

## THE BOUNDARY WATERS CANOE AREA

of Minnesota's northern border is a vast, untouched wilderness that attracts thousands of visitors each year. In order to protect the integrity of the land, the state legislature proposed a bill in 1977 that would ban the use of motorboats in the water. Senator Wendell Anderson balked, claiming the bill would prevent women, children, and people with disabilities from enjoying the region because they lacked the skill or the strength necessary for operating manual watercraft.

In 1974, three years before the bills were introduced, two Minnesota teachers, Bill Simpson and Tom Rasmussen, had taken a coed group of middle-school students into the Boundary Waters for a winter camping trip. High-school senior Greg Lais went along to help. Although they had to sleep in snow shelters, called quinzhees, as temperatures dipped as low as forty degrees below freezing, the group had such a positive experience they knew that the wilderness could truly be accessible for all—if people were prepared.

When Lais's sister heard Senator Anderson's statement, she challenged Lais to host a similar camping trip and encourage people with disabilities to take part. "We put together a group: two people who used wheelchairs, two people who were deaf, and a few friends; and we went up to the Boundary Waters," says Lais. "We weren't thinking of starting an organization at that point, but this trip really changed our worldview."

The group recognized the benefits of getting out into nature—especially for people who are usually discouraged from participating in outdoor recreation. Lais and friends decided to establish a



# THE NATURE OF INCLUSIVITY

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