

FRIENDS of the BOUNDARY WATERS WILDERNESS



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The Friends' mission is to protect, preserve and restore the wilderness character of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Quetico-Superior Ecosystem. The organization was founded in 1976.

The Vitality of the Wilderness Idea

By Darrell Knuffke

Most of us who keep books have at least one loved volume we always know where to find. Searching for another, our eyes drift past this old friend. But it's not that book, not today. Still, something reminds us that we really ought to take it down, dust it off and read it anew.

Wallace Stegner's Wilderness Letter is something of the sort. Stegner wrote it in 1960 as a declaration of the value of wild places. The Friends has long reserved a place for it on our website. Wilderness advocates quote from it regularly and with good reason, for it remains among the most compelling statements for land protection in recent memory. It is good to take it from the shelf from time to time.

Snippets: "Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed ..."

"We need wilderness preserved – as much of it as is still left, and as many kinds – because it was the challenge against which our character as a people was formed. The reminder and the reassurance that it is still there is good for our spiritual health even if we never once in ten years set foot in it. It is good for us when we are young, because of the incomparable sanity it can bring briefly, as vacation and rest, into our insane lives. It is important to us when we are old simply because it is there – important, that is, simply as an idea."

And: "What I want to speak for is not so much the wilderness uses, valuable as those are, but the wilderness idea, which is a resource in itself."

The latter sentence comes earlier in Stegner's letter, but I reorder it here to stress the point: wilderness endures only in a context – within the idea of wilderness. And to defend this place we love first and perhaps best, our own Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, we must pay some mind to the wilderness idea more broadly defined.

Stegner argued that while wilderness values include experience, they

are also intrinsic. And he left little doubt which he thought carried the greater weight.

Many of us come to wilderness advocacy first through a wilderness experience. Stegner's soul seemed to resonate most deeply to aridity and the stark desert landscapes of the West about which he wrote so beautifully. The lush, green canoe country of the north woods moved Sigurd Olson, from Listening Point outward in all the wet directions. But both these wilderness titans, perhaps brought to belief initially by their own special places, toiled for wilderness protection across every conceivable region and land type. They fought, in short, for the wilderness idea.

Our own experiences, our own wilderness journeys, are probably not so very different. It would be remarkable if each of us didn't come to love wilderness first as a particular place where we walked, paddled, camped, marveled. Understandably, that first wild place of our hearts often remains the most vivid – its moods and contours and challenges the very images our minds play back to illuminate the word "wilderness."

But at some point there is transformation. Love of a place becomes love of idea, and of ideal. If it didn't, there would be no American wilderness movement and we are a movement. It was not born of a thousand or a million affinities, each for one special place, isolated and alienated from others' loves of their own special places. It drew breath when we began to sense that our first wild place and others were profoundly alike for all their differences. Parochial affections swelled beyond personal geography and flowed into the shimmering, vivifying realm of Idea.

Wilderness as venue became wilderness as vision. Antagonists chide us with the charge that wilderness is an artificial, human, legalistic notion; that few places, if any, remain unmarked by human passage, presence and appetites. That charge is two things: true as an intellectual

Antagonists chide us with the charge that wilderness is an artificial, human, legalistic notion. That charge is two things: true as an intellectual proposition, and meaningless as a practical one.

Vitality of the Wilderness Idea continued on page 4.

Message from the Executive Director

Some years ago a novice kayaker took his shiny new boat into Lake Superior for the first time. It was the end of May, raining and blustery in the Apostle Islands, but he was reassured by the company of seasoned paddlers – especially when the shorelines disappeared and the rollers built to a couple of feet, setting up the conditions for his capsize.

It happened near the end of a three-mile crossing, just a hundred yards offshore. Winds were bending around the island, stirring up the shallows over a blocky bottom of quarried sandstone. The waves were short, fast, random. He tried to carve a tight turn and went right over, into water so cold he couldn't breathe.

And then everything went exactly right, which is the point of this story.

The paddler-turned-swimmer was wearing a wetsuit, so his lungs soon restarted and he blew the whistle on his vest. He took a tow line from a fellow paddler, who kept him off the rocks, and that paddler took a tow from another; together they pulled the capsized kayak and kayaker to a safer depth. A third rescuer joined them, and five minutes later they had the boat upright and the operator reinstalled. A few more minutes to pump out the cockpit and they were back on course.

When asked how it's going in my new work as the Friends' executive director, I have two kinds of answer. The brief one is, very well, thanks, exciting to be here and so on. The fuller version is reserved for people who are members of the Friends or our extended family. It tries to convey something of how and why things are going so well and invariably reaches to paddling as metaphor.

We Friends have been through some turbulent times and members may wonder if we're back on course as an organization devoted to the critical work of advocating for the Boundary Waters. I believe we are, just because so many things have gone, and are going, exactly right.

I am blessed to have the backing of such a stalwart and accomplished Board of Directors and especially of its chair, Carolyn Sampson. Wever Weed, my solitary fulltime staffer these first few months, is a steady source of operating instructions and calm reassurance, as is Darrell Knuffke, who leads the list of part-time helpers. I've had much useful advice from Melissa Lindsay, Kevin Proescholdt, Becky Rom, Greg Lais and many, many more.

Though I am new to the Friends and to the nonprofit world, I am no stranger to the conservation community in Minnesota and beyond; every day I am gratified by new expressions of support for the Friends and our mission. Then there are the donations from our large and loyal membership – the Friends' most important resource by far.



Ron Meador

All of which is why I opened with that story about the novice paddler, who in real life was me but metaphorically is also the Friends. As I hung off my boat in that icy water, I never doubted that I would soon be upright, warm and moving forward – the confidence that comes from the company of solid, experienced partners.

This new ED is assured, and you can be reassured, that the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness has been in the hands of extraordinarily capable directors, staffers, advisers and allies during difficult times. The occasional out-of-boat experience can be uncomfortable, but then it's over and the journey resumes. And, for what it's worth, the new guy doesn't mind diving into ice water when the cause is worthy.

We have so many of those causes: resisting ill-advised logging projects – and now mining projects – that threaten the wilderness, raising public awareness of the myriad pressures on our last wild places, inspiring a new generation of wilderness stewards, enlarging and engaging our membership to meet all of these challenges and others we've yet to encounter.

I look forward to talking with many of you about these and other matters in the days to come. Like to hear your paddling stories, too.



Happy news: Sacha Casillas has joined the Friends staff as office administrator. Some of you may recall her as an intern assisting in the inventory of roadless areas in the Superior National Forest in 2005. Since then, she has completed her degree in environmental biology from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, as well as internships with the Center for Coastal Studies in Mexico and the Dodge Nature Center in West St. Paul. We're delighted to welcome her back. ●



Sacha Casillas and friend. Photo by Rose Teng

Update: Issues & Projects

Advocacy Issues

Echo Trail Project – The Friends has joined several other conservation groups in bringing suit against the U.S. Forest Service and its proposed Echo Trail Project on the Superior National Forest. Other plaintiffs include Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness, the Northstar Chapter of the Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife and the Wilderness Society.

The project area borders the BWCAW and completely encircles the Trout Lake Unit. Logging would reach the very boundary of the wilderness in a number of places. Our view is that the agency failed to consider direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of this project and others like it on the wilderness, and therefore failed in its duty to protect the BWCAW's wilderness character. We also challenge the agency's failure to consider impacts on the threatened lynx and to ensure species diversity on the forest by, among other things, selecting an adequate range of species and carefully monitoring likely impacts on them.

Many of these claims are at issue in a lawsuit against the Superior National Forest Plan, pending in federal district court.

Other Proposed Timber Sales – The Superior National Forest is proposing two additional projects, the Cascade and the Glacier. Both are in the scoping stage, meaning that the Forest Service is compiling the list of the issues it will consider in its environmental analyses. The Friends has commented on both.

Glacier Project – The project area is described by the Forest Service as “from approximately 5 to 20 miles east of Ely in the vicinity of the Fernberg Road and Highway 1.” It poses as many threats to the BWCAW as the Echo Trail Project and may be larger, allowing “timber treatments,” ranging from clearcuts to selective cuts in which some trees are left standing, right to the wilderness boundary.

We argue here, as elsewhere, that the agency must consider the cumulative impacts of this project and others like it on the BWCAW, even though they occur outside the wilderness boundary. The project could cover 90,000 acres, 47,000 of them Superior National Forest land in the Kawishiwi Ranger District, and could entail 33 miles of new or rebuilt roads. Major lakes and streams in or near the area include Greenstone, Triangle, Farm, Moose and Fall Lakes and the Kawishiwi River. Among our major concerns is that these new roads will invite new motorized intrusions into the BWCAW, a problem that already defies agency efforts to deal with it.

Cascade Project – This project could span 24,000 acres, all in Cook County. Around 19,000 acres of the proposed project area are national forest. This project proposes no timber activity closer than a mile to the wilderness boundary, but could allow logging to the very boundary of a recognized roadless area.

Again, we want the Forest Service to consider the combined impacts of all such projects on the wilderness. Viewing each in isolation from others does not disclose, but rather conceals, their combined effects. The Friends will be tracking these projects as they move forward.

Communications Facilities – The Forest Service, in an effort to improve its communications, plans to increase the height of a repeater tower near Meander Lake. The tower will rise from 55 feet to around 100 feet and will aid communications within a 15-mile radius of the repeater – generally south of Lac LaCroix, north of Lake Vermillion, east of Forest Road 200 and west of the boundary between Saint Louis and Lake counties. The facility stands three miles south of the wilderness boundary. The taller tower will eliminate “dead spots” in reception and enhance the

safety of both Forest Service personnel and the visiting public.

One of our chief concerns was visibility of the higher tower from within the wilderness. Forest Service officials assessed that by tethering five red helium-filled balloons to the current tower and letting them rise to a height slightly above the 100-foot mark. Observers in boats from three positions within the wilderness were unable to see them. The agency deliberately held the new tower to a height below that which would require a light for aviation safety.

The Forest Service has done a good job of designing this project and assessing its impacts. Given the serious fires in and around the wilderness over the past two years, and the continuing drought in the region, the Friends is pleased to support the improvement.

Exploratory Minerals Drilling Near the BWCAW – As proposed sulfide mining projects in Northern Minnesota work their ways through the permitting processes, another potential threat to the BWCAW and the surrounding ecosystem has emerged.

The Forest Service has gathered scoping comments on three proposed minerals exploration projects about 10 miles southeast of Ely. All three involve exploratory drilling and some of the activity would occur within a few miles of the wilderness boundary. Two of the companies, Duluth Metals Limited and Encampment Resources L.L.C., hold federal mineral prospecting permits. Lehmann Exploration (Franconia) holds a federal mineral lease that apparently dates back to the 1960s. While the U.S. Bureau of Land Management administers the subsurface mineral estate, the Forest Service has both the authority and the responsibility to protect surface resources.

According to the Forest Service, the three exploration projects would involve drilling on 77 sites and would disturb about 9 acres. As many of the sites are in swampy areas, drilling would occur only when the ground is frozen. Access would require 5.3 miles of temporary road.

In its comments, the Friends urged a full-blown environmental impact statement (EIS) rather than a briefer environment analysis (EA). If the agency elects to proceed with an EA, we asked that this be considered only a scoping document for a more thorough and detailed EIS, which must be completed before any decision is made to approve the projects. Because the prospecting is likely to lead to mining, we said, a full analysis of mining's impacts in the area should be done at the outset.

Among the issues the Friends believes the Forest Service must consider are impacts on solitude and other wilderness values. The analysis must also include careful consideration of impacts on air quality, wetlands, surface and ground waters, soils and wildlife, including all species that are threatened, endangered or of special concern.

The Forest Service is expected to release a draft EA for public comment during the fall.

Off-Road Vehicles – The Forest Service is developing a travel plan for the Superior National Forest. For its preliminary consideration, it divided the forest into two zones; scoping on the East Zone ended several months ago and just closed for the West Zone. The two will come together for the forest-wide travel plan, which the agency expects to issue next year. The Friends commented on both.

Some early numbers concern us. One example: The agency's scoping documents note that there are 208.4 miles of “unclassified roads” in the West Zone (the Kawishiwi, LaCroix and Laurentian Districts). Preliminary proposals call for converting 86 miles to motorized use, closing four or five miles and converting one mile to a hiking trail, with the remainder presumably retained for agency purposes.

This portends a continuation of the long-standing imbalance between accommodations for human-powered recreation and motorized

Update *continued on next page.*

recreation. What's in short supply in the north woods is not motorized access but dedicated access for hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. The instant success of the Kab-Ash Hiking Trail in Voyageurs National Park several years ago speaks to the need.

The Friends will be involved in development of the travel plans in the months ahead. Atop the list of things we will look for is an enforcement program that can keep pace with increased motorized access.

Outreach Issues

Wilderness protection requires both enforcing the laws and developing new advocates. Our outreach projects address the latter. In the context of a youth population increasingly disconnected from natural places, as chronicled in the book "Last Child in the Woods," the primary target of our outreach projects is young people.

Thomas Flint Canoe Trips – Because many of us come to wilderness advocacy through a wilderness experience, the goal of Thomas Flint Canoe Trips is to get disadvantaged, inner city kids into the wilderness. Meeting that goal serves two purposes: creating advocates and healing communities. These trips are supported by the Thomas Flint Fund at the Minneapolis Foundation, the Edward R. Bazinet Foundation and the Friends. Our project champion, Sovatha Oum, multicultural education specialist and former Friends Board member, knows we can include more kids, and for that expansion we are looking for additional grant support. You can read about this year's trip on page 6 in this newsletter.

Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection – Insufficient federal funding has crimped the Forest Service's capacity to pay for all of the essential maintenance projects protecting the BWCW. Last year the Friends stepped in and, with a pilot project grant from REI and the National Forest Foundation, began to develop a volunteer program called the Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection. So far this year we have helped the Forest Service field 60 volunteers – the result of a larger grant from NFF and a guarantee from the Friends for necessary matching funds, of which part has come from the Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation. We are seeking additional funding which pays mostly for the volunteers' per diem expenses. For more about this project, read the article from Jim Sanders on the next page.

Living for the Wild – If they can't have an actual wilderness experience, then today's youth must at least find a connection to wilderness through someplace natural in their own backyards and communities. Our Living for the Wild curriculum teaches high school kids the value of our wild lands by creating a context of understanding wilderness through their everyday places. It encourages those kids to engage in preservation efforts in their communities and in the bigger context of wilderness. Initial development of Living for the Wild was supported by a grant from the Anne Larsen Simonson/Larsen Fund. We need additional grant support to develop a training component for teachers and youth workers, e.g. inner city youth workers; to create assessment tools for measuring the curriculum's impact, and; to adapt the curriculum for use outside the classroom. We are pleased to have the assistance of David Astin, retired environmental teacher and former member of our education committee.

Edge of the Wilderness Fund – Private development bordering the BWCW often can be stopped only by purchasing those lands. To do that, the Edge of the Wilderness Fund was established by the late Bud Heinselman and is now administered by the Friends and the Trust for Public Land. In 2006 we acquired the Chainsaw Sisters Saloon property. Now we seek funds to purchase an adjacent parcel before our option runs out this year. Such purchases require large sums; if you can support the Edge of the Wilderness Fund, please contact the Friends. ●

proposition, and meaningless as a practical one.

In 1964, the Congress might have shrugged and said that because we had changed so much of our world, there was little sense in worrying about what was left: too late, too bad, missed opportunity. Oh, well.

It very specifically didn't say that. Instead, it passed the Wilderness Act, simultaneously a statement of contrition and of hope. The prayerful among those wilderness champions of 43 years ago might have thought, if not spoken aloud: "Lord, we have been poor stewards of your creation. We have forgotten that dominion means the choice and power to protect as well as to destroy. Thus, little remains as you left it to us. We have changed some of it savagely, some of it subtly, all of it measurably. For that we are heartily sorry. But there remain some few places that still speak of the grandeur you set upon the Earth for your people. Today we resolve to leave the best that remain to their own devices and to your wisdom. That is at once the least and the most we can do."

In passing the Wilderness Act, the Congress stated, in effect, and as a matter of American public policy, that "untrammeled" lands in the federal estate would endure as surrogates for what once was all around us. (A trammel is a trap, a hobble, a restraint. Wilderness is the antithesis.) The perfect was mostly gone, but we could strive to protect the remainder: the merely magnificent.

Congress did two things in the Act of 1964: created a National Wilderness Preservation System and made an initial deposit into it of 10 million deserving acres of land. That system has now grown to exceed 105 million acres—larger, perhaps, than wilderness advocates of half a century ago might have ever imagined but still not nearly so big as it needs to be.

It is that system that concerns us here. The Congress knew that the only hope of "an enduring resource of wilderness" lay in systematic protection. It arrived at that notion not intuitively but through the tutelage of the Bob Marshalls, the Wallace Stegners; of Sig Olson and another towering Minnesotan, Olaus Murie. Their argument was simple and finally persuasive: the only hope of protecting any wilderness in perpetuity lay in protecting all of it within the unitary framework of the National Wilderness Preservation System. That is precisely what the Congress crafted. The wilderness areas that would be fitted into that system, for all their differences of geology, geography and hydrology, would be managed to a single high standard across the nation.

The concomitant is this: what is allowed to damage or to impinge upon one wilderness area threatens them all. That applies to unlawful motorized intrusions, dreadfully inadequate federal wilderness management budgets, and ill-advised management actions, such as timber sales that stop only, and only barely, at wilderness boundaries. It applies, too, to wilderness designations across the country now in process – what they say, what they mean, what they portend. Weak statutory language by which new designations enter the system can eat away wormlike at the system itself.

These are matters that must concern the Friends, its members and all who love the canoe country. This is no plea to dilute your love and enthusiasm for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. It is a plea to find room to attend to wilderness protection campaigns and wilderness management decisions across the country. For if we leave our citizens' advocacy at the boundary of our own favorite wilderness, we expose it to threats that will surely diminish it.

We must spare some thought and some energy to the fate of wild places everywhere – and to the vitality of the wilderness idea – or risk the one we treasure most. ●

Darrell Knuffke is interim Policy Director for the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness.

A “Shining Example” of Collaboration

By Jim Sanders, Forest Supervisor, Superior National Forest

This marks the second year that the Forest Service and the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness have collaborated on a wilderness volunteer program of on-the-ground ecological restoration projects in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). We call the program the Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection, and its long-term goal is to create a collaborative, permanent wilderness volunteer program based in Northeastern Minnesota.

The BWCAW has 16 hiking trails, 2,000 designated campsites, 1,200 miles of canoe routes and 400 miles of portages among 1,100 lakes. Ten percent of all visitors to the National Wilderness Preservation System (areas protected by Congress as wilderness) come to the BWCAW unit, although at 1,098,057 acres it represents just 1% of the 104 million protected acres among 630 places in 44 states. It is the only large lake-land wilderness in the country, and is also the nation's most visited wilderness, attracting over 250,000 visitors a year, according to new calculations.

Unfortunately, the BWCAW's popularity results in a lot of wear and tear. The Forest Service is charged with managing this well-loved place not only for its wilderness value but also for its recreation. Our wilderness rangers are responsible for campsite improvements such as transplanting native vegetation to encourage campsite recovery, cleaning and repairing fire grates, removing trash, replacing latrines and controlling erosion. They also maintain portages and hiking trails, collect water samples, manage non-native invasive species and instill outfitters and wilderness visitors with Leave No Trace principles. In the winter, they rely on dogsled teams to transport supplies needed

for trail work. Volunteers have been and will continue to be significant in all of these efforts, while learning wilderness protection and restoration skills through their close work with our wilderness rangers.

However, budget limitations continue to constrain the ability of the Forest Service to train, outfit and supervise our volunteers. The Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection, which financed and administered up to \$40,000 worth of work this summer, makes a critical contribution to ensure that wilderness and recreational values are kept at high standards in the BWCAW.

Besides helping to solve a budget problem, the Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection helps solve another challenge: a widening divide between people, especially young adults, and wild places. Citizens disconnected from wilderness will not likely appreciate their country's need for wilderness. The Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection provides opportunities for young adults to develop a personal connection to wilderness, and to learn collaborative skills, self-esteem and a wilderness ethic.

This year, the Friends obtained a \$20,000 grant from the National Forest Foundation and guaranteed \$20,000 in matching funds to help the Forest Service wilderness staff accomplish on-the-ground ecological and recreational restoration projects in the BWCAW. The money pays the volunteers' per diem expenses, covering a small amount of daily meals.

I want to thank the Friends for supporting and administering the Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection. The program is a shining example of how the Forest Service and the Friends can work together to protect, preserve and restore the BWCAW. Now, our collective challenge is to take this small beginning and develop the Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection into a renowned volunteer organization recognized nationwide for its training and leadership in wilderness management. Our collaborative efforts will insure the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is an enduring resource for generations to come. ●



Photo by Cynthia Lapp

“When I learned about the volunteer position in the Boundary Waters working with the Forest Service, I leapt at the chance. Here was an opportunity to spend an entire summer working to protect the wilderness that I love so much. The trips that I have gone on as part of the Wilderness Crew have shown me just how important their presence is in the BWCAW. There is always work to be done to maintain campsites and trails, educate visitors and clean up after the less conscientious ones. I am amazed at the effort the Forest Service puts in, not only to maintain and protect the BWCAW but also to minimize any sign of their own presence. From disguising fresh-cut logs to “naturalizing” freshly cleaned fire grate pits, the goal is always to leave the area looking as though no one has visited all season. As a visitor I took these little details for granted, never imagining the amount of work that was going on around me. Now, as a member of the Wilderness Crew, I am gaining new perspective on how to preserve wilderness.”

– Kim Ferdon, 22, Two Harbors, MN
Superior Wilderness Volunteer Connection

How Wilderness Heals Inner City Communities

Thomas Flint Boundary Waters Wilderness Fund Marks 16th Year

By Wever Weed

Of all the ways to heal multi-racial inner city communities, there is none better than strengthening the souls of inner city kids, and there is no better way to do that than through a wilderness experience—an experience that turned one kid, now called Teddy Bear, from a meth-cooking gang member to a husband and student learning to be a therapist for kids on drugs. An experience, as Sigurd Olson foretold, of spiritual renewal.

Since 1991, the Thomas Flint Boundary Waters Wilderness Fund has made a wilderness experience available to selected groups of kids from Minneapolis and St. Paul. Listen to their stories at base camp after they return from the wilderness and you will hear how these kids found wholeness.



Photo by Aaron Bergad, Program Director at Camp Menogyn

A plain wooden cross stands tall between a bonfire and the north shore of West Bearskin Lake, home of YMCA Camp Menogyn, bordering the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. On a late June evening in 2007, on a grassy hillside facing the lake, rough-cut log benches are filled with kids from around the country, along with their wilderness counselors and a couple of sets of parents who drove 32 miles up the Gunflint Trail, then paddled one-half mile across the lake to the camp, to hear the stories. I came as a representative of the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, which administers the Thomas Flint Fund in honor of the son of one of our founders.

Earlier in the day, the kids and counselors returned from a variety of trips, put their gear away, sweated in the sauna, jumped in the lake, ate dinner and continued a process of reflection.

Thirteen of the kids are from St. Paul and Minneapolis, and are members in the Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI), an Amherst H. Wilder Foundation program managed by Sovatha Oum, a multicultural education specialist and former board member of the Friends. The YLI kids, ages 13-18, are African-American, Russian, Philippine, Cambodian and Hmong. Each was selected by peers to receive a scholarship from the Thomas Flint Fund for an eight-day wilderness experience.

Membership in the YLI program is for one year and comes through invitation or a recommendation from community schools and organizations. This year 33 kids are participating in YLI. They meet weekly in action teams which identify and tackle a specific community issue; monthly in multi-cultural teams designed to get kids involved in cross-cultural learning, and; during each school break, in four two-day leadership encampments, immersed in a curriculum about character building, community service and leadership. During the final encampment, the conclusion of each YLI year, the kids are asked to vote on their peers' leadership abilities. The top 14 kids receive Thomas Flint Fund scholarships.

Sovatha describes the wilderness experience as a context the kids would not have otherwise – a chance to prove, as a group, that they can apply and develop the skills learned during their YLI year.

“With the wilderness experience,” says Sovatha, “the kids have to make group decisions about everything: the food they pack for every meal; routes they take each day; where they camp each night; when they stop paddling each afternoon and when they start again each morning. Most important, the wilderness forces the kids to learn that one person’s action affects the group, so they discover their strengths, not their weaknesses.”

Paul Danicic, camp director, describes the wilderness experience as an opportunity for personalities different from those in the city to emerge. “It’s an intense, shared, experience. On the trail, a shy city kid might be the one who helps the group handle a stressful situation. The kids will relate back to the wilderness experience for the rest of their lives.”

While the bonfire burns, one group of kids at a time entertains the others with a skit of a camping experience. The YLI kids gather in two groups because, by wilderness rules, no party may be larger than nine. Each skit portrays typical canoe camping experiences: setting up camp, escaping from bugs, cooking, hearing strange noises in the night, finding the right portage – all funny, light-hearted reflections of deeper experiences I would hear afterwards in one-on-one conversations with three YLI kids and a counselor.

“My counselor taught me that being a good leader is sometimes about being a good follower.”

“Portaging a canoe was about expanding my personal capabilities.”

“A gang member I knew took this wilderness trip and changed his life.”

“My wilderness experience taught me tolerance and patience.”

“Now I feel ownership of the wilderness.”

“These kids learned to appreciate silence.”

All YMCA camps teach and promote the values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility, and those values emerged from each conversation.

The next morning, after breakfast in the dining hall, after listening to more stories, I too reflected. Of all the careers I know, there can be none more important than a wilderness counselor for kids whose disadvantages often lead to unhealthy choices and beleaguered communities.

So the Thomas Flint Fund, by providing scholarships to inner city kids, also feeds the need for wilderness counselors who help to strengthen the souls of those kids. Through a counselor's guidance, a wilderness experience can be as important as any doctor's healing, for the kids, their families and communities.

Ultimately, communities must benefit from the Thomas Flint Fund. Mai Houa Vue, a graduate of the 2006 YLI trip, came back to camp this year as a wilderness counselor. During the past year, she took from her wilderness experience the skill of cooperation to encourage her community to make her St. Paul school, Harding High, a safer place.

Another trip graduate, Tabyim Xiong, is back at camp as a cook to pay for a 30-day wilderness experience. At home in St. Paul he's been studying youth work at the University of Minnesota.



“Most important, the wilderness forces the kids to learn that one person's action affects the group, so they discover their strengths, not their weaknesses.”



By noon I was saying goodbye to my hosts, Paul Danicic and Aaron Bergad, program director at the camp. They and the kids had helped me understand the YLI wilderness experience: Sigurd Olson taught us that wilderness is where we find wholeness; Camp Menogyn teaches wilderness counselors how to help kids look for wholeness. For many of the kids, for the first time in their lives, that experience heals and enlivens the most important ecosystem—themselves—the essential building block of healthy inner city, multi-racial communities. ●

Wever Weed is Communications and Outreach Director for the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness.



Photo by Bernard P. Friel

A Postcard Prevents Loss of Biodiversity

The return postcard in the Non-Native Invasive Species Identification Guide is playing a critical role in helping Forest Service employees find and eradicate these invaders of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

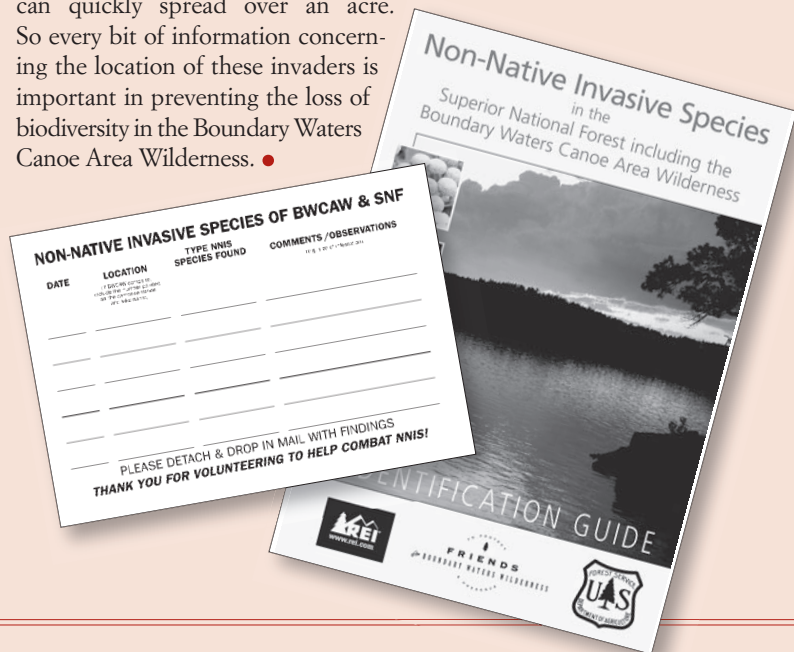
Non-native invasive species (NNIS) are second only to habitat loss as a threat to biodiversity, so finding them before they get established is a high priority for the Forest Service and the Friends. As reported in our summer newsletter, NNIS cause harmful economic impacts, too: They have overrun 133 million acres across the U.S., an area the size of California and New York combined, at a cost of \$120 billion per year.

Here's how the postcard works. BWCAW visitors pick up the NNIS Identification Guide at outfitters and Forest Service permit stations before going into the wilderness. When a NNIS is found, its type, size and location are noted on the postcard, which carries prepaid postage and is addressed to the Friends. We make a copy and send the original to the Wilderness Specialist at the Superior National Forest Supervisor's office in Duluth, Minnesota.

The Wilderness Specialist makes copies for the Forest Plant Ecologist, district wilderness program managers, wilderness rangers and the forest monitoring crew leader. The ecologist decides if someone from the NNIS summer crew should go immediately to the location, based on whether the visitor has identified a new location of NNIS that can be caught before it spreads, or whether the species is hard to eradicate. If not, field crews are alerted to keep an eye out on their next swing through the visitor-identified location.

The postcard is an innovative tool for wilderness management. The Forest Service usually never knows if its booklets, brochures, websites – and the messages in each – are truly absorbed by visitors reading them. The postcard not only measures usefulness of the NNIS Identification Guide but also gets valuable information from wilderness visitors right back to Forest Service employees for efficient and productive management needs, and the BWCAW is better served.

In a wilderness of 1,098,057 acres, especially under current budget and staffing restrictions, the Forest Service needs help finding NNIS. So far this summer, 16 postcards have identified 27 locations of NNIS that Forest Service field crews will monitor. If those numbers seem insignificant, consider that in one of those locations just five plants can quickly spread over an acre. So every bit of information concerning the location of these invaders is important in preventing the loss of biodiversity in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. ●



Will Steger to be Keynote Speaker at Annual Dinner

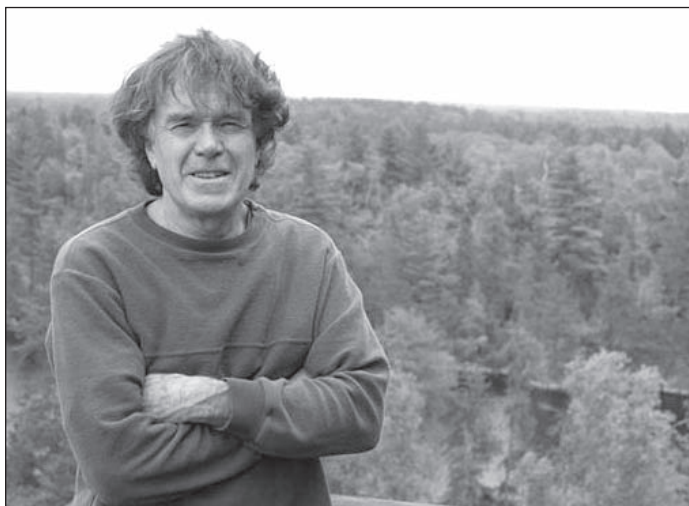


Photo by Roger Rich

The Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness will hold its 31st annual meeting and dinner on Saturday, November 17, at the Town & County Club on the Mississippi River near downtown Minneapolis.

The meeting will begin at 3:30 pm, followed by a social hour and then dinner at 6:00. Will Steger, Minnesota native, polar explorer and eyewitness to global warming, will be the keynote speaker.

Tickets are \$50 or \$450 for a table of 10. 300 seats are available. Contact the Friends as soon as possible to reserve your seat or to sponsor a table. Call 612-332-9630 or email sacha@friends-bwca.org.

New Trail Celebrates MN Wildness

One million annual visitors to the Minnesota Zoo can now learn more about wildness by walking the new Minnesota Trail, and at the trail's head they can learn about the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness. The quarter-mile Minnesota Trail, opened in July, winds through 15 wildlife exhibits of raccoons, coyotes, gray wolves, otter, puma and lynx, and a variety of Minnesota landscapes ranging from a beaver pond to a northern forest glade. At the head of the trail, in the Maritz Family Lodge, visitors can pick up a Friends brochure.

The Friends has agreed to help promote the Minnesota Trail in exchange for access to the zoo's extraordinary number of visitors. Our partnership gives us free brochure space in the Lodge, periodic direct contact with 1,100 zoo volunteers to discuss BWCAW issues specific to wilderness animals and habitats, a link to the Friends website from the zoo's website, and a mention of the Friends in the zoo's member newsletter.

We are proud to tell our members that the Minnesota Zoo is an international leader in providing high-quality education and conservation programs. When it opened in 1978, zoos across the nation were changing from displaying animals for entertainment to caring for animals in naturalistic exhibits and being active conservators of species. Today, in Minnesota alone, there are 292 species at risk. Minnesota Zoo professionals have joined colleagues worldwide to spotlight the global wildlife crisis. Today's zoos give visitors knowledge and motivation to care about wild animals and their habitats.

Some 100,000 students and their teachers are among Minnesota Zoo's annual visitors, and so our partnership is also a unique opportunity to introduce the Friends to young people. Their interest in wildness will determine the future of the BWCAW. That interest is encouraged on the Minnesota Trail – a trail of hope for wildlife and wilderness. ●

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