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First name: Martin
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Organization:
Title:
Comments: Dear Forest Service Team,
The BWCA Wilderness is a very special area in the entire world. I was born in central Europe where nothing compatible exists for the public to enjoy and marvel at. We have a unique resource here and I applaud your efforts to manage many different ideas and viewpoints.

Having said that I have been a visitor to BWCAW, aside from being a guide, for more than 53 years. I have both canoed and backpacked the wilderness. I like it so much that I founded several organizations to help the US Forest Service to maintain trails. Over the last 34 years, I organized more than 3,000 volunteers and contributed 15,000 plus hours of volunteer work to the Superior National Forest. Total contributions in volunteers' efforts runs into millions of dollars saved to the taxpayers.

Trails like Kekekabic, Powwow, Sioux Hustler were saved because of this volunteer led effort. Society has benefited immensely, because were it not for the US Forest Service collaboration with volunteer groups, about two thirds of the 200 miles plus of wilderness trails would not exist today for public to enjoy.

I urge you to be open in the new Forest Plan to restoration of existing, intrinsically beautiful, historic trails that have been for one reason, or another decommissioned in the past, because it is in the public interest to do so. Many of these trails are short and volunteer organizations could maintain them without compromising their current commitments. One way of thinking about this is for all of us to visualize the next Forest Plan from 30 years from now: would the future generations like to have more solitude and remote recreation opportunities or fewer? Is the public better off because the Kekekabic Trail was saved 34 years ago (the answer is: the North Country Trail could not have been routed via SHT and the Border Route, had the Kekekabic not been cleared in 1990)?

The backpacking trails in the BWCAW are all unique and each has its own character. There is no similar opportunity for true wilderness backpacking anywhere in Midwest and one would have to drive more than 1,000 miles to the Rockies.

But even in the wilderness of the Rocky Mountain National Park, the further and higher you go, the more civilization one will see in far distance, not to mention the clusters of city lights at night. In contrast, backpacking further into the BWCA Wilderness, one will experience more immense solitude, eventually even the singular cell phone tower red light disappearing out of sight. What could be better?

In past, many people thought that it would be impossible for anyone to clear the Kekekabic Trail (in 1990) and the Powwow Trail (after 2011 PCF). Yet thanks to cooperation from the Forest Service with volunteer groups, not only these trails were cleared once, but continue to be hike able by most backpackers.

One trail that the USFS could consider reopening is the Kelso Mountain Trail. This historic path is only 1.25 miles long and it leads to the site of a former FS lookout tower. It provides a unique experience because to get to it, visitors will paddle five miles from Sawbill Lake landing to the trailhead. When discussing this option, a Forest Service poster from entry point kiosks comes to mind: "People have passed through here, protect our past." While professionals may look at a trail like this as insignificant, please keep in mind that city people marvel at the opportunity to be in the forest. If I may, I will invoke a quote by the late ranger Tom Kaffine who once said about the Powwow Trail that "it is just an old logging road." No offense to Tom who was a great friend of the trails, but what is ordinary to one who frequents the forest every day, can be a sparkling diamond to the next person who works at a computer in a city and seeks renewal - seeing that old logging road through a different lens.

Therefore, I urge you to look at the public input through a different lens and try to be open to restoring some, when feasible and appropriate, heritage trails. As a ranger stated to me number of times: "Let's work together to develop shared objectives."

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,
Martin Kubik
writing as a citizen and a public servant (ESL)
- founder and past president of
3M Club Outdoor Club
Kekekabic Trail Club
Boundary Waters Advisory Committee
Founder and president, Boundary Waters Heritage Trails
3M Environmental Leadership Award recipient
3M Volunteer of the Year
American Hiking Society Volunteer of the Year/ Midwest