

# FRIENDS of the BOUNDARY WATERS WILDERNESS



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The Friends' mission is to protect, preserve and restore the wilderness character of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Quetico-Superior Ecosystem. The organization was founded in 1976.

## Sulfide mining brings new threats to the Boundary Waters' doorstep

By Ron Meador

The canoe country of northern Minnesota is a resilient place.

Many of us have paddled by impressive stands of ancient-looking forest that, in fact, were cut over not so long ago. Logging roads become hiking trails or, given enough time, simply disappear. Fires once called catastrophic are now embraced as forces of natural, rhythmic renewal. Water quality climbs as acid rain declines.

But these recoveries are from injuries that were short-lived or reversible. The newest threat in the north woods—a perpetual flow of acidic, toxic, metal-laden drainage from sulfide mining—is forever.

For a few years, Friends has been watching with rising concern as mining companies propose to extract copper, nickel, platinum and other precious metals from low-grade, sulfur-laden ores in the wetlands of northeastern Minnesota.

This isn't a new idea—it comes in cycles, stirring excitement when metals prices are high, then fading when they fall. But this time the prices aren't falling. Extensive test drilling has already been conducted in and around Birch Lake, south of Ely, and more is planned in an adjoining area, south of the Kawishiwi River, that reaches nearly to the BWCAW boundary. The risks have never been more real.

And so, starting last fall, Friends has been putting together a campaign to block unsafe sulfide mining projects. You'll be hearing more about it in months to come, and we hope you'll want join efforts with us.

One mining enterprise is much further along in development and is likely to seek operating permits as early as this summer. That's the NorthMet project, proposed by PolyMet Mining Corp. of Vancouver, on sites between Babbitt and Hoyt Lakes.

Some of us at Friends visited the NorthMet facilities in January and, we admit, were highly impressed with PolyMet's advanced technology for processing ore. Instead of a smelter, for example, PolyMet proposes to extract precious metals using water and heat in a kind of autoclave, with a byproduct that can be turned into drywall. We admired, too, the company's plans to recycle extensive infrastructure at U.S. Steel's old Erie Plant.

Obtaining the ore, however, is still done the old-fashioned way—by blasting and ripping up rock in the style of strip mining. Nothing very new about waste disposal, either; crushed rock goes back into the holes, then gets a compacted soil covering on top and a plastic liner underneath. These barriers reduce the rain getting into the rock, and the drainage coming out, but they can't eliminate it.

If this were a taconite mine of the type so familiar to Minnesotans, the interaction of rain and tailings wouldn't be a big concern. Iron is mined in oxide ores, which react with air and water to make, well, rust. Sulfide ores, on the other hand, react with air and water to make sulfuric acid, which leaches toxic metals as it flows over crushed rock and drains into the surrounding environment.

PolyMet claims that this project will comply with all environmental laws and regulations—as if some of them were voluntary?—and will prove as much when it submits its environmental impact statement. That report was originally due in October 2006 and has been delayed multiple times; it's now expected no sooner than late August. However, the company has already said the Environmental Impact Statement will acknowledge that NorthMet will generate acid drainage that is likely to require perpetual capture and treatment.

That's a big problem, but certainly no surprise—as far as our

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**Sulfide Mining** *continued on page 4.*

## Message from the Executive Director

All friends of the Boundary Waters, of wilderness everywhere, lost a top-notch guide with Bill Rom's passing this January.

He knew the woods and waters of northern Minnesota's canoe country as well as anybody, of course, but he could also navigate the territories of business, policy and politics.

Bill and his family built a spectacularly successful business with Canoe Country Outfitters, which started out on overflow business from Ely's three other canoe liveries but grew over 20 years to claim more than half the market. The Roms also built Ely, as much as any other individuals, into the tourist destination it is today.

Of course, this did not keep the neighbors from objecting when Bill took stands that were unpopular in the community (and sometimes diverged from his personal preferences). Here was a pilot with a seaplane business who argued for controls on overflights above the Boundary Waters; a motorboater and snowmobiler who thought some parts of wilderness ought to be off-limits to such machines.

In response, some in Ely made middle-of-the-night visits to the Rom house to circle it on snowmobiles. Once, a homemade bomb, thankfully ineffectual, was set off under his porch. They didn't hang Bill in effigy—that honor was reserved for his mentor, Sig Olson—but they made up posters urging Elyites to "Run the Bum Rom Out of Town."

I was reading stories of Bill's unflinching advocacy for wilderness recently, some of which were as familiar as folk tales. But there were new stories, too, about his childhood in Ely and the wild territory beyond. From an early age, Bill was roaming the woods and paddling the lakes in all conditions and without the benefits of modern gear. Also, without the benefit of a guiding father; his dad was killed in a mine accident when Bill was about a month old.

It is said he could do 20 miles through waist-deep snow at the age of 12, and in better weather he was known to walk all day to a distant lake and back for a short spell of good fishing. As a teenager he began travelling far and wide by canoe to fish, hunt and explore wild country.

In early adulthood, two other influences joined wilderness in shaping Bill. One was Sigurd Olson, then dean of what's now Vermilion Community College, who taught Bill and became a lifelong mentor. The other was the U.S. Forest Service, which employed him—on Sig's recommendation—for such chores as a 10-week stint extending the Kekekabic Trail from Snowbank Lake to Pan Lake. His exploits as a summer worker read like excerpts from Norman MacLean, with Minnesota place names substituted for Montana's.

There are two more stories I particu-

Bill Rom exploring the Quetico.



Ron Meador

larly like. One is a tale Bill's daughter Becky tells about learning to fly a seaplane before she was old enough to drive. Bill taught her well, and was sufficiently confident in her skills to catch a lunchtime nap as she flew the pair of them back from dropping off a fishing party in Ontario.

The teaching and trust in that story bring me back to Bill's original idea, as he returned from Navy service in World War II, to make a business of taking young boys on canoe trips into the wilderness. It turned out to be less than a brilliant business scheme, but surely the motivation was right.

The other story is about Bill's last day, and the letter his family found on his desk after he had passed. It was a suggestion that perhaps new funds could be found to remove decades-old bottles and cans from bays within the BWCAW, dumped for the most part before Bill persuaded his fellow outfitters, and then the Forest Service, to stop the flow of that particular trash into the wilderness.

At 90 and in failing health, Bill was still focused on the ways the wilderness qualities of the BWCAW could be preserved and restored. The arc of his life reminds us that while much has been lost, much also has been saved, and much work remains to do.

His wife, Barbara, and her children decided to direct memorials given in Bill's name to the Friends, and we in turn have decided to use those funds for the critical work of recruiting the next generation of wilderness stewards—young people who can, in one way or another, trace his footsteps from youthful awareness to mature advocacy to lifelong commitment. What better legacy could we imagine? ●

*A memorial service will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, August 8, at Chapel Point in Camp Widjivagan, which is north of Ely on North Arm Road, off the Echo Trail.*



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# Vigilant Advocacy in Support of our Shared Wilderness Values

## Travel Management Plan could give the green light to ATVs

In 2005, the Forest Service closed much of the Superior National Forest to all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use while it developed a new travel management plan that would determine where the vehicles could and could not go. Before this move, ATV riders could legally ride almost anywhere they wanted in the Forest (outside the Wilderness). The decision was in response to significant damage that was being done by irresponsible riders taking their machines cross-country through fragile ecosystems such as creeks and bogs.

In early June the Forest Service released a proposed travel management plan, and the Friends has been leading the way in voicing the need for strong defense of the Wilderness to be incorporated into the final plan.

The Friends is particularly concerned about roads and trails that approach, touch or follow the BWCAW border, as many such roads are proposed to be opened to ATV use in the plan. Opening these roads is of particular concern because ATVs are known to be a major vehicle for the spread of non-native invasive species and the trails also could create noise pollution in the Wilderness that conflicts with the requirements of the 1978 Act which created the BWCAW.

Opening these types of roads to ATV use also could tempt reckless riders to venture beyond the designated trail and violate Wilderness boundaries. Additionally, the Friends is concerned about the potential increase in ATV traffic and violations near the BWCAW once this plan is finalized and used to market the region as a major destination for ATV enthusiasts.

Friends' staff and volunteers have been monitoring the condition of trails that are proposed for ATV use near the BWCAW and will continue advocating for the Wilderness when submitting comments to the Forest Service on its Environmental Assessment by the deadline in early July.

## Giving logging projects the attention they demand

There are currently four large logging proposals in various stages of approval on the Superior National Forest. The Friends has closely reviewed all of these projects and we are continuing to raise concerns and work with the Forest Service to improve these proposals.

The largest of the projects, and the one that will likely have the most noticeable impact on the BWCAW, has been dubbed the Glacier Project. This proposal includes clearcuts, partial cuts, prescribed burns, road-building, and snowmobile trail expansion on about 90,000 acres surrounding Ely. The Friends has expressed particular concern about the effect the project could have on the South Kawishiwi River and Gabbro Lake entry points to the BWCAW.

The most recently announced logging project is the Clara Project. The proposal calls for a variety of management approaches including burns, selective cuts, and clearcuts within and adjacent to several large roadless areas south of Brule Lake. While visiting the project area in May, Friends staff were impressed with many of the ecological restoration activities that have been proposed by the Forest Service. This area was once home to large stands of white and red pine and other conifers and the project provides an opportunity to help restore the area to its original splendor. However, the Friends has concerns about the effectiveness of some of the Forest Service's restoration proposals, the ongoing lack of funding for monitoring of

the success of these activities, the inappropriate location of proposed clearcuts and the continued failure to provide non-motorized recreation opportunities outside of the BWCAW as part of its Forest management proposals.

## June hearings in lawsuits

While the Friends is committed to doing everything the organization can to find creative solutions to resolve policy differences with the Forest Service and other parties, occasionally it is necessary to involve the court system in that endeavor. As a result, the Friends is currently involved in two lawsuits that are expected to be resolved this summer.

A hearing on our challenge to the Superior National Forest's management plan in early June focused on the Forest Service's failure to consider the impact of its plan on the BWCAW and the adverse effects of additional road building that is part of the proposed plan. The second lawsuit is over the Echo Trail logging project northwest of Ely, which focuses on several related issues including the Forest Service's failure to consider the effects of this large logging project on the Wilderness and the impact the project would have on native wildlife.

## Regional haze plan should clear the air

To meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act, Minnesota must achieve specific goals for air quality in the BWCAW and Voyageurs National Park. The Friends have been active in the campaign to enact a strong plan for dealing with haze in the BWCAW.

Meetings with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and other interested parties have been productive, with the Friends advocating in particular for regulation of pollution from taconite facilities as well as better controls for emissions from new sources. Previously, northern Minnesota's taconite facilities have been exempted from air pollution regulation. With the taconite industry growing and making unprecedented profits, the Friends argues that now is the best time for the state to enact regulations that would protect our natural resources and the health of citizens without harming Minnesota's economy.

A draft of Minnesota's regional haze State Implementation Plan (SIP) was released in early March. Collaborating with the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, Voyageurs National Park Association and the National Parks Conservation Association, the Friends submitted extensive comments to the MPCA in May, raising serious objections about the underlying assumptions and enforcement efforts that make up the proposal. Our comments are available online at <http://www.friends-bwca.org/programs/regionalhaze.html>.

## South Kawishiwi cabin group land exchange

From time to time, opportunities arise for the Forest Service to acquire private lands located on the Superior National Forest for the public's benefit. Recently, the Forest Service was offered the chance to exchange approximately 425 acres of land it owns south of Ely for about 1,250 acres of high-biodiversity land in three areas in the Forest (including some land inside the BWCAW along the Kawishiwi River).

Although the 425-acre plot is currently owned by the Forest Service, the land has been developed with privately owned cabins, and private parties hold long-term leases. In February, the Friends wrote to the Forest Service indicating our support for the proposed land swap with the caveat that current development restrictions on the cabin property should be maintained even after the property is transferred. A decision

*Continued on next page.*

from the Forest Service is pending, and we commend the Forest Service and the property owners for their continued work on this project.

### Protecting the Canada lynx in Minnesota

Last year, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) put Minnesota's Canada lynx in harm's way when it failed to designate any lands in Minnesota outside of Voyageurs National Park as critical habitat for that threatened species. When a high-ranking official in the USFWS was forced to resign due to corruption allegations, the lynx decision and seven others were reopened, giving the enigmatic species a second chance at protection.

A public meeting in Bloomington, Minn., in April was well attended, in part due to an e-mail alert we sent to our Twin Cities members. The Friends has also submitted comments to the USFWS voicing the need for broad protection of the lynx in northeastern Minnesota. ●

### Sulfide Mining *continued from page 1.*

research can determine, no sulfide mine has ever failed to yield acid drainage. This is an ugly legacy visible all over the American West, in the Appalachians, across large parts of Ontario and in other unfortunate settings around the world. In many of these places, the problem of controlling acid drainage from mothballed mines has fallen to taxpayers, in perpetuity.

Unfortunately, the environmental and fiscal risks of sulfide mining haven't gotten much attention among Minnesotans living outside the Arrowhead, where the subject has been given some visibility by the Sierra Club's North Star chapter and northern Minnesota groups affiliated with the Act Now Coalition.

Friends will use its resources to spread the word statewide through a public education campaign, while continuing to work with those groups, the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and others.

We think the best solution has already been demonstrated by neighboring Wisconsin. Its legislature, moved by problems with the Flambeau mine near Ladysmith, temporarily suspended permits for sulfide mining until applicants prove by example that their kind of mine can be operated and closed down without substantial environmental harm.

At a minimum, we think Minnesotans should insist that the legislature write these three principles into law:

- No permits for mines that will produce drainage requiring perpetual treatment.
- No permits for mines that can't put up an adequate "damage deposit" to ensure that taxpayers won't get stuck with the costs of problems they might leave behind.
- No mining in locations that would threaten places already protected for such special qualities as wilderness, scientific, cultural, historical or recreational interest.

You'll be hearing more about our campaign in the coming months, and we'd like to hear from you—especially if you're interested in helping us get the word out, perhaps by arranging a Friends presentation to your church or community group.

Financial support is also welcome, of course. This will be an expensive campaign, and unfortunately it's not of the type that tends to appeal to institutional grantmakers. So we'll be relying on our members and their gifts to keep unsafe sulfide mining from threaten-

ing the Boundary Waters and its surrounding ecosystem.

You can find a lot more information about sulfide mining issues on our website ([www.friends-bwca.org](http://www.friends-bwca.org)). If you have suggestions or help to offer, please drop a note to our policy director, Brian Pasko, at [brian@friends-bwca.org](mailto:brian@friends-bwca.org). ●

### Is the Friends against all mining in Minnesota?

Certainly not. Like everybody else, we use products made with copper, nickel, platinum and other metals that are the focus of new sulfide mining ventures in the Arrowhead (not to mention steel produced from Iron Range taconite).

As responsible conservationists, however, we don't want to see mining cause harm to surrounding natural resources. We're especially protective of the lakes and woodlands of the Boundary Waters and the Quetico-Superior region, whose health is the heart of our mission.

If a sulfide mine in northern Minnesota can be operated in an environmentally benign way, we'll be as proud as anyone of the engineering achievement and the economic boost.

But that's a high standard, and a mine that merely complies with current laws and regulations isn't good enough. Plenty of American mines that operated legally have left a legacy of permanent harm. ●

### Legislation would sell National Forest land to mining company

Even before Minnesota agencies begin environmental review of the NorthMet mine near Hoyt Lakes, Congress is being asked to approve a special, fast-track sale of Superior National Forest land that PolyMet proposes to strip-mine for copper, nickel and other metals.

Usually, a company with rights to minerals beneath federal land seeks to obtain surface rights by acquiring and trading other parcels in exchange for the mine site. But such exchanges must first be reviewed for overall benefit to the public, including environmental impacts. In this case, according to the U.S. Forest Service, the deed conveying these roughly 6,700 acres to the U.S. government back in the 1930s prohibits a strip mine there.

The Forest Service and PolyMet have been discussing land exchanges for a couple of years but have made little progress. Now a bill sponsored by U.S. Rep. James Oberstar would authorize the Forest Service to simply sell the NorthMet site—without prior review of public benefits or environmental harm—and spend the money on future land acquisitions.

Forest Supervisor Jim Sanders sees this as an opportunity to swap a lower-value piece of land for better parcels elsewhere. In the Friends' view, it's poor public policy to eliminate an important federal review of the NorthMet project—while establishing a likely precedent for future fast-track sales of other National Forest land to mining companies as their plans proceed.

Watch our website this summer for updates on this legislation and ways you can make your voice heard on the issue. And, as always, contact us at [info@friends-bwca.org](mailto:info@friends-bwca.org) or 612-332-9630 with any questions or comments. ●

## Meet Our New Directors

Three new directors have joined the Board of Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness:



**Pete Fleming**, a chemist by training, retired in 2004 after a 36-year career at 3M, primarily in technical management. Pete has been an active volunteer with the Friends, serving on the Development Committee as well as working on special projects to inventory roadless areas in the Superior National Forest and improve relations with

Ely outfitters. He is a volunteer naturalist at the Dodge Nature Center in West St. Paul and a former member of the city council and planning commission in Woodbury. He holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Union College in New York and a Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry from Iowa State. Pete is the father of five grown children and lives in Woodbury, Minn. with his wife, Barbara.



**Jerry Greenberg** is Vice President of Regional Conservation for The Wilderness Society (TWS), and in that role he oversees wilderness and other land protection campaigns in the organization's 14 field offices. A former TWS Vice President of Communications, Jerry joined the society 13 years ago, after working as a public radio reporter in Los Angeles, and as a forester for the U.S. Forest Service in New

Mexico and for a timber company in Georgia. He has a Master of Forestry degree from Duke University. Jerry lives in Madison, Wis., with his wife, Diana, and son, Alex.

**Barbara West** has been superintendent of Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico since May 2005, but is better known in Minnesota for her previous 10 years as superintendent of Voyageurs National Park. Before that posting she served in the Interior Department as special assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs and to the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks; she also was director of research for the Navajo Reservation's Shiprock Research Center in New Mexico. She holds an AB degree in Far Eastern language and civilizations from the University of Chicago, and a master's degree in public affairs from the University of Texas, LBJ School of Public Affairs. Barbara lives at Chaco with her husband, Darrell Knuffke.

Speaking of **Darrell Knuffke**, his long Board service reached the limit set by Friends bylaws at the close of 2007. Knuffke joined the Friends Board in 2000. When the staff needed an interim policy director, he voluntarily left the Board to fill that role from October 2006 through November 2007, writing official comments and internal reports that were sharp-edged, persuasive and a pleasure to read. Darrell is staying involved by joining the Friends' Advisory Council.

Until his 2004 retirement, Darrell was a senior writer with The Wilderness Society, where he had worked since 1985, serving as a regional director in Denver for 10 years and vice president for regional conservation for five years. He serves on the board of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, and is a past board member of the National Outdoor Leadership School. Barbara describes his favorite getaway in the Quetico-Superior Ecosystem as "just about anywhere with water, pine trees, loons, and the prospect of a seeing a wolf."

Thank you, Darrell, for your all your contributions to Friends. And, please—don't forget to write! ●

## New Staff Bring Policy and Communications Experience and Expertise

There are two new faces at the Friends office since the last newsletter: Brian Pasko, Policy Director, and Greg Seitz, Communications and Engagement Director.

**Brian Pasko**, who joined the staff just after Thanksgiving, is an accomplished environmental advocate, having spent three years as the Sierra Club North Star Chapter's legislative coordinator before joining the Friends. In that role, he was a principal negotiator for environmental



interests in winning such important victories as the 2006 law reducing mercury emissions from coal-burning power plants and the 2007 law establishing renewable energy requirements for Minnesota utilities.

Pasko received his law degree from Northwestern School of Law of Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Ore., the top-ranked environmental law program in the country. He graduated with honors from Northland College in Ashland, Wis.

**Greg Seitz** arrived at the Friends in early April from the communications department at The Thomson Corporation in Eagan, Minn. His experiences there focused on internal Web communications. He is also on the board of Voyageurs National Park Association and chairs that group's Communications Committee; the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust also named him Volunteer of the Year for his work redesigning and launching its website. In addition to maintaining a personal blog since 2004, he published a chapbook of his outdoors writing in 2007. Seitz received his bachelor's degree in English from the University of Minnesota.



"Both Pasko and Seitz are tremendous additions to the Friends organization," says Ron Meador, executive director. "Both bring great experience in their fields, as well as true passion for the cause.

"Although I'm fairly new to Friends as well—having just finished my first year here—I've known the organization well enough to say with confidence that this is as strong a staff as any we've had. We're energized and moving ahead with the full range of work that matters so much to us all."

Both Pasko and Seitz are avid Boundary Waters paddlers, and even paddled together early this spring, taking a day trip down the St. Croix River. And both also expressed their enthusiasm for their new work with the Friends.

"This is a chance to focus my efforts—and all of my skills, talents and lessons learned from lobbying at the state Capitol—on protecting Minnesota's only wilderness," Pasko said. "And I'll be doing this work within the only organization to place the BWCAW at the core of its efforts for 31 years now. How could anyone pass up such an opportunity?"

Expressing a similar sentiment, Seitz said, "This is literally my dream job. To do communications work for the Friends aligns two of my greatest passions. I'm just overjoyed to be able to dedicate myself to the cause full-time."

Pasko can be reached at [brian@friends-bwca.org](mailto:brian@friends-bwca.org) and Seitz at [greg@friends-bwca.org](mailto:greg@friends-bwca.org). Please feel free to drop them a note and welcome them to the staff! ●

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# Risk and the Wilderness

By Mike Link

*Editor's note: Mike Link is one of the founders of the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness. He sat next to Sigurd Olson at the infamous hearing in Ely during a contentious public debate preceding the passage of the BWCAW Act of 1978. He has been director of the Audubon Center of the North Woods near Sandstone, Minn., since 1971. With his wife, Kate Crowley, he has published 17 books and 1000 articles about wilderness and the outdoors. Mike has visited every Wilderness area in the country.*

My life has been shaped by risk and the wilderness in ways I never could have predicted.

My son and I used to talk around campfires about grizzly bears, sheer cliffs, storms, distant rivers—the beauty and exhilaration of the outdoors. It was a common love we could share. And we also talked about risk. If a bear kills me, don't let anyone try to hunt it down, one of us said. If I get lost in the woods, don't send in the helicopters and search planes, let me find my own way out, the other responded. If I die on a river, don't let them dam it and steal its life on my account. These were our campfire conversations.

Since those conversations, I've had to wrestle with my perspective of risk in the wilderness. Someone named Karkov, perhaps the friend of the hero in Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, said "A whole person realizes that the real risk is living without risk." If we take that as our perspective, we can state that it isn't just a matter of putting risk and the wilderness into perspective, but rather risk and our whole life.

To laugh is to risk appearing a fool. To weep is to risk appearing sentimental. To reach out to another is to risk involvement. To expose feeling is to risk exposing our true selves. To love is to risk not being loved in return. To hope is to risk despair. To try is to risk failure. To live is to risk dying. But risk must be taken because the greatest risk is to risk nothing.

People who risk nothing simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, live. Chained by certitudes, they have forfeited their freedom. Only a person who risks is free.

T.S. Eliot, the poet, gave us a perspective on why wilderness has to encapsulate risk. "The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we have started and know the place for the first time."

The concept of wilderness was alien to Native Americans before Europeans arrived. Then it was all wilderness. To settlers, wilderness was a threat. Now we see it as a benefit. Today's wilderness system helps us discover our heritage; it ties us back to where we started.

Sigurd Olson wrote about Eskimos in the Arctic building skin boats when aluminum boats were available. He reflected on that period when change was occurring from historic to modern. "The primitive days are passing swiftly. The old ones may be regretful but accept the inevitable. As I made my camp, I wondered if we white men can hold on to the mystery that stirred in us since our beginning."

Today's wilderness system allows us to exist in the primitive. It means the acceptance of the opportunity to have risk. I do not mean the creation of risk, like hanging from bungee cords. In wilderness there is real risk, like having a tree fall on you, and a variety of other dangers that could happen at any time but probably won't.

Later, Sig wrote: "The mystery and unknown are the true lures of wilderness. We go for something that extends us, something we have to earn."

There is lots to be said about experiences that are earned, that we pay for, but not with money.

On a quiet Saturday afternoon in December, the phone rang. "Mr. Link, this is the American Consul in New Zealand. Your son has been in a kayaking accident."

In our campfire conversations, Matthew and I had talked about risk as a part of the beauty of our relationship with wilderness. "If I die on a river, don't let them dam it and steal its life on my account." We talked about risk being a necessary part of growing. We talked about acceptance.

"Your son is dead." In a single sentence was the summation of all of our conversations, risk taken to the final degree.

Like everyone who faces loss, I searched for meaning when there was none. I walked trails that were no longer the same, though they were no less beautiful and no less important. And neither is the concept of risk.

Anyone who has truly looked at nature knows that death is incorporated into the weave and weft of every existence. I could never reconcile my son's death and say it was good. It was, however, inevitable. There are more terrible ways of dying than by doing something we love. Those who bemoan wilderness because of the risk, those who see no threat in toxic rain, ozone depletion and rain forest destruction, have suffered another form of death by removing themselves from Earth. Physical death is inevitable. Spiritual death is something else.

Around our campfires, Matt expressed the inherent risk in wilderness travel. He never blatantly defied the odds. He honed his skills until he was comfortable in Class 5 rapids. He assessed the risk, accepted it or turned around. He chose to paddle the river that day. And the river remains wild.

I led a five-week course, Wilderness Concepts, that took college students backpacking and canoeing the Missouri River in Montana, the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming, the Badlands in South Dakota, and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. We went in asking the question: What is wilderness... from an ecological standpoint... from a personal standpoint? We read the works of Aldo Leopold, Teddy Roosevelt, T.S. Eliot, Sigurd Olson, John Muir, Bob Marshall, and others. We delved into our personal feelings. When we were finished, we determined that: 1) wilderness areas have to be large enough to sustain an unmanaged ecology; and, 2) wilderness must be where we can feel separated from other humans and human resources. This last quality includes the freedom to get lost and the freedom to die.

I can tell you that death hurts more than anything, so I'm not talking about a morbid desire to die or to get injured. It's not about bragging rights: "Wow, I broke two arms on this trip and still made it." It's about, as Will Steger wrote in his book, *North to the Pole*, "faith in the indomitable power of the human spirit."

It's about a condition of freedom in which we come to respect life: our own and all that is around us. The condition of risk and the wilderness creates self awareness. It pushes people to know themselves. It's the reason programs for at-risk youth use natural areas where risk is not sociological.

Teddy Roosevelt, father of the U.S. Forest Service, said: "Every child has inside him an aching void for excitement." If we don't fill that void with something exciting and good, the child will fill it with something exciting and not good.

John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, observed that "thousands of nerve shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that wilderness is a necessity." This was written in the 1890s!

Collin Fletcher, guru of long-distance wilderness hikers, wrote: "I go to the wilderness to kick the man-world out of me, to pare the fat off

*Continued on next page.*

my soul, to make me grateful, again, for being alive."

I would give anything to have my son back, but I would never willingly allow risk to be removed from our wilderness. It is not up to taxpayers to absorb rescue costs, it is up to us, as a nation, to accept wilderness for what it is—a place where we assume responsibility for ourselves as an act of respect for ourselves.

If I get lost in the woods, don't send in the helicopters and search planes; let me find my own way out. ●

## A Wild and Scenic Night

patagonia presents the



SYRCL A PRODUCTION OF THE  
SOUTH YUBA RIVER CITIZENS LEAGUE

Back by popular demand: the Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival, hosted once again by the Friends.

Last December's event in Minneapolis brought out more than 100 attendees, giving us an excellent opportunity to connect with old friends and potential new members.

This summer, the festival is moving to northeastern Minnesota. The Friends will host the festival at the Arrowhead Center for the Arts in Grand Marais at 7 p.m. on August 14 and 15, a Thursday and Friday.

The Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival, created by Patagonia, is made available to environmental groups across the country to help them connect to their communities, raise awareness for their campaigns and encourage local citizens to get involved.

Whether the topic is a struggle for environmental justice or an educational tale about an endangered species, the films expose audiences to forward-thinking ideas about our ecosystems.

For more information on the tour and festival, see the website: [www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org](http://www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org).

Look for more great door prizes this year. Last year, thanks to Bear Paulsen at Midwest Mountaineering, we were able to give away 30 donated items ranging from reusable grocery bags by Granite Gear to canoe paddles from Bending Branches.

Visit the Friends' Website at [www.friends-bwca.org](http://www.friends-bwca.org), or contact us at [info@friends-bwca.org](mailto:info@friends-bwca.org) or 612-332-9630, for more information about this year's festival. ●

## Double your support for the Friends this summer

If you're making a contribution to the Friends this summer, signify that it's part of the "All At Once" campaign and the donation will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the musician Jack Johnson! The Friends has been selected by Jack Johnson to participate in his "All At Once" environmental-awareness initiative. In addition to his generous financial support, we were given the chance to connect with his fans in person at his June 22 concert at Float-Rite Amphitheatre in Somerset, Wis.

To have your contribution matched, just write "All At Once" in the memo field on your check, send us an e-mail message at [info@friends-bwca.org](mailto:info@friends-bwca.org) or call at 612-332-9630 after donating to tell us you want your donation to be included. ●

## Friends Helps Green Up the Gunflint



In an area of the north woods blackened by last year's vast Ham Lake Fire, the Friends helped return a little greenery to the landscape in early May. Three staffers, joined by relatives and other Friends members, traveled to the Gunflint Trail to plant trees as part of the Gunflint Green Up the weekend of May 2–4.

The event coordinated the efforts of more than 400 volunteers, on a blustery spring Saturday, to plant more than 50,000 red and white pine seedlings on Superior National Forest lands near the BWCAW. Planting day began with a few inches of fresh snow on the ground, but by the time the planters took their lunch break, the snow had melted, the sun was shining, and thousands of new trees already were in the ground.

The event was a valuable opportunity for the Friends to work toward our goal of establishing positive relationships with people living on the edges of the wilderness. The sight of acres of bright green seedlings dotting the charred and barren ground was a powerful reminder of what can be accomplished by working together toward a common goal.

Besides tree planting, the weekend featured a welcome dinner on Friday night in a big-top tent at Green Up headquarters at the Gunflint Lodge, as well as a thank you dinner and dance on Saturday night. On Sunday morning, the Ham Run Half Marathon sent 100 runners along a 13.2 mile course on the Gunflint Trail.

The Ham Lake Fire started May 5, 2007, and burned 36,000 acres in Minnesota (as well as 40,000 acres in Canada) before it was contained two weeks later, making it the the largest wildfire in Minnesota since 1918. Because of the rapid succession of the 1999 blowdown and subsequent fires, the seed source necessary to re-grow the forest was largely missing, making human planting necessary to restore the historic boreal forest. ●



(top) Volunteers assemble in burned areas near the Seagull Guard Station before planting.

(right) Brian Pasko, Policy Director, makes room for a seedling.

## Annual Meeting Hosts Steger and Soderberg

Two champions of wilderness were featured guests at the Friends' 31st annual dinner on November 17 at the Town & Country Club in St. Paul.

Will Steger, the renowned polar explorer from Ely, spoke about the urgent threats of global warming. Barb Soderberg, the longtime wilderness manager for the BWCAW, was given the Friends' 2007 Conservationist of the Year Award.

Steger rose to international prominence in the early 1980s when he led the first confirmed expedition to the North Pole by dogsled without resupply. Since then, he has combined adventure with environmental education in such treks as the International Trans-Antarctica Expedition of 1989-90.

In his keynote speech, amply illustrated with his photos from a lifetime of remote travel, Steger spoke about his past adventures in the Arctic and Antarctic and the immediate threats posed to those regions and the entire globe by global warming.

While the situation he described was frightening, he balanced it with a message of hope about the potential of young people to devise and implement creative solutions. For two months this spring, he led six members of the "millennial generation" in a 1,400-mile dogsled expedition across Ellesmere Island to document the warming climate in that Arctic region.

Soderberg, who retired last summer from a 29-year career with the U.S. Forest Service, was honored for her tireless advocacy of wilderness values. Born in Tower and married to Ely native Kurt Soderberg, Barb's heart has always been with the wilds of northeastern



From left:  
Carolyn Sampson, Board Chair;  
Nicole Rom, Board Secretary;  
Will Steger; and Ron Meador,  
Executive Director.

Minnesota. When the BWCAW was created in 1978, Barb was hired as the first wilderness program manager by the Forest Service.

As honorary director Becky Rom said in presenting Soderberg's award, "Barb has been at the center of the storm. In the midst of management plans, lawsuits, and federal mediation, and significant personal pressure from some members of the public, Barb has kept her eyes focused on the salient principles of the 1964 Wilderness Act and the 1978 BWCAW Act."

The Friends would like to thank Steger and Soderberg once more for their invaluable work on behalf of the Wilderness and for honoring our organization with their presence at the meeting. ●

- Visit the Friends' website to read the text of Becky Rom's speech honoring Barb Soderberg:  
[www.friends-bwca.org/publications/newsletter.html](http://www.friends-bwca.org/publications/newsletter.html)
- Visit Will Steger's "Global Warming 101" website to learn more about his current efforts to educate and organize against global warming: [www.globalwarming101.org](http://www.globalwarming101.org)

**Save the Date:** This year's annual dinner will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978. It will be held at the Nicollet Island Pavilion on **October 18**. Watch your mailbox and the Friends website for more information in the coming months.

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If your company does not have MEF as a giving option, please contact Friends at 612-332-9630.

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