



December 15, 2005

Mr. Chuck Spoden
Regional Administrator
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Grand Rapids, MN

Dear Mr. Spoden,

The Sierra Club North Star Chapter hereby requests that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources designate a day-use ski-hiking-birding recreational area in sections 2, 3 and 11 of T.64 – R.3E of the Grand Portage State Forest. This is authorized by the Minnesota DNR Policy 0647A, “Areas of Solitude”.

The proposed area is adjacent to the federal BWCA Wilderness yet is accessible by a state forest road, South Fowl Lake road. The area includes a segment of the Border Lakes Hiking Trail, which will become part of the national North Country Trail administered by the National Park Service. The area is 26.8km up the Arrowhead Trail and is 40km in a straight line from Grand Marais. Strider-only ski trails that are integrated with natural vegetation are rare in Cook County.

The sub-unit area has “been recognized for a century as being ecologically and botanically unique, harboring rare communities including the rarest plants in Minnesota,” according to the Biological Evaluation of the South Fowl Snowmobile Access Project prepared by the Forest Service. Opportunities to view rare arctic or alpine plants are provided by the area. Canada yew, black-throated blue warblers, and blunt-fruited sweet cicely can be expected. The MNDNR Natural Heritage Sensitive Species database shows many sensitive species location points in this area. The area is wolf, bald eagle and lynx habitat.

We recommend the sub-unit be called the “Royal Lake Solitude Area”. The management objectives we propose are:

1. To manage and maintain this area in a manner which will preserve its wild and natural quality now and for the future.
2. Provide a quality recreational opportunity for the highest feasible number of hikers, birders and cross-country skiers.
3. To further establish this area for non-motorized use through formal designation as a state forest day use area for ski touring, birding and hiking.

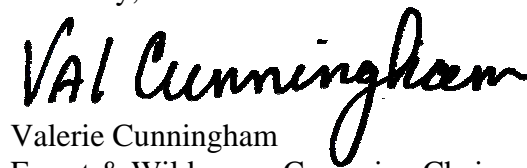
We propose little development beyond signage, OHV barriers, and location maps. Maintenance would include litter pickup, removal of windfalls on routes and controlling erosion. Ski trail strider tracking would be by volunteers. We envision a three to five kilometer loop. During summer the area would be promoted for use by hikers, anglers, and birdwatchers. The area would be

open for hunters. The unit would be shown on state public recreation maps and the DNR web site and shared with birding organizations. Sierra Club would hold outdoor outings there for members.

The Royal Lake Solitude Area would include all state forest lands north of the South Fowl Lake Road in sections 2 and 11 of the above referenced township, including two state lots straddling the wilderness boundary northeast of Royal Lake. It looks like about 400 acres.

Please circulate this proposal within the DNR and inform us of the steps in the designation process. A temporary moratorium on motorized trail development in the sub-unit would be wise so the opportunity for this designation is not lost before the agency can make a determination. Please feel free to call with any questions. We look forward to working with you on this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Val Cunningham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Valerie Cunningham
Forest & Wilderness Campaign Chair
Sierra Club North Star Chapter

Cc: Doug Rowlett, DNF Forestry Area Office
Lee Pfanmuller, Ecological Services
Laurie Martinson, Trails and Waterways
Brad Moore, Assistant Commissioner
Dennis Neitzke, Gunflint District Ranger