

## Natural Conditions and Prescribed Burning

A windstorm in July of 1999 caused over 350,000 acres of blown down timber in the BWCAW. This 30 mile long, 4 to 12 mile wide swath of downed trees increased hazardous fuels by 5 to 10 times. As a result of these fuel concentrations, wildfire potential has increased.

The BWCAW is a fire adapted ecosystem. The blowdown has left fuel conditions far from normal. Visitors should note that wildfires in blowdown have the potential to start easily, grow quicker, and exhibit increased fire intensity under a wide range of weather conditions.

The Forest Service continues to implement a fuels reduction program in the BWCAW. Fuel reduction is done through prescribed burning in key locations and through management of naturally occurring (lightning) fires where permitted. These may be managed; allowing them to play their natural role of keeping fire adapted ecosystems in balance.

Prescribed burning continues to be a valuable tool that allows us to meet our management objectives. There are a limited number of days each year with the right conditions for prescribed burning. By taking advantage of these prescribed burning windows, along with naturally ignited fire opportunities, we can reduce the risk of uncontrolled wildfires.

Prescribed burning in the BWCAW began in 2001, with approximately 75,000 acres needing fuel treatments. Due to weather, prescribed burn opportunities have been limited. Approximately 30,000 acres have been accomplished as of 2006. Additional burn units will be completed as weather permits.

## What You Can Do

### ✓ Help Reduce Fire Risk in the BWCAW

Choose a camp stove instead of a campfire. If a campfire is allowed; build it in the fire grate and keep it small. Like a candle in your home, never leave a fire unattended at any time. Keep all flammable materials away from your campfire.

Always make sure your campfire is dead out before leaving your campsite, even for a short time. Drown your fire with water, extinguishing all embers, leaving it cold to the touch. Did you know that 50% of fires in the BWCAW are caused by escaped campfires?

### ✓ Watch for Hazards

Keep a heads up! Standing trees weakened by the storm, can still pose a hazard during storms or high winds. Avoid camping around or under damaged or leaning trees. Root wads above ground may also be unstable and dangerous.

### ✓ Know About Fire Restrictions

Restrictions are implemented during high fire danger to decrease the threat of destructive wildfires. Fire restrictions are put in place for your safety and the safety of firefighters. Always check for potential restrictions just prior to your trip. Camp stoves may be required if restrictions are implemented. For current fire restriction information contact any Superior National Forest District Office or headquarters, (218) 626-4300, or our website at [www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior).

## If You See or Smell Smoke, Don't Panic

The fire may be miles from you and pose no threat to your safety.

If you encounter a wildfire as you travel in the BWCAW follow these steps:

### 1. Watch the Weather

**WIND** Most fires travel north and east or with the prevailing wind. Make sure you have a safe route to follow if wind direction changes. Keep in mind that strong winds can carry fire embers causing spot fires ahead of the original fire.

**EVENING HUMIDITY** Humidity increases in the early morning and late evening. Fire activity may decrease with higher humidity making travel safer at this time.

**TALL SMOKE PLUMES** Large plumes indicate a very hot fire. If you see or experience a large smoke plume close to you, take precaution; seek a point of refuge such as a lake.

### 2. Make a New Plan

Look at alternate travel routes staying close to larger bodies of water. If it is safe, consider traveling from the fire area. If you must travel through burned areas watch for burned snags and hot stump holes which could be hazardous.

### 3. Find a Safe Place

If you feel threatened find a large lake. Keep away from the fire's path. If the fire is upon you, don't panic. Put on your life jacket and take your canoe into the water. Paddle to the middle of the lake, tip your canoe and go under it. You can breathe the cool trapped air under your canoe until the fire passes.

## How Could Prescribed Burning Affect My BWCAW Experience?

If you are in the BWCAW during a prescribed burn you may be affected in the following ways:

- If an entry point is closed and alternates are not available, reservation and use fees will be refunded.
- Some areas or campsites may be closed during prescribed burns until fire staff indicates hazards have been reduced to an acceptable level.
- You may see vegetation cleared from control lines, heavy aircraft traffic and smoke. (A minimum tool evaluation is part of every burn plan process)
- Prescribed burning can impact campsites, portages and trails. These will be rehabilitated after prescribed burns.
- Where possible, natural fuel breaks will be used instead of constructed control lines.
- You may see sights you are not used to like planes landing, aircraft scooping water, and firefighters dressed in fire protective yellow shirts.
- We strive to use the minimum tool necessary in wilderness.
- You may hear sounds of motorized pumps or aircraft working in the area.
- Travel routes could be changed during prescribed burns to facilitate your safety. National Forest personnel could escort you through areas while burning is in progress.

## Reminders for Permit Pick-up

- Bring your confirmation letter
- Bring Golden Access, Golden Age or Seasonal Fee Cards, if applicable
- Bring identification
- Permits may ONLY be picked up by trip leader or alternate trip leader. Person that picks up the permit must be with the group for the duration of the trip.
- Permit must be picked up at the location listed on the confirmation letter or at a Forest Service issuing station.
- Although permit issuing hours may be from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, check with your permit pick-up location to confirm their specific hours of operation. Allow enough time for your group to view a short video at the issuing station.
- Permits can only be picked up the day before or the day of entry and no earlier.

## If you have questions about your reservation contact:

BWCAW Reservation Center  
P.O. Box 462 • Ballston Spa, NY 12020  
(877) 550-6777 (toll free)  
TDD: (877) TDD-NRRS (toll free)  
FAX: (518) 884-9951  
WEB SITE: [www.bwcaw.org](http://www.bwcaw.org)

For additional questions about travel in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness please contact the Superior National Forest:

Superior National Forest Supervisor's Office  
8901 Grand Ave Place  
Duluth, MN 55808  
(218) 626-4300

## For information on Quetico Provincial Park in Canada please contact:

District Manager, Ministry of Natural Resources  
Atikokan, Ontario POT 1 CO  
(807) 597-2735  
[www.ontarioparks.com](http://www.ontarioparks.com)

Prevent the need for a search and rescue operation that may impede the integrity of the wilderness area from the use of helicopters or search planes to find you, or put others in danger. Acquire and maintain necessary skills for primitive travel by foot, canoe, or other non mechanical means. **You are responsible for your own safety.**

## Emergency Numbers

In case of emergency, or if search and rescue assistance is needed, contact the nearest county sheriff's office, or call 911.

**Lake County Sheriff — Ely/Isabella area**  
800-450-8832 or 218-834-8385

**Cook County Sheriff — Grand Marais/Tofte area**  
218-387-3030

**St. Louis County Sheriff — Ely/Cook area**  
218-365-3344

Cell phone and radio coverage is limited in the Wilderness.

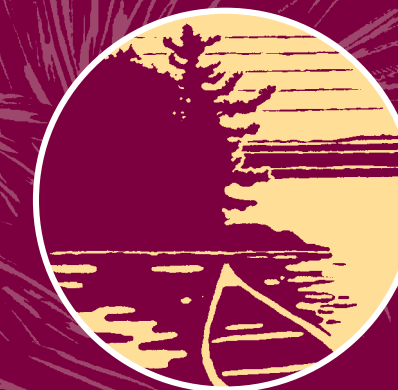
## Before You Leave Home

Leave a trip itinerary with someone at home including:

- Trip leader's name \_\_\_\_\_
- Permit number \_\_\_\_\_
- Entry point and date \_\_\_\_\_
- Exit point and date \_\_\_\_\_
- Potential Route \_\_\_\_\_
- Nearest Forest Service Ranger Station and phone number \_\_\_\_\_
- Make of car(s) driven and license number(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of people in the group \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of canoes or boats \_\_\_\_\_
- Name of outfitter (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_
- Leave a copy of your confirmation letter with your trip itinerary

The Forest Service does not automatically initiate searches if a group doesn't exit as planned. If someone is concerned because you are late returning from your trip, they should contact the County Sheriff's office (see back for emergency contact information).

# Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness



## What To Know Before You Go



USDA—FOREST SERVICE  
Superior National Forest

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) is a unique area located in the northern third of the Superior National Forest in northeastern Minnesota. Approximately 1.3 million acres in size, it extends nearly 150 miles along the International Boundary adjacent to Canada's Quetico Provincial Park and bordered on the west by Voyageurs National Park. The BWCAW contains over 1200 miles of canoe routes, 15 hiking trails and approximately 2000 designated campsites. Wilderness offers freedom to those who wish to pursue an experience of expansive solitude, challenge and personal integration with nature. Because this area was set aside in 1926 to preserve its primitive character and made a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1964, it allows visitors to canoe, portage and camp in the spirit of the French Voyageurs of 200 years ago.

*“Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons. It is to grow in the open air, and to eat and sleep with the earth.”*  
— Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

## How prepared are you to enter the BWCAW?

1. Have you thoroughly reviewed all of the information on your confirmation letter?
2. Do you know your Permit Issuing Station's hours of operation, location and accepted form of payment?
3. Do your watercraft need to be registered?
4. Who needs a life jacket in your group? Do lifejackets have to be worn?
5. Have you left an itinerary at home with family, friends, or co-workers?
6. Are you prepared for emergency situations? Are you aware of the fact that help is not a simple phone call away?
7. Are you familiar with the rules and regulations of the BWCAW and the Superior National Forest?

You should have the answers to all of these questions before embarking on your Wilderness adventure. You may know all of the answers, but does everyone in your group? If you can't find the information you are looking for throughout this brochure, try the BWCAW Trip Planning Guide, [www.bwca.org](http://www.bwca.org), [www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior), [www.Int.org](http://www.Int.org), any Superior National Forest Office or your outfitter.

Whether this is your first visit to the BWCAW or you are a seasoned visitor, an important and enjoyable first step is gathering knowledge of the region, and the specific area you'll visit.

## Be Prepared

Be sure to pack the following items to ensure a safe trip through the BWCAW:

**LIFE JACKETS** Always wear your life jacket — it won't work unless you wear it. Minnesota State law requires all watercraft, including canoes, to have one wearable U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD) on board and readily accessible for each person in the watercraft.

Mandatory Child Life Jacket Law: Minnesota law requires a life jacket to be worn by children less than 10 years old when aboard any watercraft while underway. If you capsize, stay with your canoe — it won't sink!

### CAMP STOVES AND FIREWOOD

Campfires are allowed only within the steel fire grates at developed campsites or as specifically approved on your wilderness permit.

Fire restrictions limiting open campfires may be put into effect. Be sure you have a camp stove with you. Additionally, camp stoves heat up more quickly, have less impact than a campfire, and come in handy during rainy weather. Even after forest fires, you may see an ample supply of burned

wood near your site. Collect firewood away from campsites to prevent enlarging and defacing the area. Check with MN State firewood restrictions about bringing firewood across the state line.

**MAP AND COMPASS** Bring a map and compass and know how to use them. Current detailed maps are essential to finding your way through the BWCAW. Keep your map handy. Do not rely on GPS units without a map.

**FIRST AID KIT** Bring along some basic first aid supplies. Have some basic knowledge of first aid procedures. Do not rely on a cell phone to bring you help in an emergency. Having a cell phone cannot substitute for knowing how to handle an emergency in a wilderness setting. Additionally, many areas of the BWCAW lack cell phone coverage and you may not be able to make any calls.

**WATER PURIFICATION** Although northern lakes may look clean and pure, there is a problem with *Giardia lamblia*, a water parasite that can cause life-threatening intestinal illness. All drinking water should be treated by using a purifier with a filter specifically designed to remove *Giardia lamblia*, a chemical treatment specifically designed to kill *Giardia lamblia*, or by first boiling the water — bring to a full boil for at least 3–5 minutes, then let stand until cool enough to drink.

## Wilderness Hazards

Wilderness travel offers great personal freedom, but it also imposes a requirement for self-reliance and good judgment. There are risks associated with wilderness travel. You will be on your own; help will not be close at hand. By using common sense and thinking about potential hazards before you begin, you can greatly increase your chances for a safe wilderness trip. The following are just a few of the hazards to be aware of while traveling in the BWCAW:

**WEATHER** Weather can change suddenly. Canoeing close to shore will lessen the chance of being caught by these sudden changes on open water. Get off the water if a storm threatens — lightning, wind and rain may occur.

**RAPIDS** Portages are there for a reason — use them! Generally, rapids in the BWCAW are not safe to “run.” Running water has a great deal of power and can be very deceptive. Areas above and below waterfalls may look safer than they actually are. Powerful currents and trap swimmers under the water, or sweep them to dangerous waterfalls. Fast moving water can also push swimmers and boats into obstacles like rocks and logs. Rapids are dangerous, even while wearing a life jacket. Swim only in calm water far from rapids and falls. **Although some risk is inherent in wilderness travel, risky behaviors cost lives in the BWCAW.**

**HYPOTHERMIA** Prevent hypothermia by dressing in layers including a waterproof outer layer to stay dry. Watch for warning signs of hypothermia, including uncontrolled shivering, slurred speech, lack of coordination and poor concentration. If hypothermia occurs, get the victim into a shelter out of the wind and remove wet clothes. Give fluids and food for a conscious victim and have them rest until thoroughly warmed.

## Wilderness Rules and Regulations

**WILDERNESS PERMITS** You must enter the BWCAW at the entry point and on the entry date shown on your permit. You may not re-enter on a different date using the same permit. Permit stubs become invalid when the trip leader exits the wilderness. Only the designated trip leader or alternates may pick up the permit. The person that picks up the permit must be with the group for the duration of the trip. **All members of a permit group must camp together.** The trip leader is responsible for the group's payment of user fees, their conduct in the BWCAW, and any resulting violations.

**GROUP SIZE** Nine (9) people and four (4) watercraft are the maximum allowed in your group. You may not exceed this limit at any time or anywhere (including on water, portages, and campsites) in the BWCAW. Smaller groups increase your wilderness experience and decrease the impact.

**CONTAINERS** Cans and glass bottles are not allowed. Containers of fuel, insect repellent, medicines, personal toilet articles, and other items that are not food or beverage are the only cans and bottles you may bring with you. Food may be stored in plastic containers, but you must pack them out.

**CAMPSITES** Camp only at Forest Service-designated campsites that have steel fire grates and wilderness latrines, or within designated Primitive Management Areas as specifically approved on your wilderness permit. Make camp early in the day to find an available campsite. You may camp up to fourteen (14) consecutive days on a specific site.

**CAMPFIRES** Campfires are only allowed within the steel fire grates at designated campsites or as specifically approved on your wilderness permit. If you build a fire, burn only dead and down wood found lying on the ground. Collect firewood away from campsites by paddling down shore and walking into the woods where it is more abundant. You eliminate the need for an axe if you only gather small pieces of dead and down wood that can be easily broken by hand or cut with a small folding saw. It is illegal to cut live vegetation for any reason. Drown all fires with water anytime you are away from your camp; stir the ashes until they are cold to the touch with a bare hand. Do not burn trash — it releases harmful chemicals into the environment. Please pack out everything you bring with you. Try alternatives to a campfire. An evening without a fire or other bright light is an opportunity to see wildlife and to notice sounds and smells beyond the influence of the firelight and smoke.

### TOILET FACILITIES AND WATER QUALITY

Use toilet facilities at existing campsites. If you are not near a latrine, dig a small hole six to eight inches deep, at least 150 feet or more from the water's edge. When finished, fill hole and cover with needles and leaves. Bathe and wash dishes at least 150 feet from lakes or streams. Soaps pollute — even biodegradable soaps.

**FISH REMAINS** To dispose of fish remains, travel far away from any shoreline, campsite, trail, or portage.

**STORING WATERCRAFT** Only watercraft and equipment used in connection with the current visit may be stored and left unattended. All equipment and personal property must be carried out with you at the end of each trip.

**PETS** Dogs impact wildlife and barking intrudes on the experience of others. They must be under control at all times. Dispose of fecal matter 150 feet from water sources, campsites, and portages, or deposit in a latrine.

**CULTURAL HERITAGE** Leave archeological, historical, and rock painting sites undisturbed. The use of metal detectors is prohibited.

**PORTAGES** Portage wheels are permitted only over the following: International Boundary, Four Mile Portage, Fall-Newton-Pipestone and Back Bay Portages into Basswood Lake, Prairie Portage, and Vermilion-Trout Lake Portage.

**MOTORS** Your wilderness permit must specifically authorize motorized use if you plan to use a motor in the BWCAW. Motorized watercraft are allowed only on designated lakes. Check with the Forest Service for specific regulations.

## Minnesota DNR Fishing, Hunting and Watercraft Regulations

Minnesota Conservation Officers enforce the regulations concerning boating, water, hunting, and fishing. Obtain a copy of the Minnesota Fishing and Hunting regulations at [www.dnr.mn.state.us](http://www.dnr.mn.state.us). We have included a few regulations to assist you in planning your trip.

**CANOE AND BOAT REGISTRATIONS** Minnesota requires all watercraft to be registered and honors all state watercraft registrations. If your state does not require a canoe to be registered, you must either register your canoe in your state as a motorized craft or license the canoe in Minnesota. Canoes can be registered at the DNR License Center, 500 Lafayette Road, Box 26, St. Paul, MN 55155-4026. Phone 651-296-2316. (Minnesota toll-free) 800-285-2000. Plan ahead; local license bureaus may not be open on weekends.

**FISHING** There are several different seasons, limits, and regulations depending upon the lakes you are fishing in the BWCAW. For specific lake data go to the MN DNR's Lake Finder link at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind>.

**FISHING LICENSES AND TROUT STAMPS** Fishing licenses are required to fish the BWCA Wilderness. Trout stamps are required, in addition to your fishing license, when fishing in any trout lake or stream. Your License must be in your possession when fishing.

**HUNTING** is allowed in the BWCAW under Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Hunting Regulations.

## Camping with Bears

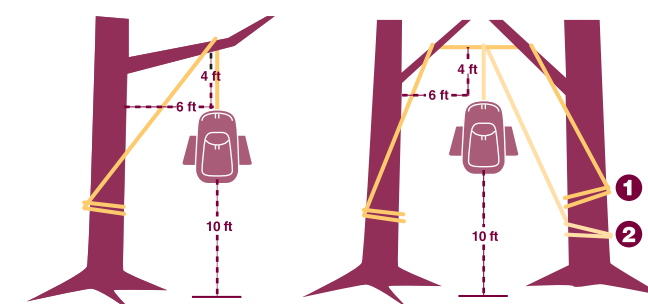
Keep a clean campsite. Never eat or store food in your tent. Reduce the chance of a bear visiting your site by hanging your food pack, as well as garbage and anything that has a strong or sweet odor (soap, toothpaste, etc.). This includes island sites since bears are good swimmers.

Some bears overcome their fear of humans and approach campsites looking for food. Most bears will be scared off by campers making noise (shouting, banging pots, or throwing fist-sized rocks at the bear, etc.).

A very persistent bear may be discouraged by spraying Capsaicin (pepper spray) into its eyes.

In the rare instance that a bear refuses to leave or becomes aggressive, you may want to move to another site.

Bear hangs must be done well to be effective. Practice hanging food at home to make sure you can do it competently and that you have the right equipment. If you hang food packs from a tree, be sure you are not damaging the tree or leaving behind pieces of rope. Use one of these methods to keep your food bear-safe:



**METHOD A**  
(uses one 50-foot length of rope).

**METHOD B**  
(uses two 50-foot lengths of rope).

**METHOD C** (bear-resistant food storage containers).

There are areas in the BWCAW where it is impossible to hang your food pack due to the lack of standing trees. It is strongly recommended that you pack food items in specially designed bear-resistant food storage containers.

