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CAMPER-OUTFITTER INTERACTION AND THE BOUNDARY WATERS CANOE AREA,
SUPERIOR NATIONAL FOREST, MINNESOTA^{1/}

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Introduction

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA), located in northeastern Minnesota, is one of the most heavily used wilderness areas in the United States. It annually accounts for about one-fourth of all man-days use of wilderness areas in the nation. Recent investigations in the Quetico-Superior Region, including the BWCA, suggest that between 60-70% of the groups visiting the area have been outfitted (1).

The importance of the outfitter in the plans of canoe country vacationers has been stated in previous research conducted by Lucas (2) and Taves, Hathaway, and Bultena (4). Their studies indicate that between 40 and 60% of the canoeists in the BWCA cite "outfitters' recommendation" as the reason for choosing a particular canoe route. The outfitter's role will become increasingly important in the future for implementation of BWCA regulations and management policy and as a means of communication of important information.

Study Objectives

The present study investigated outfitter-camper relationships in the BWCA during the 1968 and 1969 summer use periods. Research objectives focused on determination of information sources and levels of knowledge about the BWCA. Further objectives were to describe types of communication between outfitters and campers; and, to describe camper and outfitter attitudes on important management issues.

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Hypotheses regarding the effects of size and type of outfitting business, travel method, previous experience, and degree of outfitting on interaction were tested. Among the variables used to test the hypotheses were the following: basic sociological and demographic characteristics of the respondent; attitudes toward certain BWCA policy issues; knowledge of and compliance with littering regulations; previous BWCA experience; and other relevant factors (3).

Methodology

A total of 38 businesses were identified as outfitting BWCA visitor parties in 1967. Of these, 17 met the study operational size criteria (outfitting 100 or more parties into the BWCA in 1967). Three firms refused to cooperate. Along with a random sample of six firms outfitting less than 100 parties in 1967, a total of 20 firms (53%) was interviewed in detail in 1968 (15) and 1969 (5). On this basis the investigators were able to determine if other than size differences exist between outfitters.

Data gathered from the outfitting firms included date of establishment, season length, numbers of boats and canoes available for rental, type of communication with the U. S. Forest Service, and other information judged relevant to providing a background basis for the study. All owners and managers of the selected firms were asked to fill out questionnaires designed to seek three types of information: (1) certain sociological and demographic characteristics of the respondent; (2) the amount and types of subject matter contacts that occur between the respondent and the camper; and (3) the respondent's attitudes on certain BWCA policy issues.

A total of 499 canoeist interviews were conducted with group spokesmen (16 years of age and older) returning from overnight trips into the BWCA. Interviews were conducted during the summers of 1968 and 1969 at twelve access points and one portage within the wilderness according to a systematic random sampling plan.

The interview schedule obtained basic socio-demographic data, information on: outfitter use, outfitter-camper interaction, previous wilderness experience, travel method, BWCA knowledge and interest, attitudes toward BWCA management issues, and compliance with littering regulations. All questions were open ended.

Results

The principal findings of importance to managers are as follows:

1. Large outfitters are more cosmopolitan than small outfitters and have more preservationist attitudes.
2. Interaction between outfitters and campers on management issues is more likely to take place with large outfitters.
3. Outfitted groups tend to be older, slightly more educated, larger in size, less experienced, paddling canoeists, and less likely to come from Minnesota than non-outfitted groups.

4. Personal referral is the most important source of BWCA information for all groups. For outfitted groups, however, the outfitter himself provides an important source of information on the wilderness. The Forest Service was a minor source of information on the BWCA.
5. Out-of-state outfitted groups were less interested in and knowledgeable about the BWCA than in-state non-outfitted groups. Groups with more wilderness experience demonstrated more interest and knowledge than less-experienced groups.
6. The amount of equipment a group rents and its previous BWCA experience were found to be the best predictors of interaction. Completely outfitted groups talked more frequently about those subjects measured than partly outfitted groups (Table 1). Oldtimers talked more about management issues and less about camping skills than did newcomers.
7. Most management issue interaction between outfitters and campers takes place on motor restrictions: outfitters volunteered this information to newcomers and oldtimers asked for it. Outfitters are also most likely to volunteer or initiate interaction on this subject when they are a large operation and when the group is completely outfitted.
8. Between 75% and 85% of the campers oppose allowing public roads, underground shaft mining, resorts and homes in the BWCA. Opinions were divided on issues of: the level of government regulations, allowing commercial logging, and motor restrictions in the BWCA.
9. On all issues, campers who interacted with the outfitter on management issues showed less resistance to Forest Service policies (Table 2).

Table 1

Percent of studied BWCA parties interacting with outfitter
by subject and degree of outfitting, 1968-69

Subject	Degree of outfitting		
	Complete	Most	Part
Travel route	89.9	79.4	51.5
Campsite cleanup	70.8	55.9	37.9
Camp equipment	48.3	29.4	15.9
Fishing spots	80.9	67.6	50.8
Management issues	29.2	14.7	8.3
Canoe country conduct	29.2	8.8	6.8
Campsite locations	82.0	70.6	38.6

Table 2

Attitudes of outfitted BWCA study campers and interaction
with outfitters on management issues, 1968-69

Attitude	Interaction	No Interaction
	(Percent)	
Favor federal regulation of BWCA	50.0	45.5
Oppose public roads	90.0	87.3
Oppose commercial logging	57.1	67.6
Oppose underground mining	81.0	74.2
Oppose motors	21.4	34.3
Oppose resorts and homes	92.9	86.4

Management Implications

Interaction between outfitters and campers is an informational process. Advice given to the camper is incorporated into his existing perceptual structure and formulated into an attitude. Those using outfitters are most susceptible to informational social influence. Thus, outfitter information can be important in generating opposition or support for existing or proposed management policies. Utilization of this influence process could have the effect of increasing public understanding of the resource and, therefore, increased compliance with administrative policies.

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