



United States Department of Agriculture

Superior National Forest

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Permit and Visitor Use Trends 2009-2015

USDA Forest Service



Photo by Ann Schwaller



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Introduction

The following report displays permit and visitor use statistics for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) on the Superior National Forest from 2009 to 2015. The report is organized in six parts.

- Part 1** Displays an overview of quota permits and quota visitors from 2009 to 2015.
- Part 2** Displays the quota permit data by type of use and self-issue permit data during the quota season and during the non-quota season.
- Part 3** Displays quota and self-issue visitor data.
- Part 4** Displays information on the lottery from 2012 to 2016.
- Part 5** Displays detailed information on self-issue permits and visitors.
- Part 6** Displays exempt permit information and use trends.

Quota permits are required for overnight visitors and day use motor visitors (except day use motor visitors traveling from Crane Lake to Lac La Croix using self-issue permits) from May 1 to September 30. Quota season permit and quota season visitor data is retrieved from the National Recreation Reservation System. Visitors must pick up a quota permit the day of or the day before their trip start date. Quota permits are issued at Superior National Forest Ranger District offices and at select businesses who are under permit with the US Forest Service to issue BWCAW permits. Permits allow a group of up to 9 people with up to 4 watercraft to enter the Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness.

Self-issue permits are required for all non-motor day use visitors during the quota season (May 1 to September 30) and all visitors (day use visitors and overnight visitors) during the non-quota season (October 1 to April 30). Self-issue permits are available at Superior National Forest Ranger District offices and at all BWCAW entry points. It is the visitor's responsibility to fill out the permit accurately to reflect dates, location, and type of activity for the visit. Not all self-issue permits are filled out accurately or completely, and therefore, self-issue permit data is not as accurate as quota data.

For additional information on overall use on the Superior National Forest, check out the National Visitor Use report on our web page at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/>

For information on user fees that are raised through the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, or for additional information about the Superior National Forest, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, please contact the Superior National Forest at 218-626-4300.

Part 1. Overview of 2009 to 2015 Quota Permits and Quota Visitors

The majority of use in the BWCAW occurs during the quota season, defined as May 1 to September 30. During the quota season, overnight visitors and day use motor visitors must obtain quota permits. Quota permits have a limited number of permits by date and entry point. **Figures A and B** display the number of quota permits issued and the number of quota visitors from 2009 to 2015. **Table 1** displays the actual number of quota permits, quota visitors, and the average group size.

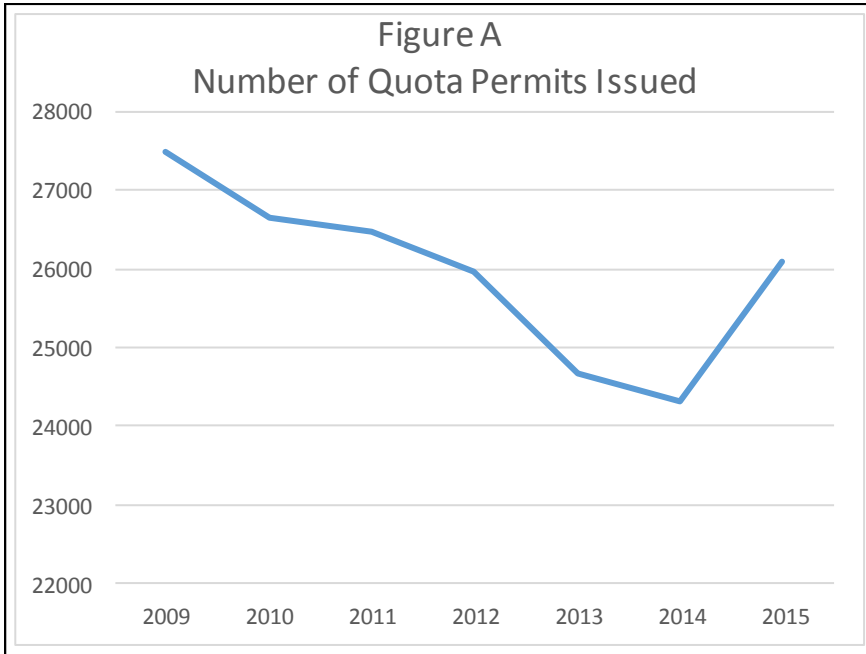
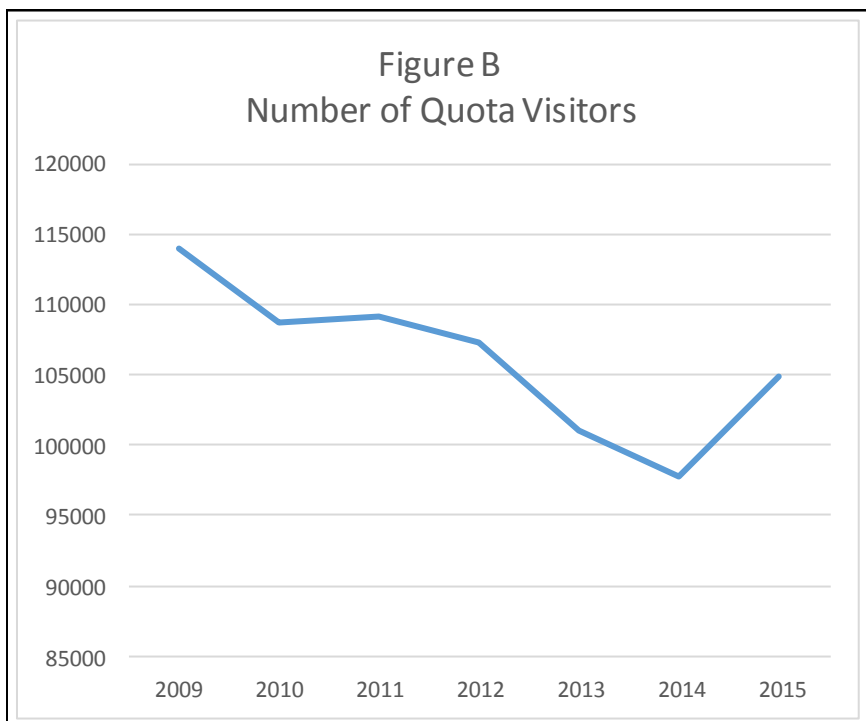


Table 1
Number of Permits and Visitors

Year	Number of Quota Permits	Quota Visitors	Average Group Size
2009	27502	114029	4.14
2010	26651	108781	4.08
2011	26480	109158	4.10
2012	25966	107257	4.13
2013	24670	100983	4.10
2014	24305	97731	4.02
2015	26096	104882	4.01



Part 2. Quota and Self-Issue Permit Information

Tables 2 and 3 display the data for both quota permits and self-issue permits. Adding the total quota permit data with the total self-issue permit data equals the total number of permits or groups that entered the BWCAW from 2009 to 2015.

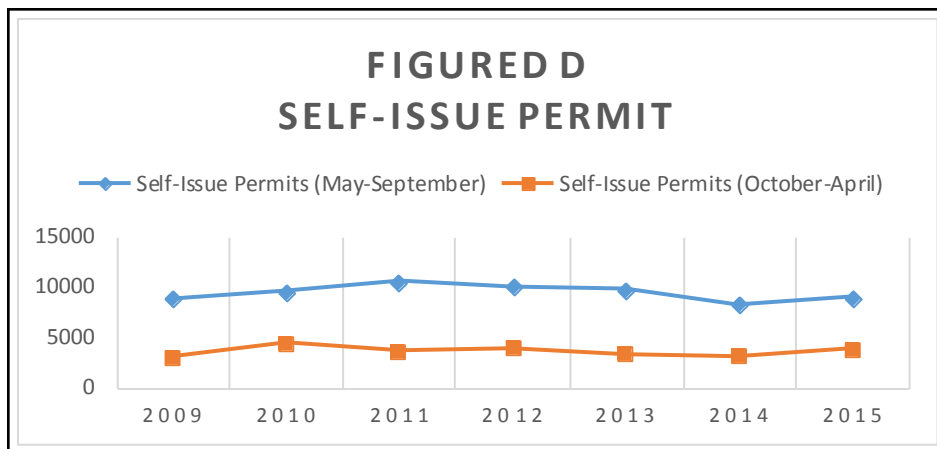
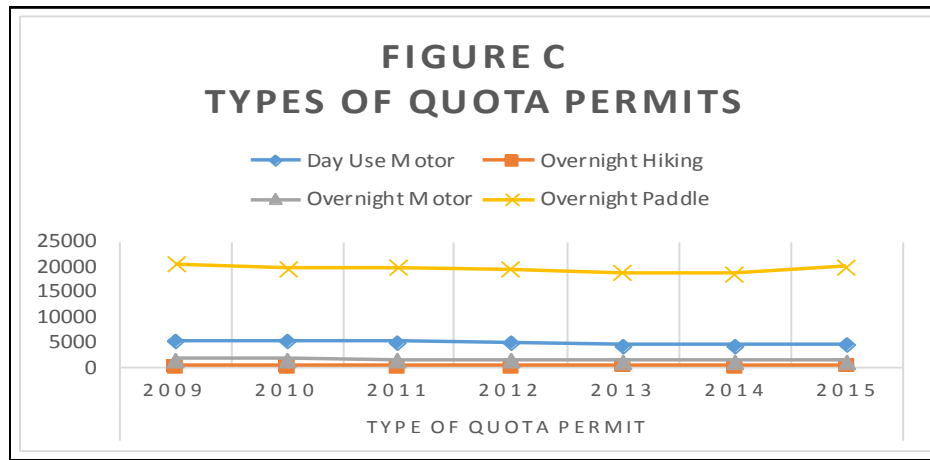
Table 2							
Quota Permits							
Type of Quota Permit	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Day Use Motor	5228	5285	5054	4789	4362	4367	4564
Overnight Hiking	244	240	236	259	266	230	355
Overnight Motor	1548	1487	1456	1398	1234	1197	1283
Overnight Paddle	20482	19639	19735	19520	18808	18511	19894
Total Quota Permits	27502	26651	26480	25966	24670	24305	26096

Table 3							
Self-Issue Permits							
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Self-Issue Permits (May-September)	8842	9503	10487	9990	9692	8178	8934
Self-Issue Permits (October-April)	3051	4342	3589	3914	3324	3081	3773
Total Self-Issue Permits	11893	13845	14076	13903	13016	11259	12707

Figure C displays the number of permits by type of quota permit from 2009 to 2015. The majority of permits are for overnight paddle followed by day use motor, then overnight motor. Overnight hiking accounts for the lowest number of permits.

Figure D displays the number of self-issue permits during the quota season and during the non-quota season from 2009 to 2015. Self-issue permit use during the quota season is greater than use during the non-quota season. See Part 5 for more information on self-issue permits.

Table 4 displays the number of quota permits issued, the number of quota permits that were cancelled and put back into the reservation system, as well as “no shows” (quota permits that were reserved, but not cancelled or used) from 2009 to 2015.



Quota Permits	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Cancellations	3085	3782	4611	4006	4699	4563	4284
No Shows	1369	1570	896	1859	1870	2029	1618
Issued Permits	27502	26651	26480	25966	24670	24305	26096

Part 3. Quota and Self-Issue Visitor Information

Table 5 displays the number of BWCAW visitors from 2009 to 2015. It shows the overnight quota season visitors, day use motor quota visitors, and self-issue permit visitors during the quota and non-quota seasons.

Figure E displays the number of overnight and day use motor quota visitors and self-issue permit visitors from 2009 to 2015. The majority of visitors are overnight quota permit visitors followed by self-issue permit visitors during the quota season, followed by day use motor quota visitors during the quota season. Self-issue visitors during the non-quota season account for the smallest group of visitors.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Overnight Quota Visitors	91781	87490	87712	86078	81542	79437	85297
Day Use Motor Quota Visitors	22248	21291	21446	21179	19441	18294	19585
Self-Issue Quota Season Visitors	28618	29128	33357	32202	33817	26353	28764
Self-Issue Non-Quota Season Visitors	8994	12216	10725	11655	11292	9637	12531
Total Visitors	151641	150125	153240	151114	146092	133721	146177

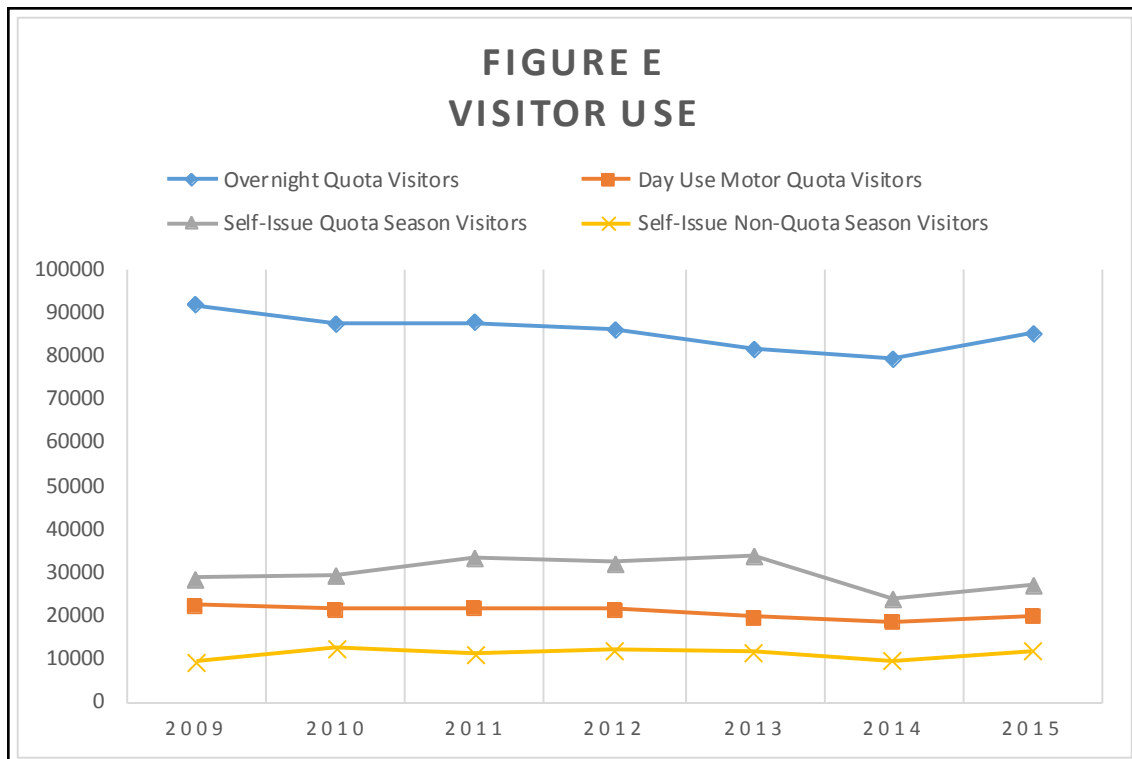


Table 6 displays the overnight quota visitor use demographics. This information is only collected from overnight quota permit reservations and not from day use motor or self-issue permit visitors. Interagency senior passes are lifetime passes for citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. age 62 or older. Access passes are lifetime passes for citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. who have a permanent disability regardless of age. The purchase of a BWCAW seasonal fee card fulfills the user fee requirements for the season, but does not eliminate the need for obtaining a quota permit for each trip. Tribal membership cards are available to local tribal members.

	Adult	Youth	Pass Holders					Tribal Membership Cards
			Interagency Pass			BWCAW Seasonal Fee Cards		
			Senior	Access	Youth Access	Adult	Youth	
2009	69749	20565	1016	85	2	336	14	14
2010	66722	19322	956	84	9	374	15	8
2011	66198	19941	1067	96	5	383	1	21
2012	65391	19128	1183	95	7	245	2	27
2013	61538	18465	1173	61	11	286	0	8
2014	60062	17710	1328	79	5	229	5	19
2015	64724	18588	1590	107	5	266	3	14

Part 4. Lottery Trends

Prior to 2012, the Forest Service ran a lottery system for all entry points. Visitors applied for quota permits for a specific entry date and entry point. They would then need to wait for the lottery to be run to find out if they were successful in obtaining a permit.

The Forest Service proposed to eliminate the lottery in 2011 because the current reservation system is capable of real-time reservations. Visitors can now see the entry points and dates that are available and make reservations for the date and entry point desired. The Forest Service eliminated the lottery for all entry points except for the five entry points where the demand for permits generally exceeds the number of permits available. The lottery continues to be used for day use motor entry points F (Moose to Newfound and Sucker), G (Moose to Basswood), D (Fall to Basswood), and overnight paddle or motor entry points 25 (Moose Lake) and 24 (Fall Lake).

	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total
2012	3845	3373	7218
2013	3699	4473	8172
2014	3848	5095	8943
2015	3867	6229	10096
2016	4209	7822	12031

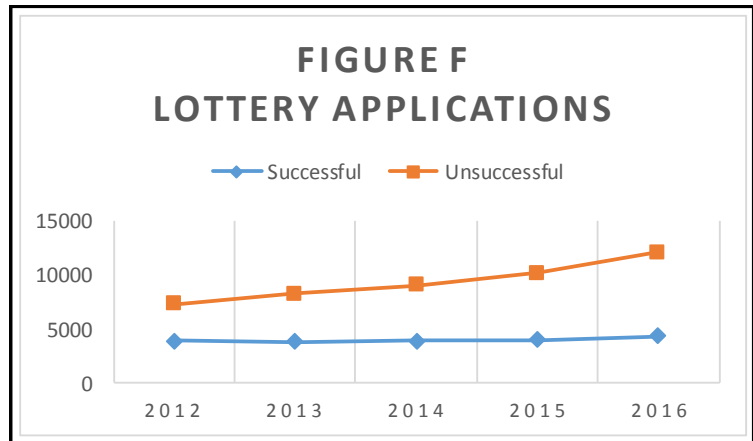


Table 7 and Figure F display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications from 2012 to 2016. Data shows that the number of successful lottery applications has remained fairly constant, whereas the number of unsuccessful applications has increased. During the lottery visitors can submit as many applications as desired. Successful applicants are encouraged to cancel permits they are unable to use. Cancelled permits are put back into the system and are then available to other visitors.

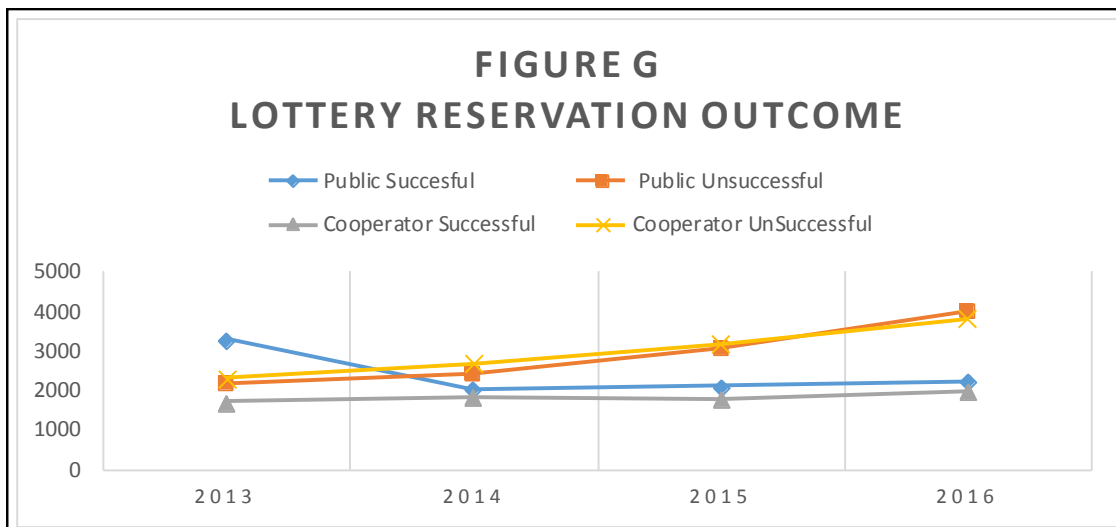


Figure G shows the successful and unsuccessful lottery reservations based on overall lottery applications that are submitted by the public and those submitted by cooperators. Cooperators are businesses approved to issue permits and they can also submit lottery applications for confirmed clients. Both the public and cooperators submitted more lottery applications during 2015 and 2016 than during 2013 and 2014.

Table 8 and Figure H display the number of successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for day use motor quota permits. Day use motor applicants account for the greatest number of lottery applications and nearly all of the available day use motor permits are obtained during the lottery. Day use motor applications have been increasing, resulting in an increase in the number of unsuccessful lottery applications.

	Successful	Unsuccessful
2012	2257	2878
2013	2314	3827
2014	2508	4255
2015	2561	5222
2016	2717	6596

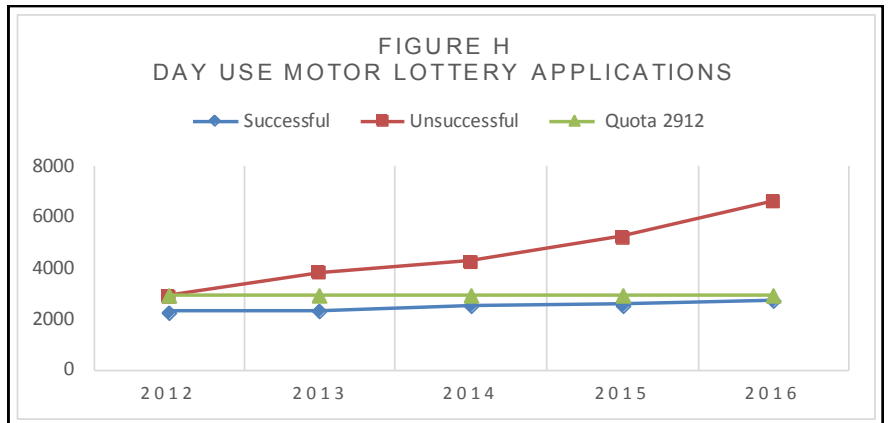


Table 9 and Figure I display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for overnight motor permits. Nearly all of the available overnight motor permits are obtained during the lottery. Since 2013, there has been an increase in the number of overnight motor lottery applications, resulting in an increase in unsuccessful lottery applications.

	Successful	Unsuccessful
2012	687	464
2013	709	644
2014	710	840
2015	708	1007
2016	709	1225

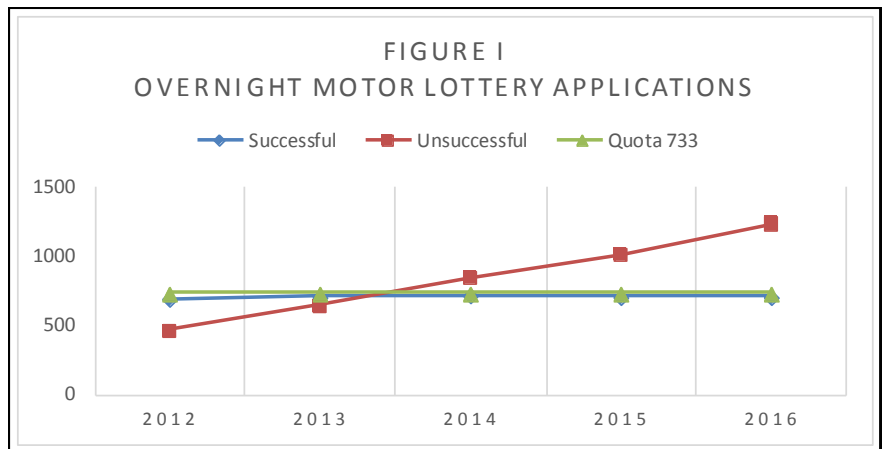
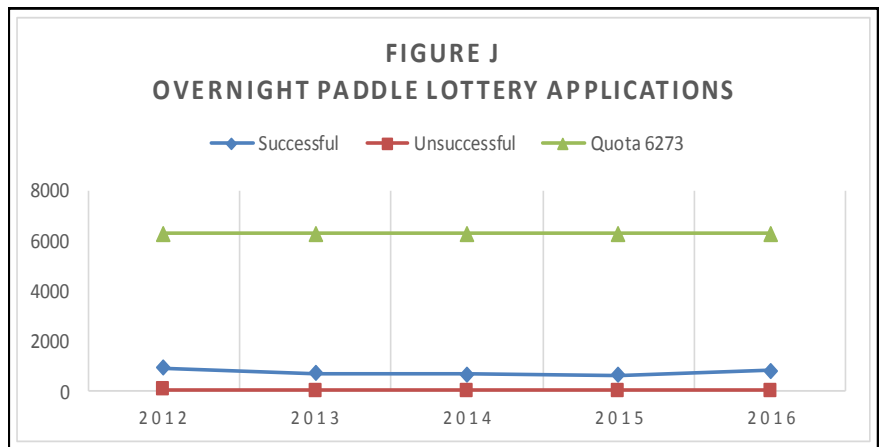


Table 10 and Figure J display the successful and unsuccessful lottery applications for overnight paddle permits. The data shows that nearly all overnight paddle applicants are successful during the lottery and that the number of permits available greatly exceeds the number of lottery applications.

	Successful	Unsuccessful
2012	901	31
2013	676	1
2014	630	0
2015	598	0
2016	783	1



Part 5. Self-Issue Permit Use Trends

Self-issue permits are required for non-motorized day use visitors during the quota season and non-quota season, all overnight use (motorized and non-motorized) during the non-quota season, and any motorized day use on Little Vermilion, Loon, Lac La Croix (not beyond the south end of Snow Bay) and Loon River.

Self-issue permits are available at all entry points and visitors are required to fill them out before entering the wilderness and have them in possession while in the wilderness. Visitors might not always fill them out accurately. For instance, some permits claim snowmobile use during the quota season when such use would not be occurring. Data included in the following tables is based on what visitors record on the permits.

The self-issue permit lists eight different methods of travel and a fill-in space for other uses. Snowmobiles are permitted on the overland portages from Crane Lake to Little Vermilion Lake in Canada and from Seagull River along the eastern portion of Saganaga Lake to Canada. Hiking with stock on hiking trails is not permitted; horseback riding can occur off designated trails and portages.

Tables 11 – 18 display the number of self-issue permits during the quota season and during the non-quota season by type of permit from 2009 to 2015.

Table 11							
Self-Issue Permits and Visitors							
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total Self-Issue Permits	11893	13845	14076	13903	12993	10331	11851
Self-Issue Permits (May-September)	8842	9503	10487	9991	9711	8179	8934
Self-Issue Permits (October-April)	3051	4342	3589	3914	3338	3081	4339
Total Individuals	37612	41344	44076	43855	45109	35990	41295
Average Party Size	3.17	2.99	3.14	3.16	3.47	3.22	3.26

Table 12 2009 Number of Self-Issue Permits			
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	5547	771	6318
Ski	0	366	366
Boat (motor)	749	137	886
Snowshoe	3	367	370
Foot (hiking)	2481	986	3467
Dog Sled	0	223	223
Snowmobile	2	180	182
Boat (non- motor)	10	3	13
Hiking with stock (horses)	1	0	1
Other (non-motor)	49	16	65
Other (motor)	0	2	2
Totals	8842	3051	11893

Table 13 2010 Number of Self-Issue Permits			
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	6578	1564	8142
Ski	0	476	476
Boat (motor)	333	216	549
Snowshoe	0	315	315
Foot (hiking)	2525	1344	3869
Dog Sled	0	329	329
Snowmobile	0	81	81
Boat (non- motor)	13	4	17
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	51	13	64
Other (motor)	3	0	3
Totals	9503	4342	13845

Table 14 2011 Number of Self-Issue Permits			
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	7448	873	8321
Ski	3	464	467
Boat (motor)	566	171	737
Snowshoe	0	474	474
Foot (hiking)	2389	1240	3629
Dog Sled	0	211	211
Snowmobile	0	102	102
Boat (non- motor)	11	5	16
Hiking with stock (horses)	2	0	2
Other (non-motor)	67	43	110
Other (motor)	1	6	7
Totals	10487	3589	14076

Table 15 2012 Number of Self-Issue Permits			
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	6771	1114	7885
Ski	2	494	496
Boat (motor)	525	244	769
Snowshoe	0	239	239
Foot (hiking)	2590	1587	4177
Dog Sled	0	166	166
Snowmobile	0	43	43
Boat (non- motor)	38	4	42
Hiking with stock (horses)	1	0	1
Other (non-motor)	57	19	76
Other (motor)	6	4	10
Totals	9990	3914	13903

Table 16 2013 Number of Self-Issue Permits			
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	6749	817	7566
Ski	2	514	516
Boat (motor)	353	200	553
Snowshoe	0	377	377
Foot (hiking)	2533	1026	3559
Dog Sled	1	279	280
Snowmobile	0	109	109
Boat (non- motor)	33	1	34
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	20	0	20
Other (motor)	2	1	3
Totals	9693	3324	13017

Table 17 2014 Number of Self-Issue Permits			
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	5690	723	6413
Ski	5	486	491
Boat (motor)	426	253	679
Snowshoe	2	323	325
Foot (hiking)	2032	1002	3034
Dog Sled	3	247	250
Snowmobile	0	32	32
Boat (non- motor)	9	6	15
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	38	7	45
Other (motor)	2	1	3
Totals	8207	3080	11287

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season	Totals
Canoe or Kayak	5912	710	6622
Ski	0	496	496
Boat (motor)	108	129	237
Snowshoe	0	288	288
Foot (hiking)	2846	1550	4396
Dog Sled	3	250	253
Snowmobile	0	88	88
Boat (non- motor)	10	2	12
Hiking with stock (horses)	0	0	0
Other (non-motor)	49	23	72
Other (motor)	1	1	2
Totals	8929	3537	12466

Part 6. Exempt Permit Information and Use Trends

There are three types of visitor uses that are exempt from both the quota and self-issue permit systems, and these visitors are issued exempt permits. The three exempt visitor groups include: 1) Day use motor visitors who are either an overnight homeowner guest or resort owner guest and are visiting a lake that is named in the BWCAW Act of 1978, are exempt from the day use motor quotas on that particular lake; 2) Authorized researchers with a government agency or researchers working in partnership with the Superior National Forest are exempt from overnight paddle quotas and possibly motor quotas depending on project need; and 3) Volunteers or other work groups with permission to work on a specific project are also exempt from paddle quotas and possibly motor quotas depending on project need. The number of exempt permits issued during the quota and non-quota seasons are displayed in Tables 19 – 25.

In addition to the exempt permits for guests of home and resort owners visiting a lake that is named in the 1978 BWCAW Act also provided that the homeowners and resort owners themselves on lakes named in the Act are also exempt from the day use motor quota on the particular lake where they own a residence or resort, and boat stickers serve as their exempt day use motor permit allowing residents to travel into the Wilderness on that particular lake without getting a separate permit. However, those use numbers do not show up in the tables below as they are not tracked.

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	189	1
Boat (motor)	1061	0
Foot (hiking)	23	3
Other	4	0
Totals	1277	4

Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	229	0
Boat (motor)	1660	13
Foot (hiking)	24	0
Other	9	0
Totals	1922	13

Table 21		
2011 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	48	0
Boat (motor)	674	0
Foot (hiking)	1	0
Other	4	0
Totals	727	0

Table 22		
2012 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	63	0
Boat (motor)	725	0
Foot (hiking)	10	0
Other	7	0
Totals	805	0

Table 23		
2013 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	57	0
Boat (motor)	1067	0
Foot (hiking)	8	0
Other	0	0
Totals	1132	0

Table 24		
2014 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	42	0
Boat (motor)	652	6
Foot (hiking)	11	0
Other	70	0
Totals	775	6

Table 25		
2015 Number of Exempt Permits		
Method of Travel	Quota Season	Non-Quota Season
Canoe or Kayak	60	0
Boat (motor)	601	2
Foot (hiking)	5	0
Other	106	0
Totals	772	2

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