nmw

northeastern minnesotans *for wilderness*

Spring 2007

Ham Lake Fire

Above: Ham Lake Fire

As this issue of the Newsletter goes to press (5/25/07), the Ham Lake fire on the Gunflint Trail has at last been contained. Over 75,850 acres in both Ontario and in the BWCAW were burned including 140 structures in the U.S. (of which 61 were personal residences) and 14 in Canada. Preliminary losses on both sides of the border will surely exceed $4 million.

Fortunately there have been no fatalities or serious injuries. NMW joins with many others in expressing regrets to those who have lost homes and property. Likewise, NMW joins many others in expressing deep appreciation to the USFS and other USA and Canadian agency personnel for their efforts to preserve life and property.

Fire is a fundamental source of forest renewal. According to Forest Ecologist Lee Frelich, the absence of extreme intense heat in the Ham Lake fire should lead to positive renewal. With sufficient rain, the forest should reestablish itself as predominantly jackpine.

Report to NMW Members

This issue of the Newsletter is more brief than most. Included in this mailing, along with the Non-Native Invasive Species Guide, is a Report to the NMW Membership. Our hope is that the report will become an annual publication. NMW has become involved in many diverse wilderness advocacy activities. Pulling these together and reviewing successes and failures has been a worthwhile activity for the Board. With limited volunteer members and competing situations calling for attention, NMW must manage its efforts carefully. We plan to reserve time at the next Annual Meeting, October 13, for member discussion of current priorities and possible new areas for advocacy.

Non-Native Invasion Species Guide

Included in the mailing of this Newsletter (to current members of NMW) is a copy of the Identification Guide for Non-Native Invasive Species in the SNF and BWCAW. NNIS can be plant or animal, and aquatic or land-based. SNF and the BWCAW are fortunate that NNIS have not established a strong foothold. Vigorous detection and control by NMW members and others is required to maintain this relative absence of NNIS.

Identification of NNIS is an ongoing activity. The invasive presence of earthworms in SNF and the BW will be added to a future edition of the Guide. Earthworms are Non-Native to SNF. Their earth churning is destructive especially to conifer species.

The Identification Guide is a joint project of the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness and USFS under a grant from Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI). NMW is participating in the area distribution of the Guide and plans to make it available at meetings of several lakeshore homeowners associations. Additional copies of the Guide can be obtained at SNF ranger stations and BW permit stations.

Friends Honor Bill & Barbara Rom

Since our last newsletter was published the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness has honored Ely wilderness advocates Bill and Barbara Rom with the Friends annual Conservation Award. In making the award, Friends board chair Carolyn Sampson noted that, "Every special place on our public lands ultimately owes its protection to a handful of dedicated people who are willing to fight for it. For the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness two such people are Bill and Barbara Rom. It is truly our privilege to honor them." NMW joins with Friends in recognizing Bill and Barb, and notes with pride the couple's longtime NMW membership.

NMW Annual Meeting Oct 13

NMW's Annual Meeting is scheduled for October 13 (Saturday afternoon) at the International Wolf Center in Ely. Mark your calendars and plan to join us. We have much for the membership to discuss. More details will be included in the next issue of the Newsletter.

A Grassroots Advocacy Group
for the Protection of the BWCAW
P.O. Box 625, Ely, MN 55731 • www.nmw.org

Widespread Vandalism at BW Entry Points:

NMW & Friends Each Match SNF Reward

NMW and Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness have each offered a $1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of vandals who have caused upwards of $10,000 damage to public property on the Superior National Forest. Added to the $1,000 offered by USFS, the total reward is now $3,000. Damage or theft involving Federal property is punishable by fines and/or up to ten years in jail.

Numerous SNF and BWCAW information signs and bulletin boards in the Kawishiwi District (Ely area) were the targets of considerable damage and theft. BW permit boxes near wilderness entry points were a special target. Most of the damage apparently occurred during the winter months.

Anyone with information regarding these crimes should call law enforcement agencies or the Forest Service at 218-365-7609.

NMW is participating with colleagues in several meetings with the Forest Service regarding law enforcement in SNF and the BWCAW. NMW is preparing several proposals to improve enforcement and apprehend violators. Some of these efforts are described in the accompaying Report to NMW Members. Others will be reported in future newsletters.

NMW 2006-07 Board

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Regional Haze

Reduced visibility because of smog is not usually associated with the relatively pristine Voyageurs National Park - BWCAW - Isle Royale National Park region. Nevertheless, the visibility impairment in the region is about 60 percent greater than what it would be in the absence of man-made emissions on the twenty percent haziest days. The major man-made contributors to this reduced visibility are sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, which react to form haze-causing particles in the atmosphere. Although the cited emissions have potential health implications, the general health quality of the air remains quite good.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is developing a plan to reduce emissions affecting visibility in the region. The Minnesota efforts are required by Federal Regulations based on the Clean Air Act. The Act, through the Regional Haze Rule of 1999, requires states with Federal Class I areas, specifically National Parks and Wildernesses, to develop a State Implementation Plan (SIP) for reducing haze. The plan must improve visibility in Class I areas to natural levels by 2064, with the first check-in point in 2018. MPCA is currently working on a SIP to reduce visibility impairment between now and 2018.

The emission sources of pollutants causing reduced visibility are many, varied, and widely distributed. According to information obtained from MPCA, Minnesota is the biggest single state source, but does not contribute even half of the emissions. States to the south, east and west are important contributors. For example, on some of the worst days, SSW winds push from St. Louis and north, across the Iron Range, and into the VNP-BW-Isle Royale region. Canada is also a contributor, although on the best visibility days the prevailing wind is from Canada.

All states that contribute to visibility impairment at a Class I area must submit a SIP to show how they will help reduce haze in that area. One of the main concepts of the regional haze rule is that all states that contribute to the haze problem must obtain their share of the emission reductions needed to meet the visibility goals. MPCA is applying this concept to the state as a whole.

Within Minnesota, the Twin Cities metro area is the largest single source of emissions. The Iron Range is a major source, although less than a fifth of the Minnesota total of haze-causing pollutants. The six Range area counties are responsible for about a third of emissions from all large facilities in Minnesota. Taconite mining centers and energy generating facilities are the major specific sites. The Range is the current focus of reduction efforts because non-Range facilities are projected to reduce emissions more significantly than those on the Range between now and 2018.

As part of the strategy to reduce haze, and in order to ensure all regions are contributing their fair share of emissions reductions, MPCA has put forward a draft plan that would require a 20 percent reduction in combined emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides from major sources in the Arrowhead region by 2012 and a 30 percent reduction by 2018. (This is a region-wide emission reduction target, not a target for each facility.)

MPCA's emission reduction efforts are complicated by several factors. Emissions reductions in existing facilities are typically achieved by retrofitting facilities with the Best Available Retrofit Technology (BART). The regional haze program calls for states to develop BART limits for certain sources and include those limits in state level operating permits. MPCA's problem is that a BART emission limit is typically based on emission control strategies applied in retrofit projects or new facilities built industry-wide. Only eight taconite facilities exist in the United States, six in Minnesota. Therefore, little new technology has been tested and research and development costs for new technology will be substantial if spread across only 6-8 facilities.

A second problem is that several new mining and power generating facilities are being proposed for the Range in the next several years. Projected emissions from these facilities must be included in the State Implementation Plan, and they would be included in the emission reduction target for the entire region.

MPCA is consulting with environmental organizations and others in development of the SIP. The SIP will also be subject to a public notice and comment period. In addition to Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness, organizations with special ties to the Arrowhead Region include Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park Association. Participating State level organizations include the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and Sierra Club North Star Chapter.