

Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center's  
***Wilderness Investigations***  
High School

**Wilderness Profile #7**  
***Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness***

**Common Core Standard Connections**

Standards addressed will vary depending on how the teacher chooses to approach the lesson and/or activities.

**Teacher background:**

Two hundred years ago French Voyageurs traversed the place now known as Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. For these adventurers travel by water was, as it had been for Native People over thousands of years, the most efficient way to get around. Because the area today is designated wilderness water travel continues to be the best travel option! Ice Age glaciers carved the rock and left a place where 20% of the land is... water.

This spectacular wilderness was part of the first set of designations in 1964. It is located entirely within the state of Minnesota and is managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Boundary Waters has a total of 810,087 acres but when combined with its neighboring Canadian wilderness (Quetico Provincial Park) the wilderness areas cover approximately two million acres.

Lest anyone think canoeing is the only activity for wilderness visitors, be aware that the area also offers cross-country skiing, dogsledding, camping and ice-fishing. Each of these activities takes the participant back in time and allows them to experience life with solitude being ones companion of choice. The area is rich in natural history, cultural history, and wilderness recreational values.

**Instructions for the teacher:**

To help students become familiar with the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) choose one or more of the following:

- Use information from *Teacher Background* and the *Student Information Sheet* to prepare and present a mini-lesson about this wilderness.

- If students have already started their *U.S. Wilderness Area Field Guide* (started in Wilderness Profile #1) have them add entries by choosing items from the list below:
  - Photocopy the *Student Information Sheet*, have students go through it and then have them create a concept web that features the main details about BWCAW.
  - Using the *Student Information Sheet*, have students choose one of the following creative projects:
    - In teams of two or more students, create a BWCAW board game. Make the game's key elements relate to the park (connected lakes and streams, trails, wooded land) as well as the playing pieces themselves (i.e. a different color or shape of canoe for each player). Players move forward by answering questions about the wilderness correctly. Have teams create an answer sheet for each question they create.
  - Use the large wilderness map and have students make a list of every lake. If they can, have them list them from largest to smallest water surface area.
  - Have students create BWCAW collages that feature some of the main human activities there.
  
- Think about and list everything you would need to bring in order to accomplish a two-week wilderness canoe trip.
  - Make a plan and estimate costs (travel to and from, food, gear, equipment, etc.).
  
- Create a *U.S. Wilderness Area* classroom display or place on class webpage. Continue to add information as new areas are focused on.
  - Just a few wilderness areas are focused on as part of *Wilderness Investigations*. Have students choose non-focused areas to research, present and post on the bulletin board.
  
- For more information about the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness go to [www.wilderness.net](http://www.wilderness.net).

**Wilderness Profile**  
***Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness***  
**Student Information Sheet**



**Canoeing in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness**

(Photo by Gregg Bruff; from Wilderness.net; Image #1556)

**What's the story?**

- Designated as Federally protected wilderness in 1964 by Congress and part of the first group of designated wilderness.
- Managed by the U.S. Forest Service the area has a total of 810,087 acres.
- Located entirely within the state of Minnesota and bordering Canada's Quetico Provincial Park.
  - The two wilderness areas cover nearly two million acres when combined.
  - The wilderness extends nearly 199 miles along the international border.
- Glaciers, during various Ice Age periods, scraped and gauged the rock leaving behind basins for lakes and channels for streams.

- The landscape is dominated by rugged cliffs and crags, gentle hills, canyon walls, rocky shores, and sandy beaches.
- Plant species are representative of those found in a boreal forest biome.
  - Tree species include red pine, eastern white pine, jack pine, birch, balsam fir, white spruce, black spruce, blue spruce, and white cedar.
  - Wild berries (blueberries, raspberries, and wild strawberries) are common in certain areas and popular with wilderness visitors and wildlife.
- The area has an abundant animal population:
  - Mammal examples: Moose, beaver, black bear, white-tail deer, gray wolf, red fox, lynx, fisher, pine martin, mink, otter, weasel, snowshoe hare, red squirrel, and bobcats.
  - Bird examples: Common loon, black-capped chickadees, white-throated sparrows, goldfinch, grosbeaks, bald eagle, mallard ducks, and osprey.
  - Fish examples: Northern pike, walleye, smallmouth bass, perch, sturgeon, and whitefish.
- Evidence of a rich human history date back as far as 10,000 – 12,000 years ago (Paleo-Indian culture). Woodland Period sites (500 BC – 1650 AD) include camping sites, villages, wild ricing sites, burial areas, pictographs, and places of special spiritual and traditional importance.
- More recent historical evidence of European explorers and trappers and early American use of the land for trapping, logging, and settlement are found here.
  - In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries French Voyageurs were hired by fur trapping companies (Mainly the North West Company which later became the Hudson Bay Company) to trade for furs with Native People. They transported huge loads of furs long distances by canoe and are known to have done so in this wilderness area.
- There are 1200 miles of canoe routes and 18 hiking trails with access to campsites and expansive wilderness.
- In winter, cross-country skiing, dog-sledding, camping, and ice-fishing are popular visitor activities.