

USDA Forest Service Introductory Volunteer Manual

welcome

**To the
Superior National Forest
And Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness**



The information provided in this packet serves as an introduction to the Superior National Forest and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). Our intent is to give you an idea of what to expect during a summer with the Forest Service in the “Northwoods.” Working in the wilderness will provide a lifetime of memories, and the experience and knowledge you gain may also be of great value in furthering a career in the natural resources field. Read on to learn more about working in this unique wilderness area.

The BWCAW

The BWCAW consists of approximately 1.1 million acres of the 3 million acre Superior National Forest, making it the largest wilderness area in the Eastern United States. The wilderness is protected under the 1964 Wilderness Act and the 1978 BWCAW Act and is a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The purpose of these two acts is to protect natural areas from overuse by humans and preserve them for future generations.

The unique topography of Northeastern Minnesota is the result of the last ice age, in which glaciers virtually stripped the area of its soil and carved thousands of depressions in the bedrock, thus creating the lakes we see today. There are so many lakes, in fact, that most visitors to the BWCAW travel by canoe, going from one lake to another via portages, or trails on land dividing the lakes. The lakes vary in depth from a few feet to a few hundred feet, and some are miles long while others measure only several hundred feet. Indeed, the lakes differ greatly from one another. Some lakes contain floating bogs or marshes, others are surrounded by high, lichen-covered cliffs, some so crystal clear one can see the bottom as if looking through glass.

The trees most commonly found in this boreal forest include aspen, paper birch, red and white pine, black and white spruce, white cedar, fir, and maples. Black bear, moose, otters, beavers, wolves, and pine martens make the BWCAW their home, as well as several dozen species of birds, including the common loon, the eagle, and the great blue heron.

The supply of fish keeps some visitors coming back year after year. While walleye is the fish of choice for many, northern pike, small mouth bass, lake, brook, and rainbow trout are all found in abundance. So bring your fishing pole! Unfortunately, another prevalent life form is BUGS! Mosquitoes, black flies, deer flies, and no-see-ums are present throughout most of the summer, especially late spring and early summer (May through mid-July). While they are definitely annoying, a good attitude can go a long way towards having an enjoyable experience.



The weather is highly variable in Northeast Minnesota. Temperatures range from 30 to 90 degrees in the warmer months (May through early September), and the sky can be cloudless one minute and filled with thunderheads a few minutes later. In addition, the speed and direction of the wind can change quickly, so navigating by canoe on large lakes can often be a challenge. In the BWCAW, it is imperative to be flexible and adaptable since the weather often has an impact on the type and amount of work that can be done in any given day.

The Wilderness Trip

What can you expect from the job you are hired to perform? Many variables such as weather, co-worker schedules, time of year, doctor appointments, and wildfire duties, can affect the job. In other words, a “typical” schedule should not be expected, and flexibility is of the utmost importance. You may not spend as much time in the Boundary Waters as you envision.

A typical work trip consists of you and a partner in the wilderness working eight consecutive ten-hour days (from 7 A.M. until 5:30 P.M). Each two-person crew usually carries five 45-50 pound packs plus the canoe, which could weigh from 40-75 pounds, or you may travel by motorboat. All gear must be carried across portages ranging from a few feet to more than a mile in length. Larger crews will obviously have more gear to carry.



The type of work you are asked to do will vary. You may perform routine maintenance on portages and campsites and contact any visitors you encounter. Or you may work on rehabilitating one portage the entire trip.

If you need to work on a special project or report for school, notify your supervisor

before you arrive. We will try to accommodate your needs.

Breaks, including lunch, will occur wherever the day’s work and travels dictate. The trip may encompass 60-80 miles of travel over varied terrain. During the trip you will camp at one or more of the 2200 campsites in the BWCAW, either switching campsites frequently or staying on one site the entire trip.

At the end of the workday, the time is yours to recover from your labor-intensive day by reading, fishing, relaxing, and of course fixing dinner.

The remainder of the trip will follow a similar pattern, but wilderness travel has so many variables that changes in plans can occur frequently. **Flexibility is important.**

Pick-up at the end of your trip is normally about 1 P.M. Back at the Service Center or District Offices, equipment is cleaned, sharpened and stored in preparation for the next trip. There is plenty of time to share stories and catch up on what’s happened in the “real world” during the past week. Then if you’ve been on an 8-day trip, it’s six days off to do as you please.

As mentioned above, one’s schedule may be highly variable. It is possible to take only day trips into the wilderness, or to spend three nights instead of seven. The zone leader of the area you are assigned to work will do coordination and scheduling of trips. If you have a problem with the schedule, or know in advance of days you cannot work, your area zone leader should be notified as soon as possible and an effort will be made to accommodate your needs.

What to Bring for Wilderness Trips

Some things to consider bringing for your trip (**items in bold are a necessity**):

- leather boots**
- rubber boots (optional but useful)
- quality rain gear (jacket/pants)**
- durable/quick drying work/camp clothes**
- pocketknife
- towel
- swimsuit
- lip balm
- binoculars

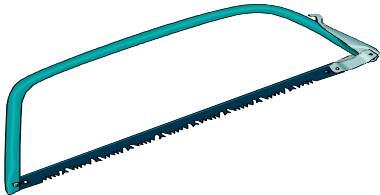


- books (field guides)
- hat (with a brim)
- sunglasses
- sunscreen
- personal hygiene items
- long underwear
- flashlight
- camera
- fishing tackle
- any medications

This list is not all encompassing, so bring things you feel will make your wilderness trips more comfortable. Remember, whatever you bring you will be carrying. Personal gear may be used in place of items provided by the Forest Service (a personal tent or sleeping bag, for example), but be aware the Forest Service can provide **no** compensation for lost or damaged property.

The Forest Service provides all necessary tools, safety equipment, canoes, life jackets, Duluth packs and liners, and camping gear (such as a tent, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, cooking equipment, camp stove and fuel). You will be expected to prepare and pack your personal gear in a Duluth pack with a plastic liner, and have it ready the evening before the trip begins.

Tasks, Tools and Equipment



Wilderness work involves many tasks. Tasks you may be asked to do include, but are not limited to the following:

- Paddling or motoring (including portaging), sometimes many miles each day
- Felling/limbing/bucking trees
- Replacing or fixing fire grates
- Digging latrines
- Clearing and brushing trails and campsites
- Seeding/tree planting
- Cleaning out water bars, and various erosion control projects
- Rehabilitating campsites, landings, portages and trails to control erosion and to return the area to a more natural state
- Collecting garbage
- Providing guidance and information to visitors
- Maintaining Forest Service facilities and vehicles

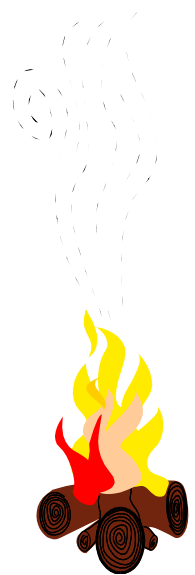
The work is labor-intensive because all work is done with hand tools. The tools often used include: 48" two-person crosscut saw, 2-4 lb. axe, pulaski, pruning saw, shovels, tamp bars, planting bars, mauls, chains, cable winch, nippers, and wheel barrows.

You will be instructed on the proper, safe way of using required tools and performing the necessary tasks. **Safety is our primary concern** since you will be miles from any medical facilities. Our safety record is very good and injuries are few. **Be prepared for hard work and to have a good time!**

Wilderness Regulations

The BWCAW is protected under the Wilderness Act of 1964, written specifically to protect areas of federal land from further intrusion by humans, keeping these lands in their natural state for the benefit of the natural community and humankind. Part of the definition of a wilderness is "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by humans, where a person is a visitor who does not remain." In October of 1978, the BWCAW Act was passed by Congress, which took into consideration the uniqueness of this Eastern wilderness. Some of the regulations and wilderness ethics you will be following when working or traveling in the wilderness are:

- **Nine person/four watercraft**- No more than nine people and four watercraft may be traveling or camping together at any time in the wilderness. Larger parties must separate while traveling and cannot visit one another on campsites or anywhere in the wilderness if they exceed these numbers.
- **Camping**- Camping is permitted only at Forest Service campsites designated by a permanent fire grate and latrine, unless a special permit for a primitive management area is sought.
- **Cans and bottles**- Metal cans and glass bottles in the form of food and beverage are not allowed in the wilderness. Fuel, insect repellent, medicines, or toiletries are permitted.
- **Fires**- Fires must be kept inside the fire grate. When leaving the campsite for any period of time, fires must be completely extinguished. Fire restrictions may be imposed due to wildfire danger.
- **Firewood**- Firewood should be gathered well away from the campsite and should be only from downed, dead wood. Live material may not be cut. In the storm damaged area (the July 4th, 1999 storm) firewood is readily available near the campsites.
- **Noise**- Visitors come to the wilderness for the solitude and peacefulness of the area, as well wildlife viewing, so noise levels should be kept to a minimum. Sound travels quite clearly over placid water, especially at night.
- **Motorized or mechanical uses**- At no time are motorized or mechanical devices (such as portage wheels or mountain bikes) allowed within the wilderness unless authorized by law, although the BWCAW does have several designated motor routes.
- **Garbage**- all refuse items must be packed out of the wilderness. No garbage should be buried, left at the site, or put in the latrines. Pack it in, pack it out!
- **Sanitation**- Use of soap products for dishes and personal hygiene should occur at least 150 feet from any water source. It is also illegal to put fish remains into the water, so burying them a minimum of 150 feet back in the woods is recommended.



Wilderness Ethics/Principals of “Leave No Trace”

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Minimize Use and Impact of Fires

Leave what you Find

Pack it in, Pack it out – Properly Dispose of what you can’t Pack Out

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

Respect Wildlife

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Food for Wilderness Trips

When packing for the trip, keep in mind cans and glass bottles are not allowed inside the wilderness; therefore, some food may have to be repackaged into plastic containers. Food purchasing can be done individually or meals can be shared between crewmembers. However your crew decides to divide meals, food must be purchased and re-packaged or frozen **before the day of departure**.

Here is a list of possible food items:

- granola, cereal bars
- pancake mix
- rice, pasta
- pre-mixed meals
- coffee, tea, hot chocolate
- peanut butter and jelly
- drink mixes
- dried milk, soups
- dried vegetables
- spice kit
- fresh fruits and vegetables
- cookies, candy
- butter, cooking oil
- nuts and dried fruit mixes
- crackers, potato chips
- salami, beef jerky
- bagels, tortillas, pita bread

Get creative, the options are endless!



All food is packed into a single food pack (for every two people), which is designed to contain a cooler in the bottom. Thus, fresh and frozen food items placed on ice at the beginning of the trip could last 3-4 days, depending on weather conditions.

Health and Safety

Working in the wilderness can be very strenuous at times (lifting 45-75 pound canoes, carrying heavy packs and tools over rough terrain, moving large rocks and heavy loads of dirt) and may be hazardous if proper precautions aren't taken. Deliberate, unsafe behavior is **not** acceptable, as the risk to yourself or your co-workers is too great. **Your safety and your health is our primary concern!**

You will need to maintain a high degree of physical fitness to contend with the rigors involved. We encourage you to **prepare ahead of time** for your summer with us. Walking flights of stairs, push-ups, sit-ups, and/or weight lifting, as well as running, biking and paddling, would provide beneficial conditioning. A visit with your doctor is recommended before beginning an exercise program. Mental preparedness is necessary as well. A strong, positive attitude is a real plus on extended trips

where hard work, bugs, and rain (or snow!) seem to conspire against you and your crew.

You are expected to carry your fair share since injuries are more likely to occur if the same person always carries the canoe, etc.. If there is a task you feel uncomfortable performing, such as felling a tree or canoeing across a lake with large waves simply tell your crew leader. This does not reflect poorly on your skills or motivation, but instead speaks to your level of common sense. Our primary concern is that everyone is safe!

Each work crew and Forest Service vehicle will be equipped with a first aid kit. Upon your arrival, it is important to familiarize yourself with the contents of that kit. As wilderness rangers, you may have to administer aid to visitors or to co-workers.

If you take prescription medications or have allergies (to bee stings, pollens etc.), be

sure to bring extra medication on a trip since weather conditions or unforeseen events may lengthen your trip. Be sure your co-workers and area work leaders are aware of your condition.

Strenuous work may lead to a reoccurrence of a previous injury. If you have any doubt about a previous medical condition, please check with your doctor before arriving and let your area work leader know in advance.

Giardia is present in most lakes in the BWCAW. Each crew will have water filters available for use. Boiling or chemically treating water is also an option.

From May to July, insects can be a nuisance. You will be contending with mosquitoes, ticks, black flies, deer and horse flies, and bees or hornets. Proper clothing and insect repellent are the best measures to limit exposure. We provide insect repellent. Daily

General Conduct

When you begin your service with us, you become a valued member of our Forest Service family. As an employee or a volunteer, you are a representative of the Forest Service, and your actions should reflect a professional manner. The public and your co-workers are to be treated with courtesy and respect at all times.

Orientation and Training

In the beginning of the season, all new employees and volunteers will attend an orientation. On-the-job training and written materials will acquaint you with the type of work to be done and the regulations involved in completing that work. All work done must follow guidelines to ensure minimum environmental impacts, visitor and employee safety, and completion of tasks with maximum efficiency and quality. Training may include defensive driving, first aid and CPR, cross-cut saw use, two-way radio use, BWCAW

checks of your entire body for ticks, is important. Washing does not remove ticks!

Poison ivy is common in some areas. Wearing long sleeves and long pants is the best preventative measure where P.I. is found, as is a sharp eye to identify it and warn others.

Black bears are common and generally harmless if proper precautions are taken. Food should be hung or placed in a bear-proof pack. If a black bear approaches, loud noises will usually scare it away.

Crew leaders will have portable two-way radio contact with the District office. Normally, there is a radio check once a day. Although topography sometimes limits radio communication, a change in location will often remedy the problem. Radio contact is very important for emergency situations and to coordinate changes in work assignments and end of trip pickups.

Disrespectful behavior, language or insinuation is not tolerated. If a problem with a co-worker arises, try to solve it amongst yourselves. If the problem cannot be resolved, then discuss it with your supervisor.

regulations, permit system operation, safety, proper use of tools, proper conduct and behavior, dealing with personnel conflicts, job hazard analysis, canoeing techniques, motor boat operation, and other relevant information. We **strongly** recommend taking a first aid and CPR class before you arrive.

We prefer you start in time for the scheduled training.

For more information on the BWCAW, visit these web sites, www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior www.bwcaw.org.

Information on Communities Surrounding the BWCAW

ELY

Ely and its surrounding area is a unique and beautiful place. The town began as a timber/mining community in the 1800's, and since the creation of the Boundary Waters, has become a bustling tourist destination in the summers. With approximately 4,000 year-round residents, the summer provides a stark contrast to this small town. About three quarters of a million people visit the BWCAW annually, and many of them come through Ely on their way to a BWCAW entry point.

Although Ely is a small town, it does have two grocery stores, a food co-op, restaurants and gas stations, a community college, movie theatre, two video rental shops, numerous gift and souvenir shops, a large number of outfitters, and all the necessities, such as a post office, library, auto parts store, medical clinic and a hospital. Those in search of more services or more varied shopping are likely to take a drive outside of town.

Ely is located about one hour northeast of Virginia, Minnesota, which is the nearest large town of about 10,000 residents. In Virginia, one will find a large grocery store, a small shopping mall, and a Target or K-Mart, as well as other services. Duluth, Minnesota is approximately a two-hour drive and is a unique

and beautiful city right on the shore of Lake Superior. One will find many ethnic food restaurants and live music throughout the week. It is home to a large hospital and has all the services a person could need.

The beautiful north shore of Lake Superior is about an hour and a half drive from Ely and is dotted with several state parks and the Superior Hiking Trail, as well as some small towns with great views of Lake Superior. St. Paul and Minneapolis (also known as "the Twin Cities") is a four to five hour drive southwest of Ely. These are all great places to visit on days off.

An almost unlimited number of summer activities exist for outdoor enthusiasts. The Boundary Waters is our backyard, and anyone can enter for the day using self-issued permits at an entry point, as well as purchasing a permit for overnight trips. Several hiking trails exist within the Boundary Waters. In addition, several lakes in the immediate area are outside the Wilderness and can be explored by canoe or motorboat. Hikers and bikers will also find many trails in the surrounding area.

For more information visit the Ely Chamber of Commerce at www.ely.org or call 1-800-777-7281.

Housing



Government employees (not volunteers) must provide their own housing. Local papers and reality offices list rentals. Co-workers may also know of places.

Volunteer Housing

Government housing is provided for volunteers. Please contact us as soon as possible to discuss your housing needs and your arrival date so we can make the necessary arrangements and have someone here to greet you. If you cannot make it during normal business hours, please call ahead and we will try to accommodate your arrival.

A new volunteer house has been constructed at the new office location across from the International Wolf Center on Highway 169. Beds and/or cots, and necessary kitchen supplies (pots/pans, plates, utensils) are provided. You must provide your own **blankets, towels, twin sheets and other linens**.

Housing is co-ed and will consist of many people from differing backgrounds and age groups.

You will need to make long distance calls by using a calling card or by calling collect. *Answering machines* are not provided, so consider bringing one along. All of Ely's services: grocery, entertainment, and shopping, are within one mile. *Bicycles* are a good means of transportation in and around the area.

You may choose to seek your own housing in or around Ely, (many rental properties are available) but this is at your own expense.

There are no entertainment furnishings, poor TV reception and no cable hook ups so you may want to bring a radio or television and VCR/DVD. If you have any special needs or questions about housing you should contact our office as soon as possible, preferably no later than one week prior to your arrival. You will be required to complete and sign volunteer and housing agreements when you arrive. We will be withholding a \$50 cleaning deposit from your first reimbursement.

You will be reimbursed once each month, based on the sum negotiated on your volunteer agreement. Please bring **sufficient funds to cover** you until your first reimbursement.

For volunteer opportunities on the Kawishiwi Ranger District, please contact Cory Mensen at (218) 365-2080, or by e-mail at cmensen@fs.fed.us

COOK

The LaCroix Ranger District Wilderness Program oversees the western portion of the BWCAW with an office in Cook, Minnesota. This community is located 90 miles north of Duluth on Highway 53. The Cook area is the gateway to a wide variety of recreation and wilderness opportunities both motorized and non-motorized on the west side of the Superior National Forest. One unique feature of this area is that the LaCroix Ranger District is where the Superior National Forest, Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and Voyageurs National Park meet with common boundaries at Crane Lake.

Cook is a small city with a population of 600. The community has a strong history of tourism with nearby Lake Vermilion being home to numerous resorts. Businesses include gift shops, a library, restaurants, banks, a grocery store, and a couple of large building/home centers. Cook also features a full service hospital, clinic, and school system. The nearby city of Virginia (25 miles south) has major stores and services.

As in all the communities within and surrounding the Superior National Forest, there are many opportunities to canoe, hike, swim, fish, or participate in numerous other forms of outdoor recreation on your days off.

The Forest Service offers housing in a newly constructed dorm style building for those interested in volunteer opportunities. Please contact us as soon as possible to discuss your housing needs and your

arrival date. Bunk style sleeping arrangements means that you might have a roommate. There may also be opportunities for government housing in Ely (45 miles to the east).

The government housing does not feature cable TV so you may want to bring a radio or VCR/DVD. Long distance calls can be made by using a calling card or calling collect. Cook's grocery store and other services, including the district office are all within a one mile walking distance. If you have any special needs or questions about housing you should contact us as soon as possible. You will be required to complete and sign volunteer and housing agreements when you arrive. We withhold a \$50 housing cleaning deposit from your first reimbursement.

You may choose to seek your own housing in or around Cook or commute from a longer distance but this is at your own expense.

You will be reimbursed once each month, based on the sum negotiated on your volunteer agreement. Please bring **sufficient funds** to cover your expenses until your first reimbursement.

For more information regarding volunteer opportunities on the LaCroix Ranger District, please contact Mark Toot at (218) 666-0020, or by email at mtoot@fs.fed.us

TOFTE and GRAND MARAIS

The East Zone Wilderness Programs are based out of Tofte and Grand Marais, Minnesota. These North Shore of Lake Superior communities are located 80 (Tofte), and 110 (Grand Marais), miles north of Duluth on Highway 61, the scenic "North Shore Drive".

Tofte is a small community with a population of 250. The community has long been influenced by tourism. It has a few gift shops, a grocery store, and several café's in the Tofte/Shcroeder area. The ranger district office is located across the road from Lake Superior. It is a very low-key community. For major services, the communities of Grand Marais and Silver Bay are about 30 miles away.

Grand Marais is somewhat larger with a population of 1200. It is a very picturesque community with a harbor on Lake Superior. Grand Marais is a full service community with two grocery stores, a coo-op, many shops, and a vibrant arts community. There is a clinic/hospital, a library, and it is the county seat of Cook County

In both of these communities, housing is in extremely short supply; therefore the Forest Service will offer housing to those interested in volunteer opportunities.

Housing for volunteers for the East Zone Wilderness Program will vary. Some of our volunteer housing will be close to town with crew/dorm type housing in modern homes and cabins. Our other housing is anywhere from 25-40 miles from town in historic Civilian Conservation Corp. era log cabins equipped with gas lighting, heat and refrigeration, as well as a very nice outhouse down the path. These more remote and primitive cabins are all on lakes adjacent to the BWCAW.

The Forest Service will work with you to find the right type of housing to fit your situation if we can. Some of our volunteer housing is near enough to town so that phone service would be available at your expense. Other Forest Service housing has no phone service nearby.

As in all small communities surrounding the BWCAW, there are many opportunities to hike, bike, fish, swim, or participate in many forms of outdoor recreation on your days off

Because working in the BWCAW is physically demanding, successful completion and documentation of a physical is a requirement. As is true with the volunteer program outlined in the section on Ely, we reimburse our volunteers two times per month. It is recommended that volunteers bring enough money to last the first several weeks in the program.

For more information on volunteering for the Forest Service's East Zone Wilderness Program based out of Tofte and Grand Marais, please contact Jonathan Benson, East Zone Wilderness Program Coordinator, at (218) 663-8085, or by e-mail at jbenson@fs.fed.us

Conclusion

We hope this information will stimulate you to ask any questions you may have before your arrival, and help you prepare for your time working with us. The more you understand before arriving, the better we hope your experience will be.

We sincerely look forward to working with you this summer in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Several volunteers and employees return year after year. They have come to love this area. We hope you might be one of them.

