



SOMMERS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

REFLECTIONS



NORTHERN TIER NATIONAL HIGH ADVENTURE

U.S. FOREST SERVICE TO REDUCE BWCAW GROUP SIZE TO SIX PEOPLE

By now most of you will have received your Winter 1992 issue of *Reflections* in which Bob Cary expressed concern over the possibility of a reduction in the maximum group size, from 10 to 6 people, in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). On November 17, those fears were confirmed when the Superior National Forest released for public comment, the Draft BWCAW Management Plan and the associated Draft EIS (Environmental Impact Statement). Plans not only call for smaller group size, but also reduce the number of overnight entry permits by nearly 30%.

These decisions — if implemented — will negatively impact the youth development and enrichment programs of such organizations as the YMCA and YWCA, the Outward Bound School, and the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, as well as other organized religious and educational groups with similar agendas. In recognition of our belief that it is vitally important that America's youth have the opportunity to learn wilderness ethics, use, values and stewardship by participating in a wilderness experience, your SAA Board of Directors has prepared this special edition of *Reflections*—not only to inform you of the issues at hand, but also to enable, encourage and elicit your **personal written response** to Forest Service officials, expressing your opinion of the intended BWCAW management changes.

The Process and BSA Involvement

The proposed BWCAW management changes were motivated by a 1988 Settlement Agreement to an appeal of the Superior National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, which required the Forest Service redetermine entry quotas for the BWCAW by October 1992. Public involvement began in November 1990 with a series of public Open Houses and formally concluded with the formation of a Task Force to discuss issues, formulate alternatives to resolve them, and to define mitigation measures. **Sandy Bridges, Allan Batterman, and Joe Mattson** represented the Northern Tier Program at the Task Force meetings, and Sandy was a member of a Working Group that dealt specifically with the "Group Size" issue. The resulting proposals are detailed in two manuals, and the public have until March 1, 1993 to respond with written comments.

What Can You Do?

It's more than a matter of what you can do — it is a matter of **What You Must Do!** The process of providing public comment in a democracy is relatively simple and straightforward. Decision-makers pay close attention to the total number of similar responses on any given issue. Effective advocacy groups understand this very well, and they use the process very effectively. In this case, we believe that each and every person who understands and believes in the value that the wilderness experience plays in educating America's youth, **must become an advocate for youth**. Please take a few minutes **right now**, to study the remainder of this document. Then write a thoughtful letter, based upon the facts presented and your personal experience, expressing your views on the attempt to reduce BWCAW access by organized youth groups. Send your letter today to:

Forest Supervisor
Superior National Forest
P.O. Box 338
Duluth, MN 55801

cc: The Honorable James L. Oberstar
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Letters must be received no later than March 1, 1993. Please send a copy to SAA, Box 428, Ely, MN 55731, as well as to anyone else that you deem appropriate.

Current Management Guidelines Are Sufficient

Table 1 summarizes the various alternatives the Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team considered. Alternative 3 depicts the Forest Service's "Preferred" future management. Alternative 1 represents the existing management guidelines as legislatively mandated in 1978. Under current management:

- Average party size is 4 persons (includes 17% of groups sized 7-10).
- Against existing carrying capacity targets, only 53% (203/382) of available overnight paddle permits are currently being issued.
- Demand for entry into the BWCAW currently exceeds the available capacity on some days at some entry points during the summer, but the overall capacity for overnight visits exceeds the projected demand, now and through the year 2040.
- The Forest Service's BWCAW Travel Model indicates (relative to 1980) that 1990 visitors did not disperse as far into the wilderness. They generally traveled to their destination, set up camp, and remained in place.

The Task Force Working Group (included BSA representation) that considered various "group size" issues, **came to consensus and recommended Alternative 1**. Results of an independent polling of readers of *The Boundary Waters Journal* also indicated (based upon first 500 surveys returned) that:

- 65% believed visitor use should be kept at current levels.
- 90% indicated they were able to find at least one legal campsite every night of their trip.
- 78% preferred the current system of visitor use distribution.
- 52% indicated that maximum party size should be greater than 6 people (7-2%, 8-28%, 9-5%, 10-17%), even though 71% traveled in groups of less than 6 people and only 2% traveled in groups of 10.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED FOR THE BOUNDARY WATERS CANOE AREA WILDERNESS - 1993 AND BEYOND.

Element	Alternative 1 (Current)*	Alternative 2	Alternative 3 (Preferred)	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6
Party Size	10 (4)**	10	6	10	4	8 (3 Watercraft)
Capacity of Travel Zone	67-85%	67-85%	67%	85%	50%	67%
Overnight Permit Quota	382/day (203/day)	326/day	276/day	377/day	187/day	276/day
Overnight Motor Permits	2,561/yr (2287/yr)	2,638/yr	1,976/yr	2,638/yr	1,345/yr	1,976/yr
Day-Use Motor Permits	10,169/yr (6702/yr)	10,539/yr@	7,902/yr@	10,539/yr@	5,083/yr@	7,902/yr@
Towboats	39 boats	39 boats	29 boats	39 boats	0 boats	29 boats
Number of Entry Points	62	60	60	61	48	60
Number of Campsites	2036	1858	1846	1873	1613	1848
Miles of Portage	178	175	168	178	141	168

*Alternative 1 depicts the existing BWCAW management parameters. (Current average use in parenthesis.)

**Approximately 17 percent of current groups are comprised of 7-10 people.

@ Towboat use will be exempt from this quota, and authorized through Special Use Permits.



Sommers Alumni Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 428

Ely, MN 55731

SPECIAL ALERT - IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUESTED!

Dear Fellow Scouts, Scouters and Friends of Scouting:

This letter accompanies a Special Edition of *Reflections*—the newsletter of the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association—which details an impending problem for the Charles L. Sommers National High Adventure Base—and potentially, for Scouting's Outdoor Programs in general. While the immediate impact concerns Scout groups using the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), such actions have set precedence for management of other federal lands. At least 50 local Councils throughout the country, as well as Philmont, use public land directly in delivering their outdoor programs to Scouts. Countless other individual Troops, Posts and Venture Crews, conduct outings in our National Parks and Forests.

Although the original intent of the Special Edition was to communicate with members of the SAA, the potential impacts of these changes (and the apparent motivation behind them) on Scouting's Outdoor and High Adventure Programs nationally, has prompted several requests that we extend circulation of this material to the **Philmont Staff Association**, as well as to every crew that experienced the BWCAW and Quetico through Sommers Canoe Base in recent years.

It is our hope that each and every one of you will "heed the call" and write a letter expressing your opinion. **Please feel free to reproduce and distribute any of the material**—including the editorial by Bob Cary entitled "Sorry, Kids." Additional copies may also be obtained by writing the SAA. Former Sommers Advisors, in addition to yourselves, why not present the opportunity for your Scouts to exercise their rights as a citizen?

Please take a few minutes to study the *Reflections* Special Issue. Think about how the intended actions might affect your Troop, Crew, Post or family. Then take some action, by expressing your thoughts to the Supervisor of the Superior National Forest. Current and future generations of Scouts will benefit from your efforts. For them, I thank you for taking the time to study the issue and becoming involved.

Yours in Scouting,

David M. Hyink
President

P.S. The original *Reflections* story by Bob Cary, and his *Ely Echo* editorial, are reproduced on the back of this letter.

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Editorial comments

Sorry, kids

We know, kids, there's a lot of concern among your parents, the schools, the federal government, and society in general over inner city gangs, delinquency, drugs, school dropouts, and lack of family values. And there are a lot of people working on this. The Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, YMCA, YWCA, church organizations, Outward Bound, and others have tried to channel some of your interests into the outdoors, not only to open up new visions to you kids, but also to develop environmental awareness and a respect for our natural resources.

As you are aware, kids, for more than a half century, many of these organizations have been taking youth groups into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, developing comradeship, citizenship, and outdoor appreciation along with camping and canoeing skills. Can't do that any more, kids. At the request of the Sierra Club, Izaak Walton League, Audubon Society, the Wilderness Society, Wilderness Watch, Nature Conservancy and Wilderness Inquiry, kids' groups are now to be outlawed from the Boundary Waters by the Forest Supervisor.

Seems as though there are people in these organizations who can't stand the sound of your voices on the water, your singing around the campfires at night, and they don't even like to see your flotillas of

four or so canoes in a group on the lakes or portages. "Visual pollution" they call it. That's what you are kids- visual pollution.

They also claim that eight of you kids with two adult leaders create too much impact on the campsites. Six adults are O.K., but eight kids and two leaders is strictly a no-no. The leaders of your youth groups testified again and again that kids' groups require two adults. With the costs spread over eight kids it is economically possible to include a lot of you from poor families who could go no other way. That's out.

Only four kids will be allowed with two adult leaders and so you poor kids get dumped. Sorry about that, but you should learn early in life that there are a lot of things in our society that poor kids simply can't have, anyway. The federal government has now declared that wilderness canoe trips are now to be one more.

Of course, there are no studies that show eight kids and their leaders have any more of an impact than six adults. No data. It is just an assumption and the people who don't like kids in the Boundary Waters have the clout to get their way. Indeed, there is ample evidence that the programs developed by the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, YMCA, YWCA, churches, and Outward Bound have been beneficial.

You have a fine record of picking up other people's litter and bringing it out, of helping injured or lost canoeists, of keeping campsites and trails cleared of blowdowns. Some of your groups, like the Boy Scouts, even have a policy of using little gas stoves instead of building wood fires. And, of course, you don't haul kegs of beer and boom boxes into the woods like some of the adults do; but the real wilderness advocates don't care about that. They want you out.

All we can say is "sorry, kids." Yes, we know a large proportion of today's adult canoe campers first went into the Boundary Waters as members in kid's groups. But times change. Surely you can find other pursuits like Nintendo or maybe pick up Terminator III or IV to play on the VCR. You really don't have to go on canoe trips and camp out, now do you?

Look at it this way: the wilderness organizations are happy. After all, it isn't every day that the Sierra Club, the Izaak Walton League, the Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy, Wilderness Society, Wilderness Watch, and Wilderness Inquiry can save a wilderness area from Girl Scout groups. And Boy Scout, YMCA, YWCA, church and Outward Bound groups, too.

By staying home, you will certainly make their day.

BWCA "Group Size Issue" Discussed

By Bob Cary

Pressure is on the U.S. Forest Service to reduce the group size to six. There were a number of very vocal people at the hearings in Duluth who oppose the 10-person youth group size and who oppose youth groups in the BWCA per se. The argument is that groups of 10 create too much visual impact such as aluminum canoes on the water,

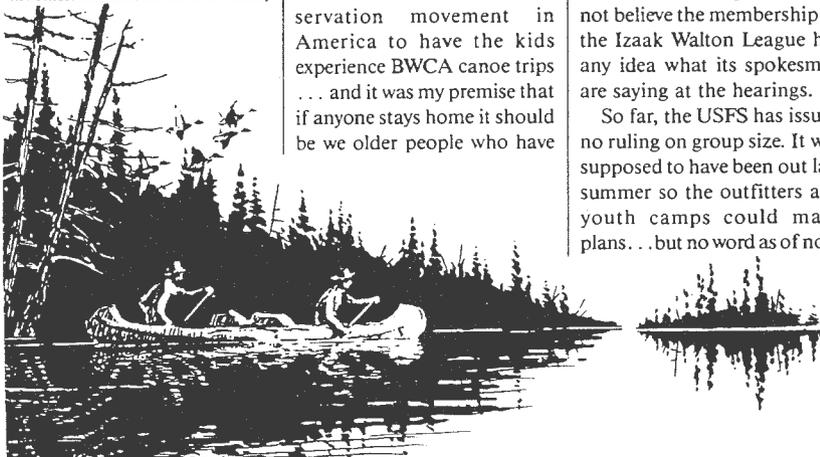
on the portages, etc. Also, they say youth groups sometimes sing around the campfire at night which "takes away from the wilderness experience."

Sandy, Al Batterman, Ely Outfitters, Gunflint Outfitters and others, including myself, have taken the position that it is important for the future of the wilderness and for the conservation movement in America to have the kids experience BWCA canoe trips . . . and it was my premise that if anyone stays home it should be we older people who have

had wilderness trips all these years.

Opponents of youth groups say they are interested only in "protecting the resource" but their comments at the USFS meeting were definitely anti-youth groups. Mainly this is the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness and the Izaak Walton League, but I do not believe the membership of the Izaak Walton League has any idea what its spokesmen are saying at the hearings.

So far, the USFS has issued no ruling on group size. It was supposed to have been out last summer so the outfitters and youth camps could make plans . . . but no word as of now.



A summary of the 1988 BWCAW Visitor Use Study data by University of Minnesota researcher David W. Lime revealed:

- Only 6% of Visitor Response Forms indicated Serious or Very Serious problems associated with meeting large groups in the BWCAW (67% indicated No Problem, with the remainder Slight to Moderate).
- Use of the BWCAW by organizations comprised approximately 9% of all visitor groups.
- 67% of groups were composed of 2-4 individuals.
- The average length of stay was 5 days.
- "Meeting too many groups" was the only problem that over ten percent of canoeists identified as a Serious or Very Serious Problem (just 12%).

Reductions Under Alternative 3 Not Justified

Published visitor use data and user opinion surveys, do not indicate that problems associated with the "capability of the resources to support human use" actually exist on a park-wide basis. Nor do they make it clear that a majority of users are demanding the kind of changes that justify the 28% reduction in overnight permits and the 40% reduction in maximum group size mandated in Alternative 3. Besides the Forest Service, exactly who "prefers" Alternative 3 is unclear, but its motivation seems to be based on problems that exist only near the entry points, and are identified by (and possibly caused by) groups (of any size) that enter the BWCAW, but are unwilling travel through it. Furthermore, the intended management changes seem to be predicated on the assumption that the "levels of solitude and encounters with others" should be the same for the wilderness periphery as they are for the interior. **U.S. Rep. James Oberstar**, D-8th (Duluth) expressed his opposition to the proposal from Washington, D.C. "The Forest Service has given in to one kind of recreational user: the type that wants to put his canoe in the water and not see another human being."

Forest Service Preferred Alternative Negatively Impacts Organized Youth Groups

We believe that attempting to make wilderness fringes resemble the interior by unilaterally restricting access, comes at too high a price in overall public access, and unfairly and inordinately impacts the educational programs of organized groups in general — and the outdoor education programs of the Boy Scouts of America in particular. Implementation of Alternative 3 would:

- **Create Additional Groups.** Most organizations that offer a youth wilderness experience require a fixed number of participants to "break even" or to stay in business. Reducing group size would force the same number of participants to comprise more groups, thus requiring more permits — in the face of a reduction in the total number of permits issued.
- **Require Additional Trained Staff.** Many organized youth programs, including the BSA, send trained staff with each group to teach wilderness skills, ethics, use, and stewardship.
- **Require Additional Supervisory Adults.** Most responsible organized youth programs rely on volunteer adults (generally using their vacations) to perform critical supervisory roles. In the case of the BSA, the presence of *two* adults is required at any youth activity.
- **Require Additional Equipment.** "Crew gear" such as dining flies, cook kits, stoves, two-way radios (BSA) would be required to meet the needs of additional groups.
- **Increase Costs.** Spreading monetary cost of staff and equipment over fewer participants per group will naturally drive the per capita cost up.

The net result for youth can only be *denied access* and *reduced participation*, caused not only by incremental out-of-pocket costs, but also by the increased difficulty in recruiting both qualified staff and volunteer adult supervision, as well as by a total reduction in overnight entry permits.

Writing Your Letter

In composing your letter it is important that you state who you are, what you want, and why you want it (or the converse). Be polite, but direct, and attempt to offer usable information. For example:

Dear Supervisor: *(address as shown on Page 1)*

I am writing to provide my comments on the recently released Draft BWCAW Management Plan and the associated Draft EIS. I have been actively involved in providing wilderness trips for Boy Scouts since 1965, and have personally made over 40 such trips into the BWCAW and Quetico. On those trips, I have witnessed first-hand the positive impacts of the wilderness experience on youth — particularly when they are part of an organized group that is accompanied by trained staff and responsible adults.

I support BWCAW Management parameters that will permit organized groups of 9 members, including at least one individual trained in wilderness travel, using no more than 3 canoes, and no more than 3 tents. This configuration will allow the Boy Scouts of America to efficiently and cost-effectively continue to provide a safe, high quality, and adequately supervised wilderness experience to America's young men and women. This configuration results in rapid travel, less time spent on portages, and deeper penetration into less-populated portions of the BWCAW and Quetico.

These objectives can clearly be accomplished under Alternative 1—my preference. They could also be accomplished under a slight modification of Alternative 6. However, based upon my examination of the 1988 BWCAW Visitor Use Study, I don't believe that the 28% reduction in overnight entry permits recommended in Alternative 6 is justified — particularly in light of the fact that 65% of respondents to a *Boundary Waters Journal* reader poll indicated that they believed BWCAW visitor use should remain at current levels. Based on the arguments presented, Alternatives 3, 5, and 6 (in its present form) are unacceptable.

Your consideration in managing the BWCAW for everyone—including organized youth groups will be most appreciated.

Need More Information?

If you would like additional information pertaining to this matter as you prepare your letters, please feel free to contact Dave Hyink (206) 863-6406, Blaine Diesslin (218) 365-6904, or Al Batterman (218) 525-3593. **Please write by March 1, 1993. Your letter will make a difference!**

SOMMERS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
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**SPECIAL GROUP-SIZE ISSUE
IMMEDIATE RESPONSE REQUESTED!**



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