

Chronology

- 1899** Minnesota legislature enacts a law allowing the federal government to reserve tracts of forest land in the state
- 1902** Morris Act passes which reserves specific forest tracts by the federal government
- 1905-1908** U.S. General Land Office withdraws a total of 659,700 acres into the forest reserves
- 1909** February 13: President Theodore Roosevelt signs Executive Order, Proclamation 848, to establish the Minnesota (later known as the Chippewa) and Superior National Forests
- Minnesota Fish and Game Commission establishes the Superior Refuge comprising 1.2 million acres
- 1916-1921** \$33 million appropriated to build roads in the national forests; it is a potential threat to wilderness characteristics of the region
- 1916** Federal-Aid Road Act enacted
- 1919** Recreational use of the Superior National Forest attracts 12,750 visitors to the region
Landscape architect Arthur H. Carhart is hired by the U.S. Forest Service to begin studying recreational uses of the forests
- 1922** Carhart submits a report to Associate Forester Carl J. Stahl advocating the preservation of parts of the Superior National Forest as a wilderness area.
Carhart's report is accepted, and Stahl withdraws \$53,000 intended to fund a circle tour motor route through the heart of the border country wilderness
Carhart resigns from the Forest Service to advocate for wilderness status for parts of the Superior National Forest
- 1924-1926** First major controversy over the border country erupts between "Good Roads" advocates who want to build roads through the forest and the champions of wilderness protection
- 1923** April 3: A conference convenes in Duluth to discuss the issue of road building in the border country; anti-road forces and government officials in attendance almost unanimously oppose additional roads in the area; conferees adopt resolutions advocating the purchase of all private lands in the Superior National Forest and the extension of all three parts of the forest to the Canadian border.
Conference results in the formation of the Superior National Forest Recreation Association to lobby for the expansion and consolidation of the forest; the association's mission is to function as the forest's guardian; group associates with the Isaac Walton League through its newsletter. The Isaac Walton League will play a major role in the preservation of the border country

- Secretary of Agriculture Henry C. Wallace cancels the road project from Ely to Buyck and part of the Ely to Gunflint and Grand Marais to Gunflint roads; the Gunflint and Echo trails were later built to facilitate limited movement into the interior
- 1926** Secretary of Agriculture W.M. Jardine establishes the first primitive area in the border country; withdraws 1,000 square miles (640,000 acres) from development in the Superior National Forest to be set aside for wilderness designation
- 1926-1930** Struggle ensues in the border country over the attempts by E.W. Backus and his investors to dam up many of the border lakes to generate hydro-electric power.
An opening at the outlet of Brule Lake is blasted to increase the flow of water into the South Brule River. Temperence River and other lakes in the area are affected by the change
- 1930** Shipstead-Newton-Nolan Act passed by the U.S. Congress to prevent the construction of power dams in the Rainy River Watershed; prohibits logging within 400 feet of shorelines with few exceptions; closes the area to settlement or homesteading or commercial development
Later the International Boundary Commission ended Backus' plans dam up the Rainy River watershed by ruling that the border lakes value lay in the "matchless...beauty and appeal beyond description...."
- 1930-1941** Additional lands acquired by the federal government through tax-forfeiture
- 1932** Chief Forester R.Y. Stuart approved *The Recreation Plan and Report of the Superior National Forest* which created the Superior Primitive Area
- 1933** State of Minnesota enacts legislation known as the "little Shipstead-Newton-Nolan Act" to protect state lands in the area from development
- 1934** Quetico-Superior Committee created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt
- 1939** Superior Roadless Primitive Area designated
- 1941-1958** Logging accelerates in the area around the roadless area; pulpwood logging in the primitive area; road built to Forest Center
- 1948** Thye-Blatnik Act passed by Congress; authorizes the U.S. Forest Service to purchase all lands still in private hands within two-thirds of the present B.W.C.A.W.; purchases could be made where necessary through eminent domain; St. Louis, Cook, and Lake counties to receive compensation for loss of lands in the area
- 1949** President Harry S. Truman issues a proclamation establishing an Air-Ban over the primitive area; flights below 4,000 feet restricted except in emergencies
- 1951** January 1: violators of the Air-Ban subject to arrest and trial

- 1956** Public Law 607 extended the authorization to purchase all publicly held land to all of the acreage in the present B.W.C.A.W.
- 1958** The area is designated the Boundary Waters Canoe Area to more accurately reflect the principal activities of visitors to the region
- 1961** \$4.5 million allocated for the purchase of privately held lands in the B.W.C.A.
- 1962-1964** Controversy erupts over logging, motor boat use, snowmobiling, road building and abuse of and littering in the area by visitors
- 1964** September 3: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Wilderness Act into law which defines wilderness and establishes the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area is included as part of the preservation system and includes almost 1.3 million acres of rocks, forest, 1,175 lakes, rivers and wetlands that extend along nearly 150 miles of the U.S. and Canadian border. The B.W.C.A. is a "special case" within the wilderness preservation system and Congress mandates that the Forest Service continue to manage the area "without necessary restrictions" on many uses of the area. The language of the act leads to decades of controversy, debate, and court cases over the definition proper use of the B.W.C.A.
December: The Selke Committee, headed by Dr. George Selke and appointed by Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, issues their report on the status of the B.W.C.A. The committee had included members from all constituent groups in the area.
- 1965** January: Secretary of Agriculture Freeman issues orders based on the Selke Report that increases the no-cut zone to 150,000 acres, limits the use of motor boats and snowmobiles to designated routes and bans them outright in other areas of the wilderness, establishes a visitor registration system to limit damage to the B.W.C.A.
- 1966-2005** Mineral prospecting and drilling for precious metals including copper and nickel continues near the borders of the B.W.C.A.W. No large scale mining commences in this time period
- 1975** Voyageur's National Park established by Congress protects much of the remaining border country from commercial and residential development without severely restricting recreational motor boat and snowmobiling use of the huge lakes within the park. The park is 218,000 acres and is essentially roadless.
The park is part of the Quetico-Superior ecosystem that includes the B.W.C.A.W., the Quetico Provincial Park, and the LeVerendrye Provincial Park and covers 2.5 million acres of internationally protected wilderness. The four areas encompass an area larger than Yellowstone National Park.
- 1978** Congress enacts the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act to officially cuts motor boat use in the wilderness from 62 to 24 percent of border lakes and bans all snowmobiling in the wilderness

except along two permanent trails into Canada; bans logging and mining within the B.W.C.A.W.

1991-1993 Lawsuits challenge the use of four motorized portages on the edge of the B.W.C.A.W. Courts order the portages closed in accordance with the 1978 law.

Local residents are outraged. Controversy between wilderness advocates and wise use proponents flares up again.

1996 Congressman Bruce Vento (4th Congressional District) and Congressman James Oberstar (8th Congressional District which includes the B.W.C.A.W. and Voyageur's National Park) introduce legislation to deal with the controversy. Vento's legislation would permanently close the portages and would designate Kabetogama Peninsula in the VNP as a wilderness. Oberstar's legislation would reopen the motorized portages and motor boat usage on four major lakes that had been closed in the 1978 law.

September: The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service held sessions between the competing interests. Hard-line positions on both sides led to little or no progress.

1998 A rider to the transportation bill authorized use of two of the truck portages. Prairie and Trout Lake portages reopen to motorized traffic.