



WILDERNESS WATCH

Keeping Wilderness Wild

P.O. Box 9175 | Missoula, MT 59807 | 406.542.2048 | wild@wildernesswatch.org | www.wildernesswatch.org

September 2, 2025

Superior National Forest
Attention: Recreation Fee Proposal
8901 Grand Avenue Place
Duluth, MN 55808

Sent via: sm.fs.bwcawsurvey@usda.gov

Dear Forest Service Staff,

The following comments come from Wilderness Watch on the agency's proposal to increase visitor fees for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). The 1.1 million-acre BWCAW is one of the most visited – if not the most visited – Wildernesses in the entire National Wilderness Preservation System. Wilderness Watch is a national wilderness conservation organization focused on the protection and proper stewardship of all units of the National Wilderness Preservation System, including the BWCAW. Our staff has had more than 50 years of experience in protecting the BWCAW, including work to pass the 1978 BWCAW Act, Public Law 95-495, through Congress.

Our specific comments follow:

1. Wilderness Watch opposes the current fee increase proposal.

The U.S. Forest Service has proposed to more than double the fees it charges to visit the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in the Superior National Forest of Minnesota.

The Forest Service has charged a visitor fee for the BWCAW since 1998, and hasn't raised the fee since 2008. Now, however, the agency has proposed to raise the fee for youth from \$8 per trip to \$20, and for adults from the current \$16 per trip to \$40—a whopping 150 percent increase.

2. Access to public lands and Wilderness should be available to everyone, not just those who can afford to pay.

While Wilderness Watch supports quotas and permit systems to reduce impacts and protect wildlife and solitude for visitors, the proposed 150 percent fee increase for the

BWCAW will both add to the commodification of the BWCAW and make it increasingly out of reach to lower-income individuals and families.

3. The Forest Service and Congress have been starving the Forest Service's national wilderness program for years.

While nearly 20 percent of the National Forest System is designated Wilderness, the budget for Wilderness is far less than one percent of the agency's budget. The Forest Service shouldn't be charging wilderness visitors exorbitant fees so it can spend taxpayer money elsewhere. It needs to fund Wilderness at a reasonable level out of its current budget.

4. The Forest Service is disingenuous in not talking about the Trump cuts to its budget.

This new fee increase proposal also comes on the heels of the Trump Administration's drastic staffing cuts at the Forest Service—including wilderness rangers. Nationally, thousands of Forest Service staffers have already been fired or pushed out, including many of the seasonal and temporary staffers who worked as wilderness rangers. Those cuts included the loss of about 100 staffers on just the Superior National Forest.

The public now shouldn't be asked to backfill those severe budget and staff cuts made by the Trump Administration that affect the BWCAW. Instead, the Forest Service should seek to restore those drastic cuts internally within the administration before asking the public to pay more to simply visit a Wilderness.

5. As the heritage of all Americans, the BWCAW should remain accessible to all members of the public, not just those who can afford to pay exorbitant fees.

The BWCAW should be accessible to everyone, not just those who can afford to pay. The proposed fee increase will make it harder for lower-income visitors to come to and experience the BWCAW.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin Proescholdt".

Kevin Proescholdt
Conservation Director