

WILDERNESS CONCERNS

Great Old Broads travel to Ely area

by KURT VANDERVORT
Ely Editor

KAWISHIWI RIVER – A bunch of Great Old Broads invaded the Kawishiwi River National Forest Campground last weekend.

This group visited the Ely area to learn firsthand about the potential threats to mining in the vicinity of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and to use their national influence to help promote a responsible and safe approach to sulfide mining.

Great Old Broads for Wilderness was started in 1989 on the 25th anniversary of the Wilderness Act by a feisty bunch of lady hikers who wanted to refute Utah Senator Orrin Hatch's notion that wilderness is inaccessible to elders, according to the organization's website.

As Rose Chilcoat, the group's associate director, related, "The founder Susan Tixier and her fellow activists were outraged, and saw that an important voice was missing from the environmental movement: the older woman—impassioned, experienced, not afraid to speak out, and definitely not needing roads. The group committed themselves to grassroots advocacy to preserve wilderness and wild places for future generations."

Chilcoat was joined in Ely by Great Old Broad executive director Shelley Silbert and their national grass roots leader Lauren Berutich, all from Durango, Colo., and about three dozen other members from all over the world, for a weekend of learning, stewardship and advocacy.

They set up their tents and made base camp at the Kawishiwi Campground and spent four days involved in various projects, including pulling invasive plants



Members of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness sign letters to legislators advocating for the protection of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The organization held a gathering in Ely last weekend. photo by K. Vandervort

with the U.S. Forest Service, paddling to Hegman Lake with Sustainable Ely, hiking around Dry and Bass lakes, learning about bears with the North American Bear Center, visiting Wintergreen Dogsled Lodge, touring Sig Olson's Listening Point, touring the Twin Metals test drill sites with Steve and Jane Koshchak of River Point Outfitters, and various other hikes and outdoor activities.

"These are the most amazing, experienced, passionate, committed women I've ever met anywhere," Chilcoat said. Members range in age from the 30s to the 80s. "We're not all old and we're not all broads, either," she said. They welcome men, called "Great Old Bro's."

"We are all very committed

to wilderness. Very committed to insuring that these lands and waters are still here for our children and grandchildren," she said.

There are about 36 chapters, called "Broad Bands," across the country. Their newest chapter just formed in Duluth.

"We recognize that the BWCA is an area that is gaining national attention in the onslaught of increased sulfide ore mining and we want to lend our unique perspective as to why keeping the BWCA clean is so important," she said.

"This issue has been brewing for some time," Silbert said. "We have one chance to save a national treasure and this is an area pretty high on our radar. This isn't an Ely issue. This is a national

issue."

Silbert said the national membership of their organization helps position them to spread the message, and educate. "Many of our members are seasoned activists," she said. "They grew up in the 1960s and they know the importance of citizen engagement, writing letters, and making their voices heard with direct action."

The Twin Metals exploratory drilling sites virtually surround the nearby Kawishiwi River and Birch Lake areas. Many sites date back to the 1970s. The Koshacks took some of the visitors on a "ground zero" tour Sunday morning. "The test drill sites were backfilled with sand, but the sulfide ore, which generates sulfuric acid, leaches out and there

are some places which remain sterile after 40 or 50 years," Chilcoat said.

Silbert said the issue of sulfide mining dangers is particularly difficult for the Great Old Broads. "Our main office is based in Durango, Colo., and we have just experienced a major spill on the Animas River where three million gallons of waste matter spilled. There is that orange sludge everywhere and you know there are heavy metals there and there is no way to clean it up. This is what could happen here and we don't want to see that possibility."

Berutich added, "This is a national issue and it is happening all over the world. We have an opportunity to have a Broad Band chapter in Minnesota. These members know the lay of the land and are intimately connected to this place."

History of the Broads

The early framework declared Broads to be a nonprofit, social organization dedicated to the protection, use, and enjoyment of the wilderness (designated, proposed, or imagined).

The early days were informal—there were no dues. To become a member you just had to declare yourself one, and then you could buy a T-shirt to proclaim it to the rest of the world.

The Broads sat around kitchen tables and brainstormed. The plan was to spend their time and energies on action protecting wilderness, not creating a formal organization with a paid staff.

By 1993, with a growing membership and expenses, the board decided to institute annual dues—though payment was still optional. In 1994, it became necessary to hire someone to maintain the membership database.

EDUCATION

School board okays athletic coaching revisions

by KURT VANDERVORT
Ely Editor

ELY – The Ely Board of Education recently approved changes to the coaches manual and performance review, proposed by the new athletic director.

With the resignation of long-time athletic director Tim Omerza and the non-renewal of the hockey coach's contract last spring, school athletics is on the front burner at ISD 696.

Tom Coombe was appointed athletic director last month and hit the ground running. "I think Ely is pretty fortunate that we have a document like this," I've coached in two other school districts and at the community college level and in none of those other jobs did I ever see anything as comprehensive.

His first task was to review the manual and coach evaluation process with 6-12 principal Mary McGrane and make revisions.

He termed as "minor" some

revisions to the coaches manual.

"One of the changes I recommend is to mesh the policy for (teams) stopping for food after games with the school board policy," he said. The manual now states that "stopping to eat after a road contest is at the discretion of the head coach" and "coaches must make students aware in advance of plans to stop after a game."

Another "gray area" is with the junior high teams. "This is not issue we will solve overnight. We collect fees for junior high athletics, yet the district does not fund these athletics. We don't pay junior high coaches. I have some questions in terms of these being district sponsored or booster-sponsored. He is looking to identify junior high sports like the Nordic Skiing activity where they are school sponsored but not school funded. That might be the easiest way around this.

There needs to be a little more clarity with this."

"The previous model for performance reviews for coaches was not the best," Coombe said. The varsity hockey coach contract issue after last season highlighted the deficiencies in the process.

He referred to vague terms used, such as "medium" or "high" which did not adequately describe a coach's performance. There are now four distinct ratings used: excellent, proficient, needs improvement and unacceptable.

The interview process for hiring for vacant coaching positions was also clarified. The manual calls for the athletic director, principal and superintendent to screen and interview applicants and make hiring recommendations to the school board.

A five-member committee is involved in filling the vacant hockey coach position, including McCrane, Coombe, faculty member Rob Simonich, and two

members of the community.

Applicants are being screened this week, followed by interviews, and a recommendation to the school board next month.

Community Education

Based on a recommendation from an advisory committee involving the Ely Folk School, the board voted to post for their own Community Education coordinator. "We agreed to try for one year with our own (Community Education) coordinator and the Folk School will do the same and in the process of that years we will try to work on ways to collaborate," Marsnik said.

A memorandum of understanding states that the advisory committees of both entities will meet over the next year to build a framework of cooperation.

Contracts approved

School Board members unanimously approved master

agreements with AFSCME Local 295 and Ely Education Association for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years.

Both contracts provide for two-percent increases in the salary scale each year.

School attorney Kelly Klun said some language changes in the AFSCME contract relate to vacation time and the teacher contract addresses increased interactive television courses.

First-year teachers start at \$34,915 in the first year of the contract and \$35,614 in 2016-2017. Teachers at the top of the wage scale will get \$65,222 this year and \$66,526 next year.

AFSCME union members such as custodians, para-professionals, bus drivers, and other staff, have 15 different job and pay categories. Starting wages range from \$13.90 per hour for a management aide to \$25.97 for health coordinator this year and \$14.18 to \$26.49 per hour next year.

COUNTY SCHOOLS

Cherry finds suitable water source with new well

by TOM KLEIN
Cook-Orr Editor

REGIONAL – A new well to provide drinking water at the Cherry School should be online by the time school starts, according to Facilities Manager Tom Cundy.

"If everything goes well, we should have potable water for the first day of school," said Cundy. "If not, I have bottled water set up and ready."

Cundy said a second well drilled by Peterson Drilling Co. at the site found water at 115 feet

and is gushing at 40 gallons a minute, nearly twice the 25 gallons a minute that engineers estimated would be sufficient to meet the school's needs during peak usage.

"The second well, which cost \$10,000, produces ample clean water and will be tied into the delivery system (in the school)," Cundy said.

The news was welcomed by the St. Louis County School Board, which has been struggling since last December with water issues at the school.

The school's old well produces about 19 gallons a minute

but can't be used for drinking water because of the presence of T-Coli (Total Coliform) bacteria.

T-Coli includes bacteria that are found in the soil, surface water, and human or animal waste. However, a few forms of T-Coli bacteria will lead to health problems, which may include diarrhea, cramps, nausea and vomiting.

Cundy said T. Coli can be neutralized through chlorination, but the water tower for the Cherry School can't accommodate such a system. has had to bring in bottled water for drink-

ing water.

Peterson Drilling Co.'s first attempt at drilling a new well was unsuccessful. The company drilled down 540 feet before hitting water, which trickled out at eight gallons a minute. In addition, the water had high Ph and hard water numbers and was cloudy.

Peterson's second attempt, however, proved more successful.

The new well will be tied into holding tanks in the school, where a chlorination system will be installed. The district had already approved a bid from

Iron Range Plumbing and Heating for the new plumbing in the school, which will cost \$31,800.

The district spent \$32,000 on the first well drilled by Peterson. But when all the costs of the new well and system are calculated, the final tally will be below the \$250,000 earmarked for the project, according to Superintendent Steven Sallee.

The school's original well, which is tied into the water tower, will supply water for fire suppression.