

**Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW)
Collaborative
Fall Meeting Summary
October 9, 2024**

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Meeting Participants:

- Aaron Kania, Superior National Forest (SNF) Kawishiwi District Ranger
- Alan Brew, Lake Superior Research Institute (Virtual)
- Asha Shoffner, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation; BIPOC Outdoors (Virtual)
- Audrey Jerome, Camp Widjiwagan
- Barb Soderberg, retired Forest Service
- Bill Iacono, BWCAW Recreationalist
- Bob LaTourell, LaTourell's Moose Lake Outfitters
- Carrie Ohly-Cusack, Aquatic Invasive Species Boundary Water Collaborative
- Cathy Quinn, SNF Wilderness Program Manager
- Clare Shirley, Sawbill Outfitters
- Derrick Passe, volunteer connection with FS: North Country Trails; Lake County SWCD
- Dr. Charles Rose, St. Cloud State University
- Heather Boyd, Grand Portage National Monument
- Ingrid Lyons, Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness/Save the Boundary Waters
- Jaimé Thibodeaux, MN Forest Resources Council
- Jason Zabokrtsky, Ely Outfitting Company
- Jim Morrison, Gunflint Trail Fire Department
- Josh Dix, Cook County Dept. of Public Works
- Ken Gilbertson, Environmental & Outdoor Education, University of Minnesota Duluth
- Kent Olson, BWCAW Recreationalist (Virtual)
- Kevin Proescholdt, Wilderness Watch
- Lane Johnson, University of Minnesota Cloquet Forestry Center
- Marcy Byrns, BWCAW Recreationalist (Virtual)
- Mary Anne Sykes, SNF Administrative Support Staff
- Nell Holden, Wilderness Inquiry (Virtual)
- Tom Hall, Superior National Forest (SNF) Supervisor
- Trevor Gibbs, Quetico Provincial Park (Virtual)
- Travis Novitsky, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Grand Portage State Park
- Seth Cohen, John S. McCain III National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution
- Isaac Merson, John S. McCain III National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution

Members unable to attend:

- Pat Eliassen, Sheriff Cook County
- Lukas Leaf, Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters
- Kesley Ebbs, Friends of the BW Northern Communities Coordinator; Growing Futures

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Overview

The meeting was brought to order by facilitators Seth Cohen and Isaac Merson of the John S. McCain III National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution (National Center), a program of the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation (Udall Foundation). Seth welcomed everyone to this second in-person meeting of the BWCAW Collaborative. He provided an overview of the agenda (Appendix A) and reviewed meeting logistics for everyone in the room and those participating virtually on MS Teams.

Building the Collaborative

Objective: Building connection and purpose for the group. Members re-introduced themselves to one another and shared a BWCAW issue they have been thinking about lately.

Multiple participants observed climate change effects in the BWCAW, such as the flooding earlier in the summer, changing ecosystem at Northern Lights Lake, and recent drought and late fire season. Specifically, the relationship between managing fire danger and visitor management was called out. One participant shared that they were hoping to build a deeper understanding of how Wilderness laws and National Forest Service Policy constrain management. Other topics included an update on road conditions around the BWCAW, progress noted on sustainable trail building at portages, and reports that the overall user experience in the Wilderness remains excellent. Several participants noted that they are thinking about the educational framework for visitors to the BWCAW, and how to build upon what is already working. Access for underrepresented visitors, and safety during Wilderness travel was another repeated theme. Time was taken to appreciate the work that is done all around the BWCAW to allow for safe recreation and wilderness travel, and also to recognize the loss of Voyageurs National Park ranger Kevin Grossheim during a recent incidence response in the Park.

Wilderness Character: Presentations and Discussion

The morning session included a presentation on the USFS approach to identifying and monitoring trends in Wilderness Character by Christina Boston, (National Forest Service, Wilderness Character Monitoring Program Manager). After spending some time working with the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management, Christina started her Forest Service career as the Wilderness Program Specialist at the Superior National Forest and has held multiple roles across the country supporting Wilderness management and monitoring and the Wild and Scenic Rivers program. Her presentation was followed by questions and discussions as it relates to the BWCAW. *Slides are available on box: <https://usfs.box.com/s/wn5q760a4s767esir1wovv4qpxr84yf1>.*

Legal basis for the preservation of Wilderness Character

The 1964 Wilderness act established Wilderness Character as the guiding principle for wilderness management. The importance of preserving Wilderness Character is affirmed by all three branches of the federal government (see slides 3-5). Federal agencies are held responsible for preserving wilderness character, and within Wilderness areas management for other purposes must be done in a way that preserves wilderness character.

Keeping it Wild 2 is the updated interagency strategy to monitor trends in wilderness character. It created the first interagency definition for Wilderness Character (Slide 14):

Wilderness character is a holistic concept based on the interaction of (1) biophysical environments primarily free from modern human manipulation and impact, (2) personal experiences in natural environments relatively free from the encumbrances and signs of modern society, and (3) symbolic meanings of humility, restraint, and interdependence that inspire human connection with nature. Taken together, these tangible and intangible values define wilderness character and distinguish wilderness from all other lands.

Christina noted that tangible qualities, which can be managed for and monitored, make up the intangible qualities. Wilderness Character is defined by five key Qualities: Untrammeled, Natural, Undeveloped, with opportunities for Solitude and unconfined recreation, and containing Other Features of Value.

1. Untrammeled (Slide 17 and 18)

This quality means the Wilderness “generally appears to have been effected primarily by the force of nature”. It includes a respect for the autonomy of nature and direction to let natural processes express themselves. The philosophy is to practice humility and restraint and learn from natural systems.

Intention matters with “Trammeling”. A Trammeling is an intentional act linked to the biophysical process in the wilderness. Actions such as fire suppression, prescribed fire, fish stocking, spraying for invasive species are all considered “trammeling”. Ranger patrols, interpretive hikes, etc. are all NOT considered trammeling.

There are **Authorized actions** that effect untrammeled quality: Trammeling actions can be looked at in totality with Wilderness Character as a whole if they improve other aspects of wilderness character.

There are also **Unauthorized actions** including management on nearby areas with the intention of affecting the Wilderness, such as Animal releases pointed into the Wilderness.

2. Natural

This quality means the Wilderness is “protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions”. It prescribes that Wilderness ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization. However, “natural” **does not** exclude Indigenous management and use. Protection might include invasive species management.

3. Undeveloped

This quality means the Wilderness is “Without permanent improvements or human habitation” and “With the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable”. It is fairly straightforward and instructs agencies to avoid building visible infrastructure such as pipelines, towers, buildings etc. within the Wilderness. This quality also includes that Wilderness is a place “Where man himself is a visitor who does not remain”. Motorized vehicles or mechanical transport fall under this quality.

4. Solitude

This quality means the Wilderness “provides outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.” Solitude also includes opportunities for primitive (self-powered) and unconfined (unrestricted) recreation.

Solitude and unconfined recreation can be at odds, for example quotas provide solitude, but also are “confining”. Management which intersects with this character might include camping restrictions in particular areas. Christina also noted that agencies can’t ‘force’ visitors to take advantage of solitude (i.e. by travelling in small groups, avoiding the use of speakers, etc.).

5. Other Features of value

Wilderness may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. Agencies are authorized to protect these features or manage for them.

These often include identified cultural sites and may be identified through legislation or through an established process. This quality allows the agency to manage for these features, such as by maintaining a historic building or removing graffiti. Each unit determines which features are considered Other Features of Value.

Interactions between Wilderness Character Qualities:

Wilderness is a singular resource, which is composed of these 5 aspects of wilderness character. The purpose of Wilderness is to create an emotion larger than itself – including both Tangible and intangible values.

Management of Wilderness Character can be complicated: Qualities can conflict with one another. There can be complex interactions, and addressing a threat to one quality may yield a new threat to the other. For instance,

- Installing scientific equipment to monitor climate change may lead to better ability to manage for natural quality, but degrades undeveloped and untrammelled quality
- Installing a fish barrier to block non-native fish may lead to better ability to manage for natural quality, but degrades undeveloped and untrammelled quality
- Providing artificial water to replace water lost to human activities may mitigate loss of habitat, but also degrades the natural and untrammelled quality of system
- A permit system to reduce crowding would improve solitude but degrade unconfined recreation



The policy is based on the theory that minimizing degradation to each quality of wilderness character will maximize preservation of wilderness character.

To open the discussion, Christina asked the participants to consider which Qualities of Wilderness Character would be affected by three different management actions: Prescribed burns, radio-collaring moose, and creating establishing permanent campsites.

Key Take-aways on Wilderness Character

- There is a clear legal requirement to preserve wilderness character
- Wilderness character is composed of 5 qualities that are equally important, interrelated, and together form a unique resource
- Stewardship decisions profoundly affect wilderness character

Christina concluded the first portion of her presentation by underscoring that understanding Wilderness Character provides consistent terminology to improve internal and external communication. The transparency and defensibility of decisions is improved by using the 5 qualities as a metric, and the overall identification and monitoring of Wilderness Character helps local staff in understanding the consequences of decisions and actions in Wilderness areas.

Discussion

Kevin offered appreciation for Christina's presentation. He then noted that he and some Wilderness advocates have significant concerns with the framework laid out in the Keeping it Wild 2 (KIW2) document. He noted that the framework sets the Qualities up in conflict with one another and diminishes the importance of the intangible quality of "Wildness" as originally described in the act. Christina responded that they are aware that KIW2 is not perfect, but that it does give a common language and discussion framework.

Ken wondered if there are any metrics for the effectiveness of visitor education. Christina responded that there isn't a direct measure of the effectiveness of education in the monitoring program. Rather the monitoring looks at the trends in the Qualities of Wilderness Character. The monitoring looks at the physical resource and that could potentially be correlated with education that is being offered.

Ken responded that he would like to better understand concretely the effect of education on Wilderness Character. "That would help the Collaborative as we think about what education materials the Collaborative could produce."

Keeping it Wild 2: [Keeping it wild 2: An updated interagency strategy to monitor trends in wilderness character across the National Wilderness Preservation System \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/keeping-it-wild-2)

Wilderness Character Monitoring

During the next portion of her presentation, Christina gave an overview of the National Monitoring Program for Wilderness Character. This Program:

- Provides nationally consistent and locally relevant Wilderness character information
- Shows accomplishments
- Provides local and regional information about policy effectiveness
- Provides a baseline to compare to over time

Christina noted that the primary stewardship task for Wilderness managers is to, at minimum, preserve the quality of Wilderness that existed when it was designated. And ideally, move the Wilderness to a less degraded state.

The Wilderness character monitoring program was developed first in 2001, and published the National Monitoring strategy in 2005. Keeping it Wild was first published in 2008 and revised in 2015 as Keeping it Wild 2 (KIW2). This is the current interagency strategy, so definitions of Wilderness Character, Qualities, Monitoring questions, and indicators are consistent nationally. However, management actions and measures to respond are relevant to the individual Wilderness.

Christina shared an example of the Monitoring framework and the way that monitoring is reported (5-year trend reports). The ideal is to start at wilderness designation, but data does not exist for all Wilderness areas, the commitment is to establish a baseline and work towards improvement. Individual trends of different aspects of Wilderness Qualities get rolled up into an overall trend of improvement or degradation of Wilderness Character.

Currently, the Forest Service is working on streamlining monitoring reports, which will share 5-year trends with the public. Of the 448 Wilderness areas in the Forest Service, 300 of them now have baseline reports. The earliest of these from around 2018 are now ready for the 5-year trend reports. The BWCAW doesn't yet have a baseline report because it was actually out ahead of the National process, but does have a 2016 Technical report including a baseline map of the BWCAW which is available on the [Collaborative Box](#).

Minimum Requirement analysis framework

Finally, Christina introduced the Minimum Requirements Analysis framework, this is a decision-making tool the individual Forest staff can use to make decisions about how management actions might affect the Qualities of Wilderness Character in a Wilderness area. It involves two steps:

Step 1: Determine whether or not any of the qualities of wilderness character are degraded, impaired, or threatened to a degree that is necessary to analyze potential action otherwise prohibited by Section 4c of the Wilderness Act to address the issue.

Step 2: Examine how components of the action and alternatives affect the overall Wilderness character.

Christina closed her presentation by sharing the email for the National Monitoring Program for any participants with further questions: Sm.fs.wcm@usda.gov

National Monitoring Program Discussion

Barb noted that the Minimum requirements framework also applies to Search and Rescue, Education, etc., as well, not just forestry or prescribed burn actions. Clare added that she is interested in the idea of the Wilderness Qualities being weighted equally, because it seems this would lead to broad agency discretion in emergency situations (Search and Rescue, and Fire Suppression) since in those instances there isn't time for a deeper consideration. She noted that often in hindsight, less intrusive methods could have been used, and wondered who provides accountability if that is the case. Forest Supervisor Tom Hall said there is a minimum requirements tool used for SAR and Human-caused fire, which is part of the larger framework. He and Cathy clarified that information is often limited in those situations, and difficult decisions have to be made rapidly to preserve life. Jim supported the fact that information collected by 911 dispatchers is often limited. Cathy affirmed that visitor education is key to prevention. Christina stated there is an option for Wilderness areas to monitor the trends in usage of motorized Search And Rescue over time.

Lane said he is aware that there's been an increase in calling for "Wild" character rather than "Natural" character, and asked if there is any thought to considering this in the Wilderness Character Monitoring?

Christina responded that there have been lots of conversations related to this at the National level, and especially to the definition of "Wild" when the area was designated, which may or may not have included an understanding of the active management occurring through stewardship of Indigenous peoples.

Ingrid asked, "How are cross-boundary effects monitored?"

Christina answered that often there are partners in State agencies and NGOs who can help in monitoring these Cross-boundary effects, and FS programs such as air resource monitoring programs can try to work with emitters to coordinate on reducing effects on Wilderness Areas.

Derrick followed up on the idea of cross-boundary effects by sharing that he views wilderness as continuum – and there is potentially an issue of heavy usage on the edge of the wilderness, and different zones of the wilderness which have different management directives on the interior of the Wilderness Area. He wondered how differential use of the spaces within a Wilderness Area are monitored.

Christina said the monitoring program tends to use coarser models, which may not account for differences across a single Wilderness area.

Jaime noted that there are also State processes that might overlap, and emphasized the importance of sharing information with State agencies so they can better understand opportunities to collaborate. The USFS could utilize the Minnesota Environmental Protection Act process (MEPA) process to comment on the impacts of large projects to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness as it relates to the Wilderness Act. She suggested collaborating with entities who could comment regarding potential impacts to the BWCAW.

National Monitoring Program Discussion (continued)

Tom noted the Forest Service can comment on MEPA documents, but may be limited in staff capacity to do so.

Kent shared the changing expectations/perceptions & experiences of what a "natural" experience really is affects the Wilderness Character measurements we are mentioning. I.E - over the last five years how we have seen people "expect" to have a wilderness experience without traveling deeper into the area - just "parking" or camping on the periphery. "I think that really affects the emphasis and/or comments of some the outcomes being measured. Related to this, there is congestion at the entry points and overall trips seem to be shorter, which could affect how the Wilderness Character is perceived."

Clare shared that one tension she had heard is that the BWCAW is very heavily used by recreationalists on the designated campsites, and there can be a question of how monitoring on "unutilized" parts of the wilderness may or may not skew how the overall Wilderness Character is perceived, and how the usage of designated campsites preserves Wilderness Character in other places.

Tom responded that there is certainly an opportunity to revisit the idea of designated campsites in the Forest Plan Amendment. It is important to continue to have conversations around the decisions FS is making about tradeoffs between elements of Wilderness Character.

Aaron said some developed campsite impacts do spread out from the campsites, such as noise, the impact of non-biodegradable soap on water quality, and accidental wildfire.

BWCAW Forest Service Updates: Q&A, Tom Hall, SNF Supervisor

Tom Hall gave an overview of relevant updates to help Collaborative members understand what is going on with the Forest related to BWCAW management.

Staffing

Tom shared that Ann Schwaller, Wilderness Program manager, has moved on to a position with the Eastern Planning Service Group, with Cathy filling behind her on a detail up from her permanent position as Assistant Wilderness Program Manager for the Superior National Forest. Going forward, the Wilderness Program Manager role will be filled by 4-month internal Forest Service detailers.

Due to budget constraints, there is currently no outside of the Agency hiring for 2025. The Forest Service are coming down from a series of additional, non-appropriated funding sources such as Wildfire Crisis Response Strategy and IRA. It will be most difficult to fill entry level positions such as front desk workers, since there is no ability to hire new employees from outside of the Agency.

Tom also shared that Kyle Stover has come on as the Gunflint District Ranger in a permanent capacity. Kyle has worked with the Superior National Forest for a long time, and previously worked with the Grand Portage Band's Tribal Forestry Department.

Tom also shared that Barbara Thompson has moved into the program manager role with Special Uses. Currently, no one at the Forest is tasked specifically as a Recreational Special Uses, and there are typically two folks in this position, so the work is currently being split amongst staff with other responsibilities.

Answering several questions from participants, Tom shared that the hiring pause includes refilling vacated positions, but there is potentially opportunities to promote from within into these positions. The biggest impact will be on SNF office hours, since front desk positions are the most difficult to fill right now. Funding from other sources, including permit sales, SRS funds, and other special use funds might be possible to use for hiring, but this would be subject to higher level decision-making than the Forest level. Largely, these limitations on staffing will not affect the prescribed burn plan for the BWCAW.

Fires

Tom and Aaron shared SNF updates on the fire season in the BWCAW. It was a dry winter with a very wet spring. There were not many fires this summer, but there has been an unusual number of fall fires in connection to the current flash drought in the Superior National Forest. With the Wood Lake Fire, Shell Lake Fire, and Bogus Lake Fire. We are in a period of very high fire risk.

Aaron shared that on fires like the one at Wood Lake, he gets two kinds of questions: “Why are we managing it in a wilderness?” and on the other hand “Why are you allowing that fire to burn?”. Per policy, the Forest Service must use full fire suppression whenever a fire is human-caused, as in the case of the Wood Lake fire. But they have the ability to use discretion in what suppression means, in order to protect firefighter safety, and prioritized protecting areas of development (such as by concentrating efforts on the developed side of the fire near the Fernberg Corridor and allowing the fire to burn to natural features on the other side where the forest is dense, and firefighter safety might be at risk. When the objectives have been set, Fire management teams have discretion on what tactics and strategies to use to achieve those objectives. There is a balance of tactics, trying to maintain wilderness character (i.e. no chainsaws, limited use of planes) while still achieving the objectives. Suppression is a continuum, so in areas of limited accessibility or safety for Firefighters, fires may burn for longer but include less intrusive management methods. This has been a learning process, and the two fires currently burning have had less hurdles because interagency coordination with the State and other partners has improved over time.

Forest Orders and Forest Closures

Tom echoed Aaron’s comments and noted that public and firefighter safety is always going to be the first priority. This is the goal of forest closures such as the ones near Wood Lake and Shell Lake. The SNF also use “occupancy and use orders” to manage visitor use in order to prevent hazards, as they have done historically which they are working through multiple channels (posted signs, front desks, cooperators and outfitter coordination, website) to communicate. There is an ongoing opportunity for improvement here. Examples include recent food storage orders and restrictions on campfires.

Forest Plan Amendment (Wilderness Chapter) - [Superior National Forest Project Page](#)

Tom shared that the Draft Plan has been published, and through the public engagement process on the plan there are currently over 1300 public comments, which the interdisciplinary planning team is working through. They are working on updating the travel model, which will be informed by information collected from visitor use surveys this winter in coordination with the University of Montana, similar to the process which took place in 2011, which received over 11,000 responses. Using similar methodology will allow the forest to identify trends over time. The goal is to understand what peoples’ trips look like, and how SNF staff can use that information to improve the travel model to update the proposed action in the Forest Plan. The next steps in 2025 will be to evaluate the sufficiency of management in the proposed Forest Plan Amendment, as well as how it complies with law, regulation and policy, and what alternatives exist to the current plan.



Forest Plan Amendment (Wilderness Chapter) (continued)

Jason asked if the questions on the Travel Model survey would be different than in the 2011 survey? And additionally, how might they be sent out?

Cathy said questions related to the Travel Model would be mostly the same even going back to the 1960s, because that allows the Forest Service to assess the trends over time. However, some no longer relevant questions would be dropped, and a few new questions have been added because there are scenarios that didn't exist even in 2011.

Tom added that the more consistent the questions can be with the 2011 survey, the quicker the OMB approval of the survey would be.

Cathy added that the survey would go out to overnight permit holders from the past season, which was about 26,000 people. The goal is to aim for a similar number of responses as 2011, when there were 11,000 responses.

Tom added that an early draft of questions could be shared with the Collaborative for feedback, but there wouldn't be a guarantee that questions could be changed due to internal government processes.

Clare asked that the Collaborative be informed when and how the surveys were going to be sent out, so that members could assist with sharing.

Cathy Agreed that that could help, and said the Survey wouldn't be going out until at least the new year, though some of logistics are still being worked out with the support of the University of Montana researchers.

Land Purchases and Exchanges - [Superior National Forest Project Page](#)

Supervisor Hall shared updates on several planned acquisitions that could add acreage to the BWCAW. They are currently scoping the prospective purchases of three different areas of land with over 1400 comments received. Potentially there will be three different decisions, separate for each realty action. There are up to 17,000 acres of land which will be offered for sale to Superior National Forest by TCF (The Conservation Fund) which would be outside the BWCAW, additionally there are 80,000 acres of School Trust lands that may be offered by the State of Minnesota depending on the State's decision processes, and finally, there are 3200 acres of St Louis County State Tax-forfeited land inside the BWCAW in St. Louis county which might be offered.

Kevin asked if there are enough funds available for all of these land purchases? Tom answered that at least based on rough estimates of the costs, the answer is yes, if all the sales end up being offered. There is 51 million dollars in appropriated funds which could be used.

Kevin also asked if for the School Trust and Tax-forfeited lands, would mineral rights be included in any purchase?

Tom answered that mineral rights could not be included due to State law.

Fernberg Corridor Landscape Management project- [Superior National Forest Project Page](#)

Tom shared that SNF staff have scoped the project and are working through about 100 comments, the Minimum Requirements analysis framework and analyzing potential alternatives to understand the impacts of management on Wilderness Character, and how to minimize negative impacts of proposed activities within the Wilderness Area which includes 26,000 acres of active prescribed burning. The draft Environmental Assessment will be released soon.

Lane asked if the Fernberg project was completely implemented as idealized, would that change the way that the Wood Lake fire was managed?

Tom and Aaron said that if the fire wasn't human caused, and Fernberg objectives were achieved, then the Wood Lake Fire could have been allowed to burn with monitoring, rather than needing full suppression, with some resources assigned to protect the nearby developments.

Additional Question & Answers from the Forest Service Update:

There were a number of comments regarding wilderness character.

Bill asked SNF Staff, "What's your impression of how BWCAW has done on the continuum of Wilderness Character?"

Cathy answered that her anecdotal gut reaction is that the Wilderness Character of the BWCAW has degraded since 1964 as a result of overuse primarily, in addition to more confined visitor use, and fire suppression.

Kevin noted several improvements to Wilderness Character, including that commercial logging no longer occurs in the BWCAW, and additionally there is now decreased motorized use from ~60% to ~20% of water surface area since the Wilderness was designated, and snowmobiling use has also been removed from the Wilderness area.

Barb noted that additional improvements to Wilderness Character also includes reduced cabins, signage, and picnic tables within the wilderness.

Clare noted that expanding access to new visitor groups is also a larger goal now than in the 1960s, and we are moving towards more equity in access.

Ingrid shared that there has definitely been an improvement in public understanding of Leave No Trace principles when traveling the Wilderness.

Ingrid also asked about practical ways the Collaborative could support the Forest Service's Wilderness management in times of shortages or diminished capacity due to budget constraints. Tom replied that here are many things that you all do in your work and life that help us manage the BWCAW. The SNF has a robust partnerships staff and relationships with cooperators and organizational partnerships, in addition to the Resource Advisory Committee, and in addition the Collaborative now helps to create further shared learning.

Respect for Tribal Lands near the Boundary Waters Wilderness

Travis shared that there is spillover from BWCAW activities outside of the BWCAW borders, i.e. hiking groups that may be illegally on Tribal lands. He asked the group to consider better education strategies to help visitors understand their routes and the way it may intersect with Tribal lands, including the importance of visiting with respect, and how the Leave No Trace principle applies outside the BWCA.

Tom responded that this is exactly why they have visitors come to duty stations to pick up their permits, so they can have the educational conversations, and try to improve so situations like the one Travis shared don't occur in the future. Cathy offered appreciation for the example so it can help FS work on these issues with the public.

Building the Workgroups:

Seth introduced the next task, which was to continue to strengthen the Workgroups as a method of generating momentum and sustainability for the Collaborative, and potentially leading to educational Webinars for the interested public. During this portion, the Collaborative members rotated through their workgroups of interest to discuss priorities and how the Collaborative can engage on issues related to Visitor Management, the Permits and Reservation System, Fire Management, and Air, Water Quality, Invasive Species, and Climate effects.

The goal of the session was to prioritize the topics previously identified during the kickoff workgroup meetings and start to identify volunteers to help lead the development of each workgroup, with each group to be led by two Collaborative members along with support from SNF staff.

Following the session, a report out shared key insights from the roundtable conversations.

The Permitting and Reservation System workgroup shared that they had the most energy around the subtopic of “Reservation System and permitting approach (Needs/Issues/Tweaks)”. Members were excited about the idea of a more holistic approach to permit issuing, including the potential to audit permit issuers to understand if there is a basis to anecdotal stories of large differences in the kinds of education and information that permit holders are receiving from the cooperators. There was also a large amount of interest in cancellation data, which led to a conversation about the potential for a fee for late-cancellations in order to discourage permit-hoarding.

There was significant interest around how to access use and monitoring data, and a desire to discuss that information.

Finally, there was an interest in looking into the accessibility of permits for underrepresented groups, large groups such as educational field trips, and groups who might not be able to specify group members/group leads by 6 months ahead of the reservation in order to reserve during the January Go-live period.

Visitor Management

The Visitor Management workgroup discussed that the topic of Education was really a tool to address many of the other topics – for instance it could support –

1. Enforcement – building upon the existing educational video to communicate rules clearly
2. Dispersing visitors
3. Educating Providers, such as those leading trips or providing permits, to make sure all have a consistent understanding of their role, and what they need to communicate to visitors
4. Sharing public information about closures or Forest orders
5. All the other visitor management topics (Day Use Quotas, Emergency Services, Campsite Rehabilitation)

The group felt it was important to look at what is already happening around education and data – there is a lot out there, and there may not be a need to reinvent the wheel. There is however a need to identify metrics to understand areas where education can be particularly impactful to what is happening on the ground, and to prioritize educational efforts in those areas.



Climate, Water Quality, and AIS:

The group shared that the topics of Water quality and invasive species had the most discussion and interest from members. They noted that education is probably the best tool to address these topics. Several members shared that developing action steps on these issues is critical, especially being specific to how data can be used to inform management actions. There is a need to process the publicly available data, and to both share that with the public and use it to make better decisions. Another issue added to the Climate Effects topic area was that Culvert Washouts are a cross-boundary effect of Climate Change and they affect how water moves across the landscape.

Fire Management:

The Fire Management group focused on prioritizing the agreed upon focus areas for the workgroup and identifying any missing topics or additions to the existing topics. Public information and education was added as a topic of interest, as the group felt that strengthening the pathways that fire information is distributed to the public was an area where they could provide input and support to the Forest Service.

Understanding and communicating the Forest Service's Fire Management philosophy in the BWCA Wilderness was the first priority for the group. Specifically, they were thinking that they could be helpful in spreading a more nuanced message surrounding the management philosophy than is possible in Fire Fact Sheets, and helping to communicate how the fire management philosophy has shifted over time. The second priority identified was understanding and communicating the Natural Role of Fire in the Ecosystem, as well as a potential sub-topic on Fire Ecology to understand how both cultural burning and prescribed fire might come together to support a Fire-dependent ecosystem.

The third identified priority was Fire Management Decision-making, and this topic was expanded to include forest closures as part of decision-making, as well as the importance of understanding how Qualitative Fire Risk influences decision-making. For instance, a fire outside of BWCAW and next to your house feels very different than one deep in the Wilderness Area. Additionally, there is an emotional component to fire management decision-making, since fire does create a very visible change in the landscape, and the public can often feel a sense of loss when favorite campsites or viewsheds are changed.

Evaluation:

Seth mentioned that the SNF steering committee was interested in some Evaluation of the Collaborative to date. Seth mentioned formal evaluations that the National Center can do following the meeting. For now, we want to spend 15-20 minutes discussing what is working well and what could be improved. The Collaborative did an on-the-spot evaluation on the Collaborative effort to date, Meetings, and Process/Facilitation.

Positives – what is working well

Delta: What could change or be improved

Collaborative (Approach/Overall):

Positives:

- Supervisor Leadership Involvement, and broader FS Staff involvement
- Ability to work with a wide spectrum of colleagues
- Education (National Wilderness Character) / Also hearing straight from FS on
- Feel like we can be heard in this meeting
- Appreciative of the hybrid facilitation, Box Folder system is a great tool for sharing
- Appreciate the long-term relationship building
- Opportunity to define success is here in the group, and there is already a benefit just that this is happening
- Regular WG Meetings

Delta:

- Want to make sure/know that FS is getting what they want from the meetings
- Agree with a lot of the positives – uncertainty around the vagueness of the process – seeking a goal to guide the process and provide accountability and wanting to find a way to be able to mark and measure success.
- Dealing with the real-world constraints (i.e. FS Staff constraints)– how can the collaborative have impact in the context of these constraints.
- Less emails for planning/scheduling. Set dates would be best.

Workgroups

- Involving others – who is missing in the room?
 - Potentially involve Voyageurs National Park
- Any Examples of information sharing and areas of representation extending the reach of the collaborative.
- For Education: Hard to know what group to talk with, not necessarily feeling like there is content to take away quite yet.
- How to stay connected and talking in between meetings – Method not via email?
 - Maybe via Box?



Next Steps and Way Forward

- Next steps with workgroup scheduling- Seth and Isaac will send invites for the next round of meetings and have those repeat in months that don't overlaps with full collaborative. Workgroup leaders can help to refine how often the groups need to meet.
- Winter and Spring Meeting Dates – January and April Meeting holds will be sent. Seth asked members to let us know ASAP of any constraints people have in April.
- **Closing reflections:** Seth offered appreciation to everyone for traveling and engaging in this collaborative effort. Tom offered excitement for the progress the group is making and thanked everyone for their contributions and for the productive meeting.

Appendix A

BWCAW Collaborative Workgroup Priority Voting from October 9th 2024 Meeting

Visitor Management

Topic	Voting Column
Dispersing Visitors – how to spread use outside of the most heavily used areas (i.e. education about areas outside of BWCA, exploring a new travel model?)	9
Campsite Rehabilitation – in the context of high usage and limited staff capacity, how to prevent campsite degradation	5
Day Use quotas -- How/Where/If to implement	5
Emergency services – Risk management and preparation for visitors (Education, Mapping etc.)	
Education for Visitors - Should be a tool to address all other topics	
Enforcement	4

Permitting and Reservation System

Topic	Voting Column
Reservation System and Permitting Approach (Needs/issues/tweaks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Go Live vs Rolling Availability o Advanced Permitting for certain types of uses o Tiered Location Permits o Cancellation Window and Fees o Special Group/Nonprofit/Educational Permitting o Zones for Travel/Camping 	11
Winter and Day Use in-person pick-up of permits	
Use and monitoring data	7
Permit Education Videos – Education around rules, duration – i.e. entry date is firm, but exit date can be approximate	7
Cooperator Management/Support with Permitting Education	5

Fire Management

Topic	Voting Column
Fire's Natural Role (Southern Boreal Forest, Great Lakes Pinery, Management Held Deciduous) (restores structure, function, nutrients, etc.)	6
Split Fire Season – affects decisions, staffing, can implement prescribed fire over long periods of time	2
Decision Making related to fire management	5
Fire Management Philosophy	7
Public Information + Education , especially around "good" fire	5
Fire Risk (Qualitative Wildfire Risk Assessment , weigh all of the above into risk then decision)	5
Cultural burning/Indigenous Traditional & Ecological Knowledge - considerations specific to the Wilderness and fire management	5

Water Quality, AIS, Climate Change and Related Topics

Topic	Voting Column
Water Quality – Monitoring and citizen science <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mercury • PFAS • Cross-boundary effects i.e. Mining, Culverts 	4
Aquatic Invasive Species <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and Citizen Science • Education 	7
Climate Change effects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education about the effects on the Wilderness • Citizen science opportunities • Forest Health 	7
Climate Change effects – Adaptation and Management in a wilderness context	3

Appendix B

BWCAW COLLABORATIVE Meeting – October 9, 2024

9:30/10:00-4:00pm

Grand Ely Lodge

Times	Agenda Topics
9:30 AM	Early arrival meet and greet - coffee/tea at venue
10:00	<p>Welcome and Overview: Seth Cohen and Isaac Merson, National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution</p> <p>Building the Collaborative Objective: Building connection and purpose for the group. Members share brief updates related to the area of representation and any issue they have been thinking about since our last meeting.</p>
	<p>Wilderness Character: Presentations and Discussion Objective: Build a deeper understanding of Wilderness character, including How the BWCAW is managed for Wilderness character (stewardship), what Wilderness character means; and ways the Collaborative might engage and contribute to this topic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FS Presentation and Discussion: Christina Boston, National Forest Service, Wilderness Character Monitoring Program Manager • Facilitated Discussion with members
12:15-1:00	Lunch together off Lodge Menu.
	<p>BWCAW Forest Service Updates: Q&A Objective: Develop ongoing understanding of what is going on with the Forest related to BWCAW management (Forest Plan Amendment, School Trust Acquisition, Fernberg, <i>Wood Lake Fire, status and approach</i>)</p> <p>Building the Workgroups: Share developed priorities and any initiated efforts for Fire Management, Permits and Reservation system, Climate/Water/Invasive species, and the larger Visitor Management group. Workgroups refine topics that will benefit the collaborative and the public at large. People in multiple groups can rotate.</p>
15 min	BREAK
	Discuss Collaborative and workgroup priorities: Clarify educational opportunities for collaborative/public to occur in Winter and Spring 2024- 2025. Identify leads.

4:00 adjourn	Next Steps and Way Forward <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation of the Collaborative• Next steps with workgroup scheduling• Winter and Spring Meeting Dates• Closing reflections and/or questions from members
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