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Minnesota: Nature's playground

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MINNESOTANS HAVE FUN. We see our state as a place filled with opportunities for adventure, relaxation, and "edutainment." Frequently referred to as "the theater of seasons," the state's changing weather multiplies the varied landscapes by four. Each lake, valley, hilltop, forest, bog, and field has four distinct personalities created by the weather. In the winter, Minnesota gets very cold and normally has considerable snowfall. By contrast, the summers are hot with sudden storms. The change from summer to winter produces a fantastically colorful landscape through which pass hundreds of thousands of migratory birds. The spring, although not as colorful as fall, is characterized by racing streams, a northerly migration of birds, and vegetation bursting with life. Minnesotans have developed special ways to play on all landscapes in all seasons. An army of hunters, several thousand strong, fills the forests and fields every fall. In the subzero dead of winter perfectly normal people sit on overturned pails, staring at holes they have bored in the ice, waiting for a fish to swim by and take their bait. In the summer, a huge fleet of pleasure boats is launched to carry people in circles around the lakes. Special vehicles are purchased to carry us off the roads into the depths of swamps so we can get away from it all. Are we different from other Americans? "You betcha"—we have learned to enjoy our time in Minnesota.

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In Minnesota we all can walk on water. In fact, we drive trucks on it. For at least three months, and in most years five months, the 10,000-plus lakes, the rivers, and the ponds of Minnesota are covered with a layer of ice strong enough to support mini-settlements of ice-fishing houses. Minnesotans have fished through the ice for decades. It is possible that the first people to develop the technology were commercial fishermen who strung their nets under the ice. Perhaps the first ice-fishermen were dairy farmers with time on their hands during the winter. However it began, ice fishing is a signature event in Minnesota. Each winter there are ice fishing contests attracting thousands of entrants. One wonders what the fish think when one morning the lake is suddenly full of dangling hooks and the noise of happy people and thousands of footsteps crunching on the ice. It is not too surprising that the contestants usually catch very young and small fish.

For several years various entrepreneurs have tried to promote stock-car races on the frozen lakes, but have met with limited success. Parka-clad spectators peering through clouds of their condensed breath and cars spinning around on ice lack the appeal of NASCAR racing on sun-drenched raceways in the South. Perhaps racing on frozen lakes is too similar to the normal winter commute on icy, snow-filled streets to be amusing.

WHY DON'T WE STAY INSIDE AND CURL UP BY THE FIRE?

This is not the place to trace the development of recreation and sport in modern American culture, but a few generalizations about that process may help explain some of our behavior. During the last half of the twentieth century Minnesota has gradually evolved from a landscape of work toward a landscape of play. During those five decades the average income and amount of leisure time available to individuals and families gradually expanded. With increased time and money, Minnesotans, like all Americans, followed the admonishments of advertisers and began to develop ways to fill their leisure time and spend their money. In this regard Minnesotans are like all
citizens of wealthy countries. However, there are a few pieces of conventional wisdom and some scholarly observations that may be useful in understanding why the special recreational landscape of Minnesota has been developed.

Most Minnesotans will tell visitors that the best way to survive in Minnesota is to be active. Do not fight the environment; find a way to enjoy it. If days are cold and snowy, take up winter camping, cross-country skiing, skating, or any one of innumerable winter sports. If the weather is hot and humid, go swimming, enjoy the breeze on a golf course, or get the wind blowing through your hair on a powerboat racing around in circles on a lake. This attitude may spring from the early agriculturalists’ bouts with cabin fever, a specific form of madness associated with being confined to a small room during the harshest times of winter.

Not everyone believes that intense activity is the best way to deal with the changes in the weather. Indoor recreation enthusiasts, those who curl up with a good book in front of a roaring fire as winter descends, balance outdoor aficionados. These “couch potatoes” prefer drinking a cold beer or iced tea in a shady spot to playing a round of golf or game of tennis during the heat of summer. In fact, the nonactive may outnumber the outdoors enthusiasts in the state, if we consider the fact that, along with other Americans whose lifestyles have become sedentary, a large fraction of adult Minnesotans are overweight.

Conventional wisdom aside, scholars have recognized special aspects of Minnesota culture. John Rooney and Richard Pillsbury have placed Minnesota in the “sports for sports’ sake” region. In this portion of the United States, schools and recreation programs offer almost everyone a chance to participate in the sport of their choice. High-school athletics are supported as recreational outlets for participants and spectators. Although most towns support basketball for high-school boys and girls, very few elite basketball players are produced in the region. In addition, Rooney and Richardson describe this region as a “bastion of girls’ high school athletics.” The “sports for sports’ sake” region is vast. Its eastern border begins west of Green Bay and runs south through central Wisconsin to the Mississippi River and follows the Mississippi south to southern Mis-
souri, but excludes St. Louis. The southern border runs west from Memphis through Arkansas along the northern Oklahoma border to the Rocky Mountains in southern Colorado. There it runs northward along the Rocky Mountain front through eastern Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana and along the Rocky Mountains to the Canadian border (it also includes Alaska). The region contains only three cities that support major-league teams in baseball, basketball, football, or hockey.

Just as in other states, recreation and sports have been embedded into the school culture of Minnesota for many reasons. Participation in sports teaches leadership and aids personal development. It also promotes community spirit, both within the schools and in the larger community that supports the schools. Minnesotans expect their children to participate in sports; therefore schools offer a variety of activities that runs the seasonal gamut and appeals to all.

While everyone is encouraged to participate, recreation in Minnesota is undoubtedly gendered. Males dominate the popular images of hunting. In fact, the most frequent justification for hunting is the camaraderie of the hunting camp. Fishing is harder to categorize. Males are most frequently portrayed, but advertising images also depict happy families in fishing boats. Increased gender equality is also apparent in other landscapes. Ladies’ days at golf courses have essentially disappeared, and young men and women are seen on ski slopes in approximately equal numbers. There seems to be a trend toward more equal participation in tennis, jogging, and biking. While Minnesota shares many attributes with the other parts of the “sports for sports’ sake” cultural region, there are several special recreational landscapes that warrant further investigation.

CLASSIFICATION OF LANDSCAPES

The meaning of places is determined by complex interactions between the physical environment, buildings and other modifications humans have added to the landscape, and interpretations made by individuals of the landscape. Children are experts at transforming humdrum landscapes into enchanted places. In Minnesota nature helps children by changing golf courses
into snowy slopes perfect for skiing or sliding. Snowplows create great banks of snow that are perfect for playing “King of the Hill.” This works for adults as well. A high retaining wall can become a perfect face for rock climbers, harvested cornfields become hunting grounds, and cutover timberlands become spiritual retreats.

Writers such as Leo Marx, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Roderick Nash have described a gradient in landscape values that ranges from urban through rural and pastoral to wilderness. The values attached to these landscapes have varied over time. Tuan argues that in the late eighteenth century the “Jeffersonian ideas categorized the city as profane, the pastoral or middle landscape as Edenic and the wilderness as also profane.” But by the late twentieth century, values had shifted. The center of large urban areas and the landscapes of urban sprawl were still profane, while the middle landscape and threatened wilderness became Edenic. Wilderness has become an ecological ideal and no longer thought of as a profane place to be conquered and transformed into a cultivated area. The pastoral areas between the city and the wilderness consist of a variety of places. Some are agricultural; others are locations where mining or lumbering occurs. And others may be resorts and small towns. These diverse places have distinctive landscapes that are the physical expression of the environmental processes and human activities found within those areas. The landscapes can be thought of as the cultural footprint on the land. According to the above-mentioned authors, Americans have differing opinions about these landscapes. Some places are thought to be beautiful or romantic and are highly valued. Others are considered ugly and dangerous and are to be avoided. As will be discussed later in this essay, the values about landscapes held by Minnesota residents vary by social class and geographic location.

It is possible to classify recreational landscapes according to a set of gradients that, while separate, have strong relationships. At one end we have the landscape of home, which is comfortable and predictable, but affords few opportunities for recreation and physical activity. At the other end are the dangerous landscapes that are filled with risk and demand mental and physical preparation. The wilderness is both dangerous for
the average or unskilled individual and safe for those who are well prepared. It can be a place for personal testing or quiet communion with nature.

Another gradient of landscapes is the degree to which they are modified by human activity. Frequently called the cultural landscape, the built environment reflects the values, needs, and desires of humans. Built recreational environments range from backyard swing sets and jungle gyms, to ball courts, gymnasiums, and swimming pools, to area stadiums and golf courses. The reservoirs constructed behind dams are probably the largest recreational landscapes that have been created by direct human activity.

In addition to built recreational landscapes are those places that, while not actually built or cultivated by humans, are heavily managed. Minnesota's lakes, marshes, streams, rivers, and forests are all controlled areas. Water bodies are regularly stocked with fish, streams are managed for trout habitat, forests are harvested for timber, and marshes are drained or sometimes flooded for waterfowl. At the extreme are landscapes that are protected from human activity. What we call wilderness in Minnesota exists because as a community we have decided to limit the depredations of human economic activity. Thus we can see at least two gradients in the landscape: one based on the degree to which humans have altered the place and the other based on the degree of danger or amount of special knowledge needed to survive in the place.

RITUALS OF PLACE IN THE RECREATIONAL LANDSCAPES

Rooney points out that Minnesotans would rather participate in sports than watch them. High-school sports and amateur leagues are used to define communities to a remarkable degree. Towns of all sizes boast baseball and softball fields, basketball courts, football fields, hockey arenas, and ice rinks. Brilliant lights on high poles pierce the dark humid nights each summer as the "town ball" leagues pit the local townsmen and farmers against those down the road. Agriculturists take pride in maintaining immaculate turf playing fields. The crowds are small but enthusiastic. In the fall, town ball yields to football leagues
tailored to the size of the school. Some schools field teams with only nine players, and there are four levels of regular eleven-man teams. All through the harvest seasons the teams compete for the right to play in Minneapolis’s Hubert H. Humphrey Dome for the state championship. Although not as football-crazed as Texans, Minnesotans still promote the sport.

We all work together while we play against each other. Both boys’ and girls’ athletics are used to enact ritually the regional struggles between various parts of the state. The title “state champion,” whether for volleyball, swimming, dance teams, football, or wrestling, is an ardently pursued prize. Each year it is suburbs against the city, the north battling the south, and the metropolitan area versus the rest of Minnesota. Hockey teams from Baudette and International Falls, wrestling teams from Caledonia and Blue Earth, basketball teams from Lychfield and Minneapolis North, cross-country and track teams from Moundsview and Stillwater struggle before hometown and community fans for statewide bragging rights. The images and myths spun around the adolescent athletics hark back to older times when parents and other relatives competed. Regional images are also honed through sports. Hockey players from the north are reputed to have skated to school in bitterly cold temperatures on frozen rivers with the howling of wolves ringing in their ears. Wrestlers from the south are said to possess iron grips and bulging arm and shoulder muscles earned by hand-milking herds of Holsteins before catching the school bus. Football players with a blue-collar work ethic are extolled along with prized basketball players who learned their moves on the tough playgrounds of the inner city. When all the state tournaments are over, the round of play practice and competition begins again with a new cohort to replace the graduates.

Once upon a time young people played games and sports without the interference of adults. Today, in order to produce athletes, parents and communities have combined to create landscapes and lifestyles organized around recreational activities. Communities have built athletic fields and ice arenas to provide spaces for children to learn, practice, and compete. Elaborate systems of leagues have been created to ensure that children get the proper training and competition. Baseball,
soccer, and hockey are probably the most extreme examples of this phenomenon. Modeled after baseball’s “Little League,” other sports established similar layers of competition. In some cases the parents have actually defied the weather and now both hockey and soccer players compete year-round. Because “ice time” in the indoor arenas is limited, games are scheduled at all times of the day. Hockey parents (usually moms) ferry the boys and girls to various venues in vans filled with the paraphernalia of pads, sticks, skates, and uniforms. Minnesota even hosts an international soccer tournament each summer.

Along with the leagues, games, and practices have come a host of specialized camps for budding athletes. There are goalie camps, power-skating camps, and “big-men” basketball camps, among others. The specialized athletic camps compete with the more traditional summer camps of the YWCA, YMCA, Scouts, and churches.

THE LAKE CABIN UP NORTH

In Minnesota there is a generic place called “up north” or “at the cabin.” Approximately 5.6 percent of the households in Minnesota own about 132,000 seasonally occupied properties in the state. The actual location of the family’s lake place may or may not be north of its primary residence. It may be a very simple structure without indoor plumbing, or it may be a five-bedroom, three-bath house. No matter; it is still “the cabin.” Having a “summer home” is too pretentious for Minnesotans. That is what the bosses of the railroads and the mill owners had. Real Minnesotans have cabins. This fascination with a cabin on a lake may be traceable back to the Scandinavian culture of many of the immigrants; today many of the families in Sweden and Norway own second homes, although many are farmhouses rather than lakeshore properties. Whatever the reason, twentieth-century Minnesotans love lake cabins.

At first the cabins were built on lakes close to towns or on lakes that could be reached from the Twin Cities by trains. The glacial moraine region of central Minnesota is pocked with hundreds of ideal lakes. They have sandy bottoms with a sharp slope down to the lakeside. The best lakes have good popula-
tions of fish. The mixed forests of the transition zone between the prairies of the south and west and the pine forests of the north are perfect places for cabins. They were not all log cabins in the pines, but the first cabins were primitive. Water had to be pumped by hand, and outdoor privies were standard. Baths were taken in the lake, and all the cooking was done on wood stoves. But working while everyone else played made homemakers unhappy, and whenever possible the cabin was improved. Electricity for lights and appliances, propane for stoves or furnaces, and indoor plumbing were added over the years. In fact, shortly after the midpoint of the century, the suburban lawn was introduced to the vernacular cabin landscape design.

THE MINNESOTA FLEET

Unlike other navies, the Minnesota fleet has more captains than crew. The crafts are generally small and carry arms only during the waterfowl hunting season. The fleet is large and consists of 793,107 bottoms not including canoes, duckboats, riceboats, or seaplanes. The fleet grows about 1 percent a year. At first, fishing boats designed by local Scandinavian builders, such as Lund or Larson, were rowed or pushed by small outboard motors made by other Scandinavian firms such as Evinrude and Johnson. Neither the boats nor motors had to be big, because families were not in a hurry and most lakes were not large. However, once waterskiing was invented in Lake City, Minnesota, life at the cabin was altered forever.

The peaceful mornings and evenings that had been spent in quiet conversation and contemplation of the ways of nature (especially fish) were shattered by the roaring ski boats pulling a new form of athlete, the water-skier. After a short time, lakeshore owner organizations and townships adopted rules to confine waterskiing—and, more recently, jet skis (sort of a motorcycle for use on water)—to certain hours of the day and to certain lakes. New water sports have made lake cabins even more popular with the young and athletic. Fishing has not disappeared, but the concept of a primitive fishing cabin has.

With the prosperity of the last three decades of the twentieth century, the number of developed lakeshore properties has
skyrocketed. The wealthy newcomers have changed the culture of the north. There is now a huge market for a wide range of consumer goods, higher quality roads, entertainment facilities such as golf courses and restaurants, and services needed by the summer population to maintain its suburban lifestyle.

CANOEING

The many lakes of Minneapolis are great places for romantic canoe rides. On warm Wednesday nights a small flotilla assembles off the shore near the Lake Harriet Band Shell to languish in the sounds of pop tunes wafting out over the water. The state’s rivers have become popular places for downstream travel in rented canoes, usually in the spring when the water is high. More recently the kayak has become popular for those who like to skim over the water without a partner.

For most Minnesotans, canoeing and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness are inseparable. The BWCAW is located in northeastern Minnesota. Established as a special management area within the Superior National Forest, the area is managed by the Department of the Interior for three primary purposes: wilderness and recreational activities, watershed management, and the protection of threatened and endangered species. The BWCAW is not a huge area (about one million acres) but it has over 1,200 miles of convoluted canoe routes. The two hundred thousand people who get permits to canoe it each year are spaced out in what amounts to long lines with significant intervals. Thus, even though it is regarded as the most heavily used wilderness area in the United States, canoe parties can still feel alone and refresh their souls. Although we canoe an all sorts of water bodies, the archetypal trip is one to the Boundary Waters where cold lakes, granite outcrops, islands, and dense forests define the wilderness experience.

HUNTING

In 1999, slightly over 8 percent of the state’s population—359,690 Minnesotans—bought licenses to hunt white-tailed deer and took to the woods. They hunted in all sections of the state,
from the cornfields of the south to the bogs and aspen forests of the north. It is not possible to know how many were afield at any one time, but it is safe to assume that the vast majority were out on the opening day of the season. In the forested sections of the state all outdoor activities are limited during “The Season.” Hunters are required to wear blaze-orange clothing, and bikers, walkers, dogs, and horses are advised to wear bright clothes as well. While not frequent, accidental shooting deaths occur each season.

Rituals are important in hunting. Hunting companions are selected with great care. While solitary hunters are common, hunting is most often done in intergenerational groups. Boys and a growing number of girls are apprenticed into the sport after passing firearms safety classes. Hunting shacks, like lake cabins, come in all styles and sizes. Most are spartan and decorated with antlers, old furniture, ample larders, and tables for playing cards. The hunting camps are egalitarian places where all are expected to contribute to the success of the hunt. However, expertise is respected, as some butcher, some cook, and others tell “Sven and Ole” jokes.

During the fall in northern Minnesota most men are not expected to be available on weekends for several weeks before the hunting season begins because they are preparing their camp and deer stands. During the season they are in the woods, and after the season they are talking about the activities of the earlier weekends. There are actually several different deer seasons. Hunters using bows get the first chance at the deer herd; those using firearms, mostly rifles but some shotguns, follow them. Finally the traditionalists who use old-fashioned “black powder,” percussion rifles, try their hand. Those interested in hunting moose need a special permit and follow greater restrictions. Fat and sleepy bears on their way to hibernation are also hunted. When the season finally draws to a close in late November or early December, the annual population of deer, moose, and bears has been reduced, but the populations of all three animals continue to expand in response to favorable environmental conditions.

Big game hunting with firearms for deer, moose, and bear is only one form of this popular sport. In the agricultural land-
scapes of the southern part of the state, the pheasant hunters take the fields. Some take up positions on the edges of fields of corn, soybeans, or prairie, and others in the party walk through the fields driving the wary birds toward them. Heavy birds, the pheasants are reluctant flyers and prefer to elude their pursuers by running through the vegetation or remaining concealed. Thus, good bird dogs are invaluable companions to the hunters. The dogs flush the birds, then locate and retrieve them after they have been shot. Pheasant hunting can be an idyllic walk through the sunny autumn landscape in the company of friends and loyal canine companions. Small-town social organizations hold special hunters’ pancake breakfasts to raise money, but there is usually no expectation that hunters will pay for permission to hunt private land. Similar to the pheasant hunters in the fields, hunters in the forests pursue woodcock, partridge, and grouse.

Duck and goose hunting, on the other hand, is best on cold rainy days when the birds fly low and stay close to the marshes. Although some try to sneak up on ducks resting on small bodies of water—called “jump-shooting”—most hunters conceal themselves and their dogs in blinds or camouflaged boats behind strings of decoys. They take to their stations well before dawn, and when the sun rises they attempt to call the birds into shooting range. Their quiet solitary pastime is generally cold and uncomfortable. But when the fast-flying waterfowl come into range, pumping adrenaline raises the temperature of hunters, both human and canine. The dogs, whether Chesapeakes or Labradors, are born to swim and joyfully plunge into the icy water after downed birds.

The most solitary of the bird hunters are the approximately forty thousand who seek wild turkeys. This is a relatively new sport, growing rapidly in response to the population explosion of the once nearly extinct birds. The Department of Natural Resources, in cooperation with sportsmen’s clubs, has restocked wild birds in woodlots and farm fields in the southern and central parts of the state. Turkey hunters dress like trees, cover their faces with camouflage paint, and, in the wee hours of the morning while the birds are roosting, take up their hiding
places. When the sun finally rises they attempt to call tom turkeys to them by imitating the seductive calls of lonesome hens. Turkeys are not the only wild birds that are increasing as a result of landscape management by humans. The population of Giant Canada geese is exploding. These birds were thought extinct until a small flock was discovered living permanently on a reservoir in Rochester that was kept ice-free year-round by warm water discharged from a local power plant. These birds were local favorites and fed by the townsfolk. Once the DNR realized the birds were living in Rochester, conservation agents captured young birds and relocated them to new breeding grounds each summer for several years. The relocation program was a stunning success. It turns out that geese love parks, and they especially love the suburbs. They like the warm water of urban parks and thrive on the lush grass of golf courses and cemeteries. Now the bird has become something of a problem. Although not quite as numerous as pigeons, the birds soil the jogging trails and golf links. Guardian ganders frequently challenge golf carts and slow-moving cars. The burgeoning numbers of offspring of the urban geese created the need for yet another relocation program. Each year city park rangers rounded up the goslings before they could fly and shipped them off to game reserves in other states. Minnesota has exported so many geese there are no more places willing to take surplus birds. The large number of resident geese has made a special hunting season necessary.

FISHING

There is nothing in Minnesota quite like "the opener," or the opening weekend of fishing. While all sorts of fish are popular with anglers, the state's premier fish is the walleyed pike. This native fish can grow very large, but most of those caught are less than five pounds. The fish are said to have soft lips, and one must be careful when they nibble bait. If one is overly eager the fish will get away. In most years the governor participates in a media event during the opener. The Friday night before opening weekend the northward-bound lanes of all the roads are jammed with pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles pulling boat trailers.
This sort of fishing is very social. There are no solitary fishermen on the opener. Even though it is seldom a warm weekend, it is considered the beginning of summer. For several years the weekend coincided with Mother’s Day. This presents a dilemma that some have attempted to solve with the “take a mother fishing weekend.” While it is a time for bonding and relaxation, the fishing opener is occasionally marred by drownings and traffic accidents.

Trout fishing has several openers, but unlike the walleye opener there are no traffic jams, drownings, or accidents. Trout streams are found in southeastern Minnesota along the limestone bluffs of the Mississippi and also along the north shore of Lake Superior. These two beautiful but sharply contrasting landscapes attract fly fishermen, who prefer to work the streams by themselves. Because there are no “stream cabins,” trout fishermen stay in motels or, even better, pitch tents in the parks or public land close to the streams. The spring nights are cool and so they pack themselves in layers of sleeping bags and blankets. Shortly after sunrise the crisp smell of campfires made with dry oak fills the misty valleys. After a few cups of scalding coffee the men and women don their thigh-high boots and wade into the cold water. It only seems that they are lashing the water with their fly rods when, in fact, they are carefully positioning their flies so the wily trout strike without thinking. Most trout fishermen do not keep all they catch. Many use barbless hooks and prefer to return their catch to the streams.

Minnesota landscapes are managed for trout. Although a sizable natural or native population exists, trout are also stocked in some streams. The DNR has several programs designed to maintain the fast-flowing clear streams of the limestone bluffs. The banks of streams are stabilized and logs or low barriers of rocks are installed so that they jut out into the stream. These structures, called wing dams, force the stream into narrow channels where the water picks up speed. The faster flowing water is able to scour the streambed and create holes, which provide an environment more conducive to trout.
FAMILY FEUDS—PRIVATE RECREATION ON PUBLIC LAND

The public owns much of the land in Minnesota. The state and federal governments own approximately 23.5 percent of the entire state. The vast majority of public land is in the northern forest zone, where the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service combined hold 6.5 percent. Another 5.5 percent came to the counties as tax-forfeited lands. The Minnesota DNR owns 10.31 percent, and various other state departments own 0.06 percent. The vast majority of the land is northwest of Duluth.5

The presence of so much public land in northern Minnesota has created a major controversy over the proper use of the land and the denizens of the forest. It is a clash between those who want to use the land for a variety of recreational purposes and those who view it as a commercial resource. The population living in the rest of the state has two sometimes conflicting views of the region. There are those who believe the land should be managed for sports such as hunting, snowmobiling, and fishing. Others view it as a preserve for wild animals such as moose, deer, and otter, or a place for contemplative individuals to interact with the wilderness and thereby find a deeper meaning in life. To provide for their needs is the BWCAW as well as a large section of the area designated the Voyageurs National Park, both located along the Canadian border. The most persistent controversy involves the use of the forest outside the special protected areas. Pulp and paper companies' desire to harvest timber clashes with the views of environmentalists such as the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, who believe that too much timber is being cut too quickly to maintain the necessary habitats for animal life and water quality.

THE SINGING WILDERNESS: BWCAW

Superior National Forest was established in northern Minnesota through several administrative processes between 1905 and the present. Shortly after World War I, when the highway
system was developed in this part of the state, camping and outdoor recreation in the national forest began to become popular. By 1919, about 12,750 people had visited the forest. Competition between the new outdoor enthusiasts and the timber companies working in the forest soon developed. The two decades between 1920 and 1940 were filled with controversy between those interested in developing hydropower and those interested in recreation. In the late 1920s the secretary of agriculture, William M. Jardine, issued a proclamation creating a “primitive area.” In 1958 the present name was established. Although we call it a wilderness, it is not a virgin forest. It has been largely cut over and experienced various forms of sparse settlements. Today the BWCAW is a roadless area, and air travel below 4,000 feet is forbidden. The use of motors in the area is severely restricted, but those who want to use motorized fishing boats and snowmobiles in the area believe the landscape should be made available to a wider fraction of the population and not just limited to the canoeist.

For many canoeists the BWCAW is already too crowded. Some feel that the wilderness experience begins only after they have paddled a full day without seeing another human. The YMCA and Scout camps using the area have developed special traditions and cultures based on the wilderness experience; for example, some camps use only handcrafted wooden canoes that reflect the fragility of the wilderness. But no matter what material is used for canoes, all the camps extol the virtues of the simple life and teach campers to care for the environment.

INFERNAL MACHINES

While canoeists are quiet and fishers and hunters—whether after waterfowl, deer, wild turkeys, or small game—are expected to be silent while in pursuit, during the past few years a new machine has posed problems for the landscape. A class of motorized vehicles with four or six wheels designed to travel off roads has become increasingly popular in the rural regions of the state—the All-Terrain Vehicle, or ATV. While some hunters use these to get to and from their “stands,” recreational-use ATVs have caused a major conflict on public land.
In Minnesota, ATV registrations have exploded 803 percent since 1984, going from 12,235 to today's 110,449. Hunters are angry because the ATV riders break trails through the forest, disturbing their hunt. It is legal to drive an ATV off a state trail, but ATV opponents contend the machines are tearing up public lands, creating noise problems, and frustrating those who are looking for solitude in the woods. ATV advocates argue they have an equal right to use public lands. They further contend that their license fees should be used to make more trails for them on the public land. In response, the DNR attempted to classify state forest lands into three groups for the purpose of managing off-road vehicle use: managed, limited, and closed. In the managed forest (90 percent of the total), all roads and trails would be open to ATVs. They also suggested that off-trail riding should be banned in the remaining 10 percent. Legislators rejected their proposal. The debate between the riders and the environmentalists is not over, but it appears that new a form of recreational landscape will be created in the forest.

RIGHT TO HUNT

Tension over the use of the publicly owned forest also generated an intense debate in the late 1990s over the right to hunt. As a result, the Minnesota legislature passed a law guaranteeing residents of Minnesota the right to hunt and fish, despite the protests of various groups of animal rights advocates. In addition, Minnesota's residents and political leaders have been engaged in a lengthy debate on the management of the wolf and deer populations in the northern part of the state. Deer hunters encourage the Division of Forestry and other sections of the DNR to create a landscape that will support a large number of deer so the hunters may harvest them.

THE GREAT STATE GET-TOGETHER

Lovers of solitude avoid one of the state's most famous recreation landscapes: the 360-acre Minnesota State Fair grounds. The twelve-day-long fair is one of the nation's largest and best-attended agricultural, educational, and entertainment events,
in recent years attracting over 1.6 million people annually. The
fair's agricultural and creative competitions draw over 35,000
entries each year. Livestock, fine arts, crafts, school projects,
baked goods, fruit, vegetables, bee and honey products, flow-
ers, butter, and cheese are all brought to the fair. But that is not
all. In addition to the exciting carnival rides, six stages provide
over 500 free performances during the exposition. The grand-
stand, originally built to showcase horse races, now features
pop, rock, and country music artists as well as comedians. It is
also a great place to shop, browse, or learn. Over four million
square feet of exhibit space contain booths housing manufac-
turers, retailers, educational institutions, artisans, politicians,
news media, and a wide variety of government agencies.

Best of all, the fair is a great place to eat! It boasts the
Midwest's largest collection of food vendors, with more than
three hundred culinary concessionaires. Everything from ethnic
foods to traditional favorites like mini donuts, fried cheese
curds, and frosty malts, along with twenty-five different foods-
on-a-stick, all can be found at the fair. There are so many
cauldrons and vats of hot grease bubbling that some say that
the air of the fair grounds gets saturated with fat molecules
after a couple of days, allowing a person to gain weight by just
walking around at the fair and inhaling the ambient atmo-
spheric calories.

The fair is the last great ritual of summer. It ends with Labor
Day and the start of school. For the rest of the year the fair
grounds are essentially idle, although a few buildings are used
for special events. The hippodrome hosts horse shows and
sporting events. In June the many streets of the grounds are
converted into parking lots for the fancy cars entered in the
"Back to the Fifties" car show. Brilliantly painted hot rods and
dream machines create one of the most festive landscapes imagi-
nable.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

There is another sort of recreational landscape developing in
Minnesota and the rest of the United States. These are the
historic sites and places that have been determined to have
some message for the present and future generations. In recent years, people have flocked to places like Historic Fort Snelling, where reenactors show visitors what fort life was like in 1828. The State Historical Society manages several rebuilt trading posts, such as Grand Portage, where the great rendezvous between the traders who worked in the boreal forests north of the Arctic Ocean met with the factors from Montreal who came west across the Great Lakes in huge cargo canoes. There are also living history farms and lumber camps, which employ reenactors to illustrate working and living conditions in the nineteenth century.

In Minneapolis, the milling district at the Falls of St. Anthony has been declared a historic district. Here visitors can go on a walking tour or engage a guide for a lively interpretation of the ruins and rebuilt structures. Forestville Park in southeastern Minnesota contains a fully stocked country store from the 1930s, but little is for sale there. There are few sites associated with the pre-European populations that are open for viewing. Access to most of them is restricted to protect the pictoglyphs and mounds. One of the most interesting of these sites is the Pipestone National Monument in southwestern Minnesota. There visitors can visit not only outcrops of the sacred calumet stone, but also see the traditional quarries and watch Native Americans produce artwork with the freshly cut stone. These places provide opportunities for “edutainment”—a mixture of education and entertainment attracting cultural tourists.

THEATER OF SEASONS

The bounds of this essay prohibit a view of all the landscapes and activities developed by Minnesotans over the years to keep themselves amused. The ever-changing landscape constantly calls to us. In the long summer days, golf courses, lakes, forests, and trails pull us out of the air-conditioned comfort of our apartments and homes. Every town in the state takes a weekend to transform itself into a playground. There are Polka Days, Corn Days, Pumpkin Festivals, and a variety of celebrations named after some local claim to fame. The streets are converted to shopping and socializing spaces, and for a day the
town is the recreational center of the area. The brilliant change in colors of fall draw even the most obstinate “couch potato” out for a walk. During the short winter days the crystal fields of winter have a more limited appeal. The sidewalks are treacherous for the elderly and the cold can kill. But nonetheless, bike paths are brushed free of snow for joggers and walkers. The parks are crisscrossed with ski trails. Most families have a few snowbirds who head for Arizona or Florida each winter, frequently reminded of the fun they are missing back home. With the coming of spring the snowbirds return, and the cycle of preparation for the intense summer begins again.

CONCLUSION

Are we different? More adventurous? More willing to come to terms with the environment? The Minnesota navy plies the lakes and rivers; the woods and fields are full of hunters. Temporary villages appear on the lakes each winter, and St. Paulites insist on celebrating the Winter Carnival during January’s coldest weeks. We try our hand at every conceivable sport, even if we are not particularly good at any of them. We probably are not all that unusual. We have just learned to have fun in the landscape and enjoy our time in Minnesota.

ENDNOTES