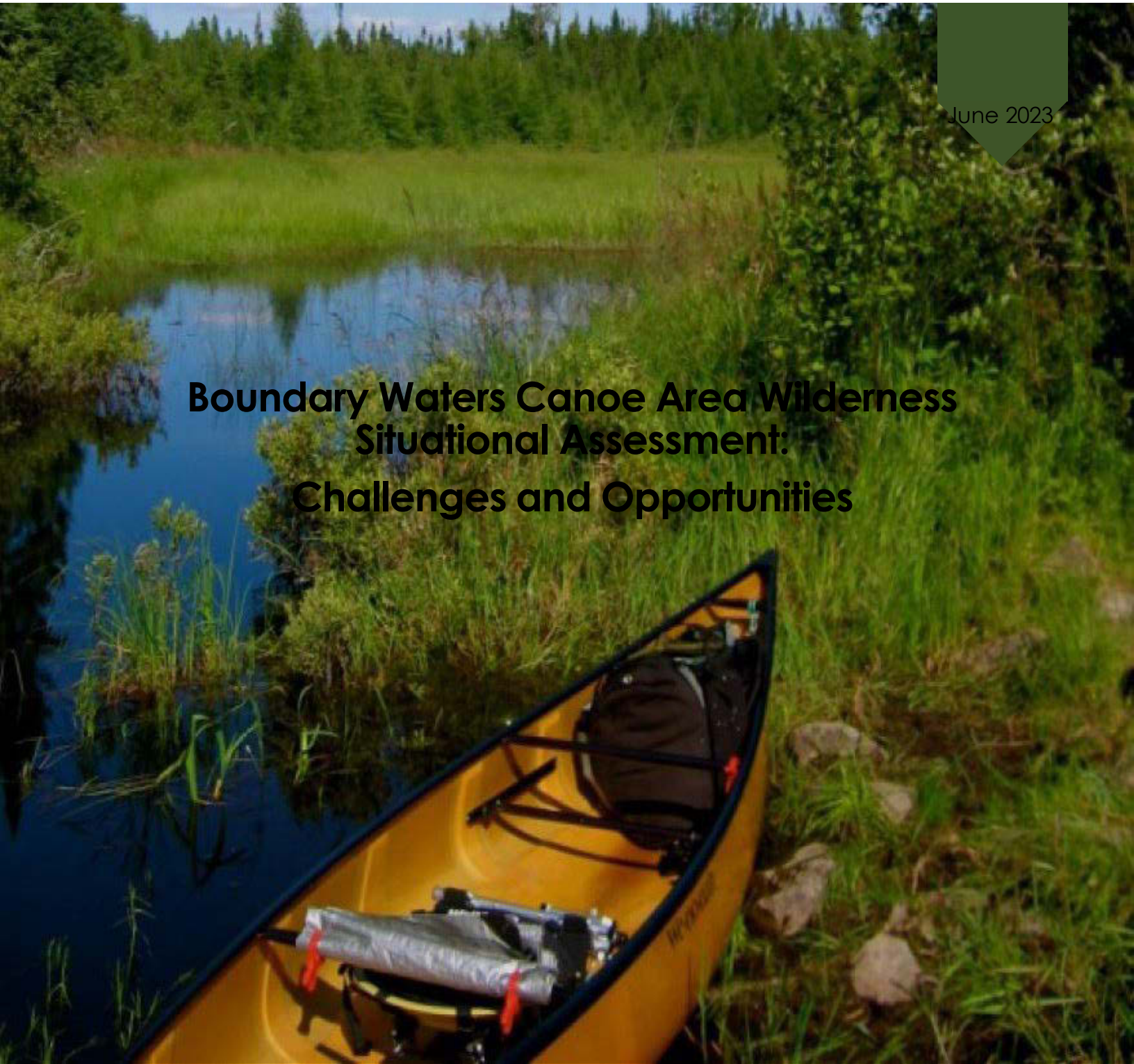


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Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Situational Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities

Credit: U.S. Forest Service

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, the [U.S. Forest Service \(Forest Service\) Superior National Forest \(SNF\)](#) began a new effort to engage individuals and groups with interests in recreation, advocacy, or commercial use in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW or Wilderness) in exploring current issues, concerns, and possibilities for collaboration with SNF. To support this initiative, SNF asked 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), to conduct confidential assessment discussions with a wide variety of interested individuals. The Udall Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan Federal agency of the Executive Branch.

The National Center conducted the assessment from December 2022 – May 2023. The primary goal was to assess the feasibility of SNF convening a multi-party collaborative effort to strengthen communication and collaboration surrounding BWCAW management challenges. The National Center invited more than 250 individuals to participate in this assessment effort. That outreach resulted in discussions with 100 individuals representing 66 distinct groups of cooperators, outfitters, guides, partners, visitors, academics, non-government organizations, local governments, and Federal, State, and County staff.¹ Information obtained was then analyzed for prevalent topics and themes that emerged frequently or in-depth during the discussions. Discussions explored personal views on Wilderness management, communication and education needs, and the value in establishing ongoing collaboration between SNF and interested parties.

This assessment report first highlights participant perspectives on the needs for collaboration and what that might require to be successful. It then explores challenges and opportunities to improve management of the BWCAW and ideas for how SNF might strengthen its communication, coordination, and educational efforts. Participants focused on a variety of management and communication issues, including visitor use patterns, campsite and trail maintenance, how to prevent and address “Leave No Trace” violations, permit system challenges, access to and availability of opportunities to experience the BWCAW, motorized and non-motorized use issues, current and future environmental impacts to the BWCAW, and several issues outside of the BWCAW that could cause impact inside the BWCAW. Participants pointed to the importance of SNF building strong relationships with local partners, including individual residents, communities, and Tribes. Participants also highlighted the need to update education and resource materials that encourage visitors to recreate responsibly.

The assessment concludes with overarching recommendations for SNF to consider. Most participants support the idea of purposeful and focused collaboration to increase understanding and to explore possibilities to preserve, protect, and improve a unique wilderness area they all care deeply about. Based on both participant interest and SNF’s desire to engage interested parties, the National Center recommends SNF move forward with forming a collaborative group or other forms of sustained public engagement. As a next step, the National Center will meet with the SNF leadership team to discuss the overall assessment results, recommendations on key issues, and potential actions for further engagement with interested parties.

¹ The National Center was unable to talk to Tribal Nations about the BWCAW for this assessment. Representatives of Boise Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage bands were invited to participate in the assessment. SNF determined it would be best to engage those Tribes separately through other government-to-government consultations. Further information on Tribal engagement can be found in the report recommendations.

1. BACKGROUND AND ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

The BWCAW is one of the largest, oldest, and most legislatively complex, heavily marketed, and most visited wilderness areas in the nation. Established in 1964 as a Federally designated wilderness area, the BWCAW consists of over one million acres of boreal forest in the northern third of the Superior National Forest. “The BWCAW extends nearly 150 miles along the International Boundary, adjacent to Canada’s Quetico and La Verendrye Provincial Parks, is bordered on the west by Voyageurs National Park, and by Grand Portage National Monument to the east. The BWCAW contains over 1,200 miles of canoe routes, 12 hiking trails and over 2,000 designated campsites.” Within the last five years (2018-2023), the BWCAW had an annual average of approximately 150,000 visitors.²

Complex wilderness management decisions often necessitate the need for discussion between all interested parties to ensure a greater shared understanding of management complexities. In 2022, the Superior National Forest (SNF) researched opportunities for public engagement assistance concerning BWCAW issues and contacted the National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution (National Center) for support.

The National Center provides collaboration, consensus-building, and conflict resolution services on a range of environmental, natural, and cultural resources, Tribal, and public lands issues involving the Federal Government. In more than 20 years of operation, the National Center has provided neutral and impartial assistance on over 650 projects across the country. The facilitation, mediation, assessment, and capacity building services provided by the National Center support public and stakeholder participation in Federal programs and projects as well as engagement with agency partners while improving decision-making, increasing efficiencies through timely project implementation, improving communication and relationships, and offering more durable and implementable outcomes.³

The goals of the situation assessment were to:

- Learn about current issues, interests, and concerns from individuals and groups who use the BWCAW and/or those who are affected by its management.
- Gather ideas on the formation of a SNF collaborative engagement effort that would consist of a diverse representation of individuals and groups interested in the BWCAW.
- Identify key parties who would like to engage at various levels in future collaborative engagement efforts with SNF and other interested parties.
- Identify barriers to participation, and suggestions for an effective collaborative process and/or other forms of public engagement.

This assessment report explores possibilities for collaboration between SNF and interested parties on various BWCAW management challenges and identifies topics, issues, and concerns that might be addressed through collaborative engagement. This report first presents participant ideas on forming a collaborative group, what it would take to have a successful process, and the potential barriers to sustained involvement by interested parties.

The report then delves into participant views on Management of the BWCAW and touches on the

² See fs.usda.gov/goto/BWCAW. Additional information can be found here: BWCAW Guide-- fs.usda.gov/goto/BWCAWGuide; BWCAW Use Reports-- fs.usda.gov/goto/BWCAWUseReports.

³ Additional information about the National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution is available at: www.udall.gov.

following challenges and opportunities to address visitor use; campsite and trail maintenance; permits; law enforcement; motorboat use; current and future environmental impacts to the BWCAW; areas of concern outside the Wilderness boundary; and views on accessibility and inclusion.

The report then covers participant perspectives on how SNF is communicating and coordinating with partners and the public, and how efforts to educate visitors might be improved. Topics include the availability of Forest Service personnel; Forest Service communication to the public about BWCAW signage and materials; Forest Service communication and relationships with partners; visitor education materials; communication tools, and participants' preferred methods of communication with Forest Service.

Lastly, the report presents a set of National Center Recommendations for the Superior National Forest to consider.

1.1 Approach and Methods

A neutral situation assessment is a valuable tool to determine the levels of trust, willingness, and ability of parties to work together collaboratively. This type of an assessment seeks to develop an understanding of the situation from the perspectives of all stakeholders (also referred to as interested parties). One of the primary goals is to identify critical elements for the design of an effective collaborative process. An assessment can help to identify critical focus areas and an organizational structure and process that has the best chance for success. The assessment aims to ensure that the entity requesting the assessment, and other audiences of the report, have the information to understand the nuanced issues and perspectives at stake so they can work together effectively to address problems and opportunities.

The National Center staff serve as impartial facilitators and process experts when conducting any assessment. The National Center team members are not subject matter experts on the BWCAW but worked closely with the SNF staff to obtain factual background and overview information to accompany the assessment of the qualitative information derived from discussions with participants. The qualitative data obtained from assessment interviews is inherently a mix of subjective and objective input that cannot always be verified for accuracy. The National Center does not fact-check the validity or accuracy of people's real or perceived experiences, perceptions, or understandings of the assessment topic. This assessment reflects a wide range of participant perspectives, experiences, and suggestions, and the statements and quotes included herein were taken at face value. Although some participant statements may include misunderstandings of the BWCAW, or how it is managed, all participant views are useful in that they reflect peoples' real or perceived experiences and can inform SNF about issues where additional communication and public engagement may be needed.

The National Center worked collaboratively with a SNF Steering Committee (Thomas Hall, Susan Catton, Ann Schwaller, Joy Vandrie, Shannon Rische, and Ellen Bogardus-Szymaniak) to define the scale and scope of the assessment, identify a comprehensive list of potentially interested participants, design discussion questions, and determine an approach for reporting the results. A situation assessment that engages a wide range of parties who have an interest in the BWCAW was identified as the best approach to obtain SNF's desired information on critical issues for collaboration.

The National Center contacted over 250 individual participants and had discussions with 100 individuals representing 66 distinct groups of cooperators, outfitters, guides, partners, visitors, academics, local

governments and Federal, State, and County staff.⁴

Participants included:

- 6 County Government staff from 3 counties.
- 6 individuals from other Federal/ State/Canadian agencies.
- 2 Gateway Communities staff.
- 4 tourism staff from 3 tourism organizations and county tourism boards.
- 8 youth program staff from 6 organizations.
- 12 individual researchers, academics, and historians.
- 14 environmental/conservation/preservation staff from 9 different organizations.
- 19 cooperators persons from 16 cooperator organizations.
- 3 wilderness users/staff from 3 Twin Cities based Nonprofit Organizations.
- 8 outfitters/guides from 8 organizations/companies.
- 18 individual unaffiliated Boundary Water users.

One-and-a-half-hour discussion video-calls were conducted via Microsoft TEAMS between December 2022 – May 2023.⁵ Due to the large number of potential participants, the National Center invited up to eight different parties to participate in each call. Discussions ranged from one to eight participants, depending on who accepted the invitations to discussion calls. A handful of individual interviews occurred to accommodate people who could not make the group interview calls.

All participants were asked the same questions from a standardized list developed by the SNF Steering Committee with guidance from the National Center. Additional follow-up questions were asked based on the unique issues raised during discussions. These follow-up questions emerged from the dialogue between the call participants and the facilitator. A list of assessment participants is included in [Appendix A](#). The assessment discussion guide, including questions asked of participants, that was sent to participants prior to interviews is included in [Appendix B](#). The questions were designed to gather feedback on management of the BWCAW and opportunities to improve communication, coordination, and collaboration with stakeholders and interested parties.

The following sections of this report summarize the range of responses and different perspectives shared in assessment discussions. Findings are organized by topics and themes that highlight participant understandings of issues and their suggestions to address challenges. Each challenge identified is followed by opportunities for improvement.

⁴ The term Cooperator is defined as a local business that has an Agreement with the Forest Service to issue BWCAW visitor use permits at their location. They augment Forest Service office hours; create convenient permit issuing locations for the public; help the Forest Service maintain a wilderness experience through the mandatory quota permit and visitor distribution system; and increase awareness of Leave-No-Trace and Tread Lightly wilderness ethics to people visiting the BWCAW. Some Guides/Outfitters are cooperators.

⁵ Throughout this report we use the term “participant(s)” to refer to those who chose to be a part of the discussion interviews.

2. EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES FOR COLLABORATION

The primary aim of Superior National Forest (SNF) requesting the National Center to conduct this assessment was to engage a diverse cross-section of their stakeholders on the feasibility of establishing a formal collaborative group to strengthen communication surrounding Wilderness management challenges. Discussion with participants sought to identify interest and need for a collaborative group or other sustained engagement, possible barriers to participation, and suggestions for an effective process. Most participants were excited or hopeful about the idea of increased engagement with SNF staff and other parties who care about the BWCAW. Participants stated that forming a collaborative group is forward thinking and they like the idea of SNF *“shifting from a reactionary to a proactive mode.”* Sustained collaborative engagement *“creates an open network of communication and provides a feedback loop to the Forest Service.”*

Participants repeatedly emphasized that the purpose, goals, sideboards, and scope of any collaborative effort should be very clear. Sustained collaboration could take different forms and representation should aim to be as inclusive as possible. Most parties suggested addressing manageable issues within the BWCAW, while some thought a broader Superior National Forest focus should be considered. Participants believe a collaborative group can expand the existing Boundary Waters narrative(s) and expand understanding of those narratives. One participant said, *“More voices at the table would be good rather than everyone pointing fingers at the Forest Service. I think it would be good to hear each other.”* Overall, participants were hopeful to find some common ground, with one stating, *“At the end of the day, we all want a clean Wilderness that’s accessible to everyone.”*

Sections 2.1 through 2.3 below detail themes heard from multiple participants. The authors developed all categorical headings.

2.1 Previous Efforts and Concerns

Some participants expressed caution about forming a collaborative and pointed to previous efforts they said had failed. They emphasized the complexity and non-trivial nature of the issues at stake. Some said certain efforts, like a State advisory management committee and an earlier mediation process, resulted in unfulfilled promises by SNF and others who were involved. Most agreed that adequate representation of interests will be challenging and reaching agreement on divisive issues may not be possible. Participants noted that issues surrounding the BWCAW have been highly contentious and that they *“fear a similar process would reopen wounds that would, again, take a long time to heal.”* They also cautioned, *“It’s essential to define the scope of discussion under the existing set of legislation.”*

Additional concerns expressed included:

- Some participants worry that a collaborative group would be a waste of time.
 - Participant Quote: “I understand the purpose of this process is different (than the 1996 mediations), but I have had so many “Stakeholder” discussion experiences that go nowhere.”
- Lack of trust from the participants regarding SNF’s intentions.
 - Participant Quote: “Concerned about a “Check the Box” mentality to say Forest Service ran feedback by a group but made the decision they wanted to make anyway.
 - Participant Quote: “Sometimes we worry about collecting and sharing data that is then used against us. If we are going to participate and share information, how do we know that it is being used in a way that doesn’t work against us.”
 - Participant Quote: “Afraid that it could be seen as a process to justify decisions that

need to go through proper stringent review, whether it be NEPA or other”

- One participant cautioned to not call it a “collaborative”, suggesting that it *“leaves a bad taste in your mouth in the West.”* The participant suggested “dialogue group.”

2.2 What Would Make a Collaborative Process Successful?

The National Center asked participants for their views on what might make a collaborative effort by Superior National Forest successful. Facilitators framed the conversation by explaining SNF’s intention to explore ways to share information between all parties in a way that might inform better management practices and actions by SNF and its partners. National Center staff clarified that although a collaborative group might provide advice, and could be a problem-solving body, the goal is not necessarily to make decisions or reach consensus. Final decision authority must rest with Forest Service on this federally designated wilderness. Participant insights highlight the need for a clear purpose and specific objectives, appropriate representation of interested parties, and potential focus groups to tackle specific challenges. The following participant thoughts are organized by categories developed by the authors.

Develop a compelling mission, purpose and vision for the process

- Be clear on what you are trying to accomplish, clarify where decision-making authority rests on various issues, and how input will be utilized in agency decision-making.
- Participant Quote: “Buying into an overall vision is critical. Vision allows you to return to something when disagreements occur. Participating people and organizations must agree to adhere to the vision and some kind of charter.”
- Participant Quote: “Goals should include exchange of information and relationship building.”

Establish very clear guidelines, roles, and side boards

- Clarify existing rules and regulations and how they impact current management, and expectations:
 - Participant Quote: “I want the district ranger or the assistant to be involved and engaged before I get involved in a group.”
 - Participant Quote: “Creating space for truthful statements that may not be what everyone wants to hear and not stifling those voices.”
 - Participant Quote: “Be respectful of everyone's time.”
 - Participant Quote: “Focus on things that could be worked on... within the scope of the current legislation.”

Build the agenda together and co-create focus areas

- Conduct surveys and engage members to develop (agenda topics) prior to the meetings:
 - Participant Quote: “I’d like to see the impetus coming from the Forest Service – show me that they want to cooperate.”
- Include locals in the design of the process
 - Participant Quote: “It is important for the agency to implement local advice, so it can be worth people’s time.”

Adequate representation

- Participants are concerned about adequate representation in a collaborative group.
 - Participant Quote: “Plan for diverse involvement so you don’t end up with the same

people with access privilege, power, and resources. Engage the Tribes. They are a critical voice. Need to remember this is Treaty Land. What are the Tribal interests in this, etc.”

- Participant Quote: “Forest Service would have to be very conscious of types of people that they ask. Some people up there would like to open the whole thing up again, rather than keeping true to the original legislation.”
- BIPOC representation should be included throughout sub-groups and should not be a separate BIPOC sub-group.
- Consider compensation of non-professionals for their time and travel expenses
 - Participant Quote: “An important question is how to get folks that aren’t getting paid to participate.”

Have key parties at the table to tackle specific topics

- Primary issues should address issues like campsite management; revising the visitor use permit system; noise and “Leave No Trace” violations, access areas and overcrowding, or other issues mentioned frequently by participants that are outlined above.
- Participant Quote: “Conversation topics need to be meaningful and have value (including the right people for the right topics) and have meaningful outcomes.”
- Focus on the issues that can be dealt with outside of legislation (within the scope of existing legislation).
- Participant Quote: “Consider developing groups that have aligned interests, mission, methods rather than representation of vastly different perspectives.”

Consider a set of focus groups or sub-committees

- Groups might be established out of a larger collaborative.
- Participant Quote: “Groups composed of interested parties can tackle key issues and then report back to the larger collaborative group.”
- Participant Quote: “Specific topics will be more valuable. It’s less appealing with just a large group to talk about big topics.”
- Participants noted that focus groups or sub-committees might focus on different challenges or issues, including communication, motor, and non-motor boating, hiking and trails, State/Federal agencies, homeowners/ vacation rentals, and youth.

Process Participation and Commitment Needs

National Center staff asked participants what they, or their organization/agency, might need to participate in some type of collaborative process. Participants shared considerations for structural, process, and relational dynamics that would need to be addressed. They were also asked what participation concerns or barriers to participation would need to be addressed. People generally agreed on the importance of a clear reason to convene people and being considerate of the demands on peoples’ schedules. They were most concerned about inclusive representation, transparency of the process, and the ability to understand how information developed during a collaborative process would be utilized by SNF, or if it is not used then explain why. The following participant thoughts are organized by categories developed by the authors.

Meeting Frequency

- Several people suggested a collaborative group needs to meet regularly to have an impact – potentially 3-4 times a year.
- Some suggested standing meetings that people can plan to attend. Others noted that ad hoc meetings may suffice.
- Participant Quote: “Meet when necessary – an ad hoc basis may make sense. Don’t need to have a standing meeting.”
- Participant Quote: “Be mindful of time constraints. Limit scope/time/prep. Avoid peak summer months.”
- Participant Quote: “September 30 - October is ideal time for us to talk about the issues that happened in the summer.”
- Participant Quote: “If limited to certain management topics and discussions, and limited in scope, then it would be easier to participate.”

In-person meetings with hybrid option

- Face to face is most desirable with hybrid meeting options to accommodate vast regional participation.
- Participant Quote: “There’s huge value in sitting down face to face and building the relationship, but smaller shops may not have the staff to spare to travel and attend. We’re so dispersed out here – I have to drive 50 miles just to get to town. But for issues that really matter, I would make a drive.”
- Participant Quote: “Maybe offer an overnight so that people can build relationships over breaks or after the meetings. Then move into hybrid meetings after relationships are built.”
- Participant Quote: “Could hold the meeting out in the Wilderness. Conversations are different when you’re out in the woods or paddling together.”

Commitment to using the information shared

- Create a feedback loop on how things are being done or why/why not.
- Participant Quote: “There would need to be some way to understand how the information will be used in relation to a decision-making process... Have some guarantee that the information will at least be utilized. And if it’s not being used, then explain why a different decision was made.”

Inclusive representation

- Plan for inclusive representation of local and regionally interested parties and invite Tribal partners to participate. Tribes may choose to not participate in the collaborative but should be engaged by SNF.
- Both business owners and environmental advocates fear the other could hijack any collaborative agenda. Participants that identify with each group acknowledge that each group cares about the BWCAW, but they have a different perspective. Participation must be balanced.
- Create space for truthful statements that may not be what everyone wants to hear and not stifling those voices.

Transparency in decision making

- Provide data on how SNF is arriving at decisions.
- Participant Quote: “Often it seems like a haphazard way of coming up with these decisions (for example, reduction of permits in certain areas).”
- Have decisionmakers in the room.

Provide a strong, impartial facilitator

- Need a strong process person to keep topics on track.
- One participant suggested a BIPOC facilitator.
- Participant Quote: “[We need a facilitator] that’s not in a ‘green’ uniform.”

Other

- Clarify the relationship to FACA and determine if it will apply to the process.
- Provide official invitations to those invited to join the collaborative group so that it can be included in their job description. This ensures that the person can fully commit to a collaborative.

3. PERSPECTIVES ON BWCAW MANAGEMENT

All participants were asked to share their perspectives on the most pressing management issues, topics, and challenges within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Conversations were framed to discover topics that might be addressed by SNF or through a collaborative process. This section highlights several challenges identified by participants and suggests opportunities to address those challenges.

3.1 Challenges

Participants described a variety of challenges they would like SNF to consider. They are concerned with perceived changes in visitor use patterns, campsite and trail maintenance, how to prevent and address “Leave No Trace” violations, permit system issues, access and availability of opportunities to experience the Wilderness area, motorized and non-motorized use issues, current and future environmental impacts to the BWCAW, and several issues outside the BWCAW boundary that could impact the area inside the boundary.

Visitor Use and Relationship to the BWCAW

Many participants believe the typical visitor’s goals have changed over the years from seeking multiple-day trips deeper into the BWCAW, to shorter trips where they can have easy access to civilization and maintain connectivity as needed. There is a perception that many visitors are primarily utilizing the campsites as base camps (often with larger group sizes) rather than venturing further into the Wilderness and that these behaviors can lead to overcrowding on lakes that are closer to BWCAW entry points. Many felt that BWCAW visitor use increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. Participants observed that new visitors to the BWCAW during this period were less familiar with being in a wilderness area and were not well prepared, for example relying on cell phones in a place that does not always have cell phone service.

- Many participants believe these behavior and usage changes have led to overcrowding and related negative impacts effected to certain areas.
- Some participants suggested this change in visitor use means “*the wilderness ethic is*

not always adhered to.”

- Some participants think the most heavily used entry point is Moose Lake.

Campsite and Trail Maintenance

Participants shared their concerns that certain campsites, portages, and trails are overused and insufficiently maintained. They attributed some of the damage to visitors and wildfires. There was general agreement among participants that in recent years (i.e., During the 2020-2022 pandemic) many visitors were not adhering to “Leave No Trace” policies, which resulted in damage to trees and campsite facilities, and more trash in parts of the BWCAW. Some speculated that it may be because “Leave No Trace” education was generally done virtually by Cooperators and Outfitters during the COVID-19 pandemic rather than in-person as in previous years. Participants highlighted the following challenges:

Leave No Trace (Examples of Campsite Misuse by Campers)

- Campers are cutting greenery and trees.
- Campers are putting things in latrines that are not allowed.
- People are burning garbage in the campfires.
- There seem to be no repercussions for visitors who abuse the BWCAW.
- Some participants felt Forest Service education videos, which are required viewing after purchasing a permit, could be improved and that SNF can take other actions to build visitor awareness (see Education section).

Campsite Management

- Campsites are not being closed to allow for regeneration.
- There is not enough firewood for campfires. People have created trails into the woods in search of firewood and it is hard to tell which trails are for the latrines or “visitor-made trails”.
- Permit changes worked well to reduce impacts on campsites, but some participants said they would like to see quota added back in a few areas. Maybe not everyday increases, but more nuanced (rotating days, for example).
- Overcrowding at popular camping spots. Fewer people seem to be using the routes that are more off the beaten path that take you into more remote wilderness. It seems people aren’t using these areas because the trails aren’t maintained or are poorly marked.
- Bears are a big concern near the portages. People understand that adding bear-proof receptacles at camp spots may take away the “wilderness experience” but there have been too many bear incidents. Bear proof containers are cost-prohibitive for some visitors.
 - Participant Quote: “The campsites have latrines and primitive camp gear already so it wouldn’t take away the wilderness values (to add bear proof containers) since there are already resources there.”

Unkept Trails

- Some campsites near the Pow Wow Trail by Isabella Lake were ruined by fires and have never been repaired.
- Unkept trails can cause accessibility issues.
- Unkept trails and lack of forest maintenance has caused damage to cultural resources.
- There is very little upkeep on the trails during the winter for those who participate in winter activities in the BWCAW.

BWCAW Visitor Use Permits and the Permitting System

Access to visitor use permits and recent changes in the issuance of BWCAW permits were a prevalent theme in group discussions. Participants shared a variety of concerns and recommendations related to management of permits. Several Cooperators and Outfitters voiced concerns that permit reductions occurred without appropriate analysis of the benefits and costs of such quota reductions. Several individuals noted that SNF managers are doing a pretty good job of managing the current permit system *“with different daily entry quotas at put-in points.”* Some participants expressed frustration with the speed in which permits disappear once they become available on Rec.gov. Navigating the permitting system can be technically challenging for some or for those with slow internet. Challenges surrounding permitting are outlined below:

Paddle Quota Reduction

Some Cooperators, Outfitters and other business owners feel the quota reductions was the wrong approach. They noted that the decision process was unclear and not based on statistical analysis. There is confusion around why quota reductions occurred at certain entry points and whether it was due to overuse and damage.

- Participant Quote: “Reduction of the quota permits was done in a way that didn’t feel transparent or data driven.”
- Participant Quote: “Fundamentally it comes down to this is public lands and reducing access to public lands should be a last resort and not a first step.”
- Participant Quote: “Reducing quotas has not made a difference to impact. Intention might be good to refresh the Wilderness [Area] but [I’m] not sure it encouraged that.”

Unused/Overbooking Permits

- Participants noted that permitting doesn’t seem to match up with campsite use and it seems like many sites are unused.
- One Cooperator mentioned that the number of “no-show” permits was more than the canceled permits from the last year.
- Participant Quote: “The Forest Service said they were going to notify people if they had more than one permit to avoid the over-permitting issue, but not sure if it happened.”
- One participant noted that perhaps the low cost of permits contributed to the overbooking and that because they are so inexpensive, people book in case they want to use them rather than only when they are sure they will.
- A few participants shared their observation that “some people are overbooking permits and then giving them away on Facebook and this really impacts local outfitters and businesses.”

Flexibility with Permits

A few participants voiced frustration with their inability to adjust permits. Some of their concerns include the following:

- Only group leaders get the emails. Others in the group are not able to see the permit.
- Permits cannot be transferred to another group or individual if plans change or someone gets ill.
- Cooperators say they have asked SNF to adjust the number of people on a permit or transfer it to another person and SNF says that they are not able to do that.
- Participant Quote: “SNF reduced the permits during the fires but when cooperators have asked

them to adjust a permit, they say they can't."

- Participant Quote: "Sometimes picking up the permit is difficult, and people have to adjust their schedule to arrive earlier than their date so that they can get their permit. There is no option to get the permit online or print it out yourself."

Permitting Website Issues (Lottery vs Recreation.gov)

- Some participants stated that the previous lottery system seemed to be fairer. The lottery system allowed the outfitter/cooperator to enter in the customer's information. There was no deadline.
- Customers don't always have equal access to the internet.
 - The time release of permits is difficult and if you don't get it in the first few minutes, you are out of luck. This challenge is a large problem for those who are trying to book multiple permits or for those with lack of access to a solid internet connection.
 - Participant Quote: "[The] current system is more about who is most on the top of their technological game or who has the best internet connection. Some customers have had success but some massive failure."
- The website does not allow a visitor to book multiple permits.
 - This is especially a problem for cooperators who book multiple permits a year.
 - Certain visitor groups (for example, organizations supporting underrepresented outdoor visitors) use the BWCAW every year to bring multiple groups into the BWCAW – especially canoeing as it is a great activity for accessibility. These visitor groups are unable to book the groups that they need to book due to the difficult permitting website process. For example, the website only limits each visitor to book 3 individual trip permits for the summer, so these entities have to circumnavigate the system by requesting a school kid, parent, or other customer to use their personal email. It was specifically noted that requiring children to have an email isn't realistic.
- There is no place on the Rec.gov website to provide input.
- A participant reported his/her experience that Apple products can't be used to book permits.

General

- SNF staff hours are short and there are not many staff to assist in addressing permitting. As a result, people prefer to go to outfitters where they can pick up their permits at hours convenient to them and can ask questions while they are there.
- A cooperator shared that although some find that it is easier to get a permit from the outfitters, *"the outfitters don't get paid to administer permits and they administer most of the permits."*
- Participant Quote: "Cooperators write our own permits for cross country skiing and ice fishing – those of us who use it year-round are not able to self-regulate to the area's benefit."

Law Enforcement

Some participants from BWCAW user groups and other participants felt there is insufficient SNF personnel in the BWCAW to assist visitors and enforce rules. They noted that campsites --and campers -- are sometimes not in compliance with regulations.

- Some participants were concerned that DNR conservation officers are limited in their ability to enforce violations. They said SNF Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) have less restrictions than

conservation officers due to their authorities. Typically, the conservation officers will give their information to the SNF law enforcement officers to implement.

- State agency personnel who participated in the assessment often spoke from an enforcement-based perspective. These participants complimented interagency coordination and communication with SNF on challenges like wildfires and only highlighted a few areas for improvement. A participant shared, *“it seems like on the law enforcement side, Forest Service hands might be tied at times in terms of enforcement. MN DNR seems to have a little more flexibility. It’s good cooperation but its ultimately the State DNR that does most of the ticket writing, etc.”*

Motorboat Use in the Wilderness

Several participants emphasized their dislike for the current level of motorboat use and commercial towboats in the BWCAW as they find it has changed the use patterns and impacted peoples’ experience of the Wilderness. Some participants shared strong concerns, including one who was a part of the legislation discussions surrounding motorboats in the BWCAW, *“When we agreed to 25 hp motors on the Moose Lake Chain and parts of Basswood, the Senate staff were told that commercial towboats could not operate with only 25 hp (Because they previously used unlimited hp motors. But they found they could operate with 25 hp). Now, towboats in those areas are half the traffic. Also, a single motor permit allows four boats I have no idea how that happened but maybe the reasoning was that the canoe permits allow four boats. So those permits are widely shared.”*

Other participants, like cooperators who rely on towboats as part of their livelihood, are happy with current towboat and mechanical boat use management. Participants pointed out that some waterways are difficult for canoes to navigate across, and the towboats assist those visitors. They also suggested towboats could assist in dispersing visitors throughout the BWCAW from various entry points.

Perspectives on Motorboats

- Some voiced strong concerns on motorboat use because it is not “primitive” and does not offer “solitude.”
- Participant Quote: “Motorboats are sometimes used at night, which is during hours that should be noise free and motorboats can be scary for canoers.”
- Seagull Lake has horsepower limits and restricted motorboat areas, but a participant noted that *“people are violating this rule and [it appears that] Forest Service is not enforcing it.”*
- A participant shared that two motorboats agreeing to meet in one place is a violation of their permits for how many motorboats are allowed on a permit.
- Participant Quote: “There are very small windows and areas in the BWCAW where you can’t hear motors. In some of the areas, motorboat use starts before dawn and continues until after dusk. Willing to compromise but can this be reduced some. I’m not a purist but noise is currently too much.”
- Others mentioned that day use motorboat permits are a very hot commodity for use in the Fall and people buy those out very quickly. Cooperators have been telling SNF that they need to get a handle on this so it’s a more even playing field and people are not gaming the system.
- Some participants are very happy with the current management of all motor use in the BWCAW and “don’t want any changes.”
- Participant Quote: “[I] believe we do need to balance the different types of users. [It’s] dangerous to be too exclusive and only cater to hard core non-motor users.”

Additional Perspectives on Commercial Towboats

- Participants mentioned that litigation from Wilderness Watch is impacting commercial towboat issues.
 - Participant Quote: “As a commercial business it’s hard to put energy into a towboat business when threat of NEPA and SNF decisions may reduce towboat use further.”
- There are issues with towboats surrounding the 1978 law. Exempt use that was counted is not counted.
- Some business owners emphasized that existing Towboat special use permits are not transferring to new owners with the sale of a business, and this has major impacts on the viability and value of those operations.

Current and Future Environmental Impacts to the BWCAW

Participants mentioned that SNF could have a more proactive and resilient response to climate change, especially around fire management practices.

- Blowdown: Some participants explained that there has been an issue in the BWCAW with excessive blowdown of dead wood.
- Others raised concerns about how best to manage all the potential deadwood fuel in the BWCAW. A participant said that historically there have been prescribed burns, including the burning of dead wood in the BWCAW.
- Participant Quote: “Prescribed Burning should be allowed to mimic Aboriginal burning... in the way that was used in pre-European times for enhancement of tree growth on important campsite areas and for wildlife and vegetation enhancement. I recognize that the impetus for this may have to originate with the Tribes. The Wilderness Act definition is historically inaccurate: ‘where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.’ Obviously as recent studies have shown, there was a lot of forest management by the early inhabitants.”
- Other environmental problems noted include wild rice depletion, loss of earthworms, wildfire, and changes in moose populations.
- Transport of invasive species: One participant expressed concerns that boat use across the region could result in the transport of invasive species. *“I worry about transport of invasive species - the boats should be docked in the area that it is being used. For example, if a boat comes from Ely to a different lake, then maybe it might bring an invasive species from that lake. It would be good to use the boats that are located at the lakes they typically use to avoid possible transport of invasive species.”*

Areas of Concern Outside the Wilderness Area Boundary

Although the scope of this assessment focused on areas within the BWCAW, several participants raised issues and concerns about areas adjacent to the BWCAW that impact the Wilderness area. Diverse parties, including business owners, environmental advocates, and visitors who are unaffiliated with any specific organization, are concerned about mining and its potential impacts on water quality. Other participants mentioned that protecting the land at the edge of the BWCAW is important.

- Participant Quote: “The copper mining is an issue to me, the water quality, and the health of the watershed. It is a very serious and threatening situation. I don’t see how the mining can be done safely.”

- Participant Quote: “The BWCAW should be protected from mining and from the aftereffects like contaminated waters.”
- Participant Quote: “I’m not necessarily 100% opposed to mining but would want to have safeguards to maintain water quality and preservation of wilderness.”
- State to Federal Land Exchanges within the BWCAW are another topic that may warrant further discussion and collaborative action.
- Participant Quote: “Land exchanges are important although the players keep changing because of the district rangers and leadership change over.”

Accessibility and Inclusion

Several male and female participants who identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and/or LGBTQIA emphasized that underrepresented groups lack exposure to learning about how to camp, canoe, or generally recreate in the BWCAW. BIPOC and other underrepresented individuals often lack the resources or access to experience national parks and wilderness areas. The participants did not voice specific criticisms with the management of the BWCAW but suggested greater opportunities for education and access.

- Equity issues can be impacted by the inability to secure permits and by permits that go unused by more affluent visitors. A participant noted, “permits are wasted by those who can afford it.”
- Some participants discussed stewardship and have mentioned that BIPOC communities have a negative interpretation of unpaid work outdoors.
- Some participants noted that what is often considered to be “appropriate” use of the Wilderness (being quiet, recreation focused, non-motorized vehicles, being unplugged from electronics) is connected to a white wilderness ethic that privileges certain types of uses over others such as activities that create noise and cultural and spiritual experiences of wilderness.

3.2 Opportunities

Participants outlined a variety of recommendations for SNF to consider. Participant suggestions vary in scale and scope and may not always be feasible. Some suggestions may be prohibited by the laws of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the 1978 Act as well as the Forest Plan. Other suggestions may be quite attainable. All suggestions reflect the real or perceived experiences of participants and are of interest to the SNF as it communicates and coordinates with various parties about the BWCAW. Participant suggestions to improve the management of the BWCAW are listed below:

Opportunities Surrounding Visitor Use and Relationship to the Wilderness

- Encourage visitors to go further into the woods by providing them with maps of routes to explore more remote areas.
- Encourage visitors to visit the Canadian side of the BWCAW. They have the carrying capacity to accept more visitors and maintain the wilderness experience.
- Collectively work on developing travel routes in the BWCAW (difficult, intermediate, beginner) like systems that exist for skiing and mountain biking.
- Pristine Management Areas should be managed by providing more guidance, outlining limitations, and adding certain restrictions to trailhead and entry-point lakes to encourage people to spread out more.

Ideas to Improve Campsites and Trails

- Participants suggested SNF develop more guidance and education on alternative routes, and

ensure trails and campsites are cleared for easy access.

- Close campsites that are facing significant impact and open new ones to help with overuse.
 - Participant Quote: “There is something like 2,000 designated campsites. When they get to a certain point of use. they should be regenerated.”
- Add pictures and descriptions of campsites for visitors to review when making reservations.
 - For example, one story mentioned a group ending up at a campsite that wasn’t accessible for an individual in their group. There were tree roots that the person couldn’t see in their peripheral vision. They also noticed that their campsite was too small for their group when they arrived at the site. This group ended up taking photos of the campsites for their own use to know which campsites would be best for their group.
- Increase staff presence on the ground to give different routes around main corridors. Primitive management areas are not used very often because people don’t know about them. If there was more maintenance on those portages, then maybe people would use them.
- People noticed that the issues they see on the United States’ side of the BWCAW are more prevalent than on the Canadian side of the BWCAW. It could be helpful to learn best practices from Canada.
- Some participants suggested providing bear trash receptacles and bear lockers at sites. A few mentioned that asking people to bring their own bearproof container can be cost prohibitive.
- SNF could encourage and set up “clean up” or “restoration” focused trips and ensure they are funded.
- Continue to develop recreation experiences outside the BWCA for people to have other opportunities outside wilderness.

Opportunities to Improve Permitting

Participants noted that there are opportunities for SNF to be more nuanced in the visitor use permitting system. Several people said any reductions and changes in BWCAW permits should be based on data points to the extent possible. Some participants suggested restricting where people can stay on certain nights and for how many nights, rather than reducing quotas overall. And encouraging visitors to travel to different places on certain days. Participants provided the following recommendations:

Visitor Permit Use

- Visitors should have the option for different types of permits to encourage more visitors to explore further into the BWCAW.
 - Incentivize different times of travel and different travel routes.
 - Require visitors to get to a certain area by a certain date and ensure they can’t stay on certain lakes for more than a certain amount of time.
- Incentivize people to fill out the surveys to get better information on where the trips are occurring so that SNF can get better data for visitor use permitting.
- Participant Quote: “Promote more hiking in the BW to reduce battling for canoe permits. It seems people are unaware of the hiking opportunities and the hiking trails are bare.”
- Participant Quote “Promote other forest-based recreation opportunities in the Superior and in other State Parks and surrounding areas that are outside the Wilderness area. There are a lot of nearby places to visit that don’t have the same restrictions as BWCAW and could help reduce

overcrowding”.

- Lead a study to monitor visitors and what they want out of the BWCAW. Ask: who are we collectively trying to serve, and what do people want? Some people just want to relax and want all the rewards without the work of paddling everywhere.

Visitor Use Permit Quotas

- Participant Quote: “SNF should use statistical analysis and science to make better decisions about quotas. Provide statistical/data evidence to show how and why permits should be reduced. Need to show the data and show the impacts and results in 2022. Should be transparent and open.”
- Adjust quotas to the types of trips people want and increase education about those opportunities.
 - Assess the different usage across the system – for example, those going in for a day or two versus those moving through. The permit doesn’t assess those kinds of questions about use.
 - Consider a permitting system that requires people on multi-day permits to move from one site to another over a certain number of days to prevent overcrowding near entry points.
- Partner with people who use the BWCAW every day or cooperators/outfitters to improve permitting and managing issues.
- Publish SNF Visitor Data of Permits at the end of the year. This information helps cooperators and other businesses plan for the following year. Information to be collected and distributed should include:
 - Number of permits per entry point.
 - Permit holder names.
 - How permits were issued.
 - How many permits were cancelled.

Permit Reservation System Website

- Enable Rec.gov to show when there are no shows or cancelations in real time, so that people nearby can obtain unused permits.
- Participant Quote: “Develop a permits specific website for only BWCAW; Recreation.gov is not good and is not living up to their government contract.”
- Visitors to the BWCAW should be able to receive their permit and materials online.
 - Participant Quote: “People should be able to get their permits online because stores are often closed, and people often arrive after work hours. MN DNR has a good system for fishing permits.”
- Allow permit applicants to pre-enter permit information so that when the release happens, they can just press submit.
- To free unused permits up for others, people who book permits at Recreation.gov should be given a warning and reminder to commit or cancel a certain number of weeks or days prior to their permit date.
 - Create a text messaging system to send to permitters to confirm if they will be using their permit. For example, “Are you using your permit? Text Yes or No.”

Visitor Use Permit Fee

- Consider raising the permit fees and making it non-refundable to prevent stockpiling or hoarding of reservations.
- Penalize those for not using the permits.

Visitor Use Permit Reservation Access

- Permitting should be done on a rolling basis instead of opening them all on one day to prevent people from taking all the permits.
- Hold Day Use permits for elderly people and people with disabilities.
- Allow groups that serve underrepresented youth and adults to enter a lottery for non-commercial outfitters.
- Hold a certain number of permits for people located in nearby zip codes.

Suggestions for Law Enforcement in the BWCAW

- Need visible enforcement by SNF staff in the BWCAW.
- Increase coordination between conservation law officers and law enforcement officers and clarify roles.
- Consider a charge for rescue in the BWCAW to encourage people to be prepared.
- Consider real penalties associated with any damage to the BWCAW. Enforce it and create examples of “Leave No Trace” violators.
- Participant Quote: “Need more boots on the ground education and enforcement. Checking permits etc. I think Superior National Forest has done a good job educating people through ranger stations and videos, but the guides and cooperators have to do their part.”
- Participant Quote: “Forest Service needs to take it a step further and have stronger consequences for “Leave No Trace” violations. Clearly list the things visitors should not do, for example, ‘prohibitive behaviors’ like leaving gear or cutting down live trees.”

Opportunities to Address Motorboat Use Challenges

- Continue to allow commercial towboats to help people cross bigger lakes safely.
- Provide safety education for visitors who are using non-motorized, non-mechanized, non- canoe equipment such as kayak and Stand-Up Paddle Board users.
- Only allow boats that are fuel efficient. Yellowstone National Park did this with snowmobiles and a participant said it worked to reduce noise and contamination of resources.
- Increase signage throughout the BWCAW that indicates where motor and non-motorized boat use is allowed.
- Restrict motorboats to designated hours. If there are already designated hours, there should be greater education and enforcement as several participants said motorboats are being used at night.
- A participant suggested that a collaborative group could generate ideas for management of motorboats – “For example, there may be some kind of a temporal zoning idea that would allow some motor-free times on the motorized routes.”

Opportunities to Decrease Environmental Impacts

- Incorporate Tribal knowledge into fire management protocols and implementation.
- Initiate prescribed burns and burning of blowdown wood.

- Develop invasive species protocol and eradication.
- Fund more Forest Service soil scientists and other science-based resources out in the field. Scientists should be looking at water quality around campsites, plant collecting, moose research, etc.

Opportunities Outside the BWCAW

- Provide clear guidance on how to manage lands adjacent to the BWCAW.
- Prohibit mining in the BWCAW.
- Survey how many jobs would be created for mining and how many people would take the mining jobs in the surrounding area. Compare that to other factors.
- Participant Quote: “Of course there would be jobs for construction and many fewer for operations and the management types would do well. And I understand the argument that tourist industry jobs can be seasonal and may not pay very well. But I’m skeptical. I’d love to see a house-to-house survey of Ely and surrounds about how many current residents would actually expect to work at a new mine, for example. Of course, there is the argument that the economy of the town needs more people with jobs, but the counter is that the pristine environment is the biggest asset to the local economy. And there is research to support that.”

Opportunities to Improve Accessibility and Inclusivity

- SNF could partner with organizations that provide opportunities to BIPOC individuals to share information about how to camp, canoe, and recreate in the BWCAW for those who do not have that experience.
- SNF should specifically hold a certain number of permits for individuals from BIPOC communities and other underrepresented groups.
- Participant Quote: “Be wary of only holding permits for LGBTQ communities since it could still exclude BIPOC communities.”
- SNF staff could offer permitting assistance for those who do not have access to the internet or who have trouble acquiring a permit.
- Provide bilingual materials for visitors in the BWCAW.
- Participant Quote: “Forest Service staff, especially backcountry rangers, should take a cultural competency/humility course.”
- Hire BIPOC staff and increase visibility of staff in the BWCAW.
- Participant Quote: “Diversify the staff at the Forest Service that work within the BWCAW. It would be helpful to make the USAJobs process easier to do this or identify the barriers and help close the gaps.”
- Fund BIPOC run programming.
- Offer transportation assistance to the BWCAW for those who do not have access to a vehicle.

4. COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

SNF is interested in improving communication, coordination, and education with partners and visitors. As part of this assessment, National Center staff asked participants to describe any examples of coordination or communication efforts with the SNF on BWCAW issues that worked well in the past or any that did not work well. This section of the report chronicles those participant insights into how SNF might strengthen its communication with others.

4.1 Challenges

Many participants highlighted the importance of having effective interpersonal relationships with Forest Service Rangers and other SNF staff. People who live near the Forest highlighted the clarity of communication around fire management, and that State and Local partners value the strong inter-agency coordination. Regular and transparent communication around management decisions is particularly important to cooperators, outfitters and others who live in Forest gateway communities. Participants noted that some communication breakdowns are related to availability of SNF personnel to address the challenges people face in wilderness areas. Other communication challenges stemmed from unclear messaging to the public, lack of information given to SNF partners, and poor signage in the BWCAW. Related challenges are outlined below:

Availability of Forest Service Personnel

- Visitors are unclear who to contact at the SNF and for what service. Some participants said there is very little information online to direct them to the right point of contact.
- Some visitors don't know who to call to get information or how to get help regarding a reservation. Sometimes they will be sent to Recreation.gov or the Ranger Station and then will get different answers.
 - Participant Quote: "Communication with individual rangers can be good depending on the ranger. As things go up the Forest Service chain, things become opaquer and the more political the decision-making appears to be."

Forest Service Communication with the Public about the BWCAW

- Some participants felt that the Forest Service has been conveying unclear messaging to the public, such as the BWCAW is "overrun," it is "difficult to visit," or when natural disasters happen that the "BWCAW is burned down." They believe this is changing public perceptions and encouraging some visitors not to visit. A few individuals spoke about the need for more effective narratives about the BWCAW.
- Participant Quote: "During the fire year, there was an unprecedented closure of the Boundary Waters. Messaging was mishandled by the Forest Service causing collateral damage. The Boundary Waters Public Relations team conveyed a narrative that the Boundary Waters had burned down. This impacted visitor numbers."
- Participant Quote: "Forest Service also messages that the BWCAW is overrun, and this is changing public perceptions. The BWCAW is different in each region and while some areas may be overcrowded, other regions are not. This may discourage people from visiting the BWCAW."

BWCAW Signage and Materials

- Information on the BWCAW is not clear or specific enough and should be more accessible.
- Some participants suggested SNF increase campsite and trail signage throughout the BWCAW.
- Other participants felt that too many signs take away from the pristine nature of the experience, and the lack of signs in wilderness is different and special.
- Participant Quote: "Current signage emphasizes recreation as the main purpose of the area and focuses on western centric values."
- Participant Quote: "The Forest Service has the most bureaucratic process to communicate things like human waste and they need someone who can develop

messages that are impactful to people.”

- Maps are hard to read, and visitors don’t always know which areas are private lands vs public lands.
- Information on Recreation.Gov are only in English – no other language is available.
- Participant Quote: “The website is mostly communicated to a general American user. There is not better messaging for people who are accessing the places more frequently. Maybe there’s two websites for people who are coming to visit or people who live in the area.”

Forest Service Communication with Partners

- Permit reductions were not communicated in advance.
- Those who are holding guide cards but are not outfitters do not get the same amount of communication as the outfitters and cooperators.
- There is a need for better communication with search and rescue to be able to evacuate people and be efficient.
 - Participant Quote: “We’ve had a significant increase of false alarms from spot locators because they’re rolling around in backpacks. Spot locators are being given out by cooperators. Our search and rescue folks are volunteers, and it takes a lot of time to find the people and we have to wait for permission to go into the BWCAW. However, some of the spot locators have texting capabilities so that we can figure out if we need to go help people or if it is a mistake.”
- Several cooperators, guides, and outfitters said there is not enough SNF communication with them outside of the scheduled cooperator meetings.
- Participant Quote: “Cooperators have great information on pinch points in the BW and the travel patterns. When visitors return to the cooperators, they tell them about what they did and what they saw. They are not telling the Forest Service these things.”
- Participant Quote: “They [cooperators, outfitters, and guides] are a wealth of knowledge on what people are doing in the Wilderness and their experiences. The Forest Service only sees people before their trips and not usually during or after their trips.”
- Participant Quote: “We want to be seen as a resource, but the Forest Service continues to view us as having an economic agenda. A smaller group of cooperators could assist in helping to manage the different types of users for example.”
- Participant Quote: “A trail was taken out and we told the Forest Service that we could try and work on it. We did about 6 miles of it. But the Forest Service changed their mind and did not want us to assist anymore. One of our attorneys pointed out that they would have to change their plan and then they said we could do it. Things have been better now through building trust.”

Visitor Education Challenges

Participants suggested that there is insufficient education for the general visitor and groups who are less familiar or unfamiliar with the low impact requirements of the Wilderness area. Participants encouraged more learning for everyone in the BWCAW, noting “*we need to have some ethics to protect wild wisdom and direct learning from nature.*” Many felt visitors lack sufficient education about “Leave No Trace” policies and other rules.

- Cooperators have noticed that visitors lack attention to the educational videos. Some said the videos are confusing and do not include the number one rule violation – “*no glass bottles or*

cans in the BWCAW.”

- Since videos are only sent to the trip leaders, only the trip leaders are required to watch the videos. Others on the trips most likely do not receive sufficient education because they do not watch the video segments. However, a participant noted that the rules are on the paper permits. There is some tension around how visitors should be educated.
- Participant Quote: “In the past it was kind of like the video police... Went from accusations of outfitters and cooperators having to show people, even if tiring, to the opposite extreme. We are worried about people making these decisions on their own. Product is not the same and user is not the same. Guests are coming for shorter times than they used to and not moving so much. Want easy access and one base camp. The easy fix by Forest Service was to cut the permits but that is not the answer to address this ‘soft laziness’ by the public.”
- Other participants emphasized that visitors need more safety guidance about navigation and route finding. One participant stated that, “*There was a boy scout group that needed rescuing by others using the BWCAW because they didn’t know how to traverse the BWCAW lakes well.*”

4.2 Communication and Education Opportunities

Participants pointed to the importance of building relationships with local communities and Tribes. They emphasized communication that is more intentional than generic such as only informing the Tribes through general newsletters and emails. Participants suggested how SNF might improve education challenges in the BWCAW. They recommended SNF encourage visitors to uphold “Leave No Trace” policies and create new education and resource materials for recreating in the BWCAW. Participant suggestions are outlined below.

Build Better Relationships and Work Strategically with BWCAW Partners

- Establish a SNF liaison with certain groups to relay critical information. Utilize the groups to share the information shared by SNF with their respective networks.
- Forest Service staff should be out in the field talking to partners more to observe and understand the needs of the BWCAW.
- Forest Service staff would get more buy-in from outfitters and cooperators if these entities were included in decision-making.
- Participant Quote: “One of the district rangers came up to my cabin and just sat and chatted with me about my thoughts on the BWCAW.”
- Collaborate with Heart of the Continent group on research and management workshops.
- Host a research and management symposium every two or three years.
- Host a summit on the BWCAW every year to discuss what is or isn’t working.
- Identify more informal collaboration opportunities with partners.
- Suggest outfitters/cooperators/guides to keep their websites up to date.
 - For example, one participant called an outfitter for a canoe and found out on the phone that they don’t do canoe rentals anymore. The website was not up to date.
- Establish a “Friends’ group.” A “Friends group” is a partnership made up of a nonprofit Friends organization and a Forest. The Friends group and Forest share a primary mission and objective.
- Partner with gateway communities to provide an education and feedback loop for SNF.
- Encourage partnerships between SNF and backcountry search and rescue groups to better coordinate on incidents.

Communicate Earlier and More Often

- Even if the information is sensitive, consider holding an informal meeting with key parties.
 - Participant Quote: “Cooperators want to be in the loop.”
- Send out surveys to gather information.
- Outfitters, guides, and cooperators would like to be notified before the general public when the BWCAW is being closed.
- During the Spring/Fall cooperator meetings, SNF should be able to provide information directly or have a feedback loop if they must go to FS headquarters for answers.
- Have a decision tree or communication plan that disseminates different communication based on what the information is.
- Co-create messaging with the local communities.
- Emails that are sent about regular communication should draw attention to what is important to read.

Effective Communication Tools

- Host a specific BWCAW website or forum that is monitored by SNF with information on what visitors need to know, where to go, tips, etc.
- Have local IT help available for website issues.
- Publish up-to-date reports on closures, fishing, ice, water levels, etc.
- Publish an updated organizational chart on the website and delineate who to contact at the Forest Service for what type of topics.
- Develop a blog or website that shows where things are happening at campsites in real time.
- Create a map of the system by lake or river where visitors can put it in comments about the routes.
- Use social media to address usage challenges:
 - Participant Quote: “Highlight a lake on social media to advertise other areas to visit, but don’t give away all the secrets.”

“Leave No Trace” Considerations

- Enhance education on “Leave No Trace” policies using a variety of communication methods.
- Participant Quote: “When you have to do it by hand it is more impactful. The online form that the outfitter is doing for you can be very hands off. There is something about having group leaders have to physically sign off and check the boxes. The backside of a current permit has many of these things, but they often get checked by someone else.”
- Request visitors to sign off on an agreement that states if you are found in violation of a rule that the visitor forfeits the permit or the right to future permits for a certain amount of time. All trip leaders and alternates would need to sign for their group.
- Partner with “Keep it Clean,” which was started by Lake of the Woods for the winter.
- Solicit more commitment from group leaders to encourage people to take care of the BWCAW like collecting cans.

Wilderness Education and Resource Materials

- Create additional education materials targeted for different types of visitors: the casual visitor, non-motorized boaters, stand-up paddlers, kayakers, canoers, etc.
- Develop interpretation materials and signage that promotes the idea of wilderness that is

deeper than recreation (for example, cultural uses, more integrative understanding of the sacredness of these lands and waters, and highlights the area's historical, cultural and religious/spiritual significance to Anishinaabe people).

- Outfitters, cooperators and guides need to work together to do more to help educate clients such as hosting a forum.
- Develop maps that can outline a variety of routes and areas for campers, hikers, and canoers to explore.
- Develop more accurate fish maps.
- Produce higher quality and more up-to-date videos and online material; create more creative messaging to reach and capture the attention of younger generations of users who might be creating the most impact and using the BWCAW more.
- Require a quiz for repeat visitors instead of requiring them to watch the education video to acquire a permit.
- The Forest Service should offer visitors a certificate of completion that confirms they have watched the education videos.
- Provide education workshops with BIPOC and other underrepresented communities (day and evening programming in the Twin Cities, for example, to reach those who work 9-5 jobs).
- Participant Quote: "Learning different ways of knowing and being in wilderness. There is a perceived way of white western male of wilderness and there is a lot of opportunities to learn from BIPOC and indigenous ways of wilderness and wilderness management."
- Provide training or access to training information on forest fire response for cooperators, guides, and outfitters.

4.3 Examples of Effective Communication

Participants were asked to share examples of good coordination and communication efforts they had experienced with the Forest Service on BWCAW issues. Many of these examples surrounded natural disaster protocols. Local, State, and Federal agencies spoke about effective interagency communication and coordination during fires and other natural disasters. An agency participant stated that, "*good communication is working through the "Heart of the Continent" meetings.*" Other participants shared the following:

- People emphasized good relationships with local SNF staff, including those who work in the BWCAW.
 - Participant Quote: "Consistency of staff in the East Zone is very good; people are approachable."
 - Participant Quote: "Overall, our communication with Forest Service has been really good and that's why the reduction in permits was a surprise."
- Cooperators noted that the organized cooperator meetings generally work well for getting a lot of information. They do not always allow time to delve into specifics or get non-agenda questions answered.
 - Participant Quote: "Cooperator meetings are helpful, but sometimes (there is) too much detail on particular issues like fires."
- Communication during forest fires and other natural disasters was cited as a positive example by many.

- During the fires, the Forest Service communicated well with the public by holding press conferences and providing information on where the closures occurred in the BWCAW.
 - Participant Quote: “There was a tornado that hit a trail and the Forest Service went to assess it. We stayed in contact with the Forest Service and by mid-May the trail was ready to go. The trail was in bad shape before that. It was only because we stayed in good contact and worked collaboratively.”
 - Participant Quote: “If the road is blocked where I am, there is no way out. The Forest Service came out and told us how to get out, gave us sandbags, told us how to communicate, and said the worst thing that would happen would be that we would have to kayak up the river and they would pick us up via helicopter.”

Preferred Methods of Communication

As part of the discussions around what is working and what could be improved, participants were asked about preferred ways to receive and provide information to SNF about the BWCAW. The majority said e-mail was ideal for most issues since it provided a way to keep track of communications. Phone calls are appreciated for urgent matters, and in-person visits and meetings are appropriate for certain topics. Table 1 below summarizes participants’ preferred methods of communication for different situations.

Table 1: Preferred Methods of Communication

Type of Communication	When This Type of Communication is Best
E-Mail	For routine information – numerous participants noted that it’s the most convenient way to track and reference past correspondence.
Phone Call	For communication with cooperators, outfitters, guides, and lodges during urgent natural disasters such as the recent fire ban. For complex or sensitive information.
Text Messages	For emergency information.
Newsletters	To highlight current initiatives and opportunities to engage in wilderness planning/policy/management.
Social Media (for example: Facebook, Instagram)	For information sharing.
Face-to-Face	For relationship building. When topics are sensitive.
Meetings	For relationship building. For information sharing during the winter and spring to help plan out the next year and learn from the prior year.
Postcard	For reminders (example: outfitters mentioned that the postcard reminder about their guide report being due is helpful.)

5. NATIONAL CENTER RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section provides some overarching and specific recommended actions for the Superior National Forest team to consider. The National Center recommends the SNF discuss and assess the feasibility of the participant suggestions that appear throughout this report. Below are some key considerations from each of the major discussion areas: 1) Management 2) Communication and Education, and 3) Collaboration. These key considerations are derived in large part from salient issues that emerged in participant discussions. Follow-up meetings between SNF and the National Center can assist with clarity of what is being recommended.

5.1 Management – Key Considerations

Conversations with assessment participants resulted in the identification of several issues, concerns, and ideas important to specific individuals and interest groups. Section 3 above details participant views on challenges and opportunities to address them. The following sections highlight recommendations derived from the assessment discussions that should be considered by SNF. These include the need for transparency in decision making, following through on stakeholder engagement actions, working closely with Tribes, developing cooperative management approaches, increasing staff-visitor interactions, revisiting the permit system, and improving accessibility of the Wilderness area for underrepresented visitors.

Transparency

Management decisions by the SNF do not appear to be transparent to many participants, and some decisions --like closures or visitor use permit quotas -- felt arbitrary to some people. A participant shared the perception that *“People from DC are making decisions about a place they’ve never been to or (don’t) know. They should be on the ground to understand the types of decisions to make here.”*

- Increase transparency by communicating early and often about any changes that will impact cooperators and outfitters, partners, advocacy groups, gateway communities, and local agencies who coordinate with SNF.
- Clarify how Forest Service decisions are made through informal and formal channels of communication, as well as the data utilized to make those decisions, especially to those that issue visitor use permits.

Follow-through

Participants that elected to give their feedback on management issues seemed hopeful that this assessment could bring some change in management practices. However, some invited parties chose not to participate in this assessment due to concerns about how the Forest Service would act on information provided, or doubts that any implementing actions would occur. A few participants shared this perspective, *“From my experience, any concerns or issues that have been voiced from our community to the Forest Service are left unanswered. I have reason to believe this assessment report will be no different. I’m referring to the concerns of outfitters, and also the residents of Ely and surrounding area.”*

- Provide more updates via website, social media, and other mediums of communication about management decisions or public engagement opportunities that build on this assessment effort.

Utilize and Incorporate Tribal Knowledges, Worldviews, and Perspectives

The National Center was unable to have conversations with Tribal Nations that have an interest in how the SNF manages the Forest in general, including the BWCAW. SNF invited Tribes to participate in this assessment, but those Tribes determined they would engage the SNF separately. Some tribal representatives shared that Tribal Governments want to ensure that they do not diminish their tribal sovereignty and Government-to-Government consultation requirements by participating in the assessment. Several participants suggested that Tribes should be more involved in BWCAW management. A participant said, *“it is important to me to know how to use the BW in the way that the Tribes have used it.”* Another participant stated, *“Spiritual values need to be incorporated into management. We can’t intrude too much with our management and should incorporate our values. This management should be led by those who have been there longer.”*

The National Center recommends the following:

- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of current communication and coordination with Tribal partners on BWCAW issues specifically.
- Identify areas where coordination might be increased on relevant BWCAW management issues.
- Engage Tribes through established MOUs and/or new Government-to-Government consultation processes.

Increase Cooperative Management Options

Participants suggested SNF should collaborate and partner with key parties on the management of the BWCAW wherever feasible. Participants suggested SNF explore cooperative management opportunities for BWCAW and the Quetico Provincial Park (QPP). Additionally, some participants suggested using agency partners and other interested partners to help maintain the BWCAW.

- Convene a group of Tribal and Forest Service fire management experts to develop a fire management plan.
- Partner with appropriate entities to study the various impacts of invasive species in the BWCAW and/or share information about any work that is currently underway to address this challenge.
- Consider more opportunities to coordinate and/or share best practices and lessons learned with QPP partners and any opportunities to coordinate on joint management issues that involve BWCAW and QPP as a contiguous unit.
- Utilize the National Forest Stewardship Act to deploy volunteers to assist in BWCAW maintenance.

Consider New Ways to Address Visitors Impacts and Improve Relationships with the Wilderness

- The National Center understands that SNF may already be studying visitor behavior and impacts. Participant comments suggest that SNF might update strategies to assess current use patterns throughout the BWCAW to better understand recent visitor types and impacts. Wilderness impacts could be reduced by updating strategies to spread visitors more effectively throughout the BWCAW.
- Consider additional studies/surveys of what people want out of their BWCAW experience.
- Provide additional information in interpretive signage about what is and what is not allowed in the BWCAW.
- Strengthen Leave No Trace Regulations and Enforcement

Increase Staff Interactions with Visitors and Partners

Most participants had positive interactions with locally based staff who they encountered in the BWCAW and on the rest of the SNF. They value those interpersonal encounters.

- Increase SNF field-based staff in the BWCAW, as budgets allow.

- Increase opportunities for coordination and co-learning between SNF wilderness rangers and other staff, along with the public who live in gateway communities.
- Increase visibility of BWCAW staff in busy areas to educate people on Leave No Trace and provide enforcement as needed.

Balance Visitor Use Permit System Needs

A critical question from some parties was, “How do you provide more equitable access to permits and still manage overcrowding?” There is a perception that cutting permits and reducing access may improve impacts to campsites, trails, and portages but unfairly limit access to the public or have unequal impacts on businesses that rely on local tourism.

- Share available information/data with visitors and interested groups. to inform people about how and why permit system decisions are made.
- Consider a more nuanced visitor permit system to better distribute visitors away from entry points and prevent overcrowding and related impacts of noise and stress to natural resources.
- Consider ways to lengthen the time allowed for access to permits on recreation.gov (i.e., rolling basis)
- Set aside some permits for underrepresented user groups and local visitors.

Improve Accessibility

- Consider more formal partnerships (MOU, etc.) with organizations that represent diverse underrepresented groups who desire wilderness education and access to the BWCAW.
- Examine the visitor permit system to ensure it does not disadvantage certain user groups, including those with less or no access to fast internet and those for whom English is not a first language.
- Consider reserving some permits for BIPOC and other underrepresented visitors.
- Provide cross-cultural or cultural competency training to field staff.

Create a Forum for Dialogue on Motorboat Uses in the BWCAW

- Create a safe space to discuss various perspectives and to explore possibilities where modifications might be made to management direction, within the existing legislation.

5.2 Communication and Education – Key Considerations

The National Center suggests utilizing the preferred methods of communication for different situations as outlined by participants in Figure 2 on p. 26. Additionally, consider participants’ needs for the following:

Consider New Materials and Platforms

- Where possible, produce more up-to-date videos and online material; develop creative messaging to reach and capture the attention of younger generations of visitors who might be using the BWCAW more and creating the most impact.
- Develop additional targeted education materials for different types of visitors such as the casual user, motorboat users, non-motorized boaters (kayakers, canoers, etc.), and stand-up paddlers.

Expand the Narrative of the BWCAW

- Develop interpretation materials and signage that promotes the idea of wilderness that is deeper than recreation (for example, cultural uses, more integrative understanding of the sacredness of these lands and waters, and highlights the area’s historical, cultural and religious/spiritual significance to Anishinaabe peoples).
- Create additional educational materials to more effectively prepare visitors to experience and respect the Wilderness area.

Campsites and Trails

- Communicate and update visitors on BWCAW priorities and maintenance activities via newsletters and social media.
- Educate visitors about alternative routes and under-utilized campsites within the BWCAW.
- Educate visitors about areas outside the BWCAW that provide similar opportunities and are easier to access.
- Establish an online system that allows visitors to provide feedback or alert SNF to visually indicate where there are maintenance needs.

5.3 Collaboration – Key Considerations

Most participants were excited or hopeful about the idea of more engagement with SNF staff and other parties. As highlighted in the Collaboration section above, many noted that they would be interested in participating in a collaborative process if it was well organized, could address specific topics, represented diverse interests, and was sensitive participants' time constraints. Needs for participation outlined by participants are covered in the Collaboration section of the report. Below are suggestions that relate to the structure of a group and considerations related to individual meetings:

Structure of a Collaborative Engagement Process

All participants felt any collaborative effort must be built around a compelling mission, purpose, and vision for engagement. It will be important to design a process with clear guidelines and clarity of roles for those involved. It will also be critical to have some SNF decisionmakers in the room to hear and learn directly from various participants. Participants want to ensure that decision-making authority on various issues is clear to them, even if the collaborative group is not a decision-making body. There should be an established feedback loop between SNF and participants on how input informs decision-making, including when work that arises from collaborative engagement is not utilized. SNF should also clarify Forest Service policies, mandates, and jurisdictions and how those impact current management.

The National Center recommends SNF be thoughtful and deliberate about diverse representation in any collaborative effort. Participation should be adequate and inclusive of various BWCAW interests and should include opportunities for participation of local and regionally interested parties as well as visitors from outside the region. Invite Tribal Governments to be part of any collaborative process even if they choose to engage in other ways. Following are additional suggestions that were central in the participant dialogues:

- Consider different terms for the group other than 'collaborative' (example: advisory committee, dialogue group, etc.).
- Consider utilizing a set of focus groups or sub-committees.
 - Have appropriate interested parties and subject matter experts at the table to tackle specific topics.
 - Sub-committees might focus on specific priorities related to management of the BWCAW, including communication, and education.
- Clarify the relationship to Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and determine if it will apply to the process.
- Provide an official invitation to those invited to join a collaborative group so that it can be included in their job description to ensure that people can fully commit to the effort.

Meetings

Based on participant input, a collaborative group should meet consistently but be sensitive to the time demands on individuals and organizations. Regular meetings might be most effective on a quarterly basis but seek to avoid peak tourist season. Standing meetings that people can plan to attend will help improve turnout. Seek to design in-person meetings where relationship building can be paramount but allow for a hybrid option to accommodate the realities of vast regional participation and competing priorities. Collaboratively build meeting agendas with participants to ensure co-creation of focus areas. This will ensure that agenda topics are meaningful to both SNF and all other participants. Lastly, participants often suggested that it will be important to focus on the issues that can be dealt with outside of legislation (within the scope of existing legislation).

5.4 Concluding Remarks

The National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution recommends Superior National Forest move forward with forming a collaborative group or other forms of sustained engagement to strengthen communication and to better coordinate on specific issues that might benefit from shared learning. The National Center has presented the results of the assessment to the SNF Steering Committee and SNF Forest Leadership Team to determine next steps. Based on the results of this assessment, SNF is now considering the scope, scale, and budget needed to convene a collaborative effort with a diverse cross-section of partners, stakeholders, and other interested parties. The National Center will be working with SNF to design a path forward and to advise SNF on what might be needed to convene a formal collaborative group.

APPENDIX A – ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS

Participant Affiliation	Participant Name
Adventurous Christians	Matt White
Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute	Jason Taylor
Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute	Lauren Redmore
Big City Mountaineers	Fred Sproat
BIPOC Outdoors Twin Cities	Asha Shoffner
Border Route Trail Association	Gary Carlson
Boundary Waters Advisory Committee	Rod Markin
BW Activist and Historian	Chuck Dayton
BWCAW Coalition	Carrie Ohly-Cusack
BWCAW User	Justin A.
BWCAW User	Francis Beloy
BWCAW User	Aaron Bergsma
BWCAW User	Marcy Byrns
BWCAW User	Sara Citrowske
BWCAW User	Leonard Clewett
BWCAW User	Dean Cooper
BWCAW User	Carol DeSain
BWCAW User	Patrick Fay
BWCAW User	Mark Flom
BWCAW User	Lynden Gerdes
BWCAW User	Jennifer Greenberg
BWCAW User	Elizabeth Jefferson
BWCAW User	Anonymous
BWCAW User	Michael Kennedy
BWCAW User	Kent Olson
BWCAW User	Aaron Onsrud
BWCAW User	Steve Perunovich
BWCAW User	Paul Schlueter
Camp Mishawaka	Stephen Purdum
Canada Border Services	Kim Beaudry
Central Michigan University	Bob Dvorak
Conservationists with Common Sense	Nancy McReady
Cook County	James Joerke
Cook County Sheriff Office	Pat Eliassen
Custom Cabin Rental	Willy Vosburgh
Duluth County	Phil Jents
Ely County	Roger Skraba
Ely Community Resource	Julie Hignell
Ely Fishing Guide Company	Rob Nelson
Ely Outfitting	Jason Zabokrtsky

Participant Affiliation	Participant Name
Friends of the BWCAW	Max Kieley
Friends of the BWCAW	Chris Knopf
Friends of the BWCAW	Scott Beauchamp
Friends of the BWCAW	Ozzie Reif
Girl Scouts of MN & WI Lakes and Pines	Melissa Garza
Girl Scouts of MN & WI Lakes and Pines	Ann McNally
Grand Portage National Monument	William Clayton
Gunflint Northwoods Outfitters	John Fredrickson
Hauling Dogs LLC	Shawn McCarty
Hungry Jack Canoe Outfitters	David Seaton
Jasper Company	Don Beans
Lake County Sheriff Office	Nathan Stadler
Lake County Sheriff Office	Timothy Luoma
Lake Vermilion Resort and Tourism Association	Dan Deban
LaTourell's Resort & Outfitters	Bob LaTourell
Listening Point Foundation	Steffi O'Brien
MN Department of Natural Resources	Shelly Patten
North Country Canoe Outfitters	John Schiefelbein
North Country Trail Association	Matt Davis
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness	Becky Rom
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness	Ingrid Lyons
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness	Matt Norton
Northern Tier BSA	Blake Ferree
Outdoor Afro	Stephen Scott
Piragis Northwoods Company	Drew Brockett
Prior Forest Service Employee	Steve Cochran
Prior Forest Service Employee	Barbara Soderberg
Quetico Provincial Park	Trevor Gibb
Sawbill Canoe Outfitters	Clare Shirley
Sawbill Canoe Outfitters	Dan Shirley
Seagull Canoe Outfitters	Deb Mark
Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute - Northland College	Alan Brew
Snowbank Lodge and Outfitters	Adam Jensen
Society for Wilderness Stewardship - Midwest region	Julia Cotter
Spirit of the Wilderness Outfitters	Ginny Nelson
Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters	Bob St. Pierre
St Louis County Sheriff Office	Jason Akerson
St. Louis County	Paul McDonald
Stone Harbor Wilderness Supply	Annika Truebenbach
The Nature Conservancy - Minnesota/Canada	Ann Mulholland
Timber Trail Lodge & Outfitters	Peter Kostantacos
Tuscarora Outfitters	Ada Igoe
Tuscarora Outfitters	Andy McDonnell
University of Minnesota	Lee Frelich
University of Minnesota Boreal Forest and Community Resilience	Ingrid Schneider

Participant Affiliation	Participant Name
Project	
University of Minnesota Boreal Forest and Community Resilience Project	Mae Davenport
US Customs and Border Protection	Erich Rohr
Virginia Tech	Joe Roggenbuck
Visit Cook County	Linda Jurek
Visit Cook County	Kjersti Vick
Voyageur Canoe Outfitters	Matt Ritter
Voyageur Canoe Outfitters	Mike Prom
Voyageurs National Park	Bob Degross
Wilderness Inquiry	Cyri Tjaden
Wilderness Watch and BWCAW Historian	Kevin Proescholdt
Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center	Peter Smerud
Women's Wilderness Discovery	Peta Barrett
YMCA Camp Menogyn	Meghan Cosgrove
YMCA Camp Menogyn	Brent Saxton
YMCA Camp Widjiwagan	Matt Poppleton

APPENDIX B – DISCUSSION GUIDE

Discussion Guide - Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Assessment

Introduction

The [U.S. Forest Service \(Forest Service\) Superior National Forest \(SNF\)](#) is working with the [National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution](#) (National Center), a program of the [Udall Foundation](#), to conduct an independent, neutral situation assessment to gather input from a broad range of individuals and groups with interests in recreation, advocacy, or commercial use that live nearby, work in, and visit the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). The assessment will help SNF identify diverse areas of concern by those interested in the management of the BWCAW. The assessment discussions will also explore the possibilities of forming a public engagement process for interested parties or other forms of sustained engagement between the Forest Service and parties interested in the management of the Wilderness area. The SNF leadership believes a public engagement effort with interested parties can help improve communication of wilderness management principles and decisions, while also allowing people to engage with different viewpoints in a facilitated and cooperative environment. Determination of next steps and further engagement will be made based on outcomes of these assessment and later discussions with SNF.

Goals of Assessment

The goals of the assessment discussions are to:

- Learn about current issues, interests, and concerns from interested parties related to the management of the BWCAW. (Tribes, Stakeholders, Partners)
- Gather ideas on the formation of a SNF-led public engagement effort that would consist of a diverse cross-section of parties interested in the BWCAW.
- Identify key parties who would like to engage at various levels (meetings, calls, etc.)
- Identify barriers to participation and suggestions for an effective engagement process.

Background

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is one of the largest, oldest, and most legislatively complex, heavily marketed and visited federally designated wilderness areas in the nation. Within the last five years, the BWCAW had an annual average of approximately 150,000 visitors. Complex wilderness management decisions often necessitate the need for periodic communication assessments between all interested parties to ensure a greater shared understanding of management complexities. In 2022, the Superior National Forest researched opportunities for public engagement assistance concerning BWCAW issues and contacted the National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution.

The National Center is a program of the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation, an independent, nonpartisan Federal agency of the Executive Branch. The National Center provides collaboration, consensus-building, and conflict resolution services on a range of environmental, natural, and cultural resources, Tribal, and public lands issues involving the Federal Government. In more than 20 years of operation, the National Center has provided neutral and impartial assistance on over 650 projects across the country. The facilitation, mediation, assessment, and capacity building services provided by the National Center support public and stakeholder participation in Federal programs and

projects as well as engagement with agency partners while improving decision-making, increasing efficiencies through timely project implementation, improving communication and relationships, and offering more durable and implementable outcomes.³

The National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution Facilitation Team conducting the discussions includes Seth Cohen, Melanie Knapp, and Courtney Owen.

Steering Committee Members

The National Center is working with a Steering Team comprised of members of SNF to plan and conduct this assessment. SNF staff will not be present in the discussions, but they will receive a summary of the assessment results without attribution of discussion participants (see Confidentiality below).

Discussion Logistics

Due to COVID-19, discussions will be conducted virtually via phone, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. Individual discussions will be one hour. Focus group discussions will be 1.5 hours. Discussions will not be recorded (see below for additional details).

Confidentiality

These discussions are confidential. The National Center will summarize insights from these discussions without attribution. The National Center will capture notes from these discussions and do everything legally possible to honor that confidentiality. Notes from discussions are used for internal use **only** by National Center staff. The National Center will share compiled results of the discussions with the Superior National Forest Team and participants. The National Center will include a list of all individuals that participated and their affiliations in an appendix to the results.

Results of the Assessment

Following the discussions, the National Center will compile the information, prepare an analysis of the range of views from the participants, and results of the assessment will be shared with participants for review and comment. We will then revise the compilation document as appropriate and present it as discussion themes and opportunities. Utilizing the assessment results, the National Center will work with the SNF steering committee to develop recommendations and provide support to consider next steps for engagement with BWCAW parties.

³ Additional information about the National Center is available at: www.udall.gov.

Assessment Discussion Questions

1. Please tell us a little about your background and your (or your organization's) association with the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW)? Why is the BWCAW important to you?
2. What do you see as the most pressing wilderness management issues, topics, or challenges that need to be addressed in the BWCAW?
3. Any thoughts or suggestions on how to improve the management of this designated wilderness?
4. Can you describe an example of coordination or communication efforts with the Forest Service on BWCAW management issues that worked well in the past and didn't work well in the past? What do you wish had been handled differently and how?
5. What is your preferred way to receive and provide information about the BWCAW with the Forest Service?
6. What are your thoughts about the Superior NF setting up a collaborative group or other form of sustained engagement that allows for multi-party dialogue on wilderness management issues?
 - a. What would help make a collaborative process successful?
 - b. Would you /your organization or agency be interested in participating in a collaborative process with the Forest Service and other interested parties?
 - c. What would you/ your organization or agency need to participate in a collaborative process (examples: ethics review, official invitation, ground rules/working agreement, group norms; working charter, etc.)?
 - d. Would you have any concerns about staying involved in a collaborative process (examples: meeting frequency, logistics, location etc.)? Do you see any barriers that would need to be addressed?
7. Are there other interested parties you have strong relationships with on BWCAW issues or who you feel represent your viewpoints on wilderness management issues. Please share any of these organizations or individuals that you feel should be considered for future collaborative efforts.
8. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we have not discussed?