



Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness Board

In alphabetical order

Dodd Cosgrove – Board Secretary

Dodd first paddled the Boundary Waters in 1964, one month before it gained official designation as a Wilderness area. Retired after 30 years working as a Chartered Financial Analyst, Dodd has served on multiple boards, including The Quetico Superior Foundation and Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, at times serving as treasurer for both. For the last 19 years he and his family have owned a cabin on Little Long Lake and all of his children have been campers at a Y camp near the Boundary Waters.



Adam Fetcher – Board Co-Chair

As a result of his Minnesota roots - North St Paul and Carleton College - Adam has been traveling to the Boundary Waters and surrounding areas most of his life. Adam began his professional career working for the two Obama presidential campaigns, in 2008 as a field organizer and in 2012 as Deputy National Press Secretary. He has served as Press Secretary for the US Department of Interior and, most recently, as Director of Global PR and Communications for Patagonia.



Hunt Greene

Hunt, started traveling the Boundary Waters in 1963 over 50 years ago. He is a native of Texas who attended Camp Nebagamon in Wisconsin during those Boundary Water summers. He went on to graduate from Northwestern University in Chicago and The Harvard Business School in Boston. This all led to property he purchased on Lake Vermilion next to the BWCAW in 1971 and a job he took as an investment banker in Minneapolis in 1975. Hunt, also serves on the board of Wilderness Inquiry which is active in creating outdoor experiences for urban and other children, as well as people with disabilities. Life is all about the outdoors now and for future generations. The BWCAW is one of the most pristine and heavily used and enjoyed wilderness areas in the world. It contributes substantially to Northern Minnesota and provides important experiences and jobs for everyone involved.



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Lawson Gerdes

Lawson earned a BS in Environmental Studies from Grand Valley State University (MI), a BS in Wildlife and Habitat Ecology from the University of Minnesota, and a MS in Landscape Ecology and Forest Science from Michigan Technological University. In April 2016, she retired with 40 years of experience as a field ecologist and natural resources program manager; including wildlife biologist on the Superior National Forest, landscape ecologist on the Hiawatha National Forest, and ecologist/northern coordinator for the Minnesota Biological Survey (MN DNR Ecological and Water Resources). Lawson has travelled extensively (by canoe and on foot) throughout the Boundary Waters Wilderness; collecting vegetation data, documenting rare plants, and assessing native plant community and landscape condition. She regards the Boundary Waters Wilderness, and the Rainy River Watershed that encompasses it, as one of the most ecologically significant landscapes on earth. Lawson considers the Boundary Waters Wilderness the quintessential classroom; where people can immerse themselves in outstanding biodiversity, and observe species interactions and intact natural processes occurring at multiple scales. There is no more suitable place, to reflect on our relationship with the natural world and our responsibility to take actions to protect it.



Ellen Hawkins

Tofte resident Ellen Hawkins has lived in northeastern Minnesota for nearly 40 years. A retired U.S. Forest Service Boundary Waters wilderness ranger, she has been a member of NMW for 19 years and continues to work with wilderness education and management. Ellen's home is 15 minutes from the nearest Boundary Waters entry point and she is at her happiest when she's quietly in the wilderness, surrounded by wildlife. As a local resident, Ellen loves having part of the Wilderness Preservation System in her backyard. She is deeply committed to doing what she can to protect the Boundary Waters so it will remain an untouched, untamed Wilderness treasured by people from all around the world.



Diane Hofstede

Diane served as a member of the City Council for the City of Minneapolis. Her family has owned property on Burntside Lake, near the Boundary Waters, for two generations. As a result, Diane has been a regular visitor to the Ely area for years. She brings expertise in business, civic, government, financial, and community arenas to our efforts.



Bill Hohengarten

Bill went on his first wilderness canoe trips in the Quetico-Superior as a 10-year old camper at Camp Owakonze in Ontario. That was the beginning of his life-long love of the Rainy River watershed straddling both sides of the international border, which to him is the most beautiful and iconic wilderness anywhere. In 2011, forty years after those first childhood canoe trips, Bill realized his long-held dream of moving full-time to the Boundary Waters area and now lives with his family outside of Ely, just a short paddle from the Wilderness boundary. Before moving to Ely, Bill practiced law in Washington, D.C., with a focus on Supreme Court and Appellate litigation, including pro bono cases defending our nation's wilderness lands. After completing law school, Bill also served as a law clerk to Justice David H. Souter of the United States Supreme Court, and to Chief Judge Jon O. Newman of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.



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Ann McNally

Ann went on her first canoe trip, a 7-day Quetico trip, in 1992, was a guide-in-training in 1994 and 1995, and then guided in the BWCAW from 1996-2000. After graduating from college, she took a break to get a Ph.D. in chemistry and then worked full-time on municipal water quality issues. She shifted to teaching college chemistry when her first son was born in 2010, allowing her to return to Ely in the summers starting in 2011, where she now directs the same youth wilderness tripping program she worked for in college.

Ann is especially enthusiastic about promoting wilderness travel to teenagers who might not typically be expected to thrive on a canoe trip – girls, minorities, the poor, people with disabilities. She has seen time and again that canoe trips are confidence-building and fun and help these youth develop a work ethic and sense of confidence and cooperation that will serve them well in the future. A recent BWCAW highlight was taking both her mom and her children (aged 6 and 9) to Knife lake. Although she is always happy to lobby or review scientific data, she feels that the most important thing she can do to save the Boundary Waters is ensure that youth from a wide range of backgrounds are given the opportunity to experience canoe country.



Heather Meier

Heather Meier grew up camping with her family in the Superior National Forest, spending every long weekend and vacation there. She feels her love for the wilderness is the greatest gift she was given by her parents. When she was in middle school, in 1982, her parents realized their dream. They purchased land and ultimately built a log cabin on Eagles Nest Lake #3 near Ely. Though they owned the land, they didn't own the mineral leases. Heather's parents worked hard to create a beautiful log cabin home that they would one day leave to her and her nephew. In 2011 her parents were notified by the State of Minnesota that state-owned mineral under their property had been leased to a mining company. Heather and her parents work to save their beloved land, home, and legacy.

David Miller – Board Treasurer

David Miller began visiting the Boundary Waters with his father and brothers in 1965, developing an early and lifelong connection to the area. It was those experiences that led him and his wife, Kathleen, to relocate to Minnesota following graduate school. He introduced his wife and their three children to the pleasures and wonders of wilderness canoe adventures and they have logged many hours traversing the waters of Quetico Provincial Park and the Boundary Waters. The Millers spend much of their time in their cabin on White Iron Lake, southeast of Ely on the edge of the Boundary Waters. David's belief that America's most visited Wilderness deserves the respect and defense of all who use it is what inspired him to join the board of Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness in its efforts to protect the Boundary Waters from the risks of sulfide-ore copper mining.



Jon Nelson - Board Co-Chair

Duluth resident Jon Nelson has been visiting the Boundary Waters regularly since 1980. For many years he led trips for Wilderness Inquiry, taking people of all abilities on canoe and dogsled journeys in the Wilderness. He has served on the boards of the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness and Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness for many of the past 25 years. He frequently travels with his family and friends to the Boundary Waters, in all seasons, to enjoy the area's pristine beauty. His experiences of being in the area, and sharing those times with people who appreciated the opportunity to visit there, led him to become passionate about protecting the Wilderness. The threat of sulfide-ore copper mining and its long history of polluting water inspired him to become a board member of NMW.



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Steve Snyder

Steve Snyder has traveled the BWCAW/Quetico every year for 60 years, now often with his two grandsons. He and his wife spend as much time as they can at their island cabin off the Echo Trail. His roots run deep in Northeastern Minnesota. Steve's grandfather was a mine laborer, and those grandparents and a great-grandmother are buried in the Ely cemetery. Steve paid for his college education working summers as a fishing guide for Sawbill Lodge, north of Tofte. Later, he walked the halls of Congress in support of the 1978 BW Wilderness Act and assembled the legal team that defended the Act all the way to the Supreme Court. Steve has served as a Board member for various Minnesota-based environmental organizations. He is an attorney.



Jen Pearson

Jen began doing Boundary Waters trips with her family as a young child. With a family cabin on Lake Vermillion, and an early love of the nearby BWCA that quickly developed, later years were spent canoe guiding, honeymooning, and eventually taking her own husband, children and family members on trips as well as taking annual “mother-daughter” trips with friends/daughters. As a family practice physician and medical school faculty living in Duluth, she's become a vocal advocate of the need to incorporate human health effects into the regulatory process for industry with potential significant adverse effects to both ecological and human health. With the current threat of sulfide-ore-copper-nickel mining, this voice of advocacy has been coordinated with other health professionals and amplified in effort to protect the iconic and beloved BWCAW and its utilizers. She welcomes the opportunity to work with the NMW Board to help preserve and protect this wild, beloved, soul-feeding place that beckons many to choose to call northern Minnesota “home”.



Steve Piragis

A native of Massachusetts, Steve came to Ely in 1975 to work as a biologist for the EPA where he met his work partner, Nancy, who later became his wife. Coming from New England to Ely, with its abundance of birds, botany and fish, was like discovering paradise. Steve and Nancy fell in love with Ely and the Boundary Waters on their first trip to Hegman Lake. This inspired them to go into the business of selling and renting canoes and the gear that canoe campers need. In 1979 they founded their Ely-based company Piragis Northwoods Company and Boundary Waters Catalog in Ely, where they employ 17 full-time employees and 45 summer staff. The Boundary Waters supports their family and employees, and Steve feels strongly about stopping the threat of acid mine drainage that would result from the proposed sulfide-ore copper mining project in the area. He believes that the Wilderness is their future and mining copper is a boom-and-bust business that has devastated many other small communities like Ely. That belief is what drives Steve and his wife to work to stop the proposed mining project.



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Becky Rom – Board Vice-Chair

Becky Rom, a retired attorney, is a third generation resident of Ely. She is the daughter of Bill Rom, who owned and operated Ely-based Canoe Country Outfitters for 30 years. Becky worked in the family business and learned at an early age the importance of wild country. She first worked on wilderness preservation when she was a seventh-grader, engaging in public debates on the merits of the bill that became the Wilderness Act. For the past 40 years Becky has worked as a citizen activist on wilderness preservation throughout the United States but she continues to be drawn back home to the Boundary Waters. The Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters is her fourth national campaign to protect the area.



Paul D. Schurke

Paul Schurke is an Ely resident with a long history in the Boundary Waters. In the 1970s, he and Greg Lais founded Wilderness Inquiry, a non-profit endeavor to provide Boundary Waters canoe trips for disabled persons. The trips became so popular that they decided to start dogsledding journeys as well. Those outings led to the foundation of Wintergreen Dogsled Lodge, a business Paul runs with his wife, Susan. In 1986, Paul, Will Steger, Ann Bancroft and their team reached the North Pole in the first confirmed trek to the top of the world without resupply. Paul is recipient of several explorer awards and Wintergreen has been honored by *Outside* magazine. Paul and Susan's three children also work with them in the business. Paul's deep love of the Boundary Waters and his deep roots in the area inspire him to work hard to keep the area pristine and unspoiled for generations to come.



Jeff Soderstrom

Chicago-native Jeff Soderstrom began visiting the Boundary Waters as a teen and was so inspired by its beauty that he decided to go to college in Minnesota and settle in the state afterward. He and his wife began taking their three children to the Boundary Waters when they were very young, and in 2005 they purchased a cabin on Eagle's Nest Lake #3, near Ely. A lifelong conservationist, Jeff has made dozens of trips into the Boundary Waters and Quetico Provincial Park. He is a vice president of risk mitigation for Ameriprise Financial in Minneapolis. Upon learning about the sulfide-ore copper mining threats several years ago, Jeff helped start a Twin Cities Boundary Waters Business Group to raise awareness of the issue. The Boundary Waters has been a big part of the life of the Soderstrom family, and time spent there has shaped the children into conservationist-minded young people. He wants to do all he can to preserve the Boundary Waters for generations to come.



Kris Wegerson, M.D.

Kris Wegerson is a Bad River Tribal Clinic-based family practice physician. The Boundary Waters is her favorite place on the planet and she enjoys spending time there to become immersed in nature and experience it in its wildest form. She owns a cabin on Snowbank Lake where she can see the Boundary Waters in the distance. One of her life goals is to help protect and preserve the Boundary Waters for generations to come. Kris has been involved with Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness since the early 2000s and is honored to collaborate with the talented and dedicated people in the organization as they collectively work to save the Boundary Waters from the proposed sulfide-ore copper mining project.



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Jason Zabokrtsky

Jason Zabokrtsky's passion for the Boundary Waters was born in the mid-1990s when he led youth groups on adventures in the Wilderness area. That passion grew into a career and in 2007 he founded Ely Outfitting Company and Boundary Waters Guide Service. He resides year-round in the area, just on the edge of the Boundary Waters. He and his staff of outdoor educators provide professional guiding services and the equipment needed for wilderness canoe trips. For guests who prefer to be self-guided, Jason and his staff teach skills necessary for enjoyable Boundary Waters adventures. In the winter, Jason leads dogsledding trips and in warmer months he travels to seldom-visited parts of the Boundary Waters. Jason's experiences in the Boundary Waters have made him passionate about wanting to protect the area from sulfide-ore copper mining.

