Remembering Basswood Lake

People don’t seem to know about the history of the Boundary Waters. That loggers had clear cut the area in the late 1890s, and that it was logged again years later. They have forgotten about the many resorts that were on Basswood Lake.

This summer, Doug and Nancy McReady took Connie and Mike Loisel to Basswood Lake. Connie’s parents owned and ran Maple Leaf Resort near Wind Bay.

On the boat ride up the Moose Lake Chain of Lakes to Prairie Portage we noticing how much the forest has recovered from the 1999 blowdown. The new growth is like a green curtain hiding the downed and uprooted trees.

Connie and Mike told stories as we motored by some of their old haunts of their youth. Connie pointed where Johnson Brothers’ Fishing Camp used to be in Bayley Bay and Mike told us about the Beaver Island cabin. Mike said the Hubachek crew rotated the cabin on Beaver Island 180 degrees for a better view of Canada. After that it was called the Merry-Go-Round Lodge.

All along the way we saw very few boats and only a few canoe parties.

Of course we made a stop at the giant cedar tree. Some say it is 1400+ years old and is the oldest standing tree in Minnesota. Needed more hands to get all the way around that tree!

As we passed by the former Su-Sha-Nan’s site Connie and Mike told us about how hard a worker Geraldine Floyd was at Su-Sha-Nan. She would keep the Lodge spotless, bake all the bread and even made 17 pies a day. Connie said Geraldine always thought Dick had such a hard job, going to town to get the guests until she realized all he did was drive the duck (a six-wheel-drive amphibious vehicle) to Hoist Bay, cross the Four Mile Portage, cross Fall Lake, drive into town and then backtrack to the resort.

All the while Geraldine was washing windows, cleaning and baking! Su-Sha-Nan was later sold to Nugents.

Motoring past Wind Bay, Connie excitedly pointed her finger to her family’s Maple Leaf Lodge site as we motored in for lunch. There were Forget-Me-Not flowers at the shore. We walked up the well worn path to the fire grate. We tried to imagine the lodge sitting on that site, and thinking about the Longbranch in Winton being only one third of that very lodge.

We passed Skidway and talked about the Lilies of the Valleys still found on the island, but we didn’t stop to look for them.

At Washington Island we saw the old barge. It has deteriorated over the years. Our next stop was at Half Dog Island to see the brass plaque placed into the huge rock by the Webster family when they sold the island to the federal government.

We motored back to Hubachek’s Wilderness Research site and pointed out where the lodge site had been and also where the little midget floating cabin rested. Then it was off into the woods to find the Cross of Lorraine. F. B. Hubachek had the Cross of Lorraine erected in honor of his sister who

(Continued on Page Two)
was in WWI. It’s about twenty feet tall. The 1999 blowdown broke one of the cross beams.

Hubachek’s buildings were all dismantled and hauled across the Four Mile Portage to Fall Lake property in 1983. The Ely Chamber is one of Hubachek’s buildings, as is the Rod & Gun Club’s shooting range building. The Research Center on Fall Lake is now part of the University of Minnesota.

Heading back to Prairie Portage Connie commented that we weren’t traveling much faster than the ducks that brought guests to the lodge. She said the ducks went purposely slow to allow the cabin girls time to get the cabins all cleaned for the new arrivals. Connie said it was a long, slow ride to the lodge, but not as long as the ride to Dominion Island.

The duck from Dominion Island picked up guest in Ely; traveled across Fall Lake and Four Mile Portage; entered Hoist Bay of Basswood; traveled into Back Bay and crossed over the portage from Back Bay to the Pipestone side of Basswood to get to Dominion Island. Now that’s quite the trip! The Dominion Island duck wasn’t allowed to cross the private property on Pipestone Portage which would have made the trip a lot shorter.

It was a wonderful day learning more about Basswood Lake’s history.
Message from the President

Fall is once again here, and we are all wondering where the summer went. It seems like it was just the 4th of July and my husband and I were towing the CWCS boat and throwing candy to all the kids that lined the streets in the Ely parade.

Just days before the Ely Blueberry Festival, Save the Boundary Waters – Sustainable Ely – Northeastern Minnesota for Wilderness, (they are all one and the same), held an anti-mining presentation at Vermilion Community College hosted by Becky Rom. Can’t say for sure, but it seemed like the presentation resulted in a lot of people coming to the CWCS booth at Whiteside Park to buy raffle tickets for the boat. Many members also renewed their memberships as well. Support at both the Blueberry Festival and the Harvest Moon Festival was very good.

Congratulations to the winners in the CWCS boat raffle. The winners are:

Jeremy Nelson from Britt won the boat, motor & trailer package provided by Duane’s Marine

Xavier Villarrod from Finlayson won the day fishing trip on Basswood Lake with Todd Larson, Basswood Trails Guide Service

Bryan Baier from Ely won the birch bark framed ‘Boundary Waters Camp’ print

A few days after the Harvest Moon Festival, my husband and I went on the Coal Creek bus tour to North Dakota. It is a yearly tour Lake Country Power invites co-op members to do.

- We visited the Falkirk Mine where 8 million tons of lignite coal is mined yearly to supply Coal Creek Station, the largest power plant in North Dakota. The equipment to mine the coal is three times the size of taconite mine equipment. The coal is less than 200 feet in the ground, and it was interesting to hear that the entire mine area is GPSed so the land can be reclaimed to its original condition.
- We toured the Coal Creek Station which was surprisingly clean. It was interesting to learn that fly ash, a byproduct of burning coal is used to make a lighter and stronger cement-like product. Great River Energy, an electric transmission and generation cooperative, provides electricity to Minnesota’s Lake Country Power.
- A tour guide talked about the Blue Flint Ethanol Plant that uses a mix of primary and waste steam to produce ethanol. This makes it one of the lowest-cost facilities in the nation.

The tour also included driving across the Garrison Dam, the fifth largest earthen dam in the world. A stop was made at the Fort Mandan Visitor Center. We learn about Lewis and Clark wintering there in 1804. We also learned that the construction of the visitor center utilized the fly ash cement. It was a great tour and I would encourage others to sign up for it next year.

CWCS is happy to report that work is finally being done on the South Fowl Snowmobile Trail. It’s been long in coming, and it should be ready this winter.

On a disappointing note, it looks like another lawsuit may be in CWCS’s future with Wilderness Watch filing a lawsuit against the use of towboats in the Boundary Waters. We are waiting to hear from the Resort & Outfitters Association on this matter.

Thank you to all our winners for supporting Conservationists with Common Sense, and thanks to everyone for their continued support of CWCS!

Nancy McReady
CWCS President

Silver wings
Shine in the sunlight.
Roaring engines
Heading somewhere in flight.

They’re taking you away,
Leavin me lonely.
Silver wings
Slowly fadin outta sight.

These are the words to the favorite song of Minnesota Representative David Dill of District 3A. As an airplane pilot, it was the perfect song to send him on to his final resting place.

Dill died on Aug. 8 of cancer and complications of diabetes. He battled many health issues over the years but still carried on his duties as northeastern Minnesota’s representative. David was a conservative Democrat and a true bipartisan politician. He was known for his ability to reach across the aisle, often crossing that aisle to serve his constituents to the best of his ability.

David was a true advocate for the outdoorsman in his support of snowmobiling, hunting and fishing. He will be greatly missed, and his seat in the State House will be hard to fill.

On December 8, DFL Rob Ecklund and GOP Roger Skraba will vie for that seat.
Copper/Nickel Mining can be done

This summer, Save the Boundary Waters – Sustainable Ely – Northeastern Minnesota for Wilderness gave a presentation on sulfide mining at Vermilion Community College. It was a nice slide presentation of the layout of the area, depicting the Boundary Waters, what makes it special, the watershed, the mineral deposits, the aquatic and forest ecology, etc. Many of us who support the proposed copper/nickel mining projects have heard similar presentation several times before by Becky Rom and her friends.

What was different this time, before a group of about 100 people, was that the question period was literally shut down by Rom at 7:30 after two questions. Was she intimidated by the dozen or so supporters of mining projects and what questions they would ask? We checked with Vermillion Community College and the theater had been booked until 9:30 PM.

Bill Erzar asked about the sulfide content of the ore body of Twin Metals. Rom said she didn’t know the number, yet she knew the copper content is 5%. Erzar asked isn’t the sulfide content an important number to know. Rom said it was in their reports.

The next question was asked by Warren Johnson about misleading people by saying all the ground moved would have sulfide content. Brad Sagen stepped in to explain that all the waste rock would not have sulfide content, and he ran out the clock for questions.

The statement was made at the presentation that sulfide mining has never been done without harming the environment and that it is always toxic. This is wrong and it has been proven that negative impacts can be prevented.

There are several safe sulfide mining operations that are being done around the United States. Minnesota can mine just as safely, if not more safely.

The Henderson Mine and Mill near Denver, Colorado. A molybdenum sulfide mine and mill have maintained a spotless environmental compliance record since 1976. Denver residents regularly use areas adjacent to the mine and mill sites for fishing, camping, picnicking, hunting, hiking, skiing, and snowmobiling. Treated wastewater from the operation supports a thriving population of Boreal toads. Streams downstream from both the mine and mill facilities are excellent brown and brook trout fisheries. Both the mine and the mill are located in Denver’s watershed.

The Viburnum Mine No. 27 is developed in geology similar to that found in southwestern Wisconsin’s lead-zinc mining district. The water from this lead-zinc sulfide mine which operated from 1960 to 1978, is so clean it has served as the primary domestic water source for the town of Viburnum, Missouri since 1981.

The McLaughlin Mine is a gold mine acknowledged by regulators, environmentalists, and the mining industry to be a model of effective environmental practice. Since its development in 1985, the mine has operated without environmental harm. It has not only protected but actually enhanced the quality of both on-site and downstream habitats and improved downstream water quality. Ultimately the entire mine site and attached buffer lands of thousands of acres will become a wildlife preserve and an environmental studies field research station for the University of California.

The Cannon Mine is a gold mine that was developed in 1985, one block south of the Wenatchee, Washington, city limits. The Cannon Mine is a model of environmentally responsible mining in an established urban environment. The mine, which operated for nine years, is now in the final stages of reclamation, and nearly all traces of this once bustling underground mining and milling project are gone. All of the millsite buildings have been removed, the area regraded, and replanted; the mine portal has been plugged; and the tailings management area has been reclaimed and planted with natural grasses. The local school district has converted the mine buildings into offices and an equipment maintenance facility. As quoted in a July 2, 1996 article entitled “A Promise Kept - Mine Tailings Cleaned Up” in the Wenatchee World, a local official states that the mine has done a good job living up to its promises - “The scale of the (reclamation) work is just amazing. It’s been a good project.”

Southwestern Wisconsin Historic Lead-Zinc District - At least a dozen historic (i.e., closed) mines in the lead-zinc district of southwestern Wisconsin and adjacent parts of Iowa and Illinois meet the arbitrary operating and closure criteria. Mining in this district began as early as 1825, long before the enactment of federal and Wisconsin environmental laws and regulations. Mining in the district continued, with the last zinc mine closing in the late 1970s. Most of the mines in southwestern Wisconsin were abandoned without formal reclamation; many were simply plowed under and today remain as nearly indiscernible features in the rolling farmlands characteristic of this part of Wisconsin. A few isolated and localized water quality problems are known at several mines, but there are literally hundreds of historic mines that do not create surface water or groundwater pollution problems. The ore bodies in this district contain abundant acid-generating iron sulfide minerals (pyrite and marcasite). ARD is not a problem in this district due to the high acid neutralization capacity of the carbonate host rocks. A number of communities in the area including Platteville and Dodgeville, Wisconsin; Dubuque, Iowa; and Galena, Illinois and are built on top of and adjacent to these historic mines.

The Flambeau Mine is located in northern Wisconsin, partially within city limits of Ladysmith and immediately adjacent to the Flambeau River. The open-pit, copper-gold mine began operations in July 1991. Backfilling of the pit took about 1.5 years and reclamation activities at the site were completed by the end of 1999. Stormwater runoff from sulfide waste material and the operating open pit, along with groundwater infiltration into the pit, are treated in a state-of-the-art water treatment facility that produces mine discharge water which has proven safe at 100 percent concentration (i.e., without dilution) for the most sensitive aquatic life, and meets state drinking water safety standards. Mine water has not adversely affected river life, but water monitoring will continue for many years. Tax revenue from the mine stimulated an economic development boom in Rusk County where the unemployment rate fell from 15.3% just prior to the mine opening to 4.0% in October 1996. The Flambeau Mine is one of Rusk County’s top tourist attractions, with over 30,000 people per year visiting the mine’s information center. How about that! The Flambeau Mine is a tourist attraction!

The Minnesota DNR has learned from a talc mine near Babbitt called the Dunka pit. Sulfite rock exposed there in the 1960s was leaching metals into a nearby creek. The state compelled the mining company to build wetlands that now largely absorb the metals. The site has been monitored since 1977 and monitoring will continue. DNR mining researcher Paul Eger said you can’t just walk away from a closed sulfide mine. “We’ve learned a lot,” Eger said. “New mines can operate with much less maintenance and much less
unexpected water quality issues.” Jim Kuipers, an expert in hard-rock metals mining said sulfide mining can be done well, with the best chance in a state with mining history like Minnesota. “If we can encourage good mining companies, with good solid deposits to do the right thing, we might actually make some advance in terms of environmental protection, and things like that,” says Kuipers.

Dissolved oxygen tests in Dunka River are very high. That means it is very healthy and that it is not polluted. The nearby water body of Birch Lake has some great fishing as well.

Stillwater Mine is in southern Montana in the magnificent Beartooth Mountains on the northern edge of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, about 30 miles north of Yellowstone National Park. This platinum-palladium sulfide mine is an excellent example of environmentally responsible mining in an extremely beautiful and sensitive environment. Operating since 1987, the Stillwater Mine has maintained a clean environmental record. This underground mine is recognized by regulators, environmental groups, and industry experts for its excellent concurrent reclamation activities, wildlife enhancement projects, community support programs, and responsive environmental management. In addition to its scenic attributes, the area around the mine is also recognized for its recreational opportunities - the mine is adjacent to the Stillwater River, a Montana Blue Ribbon Trout Fishery. Stillwater Mine is in the process of expanding its mine operation a mile east of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area on the Custer National Forest in known bear habitat.

In 2000, Stillwater Mining Company and three local environmental groups signed a historic, legally binding agreement called the Good Neighbor Agreement to iron out differences transparently. Applying rigorous environmental practices to the mine’s operations will protect two important Montana watersheds. In the past ten years, Stillwater Mine has been chosen to receive the Bureau of Land Management’s Sustainable Mining Award TWICE. Stillwater Mine was nominated by the Boulder River Watershed Association. The recent award is for community outreach and recognizes the economic benefits of mineral development along with contributions to the health and quality of life in local communities.

Bottom line is sulfide hardrock mining can and is being done safely. The mine isn’t shut down or stopped before it is even started. Working together, a similar agreement as the Good Neighbor Agreement, can assure Twin Metals and PolyMet operate safely in our area.

MPCA looking to change 40 year old wild rice standard

In 1973 the state developed a rule that limits the amount of sulfate in waters where wild rice grows. The limit is 10 milligrams per liter. This was based on a 1930s and 1940s sampling done by one biologist, John Moyle.

Citing new science, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) charged with keeping Minnesota’s water clean plans to stick with its draft approach for setting sulfate standards for wild rice protection. The MPCA says using the same limit for every river or lake where wild rice grows doesn’t make sense, because many factors influence whether wild rice will thrive.

The draft proposal says sulfate levels should be based on location-specific factors rather than a single sulfate level for all wild rice waters.

The MPCA says scientists will continue to work on a final wild rice plan, but say it is expected to mirror their suggestion of location-specific factors.

The agency originally started re-evaluating sulfate standards after groups voiced their concern with the current standard being too low.

A public comment period will be announced as the plan progresses.
Northern Counties supporting ATV use

Getting around to local hotspots was made easier by Cook County with an amendment to their ATV ordinance that will allow Class I all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to be driven on approximately four miles of the Gunflint Trail.

Class 2 ATVs, commonly referred to as side-by-side ATVs, already have the right under Minnesota State Statute to be driven the entire length of the Gunflint Trail.

The Lake County Board of Commissioners approved changes to an ordinance which allows ATV riders to use almost any county road to access ATV trails throughout the county.

The only roads maintained by the county that would not be open to ATV traffic would be Fernberg Road from Lake One to Highway 169 near Ely and Highway 2 from County Road 15 to Upland Trail near Toimi.

St. Louis County is heading down the road already traveled by most of its neighbors. Koochiching, Lake and Cook counties all have adopted blanket ordinances that allow ATVs on nearly all county roads.

The ordinances allow ATVs on the right side of the roadway or shoulder but keep them out of the ditch or outside road slopes where erosion can be a problem.

The Ely/Babbitt/Tower Prospectors Alliance (http://www.prospectorsloop.com/) has made great progress in connecting the three communities as well as to trails toward the North Shore.

Following court approval, South Fowl snowmobile trail work begins

The U.S. Forest Service is working with the State of Minnesota, Cook County, and volunteers from the Arrowhead Coalition for Multiple Use (ACMU) to implement the South Fowl Lake Snowmobile Access Project on the Gunflint Ranger District of the Superior National Forest.

This project will provide snowmobile access from McFarland Lake, at the end of the Arrowhead Trail, to South Fowl Lake.

The trail replaces the previous Tilbury trail, which was closed in 2003 after it was discovered to be a non-compliant use in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Currently, crews are finalizing trail layout and construction plans, conducting remaining biological survey work, and have begun to clear brush along the 2.2-mile trail.

The intent is to complete construction in time for snowmobilers to use the trail this coming winter. The South Fowl Snowmobile Trail is a winter use only trail, not for ATVs.

However, because so many of our members are also snowmobilers we want to let people know that volunteers are needed to get this trail open for snowmobiling this year.

Thanks to volunteers from the Arrowhead Coalition for Multiple Use and U.S. Forest Service personnel who worked together on the trail on May 30. Diane Greeley, Eric Nelms, John McClure, Gary Trovall, Jeff DeShaw, Chuck Silence and Tom Kaffine. Work is continuing this fall.

Forest Service spokesperson Kristina Reichenbach said in addition to trail construction this summer and fall, Superior National Forest staff will develop the monitoring aspect of the project with plans to closely watch and report on trail conditions and use during next winter.

On Feb. 13, 2015, Judge John Tunheim issued the long-awaited opinion on the U.S. Forest Service 2006 decision to construct the snowmobile trail between McFarland and South Fowl lakes in Hovland.
A Montana-based group has filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service over how many towboats are allowed in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

Wilderness Watch, a group based in Missoula, Montana with a satellite office in Minnesota, filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Minnesota Sept. 25.

One of the employees at Wilderness Watch is former Friends of the Boundary Waters director Kevin Proescholdt.

The suit claims the Forest Service exceeded the cap set for commercial towboat operations as well as total motorboat usage in the BWCA.

The court is being asked to stop the Forest Service from issuing motorboat permits until the agency complies with the 1978 Wilderness Act.

“The aesthetic, recreational, scientific, spiritual, and educational interests of Wilderness Watch’s members have been and will be adversely affected and irreparably injured if the Forest Service continues to authorize motorboat use in the BWCAW that exceeds the legal limit. These are actual and concrete injuries caused by Defendants’ failure to comply with mandatory duties under the Wilderness Act,” the lawsuit states.

The sticky part of the lawsuit has to do with two things, what the actual cap should or shouldn’t be for motorboat usage and what exactly a “trip” is in relation to usage.

The cap number has been the subject of a previous lawsuit which was never fully resolved.

The problem has to with Congress setting a statutory cap at “the average actual annual motorboat use of the calendar years 1976, 1977, and 1978.”

But the Forest Service lost the numbers from those years and when the agency tried to recreate them, they were sued by the Friends.

After more litigation and a change in the management plan for the BWCA, the numbers currently being used were determined.

Today, the quota for general motorboat use is 7,902 trips per year and the quota for commercial towboat use is 1,324 trips for a total quota cap of 9,244 motorboat trips per year.

But what is a “trip?” Even the Wilderness Watch lawsuit does not have supporting evidence if a trip is a round trip or a one-way trip. Or whether a trip can include multiple stops.

“Wilderness Watch was unable to obtain from the self-reported data, or from the Forest Service, a definition of the word “trip” as it pertains to commercial towboat quotas, or any indication of the extent of motorboat usage allowed under one commercial towboat permit.”

Wilderness Watch requested documentation from the Forest Service on how many towboat trips are made by outfitters into the BWCA.

With the cap at 1,324, data from 2006-2014 obtained by Wilderness Watch found usage exceeding that amount for five of the nine years.

But the issue of what a trip is or isn’t leaves the numbers as being unclear.

However, Wilderness Watch alleges the numbers are not complete:

“Two of the largest commercial towboat operators, Canadian Border Outfitters and LaTourell, had absent or incomplete data for a number of years. Each of these companies typically completes hundreds of trips per year within the BWCAW. LaTourell noted in its self-reporting documentation that it excluded all Prairie Portage trips without providing any explanation as to why these trips were exempt from reporting.”

Bob LaTourell disputed the allegations and said his business complied with Forest Service request.

“We’ve provided the Forest Service everything that’s been asked of us,” said LaTourell.

The numbers being used by Wilderness Watch are really the problem with the lawsuit, the Moose Lake outfitter said.

“The cap they keep referring to, that does not include a whole bunch of use that is still in question. The exempt use needs to be added to that number. The fact is that use is not included in the number they’re talking about.”

“Until they get the correct numbers in the first place, none of that is truthful,” said LaTourell.

The suit also alleges the number of general motorboat trips exceeded the cap of 7,902. However, that is based on a key assumption.

“For example, in 2010, the Forest Service authorized 10,633 general motorboat trip permits. Of those permits, 1,659 were not used, either because they were cancelled or the permit holder did not show for the trip, resulting in 8,974 actual general motorboat trips for 2010.”

This assumes that every permit picked up was used with no consideration for people who picked up a permit but never went on a trip.

In addition to stopping the Forest Service from issuing any motor permits, the suit demands a new permitting process for commercial towboat operations and specific definitions for terms such as “trip,” specific use restrictions and boat and client limitations, and specific reporting and administration requirements.

To further complicate the issue, Wilderness Watch mentioned the “chain of lakes” issue which was never resolved after a 12-year legal battle.

The case started in 1999 after the courts ruled that homeowners and resort owners on Moose, South Farm and Saganaga lakes could no longer be issued a sticker to allow them access into BWCAW lakes that could be reached by motorboat without portaging.

In 2006, the courts directed the Forest Service to determine usage numbers from 1976-78 on those lakes but couldn’t do so.

In 2011, failing to come up with defensible numbers, the Forest Service decided to stay with the original usage numbers.

What had been a win for Ely-based Conservationists With Common Sense turned into a hollow victory.

Seeing this lawsuit come forward was disappointing for CWCS president Nancy McReady.

“CWCS is very disappointed to see a lawsuit that mainly targets canoeists who want to enjoy a wilderness experience. We have a wonderful wilderness in the Boundary Waters and towboats aid canoeists in getting them into more solitude areas quicker,” said McReady.

“The Boundary Waters has seen decreases in the number of visitors over the past five years, and this type of lawsuit may cause even more decline. It surely won’t bolster up Sustainable Ely’s claim that tourism can sustain Ely.”

LaTourell said the key to the case is the numbers.

“The biggest thing they’re trying to attack is the cap. It’s a very arguable point that it exists at the level they say it is being that use now includes formerly exempt use. None of the exempt use from the 1976-78 period is included,” said LaTourell.
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