*NORTHEASTERN MINNESOTANS FOR WILDERNESS*

P.O. Box 625 Ely, Minnesota 55731

# *Fall Bulletin*

Our next newsletter is in the final stages of preparation. It may not be ready for a timely **REMINDER OF THE ANNUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 13 IN ELY**. We are experimenting with this more informal "bulletin" version of the Newsletter. Hope you find it useful.

## NMW ANNUAL MEETING, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2007 INTERNATIONAL WOLF CENTER - ELY, 1-4 PM

**The Future of NMW.** We propose to devote much of the Annual Meeting to a conversation with the membership regarding future directions for NMW. NMW is changing as a result of changes in the threats to wilderness and wildlands. Much of our time these days is spent at a computer analyzing and occasionally opposing proposed administrative actions by SNF and DNR. The final stage of opposition to an administrative action is the courts. Unless environmental/wilderness organizations are prepared to go to court it seems questionable to engage in the comments invited on proposed SNF and DNR administrative actions. Court actions and the appeals process leading to them also involve NMW in more complex relationships with other organizations and indeed with the public at large. The membership must help the Board sort out the appropriate role of NMW in this area.

We also need to determine the special role of NMW in the context of other organizations with similar goals (i.e.) what is our niche? We were founded to represent the citizens of the area concerned with wilderness and wild places. This we have done well. Our role is increasingly one of knowing the territory better than anyone else on a day to day basis and being at the forefront of issues as they emerge and must be addressed. (See the item following on SNF law enforcement.)

We plan to present brief reports on our current major areas of activity – general forest planning, ATV trail planning and enforcement, metallic sulfide mining, and lead free fishing tackle. The key word is "brief" because we hope to devote most of this portion to member discussion. There is much knowledge and insight in the membership regarding these issues. We plan to take better advantage of this knowledge.

**Celebrating Our (albeit brief) History.** We want to both celebrate our initial 10-11 year history (organized in '96, incorporated in '97) and to take stock of our activities as a basis for planning future directions. Several past officers and board members will lead this part of the discussion.

## The Past Few Months

**Metallic Sulfide Mining.** This spring and summer have been unusually busy for NMW. Much time has been spent on the issue of metallic sulfide mining where mines are now proposed in the Ely area (S. Kawishiwi River and Birch Lake area) within less than a mile of the BWCAW. Metallic sulfide mining is the major topic of the next newsletter so we won't pursue it further here.

**Responses to SNF and DNR Forest and ATV Trail Plans.** SNF has submitted several proposed projects for public comment. These implement the 2004 Forest Plan (over which NMW has joined other organizations in a lawsuit regarding substantive and procedural issues). The **SNF Echo Trail Project** plan involves major substantive issues as well as the procedural issues in the Forest Plan. NMW's major concerns are the logging proposed for current Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA), thus making IRA ineligible for future Wilderness status; and the logging activities, particularly clearcutting, proposed in proximity to the BWCAW. NMW and colleague organizations failed to resolve our differences with SNF. Upon SNF denial of our administrative appeal, five organizations (NMW, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the BWCA, Sierra Club Northstar Chapter, and the Wilderness Society) filed a lawsuit. Oral arguments in the case are expected in January.

NMW recently submitted comments on the Scoping Document for the **SNF Glacier Project**. (The Glacier Project concerns the Fernberg Road corridor and the area south and east of Ely in the vicinity of Highway 1.) The issues

are similar to those in the Echo Trail Project. SNF appears to be taking a somewhat different stance in Glacier and hopefully the issues may be resolved.

NMW also submitted comments regarding **several ATV trail and road approvals (inventories) proposed by SNF and by DNR**. NMW's special concerns are ATV trails in the vicinity of the BWCAW (and other wildlands and recreational opportunities), and inappropriate density of ATV trails which might lead to unplanned 'scramble' areas and other violations. SNF and DNR inventories form the basis for planning additional ATV trails in the region.

NMW has also submitted comments on several of the **initial proposals for metallic sulfide mining** (primarily for test drilling) in the Kawishiwi River – Birch Lake area.

**Participation in the Ely Blueberry Arts and Harvest Moon Festivals.** NMW operated an informational booth at the two festivals sponsored by the Ely Chamber of Commerce this summer. We were able to communicate our message and concerns to a broad segment of the public and to receive public comment regarding our activities. Not incidentally, we recruited a number of new members and supporters in the process. If you read the Ely area newspapers you know that our participation was not without controversy. NMW thanks the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota and two *pro bono* attorneys for making our participation possible.

**SNF Law Enforcement – The Basswood Lake Shooting Incidents.** Members have probably read of the attempt by six Ely area residents to terrorize canoe campers on Basswood Lake August 7 by shooting guns and fireworks into campsites and inflicting unspeakable verbal abuse. The five adults and one juvenile have been charged by the State with a total of 79 charges. Federal and possible Ontario charges have yet to be announced. NMW participates in a continuing series of meetings with SNF staff regarding law enforcement. We will monitor enforcement and prosecution of these incidents to assure appropriate punishment. Likewise we will evaluate enforcement actions in the incidents to assure future protection of BWCAW and SNF visitors.

## Proposals to Produce and Utilize Biomass in Northeastern Minnesota

The Iron Range Resources Agency (IRR) and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) have begun a campaign to promote the use of biomass in Northeastern Minnesota. NMW has not (yet) taken a position on the proposal, which is primarily a general promotional campaign at this point. NMW members should be aware of the potential problems concerning biomass summarized in the following statement from Sierra Club Northstar Chapter.

### Sierra Club Northstar Chapter– Biomass Position Statement

**Biomass.** State law already includes "trees or other vegetation" in its definition of "renewable energy". The Legislative Task Force was directed to include "herbaceous crops, trees, agricultural waste, and aquatic plant matter" in its studies.

But when the Legislature passed the law mandating that utilities build biomass energy sources, it specified "farm-grown closed-loop biomass": including "poplar, aspen, willow, switch grass, sorghum, alfalfa, and cultivated prairie grass." It also added a loophole for a northern MN mill burning "biomass residue wood, sawdust, bark, chipped wood, or brush;" and other projects using "waste wood, including chipped wood, bark, brush, residue wood, and sawdust."

**Sierra Club position.** Sierra Club does not support using whole trees or logging waste (branches, forest floor material) directly from forests in biomass plants, except those from privately owned tree farms that did not recently replace natural forests. This material is needed to replenish soil nutrients, in ways that do not increase fire risk. Biomass operations often scrape every stick and blade of grass from the soil, causing erosion and leaching soils.

We do not oppose using marginal agricultural land for farms of hybrid trees. This type of farming uses less chemicals than corn or soybean agriculture and creates less stream turbidity. The Sierra Club is opposed to use of transgenic trees in plantations or natural forests because of the risks to native trees and ecosystems.

Sierra Club does support use of wood waste from mills. Any "biomass residue wood, sawdust, bark, chipped wood, or brush;" (216B.2424 subd. 5(e)(2)) or "waste wood, including chipped wood, bark, brush, residue wood, and sawdust" (216B.2424 subd. 6(f)) used in biomass plants should be mill waste, not harvested or salvaged from logging operations.

Where applicable, Sierra Club does not support use of recyclable waste paper in biomass plants or municipal incinerators.

The Sierra Club notes that crop residues have a role in maintaining soil fertility and structure and their removal for use as a fuel is not without significant impacts. Depriving soil of these nutrients may necessitate greater use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, potentially canceling any environmental or economic benefit of using agricultural wastes as biomass. The use of pesticides and drainage technologies to grow crops have created significant environmental impacts and fuel use of crop residues would provide market incentives to increase these impacts. Crops grown specifically for fuel would have to be evaluated for their pesticide and soil productivity impacts on a case by case basis. **Contact** Lois Norgarrd, Forestry Organizer, lois.norgarrd@northstar.sierraclub.org