and moving toward environmental review. Minnesotans are now confronted with one of the biggest environmental debates our state has seen since the 1970s.

Meet the new neighbors
Twin Metals’ potential mine site is located about three miles from the South Kawishiwi River and Little Gabbro Lake entry points to the Boundary Waters.

The project is moving forward rapidly, but is still at least five years from digging, with exploratory drilling underway. The company controls roughly 32,000 acres of land in northern Minnesota, and has drill rigs taking core samples to map the deposit, understand the economic potential, and inform the mine design.

The targeted area straddles Highway 1 along the South Kawishiwi River and Birch Lake, about 10 miles southeast of Ely. A partnership between Canadian junior mining company Duluth Metals and Chilean mining conglomerate Antofagasta PLC, the mine would seek to extract nearly 14 billion pounds of copper, as well as nickel, platinum, palladium and gold.

Twin Metals would dig tunnels more than 3,000 feet below the surface to extract these metals. Based on today’s high demand for electronics, like cell phones and iPads, and also wind turbines and hybrid vehicle fuel cells, all of which use copper and other metals, this enormous undertaking could be economically feasible.

The gigantic scale of the proposal, the pollution that plagues this form of mining, and its location next door to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness are concerns for many. The mine’s potential for job creation and tax dollars is gaining support. And a lot of people—from wilderness paddlers to U.S. Senators—are still trying to figure out how concerned or supportive they should be.

Building momentum
For the past three years, Twin Metals has been making rapid progress. In 2010, it was born out of a deal that gave Antofagasta a 40 percent stake in the project, with the option to purchase another 25 percent share, for significant financial support. So far, the Chilean company has pledged $130 million for mine development.

A year later, Twin Metals acquired Franconia Minerals, which had been exploring for a possible mine nearby, most of it located underneath Birch Lake, a few miles further from the BWCAW than the primary deposit. Twin Metals’ combined holdings now include an estimated 13.7 billion pounds of copper, 4.4 billion pounds of nickel and 21.2 million ounces of palladium, platinum and gold.

Fueled by the potential of its holdings, the company set down roots in Ely by opening a field office in town, making donations to the community’s food shelf and sponsoring Little League baseball teams.

In October 2011, Twin Metals embarked on a prefeasibility study, a multi-year project to evaluate possible mine designs, environmental impacts, infrastructure needs, and other aspects. It selected Bechtel Mining & Metals, part of a larger firm based in San Francisco and a previous partner with Antofagasta, to lead the study.

The choice of firms was controversial, however. According to the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, Bechtel has been associated with mines in New Guinea which dump millions of gallons of toxic waste into local streams, and a pipeline project in New Hampshire which was fined $90,000 for violating environmental laws and dumping sediment into streams and wetlands.

A March 2012 story in the Ely Echo highlighted a leading design possibility that would include a five-mile-long tunnel which descends into the mine from near Babbitt, MN. Trucks would be able to drive through the mine, and underground facilities could include offices and possibly ore processing. Twin Metals has stated that much of its mine waste will be put back into the shafts after mining.

Once the prefeasibility study is complete, many more details about the proposal should be available. John Myers in the Duluth News-Tribune reported a mine design is expected in mid-2013, with scoping for

Canoeing on the South Kawishiwi River, between the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the proposed Twin Metals mine site. All photos courtesy Greg Seitz.
environmental review to commence after the design is complete. Once environmental review begins, the public will have opportunities to provide comments.

**Water work**

Northern Minnesota’s water-rich environment presents special challenges to any mine. Visibly, the region is full of lakes, rivers, and wetlands. Below the surface is fractured bedrock, which allows groundwater to move rapidly, both around the area and between the surface and aquifers.

The big environmental question with this form of mining relates to its impacts to water and how mining companies claim they will prevent pollution. The metals being extracted are embedded in ore which contain sulfides. When ore comes into contact with air and water, it produces sulfuric acid and toxic metals leach from the rock.

Twin Metals recently began a new project to better understand the movement of groundwater through its proposed mine site. The hydrogeologic study would involve drilling about 400 wells to study the issue. The company recently applied for a permit with the Superior National Forest for the study, which would involve building more roads and drill pads, seeking permission to occupy the surface.

“We are currently ensuring that the proposal is as fine-tuned and accurate as possible,” said Mary Shedd of the Superior National Forest. “We’re hoping to start scoping in the next month or two. The proposal is very well developed, but we still need to fine tune location of access roads and a few other things like that.”

The scoping process would determine the appropriate level of environmental review needed for the study, with an opportunity for public comment, and then based on that input, identifying possible issues and alternatives. Shedd said the Forest Service hopes to make a decision on the project within a year.

Around the world, this chemistry has almost always caused toxic pollution. A 2006 study by mine engineer Jim Kuipers and environmental geochemist Ann Maest found that 76 percent of similar mines exceeded the water quality predicted in pre-mining Environmental Impact Statements. For mines located near surface water, that number rose to 85 percent.

The Environmental Protection Agency’s Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) Program identifies sources of significant pollution in the United States. According to national environmental group Earthworks, “Of the 26 industries that must report to TRI, nearly half of 2011’s total toxic releases originated from mining of metals like copper, lead, and gold, according to the analysis. Metal mining, which typically accounts for the largest share of toxics reported by industries, grew to 46 percent of total releases in 2011.”

**Mixed feelings**

In 2011, rural Stony River Township, the community where the Twin Metals mine project would be located, passed a resolution calling for a statewide moratorium on this type of mining, and for changes to mineral leasing laws under which the Department of Natural Resources leases drilling rights on private land to mining companies (see sidebar). Two other northern Minnesota townships followed suit.

The anti-mining resolutions were symbolic gestures. The townships have little say in whether or not mining goes forward in their communities, as permits are issued by
LAND SWAP POLITICS
When the state of Minnesota was created, the federal government granted 2.9 million acres of land to the state for the purpose of generating funding for schools. Then, when the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness was created in 1978, about 86,000 acres of these school trust lands were included in the federal wilderness.

Because the lands are inside the Boundary Waters, the usual activities like logging, mining or leasing and sale as a means of generating school funding are not options. The state has been wrestling with how to resolve this issue ever since.

In 2012, Rep. Chip Cravaack, who represented Minnesota’s Eighth Congressional District at the time, introduced legislation to exchange the school trust lands in the BWCAW for National Forest Lands outside the wilderness. The Boundary Waters would become almost wholly-owned by the federal government, while the state would take control of a significant swath of land currently managed by the Forest Service.

Environmental groups fought the legislation on the grounds that the transfer of ownership to the state would mean the lands would be intensively managed for revenue, rather than preserving recreational or ecological value. There were other problems with the legislation, most notably that it was unclear exactly what National Forest lands would be included in the exchange.

Rep. Cravaack’s legislation passed the U.S. House of Representatives, but companion legislation was not introduced in the Senate before the end of the year. In early 2013, Senator Al Franken has been meeting with stakeholders to learn about the issue and work on identifying possible solutions. At the state level, legislation was introduced in the Minnesota state legislature to buy out the lands—providing money to the school trust which can be invested and used to fund education. The lands would remain in state ownership, but not in the school trust.

Jobs, jobs, jobs?
Potential employment at the mines is frequently touted as a benefit in economically depressed northern Minnesota. Twin Metals says it could create up to 1,000 jobs, and nearby PolyMet anticipates 360 jobs at its mine and processing plant.

The actual employment impact is a topic of great debate. Studies funded by the mining industry and done by the University of Minnesota, Duluth tout potential employment from the mines state and federal agencies. But they indicate a worry among residents that the mines could change the way of life in the Quetico-Superior region.

Later in 2011, the St. Louis County board of commissioners took up consideration of a resolution in support of the new mine proposals. Citizens flooded a series of hearings, however, and the board ultimately passed a statement expressing the county’s favorable view of potential mining with strict environmental oversight.

Minnesota’s state leaders have been generally supportive of the project and other mine proposals, though most temper their statements with the need to wait and see what environmental reviews say about impacts, and the need to ensure the environment is protected.

Senator Al Franken, visiting Two Harbors recently, expressed “cautious optimism” about the new mining, “if we can protect our water and we don’t lower the bar” for mining companies, the Lake County News-Chronicle reported.
and related businesses at 15,000.

According to the study, if every proposed mine and proposed mine expansion in the taconite and copper industry in northern Minnesota occurs, an average of 2,423 construction jobs per year for five years will be created.

Conversely, a November 2012 report by the Mining Truth coalition, led by three Minnesota conservation groups, described the employment reality in communities near two Arizona copper mines. It found that job promises by mining companies were rarely fulfilled, that mine employment was unstable, and that the mines' overall effect was to depress, rather than boost, the economy in their region.

The report also questioned the promised benefit of Minnesota's PolyMet mine proposal. Citing the project's Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Mining Truth noted that the company only expects 25 percent of workers to be hired locally. While 90 workers would be from neighboring communities, almost 200 would be brought in from elsewhere, and 72 would commute from regional hubs like Duluth.

University of Montana economist Tom Power has studied mining's economic impacts for 40 years. He wrote a study in 2007, funded by the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) and the Sierra Club, which disputed the job creation potential of copper mining in Minnesota.

In that report, Power wrote that mining's boom-and-bust nature causes its harmful economic impacts. The global demand for metal fluctuates rapidly, based on recessions and expansions. “When metal prices are high, lower grade deposits are brought on line, adding to the supply and moderating price increases,” Power wrote. “As demand and prices fluctuate, so do production, employment, and payroll.”

Power recently spoke with Minnesota Public Radio News. “We have hundreds of years of history with mining. It's staring us in the face on the Iron Range or the Upper Peninsula or Butte, Montana,” Power said. “How is it that despite the high wages, and despite the incredible wealth pulled out of the ground, these areas are not prosperous?”

A matter of time
The copper and other metals of northern Minnesota’s “Duluth Complex” have been embedded in this rock for more than a billion years. Miners have sought it before, particularly during the 1970s, when International Nickel Company (INCO) worked on developing a surface mine in the same area Twin Metals is exploring. Then as now, a big question about whether or not the mine was feasible was the market for the metal. INCO ultimately backed out of its project when prices fell.

The legacy of that effort is still visible on the landscape. INCO performed a “bulk sample” in 1974, digging up
about 10,000 tons of rock at a site just off the Spruce Road, a short distance from the Boundary Waters. In 2011, the Friends of the Boundary Waters collected samples of the runoff from the site, and independent lab tests found elevated levels of copper, arsenic, and other metals. The runoff is miniscule, but raised concerns about full-scale mining in the area.

In 1974, Minnesota Naturalist magazine devoted a full issue to the topic of copper-nickel mining. Famed wilderness author and conservationist Sigurd Olson wrote the introduction, urging careful consideration of the proposals.

“Today this land is faced with a new threat that could destroy swiftly and forever the very qualities that engender love and dedication in those who have known it,” Olson wrote. “Short term mining developments within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area or close enough to affect it adversely must be weighed now against its value as wilderness.”

Some things never change. It’s up to everyone who cares for the Quetico-Superior region to get informed about the issue and get involved in the conversation.

**POLYMET PROGRESS**

The face of this new type of mining proposed for Minnesota has largely been PolyMet Mining Corp. for the past several years. The company proposes an open-pit copper and nickel mine near Hoyt Lakes, at the headwaters of rivers which ultimately flow into the St. Louis River and then Lake Superior.

PolyMet has been refining its mine plan and working through environmental review since 2005. In November 2009, it released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for public comment. The plan was widely criticized for projections of extensive pollution and a lack of detail.

One of the DEIS’s most vocal critics was the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which gave the environmental review its lowest possible ranking, something given to less than one percent of all DEISes the agency has reviewed since 1987. It found the environmental impacts unacceptable and the review itself to be inadequate.

PolyMet has been working on a Supplemental DEIS to address the problems ever since. The company and involved agencies now say it should be released for public review this summer.

In November 2012, PolyMet announced a pilot plant using Reverse Osmosis water filtration had successfully treated more than 1 million gallons of water. In a press release, the company stated that this proves it can meet Minnesota’s water quality standard for sulfates, a key pollutant which can cause increases in mercury contamination and harm wild rice.

There is a growing possibility that this costly form of water treatment will be required for many years after the mine ceases operations, if not in perpetuity. Kathryn Hoffman, a staff attorney at the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, put it bluntly, “If you have to fund a reverse osmosis plant for 100 or 500 or 1,000 years, how do you know much that will cost? You really can’t know that. The question the DNR should really be asking themselves is, why are we signing up for a site that is going to be polluted for the next 2,000 years? Putting up financial assurance is fine, but it avoids the real question.”

The company and public agencies working on the environmental review are also working out details of wetland mitigation. The mine will need to replace 1,600 acres of wetlands to meet state law. A sod farm near the Sax-Zim Bog is one targeted location for new wetlands.

*Greg Seitz is a writer and communications consultant. He previously served as Communications Director for the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, one of the three lead organizations in the Mining Truth coalition mentioned in this article, and continues to serve as a contractor with the Friends and other organizations.*
During the summer of 2012, the Northern Tier High Adventure Program helped 755 crews, most of them Boy Scouts, explore the wilderness of northern Minnesota and Canada. That’s 6,012 people starting and ending canoe trips at one of three base camps, and connecting with the boreal forests of the north country through classic wilderness adventure.

“It’s incredible to see a group of six boys come back to the base dirty, covered head to toe in mosquito bites and smiling and talking about all the amazing things they learned,” says Northern Tier’s Director of Program Leslie Thibodeaux. “They’re whole different people.”

At a time when fewer people are canoeing in places like the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Quetico Provincial Park, Northern Tier’s program statistics are refreshing—particularly given the fact that the troops they outfit are choosing to take longer and longer trips.

“At this point, our average crew length has been growing, so people want to spend more time in the wilderness,” Thibodeaux says. Crews typically choose from between six and ten night trips, but for the summer of 2013 a half dozen groups will spend as many as 13 nights on trail. Whatever length, the trips will be a chance to take their Scouting skills to the next level, and the groups will design their adventure around their specific goals and interests.

According to Thibodeaux, Northern Tier is one of four high adventure base camps for the Boy Scouts, and they take pride in being a choose-your-own-adventure kind of program. “If a crew comes in and says I want to paddle 100 miles over the next seven days, or if they come in and say I want to spend 10 days here and love fishing, we’ll help them plan a trip with more fishing or more travel,” she says.

The groups launch from one of three base camps: the Charles L. Sommers Canoe Base outside of Ely, MN, the Donald Rogert Canoe Base in Atikokan, Ontario, or the Northern Expeditions Canoe Base in Bissett, Manitoba. They’ll meet with their interpreter, or counselor, learn about voyageur history, get outfitted with gear and hit the water the next day. With 90 years of program experience, Thibodeaux says Northern Tier has gotten pretty efficient at getting groups on trail.

“There is never a day that we don’t have crews coming into base [to start their trip] or coming off the water,” Thibodeaux says of the Sommers Canoe Base. Located on Moose Lake, the base opened in 1933, but...
the program got its start as early as 1923 when a single scouting group paddled the Boundary Waters.

“The cost for that seven-day trip was $5.80 per person plus $9 for counsel, or $61.65 for a seven day trip for nine people. It’s a pretty awesome little piece of history right there,” Thibodeaux says.

These days, the typical group going into the Boundary Waters will have six kids, two adults and an interpreter from the base. Most groups plan their trips for two or three years and make their reservations a year and a half before they arrive. “Most really good troops will be set up on a rotation, going to a regular camp near their home this summer and a high adventure camp next summer. They’re planning two to three years in advance and do a lot of fundraising to pay for a trip like this,” Leslie says.

The High Adventure Bases were developed as a way to keep older boys involved in the Scouts. As a result, the majority of the groups coming through Sommers Canoe Base are boy scouts but Northern Tier welcomes girls and boys between the ages of 13 and 20. Girl Scouts troops, groups of adjudicated youth and other public groups get outfitted through Sommers Canoe Base during the summer and winter. Thibodeaux says that’s a little know fact about Sommers: they’re not just about summer Boundary Waters trips.

“We just had a five day dog sled trip pull out of here as I was pulling in this morning,” Thibodeaux says. Winter groups camp on the ice for two to five nights, “dog sledding, snowshoeing, skiing, hiking and sleeping in a quinzy or whatever crazy shelters they choose to build.”

Last year, the base outfitted 72 winter crews for a total of 600 people, and this season they had hit 82 crews and nearly 700 people by February. “We are a full outfitter in the winter. As long as they show up with a hat and long underwear we can provide the rest,” Thibodeaux says.

That kind of full service outfitting—providing the gear, the provisions, and the interpreters—is perhaps what makes it possible for Sommers and Northern Tier to introduce so many groups to the wilderness. They have the process of outfitting down to a science so the troops can get out to where the magic begins: canoe country.
By Greg Stringfellow

Every summer since I turned 14 my Dad and I have gone on a High Adventure trip. These trips have taken us across the United States and Europe, and thanks to my trip to Northern Tier in 2012, I added Canada to that list. We’d been planning a trip to Northern Tier since I was old enough to attend the High Adventure Bases, however we decided to save it for last since it was something we both wanted to work towards. At the last minute my Dad had to drop out due to an injury and I was left to go as a solo passenger. To tell you the truth, I was a little nervous. Here I was, a 17-year-old Eagle Scout who has traveled all across the country and the world, and I was nervous about going alone. But the impact that Northern Tier had on me was unmeasurable.

My peers selected me to be the “Crew Leader” so I was in charge of mapping out our route. Since none of us were big into fishing, I decided to go on a sightseeing trip, even if it was more strenuous and required many canoe portages that were much longer (Don’t worry, since it was my decision, I was always carrying one of the canoes). That was, by far, the right decision. For the first day I was still pretty nervous (and to be honest a little upset) about being the only one there by myself, but I quickly got over it when I saw the beautiful Minnesota wilderness. I finally realized that this was not a problem but an opportunity to prove to myself that I can do anything I set my mind to—and I don’t have to rely on anybody else. This setting allowed me to try many new things, like capsizing a canoe or trying to catch my own food without fear of serious consequences if I failed. I used the remainder of the trip as an opportunity to prove to myself that I could do anything that I set my mind to.

But more than that, it provided something rare: a place where I could totally relax and clear my mind and think. I woke up early to watch the sun rise over the water, spent all day looking at waterfalls and being out on the water, and then gathered around the campfire at night and talked to all of the guys that were on the trip. Without the constant distractions from cell phones, Facebook, or Twitter, it was easy to become relaxed and get to know each other. Northern Tier offered me so many experiences that I could never have found anywhere else. Being a group of 16 and 17 year olds, it was nice to get away from all of the distractions that hang over us in the constantly connected day and age we live in. Not having access to Facebook, or texting or anything like that, we were truly able to bond as a group and got to know ourselves better.
Please tell us what your involvement with the Quetico Superior Foundation means to you:
Some of my most formative experiences growing up came from canoe trips in the Quetico-Superior region. By working with the Foundation and the grant program, I hope to not only help protect the region but also introduce people of all ages and backgrounds to the rich history and power of the wilderness experience.

What other ways have you been active in the Quetico-Superior region?
I was eight years old when I went on my first Boundary Waters trip. I’ll never forget the lessons my parents taught me as we ventured along the Number Chain. From there I began participating on and guiding trips with YMCA Camp Warren. Currently, I have the privilege of serving as the executive director of Camp Warren, where we continue to provide transformational Boundary Waters trips for kids. I also make it a priority to take a canoe trip at least once a year with friends or family.

What is the most pressing issue you see in the region today?
I see the proposed sulfide mining operations as the greatest threat to the region right now. I also think that broader efforts are needed to get kids to wilderness areas. Current Boundary Waters and Quetico visitors do not reflect the general U.S. population. If we’re not careful, we will have a dramatic shortage of wilderness stewards in future generations.

What’s one of your favorite memories from the Quetico-Superior region?
There are too many to count but I really enjoyed taking one of our international staff members (who was from Australia) up to Lac la Croix a few years ago. From my youth, I have a distinct memory of a trip up to Beaverhouse Lake in the Quetico. It was the first time in my life I’d gone a week without seeing other people.

What’s your favorite spot or way to see the Quetico-Superior region?
I would say Winchell is my favorite lake but nothing beats a snowshoe into Hegman in the winter time.
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Meet Shelby Gonzales
Iron Range writer and marketing professional

Home: Grand Marais
Occupation: Marketing Manager at the Cook County Visitor’s Bureau and Outdoor Writer
Radio Feature: “Out There” on WTIP, North Shore Community Radio

In a Nutshell:
Shelby Gonzalez grew up in South Minneapolis, a self-described “indoorsy type”. Her mom bribed her to play outside: two hours outdoors and she could have her book back. Everything changed in high school, when Shelby heard about YMCA Camp Menogyn from a classmate. Learning that teenagers could canoe in the Canadian Arctic resonated so strongly with Shelby that—much to her mothers’ surprise—she signed up for a 16-day canoe trip in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness that summer. It changed the course of her life, and eventually led to Shelby’s career as an outdoor writer promoting the North Shore.

Her Story:
Shelby is the first to admit that the Menogyn trip was the hardest thing she’d ever done—it was physically demanding but also well outside of her comfort zone. She’d never lived outside and slept in a tent like that. But she also loved it, and the next summer she went on a month-long canoe trip in the Wabikimi Wilderness of Northwestern Ontario.

“My experience at Menogyn helped me redefine my sense of what I could do as a person,” Shelby says. “I had never before defined myself as the kind of person who can portage a 70-pound canoe or who can go out and camp for two weeks. But [after those trips], there was a sense of possibility that had never been there before.”

That sense of possibility changed everything. During Shelby’s junior and senior years of high school, she had studied math and science full time at the University of Minnesota through a program that allowed high school students to take college courses. She assumed she’d follow a similar track in college, but when she graduated from high school in 2003, she no longer felt sure of that.

Instead of going straight to college, Shelby took a year to travel New Zealand, Asia, and Europe, and when she returned she’d decided to study outdoor writing. She attended the University of Minnesota, Duluth (UMD), became a rock climbing instructor and wrote for regional publications. Those writing assignments took off so quickly that she eventually withdrew from UMD and pursued writing full time.

Now, she is the marketing manager at the Cook County Visitor’s Bureau, produces an outdoor segment for the local radio station, and continues to write on the side. The young girl who once stayed inside and read books is now a self-proclaimed evangelist for the North Shore—even after brief stints living in California and Wisconsin, she believes that Northeastern Minnesota is an underrated gem of outdoor recreation.

Why Read Shelby Gonzalez:
Shelby’s writing runs the gamut from understanding the environment to recounting her own outdoor experiences. She recently wrote a piece about caribou in Minnesota. The animal was once native to the region, and she researched efforts during the 1990s to begin a reintroduction program (those efforts were never realized due to what was likely politics). But it’s often her outdoor adventure stories that get the most response from readers, even years after their published.

Shelby thinks that’s because she comes at her storytelling from the perspective of a newbie. She didn’t grow up hunting, camping or climbing, so she started from ground zero with most outdoor activities, including trail running, snowboarding, and stand up paddleboarding.

She’s honest about her beginner perspective, and humorously shares the details of her nerves and doubts. When she learned to snowboard, she wrote about wearing kneepads, wrist guards and padding the seat of her pants in case she fell on her tailbone. She hopes that kind of candor makes the outdoors more accessible to others.

“If I’m writing with one person in mind it’s the person who’s interested in getting more into this outdoor experience.”

Writer and activist Sigurd F. Olson spent his life getting to know the place he lived and writing about what made it special. In this corner of Wilderness News, we honor his legacy by taking a look at the new voices of the north country.
thing or who is interested in taking their outdoor experience to another level but is held back by those kinds of fears,” Shelby says. “I have a strong sense of calling around that… There’s nothing more rewarding for me than having someone say I love your stories because they make me feel like maybe I could do that too.”

On Working for the Visitor’s Bureau:
In many ways, Shelby’s writing made her an ambassador for the north shore, spreading the word about its beauty and accessibility. Joining the Cook County Visitor’s Bureau as a marketing manager has only expanded her reach, spreading the word in a new medium. It’s a natural fit for someone who believes that the north shore is under-recognized as a destination.

“It’s really just a gem, and not just compared to other places in the Midwest, but nationwide,” she says. “I never thought that my particular oddball combination of experience and knowledge areas would all combine.”

Yet the job is a perfect fit. Shelby draws on her writing, her experience in California where she worked in nonprofit communications, and her experience as a managing editor of Northern Wilds, a publication out of Grand Marais that covers outdoor recreation on the North Shore. Most importantly, it seems, the job fits with what you might call Shelby’s mission.

“My goal and guiding focus has always been to inspire people to get outside and show them different ways that they can do that,” says Shelby, “and so part of my writing naturally entails sharing my very genuine love of and appreciation for this part of the world.”

Where to Find Shelby Gonzales:
http://www.shelbygonzalez.com
http://wtip.org/drupal/content/out-there

Sulfide mining and cell towers near wilderness serenity and wonder.

And wondering –
about the current state of environmental values,
about the selfish drive of profit pirates,
about the diminishing quality of preservation integrity.

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– Larry Christianson
What’s New Online:

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• Local Musher Wins Beargrease
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• Moose Population Drops by a Third in One Year

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Sunset brings an evening of reflection on a Northern Tier High Adventure Base canoe trip. Photo courtesy Northern Tier High Adventure Base.
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