



Superior National Forest

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Situational Assessment Report

Frequently Asked Questions

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Q. Will Situational Assessment results be made public?

A. NCECR's report titled [Boundary Waters Canoe Area Situational Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities](#) is available on the SNF website under Visit Us, Destinations, scroll to bottom and click on BWCA Wilderness Research and Publications link.

R. What is the goal of the Situational Assessment?

A. To assess ways for the Superior National Forest to strengthen communication and engagement surrounding BWCAW management challenges.

Q: What was the criteria used to determine who would be selected to participate in the assessment conversations?

A: A team of Forest Service employees familiar with the BWCAW interested groups developed a comprehensive list of partners, interested parties, and others to create a curated, inclusive list including individuals representing: Tribal governments, County governments, local/city governments, tourism organizations, youth camps/programs, research and academic/historians, environmental/conservation and preservation groups, other state/Federal and Canadian agencies, BWCAW cooperators, diversity wilderness visitor groups, permitted outfitter/guides and unaffiliated wilderness visitors (those not going through a outfitting/guiding business for their BWCAW trip). The SNF provided this list of potential assessment participants to the NCECR team. The NCECR team emailed all parties, and 100 individuals chose to participate. Additionally, the NCECR took recommendations from identified participants for other potential stakeholders to reach out to. The objective was to identify those with wide ranging viewpoints and to also hear from those that may not have had an opportunity in the past to voice their opinion.

Q: Are there parties involved that are not affiliated with a local business, organization, or agency?

A: Yes, a sampling of past permitted BWCAW visitors, that did not use the services of a local outfitter & guide, were randomly selected from the Recreation.gov database to participate in the discussions. Participants included: first time paddle/hike, motor permit holders, Paddle/Hike, and motor permit holders who have made multiple trips to the BWCAW. Participants were from the Arrowhead region of Minnesota, greater Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Greater United States.

Q. Why isn't anyone from the timber or mining industry in the participant list?

A. This assessment focuses on issues within the boundaries of the BWCAW, which is protected from mining, logging and other extraction of natural resources. The Forest Service is aware that management outside of the

wilderness area can affect the wilderness; however, the focus of this effort is specific to the management of the BWCAW.

Q. My organization and/or myself were not selected to participate in the situational assessment and we/I have a vested interest in the Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness.

A. The situational assessment is simply a first step, and the SNF is working to engage in a collaborative effort. There will be future opportunities to provide input and have your voice heard. As the Superior National Forest (SNF) and the National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution (NCECR) move forward with designing and standing up a collaborative over the next couple of months more information will become available on how you can participate. If you would like to get your name or organization on a list to be considered, please email SM.FS.R9BWCAW@usda.gov with the subject line: interest in BWCAW collaborative.

Q. How does this situational assessment affect a timeline for towboat NEPA or additional quota reduction?

A. For future large management decisions such as towboat management or non-emergency related changes in quota, the SNF sees the benefit of having a collaborative group in place for improved communication, transparency, and engagement. The Forest Service is entering into an agreement with NCECR to design and stand up a collaborative group, a process that will occur over the next few months. Once a collaborative is in place then SNF plans to move into public engagement for towboat management.

Q. If a collaborative is formed, would they be responsible for decisions involving the BWCAW?

A. No, The Forest Service retains decision making authority. Discussions and input received through the collaborative would be used to help inform management decisions.

Q. Which recommendations from NCECR report is the Forest Service going to implement?

A. The SNF will review and consider in detail all participant recommendations from the Situational Assessment report. SNF has already met with NCECR to gain clarity on what has been proposed. This review step is important because some of the recommendations may already be in action, yet unknown to some participants, while other recommendations may not be allowed within current policy. Some recommendations may best lend themselves to being addressed in collaboration with interested parties, while other are more administrative in nature and will be assessed with SNF and other Forest Service staff.

Following is a listing of select recommendations from the Situational Assessment with information related to what the SNF is already doing to address them.

Management – Key Considerations

- **Utilize and Incorporate Tribal Knowledge, Worldviews, and Perspectives**

- *“...several participants suggested that Tribes should be more involved in BWCAW management...”* specifically, participants suggested *“...engage Tribes through established MOUs and/or new Government-to-Government consultation processes...”*.

What the Forest Service is doing: A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed May 2, 2023 provides a framework for cooperation between the Superior National Forest (SNF) and Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, and Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Bands) for natural resource management, economic development and employment, training and education, maintaining cultural lifeways, and regulatory jurisdiction on National Forest System and trust lands within the 1854 Treaty boundaries.

Tribal Governments are afforded special rights as domestic dependent nations that are recognized by Treaties signed with the federal government. The Forest Service engages in a special government to government consultation with the Bands to fulfill its legal trust duty. The legal status held by tribes' means the rights of tribal governments are different from the general public and our agency partners.

- **Increase Cooperative management options.**

- *“Participants suggested SNF should collaborate and partner with key parties on the management of the BWCAW wherever feasible. Participants suggested SNF explore cooperative management opportunities for BWCAW and the Quetico Provincial Park (QPP). Additionally, some participants suggested using agency partners and other interested partners to help maintain the BWCAW”. Specifically, “Consider more opportunities to coordinate and/or share best practices and lessons learned with QPP partners and any opportunities to coordinate on joint management issues that involve BWCAW and QPP as a contiguous unit”.*

What the Forest Service is doing: SNF is a founding and active member of the [Heart of the Continent Partnership \(HOCP\)](#), a Canadian/American coalition of land managers and local stakeholders working together on cross-border projects that promote the economic, cultural and natural health of lakes, forest and communities on the Ontario/Minnesota border. HOCP represents a broad array of organizations. One of the latest projects that SNF worked on with HOCP was the Heart of the Continent – Dark Skies Initiative. With guidance from [International Dark Sky Association](#) – Starry Skies Lake Superior, the National Park Service Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division, Ohio Northern University, and the cooperation of public land managers, HOCP worked to designation of the world’s largest dark sky destination. Through this joint effort of the HOCP – the BWCAW was awarded Dark Sky Sanctuary status in September 2020, Voyageurs National Park was certified as a Dark Sky Park in December 2020, and Quetico Provincial Park was designated an International Dark Sky Park in February 2021.

- **Consider New Ways to Address Visitor Impacts and Improve Relationships with the Wilderness**

- *“Provide additional information in interpretive signage about what is and what is not allowed in the BWCAW”.*

What the Forest Service is doing: The Superior National Forest currently has several locations where BWCAW rules and information can be found including:

- The [BWCAW Trip Planning Guide](#) provides a comprehensive overview of the rules, regulations, and Leave No Trace (LNT) practices to prepare for a safe and successful wilderness trip. The Trip Planning Guide explains the *why* behind BWCAW rules, regulations, and best practices.
- Every BWCAW permit, including self-issue, have a list of the most common 18 rules, regulations and LNT practices printed on the back. By default, anyone legally traveling within the BWCAW has access to this information.
- The SNF [website](#) is full of BWCAW specific information to help educate the public about this unique wilderness area as well as prepare visitors of all ages and experience levels for a successful trip.
- The SNF produced a series of BWCAW user education videos to promote best practices while traveling in the wilderness. The three-part series covers trip planning topics needed months in advance of your trip to the moment your paddle hits the water. Links to the videos are automatically sent to BWCAW permit holders through the Recreation.gov reservation system. The first video is released via email with your permit confirmation letter. The second video is distributed approximately two weeks prior to start of your trip. The third video is designed to be watched when picking up a permit from a permit issuing station. Additionally, each three-minute video can be viewed on demand on YouTube at:
 - Part 1: BWCAW [Trip Planning](#)
 - Part 2: BWCAW [Plan Ahead and Prepare](#)
 - Part 3: BWCAW [Know Before You Go](#)

- The BWCAW permit reservation site [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) provides in depth information on BWCAW rules, regulations, LNT practices, and entry point specific content including motor restrictions, permit requirements and more. In addition, current information such as campfire restrictions, closures, wildfire activity, and other timely notifications are both disseminated on Recreation.gov as well as via email to permit holders when deemed necessary.
- The SNF utilizes social media on a regular basis to highlight the many activities taking place on the forest. In addition, social media platforms are used to communicate a variety of educational messages specific to wilderness travel including, bear awareness and proper food storage, Leave No Trace practices, campfire restrictions, BWCAW permit reservations, and much more. Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) to stay in the know.
- Every BWCAW entry point is equipped with a kiosk displaying interpretive information about the area, LNT reminders, a supply of BWCAW self-issue permits, and entry point specific details to provide BWCAW visitors with last minute information prior to embarking on their wilderness trip.

Communication and Education – Key Considerations

• Campsites and Trails

- *“Communicate and update visitors on BWCAW priorities and maintenance activities via newsletter and social media”.*

What the Forest Service is doing: The SNF currently provides this type of information in several places and formats including the annual Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) [report](#), cooperator newsletter and meeting, and the Forest Monitoring and Evaluation [Report](#). Currently, information about upcoming BWCAW maintenance or rehabilitation plans are shared at the spring and fall BWCAW permit cooperator meetings. Updates are often shared via social media after maintenance or project work is complete.

- *“Educate visitors about alternative routes and under-utilized campsites”.*

What the Forest Service is doing: Designated wilderness offers solitude, freedom, primitive recreation, challenge, risk, and personal connection with nature. The BWCAW allows visitors to canoe, portage, and camp in the spirit of those travelers that came before them centuries ago. Directing visitors to specific routes, lakes, or campsites is contrary to the spirit of the 1964 Wilderness Act and could result in resource damage to these locations.

- *“Educate visitors about areas outside the Wilderness area that provide similar opportunities and are easier to access”.*

What the Forest Service is doing: The SNF offers an array of camping opportunities outside of the BWCAW that can accommodate a variety of experience levels. From car camping in developed campgrounds to wilderness-like lake based canoe camping, a complete overview of these opportunities can be found [here](#). See new release highlighting [15 under the radar non-wilderness](#) camping, hiking and paddling sites across the forest. Additionally, [Voyageur National Park](#) and the [Minnesota State Park](#) system offer similar alternatives to camping in a federally designated wilderness area.

- *“Establish an online system that allows visitors to provide feedback to alert SNF to visually indicate where there are maintenance needs”.*

What the Forest Service is doing: BWCAW visitors can currently share feedback on maintenance issues or social conditions directly through [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) using the “review”. Reviews posted through Recreation.gov are monitored regularly by SNF staff. Imminent maintenance needs can be reported directly to SNF [offices](#).