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**WILDERNESS, A SPIRITUAL ANTIDOTE TO
THE EVERYDAY:
A PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES
IN THE BOUNDARY WATERS
CANOE AREA WILDERNESS**

By

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Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Science
in Recreation Management

The College of Forestry and Conservation at
The University of Montana
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Abstract

Foster, Ian M., M.S., Spring 2012

Recreation Management

Wilderness, a Spiritual Antidote to the Everyday: A Phenomenology of Spiritual Experiences in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness

Chairperson: Dr. William T. Borrie

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and explain the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness. The motivations for the research included: growing interest in empirical studies on the relationship between spirituality and human health, increasing concern over human's loss of spiritual relationships with nature, and personal curiosity about the wild and spiritual nature of wilderness experiences. Research was focused on overnight visitors traveling by canoe in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness of northeastern Minnesota. Data from thirty-two semi-structured interviews was used to question, update, and improve understanding of the phenomena. Phenomenological interviews (interviews that situate comments made in the moment within the life-worlds of respondents) were conducted in-situ on a random sample of visitors to six wilderness lakes. The interviews were transcribed and both idiographic (individual level) analyses and nomothetic (overall patterns) analyses were conducted through the process of the hermeneutic circle. The resulting narrative develops the inputs, processes and outcomes of participant's spiritual experiences in wilderness, and advances the understanding of a) visitors' perspectives of wilderness as different from the everyday; b) the role of antecedents in spiritual experiences, including mentors, memories, and religious and spiritual perspectives; and c) the growing impact that cultural changes have on spiritual experiences in wilderness. As visitors committed to wilderness experiences filled with novel, primitive, physical, and quiet elements, study participants found the time and space necessary for spiritual practices and processes. They depicted wilderness as a setting where they can manage the information they are required to process and engage in habits and rituals that support contemplation of spiritual themes. This study captured how participants engaged the wild (space free from intentional human control), immersed themselves in primitive and simple ways of being, and escaped information technology and their everyday. In those ways participants kindled, stoked, and/or sustained their relationship with themselves, other humans, powers greater than themselves and the wild landscape. While wilderness managers may feel challenged in their abilities to provide opportunities for spiritual experiences in wilderness, visitors stressed the importance and significance of the experiences, especially as a spiritual antidote to their everyday lives.

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1.0 CHAPTER 1– INTRODUCTION

“Seekers of wilderness experience may think they go into the back country for a lark, just to test themselves, or to face a challenge, but what they really go in for is to experience at first hand the spiritual values of wilderness... the opportunity of knowing again what simplicity really means, the importance of the natural and the sense of oneness with the earth that inevitably comes with it” ~S. Olson, 1969: 137

1.1 Problem Statement

Every year millions of Americans spend time in designated wilderness areas. Many of them call their wilderness experiences *spiritual*. Some explain that in the wild they feel closer to God than anywhere else. Some say it teaches and reminds them of what it means to be alive. A number describe experiences and outcomes such as connecting with natural processes, reflecting upon their self and purpose, feeling community, and developing spiritually. Some visitors return from their adventures more confident, recharged, and sure of what it means to be human.

Despite this, understanding and managing for rich and meaningful spiritual experiences in wilderness is a difficult, and by some managers’ measure, an irrelevant task. As Roger Kaye stated, “The spiritual realm is usually relegated to the background of wilderness stewardship, often alluded to, but seldom incorporated in planning, management, and educational programs” (Kaye, 2006). The crux of the issue therefore becomes understanding the complexities and ever changing nature of the phenomena of wilderness-based spirituality. Kaye stated:

An adaptive mechanism, the spiritual dimension of wilderness has evolved, is evolving, and will continue to evolve in response to changes in ourselves and our relationship to the natural world. The manifestation of spirituality in the wilderness concept both reflects the unmet needs of our urban, commodity-driven culture, and reveals some archetypal part of us that this culture has obscured - R. Kaye, 2006: 7

Stepping back and reflecting on modern culture, human behaviors often seem to exemplify a human/nature disconnect. With highly scheduled lives, unsustainable resource consumption, abundant digital media, and careless dietary habits, American’s lifestyles are often

characterized as harmful to themselves and the environment around them (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996). As culture and technology arbitrate our knowledge of, connection to, and respect for natural processes, we must consider the importance of our relationship with the wild, and in particular the spiritual dimension of that relationship. When disconnected from both wild nature and everyday nature, it seems that adults and youth alike forget the places and non human animals that their actions impact (Louv, 2012). In the wake of our habits, places once considered sacred seem to get developed and their meanings forgotten (Higgins-Zogib et al., 2010). While interpretations of what it means to be sacred or spiritual, or to experience spirituality vary, that element of human life is implanted in both individual and cultural development (Schmidt and Little, 2007). As the meanings of various sacred spaces are lost, and our experiences within them mediated and redefined by cultural changes, it is understandable that wild landscapes may more and more often be viewed as sanctuaries and experienced in spiritually meaningful ways (Verschuuren et al. 2010).

Early wilderness lawmakers forecasted such trends and wrote laws that supported Americans experiencing wild natural areas. Most notably, Nagle pointed out, “The witnesses testifying on behalf of the proposed Wilderness Act during the 1950’s and 1960’s repeatedly sounded spiritual themes . . . spiritual values are embedded in the history of the Wilderness Act” (2005). As written in the Wilderness Act of 1964, wilderness areas offer, “. . .opportunities for solitude, or primitive and unconfined experiences” (P.L. 88-5777, 78 Stat. 890: 16 U.S. C. 1131, Sec. 2. (c)). These are each elements commonly associated with visitors’ having spiritual experiences (Ashley, 2007; Rothwell, 2008; Heintzman, 2010). However, though they are associated, rarely are the visitors’ definitions of the terms understood, or understood in the context of their past or present experiences.

As concepts of health are becoming more holistic, the complexities of the human organism and the interrelationship between body, mind, and spirit are increasingly recognized, questioned, and in need of study (Hawks, 1994; Fisher, 2009). Natural settings have been cited as, “increasingly seen as therapeutic environments, places for cathartic experiences” (Ewert et al., 2003: 141), and protected areas acknowledged as places “to find peace, solitude, and spirituality” (Worboys et al., 2005: 78). Were the architects of the Wilderness Act correct that wilderness carries greater spiritual importance compared to other spaces?

Amidst comparing wilderness and smaller green spaces, McDonald and others postulated that everyday nature may remind us of the wilds that exist, but that it is immense wild places provide spiritual inspiration, solitude, and maintain visitors’ physical health and wellbeing (McDonald et al., 2009). The study additionally found a link between valuing the natural environment as sacred and the ability of an environment to promote health, happiness, wellbeing, and human actions supporting the continued conservation of wild areas (McDonald et al., 2009).

Past studies (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2007) have demonstrated that self-defined spiritual experiences are recognized as an important component of wilderness experiences, but the studies don’t seem to fully capture the heart of what participants are experiencing and subsequently calling spiritual. While additional approaches, both quantitative and qualitative, have been developed to understand these elements of wilderness experiences, managers and researchers still struggle to meaningfully measure and merge the experiential concepts into planning and management frameworks (Borrie and Dvorak, 2007).

Understandably, spiritual experiences, values, and benefits can be “ethereal and intangible and, therefore hard to define and measure” (Driver *et al.*, 1996: 5). Hendee and Dawson wisely explain:

Investigation into the spiritual benefits of wilderness experiences has been hampered in the past because spiritual experiences are intensely personal and often inexpressible, and because the varied personal meanings of spirituality have made spirituality difficult to operationally define. - 2002: 225

To better grasp the holistic elements of wilderness experiences, including spiritual experiences, Borrie and Dvorak (2007) emphasized the importance of considering symbolic values, self-reflection, and spiritual experiences within a relationship approach to wilderness experiences.

While model development and quantitative studies have likely progressed the field, it is necessary to conduct empirical studies that provide meaningful context in order to better understand the complexities of spiritual experiences in wilderness (Heintzman, 2010).

Never before has a study researched a random sample of wilderness visitors in-situ (at the sight of the phenomena). Of the previous work conducted in-situ, the samples were either all female or all male groups, or involved other purposive sampling, (e.g. sometimes focused narrowly on religious groups). One exception is Marsh's (2007) means end analysis of backcountry skiers at Teton Pass, Wyoming. However, Marsh's study was not conducted in wilderness, instead only a mile or two off of a highway. It remains that spirituality is a complex and ever evolving element of wilderness experiences, and researchers and managers need to continue to better explain the relationship between nature-based recreation and the multifaceted phenomena of spirituality (Heintzman, 2010). Therefore, the following research questions will guide the subsequent investigations in this thesis.

1.2 Guiding Questions

“ . . . we have not merely escaped from something but also into something . . . we have joined the greatest of all communities, which is not that of man alone but of everything which shares with us the great adventure of being alive.” ~Joseph Wood Krutch, 1995

1) What is the *phenomena* of spiritual experiences in wilderness? The preeminent goal is to *describe* these experiences in a way that respects their *complexity* and accurately situates them

within each participants' unique personal and cultural *contexts*. Conducting phenomenological interviews in situ with a random sample of wilderness visitors adds to the existing understandings and updates previous findings.

2) Are there elements of *designated wilderness*, both *similar* and *different* from other natural landscapes that inspire visitors to have spiritual experiences? Additionally, do participants have a relationship to wilderness, compared to other natural landscapes, that contributes to the experiences? The aim is to understand if and/or how wilderness areas in particular facilitate spiritual experiences. The setting and activity attributes that contribute to such experiences have been explored but limited attention has been given to how participants perceive and interact with wilderness as compared to other natural areas. The goal is to holistically understand *if* and *how* wilderness is spiritually *inspirational* and/or *different* from other natural landscapes. Understanding these important differences can help both managers and visitors know what characteristics of wilderness experiences to protect.

3) What are the most influential *antecedents* (eg. individual socio-demographics, history of wilderness attachment, and history of wilderness spirituality mentorship); *conceptual frameworks* (eg. understanding, recognition, and operationalization of religious frameworks); and *outcomes* (e.g. the benefits or outcomes that result from the experience) associated with the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness? These various *inputs* and *outputs* are an essential part of this phenomenology. Grasping these inputs and outputs helps us understand how our *relationship* to the landscapes may be *evolving*.

4) What role does *water* play in spiritual experiences in wilderness? The presence and absence of water as a physical necessity, a mode of travel, and potentially a symbol of life, power, and/or purpose, may have a very direct impact on recreational experiences. It is important

to consider the impact of the nearly continuous presence of *water* within this particular wilderness area. Its role will be questioned as *symbolic*, *novel*, and *utilitarian*.

5) Do visitors hold definitions of *spirituality* and *wilderness spirituality*, and if so, what are they and how are they employed? In subsequent chapters, the idea that the terms spirituality and wilderness are socially constructed will be served due diligence. For now, it is key to understand the importance of ascertaining *participant definitions* of these terms. There are numerous social (re)constructions of the meaning of wilderness. Discovering *how* and *from what* they evolve may help to clarify the role of texts, mentors, and memories in participant described spiritual experiences. Because such *subjective* terms are integral parts of the data, they will be re-defined when necessary.

1.3 Moving Forward

“In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for the preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.” ~Public Law 88-577: 16 U.S. C. 1131-1136 Sec. 2.(a)

Recently spurring the field forward, Kaye noted, “Insights into the human mind’s workings enable understanding of and provision for the spiritual dimension of wilderness in psychological (secular) terms, thus making it a legitimate concern of science-based natural resource agencies” (Kaye, 2006: 7). While not seated in a purely psychological framework, this study aims to capture the complexities of spiritual experiences in wilderness as near to their occurrence as possible and then situate them within the context of the participant’s larger life-world (Van Manen, 1990). This research project specifically aims to describe the phenomena of spiritual experiences in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). During the

summer of 2010 I spent just over four weeks canoeing the lakes of northeastern Minnesota and learning about the *phenomena* through a formal research project. Spiritual experiences in wilderness were examined using a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology including in-situ interviews of 32 overnight wilderness visitors traveling by canoe. Hermeneutic phenomenology is most simply defined as a descriptive practice that focuses on the structure of experience and the principles that give form and meaning to it; an interpretive process concentrating on drawing meaning from data, researcher reflections, and research writings (Laverty, 2003). The hermeneutic circle as described by Patterson and Williams (2002), was used to constantly examine the data, interview transcripts, by examining the relationship between various parts of the data and the whole of the data.

The resulting analytical story of the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness reveals interactions between visitors, time, space, mentors, others, and wilderness that are varied and complex. This qualitative study of wilderness spirituality not only describes the phenomena but identifies the most influential components of the experience, relates them to one another, and to the larger field of nature-based spirituality. This story verifies previous findings, deepens our understanding of wilderness spirituality, and fills gaps in our knowledge about the inputs, processes, and outcomes of spiritual experiences in wilderness. Most notably, participants appeared to describe wilderness and experiences therein as a **spiritual antidote to the everyday**; existing in juxtaposition with our current human controlled spaces, culture, and schedules. *Antidote*, in this context, refers to providing something different, something capable of wholly contrasting against the stresses of their everyday lives, allowing unique opportunities for experiences they defined as spiritual. Participants seemed to say that the BWCAW provided a sanctuary and opportunities they could not find in other places.

This project specifically addresses how humans relate to and experience wilderness. Which interpretation of wilderness, you may ask? To simultaneously be clear and complicate the answer, this study leans on Hendee and Dawson's (2002) assertion that *wilderness* is whatever study participants think it is. The study has the potential to aid wilderness managers, advocates, researchers, educators and visitors in understanding how wilderness spirituality is experienced, what *it* actually is, and the role it plays in the development and maintenance of human/nature relationships and relationships to wilderness in particular.

1.4 Thesis Organization

The thesis consists of five chapters. The chapters are presented in the order they were prepared. Chapter 1 (this chapter) introduces the rationale behind the thesis in the *Introduction*, clarifies the aim through the *Problem Statement* and *Guiding Questions*, discusses the role of wilderness within *Study in Wilderness* and *Measuring Spirituality in Wilderness*, and finishes with this preview of the remainder of the study.

Chapter 2, the *Literature Review*, shares relevant work through logically chosen pairings of research fields including: *Wilderness Ideas and Experiences*, *Previous Spirituality Research*, *Wilderness and Spirituality*, and *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology*. These couplings present concepts, findings, and challenges applicable to this study and prepare the reader for to learn about the research techniques used herein. Chapter 3, *Research Methods*, continues to inform the reader on the topic and explains how this study in particular addresses the described challenges. The section begins by introducing the *Philosophical Orientation and Research Methodology*. Within that section the *Ontology*, *Axiology* and *Epistemology* are described and an in-depth consideration of the *Researcher Motivations* is presented. Next, the *Study Area*, *Sampling Details*, *In-Situ Interview Process*, *Pilot Study*,

and Study Participants are all explained under the broader section titled *Sampling*. Lastly, the *Data Collection and Analysis Methods* section explains how the data is utilized to achieve the study's goals.

The *Results* chapter, Chapter 4, contains the descriptive findings and is divided into four sub-sections. Each sub-section, *Being There*, *Wilderness as a Sanctuary*, *Steps to the Spiritual*, and *Explaining the Mystery* addresses a series of themes discovered in the data and shares those findings along with supporting data that provides meaningful context. The ordering of the *Results* section is an attempt to accurately position the language and experiences of the participants. It is recommended that broad conclusions not be drawn until reviewing the entire section. Chapter 5, the *Discussion*, begins with a *Study Overview* and then lays out the *Chapter Organization*. Next the *Methodological Considerations* are shared and finally *Concluding Thoughts* are grouped into five sections titled: *The Phenomena*, *Facilitated Journey*, *Untamed*, *Water Reflections and Bounds of Spiritual Experiences in Wilderness*. The chapter and study concludes with *Recommendations for Future Work* and *Final Words*.

2.0 CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will expand on concepts introduced in *Chapter 1* as well as establish a framework that informs this project. In order to logically develop the framework, this review has been divided into five sections, *Wilderness Ideas and Experiences*, *Previous Spirituality Research*, *Wilderness and Spirituality*, *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, and *Summary*. The first section *Wilderness Ideas and Experiences* shares research and writing focused on both the varied history and definitions of wilderness, as well as the diverse visitor experiences within wilderness. The section titled *Spirituality and Psychology* relates the broad topic of spirituality to psychology, demonstrating how spirituality has recently been related to spiritual development, personal development, and mental health. Within the section *Wilderness and Spirituality* previous studies are considered and their recommendations are noted, providing guidance for the current study. *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology* introduces these qualitative methods and how they seek to uncover and describe the phenomena in new and meaningful ways. Finally a *Summary* notes important lessons from the literature review.

2.1 *Wilderness Ideas and Experiences*

Wilderness may be viewed as all at once many things: a place, a concept, an idea, a sacred space, and simply a title. Recently researchers have gone so far to say that wilderness is, “beset by a tangle of meanings” (Washington, 2007: 441). This study was conducted in designated wilderness for three notable reasons. First and most importantly, designated wilderness, holds more opportunities for ecological and experiential *wildness* than any other recreation space; a result of the deliberate setting apart of wilderness from forces of human driven change (Borrie et al., 2011). More simply this means that the space is likely better than any other for examining the ways that humans interact with an untrammled environment.

Secondly, conducting the study in designated wilderness allowed for the subjective term “wilderness” to be more consistently *understood* and similarly *defined* by participants. Lastly, as pointed out by Kaye (2006), wilderness managers may increasingly work to protect spiritual experiences because of their psychological qualities.

Looking back, there were times when wilderness was commonly viewed negatively, as a threat to civilization (Nash, 2001). Manning (1989) described how wilderness has been considered everything from the Garden of Eden, to the home of evil. Historically, the word has derived from the notion of *wildness* or that which is not controlled by humans. However, over the last two centuries, the collective prose, philosophy, photography and wilderness advocacy of the John Muirs, Aldo Leopolds, Ansel Adams, Mardie Muries, Jay Griffiths, Henry Thoreaus, Ralph Waldo Emersons, Terry Tempest Williams and Howard Zahnisers struck a chord with the American population. As perceptions have evolved, Watson was inspired to say, “Wilderness is difficult to define, yet it has nearly universal and immediate appeal” (2004:5).

In the Wilderness Act of 1964, the National Wilderness Preservation System was established and a legal definition of wilderness was created. Section 2(c) of the Act states,

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. – P.L. 88-577: 16 U.S. C. 1131-1136, Sec. 2. (c)

It seems apparent that human experiences are a central component of this legal definition of wilderness. Maintaining, “. . . outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation,” is clearly a management component (P.L. 88-577: 16 U.S. C. 1131-1136, Sec. 2. (c)). Specifically, the Act states, “. . . these shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness” (P.L. 88-577: 16 U.S. C. 1131-1136, Sec. 2. (a)). Examples of lawmaking that more explicitly relate wilderness and spirituality exist. In the 1975 the so called Eastern Areas Wilderness Act congress declared that designated wilderness in the eastern half of the United States be, “. . . managed to promote and perpetuate the wilderness character of the land and its specific values for solitude, physical and mental challenge, scientific study, inspiration, and primitive recreation for the benefit of all the American people of present and future generations” (P.L. 93-622, 88 Stat. 2096; 16 U.S.C. 1132, Sec. 2. (b)). Some have identified the inclusion of the term ‘inspiration’ as a signal that that human and potentially spiritual development were priorities within the legislation (Nagel, 2005; Redick, 2009).

For many scholars and writers, wilderness is commonly recognized by its naturalness, primitiveness, remoteness and size (McDonald et al., 1989). Recently, Seekamp and Cole discussed the experiential qualities of wilderness as described in the Act and found that current wilderness visitors, managers, and advocates have similar meanings for the qualities of the experience, all of which align with the definitions applied by past researchers:

For example, *solitude* was defined as the absence of other visitors (Hammit et al. 1984; Manning 1985; Vaske et al 1986); definitions of primitive recreation focused on the absence of modern conveniences, structures, and facilities (Borrie and Roggenbuck 2001; Landres et al. 2008; Shafer and Hammit 1995); unconfined recreation was defined as a lack of restriction and regulation (Landres et al. 2008; McCool 2004). - 2009: 27

Here we can see that wilderness is understood as a place where nature is still wild; the flora, fauna, and landscapes are allowed *to be*, outside of human influence. Visitors can visit and know they will encounter few people and no human made structures; instead they are dependent on their own skills, and just the equipment they can carry on their backs or in a canoe. Additionally, visitors must only conform to the few regulations in place to preserve the space and are otherwise left to care for themselves and find their paths and destinations on their own, making the experiences wild compared to their everyday. The idea that some consensus exists is reassuring but the study will still aim to get individual's perspectives in order to always place their comments within the proper context.

One definition of wilderness in particular, one by David James Duncan that clearly has spiritual elements entwined, is an example of how wilderness can be multiple things at once, even to just one person:

Wilderness is a symphony of creative forces as ancient as the earth herself. Wilderness is an unsullied, uninterpreted gift direct from the creative genius of the universe or creator-call it what you will- to all created beings. Wilderness is what allows life to live, diversity to diversify, natural selection to naturally select. Wilderness is our perfect model and our only perfect model of exactly what this planet is capable of becoming when human kind and his biblical pal Lucifer get the hell out of the way of the laws god set into motion. Wilderness is the material-prima out of which we earthlings, human and non-human, forge a self. . .without wilderness we are dead meat. Wilderness is holy. In this holiness is the birthright of every creature, particularly those who come after us to whom we have a huge obligation to pass the holiness on intact. - 1999

One could argue that Duncan's perspective is at least partly the result of the romantic movement in Western Europe advising people to "seek spiritual experience through new channels, including works of art and works of nature" (Timmerman, 2000). The movement ushered in a number of authors in America that pioneered and made a plethora of perspectives pervasive in literature. Albanese (1988) captures many of the specific writings in her *Spirituality and the American Transcendentalists*. Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Ralph Waldo

Emmerson, and subsequently Aldo Leopold all influenced the modern environmental movement and frequently wrote on the topic of wilderness. Hendee and Dawson emphasize this noting, “Historically, American writers have extolled the closeness to nature, education, freedom, solitude, and simplicity, as well as spiritual, aesthetic, and mystical dimensions of the wilderness experience” (2002: 7). It is key to note that those writers and their beliefs and stories may have shaped how some individuals spiritually interact with and perceive wilderness.

Before considering how spirituality is entangled in wilderness, the varying definitions must be considered. Though the Wilderness Act recognizes wilderness as an ‘area’ with a particular characteristics, reflect on the following quote from Nash:

Wilderness has a deceptive concreteness at first glance. The difficulty is that while the word is a noun it acts like an adjective. There is no specific object that is wilderness. The term designates a quality (as the ‘-ness’ suggests) that produces a certain mood or feeling in a given individual and, as a consequence, may be assigned by that person to a specific place. Because of the subjectivity a universally acceptable definition is elusive. - 1982: 1

Recently, in an effort to identify efficient and effective monitoring and management techniques, scholars have looked back to the law. As directed by the Wilderness Act of 1964, “agencies administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area” (P.L. 88-577: 16 U.S. C. 1131-1136, Sec. 3. (b)). According to Landres et al. (2005) wilderness character may be described as biophysical, experiential, and symbolic ideals that distinguish wilderness from all other lands and the variety of wilderness experiences. This phenomenology may provide insightful details regarding what characteristics managers should aim to protect. This section aims to more deeply examine some current perspectives on wilderness and wilderness management and thus help build a context for the research and the experiences it aims to study.

Because this is a study on wilderness and spirituality, consider the following details focused on the relationship between wilderness and religion. Speaking broadly to the legacy,

Kaye notes:

The association between wilderness and spirituality reaches back thousands of years. In Western traditions, leaders and prophets such as Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and Muhammad left their society to find their vision and inspiration in the wilds. The Buddha's remote sojourn provided spiritual insights that were influential in the East and in the formation of Thoreau's transcendentalist ideas- a foundation of the American wilderness movement.
- 2006: 4

Visitors may or may not assign religious meaning to their views of wilderness and spirituality. It is important though to gain at least a minor understanding of their religious beliefs in order to be sure that the most relevant parts of their life-worlds are understood. In 1989 George Stankey wrote *Beyond the Campfire's Light: Historical Roots of the Wilderness Concept*. The publication is a relatively thorough and useful guide that looks at how the Judeo-Christian origins of western society influenced ideas of wilderness. Stankey considers changes over time, and in his conclusion, on a bit of an aside, Stankey suggests that wilderness may, "still retain an image for many people as a place of fear and foreboding and as an challenge to civilizations survival" (1989: 24). While it is clear from current visitor studies that this is not the dominating image, it is important to keep the history of the term in mind and consider that such an image may be prevalent in modern populations that never visit wilderness. Bratton (1993) also took an in depth look at the intersection of wilderness and religion, producing a book titled, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*. The book is a journey through both the Bible's (multiple versions) references and relationship to wilderness, and through contemporary wild lands and the experiential and managerial issues they stir up. These are just two of many authors that have delved into the relation between religion and wilderness. Depending on how participants seem to be arriving at their opinions, such texts may inform the analysis by depicting religious based

reasons for certain perspectives and beliefs. Pertinent here are the references to how various teachings of the Bible often inspire acknowledgement that setting aside wild areas can “contribute to human welfare” and that living with wild nature and caring for it can meet a “biblical ideal” (Stankey, 1989: 21; Bratton, 1993: 307). If participants are in agreement with such views, those perspectives may impact the way that they relate to and spiritually value a wild area.

Without a universally accepted definition, it is also important to look at current ideas and experiences in order to understand the state of the human/ nature relationship. To do this, much work has focused on environmental values. Values are often viewed as ecocentric or anthropocentric (Worboys, Lockwood, and De Lacy, 2005: 79). Williams and Watson argue that *wilderness values* could include values, benefits, desires, attitudes, meanings, preferences, services, reasons, motivations, and uses (2007: 123). Hendee and Dawson (2002) point to values being experiential, scientific, symbolic, spiritual, and economic, while Worboys, Lockwood and DeLacy (2005) include extractive (direct use and ecosystem services) and relational (social, cultural, spiritual, personal, bequest, and existence). Some typologies of wilderness values explicitly include spiritual values and provide an introduction to the depth of the relationship between wilderness and spirituality that is considered in the later subsection *Wilderness and Spirituality*. To be clear, this is not a study of values, but by considering values it may become clear that spirituality is one value of wilderness and spiritual experiences may be shared through the lens of environmental values.

Wilderness is not only viewed and valued in a multitude of ways, it can be experienced differently as well. Emphasizing the importance of researching wilderness experiences, Fox explained, “I suggest that ‘wilderness experiences’ is a category we cannot live without, because

it connects some people to wilderness, is a force within today's society and carries a constructed historical reality with material consequence" (2000: 55). Earlier in the article Fox stated:

If wilderness is a constructed and bound concept, what is the entity called "wilderness experience?" Can "wilderness experience" exist outside of cultural and historical forces? How would one delineate a "wilderness experience?" When does a "wilderness experience" begin or end? If the "wilderness experience" is over (e.g., a discrete river trip), are the learnings derived from that event, recognized in the future, part of the original experience?" Or are they a different experience? Or is it an ongoing "wilderness experience?" - 2000:51

In an article titled *The Dynamic, Emergent, and Multi-Phasic Nature of on-site Wilderness Experiences*, Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) answer some of these questions and had findings supporting the phasic nature of the wilderness experience. Measures assessing experiential change yielded results such as 'care for wilderness' scores being higher during the exit phase of the experience than during the entry (Borrie and Roggenbuck, 2001). It is notable however that when comparing four methods of measuring wilderness experiences (satisfaction approaches, benefits-based approaches, experience-based approaches, and meanings based approaches), Borrie and Birzell (2001) found each to have their shortcomings and speculated that the multifaceted nature of the phenomena of wilderness experiences was mostly to blame. Most importantly though, Fox, along with Borrie and Birzell wisely prepare a study such as this to be aware of the 'ongoing relationship' filled with various phases.

Looking back to a study published in 1986, we see that there has been a continual acknowledgement of the complexity of the wilderness experience. Talbot and Kaplan (1986) were led to conclude, "The wilderness environment is one where the experience of compatibility, the harmonizing of one's own capabilities and inclinations with the opportunities and limitations present in the physical surroundings, is particularly likely." With this in mind, it is easy to see how varied spiritual experiences can be if wilderness has the ability to meet individuals at any of

the endless levels of capability and inclination with which they enter. It seems that too often studies lack the ability to gain real-time information about participants' experiences in a way that is fresh, and recently lived. By studying the phenomena in-situ seemingly ordinary habits and rituals can be shared, not just the one exceptional experience that will be most remembered following the trip.

Due to the number of lakes in the study area, which will be described in the next chapter, it was important to recognize that perspectives on *water* would likely be shared and impact visitors experiences. Stokowski (2008) explained the symbolic importance of the water landscape noting that people carry symbolic associations with water, including purity, power, timelessness, refreshment, life support, wildness, distance, serenity, continuousness and unpredictability. Such lists are helpful to consider and compare to participant explanations. Stokowski (2008) stressed how water and rivers are frequently employed as metaphors in art, literature, and culture. A historical review suggests that most water symbols center around five general meanings: creation and birth, spiritual and emotional growth, cleansing, journey, and fulfillment (Stokowski, 2008). The idea that nature carries symbols that affirm culture and self may prove most intriguing as spiritual experiences in wilderness are considered. The current management paradigm is still struggling to understand views that consider water more symbolically rather than instrumentally. Mechanisms to consider and value non-instrumental uses are largely nonexistent (Stokowski, 2008).

Another important symbol to consider for this project has been the idea of *home* and its relation to wilderness. Many writers have captured the idea that, "When you go out there you don't get away from it all, you get back to it all; you come home to what is important, you come home to yourself" (Dombrovskis, 2003: 1). The timelessness and sense of permanence that

wilderness is capable of evoking may be a hard thing to find in modern societies. Philosophers such as Bugbee have dealt with nature as simultaneously our home and our Holy Land and we must therefore shuttle ourselves between wilderness and civilization (Conway, 1999). A constant theme in the literature for both wilderness and the attendant experiences is the idea that wilderness is *different* and acts in contrast with the modern everyday. This concept will be explored within this review with a look at the difference between sacred and profane but also given ample attention through the results and discussion. Most notably, it is essential here to recognize the degree of subjectivity that definitions of wilderness and the attendant experiences bring to the study.

2.2 Previous Spirituality Research

Fox's definition of spirituality is one of many that has emerged from previous studies to provide perspective. Fox stated:

Spirituality is an altered state of consciousness where an individual may experience a higher sense of self, inner feelings, inner knowledge, awareness and attainment to the world and one's place in it, knowledge of personal relations and the relationship to the environment, or a belief in a power greater than imaginable. - 1999: 455

Fox seems to capture the subjective term's complex nature better than any other such that it is the "guiding definition" for this study. Not only does Fox capture the way that spirituality is 'an altered state' alluding to it being very different from the mentality of the everyday, she also includes references to how spirituality can be both inward and outward as well as deal only the self, and/or extend to others and/or beyond to 'a power greater than imaginable.' Fox additionally managed to acknowledge that spirituality can include awareness, feelings, relationships, and beliefs, either experienced on their own, or in a compounding way. Let her definition simply provide a starting point and handrail for this review.

Before looking at the psychological conceptions of spirituality, it is important to recognize the various definitions and traits of spirituality as introduced in past studies and related literature. *Spirituality* is an English word, which is derived from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning ‘breath of life.’ It is key to notice how spirituality is both related to and separate from religion. Religion can be defined as, “A covenant faith community with teachings and narratives that enhance the search for the sacred and encourage morality” (Dollahite, 1998: 5). Traditionally in Western culture a spiritual person could only be a religious person but this is changing as more people seek spiritual nourishment outside of formal religions (Ashley, 2009). For this reason, this study focuses exclusively on spirituality and does not attempt to inquire about religious experiences, though some participants may classify them as identical.

Recent research has stated, “spirituality is now commonly regarded to be concerned with individual phenomena such as personal experiences of the transcendent and religiousness is often more narrowly identified with prescribed theology” (Siedlitz et al., 2002: 440). Based on this understanding an individual’s spiritual experiences can refer to the act of pondering life’s deeper motivations or as Vaughn states, spiritual experiences are the subjective experience of the sacred (1991). There are certainly difficulties involved in defining something so related to subjective experiences, but these definitions of spirituality and spiritual are important in that they recognize participants’ descriptions of their self-defined spiritual experiences as spirituality.

Tacey explained the difficulty well saying:

It is difficult to offer precise answers, [to the question ‘What is spirituality?’] since spirituality eludes the kind of rationalistic knowing that arrives at simple definitions. . . Spirituality is especially hard to define because it is largely what we don’t know about ourselves. . . we must approach this subject [definition of spirituality] with humility, awe and reverence, not hubris or certainty, because when we are most certain about spirituality, we are most certainly removed from its essence. - 2000: 17

Despite these caveats, numerous definitions do exist. The following are provided for purposes of expanding perspectives and understanding how spirituality has been defined or dealt with in related studies.

- 1) The concept of spirituality has traditionally included an awareness of and fusion with a power or principle greater than the self. Spirituality has often been described as that which gives meaning and purpose to life. - Stringer and McAvoy, 1992: 14
- 2) Spirituality is a construct that has individual interpretation usually born from opportunities to experience a profound sense of connectedness with either supernatural or human other. - Marsh, 2007: 24-25
- 3) Spirituality, including transcendence, is a moment of extreme happiness; a feeling of lightness and freedom; a sense of harmony with the whole world; moments which are totally absorbing and feel important. - Williams and Harvey, 2001: 249
- 4) [Spirituality is] An altered state of consciousness where an individual may experience a higher sense of self, inner feelings, inner knowledge, awareness and attainment to the world and one's place in it, knowledge of personal relations and the relationship with the environment, or a belief in a power greater than imaginable. - Fox, 1999: 45

As previously noted, definition #4 from Fox can be considered the guiding definition for this study. In addition to the elements from Fox's definition that were already noted as relevant, other important components to this study are: Stringer and McAvoy's reference to 'that which gives meaning and purpose to life,' Williams and Harvey's acknowledgement of 'happiness,' 'harmony,' and 'totally absorbing,' and finally, Marsh's focus on 'connectedness.' These definitions informed this study of the different ways spirituality may be understood and shaped the way that questions regarding spirituality were formulated.

Helminiak identified six ways that the term spirituality has been utilized in the literature: 1) to represent "the human spiritual nature," 2) as "concern for transcendence," 3) as a "lived reality" that helps realize the full human spiritual capacity, 4) "as an academic discipline," 5) as communication with spirits, and 6) as parapsychology (1996: 32). Another term that is often used is "mystical Experience" (Hood, 1975). Hood explained that mystical experiences are

umbrella experiences and though he identified six categories of mysticism, each is not always a part of the greater experience. In 2002, Johnson wrote specifically about the spiritual benefits provided aspects of wilderness and looked for the psychological understanding of why six particular benefits (the enduring, the sublime, beauty, competence, experience of peace, and self-forgetting) are perceived as beneficial.

In all of these definitions and benefits, there is a component of self-identity, beyond the construct of an individual body. According to Helminiak, spirituality deals with the individual's 'knowing of the self,' which places spiritual meanings and phenomena in the realm of psychology (2001). The field of modern psychology often recognizes individual spirituality as consisting of three themes: *identity*, *fulfillment* and *context* (Marsh, 2007). *Identity* refers to how a person experiences transcendence of self and relates self to community (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Marsh, 2007). *Fulfillment* pertains to how individuals address the questions about the meaning of their life and pursue their passions, and lastly, *context* characterizes the setting of actual spiritual experiences (Marsh, 2007). These interrelated themes point to the importance of experiences and perceptions of experiences involving interactions with the world (Marsh, 2007). However, based on participant explanations, spirituality need not include all three elements. Developing *identity* for example seemed to stand alone as a spiritual experience for many participants (Marsh, 2007).

More broadly, spiritual development is a multifaceted process that may or may not include: a transcendent dimension; be considerate of meaning and purpose in life, mission in life, sacredness of life, and material values; and contemplate altruism, idealism, tragedy, and the fruits of spirituality (adapted from Ashley, 2009). Though this study doesn't specifically aim to define or measure spiritual development, these factors or units of analysis are

important to be familiar with because conversations can include references to such processes and/or considerations. Other units of analysis for spirituality outcomes have also been recommended from the field of personality psychology. Prayer, fulfillment, universality, timelessness, and connectedness are the most relevant of these (Emmons and Paloutzian, 2003). Additionally Beck offers that, “spiritual people are characterized by all or most of the following qualities: awareness, breadth of outlook, a holistic outlook, integration, wonder, gratitude, hope, courage, energy, detachment, acceptance, love, and gentleness” (1986: 152-153). These lists will serve as reminders of potential units of meaning and significance during the discussion.

To further the develop the psychological understanding of spirituality, consider the idea of *true self*. Psychology frequently considers how the true self is developed and uses words and phrases such as innate, organic, central self, instinctive self, aliveness, being, self-contained, bodily, personal body-scheme, I, and reaching out in order to describe the true self (Alma and Zock, 2002). As participants discuss their personal experiences and the relation of the experience to their entire life, these terms may arise and become meaningful themes that provide both windows for analysis and avenues for conversation. To relate some of the terms to experiences, it is important to consider the psychologist Winnicott who associates *transitional experiences*, where one relates to the world and forms identity, with vocabulary such as commitment, ritual, and belief. No matter the source of the terms, these associations highlight the importance of meaningful experiences in spiritual and religious development. Through producing a phenomenology of spiritual experiences, it is possible that relationships between ideas like true self and ritual and wilderness may be described and the complexities of the experiences illuminated and their context depicted.

To add to the numbered definitions and terms above, transcendence can additionally be viewed as the process of reaching out beyond oneself, sometimes self-forgetting in order to identify with something bigger or beyond and making meaning of experience through broadened perspectives (Maslow, 1970). Maslow succinctly notes that individual immersion in one's passions leads to fulfillment, self-actualization, self-awareness and often self-transcendence (1970). Additionally, some authors stress that spirituality or self-transcendence is the main motivation for pursuing individual spiritual development (Alma and Zock, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Transcendence, though not a term that is labeled as a theme in this study, but it is of interest due to how many studies refer to participants feeling different while in the natural settings. Through this study explicit participant references to transcendence or similar feelings are identified and described. 'Self-actualization', a term coined by Maslow (1968) was found to be a key element in visitor experiences that involved 'ultimate psychological growth' (Scott, 1974). Considering the immersive qualities of a trip into the BWCAW, it seems likely that self-actualization/awareness/and transcendence are all elements that would clearly be identified as processes and outcomes

Much work has been done in religious and psychological bodies of literature to otherwise characterize both religious and spiritual experiences. Fromm (1950) identified common features of religious experiences, though he subsequently chose to refer to them as mystical experiences. His features included 'awe before reality', 'ultimate concern' and 'letting go' (Fromm, 1950). Other process-oriented topics that will be further examined through this study are nirvana, and ritual. Ritual tends to include more specific processes such as, worship, meditation or contemplation. Other rituals that may be reviewed include

rites of passage, purification, and sacrifice. Nirvana is known as an ultimate transcendence in the intuitive experience of and subsequent reflection upon inner liberation (Smart, 1996).

Another potentially transitional experience is the act of vision questing in wilderness. Modern vision quests have been studied by Riley and Hendee (1998). Not only did their study attempt to characterize the questers and their intentions (spiritual journey/self discovery was listed as the most important intention), but the study considered spiritual benefits such as categorized as connection to self, self empowerment, and connection to other (Riley and Hendee, 1998). These categories were further sub-divided but provide additional terms to consider while analyzing the process of spiritual experiences.

To continue the consideration of pertinent experiences, McDonald (1989) argued that spiritual experiences occur within *expanding spheres of continuity* where recreation promotes physical and mental states that support meditative reflection. The concept of physical activity promoting various mental states is further developed in the peak and flow literature. Maslow, one of the prominent writers on peak experiences, wrote, “all mystical or peak experiences are the same in their essence,” highlighting that the psychological process is the same across individuals. Csikszentmihalyi provided evidence of psychological similarities in peak experiences across a variety of visitors to the outdoors (1990). When involved in activities, participants similarly described the merging of action and awareness, focus on a narrow set of stimuli, and a loss of sense of self, all similar to flow experiences as described by Maslow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Maslow, 1974). Both peak and flow are comparable to spiritual experiences in that they provide insight regarding a person’s place in the universe (McDonald and Schreyer, 1991). Emphasizing the ability that humans have to maintain their spirituality, and continue to reconsider their spirituality, Steiner (1971) explained that

spiritual experiences can be recalled and experienced again and that spiritual experience is quite different from our normal consciousness. This concept can play a role in explaining spirituality as an integral component of the life-long human-nature relationship.

Lastly, McDonald and Schreyer's findings that there is a distinction between the process and the content of spirituality will help guide the analysis of the phenomena of spiritual experiences (1991). Understanding which component of the experiences are content and which are process can help more accurately describe them. While one cannot exist without the other, process refers to activities and behaviors (e.g., meditation, flow experience) a person is engaged in and content is the actual object of spirituality (e.g., belief system, substance of prayer) that is contemplated (McDonald and Schreyer, 1991). This and the array of other descriptions of spirituality and psychological conceptions of spirituality are useful in shaping the interview guide and the analysis of this study.

2.3 Wilderness and Spirituality

Spirituality and wilderness have long been intertwined by wilderness visitors as well as wilderness and religious researchers and writers. Looking back to the 1960's and 1970's, there are multiple studies on spirituality related to wilderness that demonstrate interest in the field during the time of early wilderness designation. A 1962 Outdoor Recreational Resources Review Commission noted the desire of visitors to exit civilization and obtain an esthetic-religious type of experience as a dimension that dominated the appeal of wilderness (Ferris, 1962). In 1968 a study of over one thousand wilderness users in the Pacific Northwest found that some attitudes that characterized the more purist wilderness users could be labeled spartanism, primevalism, a desire to escape social interaction (Hendee et al., 1968). A study of wilderness users in the eastern United States indicated that the experience qualities of emotional and aesthetic to be the

first and second of five when compared with physical, educational, and social (Shafer et al., 1972). Reinforcing these findings, Rossman and Ulehla (1977) used ‘rewards from wilderness’ factor scales to determine that emotional and religious or spiritual experiences are considered by surveyed college students as some of the most important benefits realized by recreationalists.

Each of those early studies are likely in response to spirituality being an important consideration in early wilderness designation. Past research (Heintzman and Mannell, 1999; Heintzman, 2002) has demonstrated that the degree to which introspection and spirituality added to a visitor’s satisfaction were statistically higher in wilderness as compared to nature parks and parks designed for recreation, but field lacks rich description as to why this is. Additionally, the ‘spiritual benefits’ of wilderness experiences have recently received attention in research (e.g. Heintzman, 2007, 2012; Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Marsh, 2007; Ashley, 2007, 2009). Unfortunately, though the benefits are slowly becoming more clear, grasping, protecting, and managing for poorly understood experiences is difficult.

While the term spirituality is not explicitly used in the Act, as previously noted, the Act mandates managers to preserve “wilderness character” (P.L. 88-577: 16 U.S. C. 1131-1136, Sec. 3. (b)). While recently exploring the topic, Watson appropriately asked, “What are we protecting wilderness from?” (Watson, 2004: 6). He went on to note that beyond traditional definitions of stewardship, managers need to be stewards of the relationship that people have with wilderness areas (Watson, 2004). Wilderness character has been analyzed in many ways, but consider a perspective from the author of the Act, Howard Zahniser. He is quoted stating, “We deeply need the humility to know ourselves as the dependent members of a great community of life, and this can indeed be one of the spiritual benefits of a wilderness experience” (Kaye, 2002: 3). With a clear intent to protect a variety of experiences, potentially including spiritual ones, Watson noted,

“Wilderness character is perceptual, with different people perceiving it very differently, and these perceptions are bound to change over time” (Watson, 2004: 7). The National Survey on Recreation and the Environment found that 81% of respondents noted spiritual inspiration as being a moderately, very, or extremely important element of their personal experiences with nature (NSRE, 2000). The more recent emphasis on spiritual experiences in wilderness may stem from citizens being more involved in issues of land management, recognizing the scarcity of such landscapes. This could be one example of the change Watson may have been referring to. Depending on our view of a landscape’s health and future potential, we may experience it differently.

As highlighted in *Previous Spirituality Research*, both spirituality and religion are often understood to include a search for the sacred. When looking at cognitive and moral components of resource management, one clear moral component is based on a person’s view of the resource as symbolically sacred (Moore and McClaran, 1991). There are complex and strong essential beliefs that tend to underlie a relationship with an object or place as sacred (Durkheim, 1912/2001). A question therefore becomes, do wilderness visitors and managers similarly view the space as sacred? Fernandez-Gimenez et al. (1992) and Moore and McClaran (1991) found that visitors and managers with differing symbolic views of wilderness as sacred support different levels of policies and guidelines. To look more closely at this issue in the context of the present study, consider the following studies and writings that compare the sacred and the profane.

In the context of wilderness, multiple writers including McDonald et al. 1988 have leaned on the term sacred when describing components of spiritual experiences. McDonald et al. suggested that specific setting components that support sacred status are components that lead to

and define spiritual experiences (1988). They included large open spaces as well as small natural stimuli. Around the same time, Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) were identifying twelve properties of the sacred that can easily be applied to wilderness and have been employed in research (Moore and McClaran, 1991; Bloom, 2008). The twelve properties are commitment, ritual, sacrifice, *communitas*, *kratophany*, *ecstasy and flow*, *contamination*, *myth and mystery*, *opposition to the profane*, and *objectification* (Belk et al., 1989). Moore and McClaran (1991) used the properties to determine that varying understandings of wilderness as sacred space leads to conflicts over use and management. In Bloom's (2008) work, the properties were distilled into a dichotomy of *wilderness affect* and *wilderness inspiration*. Notably, Bloom's (2008) study found *opposition to the profane* to be the second most represented wilderness property by participants, only behind the theme of *ecstasy and flow*. To grasp the meaning of *sacred*, it is important to look at earlier work conducted on the topic. While trying to sociologically explain what adheres society to itself, Emile Durkheim began analyzing religion (1912/2001).

Durkheim arrived at definitions of religion that focused on how humans hold certain elements of life and certain places to be sacred. Durkheim contrasted the sacred and the profane by their essence, level of protection, and relation to individuals and groups within society (1912/2001).

Eliade (1957) additionally looked at the role of the sacred within society, though offered that the sacred uncovers itself to society through processes of enlightenment or revelation. Though the views differ, their use of the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane are important.

Stepping back and more broadly viewing the link between wilderness and spirituality, it is easy to see that the topic has gained significant interest since the 1980's. Kaplan, Kaplan, and Talbot studied the psychological benefits of nature, including spiritual components through the 1980's. In the late 1980's McDonald and others explored the link between the outdoors and

spirituality and spiritual growth. One study analyzed the ways that wilderness may foster wilderness spirituality, which was described as “the sudden or gradual awareness of interrelationships among plants, animals, the landscape, and indeed all naturally-occurring things within [an] environment . . . ‘untrammeled by man’” (McDonald et al., 1988: 194). They classified relevant experiences of wilderness as: sacred places and things, organized groups, cultural heritage, and individual experiences. Most notably the increased interest in the field has inspired both guiding questions for this study, and curiosity about what has changed over the years to encourage more interest. It seems more interest needs to be paid to how the field of wilderness spirituality is being impacted from the outside. Other than McDonald’s reference to visitors bringing baggage into the wilderness, there have been few references to antecedents that may be changing the nature of the spiritual experiences in wilderness. Through the remaining studies reviewed, the importance of antecedents and the everyday lives of participants are addressed. The classifications shared here will be related to this studies findings to see if similar characterizations aid in describing this studies findings.

Looking again at the growth of the field, Williams and Harvey, referring to the 1990’s stated, “Public and professional interest in the relationship between spirituality and nature has been increasing during the past decade” (2001: 249). In the 1991 book *Benefits of Leisure*, a full chapter by McDonald and Schreyer on the spiritual benefits of leisure likely garnered some of that interest. In 1992 Stringer and McAvoy published a study that included gathering data from 26 individuals through interviews, observations, participant journals, and questionnaires (1992). The data was focused on common attributes of wilderness spiritual experiences and the results included the following: the sense of a common spirit among a group; a power greater than the self; clarity of inner knowledge; feelings of strength, peace and oneness; awareness of one’s

relationship to the world; and other intangible or ineffable qualities. The qualitative study was conducted on two all male trips. The first was a canoe trip in Northern Ontario and a second a backpacking trip in Wyoming. The study found that wilderness was not identified as place where participants were looking for spiritual experiences, but due to the lack of ‘constraints’ they appeared to find them. Most notably, theirs was the first study to emphasize the importance of limited constraints, and additionally, the study, like that herein, found sharing experiences with others to be a spiritual process. This factor of sharing canoe space will be addressed in this study.

In a similar study by Fox (1997) four stages of wilderness experience were identified: reflection on, or experience of natural beauty, triggers experience; experience is followed feelings of awe, absorption, wonderment, and timelessness; emotions are followed by feelings of tranquility, calmness, elation, and peacefulness; the culmination is spiritual growth. Fox’s study makes it clear that not every individual will experience the same sequence of events yet this progression is obviously of interest to creating a phenomenology of spiritual experiences in wilderness. Though the stages seem a bit narrow, the progression can be compared to the findings herein. Interestingly though, the all women’s group had “structured time for solitude” which may be why the outcome seems somewhat rigid. In her 1999 follow up to the 1997 study Fox focused on characterizing the experiences and used the terms enraptured, awakening, and becoming aware of natural beauty. This lists of process attributes and attempts at describing the phases of the phenomena of spiritual experiences provide helpful starting points for the present study.

Heintzman (2010), the most published researcher on the topic, specifically requests that more research is completed that identifies the components of nature-based recreation that influence spirituality with the spiritual outcomes of the experiences. Studies have demonstrated

wilderness visitors' interest in reflecting on spiritual components while recreating, and suggested that a majority of people who visit park and wilderness areas seek (in part) spiritual outcomes (Heintzman, 2010). In 2003, Heintzman reviewed recent research and found that humans' knowledge of the benefits of spirituality is growing and that they are more regularly looking to natural landscapes as meaningful settings for such experiences. That appeared to mark a change compared to the interests of Stringer and McAvoy's participants who more-so happened upon their spiritual experiences.

At about the same time, Johnson identified six spiritual benefits of visiting wilderness and related them spiritual traditions. The six categories of benefits and their associated characteristics were explained by Johnson (2002) as: 1) the *enduring* wilderness and its permanence is 'God' like and comforting in an ever changing and more mobile world, 2) the *sublime* of wilderness where the immensity and power inspire a sense of awe, 3) the *beauty* of wilderness that evokes peaceful thoughts, 4) the *competence* that comes from successfully completing challenges that are particular to wilderness, 5) the *experience of peace* that comes from participating in wilderness experiences that involve risk and challenge, but are within the participants limit, and lastly, 6) *self-forgetting* or a oneness with nature or transcendence often occurs in wilderness due to the amalgamation of the other five categories. To end his study Johnson calls for a deeper investigation into the terms.

Additional studies have done well to characterize certain elements of spiritual experiences and the related outcomes. Heintzman and Mannell (1999) used a questionnaire to quantitatively measure relationships between respondent's participation in various leisure settings, including wilderness settings, and their spiritual well-being. A portion of the study concluded that motivation, participation, and time components of leisure style were found to be

indirectly and positively associated with spiritual well being (2003). Spiritual well-being was defined by the study as including physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual health and also included an element of coping (Heintzman and Mannell, 2003). Two factors, *Sacrilization*, defined as awareness of the spiritual dimension of life, and *Sense of Place*, defined as the inspiration and connectedness resulting from the context of the setting, were found to significantly relate the ideas of leisure, spirituality, coping, and wellbeing. Despite having some measurable findings, the study suggested the need for deeper investigation into the importance of context, and the conceptualization of spiritual experiences.

A 1999 Fredrickson and Anderson study followed two groups of women through wilderness experiences in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Grand Canyon. The study used on-site observations, field journals and interviews to assess wilderness experiences as a source of spiritual inspiration and identified periods of solitude, physical challenge, a noncompetitive atmosphere, direct contact with nature, and being in bone fide wilderness as important factors that lead to spiritual inspiration (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999). To close their study they posed multiple questions in their discussion for other researchers to address: 1) Which comes first, the individual feeling emotionally secure within their social setting, or the individual feeling secure within their biophysical environment which enables the individual to feel more self secure within their social situations? 2) How does gender influence group dynamics and 'place' as a source of inspiration? 3) How do the experiences of spiritual inspiration differ between groups (or individuals) within the same wilderness? and 4) How might spiritual benefits accrue over time? Each of these questions helps identify gaps in the research and informed the methodology used herein. This study specifically addressed questions three and four.

Another highly relevant and informative study is titled *Qualitative Insights into Leisure as a Spiritual Experience* (Schmidt and Little, 2007). The data for the phenomenological study came from in-depth interviews with a convenience and snowball sample of 24 people able and interested in talking about their spirituality and leisure habits. The study identified common themes of self-defined spiritual leisure experiences and described specific as triggers, responses, and outcomes. The findings supported those of previous studies but acknowledged that more work is needed to confirm the role, “that spiritual experiences of leisure may have a role in enhancing individuals’ understandings of self, their lifeworld, their humanity, and provide opportunities to grow and be aware as humans” (Schmidt and Little, 2007: 243). They conclude that more detailed investigation is needed to determine the ways the experiences unfold in people’s lives and how to facilitate the experiences (Schmidt and Little, 2007). Again the idea of a spiritual relationship over time seems to require attention. The methods herein, specifically questions regarding a relationship or connection with wilderness, address that need and do so within the specific environment that appears to support the phenomena. Additionally it is apparent that few studies have explored the relationship between specific spiritual traditions and leisure based spiritual experiences.

Ellard et al. (2009) explored spiritual dimension of vacation experiences in-situ in specific outdoor locations across Montana. Their formal and non-formal qualitative interview questions found that four spiritual themes prevailed during their Montana vacations: creation perspectives, nature-based perspectives, tranquility and transcendence, and recentering/refocusing/getting away (Ellard et al., 2009). The study supports the work of others that have found that time, space, nature, and quiet facilitate spiritual experiences (Ellard et al., 2009). Though the study was not conducted in wilderness, participants used a similar vocabulary

to related wilderness based studies. Though the original data collection was aimed at simply learning about the Montana vacation experience, spiritual themes were so prevalent that they required acknowledgement and are believed to have implications on future tourism policies and research (Ellard et al., 2009). While the study does not go into the depth of that herein, the themes data presented and emergent themes can be compared to those in this study. Notably their study began without focusing on spirituality and discovered it as main theme. That is interesting but limits the studies ability to ask questions focused specifically on spirituality.

Within the pool of studies, various factors identified as influencing spiritual experiences in wilderness include the variety of setting, type of experience, and impact of socialization (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1983; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999), as well as the remoteness of natural environment. Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) found that most participants were moved to new spiritual heights as a result of their wilderness experience. Heintzman (2003) additionally analyzed 'leisure style' as a component that influences spiritual experiences as a component of wilderness experiences. Heintzman (2002) found the type of park visited to be a statistically significant determinant of the degree of introspection that participants experienced. He additionally also found positive relationships between park visitors' participation in nature-based activities (visiting viewpoints or lookouts, viewing or photographing nature, and canoeing or hiking) and the degree to which spirituality/introspection added to the satisfaction of their park experience (2002). It is crucial to note that spirituality is not defined in any of these studies though study participants' understanding of spirituality is often included.

Most recently, Ashley (2009) studied the meaning of spiritual values in Tasmanian Wilderness with hopes of better integrating them into management strategies. Ashley noted that

the growth in interest in wilderness spirituality is marked by people undergoing attitudinal shifts as they re-evaluate their relationship with nature (2009: 37). In another recent study, Marsh (2007) focused on spiritual values in addition to the attributes and consequences of spiritual aspects of backcountry experiences.

The idea that nature recreation facilitates a progression through stages of spiritual experiences within one trip has been looked at by multiple researchers. Fox (1999) created she called the *Spiritual Experience Process Funnel*. Fredrickson and Anderson's (1999) modeling placed more emphasis on setting components, going beyond what they considered the traditional reliance on sense of place, place attachment, and sense of the divine to explain wilderness user's spiritual experiences. A conceptual model was created by Heintzman that emphasizes that leisure experiences, involving time, activity, motivation and setting have the ability to create a context where the spiritual can be explored and 'spiritual emergencies' can be tended to (2002). Heintzman (2010) notes that the existing models fail to include important factors such as antecedent conditions like personal history and current circumstances. Demographics and spiritual traditions are additionally speculated to play large roles in the relationship between spirituality and recreation.

To date, antecedent conditions, individuals' a priori characteristics that may inform their experience, have included: personal history and current circumstances, referred to as baggage (e.g., fear) by Fox (1999) and lifestyle and life events by Heintzman (2007); motivation and attitude (Heintzman, 2007; Stringer and McAvoy, 1992; Riley and Hendee, 1999); socio-demographic characteristics (Heintzman, 1998); and spiritual traditions (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2008; Stringer and McAvoy 1992). Driver et al. highlight that nature based spiritual experiences include:

. . . introspection and reflection on deep personal values; the elements of human devotion, reverence, respect, wonder, awe, mystery, or lack of total understanding; inspiration; interaction with and relationship to something other and greater than oneself; sense of humility; and sense of timelessness, integration, continuity, connectedness, and community. - 1996: 5

Clearly, reaching a concise definition of nature-based and/or wilderness based spirituality is not nearly as easy as creating lists and typologies of various facilitating factors and benefits. A theoretical model measuring commitment and community awareness was created in 1991 by McDonald and Schreyer. Fox proposed another model called the Spiritual Experience Process Funnel consisting of six themes: baggage, fear, relaxation, spiritual experiences triggers, emotive experience, transcendental, and attitudinal and behavioral changes over time (Fox, 1997). Lastly, an additional model was suggested that put more weight into the setting components (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999).

Each of these and the other antecedents, processes and outcomes found by other studies frame the current work and inform the methods. As previously noted, within the present study the influence of *water* on the wilderness experience deserves attention since the study location is so unique as a lake dominated wilderness. Recently an article titled *Journeying by Canoe: Reflections on the Canoe and Spirituality* provided great insight into both the role of water, and the impact of traveling by canoe (Peace, 2009). The article investigates ways that humans have interacted with the canoe and differentiated themes that accompany the just the canoe, and themes that are conditioned by historical circumstances (Peace, 2009). Physical elements that inspired spirituality such as paddling and portaging were found to be canoe specific along with group and solo elements of canoe specific travel. The study labeled other elements as circumstances such as paddler's *baggage* and *connections*, which stress the importance of antecedents in spiritual experiences. Examples of the antecedents could be the historical uses of

the canoe or the relationship that a person has with their paddling partner. The insights were used to help foresee potential themes related to the specific context of this study.

Other notable articles included, Rogness (1994) who provided a personal reflection on canoe traveling and the work of Mason (1988), which gave insight into canoe culture that can help define self image. Beck (1987) additionally produced a phenomenology of river recreation that focused on optimal experiences within whitewater wilderness adventures. The study identified nine dimensions of optimal experience, many of which were laced with perspectives of water that may be seen during the present study. Notably, spirituality was one of the nine dimensions. Likely the most informing writing related to water and spirituality came from Sigurd Olson (1938) and a biographer of his David Backes (1995). Olson's perspectives on wilderness and canoe travel, including journals about "glimpses of the infinite" and "flashes of insight," provide great perspective on one approach to spirituality and how time in wilderness can develop an individual's personal philosophy.

Recall the reference above to the current implications of research on management considerations. Notably, the initial responsibilities set forth in the 1964 Act, were reinforced by the 1983 U.S. Congress. The record shows the specific command, "The overriding principle guiding management of all wilderness areas, regardless of which agency administers them, is the Wilderness Act (section 4 (b)) mandate to preserve their wilderness character" (U.S. Congress, Congressional Record, 1983). To date, it seems that ideas of monitoring and maintaining wilderness character is the most likely to recognize and incorporate spiritual elements of wilderness. To again consider what forms this may take, think about the following comment from Peter Landres, "For the purposes of monitoring, wilderness character can be described as the combination of biophysical, experiential, and symbolic ideals that distinguishes wilderness

from all other lands” (Landres, 2004). In that vein, McCool (2004) considered how the wilderness character and original definitions of wilderness in the Act include the notion of wilderness providing *unconfined* experiences. McCool (2004) concludes that the notion of unconfined experiences needs more debate and deliberation, and we need to better understand how it interacts with other dimensions of wilderness. This study aims to clarify elements of the experiential and symbolic components of spiritual experiences, and in the process uncovers many details related to how wilderness may be distinguished as an other, different from everyday landscapes.

2.4 Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

While the following chapter on methods explains the approach taken herein, this short section highlights the body of literature that was reviewed through the process of choosing an appropriate methodology. Choosing phenomenology as a methodology was the result of looking at the intersections of psychological and philosophical frameworks. Philosopher Edmund Husserl’s late 19th and early 20th century work to understand the role of imagination, fantasy, and consciousness as elements of lived experiences led him to create and define the phenomenological method. Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness (Groenewald, 2004). Personal consciousness, perceiving immediate experience is therefore the only reality treated as pure ‘phenomena.’ Husserl called his philosophical method ‘phenomenology’, a human science of pure ‘phenomena’ (Eagleton, 1983: 55). According to Heidegger, who differentiated hermeneutic phenomenology from phenomenology, people and the world are indissolubly related in cultural, social, and historic

contexts (Munhall, 1989). Thus hermeneutic phenomenology can simultaneously acknowledge that personal realities exist and that those realities can be related in contexts.

Phenomenology, on the face of it, is the detailed study of the experience of being conscious of something (Chung & Ashworth, 2006). It is therefore the process of researching lived experiences, the study of the lifeworld- the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it (Husserl, 1970; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). This form of study initially appears to be a psychological endeavor, an attempt to understand conscious experience. However, Chung and Ashworth (2006) effectively describe Husserl's aim as providing conceptual underpinnings for different sciences and scholarly disciplines. Psychology is one discipline that the framework can apply to.

To further this exploration, consider other explanations of the term. Phenomenology is a framework that recognizes that natural science aims to *taxonomize* natural phenomena (such as biology) and causally or probabilistically *explain* the behavior of things (such as in physics), while human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena and *understanding* the lived structures of meaning (Van Manen, 1990). Increasing the departure from natural science, Robert Stake, drawing on philosopher William Dilthey's work, explains:

. . . knowledge in the human sciences is greatly different from that in the physical sciences, the second being an impersonal explanations of how things work, the first being what humans think and feel as to how things work. It was not that humans draw conclusions with little evidence, which is often true, but that, no matter how shy or subdued they are, they understand events as somehow a participant in them. - 2010: 48

Phenomenology recognizes this implication of human sciences and 'is interested in what is essentially not replaceable' and should be considered a 'philosophy or *theory of the unique*' (Van Manen, 1990: 7). Thus, phenomenologist Peter Hay says,

Phenomenological investigation lays stress upon the vernacular constructions of meaning and their attendant technologies, beliefs, value codes and myth structures via a process of

multi-sensorial receptivity to that-which-would-be-known, an openness that collapses the critical distance between subject and object, insisting that they flow into each other. - 2006: 33

In this way, the phenomena under study will be conveyed and understood through a method that places the researcher in the closest possible contact with the lived experiences of the research participants. These attributes make the method appealing in that the wilderness experience is so dependent on the context that is usually very different from people's everyday settings.

Further investigation revealed that Max Van Manen (1990) wrote a book titled *Researching the Lived Experience*, which is fundamentally pedagogically oriented and puts phenomenology into somewhat simpler language than other sources. The book shows a semiotic employment of phenomenological and hermeneutic methods and guides readers past the pitfalls of the psychology vs. philosophy discussion and succinctly details the phenomenological and hermeneutical frameworks. Van Manen explains that, "phenomenological research is the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness because consciousness is the only access human beings have to the world" (1990: 9). Van Manen's work can be referred to in order to orient the acts of reflecting and writing. His work places a strong emphasis on the importance of language, and provides exercises that help isolate units of meaning as well as units of significance.

It has to be said that phenomenology will never lay out mechanical techniques of research after the style of an experimental design. Instead, the research approach intends to elucidate experience rather than test causal hypotheses. By pairing the practice with Hermeneutics, the resulting analysis becomes a context driven view of experiences that focuses on how participants are involved in, "emergent experiences motivated by the not very well-defined goal of acquiring stories that ultimately enrich one's life" (Patterson et al., 1998: 423). By adding hermeneutics

and particularly the hermeneutic circle to the methodology, the process becomes better defined and easier to follow for an amateur researcher (Patterson, 2002). Seamon (1987) pointed out that a defining element of hermeneutics, within hermeneutic phenomenological research is that the creator of the text (the data) is not typically available to comment on its making or significance and therefore the researcher must find ways to discover meaning through the text itself. The hermeneutic analysis process is outlined and clarified in *Chapter 3*, where the methods are explained in detail. Notably hermeneutic research is becoming increasingly popular, but according to Patterson et al. (1998) the researchers using the technique must be sure to clarify their normative commitments. The methods section is attentive to this warning and the ontology, axiology and epistemology of this project are explained in detail.

2.5 Summary

The literature reviewed provided and explained useful perspectives, terms, and findings on the topics at hand. Numerous studies clearly conveyed that defining and studying wilderness and spirituality is a complex and often complicated practice because of the individuality and subjectivity involved. To address this complexity, hermeneutic phenomenology has been introduced as the study of the whole person aimed at understanding the nature and meaning of things that are lived. With that in mind, this research works to understand the participant's conception of the subjective terminology and not prescribe particular definitions for interviewees to adhere to. With a study focused so specifically on the heart of the experience, there is an opportunity to more holistically describe the phenomena and inform both future work on the topic and the management of a special public resource.

3.0 CHAPTER 3- METHODS

This chapter examines *how* this research project was conducted. Within this section, the following definitions apply: *philosophical orientation* is the ‘worldview that underlies and informs methodology and methods’; *methodology* is defined as ‘a way of thinking about and studying a social phenomena’; and *methods* are the ‘techniques and procedures used to gather and analyze data’ (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 1). The chapter includes description of the study site and study participants as well as both description and justification of the various methods including: sampling technique, in-situ interview approach, and data collection and analysis. The section begins with an examination of the philosophical orientation and normative commitments that guided the various methods used through the study.

3.1.0 Philosophical Orientation and Research Methodology

The purpose of this project is to explore, describe, and analyze spiritual experiences, as described by overnight visitors to a wilderness setting. The effort examined the nature of visitors’ relationships to wilderness; in particular, their spiritual insights and habits, in order to best capture and make meaning of descriptions of spiritual experiences as near to the time and place of their occurrence as possible. It locates the phenomena within the *life-world* of the wilderness visitor such that future visitors, managers and academics can better understand the role of wilderness and wilderness spirituality in the overall lives of individuals (Van Manen, 1990).

Experiences related to wild landscapes are wholly particular to individuals in that visitors have an array of life experiences, expectations, religious beliefs, and comfort/interest in the topic. Accordingly, rather than define multifaceted terms such as wilderness and spirituality *a priori*, this study recognizes that research functions in a realm where these terms are whatever

ideas, constructs, or realities that people think they are (Hendee and Dawson, 2002). It is my view that essential experiential qualities of the person-environment relationship can be interpreted and a resulting description can encapsulate the individuality, ambiguity, and complexity of a topic. Furthermore, *meaning* can be constructed from subjective, individual perspectives and related to material environments in which phenomena occur, further developing a body of knowledge. It is key to note that meaning will be constructed not just from individual perspectives, but from comparing perspectives, finding common themes, and noting how and why perspectives may be different. Included in this section, you will find an explanation of why, despite how personally nuanced individual views can be, visitors' experiences can be compared due to *situated freedom*. Situated freedom explains why individual realities can be compared in order to develop meaningful and essential *concept level themes*. Themes in this study are not objects, or moments in an interview but rather, "an aspect of the structure of lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990: 87).

Within any search for understanding it is clear that we discover meaning best when the foreground is placed against a background for context. French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty referred to this concept by saying we must uncover the 'thing(s)' that make a thing what it is. The included exam of hermeneutic phenomenology explains how the themes were decided on and provides a review of the idiographic and nomothetic processes that led to the narrative presented in the results. Though the history of the hermeneutic and phenomenological paradigms was described in the literature review, the following paragraphs will explain the normative philosophical commitments relative to this particular study.

3.1.1 Ontology

The ontological assumptions of phenomenology are contemplative, asserting that there is great significance in the examination of knowledge that has been experienced (Laverty, 2003). Martin Heidegger's assertion that 'our experiences, and therefore our realities, are *subjective* and *exclusively constructed*' is the most ontologically important assumption to this study (Annells, 1996). Heidegger called ontology "the *phenomenology of being*" (Van Manen, 1990: 183). Through the course of this work, the term 'lifeworld' is used to capture these ontological assumptions. Each person's lived experiences are purely individual and comprise their 'lifeworld.' A way to understand lived experiences is to consider personal consciousness, the perceiving of immediate experience, as the only reality treated as pure 'phenomena.'

Hermeneutic philosophy is phenomenological in nature assuming that "*multiple realities* exist that vary across time, cultures, and individuals" (Patterson and Williams, 2002: 14). In particular, while physical and social structures exist, humans interact with them in varying ways creating multiple and changing realities. This project views all the varying elements of an individual's life history (e.g. religious views, experiences in and perspectives of the wild) to be intertwined in their 'lifeworld' and therefore does not attempt to analyze parts in isolation from their whole. Put most simply, person and world are part and parcel of each other (Seamon, 2002).

3.1.2 Axiology

Axiologically, the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is most broadly, understanding. This effort examined visitors' spiritual insights and habits and attempted to capture descriptions of spiritual experiences as near to the time and place of their occurrence as possible. In this study, the *text* comes from overnight wilderness visitors who are willing and able to express their lived experiences. The goal herein is not to develop scales or models to measure or envisage how

visitors will spiritually experience a wilderness setting. The aim is to better describe and comprehend the *lived experiences* as communicated by visitors. To access that reality, this research was conducted in a wild landscape that places humans close to natural elements for a time of at least two days and a night.

The key point in hermeneutics is that *meaning* must be made through the interpretation of a text produced by a participant. More specifically, the approach seeks to make sense of the experiences of the research participants based on a provided *context* rather than using the text to predict the meaning of future experiences for that individual or others (Carr, 2010). A major axiological challenge in phenomenology is to describe the person-world intimacy in a way that provides legitimacy, avoiding a subject-object dichotomy (Seamon, 2002). The framework guides exploration individuals' actions, beliefs, and experiences within explicit contexts; rather than categorizing isolated factors and using them for predictive purposes. This approach to the interpretation of a text embraces the subjectivity associated with research and the participant's lifeworld and awareness. Additionally, the axiological assumptions of hermeneutics recognize the role of understanding human behavior in relation to our own behavior and posit that it is impractical and unfeasible to eliminate one's own concepts in the interpretation of meaning (Annells, 1996). Considering that this research includes texts focused on the highly subjective topic of spirituality, the work aims to provide readers with clear explanations of the subject of study, interpret the data as it relates to the specific phenomena, and to explain how to integrate the new and existing understandings. The ontology and axiology set the stage for a short explanation of the epistemology.

3.1.3 Epistemology

The epistemology of a hermeneutic phenomenological study lies in recognizing and appreciating the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience explained by the text. The methodology was chosen to create credible, intimate, and stimulating results. Paterson and Williams emphasize the truth and utility that arise from analysis that ‘enhances understanding, promotes communication, and resolves conflict’ (Patterson and Williams, 2002: 35). A key to this success is acknowledging that researchers are not completely objective in their observations and analyses. We must accept the role of existing theory and potential observational and interpretive bias. In contrast to positivists, phenomenologists believe that the researcher cannot be detached from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Groenewald, 2004). Qualitative researchers shouldn’t hesitate to explain their subjective perspective since that process alone helps explain how interpretation yields certain knowledge.

In order to ensure readers understand and believe the knowledge gathered here, it is important for me to communicate my understanding of previous theory and reveal what I already know about the phenomenon prior to and within the analysis process. It is key to note that within hermeneutics researchers are encouraged to gain a rich understanding of the phenomena in question. It is important to clarify that this is not the researcher’s final understanding, but instead a tentative understanding at a specific time and place (Patterson and Williams, 2002). To provide transparency, within this study you will find the original reasons for the research (see *Research Motivations*). Additionally, there is evidence of how interview questions were derived (see *Interview Process*), how the interviews were conducted (see *Sampling and In-Situ Interviews*), and how the texts were specifically collected and analyzed (see *Data Collection and Analysis*).

Beyond directly questioning researcher bias, conventionally trained social scientists are most likely to question the *trustworthiness* of a hermeneutic phenomenological project. To address this, various criteria have been adopted from numerous other studies to help guide this research: *equivalence, credibility, originality, and quality*.

Equivalence refers to the reliability of measurement. Positivists are likely to point out that in their research predetermined scales and standards create reliability that can't be found in interpretive work. Hermeneutic phenomenology addresses equivalence in multiple ways. To begin, it asserts that numerical representation and analysis does not remove interpretation bias. Instead the surveys often include that bias in the form of "burden of interpretation", which lies with the respondent (Patterson and Williams, 2002). Respondents interpret what a survey question is asking and their answer contains that variability. Hermeneutic phenomenology tests for equivalence by letting multiple researchers, with their own life perspectives and concerns, review and interpret the descriptions to determine if there is a coherent set of themes. Seamon asks, "Can other interested parties find in their own life and experience, either directly or vicariously, what the phenomenologist has found in his own work?" (Seamon, 2002). No matter the approach, positivist or phenomenological, the conclusions of any study are equally interpretive possibilities that can and should be critiqued.

To provide both *equivalence* and *credibility*, it is paramount that all components of the methodology and methods are transparent and the burden of interpretation is thoroughly understood and mediated. With the burden of interpretation falling on me, it was crucial to take both simple and complex actions to ensure respondents would judge the results credible. Often lines of questioning included follow up questions for clarification and/or confirmation questions to assure that the meanings of certain words and phrases within answers were understood.

Patterson and Williams explain that such issues have driven hermeneutic researchers to collection methods (e.g. in depth interviews, participant observation, setting description) “in which they are in a better position to control, assess, and take advantage of their role in data production” (2002: 25). Patton similarly states that phenomenology is a “variation of grounded theory” that employs “methods that take the researcher into and close to the real world so that the results and findings are ‘grounded’ in the empirical world” (Patton, 1990: 67).

Another example of mediation in the results and analysis process is citing a significant amount of textual data from the interviews so that readers can see for themselves the richness of the perspectives captured. Additionally within the results and analysis, context will be provided whenever appropriate and possible, in order to illuminate the “individual cases and specific occurrences of a phenomenon” (Patterson and Williams, 2002: 25). This contextualizing overcomes potential misinterpretations, generalizations, and application of universal laws, and instead promotes accurate situating of participant comments. Most essentially, the researcher should provide sufficient evidence that allows readers to make independent judgments about the analysis.

The *originality* and *quality* of the work are two components of trustworthiness that go hand-in-hand. Original work should clearly chart a new and different pathway to understanding and produce novel results that contribute to the existing knowledge of the phenomena. Original phenomenological work requires thoughtful open ended questioning that captures the wholeness of experience and simultaneously builds on existing work and considers new explanations of previously explored phenomena. Juliet Strauss explains that quality qualitative work will “make readers or listeners stand up and say things like, ‘wow,’ ‘I’m touched,’ ‘now I understand,’ ‘that has power’” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 302). To get such reactions the work must be ‘creative

yet grounded’, ‘interesting, clear, logical, and make the reader think and want to read more’ (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 302). For this study, the process (described below) provided a flexibility that allowed constant reflection and diligent assesment of the meaning-making going on within the phenomena, and the data collection and analysis process. While the limits of knowledge are never certain, by following these criteria, the knowledge gained here is justified and created with full transparency.

3.1.4 Researcher Motivations

In the vein of trustworthiness, I have included this section to explain my motivations and perspectives and acknowledge the influence they may have on my work. I share them here in hopes of creating transparency and revealing all information pertinent to research decisions, thus letting readers form their own conclusions regarding this research and the results. The following paragraphs explain my relevant life events that led me to this field of study and my current perspectives on the topic. I begin with a short vignette of my general life-course with regard to nature, then explain my exposure to religion and spirituality, and lastly share how I arrived at this specific topic.

As I child my backyard forest and accompanying thicket were where I found consistency. My adolescent years were highlighted by mountain, river and lake explorations and included daily forays into yet to be developed open and wild spaces at the edge of my neighborhoods. As I grew older and gained freedom I adventured into designated wilderness with friends, family, and occasionally alone, slowly sorting out the personal importance of place attachment. My twenties became a story of contrasting environs. I lived in concrete jungles, one of which had no more than eighty feet of elevation change, prohibiting any attempt to view the landscape at a large

scale. While the cities satisfied my cultural curiosities, on a weekly and at times daily basis I searched out untrammelled tracts of land amazingly left untouched by human development.

My exposure and concern for religion and spirituality through my years has been variable and sporadic. As an infant, my parents baptized me in a mountain stream. I never learned exactly what beliefs or church they were admitting me to, other than the most general of Christian beliefs. They described it as something that just seemed “right” to do. That single action was the pinnacle of my childhood religious experiences, which is to say that religion didn’t get practiced, let alone discussed outside of conversations about how it played a role in various historical and current events. Despite my parents’ detachment from the organized religions that they grew up with, they both made me anecdotally aware of their spirituality. Their spiritualities were never explicitly described or taught, but I came to understand them as beliefs in a Christian God but disbelief in some of the goals and actions of organized religion.

Though I have considered myself Christian for the majority of my life, I did little through my youth to formally explore religion and spirituality other than give cursory consideration to some classic existence questions. Beyond thinking explicitly about Christianity, I additionally considered my paternal grandma’s Chippewa heritage. Being 1/8 Chippewa has always been a point of pride for her and a point of unspoken curiosity for me. She has attended United Methodist Churches as long as I have known her, but I always wondered about the beliefs of her distant ancestors. Compared to all of my grandparents who attended church regularly, I have had few connections with organized religion. Before getting married I spent a bit of time learning about Martin Luther and Lutheranism, both out of personal interest and love for my wife who is Lutheran. However, despite both my and my wife’s interest in being part of a religious community, we have always seemed too busy to make church a habit.

More recently I found that questions pertaining to religion and spirituality have tended to percolate and consume my thoughts when I am active in the outdoors; doing things like running scenic mountain trails, climbing majestic peaks, or fishing sinuous creeks and rivers. I have been fortunate to explore and experience an array of natural landscapes throughout my life, and over time have grown especially fond of wilderness experiences. Wilderness areas and backcountry landscapes have become where I go to feel at one with myself, to deeply connect with others, to situate myself within the world, and contemplate that something greater. These experiences have inspired many of my personal values. Gratitude is an exemplar of such values.

Importantly, a few years back, I began to wonder: ‘Do other people seek out natural places and outdoor activities for religious or spiritual purposes? If so, what sorts of experiences are they having? As I began answering these questions with informal study I quickly latched on to the topic, wanting to know the nature of these experiences and their impact on human-nature relationships. I further considered specifically, *how* and *why* does wilderness support spiritual themes? How does *it* affect visitor’s personal and spiritual development? How does *it* shape their relationship with nature and wild areas in particular? Are wilderness experiences simply an escape from an overly cluttered existence or are there certain setting and activity based characteristics that promote the phenomena? Because both wilderness and spirituality are at least partly understood as human constructions, ideas or states of mind, the question arises; are the array of visitors that speak of these experiences actually talking about the same things?

Thus, beyond my own experiences, I was interested in how others develop connections with natural landscapes, and how public lands, and in particular wild areas, facilitate such relations. Before beginning this study, I talked with friends, backcountry travel companions, peers, advisers, and family about the topic and was impressed by their interest and varying

reactions to my curiosity. Conversations with others and much previous research demonstrate that I am not alone; that spiritual experiences are often a meaningful component of individuals' relationships with, and interest in nature. In an effort to broaden my understanding of such experiences and their importance, I arrived at the idea of creating a phenomenology of spiritual experiences in wilderness.

My intentions here are to help all sorts of readers understand how the researcher's beliefs and perspectives may influence the study methods and interpretation of the data gathered. I have experienced the multifaceted phenomena in my own way and have now come to understand it further through the study of others' experiences. It is crucial to say here that though I have had what I personally consider meaningful spiritual experiences in wilderness, I began this study with no expectation of what a meaningful spiritual experience may entail for other people. I started this study with just a basic understanding of the connections between religion, spirituality, and meaning making experiences in nature. My understanding has deepened considerably through this research process, though this work remains simply my comprehension at a particular point in time.

3.2.0 Sampling

The most common approach to understanding recreation has historically been through motivational approaches (Patterson et. al, 1998). Motivational approaches include understanding visitor's goals, their expected and desired outcomes, and their judgments of perceived and actual outcomes. More recently visitor experiences have been measured by four approaches: experience-based approaches, satisfaction approaches, benefits-based approaches, and meaning-based approaches (Borrie and Birzell, 2001). In order to best understand the phenomenon of interest, this study subscribes to a meanings based approach. This approach is in line with

phenomenological ideals. Phenomenology perceives immediate experience as the only reality treated as pure phenomena. Grasping the ways meaning is constructed from the phenomena becomes the way to uncover how participants experience wilderness and spirituality simultaneously.

The aim of this study was to sample in a way that allowed for spiritual experiences in the BWCAW to be richly and deeply understood. The *experience* itself is therefore the unit of analysis. Representativeness in this case refers to how well the results characterize the topic being studied (Patterson and Williams, 2002: 40). Instead of being an estimator of defined population, the subject of interest is a phenomena that deserves depth and specificity at an individual scale. The population of interest includes people who have self-defined spiritual experiences in wild places. The study is not aimed at surveying whether or not individuals are having what they describe as spiritual experiences in wild places, but rather describing the experiences of those that do have those experiences. Consequently, the aim was to sample visitors who were willing and able to discuss experiences they define as spiritual in places they view as wild. The section *Sampling Details* explains the process. Remember that terms with varying definitions such as *spirituality* and *wild* were not pre-defined by the study, but instead defined by each interviewee to ensure a deeper understanding of phenomena as a piece each participant's life-world (Van Manen, 1990).

A target number of 30 interviews was decided upon during the research design phase. It is generally thought, though somewhat arbitrarily, that when doing in-depth interviews, doing 30 provides the researcher with enough data to uncover significant insights into the questions of interest, provided the questions are well formulated (Patterson and Williams, 2002).

3.2.1 Study Area

This study was conducted in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) of northeast Minnesota. The importance of measuring this phenomena in this bona-fide wilderness is described in the introduction, but as a reminder the following are the five main reasons: 1) an understanding of the otherwise amorphous concept of *wilderness* was more likely to exist; 2) it allowed for the new understandings to be compared to previous work done in bona-fide wilderness areas and specifically in canoe country; 3) the work could potentially assist wilderness system managers as they attempt to oversee some of the wildest areas of our country; 4) ensured that interviewees were immersed in an environment bearing traits commonly understood as wild; and most importantly 5) the BWCAW is a land/waterscape that is often considered unique and unparalleled, making it likely to inspire spiritual experiences. These reasons spurred and confirmed my interest in the area. Additionally I had personally not been to canoe country but had heard nothing but accolades for the beauty, rich species diversity, and the trip possibilities it held. The BWCAW is characterized as unique, pristine, endangered, rugged, primitive, beautiful and fragile (Boston, 2004). While numerous participant comments further describe the setting, the following three paragraphs are meant to describe the place and its history.

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), which now includes 756 distinct wilderness areas covering 109,494,508 acres in 44 states. These areas receive over fifteen million recreation visitor days per annum. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness represents less than 1% of the acreage of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), but receives 10% of the use of the entire NWPS (Boston, 2004). Much of the area was set aside as road less in 1926 and was named

the Superior Roadless Area in 1938. It was then called the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in 1958. In 1964 Congress passed the Wilderness Act which included the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in the national preservation system and finally in 1978 the BWCAW Act was established to provide detailed management guidance for the Superior National Forest (P.L. 88-5777, 78 Stat. 890; 16 U.S. C. 1131, Special Provisions (5); P.L. 95-495).

Approximately 1.3 million acres in size, the BWCA contains over 1200 miles of canoe routes, 16 hiking trails and roughly 2,200 backcountry campsites almost all of which are only accessible by canoe. The BWCAW has characteristics unique to recreation areas in the United States with its approximately 1,175 lakes that vary in size from 10 acres to 10,000 acres, and several hundred miles of streams. The lakes and streams together comprise more than 20% of the BWCAW surface area. It is the largest land/lake wilderness in the NWPS and is the largest wilderness east of the Rocky Mountains and north of the Everglades.

Within the distinctive physical landscape, the area has exceptional plant and animal diversity. The BWCAW contains the largest contiguous areas of virgin forest remaining in the eastern United States. The forests are a mix of boreal species from the north and deciduous species from the south. The transition zone contains conifers such as red pine, eastern white pine, jack pine, balsam fir, white spruce, black spruce and white-cedar, as well as deciduous birch, aspen, ash, and maple. Berries and woodland wildflowers additionally help support a range of fauna including bobcats, fisher, pine martin, mink, otter, and snowshoe hare. The BWCAW is also within the range of the largest population of wolves in the contiguous United States, and is home to other charismatic mega-fauna such as red fox, moose, lynx, and black bear. The American Bird Conservancy recently named the Superior National Forest, including the BWCAW one of 100 Globally Important Bird Areas as it supports large numbers of neo-tropical

bird populations, and strong populations of year-round birds including bald eagle, common loon, spruce grouse, pileated woodpecker, osprey, and peregrine falcons, an endangered species. All of these factors combine to make it one of the most captivating wilderness areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Canoeing, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, dog sledding, fishing, hunting, and camping are the primary recreational activities in the BWCAW (Proescholdt et. al, 1995). Canoe paddlers make up a strong majority of the visitors and were the only segment of visitors used in this study (Dvorak et. al, 2012). The landscape allows paddlers to paddle lakes, portage canoes over land, and camp much as the Native Americans, or the French Voyagers did, who explored the primitive area over 200 years ago. Presently, over 250,000 people visit annually (equating to 1.5 million recreation visitor days) making it the most used wilderness area.

Once the general study area was chosen, the more exact locations were based on a purposive sample technique. There was no literature that suggested that visitors to any particular area such as ‘periphery lakes’ (those accessible from trailheads or requiring fewer than three short portages) or ‘interior lakes’ (those only accessible by three or more portages or long paddling distances and long portage distances) were more likely to experience and discuss spiritual experiences. The study sites were therefore chosen in areas known to have at least middle amounts of use to ensure that potential participants would be present, and such that campers at both peripheral and interior lakes would be sampled. The lakes specifically included: Lake One, Lake Two, Lake Three, Lake Four, Sawbill Lake, and Cherokee Lake. Lakes One, Two, and Sawbill have their entry quota filled a high percentage of the time and are considered more peripheral. Lakes Three, Four, and Cherokee are more internal and have medium to high campsite occupancy. The mix of lakes potentially provided a better diversity of paddlers, which

was important since previous studies hadn't identified one type of paddler as more likely to have spiritual experiences than another.

Most exactly, the research took place at established campsites at the specific lakes. All visitors to these lakes are required to stay at campsites that are designated with a fire grate and a pit toilet. Each of these sites are marked on most navigational maps depicting the area. Two interviews were conducted at Lake One, eleven at Lake Two, eight at Lake Three, two at Lake Four, two at Sawbill Lake, and seven at Cherokee Lake. Therefore, fifteen were conducted at peripheral lakes, and seventeen at interior lakes. Interviews were conducted at these designated campsites and 30 of the 31 took place along the rocky shoreline within sight of the main campsite, and the other took place in the woods just above the campsite. The majority of the sampled campsites had rocky shorelines with ample space for sitting comfortably on granite slabs or boulders within ten feet of the water. Additionally, most campsites are located on prominent points or in locations that have good views of the surroundings. Often participants were already spending time in the exact spots that the interviews took place. See the *In-Situ Interviews* section to gain deeper understanding of the importance of the study area.

3.2.2 Sampling Details

In order to get an array of rich, deep, and thorough data on the phenomena of interest, the interviews were conducted in a way that provided unbiased and uninterrupted time for in-situ interviews. Reasons for conducting in-situ interviews are included in a subsequent section, but here you will learn the general logistics and sample details.

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness hosts the majority of its visitors between early June and mid September. The research was conducted over two sample periods totaling thirty days. The trip dates were July 8 to July 28 and August 24 to August 3, 2010. These

sample periods were chosen because they are within the peak visitation months and made sense logistically. This schedule worked well for a number of reasons. The time allotted allowed for thirty interviews of individual paddlers and one interview of a pair of paddlers. The ample time was necessary considering the weather did not support canoe travel or comfortable interview conditions seven of the thirty sample days. Furthermore, one day there were no potential participants on the sample lake because each of the paddle groups that camped at the lake had already participated in the study. Lastly, there were two days of the thirty that included significant travel, such that no time was left for interviewing. Therefore, of the remaining days, nine days included just one interview, and eleven days included two. The time of day for interviews is discussed below.

Within the study area, specifically upon each of the six lakes, the goal was to randomize the sample to ensure that there was no bias involved in selecting the campsites of potential participants. This randomization ensured that certain campsites were not skipped because the campers were in some way intimidating or uninteresting for reasons unrelated to the study. For example, if two sites were close together and one site had three beautiful cedar-strip canoes and the other had three dented up aluminum canoes parked at the shore, there had to be a method in place that ensured randomization instead of allowing for researcher bias towards learning about the beautiful cedar-strip canoes. To combat any potential bias, the following protocols were followed:

- On even calendar days, campsites located in a clockwise direction from the researcher's site would be sampled, and on odd calendar days, campsites in a counter-clockwise direction would be sampled.
- Because campsite occupancy was usually visible from afar, or their occupancy was known based on paddling the area during the morning, when 2 sites were visible or known to be occupied, site #2 was sampled; when 3 sites were visible or

known to be occupied, sites #1 and #3 were sampled; when 4 sites were visible or known to be occupied, sites #2 and #4 were sampled; when 5 sites were visible or known to be occupied, sites #1 and #3, and if needed, #5 were sampled.

- If a previously sampled group was within the visible or known to be occupied area, that site was not considered in the count.
- When a site was on an island and therefore the order of sites was not clear, the distance to the island site was compared to the other shoreline sites and it was included in the count based on the comparative distance.
- In the case that more than five or more visible or known to be occupied sites had previously been sampled, the first and second un-sampled sites were approached.
- If weather, and/or water conditions, did not permit travel to more distant sites that would otherwise have been sampled based on the protocol above, closer sites were sampled despite the deviation from the protocol.
- Only one person from a group of paddlers was to be interviewed unless a specific goal was to be fulfilled. There were situations that became exceptions that are described in further below: 1) two individuals, a young man and his mother, were interviewed separately at one site; and 2) two close friends were simultaneously interviewed at one site.

All sampling was conducted between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. This time window was decided on based on comments of experienced BWCAW paddlers who noted that it was the time that paddlers were most likely to be available to participate. The period is after lunch, before dinner, and when groups tend to have already gotten their campsite set up and are most likely to be lounging along the lakeshore; making them approachable and potentially willing to spend time in an interview. Other times such as early morning hours may have allowed for different in-situ conditions such as quiet and misty, but it was decided that visits to camps could be considered more intrusive during those hours.

When a site was approached, the first person to be contacted was read the Recruitment Script (see Appendix D). If two or more individuals were present near the shore, they were greeted as a group and all presented with the recruitment speech. If more than one person

showed interest, the person with the most recent birthday was asked to join. The two exceptions noted in the protocol were conducted for the following reasons. The first exception, where both a mother and son from the same group were interviewed separately, allowed for a glimpse at how interviews with members of the same group may carry similar structures because of similar experiences. Additionally the choice to do so was made based on the observed importance of spiritual mentors, which had been identified as a salient component of earlier interviews with different respondents. As the initial interview of the young man was coming to a close, his mother paddled up after doing a bit of exploration around their new campsite. The mother inquired about the interview and asked if a second was needed. Normally a second is avoided because the interviewees may compare and question the differences in the interviews and be left uncertain why certain probes were used in one case and not the other. Due to my interest in the topic of spiritual mentoring, the nature of the young man's answers, and the fact that his interview followed the interview guide almost exactly, it was decided that the opportunity should not be passed up. Before the second interview was conducted, a point was made to additionally acquire the permission of the young man. The interview with the mother followed the interview guide extremely closely and no personal information gathered during the first interview was shared in any way during the second. The choice yielded some usable and novel findings and did not compromise the comfort or trust of either participant.

The second, a simultaneous interview with two close friends, allowed insight into the challenges and benefits of group interviews. Interviewing two participants simultaneously was performed based on recommendations from the head of the research advisory committee. Learning how the interview dynamic changes with two interviewees was the main goal. The two friends that were simultaneously interviewed actually suggested the set-up. It appeared that

neither wanted to be left alone while the other had the ‘privilege’ of being interviewed. The two participants were each asked to share their thoughts on each question. Other than logistical questions that one or the other answered, each interviewee answered all questions and probes were used in the same manner as usual. The dynamic did change as a result of both of the interview variations described, and those findings are included in the results and analysis. In every interview, participants were made aware that they are more than welcome to pass on a question. This point was made abundantly clear in this second described scenario since individuals may be more sensitive about answering a question in front of a peer than an unknown researcher.

This study did not aim to capture a representative sample of the entire NWPS visitor population. Instead, an attempt was made to obtain a moderately diverse sample population based on age and gender. Within the literature reviewed no studies included findings that one gender or age group was more likely to have spiritual experiences than another. Therefore, an attempt to interview a particular age or gender was only made when multiple members of a paddling group were willing to be interviewed and there was a noticeable gap in the sample population diversity. This only occurred once near the beginning of the study. Rather than let them know that I would choose based on who had the most recent birthday, I stated that it would be good to interview the woman because my sample population at that point had been primarily men. There was no other time that such a tactic was necessary.

As a researcher engaged in a hermeneutic phenomenological study in-situ, I was constantly aware that I was interrupting the experiences of others. No matter what sort of experiences they were having at that time, it was important that my sampling was efficient, and that I was respectful and appreciative of all that my participants gave up to be involved and

contributed to the study. Before approaching an individual's or group's campsite I was fully prepared with the Subject Information and Consent Form (see Appendix C), cued audio recording materials, the interview guide, the demographic information sheet and a writing implement. Approaching a potential participant's campsite was simultaneously exciting and intimidating. Paddling directly up to an occupied campsite that is not your own can be likened to entering a person's home and then announcing your arrival. There are no defined campsite boundaries such that the shoreline ends up being a transparent wall. For that reason I always initiated conversation and presented the recruitment speech or a variation of it while still in my canoe, only going ashore once at least one individual showed interest in taking part in the study.

After making acquaintance, utilizing the Recruitment Script (see Appendix D), and confirming their interest, the interviewee was offered a ground level sitting pad and presented with the Subject Information and Informed Consent form (see Appendix C). The form and protocol were both approved by the University of Montana Institutional Review Board. Upon receiving verbal agreement after the participant had read the form, I redundantly got verbal confirmation that it was acceptable for the interview to be recorded, and only then began recording. All participants allowed their interview to be digitally recorded. Following the answer to the final question, the digital recorder was turned off and the participant completed the Demographic Information Sheet (see Appendix B). Though many conversations continued after the questioning was finalized and the demographic sheet had been completed, the additional conversational content is not included in the results and analysis. The actual interviews lasted between 14 and 55 minutes with an average time of 28 minutes. Though the interview settings could be described as informal, the interview's themselves were organized while trying to be as organic as possible. As described by van Manen (1990), the interview will be *systematic* in its

mode of questioning, intuiting, and focusing, *explicit* in its attempts to articulate through content and forms of meaning embedded in the lived experience, and *self-critical* as it continually examines its own goals and methods in an attempt to come to terms with the strengths and weaknesses of its approach and achievements. The following sections on In-Situ Interview Process, Pilot Study, Interview Questions, and Data Collection and Analysis capture the systematic, explicit, and self-critical aims and nature of this study.

3.2.3 In-Situ Interview Process

All interviews were in-situ, semi-structured, in-depth, and based upon an interview guide. Remember that phenomenology is the detailed study of the experience of being conscious of something (Chung and Ashworth, 2006). It is a process of researching lived experiences, the study of the life-world- the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it (Husserl, 1970b). In a hermeneutic study, the *text* is comprised of the short answers, stories, definitions, and elaborations captured in the interview. The researcher's various observations of the interview experience additionally help supplement and situate the text, illuminating its true nature. Combining these commitments, it becomes essential to get as close to the subjects consciousness in a particular time and place as possible. The success of the process was highly dependent on a) developing a comfortable relationship with the participant and b) being temporally angled to grasp the complexities and subtleties of the experience while it is brand new or in some cases being lived by the participant.

The phenomenological interview requires developing trust and rapport with the participant in order to ensure an open and honest discussion about the experience under investigation (Laverly, 2003; Van Manen, 1990). In this study, sharing the wilderness experience with participants was likely highly important. The function of the interview is to encourage

explicit interpersonal dialogue in which participants explain the details of their experiences and examine their own lived experience. As an interviewer I approached topics with sensitivity and routinely felt that participants trusted and confided in me more quickly than I expected. It seemed that by sharing the experience of paddling, portaging, and living primitively in the wilderness may have given me a helpful level of legitimacy. Participants were quick to ask how my trip was going and often asked about specific *shared experiences* such as, “How did yesterday’s thunderstorm treat you?” It seemed that participants knew I had, granted in my own way, experienced many of the scenarios and contexts they depicted. Rather than standing at the trailhead after taking my morning shower and asking them about their trip and experiences, I was there, in a wild landscape, had bathed in the lakes, caught fish for dinner (albeit twice in thirty days), paddled into the winds, and combated the same swarms of mosquitoes. The descriptions of their trials, tribulations, and jubilations seemed honest, humble, and rich.

The existing trust, whether real or perceived, allowed me to ask questions that were personal, different, and upon topics that words can sometimes seem incapable of capturing. Exploring and inquiring about a person’s spirituality could have been intimidating or even impolite, but participants saw that I was sincerely interested in the topic and had gone to significant lengths to discuss it with them in a special place. I had expected that understanding the scope of their spiritual experiences would be difficult and at times impossible; that interviewees would give me the answer, “I don’t know, that is just the way it is.” Fortunately, during the interviews along the shorelines, participants appeared to take time and work hard to explain moments in time and the meaning that they were drawing from them. I noticed participants watch the small waves on the lake splash against the shore while thinking. They would also look off in the distance or more closely at an intriguing rock in their hand and I can

guess that they were considering the best way to express a feeling or scene. The in-situ approach seemed to build a relationship between me and the interviewees that may have allowed access to special stories and emotions, hopefully aiding in the understanding of the phenomena.

Secondly, the interviews aimed to capture the phenomena as it was immediately experienced by the human under study (Manen, 1990). Explaining the experience before the trip had concluded, meant that it hadn't been compartmentalized within the story of the trip, but rather it seemed to be an description of what they were living in that moment. Being in-situ likely made it possible to ask them to how they were *feeling* at that moment, not how they *felt*, or *thought* that they had felt. Describing experiences with language can be both limiting and inefficient, but since the topic of the description was either at hand or very recently viewed/lived, its very nature seemed more easily conveyed. As mentioned, there were times that interviewees referenced real-time views, wildlife sightings, and feelings as part of their self-described spiritual experiences. Occasionally in an interview a participant would tell a story from a past visit to wilderness but struggle to express the meaning making that occurred. In a few of those instances the participant would jump to a related present experience and more confidently relay the significance and essence of a similar experience that happened on the trip at hand.

3.2.4 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted as a precursor to the anticipated main study. The purpose of conducting a pilot study was to assess a specific interview approach and explore potential outcomes. When conducting a similar phenomenological study to this, Schmidt and Little (2007) used an interview approach that was intriguing and could be potentially replicated in-situ for this study. They describe their experience as follows:

With experience, the interviews became more unstructured with the bulk of the interviews flowing from one main question, namely: "When I mentioned [the study was

on] spiritual leisure experiences, what sort of things came to mind?” For the majority of the respondents this led to extensive and free flowing discourse on their experiences of leisure that were personally spiritual. This initial question was followed by researcher prompts that helped to elaborate on the meanings, feelings, thoughts, and understandings of the experience. - Schmidt and Little, 2007

They arrived at this approach after finding that their initial interview guide was too structured and guiding. Because of their findings, their same interview method was attempted during the pilot to see if it would meet the needs of the study at hand.

The pilot was conducted at two trailheads located just outside of the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness Area on the Bitterroot National Forest. Two wilderness visitors were interviewed at the Bass Creek Trailhead (Trail 4) at Charles Waters campground, and one was interviewed at Sweeney Ridge Trailhead (Trail 393). The three participants were interviewed upon returning to the trailheads after either a day hike (2 participants/ 1 at each trailhead) or after an overnight trip (1 participant/ Bass Creek trailhead). The pilot study was conducted over two days, a Thursday and Friday, in late June, 2010. The interviews lasted approximately 14, 17, and 26 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded with the participant’s permission and reviewed to assess the success of the unstructured method with a focus on how helpful the probes were.

The outcomes from the pilot were as follows:

- All forest visitors who were approached with the recruitment speech accepted the invitation (most recent birthday had to be used twice to yield one participant from group of two)
- Participants were eager to discuss the ways that they personally experienced spirituality while in the wild
- Lengthy follow up questions and probes were necessary to understand the situations and emotions involved in the particular experiences
- Responses provided a sense of spiritual experiences, but upon review did not characterize how the experiences fit into the overall wilderness experience

- Question and probes did not capture sufficient details on how the experiences in the wild were different than experiences that participants had in other, less natural settings
- Individual definitions were obtained, but had to be pieced together from multiple responses to probes
- Participants were excited to reflect on their experience in a meaningful way but at times seemed anxious to be on their way; this was seen as a result of the ‘exit’ interview

The pilot study confirmed that wilderness visitors were willing and able to discuss experiences they labeled as spiritual. The main difficulties came from being unprepared to organize their responses in a way that limited redundant probes as well as ensured complete coverage of topics of interest. While building rapport and accessing relatively personal perspectives was not a problem, the resulting conversations failed to discover how each individual's life experiences played a role in the spiritual experiences they discussed and inconsistently captured the role of the activity, setting, and group dynamic in the overall spiritual experience. Upon reviewing these findings it was decided that a slightly more formal approach that included an interview guide would be appropriate for the main study.

3.2.5 Interview Questions

In order to understand the ways that people live, comprehend and position their self-defined spiritual experiences in wilderness, the line of questioning had to be simultaneously scientific, respectful, deliberate, and specifically nuanced for each individual. During the interviews the interview guide 1) helped keep the interviews directed toward the particular research topics, 2) reminded me of effective and thought provoking probes, and 3) kept the interviews relatively scientifically consistent making nomothetic analysis possible. The in-depth interview questions reflect the in-situ phenomenological approach previously described. The

process provided the flexibility necessary to accommodate and address unanticipated story telling, concept elaboration, and explanations of beliefs.

The interview guide (see Table 1.0) was formulated to meet the goals of the study. Minor changes to the question order and small edits to wording and probe depth were made early in the study to yield more thorough responses.

Table 1.0- Interview Guide

- 1) How would you describe your experience so far on this trip in the Boundary Waters?
 (Follow Up) Was there any part that was particularly meaningful or memorable?
 (If Yes) Can you tell me more about what made that experience meaningful or memorable?
 (Probe) When/where did you have that experience?
 (Probe) Did you tend to have these experiences alone or with groups of people?
 (Probe) For example, how would you describe your experience to a friend back home.
 (Probe) What sorts of feelings stand out in your mind from the particular experience?
- 2) Would you describe any experiences you have had on this trip so far as spiritual?
 (If Yes) Can you tell me more about that experience? (setting, company, mindset, activity, thoughts, emotions, and memories).
 (Probe) Same as Q1.
- 3) Can you describe the connection or attachment that you have to the wild or wilderness?
 (If Yes) When and how did that connection or attachment begin?
 (Follow Up) Do you think your answer is specific to the Boundary Waters or does it relate to wild areas in general?
 (Probe) Was there a person or place in particular that you feel helped initiate the connection you speak of?
- 4) Is designated wilderness different than other natural places you visit?
 (If Yes) What do you find is similar and what is different?
 (Follow Up) How does your connection/relationship with wilderness compare to your connection/relationship with other natural places?
 (Follow Up) Why do you decide to take trips into the Boundary Waters areas?
 (Probe) Are those reasons different for other wilderness areas you visit?
- 5) During your trip here in the Boundary Waters, do you feel different in any way from how you felt before your trip?
 (If Yes) In what ways do you feel different? Are those spiritual ways?
 (Follow Up) Do you come to wilderness expecting to have spiritual experiences?

(Follow Up) When you return home, do you feel different than before your trip, or does experiencing the wild change you in any way?

6) Some people believe in ‘God’ or something greater. Do you, and if so, how do you define that?

(Follow Up) Do you ever feel a ‘closeness’ to that which you described?

(Probe) Can you tell me about these moments, such as when and where.

7) What does the word spirituality mean to you?

(Follow Up) Would you define wilderness spirituality differently than spirituality more generally?

8) I’m interested in learning a little more about your spiritual life outside of wilderness. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

(Follow Up) Do you have . . . How would you describe your spiritual experiences outside of wilderness?

(Follow Up) Are spiritual experiences you have in the wild different than those you spoke of?

(Probe) How do you think you have spiritual experiences in wilderness, but not outside of wilderness?

9) Obviously, when we travel in the Boundary Waters, we spend a lot of time on or near water. I’m wondering if you think water influences your experience and in particular your spiritual experiences out here?

10) Is there anything else you would like to say or emphasize about the topics that we have covered today?

11) Can you tell me about a specific experience you have had that encapsulates some of the things we have talked about today?

The open-ended questions allowed for planned follow up questions and probes, as well as the employment of unscripted questions to further explore unique ideas and personal contexts. The aim of the opening question, #1, and affiliated probes was to demonstrate the depth of answer sought and to build rapport with the participant. Establishing the depth early made later answers more detailed and rich. It also allowed for a more conversational and relaxed atmosphere to be established.

Question #2 got directly to the point, inquiring whether participants had what they would define as spiritual experiences while on their trip. The question begins simply but using the same

probes as question #1 the question gets at the heart of the phenomena. Questions #3 and #4 sought the participant's definition and description of wilderness, including how wilderness compares to other natural areas they visit. The questions got at participant definitions by examining the relationship that they have to the spaces and comparing those relations to others. They additionally began to capture the processes by which any existing connections and attachments were formed. Often the answers provided a context that could later be referred back to or questioned with regards to other subjects.

The following set of questions, #5, #6, and #7, addressed spiritual experiences, definitions of spirituality, and the relation of those to wild places and wilderness. Again, the questions were developed in a way that let the participant define the more subjective terms. Questions #7 and #8 were designed to provide further context for previous answers and allow for relevant untold contextual elements to surface. Question #9 was specifically included to determine the importance of the lake based setting on individuals' overall experiences and potentially, their spiritualities. The final questions #10 and #11 provided an opportunity to capture additional raw experiential data. Being so proximate to the experiences meant that it was important to target any and all potentially fresh and vivid experiences.

3.2.6 Study Participants

The following information is a compilation of the data gathered from the completed demographic information sheets, which each participant completed following their interview. Based on the sampling goals and study protocols, 32 paddlers over the age of 18 were sampled at their campsites for this project. The complete demographic details can be found in Appendix A.

Most generally, 20 participants were male, 12 were female and the range of ages was 19 to 67 with an average age of 40 years old. Thirteen of the participants were from states other than

Minnesota (MI) or Wisconsin (WI), though only three of those were from outside those states normally considered part of the Midwest. Of the participants from MI and WI, no one area was more represented than another. Twenty of the 32 consider themselves Caucasian and the remainder all described their nationality/ethnicity as Northern European or a combination of two or more Northern European countries. Of the study participants, 25 of the 32 either were attending college or had received a bachelors degree or higher. Five participants had gotten either a masters or doctoral degree. All participants had at least graduated High School (HS) and of the seven that graduated HS but did not receive a bachelor degree, five had gone to at least a full year of college or community college. The careers listed varied greatly as might be expected, and the only repeat career was engineering. Five of the study participants were engineers.

When asked if they consider themselves part of a religious group, six answered they had no preference, one stated he was agnostic, and the remainder responded either Christian, or a denomination of Christianity. Nine considered themselves Protestant, six Catholic, three Lutheran, three Christian with no particular denomination, one Methodist, and one United Unitarian Universalist. This Christian-dominated sample is not unexpected in this region of the northern Midwest. For analysis purposes, interviewees' answers were sometimes compared to their denomination in order to relate potential religious habits to spiritual habits.

Other notable descriptors that were gathered include trip length, group size, and frequency of wilderness visits. The groups were staying in the wilderness between two and ten nights with an average of 4.7 nights. The number of people per group ranged from one to nine with an average of 4.2. More than two-thirds of the thirty-two participants visit wilderness two or less times per year on average. Of the remainder, four visit eight or more times per year and five visit wilderness between three and six times per year. All of these demographics are very similar

to the visitor demographics found in research carried out in 2007 and presented by Dvorak et al. (2012).

3.2.7 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The title ‘analysis’ is often intentionally not used in phenomenological studies because it usually refers to the breaking apart into groups and categories. The important elements and themes of the phenomena can be lost if data are exclusively analyzed in such a way. Instead, this study analysis includes searching out the structure of the phenomena, finding themes that define experiences, themes that potentially exist across and at different scales, and themes that allow for an understanding of the experience from all possible angles. The process aimed to be precise and comprehensive by involving interpretive descriptions that are full and complete with details capturing the fundamental nature of spiritual experiences exactly as they were lived by the wilderness visitors sampled.

The primary researcher conducted the interview process, the verbatim transcription of the interviews, and all analysis. An important part of the data collection process began immediately after each interview, before any transcription. On the evening of an interview, or the morning after, the audio recording was listened to in its entirety. During that review shorthand notes were made about a) observations of behaviors, mannerisms, and tones present during the interview, b) theoretical and emergent storylines, and c) methodological strengths and weaknesses. Additionally through the data collection process I began writing a variety of memos as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008). The memos identified developing concepts and storylines, made comparisons and asked questions, and began looking at relationships between inputs, processes, and outputs.

The first step following the completion of the data gathering described above was to transcribe the interviews verbatim for subsequent analysis. The data was stripped of extraneous verbalizations except for meaningful pauses or vocalizations that were related to the subject of the conversation. Though the transcription process was lengthy, spending so much time with the data allowed for deeper comprehension of each interview. It gave me a more holistic sense of them, emphasizing their unique qualities, and allowed for more memo writing.

Once transcribed, the body of data (interviews, notes, and memos) was analyzed using the *hermeneutic circle*, as described by Patterson and Williams (2002). In keeping with the noted philosophical commitments, the process was a constant examination of the *relationship* between the various parts and the whole of the data. The development of an organizing system, through which to view the data is explained as:

The purpose of an organizing system is to identify predominant themes through which narrative accounts (interviews) can be meaningfully organized, interpreted, and presented . . . This “organizing system” approach is fundamentally different from a “content-analysis” approach that proceeds by developing a system of categories into which data are coded . . . a successful organizing system is what makes the analysis “holistic” as opposed to “reductionistic/multivariate” in nature. - Patterson and Williams, 2002: 45

In order to develop an organizing system, all transcribed interviews were read through three more times to ensure understanding of the content. The first goal was to understand each individual interview and the spiritual experiences therein as well as relationships between the described experiences and the individual’s vast context. One of the normative commitments herein is recognizing and respecting the exclusive constructions of reality and their inherent subjectivity. Patterson and Williams (2002: 102) call this process idiographic analysis, “the analysis of individuals as opposed to an aggregate or across individuals analysis.” Though the idiographic process actually started the day of, or day after, the original interview, it was completed again in order to re-immense myself in the data.

During the final two readings of interviews in their entirety, close attention was paid to what *meaning units* exist. Meaning units are groups of consecutive sentences that hold information about the phenomena under study. Notes were made in margins and sections were highlighted to delineate each unit and hint at all possible labels. Patterson (2009) calls this process a subversive reading/analysis of the interview, where the reader is effectively trying to get into interviewee's world and experience the phenomena through their eyes. During this process, existing idiographic memos were added to and the true range of meaning units was considered. While doing these readings, I was fortunate to share multiple full interview transcripts with a small group of University of Montana (UM) graduate students as well as three UM professors interested in qualitative analysis. The resulting discussions highlighted aspects of interviews that I missed, as well as confirmed units of meaning that I had identified. When identifying units of meaning, Holloway (1997) recommends going back to the recorded interviews and the matching memos in order to confirm complete understanding of the content. This was done in several instances.

Once the range of meaning units was understood, phrases directly from the interviews as well as novel comprehensible words and phrases were decided upon as *thematic labels*. The creation of thematic labels represents analysis concerning what meaning units exist (Patterson and Williams, 2002). To organize the coding process, the actual method of utilizing thematic labels to manage meaning units, NVIVO qualitative software was used. The software made designating, storing, and accessing the meaning units associated within their thematic labels quick and easy. All 31 transcripts were coded during a meticulous final read of each interview. Through the process a few thematic labels were slightly renamed to grasp the array of relevant meaning units, and at least five new labels were created to provide further clarification of

themes. Eventually 39 thematic labels were created that could fully capture the storylines present.

Through the coding procedure, the nuances brought on by individual *contexts* were not lost. When a meaning unit was placed under a thematic label and the meaning unit lacked the text that situated it, special notes were made in the interview specific memos. The idiographic process of looking at each interview on its own paved the way for the nomothetic analysis, which aimed to find patterns across individuals.

Nomothetic analysis may initially appear to contradict the normative commitments of this study. The concept of *situated freedom*, as described by Patterson and Williams (2002) addresses this contradiction. Remember that the hermeneutic paradigm recognizes that individuals “co-constitute” meaning as they interact with the social and physical environments around them (Carr, 2010). With that in mind, phenomenologists aim to respect and understand the subjective nature of each participant’s individual life-world (Van Manen, 1990). Individuals constantly exercise their *freedoms* in thought and action, allowing them to carry varying views on similar experiences. Simultaneously though, there is a *situatedness* of those experiences. Individuals are often constrained in part by their social and physical environments, and hermeneutic ontology notes that sometimes similarities in individual experiences and meanings are not only possible, but probable (Patterson and Williams, 2002). The methodology described here, especially when considering situated freedom, allowed me to highlight and tell the stories of individuals and then compare and contrast them, yielding a simultaneously descriptive and theoretical analysis.

The nomothetic portion of the analysis targeted the similarities and differences between individual experiences. The interviews were related to one another through *themes* at the *concept level*. To do this, I read all meaning units under each thematic label and made notes on the

patterns and range of meaning units. The effort entailed describing the analytical story but also explaining and theorizing on findings that either did not align with those of past studies or introduced new elements to the topic. The process maintained the ‘part-whole’ focus of the idiographic analysis described above. As patterns and ranges were identified, the individual context of each meaning unit was considered and compared to others. Turning these results into a coherent story required lengthy writing, editing, and reworking of the analysis. The nomothetic process requires constant reflection back to the idiographic level to confirm similarities and meanings in general. The reflecting and reworking is intentional and planned, hence the inclusion of *circle* in the title of the approach. The resulting storyline aims to be logical and honest.

The method involved numerous subjective choices about how to present the collection of stories to tell, and how to best represent the array of situated experiences. The content presented as storylines in the results is constructed from the resulting thematic labels, meaning units, notes and memos. As certain patterns were linked, compared, and contrasted, efforts were made to explain why and supporting data was provided to help clarify the explanation. The results aim to be *persuasive, practical, and insightful*. Persuasiveness, in this case, means that the reader is able to make a relatively independent judgment on the legitimacy of a result and is presented with sufficient data to draw conclusions about the phenomena under study (Carr, 2010). Practical refers to the usefulness of the organizing system, and its ability to “enhance understanding, promote communication, and resolve conflict (Patterson and Williams, 2002: 35). Lastly, insightful means that the system is creative in ways that contribute to deep understanding of the phenomena. The following results chapter is an in depth examination and explanation of the actual analysis, as well as a telling of the analytical story that emerged.

4.0 CHAPTER 4- RESULTS

4.1 Overview of the Analytic Story

The results presented here represent the analytic storyline that seemed to surface more than any other from the data. The storyline conveys wilderness existing as an essential spiritual supplement to participants' everyday lives. From the data it appears that many participants understood wilderness as rarefied, because for them, wilderness was unmatched in its ability to minimize social constraints and expectations, limit cultural information to be processed, promote the practice of primitive ways of being, and encourage wild encounters with the natural world. In those conditions their spiritual relationships to higher powers, to themselves, to their existence, to other people, and to the physical space of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness appeared to be kindled, stoked, and/or sustained.

The data is depicted through four broad sections that were chosen because of how they let the interviewee's quotes develop and stories unfold in the most holistic manner possible. Each section is titled in a way that broadly captures both the tone of the descriptions and their interpreted meaning. For example, *Being There* is presented first because it most broadly relates participants' wilderness experiences to their spiritualities and self-described spiritual experiences and it references the analysis that participants were very present and aware of their surroundings.

More exactly, *Being There* simultaneously addresses participant definitions and considers the quiet, primitive, novel, and physical elements of their experiences and relates them to their various spiritualities. *Wilderness as a Sanctuary* highlights specific spiritual perspectives and processes that typified wilderness as a sanctuary from the pressures of participant's everyday lives. The section focuses on processes of immersion, feeling on an edge, viewing the landscape as created by something greater, living free of judgment, and discovering a better self. Sections 1

and 2 combine to depict an array of experiences, many of which begin to shape a storyline that wilderness acts as an essential supplement that provides spiritual opportunities, experiences, and lessons that visitor's everyday lives lack.

Steps to the Spiritual shares how participants brought lessons, memories, and expectations with them to the wilderness, and additionally practiced and developed habits in the wilderness that promoted spiritual experiences. Within the section, connections to place and others, rituals, mentors, sharing habits, definitions of scale, and ever-changing relationships are considered and described. Lastly, *Explaining the Mystery* cross-cuts sections 1, 2, and 3 to address issues of language and spirituality, types of spirituality, and critiques of spirituality. Similar to sections 1 and 2, sections 3 and 4 develop the notion that wilderness provides something necessary that everyday life cannot.

Table 2- Results

- 4.2.0 Being There
 - 4.2.1 Finding Wilderness
 - 4.2.2 Committing to Wilderness
 - 4.2.3 Finding Quiet
 - 4.2.4 Importance of Primitive
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- 4.3.0 Wilderness as a Sanctuary
 - 4.3.1 Immersion
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 - 4.3.3 God's Creation
 - 4.3.4 Living Without Judgment
 - 4.3.5 Finding a Better You
- 4.4.0 Steps to the Spiritual
 - 4.4.1 Solidifying Connections
 - 4.4.2 Role of Ritual
 - 4.4.3 Shaped by Mentors
 - 4.4.4 Sharing the Wild
 - 4.4.5 Defining the Scale of Wilderness Spirituality
 - 4.4.6 Changing Relationships
- 4.5.0 Explaining the Mystery
 - 4.5.1 Language and Spirituality
 - 4.5.2 Spirituality vs. Wilderness Spirituality

4.2.0 Being There

Being There shares the variety of ways that participants described their engagement with the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). The section begins by exploring how wilderness was described as different from everyday settings, as well as from other natural places that participants had visited. *Finding Wilderness* takes an initial look at how participants perceived and defined the wilderness, as a place and idea. Through the data, the connection between wilderness and spirituality begins to be revealed. The section reveals characteristics of participants' wilderness experiences and notes some of the ways that wilderness was described as a spiritually inspiring place for them. *Committing to Wilderness* is an introduction to concrete attributes of the wilderness setting and experiences as explained by participants. The section provides an introduction to the scope of perspectives that are shared throughout the results. The following section, *Finding Quiet*, holds possibly the most revealing data depicting *how* the majority of participants found the *time* and *space* to consider spiritual thoughts. The section begins with participant explanations of quiet, including general comments about how visitors searched for and valued that quiet, as well as exclusive references to the ways the quiet supported spiritual experiences.

The final three subsections of *Being There* address how particular aspects of wilderness experiences seemed to facilitate spiritual experiences. *Importance of the Primitive* highlights the primitive, rustic, and wild character of visitor experiences and how those elements inspired, impacted, and became spiritual experiences. The section expresses participants' perceptions of the more basic life-supporting tasks that wilderness visits often require. The question is then 'how' do those tasks influence visitors' spiritual experiences. The *Role of Novelty* explains the way that interviewees engaged and perceived new or unfrequented settings and activities,

yielding direct and indirect references and relations to spirituality. Similarly, *Physical Nature* captures specific features of participant experiences that contributed to their spiritual experiences. The physical nature of completing those basic life-supporting tasks on an overnight trip, as well as the physical activity required to travel in the BWCAW carried deep meaning for some participants.

4.2.1 Finding Wilderness

Understanding how wilderness visitors assign emotional, cultural and symbolic meaning to the BWCAW is important to this study since those perceptions and beliefs may have influenced their spiritual experiences. As described in the methods section, participant definitions were usually sought when a term was thought to have an unclear or subjective meaning. The term wilderness required such attention. Rather than asking specifically, questions two and three of the interview guide were used to grasp how the study participants understood wilderness. The questions asked the interviewees if they had a connection to wilderness, and if so, to describe it. They were additionally asked if that connection to wilderness was different from other natural places that they visit. Some answers were clearly talking exclusively about designated wilderness while the remainder used the term wilderness more loosely making it difficult to tell how they were defining wilderness. Within this subsection the quotes illustrate both the range and depth of the related answers, helping describe if and how wilderness is more supportive of spiritual experiences than other natural areas. Many responses shared in other sections also address the issue, though within more complicated contexts. While *Finding Wilderness* specifically addresses this topic, consider it an introduction to the range of perspectives.

The most common response regarding how wilderness is different from other places involved how much, or little, influence humans had on the landscape. Joe, a long time Boundary Waters paddler, noted:

Well, the difference between designated wilderness and other places is that here there is an elemental component. This is pure wild. You are away from the noise of civilization and just the sounds of paddles in the water and it has a completely different rhythm than I have in my daily life. Everything involves exertion here and there are rewards, you get to get farther away.

In this quote Joe told of the different rhythm that the wilderness involves. It seemed that he was stressing how it is special to be able to get away from civilization to a place he understands as pure wild. He noted that he enjoys the rewards of the physical part of wilderness trips, and by saying “you get to,” he seemed to be demonstrating the pleasure he found in both the opportunity and reality of going farther away from civilization. Later in the interview Joe stated, “It’s the wild, not having anything but the basics and seeing nobody but your buddy for a week, that is what makes this so different and special and spiritual.” Joe’s references to relying on just basics and seemingly finding solitude are examples of humans having less impact on the landscape. Future sections address both the primitive and quiet elements of the wilderness experience.

While talking about spiritual experiences, Brian spoke about how he feels ‘a connectivity to God’ saying, “I definitely feel a connectivity being in his natural splendor versus the built environment.” When asked what some characteristics of “natural splendor” are, he said:

Well here in the BWCAW, with a capital W, there is no motorized, no paved roads, or paved pathways of any sort; compared to everywhere else, the capital W wilderness, on a scale of 1 to 10, this is 10, being the greatest connectivity to God’s natural splendor, that is all you see here. All the other motorized and electronic stuff is not present, whereas you do see that in all other experiences.

He was specifying designated wilderness here with the “capital W.” The reference to no “motorized and electronic stuff” was common among participants, following the legal definitions

and some of the regulatory restrictions. Brian's loose use of "electronic stuff" was technically a personal choice considering other visitors sometimes carry items such as electronic fish finders, ipods and battery powered speaker sets. With that in mind it seems that he considered the total detachment from such items to be part of the wilderness experience, reducing the normal human influences on the experience. Additionally it was clear that the idea of God's creation played a role in his understanding wilderness. As will be elaborated on in section 4.3.3 *God's Creation*, nearly two thirds of the interviewees referenced the landscape being the work of their Christian God. Brian's statements introduced how some people viewed wilderness as God's creation and also reinforced the importance of the naturalness of designated wilderness. These first two examples, Joe and Brian, simply introduced a few ideas associated with finding wilderness. Notably, not all participants so quickly defined wilderness in such ways.

Though the following two interviewees provided many useful examples of spiritual experiences in the Boundary waters, each participant was hesitant to define the Boundary Waters as true wilderness. These perspectives provide evidence of the range of opinions on the topic.

Talking specifically about the BWCAW Laura said:

I mean, I spend – I've kind of outgrown them a bit. I mean, they're pretty well used sites and stuff and it's so stressful getting a campsite now and then, especially when you have little kids and stuff. We'll try it during the day and they're like, "Let's find a campsite. Oh, no, no. Not –"No, we're gonna go for a while. But, yeah, I just got done doing a trip north of Atikokan for a while and that was definitely a different definition of wilderness, to say the least. In the true sense of the word, just a tract of land where people could build a house if they wanted to or not at all. [I: It's just out there that far, is that what you mean by that?] Yeah, it was just like Canadian government just owns the land and then you can have a permit to travel through it. But people build roads or have a cabin or railroad tracks or something like that. And it's a little more adventuresome perhaps than I would think of Boundary Waters travel, but also I've spent a lot of time here the last couple of years leading the intro trips.

Describing the differences between designated wilderness areas she had traveled in and other natural areas she has visited, Mary noted:

Up in Canada it is not classified as wilderness or even classified as a special place, it is just an unmarked place on the map but it is just as, it is more wild in those places. I don't feel it gets used as much as here. So I mean usage is probably the biggest thing that makes places different.

These two canoe guides/ camp counselors were both college age females and seemed to have been attracted to the wilds of Canada. Their definitions of wilderness were clearly shaped by their experiences there. The number of people, demarcation on maps and even the light regulations in the Boundary Waters appeared to stand in contrast to the vastness, rarely visited, less regulated wilds of Canada that they had paddled. These quotes help stress that perceptions are all diverse and relative to personal experiences and beliefs.

Despite their thinking that even wilder places exist, both of these interviewees spoke at length about rich spiritual experiences in the wilds of the Boundary Waters. The following quotes from Mary hinted at the spiritual experiences, but also introduced the topic of water and how it plays a large roll in BWCAW experiences in general. Mary talked about how water impacts her experiences in the BWCAW saying:

I think that it enhances them a lot. I mean, I am just amazed, you know people are 70% water and organisms can't live without water, I feel like it is the vibration of our planet because it is literally the thing that makes our planet pulse and breathe and beat. I mean when I look at water it is just this wonderful element that is crazy, I mean you can travel by it and you can survive by it. Like I said, when it reflects the sky it is just this easel.

The water reflecting the sky was a spiritual experience she had previously mentioned saying, "I feel that for me, it {spiritual experiences} is mostly at sunset, and usually sitting out by the water . . .like last night, I was just watching these two mediums {water and sky} entirely change all the time." Beyond just spiritual moments of beauty, it seemed that the ever-present waterscape

helped elicit thoughts of the aliveness of the earth and her dependence on the element. In the following quote, her preference for wilderness was made clear. Even if areas such as the BWCAW were not considered as wild as certain areas in Canada that she had paddled, she still seemed to consider herself very attached to them:

That's what I find most enjoyable about the wilderness versus other settings perhaps. The ability to be really in tune with your own needs and self, what you find – you're very aware of if you're hungry or thirsty or you're cold, you stop. Just a little more careful, perhaps, about the way you're treating yourself. So, yeah, not necessarily a place of beautiful clear lakes that you can't get anywhere else really, but also a way of a more personal reflection. [I: When you say personal reflection, what does that entail for you?] Just taking time outside of having distractions to look back on perhaps what's been going on during the year and that sort of thing.

Here we see how Mary's emotional connections to the wilderness supported her personal reflection time, an experience that she later considered part of her spirituality by saying, “{Spiritual times are-} A time of reflection when you actually get to reflect on what you have been doing and where you are, and ultimately where you are and how small you feel and just that moment of silence.” For her just being in the wilderness seemed to be symbolic of being more in tune with personal needs and health. With those meanings attached to her expectations and experiences, it appeared that spiritual experiences would be more likely to arise in places defined by our culture as wilderness. In this case, it seemed that the combination of culturally defined wilderness and a unique land/waterscape combined to influence both perceptions and experiences.

Another interviewee, Dan, similarly spoke of water. He made the following comments while talking about things that made wilderness different from other places that he visits, saying:

The waters here are beautiful and in the summer it can refresh you, it is sustenance, I mean . . . it is living, and there are so many things in that water that live, survive and die on one another in this wonderful life cycle. So yeah, the water here is huge. Even when I am backpacking in CO, we always backpack to a lake. I mean who wants to sit. . . you

know it is pretty above timberline and in the alpine, but getting to a lake in there is always better. You can fish, it is your water source. . . it always adds to your wilderness experiences.

Water indeed added to his wilderness experiences. For both Mary and Dan, we can see that particular elements can shape experiences. As noted throughout the results, the water played a major role in how people interacted with the wilderness. Obviously there are other, non-wilderness environments that have features such as waterscapes or mountain ranges that are capable of inspiring spiritual experiences, but for many it seemed that both the spoken and unspoken meanings of wilderness designation significantly enhanced the experiences had there.

Getting back to more general examples of wilderness being different, consider Sue's comments. She explained, "The leave no trace component, and here, the limited amount of people really changes things, you can't get away in state parks or even national forests." For Sue, the regulations of designated wilderness meant that she was capable of 'getting away' from other people and signs of other people. Interestingly though, at multiple points in the interview she told of her interest in socializing with her group. There was a context that explains this further. Like a lot of travelers, she appeared to have an interest in spending time with her group, but going deeper, she was recently divorced and with a group called the Minnesota Rovers. The social group's mission was to provide outings that promoted adventure and companionship. It seemed then that she had a desire to have more meaningful interactions with a small group in a scenario where there were less distractions by other people. This was a characteristic of wilderness that came up multiple times.

Another characteristic of wilderness experiences was feeling like you are "away" or more remote, when comparing wilderness to other natural areas. Kevin noted, "The fact that there are no roads, no powerboats, you just feel like you're further away, I think; – it's just feels more

remote.” That remoteness seemed meaningful for Kevin as he went on to say:

I think it’s something special. And I don’t know how much longer it will really last. I think it’s something that’s – it’s one of those things where it’s difficult to get to but that’s part of the enjoyment. It’s part of what makes it so special, is the effort that it takes to get there. I mean, I think it’s similar to photography. I mean, you can – millions of people can take pictures of the Eiffel Tower, but it’s just a different experience here. It’s something that not everyone gets to see. And it’s, to me, it just feels a bit more special. I just like the whole – part of it that you’re definitely much – you have to be much more self sufficient. And it’s kinda the ‘boy scouty’ thing. You know, setting up camp and building fires and – Pump your own water and looking for wood and yeah, all that. I enjoy that and find it special.

His quote was not used to draw a connection between the wilderness and spirituality, but to illustrate how the effort needed to travel in wilderness can shape the experience and make it special in many ways. Though it was unclear if he was referring to designated wilderness, his understanding of it was obvious. Others similarly made their understandings and expectations clear. When asked what makes wilderness different than other natural areas he visited, Dan said:

I just think the solitude and beauty are the big factors. I am an introvert, so I rejuvenate when I can be by myself or with a very small group of people; I hate crowds. Disney world would have no restorative qualities for me.

The comparison between Disney and the Boundary Waters depicted his view of ‘restorative qualities’ and clarified his expectations. He went on to draw a more meaningful comparison when asked if his connection to wilderness was different:

Ummm . . . not really except in the fact that they give you more solitude because they are larger areas. See, I can go on a float trip in Missouri and the streams are beautiful, and the weather is great for being in the water, but you don’t have the solitude and the expanse. There is something about being a small person in the huge expansive wilderness area that changes, probably does drive home how insignificant you are which makes you understand how much more significant your greater power is because it developed all this, designed all this.

The “solitude and the expanse” were undoubtedly major contributors to the spiritual feelings Dan had in the wilderness, as compared to another similar waterscape. Here again we see a reference

to a God or greater power coming about as an interviewee talked about the landscape around them. Note that the question didn't specifically ask about his connection to a higher power, but the connection under discussion was his more general relationship to wilderness.

Mark indicated that there is a mystique in wilderness that he doesn't find in other natural areas. He stated:

We have 100 wooded acres in Wisconsin and it is my retreat. Sometimes I will kiss the palm of my hand and smack it on the ground thinking, "I am here." But that is different; it still doesn't have the mystique that this does up here. If we run out of eggs, it is 5 miles to town, and if we think if it is going to rain, we don't plan a picnic. Here, we have no control and that is the way we like it, it changes your perspective.

That mystique appeared to be borne out of the relative unpredictable nature of the wilderness.

Not having everything available at all times seemed to provide perspective. Clearly for him, the remoteness that wilderness forces made the experience much different from those in other natural areas.

Other participants spoke of not only the remoteness, but how that same lack of human influence that was previously mentioned led to different experiences. Eric, a frequent visitor to designated wilderness areas, highlighted the importance of the lack of signs and stressed how challenges, including navigational, defined wilderness for him and shaped the spiritual outcomes of his experiences:

Well, the big difference to me between wilderness and a national park is there's a sign telling you everywhere to go. Like out here, navigation is part of the challenge. Getting to where you're supposed to go without all the campsites being marked or somebody pointing this way or that. But I was thinking earlier, we have an RV too when we go camping. When we're in the campground there, there's 40 people per acre or more. . . We prefer not to be able to see anybody, this is a lot better than the RV campground. . . not having each campsite marked, each portage marked, and you had to get out the maps, and we occasionally argued over where we were on the map and stuff, we like that challenge. And when you turn a bend and there's the campsite you were expecting to see, it's

rewarding, and you feel good. . . Those are some of those challenges that I think are part of spirituality.

Compared to more managed or guided experiences in other natural places, Eric seemed to enjoy the freedom and challenge afforded by management policies that place a lot of responsibility on visitor. Within the quote, we again see that feeling alone, away from others, was meaningful for this paddler. In addition to feeling alone, being successful on his own without the help of signs seemed to shape his emotions. It appeared likely that compared to visits to other natural areas, his trips in the wilderness have different challenges and rewards.

Challenges and character building experiences were also important to Ed. He explained:

Wilderness takes it one step further, and it allows people a chance for immersion. You know you really have to be, your immersed in it; if there's a thunderstorm that comes over; if you turn your ankle; if your gorp got wet. You know, minor and major things like this; I think they build character and a connection to the natural world in a better way than a contrived experience. You need that connection in order to gain a spiritual perspective. Contrived experiences are more for entertainment, I think. I see that as the key difference. We're in a society that craves entertainment rather than experience. So experience can be positive or negative. It can be, entertainment for most people, if it's not positive, it's not worth doing. If it's a negative entertainment experience; it's not gonna make money; it's not gonna pay for itself; it's Disney. Wilderness can be both. . . I am just glad that a society chooses to not to destroy and can set aside places just for the sake of it . . . it defines civilization to be, to provide for multiple generations.

From discussing the more raw experiences such as the thunderstorms to considering the type of entertainment that wilderness provided, it was clear the wilderness holds incomparable experiences that carry significant weight in Ed's life. Just before this explanation he spent time discussing the state parks and their ability to provide access to many, but their inability to preserve landscapes, limit development, and avoid contrived experiences. It is clear that here he was talking about designated wilderness and it seemed that preserving it was something he

valued and thanked civilization for valuing. For Ed, wilderness was a space that humans have not impacted or shaped for artificial entertainment purposes.

This section has presented a variety of perspectives on what makes wilderness different from other natural areas. While each of the cited comments helped describe how visitors view the space as different from others, it was not always clear that participants found the defining characteristics to be meaningful to spiritual experiences in wilderness, but that was not the goal of the sub-section. The aim instead was to introduce visitor perceptions of the attributes that make wilderness special and may influence spiritual experiences. The remoteness, beauty, novelty of a water-dominated landscape, landscape as God's creation, challenges the landscape presented, and most obviously the lack of human influences made wilderness different for the noted participants. It is important to recognize how these topics can be culturally shaped, can play on emotions, and can potentially be symbolic in ways that influence experiences. Each of these topics will arise again throughout the results.

4.2.2 Committing to Wilderness

Committing to Wilderness describes elements of the physical setting that were meaningful to participants' spiritual experiences therein. For this section, wilderness and wild are again selectively used based upon which term the participant predominantly used during their interview. The transitive verb *commit* is in the title because it captures the idea that participants are going to wilderness and accepting its differences. During the interviews, many characteristics of wilderness/wild settings were explained as important to spiritual experiences. It became clear that the *beauty, size, solitude, and power* that the wilderness can display were the most commonly cited attributes and are therefore discussed here.

The role of *beauty* in spiritual experiences was often discussed by interviewees and is

therefore focused on here but receives attention through the analysis. When asked a follow up question, [What about the beauty makes it spiritual?] John said:

When I am out here I notice things like the clouds and the amazing colors of the forest, you know I don't really pay attention to a lot of things but when I come up here I start to see a lot more of mother nature. It brings out a good sense, kind of a peaceful sense when you are surrounded by it. You don't really see any structured objects and you know you just sort of see what mother nature left for us right here and that is pretty nice.

The response captured how beauty can tap into emotions, produce certain feelings and inspire awareness in John. By noting that the landscape represents 'mother nature' John seemed to be acknowledging a higher being's relationship to the landscape. He was pointing out that in the wilderness he could become aware of the beauty of the place. Specifically John seemed to be noting how it was more beautiful because it is a place that unsullied by evidence of humans.

Charlie was similarly captivated by attributes of the setting. When asked, [Have you had any experiences you would call spiritual?] Charlie excitedly shared, "I'd never seen an eagle in the wild, and we were here for 20 minutes and saw one, and saw them and saw them and saw them. Every day we have seen eagles, (pause) just amazing. . . I can't stop looking for them." The reality of seeing wildlife, eagles in particular, seemed to spiritually satisfy Charlie's curiosity. He continued to say, "It is definitely something beautiful that we don't see back home." The wilderness appeared to hold elements of beauty that Charlie is not use to seeing on a regular basis. For Charlie, spiritual experiences seemed to be something he had in moments of beauty. For others, spiritual experiences were not simply focused on moments, but rather the complete experience. Rob noted, "Just being here is spiritual . . . we are able to enjoy the beautiful world that God has created for us." Rob's reference to God's creation is expanded on in section 4.3.3 *God's Creation*; here though, the importance lies in his reference to the whole act

of being in the BWCAW as spiritual. To relate this perspective to beauty, consider the Rob's later comment:

The Quetico and the Boundary Waters are unique ecosystems, you can't find it anywhere else, every moment there is so much to see and consider. . . I feel like I always see as much or more wildlife than I am expect and the water is always pristine and the forests thick and healthy.

Rob, describing the water as pristine, seemed to hint that the beauty in the place is pure or unharmed. Obviously for Rob the unique ecosystems provide a lot to look at and inspired him to "consider" his surroundings.

In addition to Rob, multiple participants conveyed that viewing the beauty of the BWCAW meant seeing God's creation. Brian specifically said, "I think this is actually a form of worship too, just coming out and seeing this beauty, enjoying God's creation. I think he made this for people to enjoy." Joe noted, "This is isn't man made or man contrived, this came about without any of man's work or management, this was someone else's design."

Kevin explained his perspective on higher powers, or lack thereof, relating his perspective to the setting by saying:

The main thing I believe is just the chemistry of life; us – this is it. And then after you die, your body breaks down into all its amino acids and then the nutrients and something else takes it up. I definitely feel like this a place where I can see my beliefs in motion; there is so much life and death here. The cycles of life are beautifully clear here . . . I certainly think about it a lot, it seems like a perfect place to consider the process.

The quote suggested his beliefs, but simultaneously did a nice job of capturing the ways that the beauty of the setting inspired him to consider some deep questions. Kevin's comments reveal that beauty can encourage meaningful consideration of processes and objects that individuals may not consider spiritual but are relative to their beliefs.

It is significant to grasp the ways that participants signaled whether their perspective or experiences were spiritual. Understanding ranges of views is constantly important through this

study, and perspectives on the setting are no different. For some visitors, the setting had signs of human use that got in the way of beauty. A female participant, Mary, stated:

The Boundary Waters is a place that I would call well trodden and less wild than many places, sometimes it is a bit much . . . I like some of the less traveled lakes because they don't seem as used or worn down . . . on this lake the campsites and portages seem pretty beat up.

Her perspective again seemed shaped by her experiences as a canoe guide, often travelling in areas of Canada that get far fewer visitors. For her, the natural beauty of the BWCAW setting appeared to vary based on how much human use they received.

Though portions of the setting may have seemed “beat up” to Mary, overall we see *beauty* being captivating, calming, awe inspiring, and thought provoking. It seemed that beauty was at the very least a contributing factor to spiritual experiences. Notably, the quotes also demonstrate how signs of human use appear to detract from beauty and the participant's likelihood of having spiritual experiences.

Many interviewees noted that when in the Boundary Waters they have a tendency to gain a perspective that made them feel small amidst a very large (in *size*) setting. Tom, simply stated, “Wilderness is very special in that it is so big and makes it easier to get away from other people.” Though Tom was not specifically relating the size of the wilderness to spirituality, he later noted, “I am more spiritual on those solo trips because I can be way out there, alone with myself and my thoughts.” While speaking with Tom, his excitement level seemed to rise as he spoke about getting away in a “big” landscape. During the interview Tom noted that he normally takes at least one solo trip a year.

Not only did participants stress the importance of the physical size of wilderness, some mentioned that the management of wilderness helped the space feel large. In a portion of conversation unrelated to spirituality Beth noted:

Out here everything is big and places seem secluded and quiet because everything is so separate, and there's only so many campsites. In like the southwest {Utah} where I've been {in a wilderness}, you can pretty much camp wherever you want, but your not quite sure how close you are to people. You might be miles away or real close, but out here there are rules, the campsite spacing ensures you will have your space . . .it's special because everyone feels that it's theirs, and there is sure plenty of it. We all spend time here and keep it nice for each other.

Indeed, Beth seemed thankful for the rules and designated campsites. What is not clear is whether or not the statement was related to spirituality.

For Jen, there was apparently a relationship between the size of the landscape and spirituality, but equally important was Jen's perspective on other visitors. Jen explained:

This is a big landscape and that definitely plays a role in my spirituality. For me, knowing that people have come this far, they've got the knowledge and where with all to be here . . . I actually like seeing them, because I know they are experiencing the beauty of the wild as well, and it doesn't interrupt my spiritual journey.

Jen found that no matter whether she saw others or not, the physical effort required to get to most places meant that other visitors were sure to be decent people. Later in the interview, while talking about aspects of the experience that she considered spiritual, Jen said, "The wind blowing across this giant place and through the forest {pause} I guess there is that sense that there is something bigger than us." From Jen's comments it seemed that not only did she find something spiritual about the size of the landscape, but she was okay with seeing others. She was okay because she knew that they had faced similar challenges to her to get there, confirming that they were good people that, like her, were enjoying the beauty of the wild.

It can be difficult to interpret the exact meaning of the above comments, but it is clear that the tangible *size* of the area can be an important part of the wilderness experience, and potentially spiritual experiences. For some, the size and regulations seemed to limit encounters

with people to a level that supported certain kinds of experiences. This will be examined more closely in subsequent section *Finding Quiet*.

The *solitude* afforded by the sizable landscape may have been the most commonly cited setting feature that influenced spiritual experiences. This topic will be revisited through the study and particularly gets a close look when discussing the impact of having few distractions. Tom, the father that enjoys solo trips, mentioned that he enjoys those trips for the, “pure quiet,” that they provide. He also stated that wilderness provided, the “mental space,” he needs in order to “think and reflect.” Those thoughts were echoed by a numerous participants. When asked about his experiences in general, another interviewee (Jim) explained:

When I am here, spending time on the lakes or in camp, I just think about the peace and quiet I guess, I mean a bit ago I was kind of taking a nap on a rock after swimming for a while. You know I was trying to decide if I wanted to go fishing or just go explore in the canoe, or do something else. It is sort of spiritual in the fact that it is relaxing and it is something totally different than what life is like back at home. [I: When you say totally different, what do you mean by that?] I like to use the term off the grid, no cell phones, no computers, no motors of any kind. It is just you and your own power to get from one place to another.

Jim was interviewed in mid July, a time when the weather and lake water temperatures seemed to be ideal for swimming and lounging lakeside. Visitors seemed to consistently be doing these things in the afternoon hours. Compared to more measurable attributes like size and solitude of people, his comments hint why the Boundary Waters experience is simply distinctive. Jim’s comments alluded to how relaxing and “totally different” the experience was compared to life back home. He particularly notes elements of the experience of wilderness: the peace and quiet, the opportunities for experiences such as fishing, exploring in the canoe, swimming in lakes, napping on shoreline rocks, and stressed that all of it is done through human power, “off the grid.” The characteristics of wilderness that supported these experiences are many, but obviously

the peacefulness or solitude, played a large role.

Nearly every participant mentioned the peacefulness of the area. David, a man who grew up backpacking in wilderness areas in Colorado, explained:

I would have never thought anything would have torn me away for the love I had for the magnificent mountains of the west. Backpacking, hiking, and summiting big mountains and stuff was the wild I knew until I came up here. And the first time I came up here, it was just phenomenal. It was just such an immersive experience. And it was like, wow, this is the first place that could probably take me away from Colorado. And years later, after many more trips here, it's something that fills that void of the mountains. [I: What do you think in particular out here fills that void?] I like the solitude. A lot of places in Colorado have gotten busy and routes that you used to always take and you'd never see anybody have become popular because in some backpackers' magazine, they talked about that trail. And all of a sudden, everybody is doing it. So that was something. Here, you are in a canoe and your trail is a whole lake, you can explore so much. The water adds so much. You know, we came up here that first trip, and we came up in September. It was kind of late, and it had frosted the week we came up. And we didn't see anybody. The quiet mornings with fog were outstanding. The quiet was unparalleled and we saw so much wildlife, just us and the wild.

When asked if there was any part of his trip that that he considered spiritual, David noted, "Well, yeah, sure. Everything out here is spiritual." For David, a Colorado to Minnesota transfer, being away from humans in a natural setting seemed to be a strong predictor of wild. He used the words immersive and wild in a way that signaled that the BWCAW held something special for him. Later in the interview David shared that upon his father's passing he moved from Denver to Summit County, up in the Rockies, because he felt he needed to be closer to the mountains, a place his father adored and shared with him. Indeed, having a wild place nearby seemed highly important for David. The quiet and wildlife provided by the BWCAW appeared to meet his needs. For David, the outstanding attributes of the setting seemed to be the freedom it provided to explore, the unparalleled quiet, and the chance to be with the wild.

Many participants shared his sentiments regarding being away from others and finding quiet. However, experiences in the same setting can differ. Regarding encounters with others, another visitor, Linda, said:

I can't say that I haven't seen many people, because I have actually seen quite a few and it has sort of been surprising . . . I think I will find the place more spiritual when I find time to just sit out on that rocky point and look out on the lake when people aren't paddling by.

Linda's surprise at the number of people seemed to be impacting her experience. However, she appeared to have a solution that would provide her the space for her desired experience. Part of her inability to find the place to be spiritual seemed to be based on being in close proximity to others (her kids) so far on her trip, and not just the high number of people. As the results continue to revisit the topic of solitude, it is important to keep in mind that participants approached the wilderness with different perspectives and expectations. Recall that Jim seemed to be seeking time "off the grid," David tended to view the BWCAW by comparing it to wilderness areas in Colorado, and Linda appeared to have expectations of what spiritual settings would look like.

Another important component of the setting was the *power* that the landscape seemed to hold, and/or demonstrated. The subjective term power was intentionally chosen here because the attribute was more vague but seemed to be as important as the other three topics of this section. One interviewee, Charlie, a boy-scout dad on an annual scout trip, said, "This place is special; where else do you have to make it on your own. You have your things for a week, and you make due the best you can rain or shine and get through it; there are different things to deal with." Charlie had previously said, "My time out here allows for spiritual lessons. . . you have to test yourself, try to survive; it is part of my development." Taken together, Charlie's comments seemed to be talking about the significant challenges that wilderness visitors can encounter and

have to overcome. By saying “you have to make it on your own,” he seemed to be contrasting the experience with his everyday life, where many components of survival are ensured and don’t have to be contemplated on a regular basis. Charlie’s comments alluded to the lack of control that he felt and how that reality inspired spiritual lessons and helped him develop.

The power of the landscape and fragility of humans was also introduced by Jen. She commented, “I noticed that the video that the Parks and Forest Service shows has changed to indicate that someone could die out here. You are on your own, and you can’t rely on a cell phone for somebody to save you.” Notably, Jen’s comments did not seem related to her spirituality but did reinforce how visitors possibly perceived the landscape to hold danger that some may have consider powerful and intimidating. Such feelings certainly could encourage feelings of self-reliance.

Harsh weather is another example of a powerful element of wilderness that may have been promoting spiritual thoughts. With tents being the most substantial shelter, visitors discussed the power of the storms they experienced on the present trip as well as past ones. Bill, another scout dad, recalled, “When the boys heard that clap of lightning, you could see it in their eyes that they were all in awe of the power.” The “awe” that the scouts demonstrated may have been signifying feelings of smallness and potentially fragility in the face of powerful natural systems. The power could be said to be represent something bigger, something that humbled visitors and encouraged humility. Both of these emotions may have provoked spiritual thoughts.

One of the most commonly sighted powers of nature was wind. In a setting where almost all travel is done by canoe, having to paddle and navigate in the presence of wind is understandably significant. While talking about the role of water in her spirituality, Beth explained:

I'm captivated by how secluded we are. I see white caps on the water and know it's windy, and I can sometimes tell if it's too windy to paddle. It is hard to paddle when it's windy, but it feels good to have to paddle hard and only move like a foot and have to go through 10 paddles and you haven't really got anywhere. But eventually you will, you just have to be {pause} it's all about patience.

The context of the comment could indicate that experiencing the power of the wind/water combination was a component of a spiritual experience that teaches or reinforces patience.

For others it was hard to have spiritual experiences in the presence of a blowing wind. While sharing moments that she considers spiritual, Nancy noted, "It's more when it is still. It's always when it is still, I feel that way. I feel awesome when it's all windy, but not in the same way." Nancy seemed to be refining her opinion as she spoke but for her the wind seemed to disrupt the stillness she liked for her spiritual experiences.

Still others seemed to find the wind to be a spiritual component of the landscape. When asked how water influences his spiritual experiences, John expressed:

I think the sound {pause} when I am out there in the canoe, it is just that {pause} you know you just are in the canoe and it is your own power. . .you may be dealing with the wind and other things that mother nature throws at you but you are in the midst of it, you just sort of blend in with everything. . .it is almost like a harmony with the water. . .you start to feel the wind, the direction and you just start to understand.

John's comment described how he experienced the wind and water as integral elements of the setting that he related to his overall spiritual experience. Because John described the whole of his trip to the BWCAW as spiritual, he was asked if there were moments he would consider more spiritual than others. While talking about those moments that he said, "I have so many memories of different landscapes and moments in them, like the way the sun comes through the clouds and the feeling of the wind and the heat and usually I just have that moment of silence." For John, observing natural systems at work on the landscape seemed highly captivating and spiritually meaningful.

Committing to Wilderness includes many quotes where participants described being in a setting that is very different from their everyday environment. In the data it seemed that wilderness held far fewer conveniences and safety measures than an everyday home and consistently placed the visitor in direct contact with natural elements. For these and other reasons the wilderness setting appeared to support memorable experiences that some consider spiritual.

On the topic of memorable, one participant noted, “Half the time I get to work, and I can’t remember if I worked out {that morning} or not. Then up here, you remember so many of the experiences for years.” Exploring some of those individual experiences that visitors recalled as so memorable helped get at the heart of the phenomena of spiritual experiences. From the data presented in this section it seemed that participants recognized the *beauty, size, solitude, and power* of the wilderness and the experiences had there and often related those elements to their spiritual experiences. Recall the title of this sub-section, *Committing to Wilderness*. Commit, meaning to put in charge or trust, speaks to the idea that visitors understood that wilderness is different from their everyday environment and offered those special attributes. In turn, the experiences may be remote, unpredictable, and exciting. Within this section the wild/wilderness was most often depicted as out of the control of humans. No attempt was made to define who or what, if anything is in control. Instead, perceptions of the setting were shared and related to spiritual experiences.

4.2.3 Finding Quiet

Nearly all participants made reference to the quiet that they found in the wilderness. Those references to quiet included speaking of solitude, peace, privacy, and freeness. Participant’s seemed to use these terms to convey that they and their thoughts felt supported instead of interrupted. Through this section, explanations of spiritualities help link the role of

finding quiet to specific spiritual experiences. Here, the spiritual aspects of the phenomena of spending time in the BWCAW, away from the everyday, are shared and studied. Because so many people referenced the process of getting away from other people, a good starting point for this section is to consider how getting away was described as finding *space* and *time*.

Consider the role of space, and in particular space for “solitude” in the following comment. When talking about his wilderness experiences, Ed noted, “I get fed emotionally by wilderness experiences . . .it feeds my spirit.” Later in the interview while talking about a wilderness experience, he mentioned, “A couple years ago we went into Snake River and Bald Eagle, and there are very few permits there and so there is a lot more solitude.” When asked to clarify his use of “solitude” Ed said:

A place of solitude combines independence and peacefulness in an experience. . .It can be; if there are more people around but they’re peaceful in their experience, then I would consider that solitude. That’s kind of the idea; I don’t mind regulations and run-ins with others, as long as everyone keeps things peaceful.

While it was not entirely clear that his comments were related to spirituality, Ed, a father who had been a paddler for many years, described how the quiet and peacefulness can sometimes be impacted by others. In the comment Ed initially stressed that a place of solitude should allow for independence and peacefulness. In this case and others it seemed that quiet, being synonymous with solitude, seemed to lead to feelings of peacefulness. It appeared that he meant it is important to be alone and feel uninterrupted, or “peaceful”. His comment did however described how others can sometimes be present without impacting that experience. He got at an idea shared earlier in the results; for some, it doesn’t impact them to encounter other people, as long as they are similarly committed to the peacefulness of the *space*. The behavior of others can still allow solitude to remain, despite their presence. Seemingly with the same end in mind, Ed noted that regulations are something that he also doesn’t mind because they help preserve the solitude. It

appeared that Ed's experiences with solitude could easily be interrupted by others, if those others didn't have similar goals to him.

Another paddler described her spiritual experiences using "peaceful" in a similar way to Ed. Sue explained:

Every time I come up here I do feel that way as far as when you look out and that's all you see is wilderness and usually no people and it's peaceful. Yes, those are my spiritual moments. . . I would have to say there's no cars, no boats, there's no noise.

Sue described how seeing nothing but wilderness is an important part of finding peace and having spiritual moments. She went on to give more details of her spiritual moments and said, "I am an early riser and I come and sit down by the water and wait for the sun to rise and listen to the loons. That is what I like, that is my time with God, my spiritual time." Notably, her spiritual experiences were her "time with God." Those comments made it clear that being alone in a peaceful space, free of cars, boats and human produced noises, allow her that peace. Those were essential components of the phenomena for her. Linda, a mother of two also spoke about sounds and their roll in spiritual experiences. When she was asked if she felt like water supported those spiritual feelings she was talking about, Linda responded:

I think the waves and the motion of water is calming. [I: What tends to go through your mind that signals that you are calm?] Just less, the sound of the waves fills an empty space, it is soothing and drips comes off the paddle, it is rhythmic. I am sure that rhythm helps me focus, or almost brings a pattern to my thinking {pause} sort of like how deep breaths give you space to think, it gives me the space for that quiet.

In the quote there appears that "space for quiet" is both a physical space and an auditory space. She considered certain moments while paddling to provide a rhythm that helped her focus and gave pattern to her thinking. Interestingly, Linda had been paddling with both her son and daughter in the canoe and it seemed that there was potential for them to interrupt that quiet. However, similar to Ed, Linda seemed able to find that space for quiet when those around her

supported it.

Another element participants considered when thinking about quiet is *time*; or as we will see, more importantly comfort. For many participants, getting to a peaceful state, or a quiet state where visitors are able to just think, can sometimes require the passing of some *time*, where that time is consumed by thoughts like, ‘how am I going to cook my dinner, I’ve never used my stove?’ or ‘how am I going to deal with the mosquitoes tonight?’ For some, once a certain level of comfort or confidence is obtained, only then may the time be available to find quiet. Recall that when asked if there was any part of his experiences that he would consider spiritual, John said, “I think every time I come up here it is. That is why I come up here.” John, who takes four to six trips a year into the Boundary Waters explained:

You get to a point on these 4-5 day trips where everything is tuned, all your really focused on is what the clouds are doing, what the weather is, what the task at hand is. You are not worried or concerned about your systems, you are in the moment. You know, you notice which way is the wind blowing, you are just looking at the variables of mother nature, you are focused and that is a special feeling.

Here John captures a thought that others loosely alluded to: sometimes it takes a few days to get systems down before visitors are really able to settle in and focus in a way that allows for specific special moments. This idea can also be related to finding rhythm and flow as analyzed in section *Physical Nature*.

Each of the above quotes gets at the idea of the *space* and *time* for finding quiet in a slightly different way. For some participants, the quiet seemed related to spiritual experiences, while for others, without proper probing we can only relate the quiet to their overall wilderness experience. The data above is an intentionally short introduction to a topic that received significant attention. The following quotes describe how experiences, most of which evidently spiritual, are shaped by various forms of quiet and additionally place the quiet in opposition to

visitors' everyday lives. While reading these quotes, the idea of *escape* will likely come to mind. In this sample, escaping from society seems to be an integral element of participants overall experience. Central to this study is how that element is related to spiritual experiences. The title *Finding Quiet* was chosen because it best captures how the 'escape' to wilderness seems to include a quietness that participants are either searching for, or find without knowing they were looking for it. The goal is not to analyze wilderness experiences as an escape, but to examine how feelings of 'escape' may play a role in spiritual experiences.

Because of visitor permitting and campsite locations in the Boundary Waters, depending on the season, lakes being paddled, and the chosen campsite, it can be common to not come into close contact with other people or groups. Ken, a paddler from Alabama, talked about getting away and spoke of the importance of finding quiet:

I intentionally try to get away from people, and I've been successful . . . There's degrees of getting away though; I mentioned earlier, before you turned on the recorder, about not seeing any contrails from the airplanes and stuff. Sometimes, you'll be somewhere, and a plane will come over, and it'll ruin the experience.

For Ken, the contrails seem to be a symbolic intrusion, a reminder of the outside world. By using the work "ruin," Ken makes it clear that getting "away" is important to him and the contrails intrude on that experience.

Others described the quiet setting by focusing on the sensual components. When asked about whether or not she would consider any of her experiences on her trip so far to be spiritual, Beth, an annual Boundary Waters visitor said:

I would say mostly when you're out on the lake alone, or with your paddling partner but it is quiet and you can feel the wind blow and all you can hear is the wind and the trees and the birds. And just the sound of your paddle in the water. I mean, I'm not a very religious person, but that's as close as it gets for me. I feel at home. I feel in my own element out here.

Beth had defined spirituality as, “A feeling that you get sometimes when you are happy and you are in a place that is beautiful and makes you feel good {pause} it is a feeling.” It seems that ‘home’ may carry a similar definition for her, as she said that she feels in her “own element” when in the Boundary Waters. For Beth, that feeling seems to come amidst those quiet moments on the lake. Quiet times in the canoe as similarly depicted by Nancy as spiritual experiences. She explained:

Probably when we were paddling around in the evening, all alone on the lake and then when we came – like I saw the moon and everything was still and we stopped paddling and just sat taking it in as the moon rose. I was suddenly like, “Oh, I feel,” – it took that long. But in the past, it’s really taken like 14 days for me to really feel like I’ve let go. I mean that’s been since – I mean I haven’t done that since college, to be out for that long. But it really like, to feel like I really let go of all that baggage, I don’t – I have a bit, but yeah, last night, I was like, I had that feeling kind of. . . It’s not the denial letting go, like, “Oh, I’m going to distract myself and think about something else.” Like it feels like it truly starts melting away rather than “Oh, I’m going to have a beer and let go.” It’s more like it’s kind of actually providing better perspective. I know that that’s the hard thing, that kind of letting go . . . You really have to let go of that other stuff to have anything like that happen.

Here we see that for Nancy part of finding quiet is “letting go” or not allowing herself to be distracted by tasks that get in the way of a new or different perspective. Nancy talked about “letting go” and related the feeling to concepts of time, or as mentioned earlier, comfort. In the last sentence it becomes clear that “letting go” is a necessary element of the phenomena for her. For Nancy, the time is not necessarily a component of the time it takes to get her systems down, but rather to let go of concerns from her everyday life that tend to consume her thoughts. Her explanation of how letting go is different in this sort of scenario provides a glimpse at how important and rare these sorts of experiences are for her. Nancy went on to share some of the “baggage” and it was clear that it had weighed heavily on her and continued to, but the quiet on the lake as the moon rose provided perspective and opened her up to a spiritual experience. Most

important here, we see that for some people the setting doesn't just allow them to let go of the baggage by distracting them, but instead by providing an entirely different perspective that helps them gauge how important or unimportant certain baggage really is.

During the one interview with two participants, Eric and Ken spoke of a calm on the lake providing a special moment:

Eric: This morning, especially, it was real calm and just had a little bit of fog on the water, and we got up before the sunrise, and it was really nice. That's – this morning was picture perfect, and that's kind of what I come for. *Ken:* I think we made that comment in that moment. This is what you come to the Boundary Waters for, the way it was right then, this morning. Especially after the wind we had had the last few days. *Eric:* The water was just smooth. *Ken:* It was like a mirror. [I: Yeah. How did you feel in that moment?] *Eric:* Really like nothing else mattered. It was just real calming. *Ken:* It is rare that my mind is that calm.

Here the stillness of the water seems to be a metric for the calm in the Eric and Ken's lives. The flat water seemed to be representing not only non-existent winds but mental quiet. Ken had previously talked about how stressful his work environment is saying, "I have what I would call a demanding job. I get called on Saturdays. I get called on Sundays. I get paged when I am at Sunday School at church or whatever, and I just need time to, as they say, recharge my batteries." Indeed, the setting seemed to provide a stark contrast that was welcomed. As he noted, "that is what they had come to the Boundary Waters for, the way it was right then." Reflecting on the interview, it appeared they described the world around them as right and/or perfect; it was moment where they were getting a sense of how things should be, or at least it was a counter point to the stress of the everyday that creates a better balance.

For many participants, the quiet setting provides that complete contrast to their daily lives where technology is constantly at their fingertips. Brian, a self described busy father of two, described his spiritual experiences as times when, "I take moments to just think about {pause}

know that he {the Lord} is always there.” He seemed to convey that finding that time for those moments was tough back home saying:

It’s just being out here as I say to my colleagues back to my office, don’t have the Blackberry, no electronic interference, Kathy and I both appreciate that since we’re pretty ‘connected’ in our jobs, so it’s important to just leave that behind. Unplugging and just being on God’s time so you’re up during with the daylight for the quiet sunrise and you’re taking it easy in the tents during the dark, while you and I both have watches and may have our routines, but we do in the morning what we do in the evening, and it doesn’t really matter. It gives us a lot more of those moments to just think about ourselves and our Lord.

Clearly Brian’s experiences in the wilderness provided far less interference and allowed a different schedule to arise that included more time to think in spiritual ways. His comments alluded to the fact that he needs time to be unplugged and out of touch with work. Also within the quote, he mentioned “God’s time,” speaking to the way that he tended to experience quiet parts of the day such as the actual sunrise and sunset differently than he does at home. Carol, a trip leader for a group of six women talked about some of the differences saying, “It’s just, it’s perfect, it’s peaceful, it’s no hustle and bustle, just you, your thoughts, your friends, you’re – it is all in one spot.” During her interview Carol had said that she was not very spiritual, but noted:

In my own way I guess I am spiritual. The tranquility and sharing it with friends is spiritual, to me that is what I go for. That’s what I, that is what I cherish, just- I am lucky . . .it is not certain moments, but the whole experience. There are different feelings in different moments, but it is all just accomplishments.

It is understandable that Carol focused on the accomplishments of her group, of which she was the leader. Carol had taken groups of four to six friends on such wilderness trips for four years in a row and outside of the interview noted that most of her friends didn’t have the skills or ability to do the trip on their own. She noted that it is amazing that they get as far as they did. It seemed that the mix of the accomplishments and the tranquil environment that doesn’t have too much

hustle and bustle is what she cherished in her own way.

Not having everyday demands, like participants may have had back home, seemed to shape many perspectives. Barb, a college age woman with her boyfriend said:

I notice the peace more when I'm camping and alone. It is right in front of me. There's no one here. None of the busy day-to-day stuff. So it's kind of more obvious. I do find peace with other things, too, but this is definitely the most peaceful.

It seemed that Barb found peace in the simplicity of the experience. When asked how she defines spirituality she said, "Going into the wilderness and being by myself and letting my mind wander, thinking about how I feel." She later talked about how maybe being spiritual is just being alone and considered whether or not she could do that out of wilderness saying, "I think I could fit it in during a time like my shower every morning, but being out in the wilderness is so much prettier." Here we see that being alone in a pretty setting seems to inspire her to notice the peace. Laura, also a younger woman, spoke of the role of quiet on her spiritual experiences in wilderness and compared them to time out of wilderness saying:

I keep coming back here in search of why I keep coming back here. It's an ongoing process I'm sure. I think the ability to not have the motorized vehicles and constant surrounding people and extraneous noises and stuff like that, and being able to focus on a small group of people that you're traveling with and the conversation and dialogue and intimacy you can gather from a small group without cell phones or computers and stuff distracting you.

Similar to others, Laura hinted at how being away from technology was important to her and went on to highlight how intimate it is to communicate with a small group in a place without those distractions. Her comment makes even more sense knowing that she was a canoe guide. For her, spirituality was, "A process of respecting a gorgeous place; creating spiritual bonds with my groups of campers; or either a young person or myself completing a difficult portage and feeling that accomplishment." Her comments often focused on the campers, even telling of times

she suspected that they were having spiritual moments in the quiet saying, “One morning, really beautiful and a little chilly, I could see that they understood, they treasured that quiet time.” The campers’ spiritual experiences seemed inspired by the coupling of bits of adversity such as cold with the quiet beauty of the place.

Being able to find quiet and just focus on the task at hand or focus on nothing at all seemed to be a gateway to spiritual experiences or be a spiritual experience on its own for many visitors. Some visitor’s comments included references to time to relax; it is important to consider the relationship between relaxing and quiet, as well as the relationship of each to spiritual experiences. When asked to expand on a comment about feeling more spiritually aware in the wilderness Chris explained:

Probably for time to relax, time to think, time to embrace the wilderness, just to, I guess, enjoy life. You can do that with all the busy stuff, the work and stuff, but out here there is nothing to worry about.

Later in the interview Chris added that his trips are very spiritual because, “I have all the time to think about this; at home I get to think about it too, but not in the same way.” Indeed relaxation, quiet, and spirituality seemed to go hand in hand for many visitors. Chris, a believer in God, appeared to have time to consider God in ways he doesn’t normally, saying, “Up here I can connect, think about {hesitation} believing that there is something helping or guiding us through life.” It is not appropriate to say that relaxation in a beautiful place like the Boundary Waters always led to spiritual thoughts for participants, but it seemed to go hand in hand in this case. For some participants, putting themselves out in wilderness seemed to be a deliberate act of opening themselves up to the possibilities of higher powers. Rather than thinking about everyday distractions, participants seemed to use the quiet time to consider thoughts that they are otherwise too busy for.

Many interviewees spoke clearly about the impact of *finding quiet* on their spiritual experiences and even more explicitly highlighted the way the setting sits in opposition to their everyday. Charlie, a scout troop leader spoke of the ways that the wilderness holds lessons and specifically highlighted the spiritual lesson of wilderness saying, “Slowing down and paying attention more. You don’t have to be running 100 miles an hour to get things done and get places in life.” When asked if he had specific spiritual experiences, Charlie responded, “Like now, sitting down and just listening and watching what is going on around us.” For him, being able to sit down and reflect seemed spiritual and his spirituality appeared to have less to do with worship and more to do with having faith and understanding that there are always lessons around. Taking time to be quiet and reflect was an important part of his trip. Similarly, Laura, mentioned earlier in this section, noted, “There’s less extraneous factors going on, you can take a lot more time to reflect upon yourself and certain situations.” Laura made that comment while talking about how important she feels it is to get her teen girl campers away from home in order to develop; both self esteem and “maybe spiritually.”

There were many words and phrases that seemed to refer to the quiet. David used the phrase “clear your head,” to capture the idea of quiet. He spoke of the process saying:

Here you can clear your head and get some fresh air. [I: For sure. That idea of kind of clearing your head, what does that mean for you?] Well, I mean, you take phone calls and emails and all that kind of stuff that goes on with work. Or the day to day grind of kids, getting them to and from school, or whatever you got to do. And you can just set all that aside and just relax. Just kind of re-center. I don’t know if it’s an active thought process to get to that, but it just kind of naturally happens.

Indeed, being away from the grind seemed to trigger this sort of thought process for many people. While we can imagine people just laying along a shoreline and relaxing, often it seems that there is more to it than just quieting the mind. The setting, for a variety of reasons, inspired

people to not just go blank and rest, but find quiet and contemplate meaningful things. David later linked his comment to his spirituality when he noted, “What we were talking about earlier is a good example of spirituality, when it is so calm and we just listen and it is so cool hear so much, to be part of this.” David’s initial explanation of quiet didn’t obviously connect to his spirituality, but his other comment signaled that finding quiet and finding calm were part of the same spiritual process.

Whether participants were thinking about how a place like the Boundary Waters came to be, how lucky and accomplished they felt for taking a trip in the wild, or reflecting on the meaning of their life, it always seemed that there was more to “relaxing” than just kicking up their heels. Most participants emphasized these points and many made direct mention of the information technology that they are happy to detach from. In the quotes below, there are again direct references to getting away from the digital elements of daily life and finding a certain quiet that is personally meaningful. Not all participants cited below found getting away from information technology to be a spiritual experience, but each quote helps us understand the impacts of disconnecting. In the next quote from Steve we heard of a need to disconnect. The father of two was travelling with another father and his son made it clear that his relaxation was not what he calls a spiritual experience. Steve explained:

Fred {paddling partner} and I are in the architectural field, so it’s always – even with the economy, it’s {pause} We’ve been able to hold strong through that, and normal day-to-day life for us is go, go, go, and at some point you just have to disconnect, and unwind, and take advantage of this.

Here he depicted his desire to separate himself from his busy everyday situation. For him it is not a disconnect that spawns spiritual experiences, but it is an opportunity that he aimed to take advantage of in his own way. Steve went on to say:

[When you say away from the hustle and bustle, how does that feel different to you?]
Well, if we're looking for words, then . . . peaceful, tranquil, kind of let's you reconnect with the outdoors, and that sort of thing that you typically don't get, I mean coming from the Twin Cities, everything is go, go, go all the time, so it's just nice to be able to get away, come up here, and not have to worry about much other than having some water to drink, and making sure the kids stay safe.

Clearly much of the same language was being used without the experience being considered spiritual. This observation forces us to think about the nature of spirituality. Since many experiences seem to be similarly defined, it may have distilled down to how comfortable individuals were with the term itself. Though this and the following quote lack the spiritual experience focus, they both give a good perspective on how the setting provides a disconnect. For Steve, his disconnect with the everyday allowed room for him to "reconnect with the outdoors." The "peaceful, tranquil" setting appeared to allow that disconnect to occur.

Jason similarly spoke about the grasp that his office has on him and noted how important it is to get away to a quiet place saying:

It's been really nice, really relaxing, which is what I was coming up here for just to get away from everything. I've always been into the wilderness and outdoors, cooking on a camp stove. A lot of people think that's a lot of work but it's still at the same time relaxing getting away from microwaves and that kind of thing, and computers and all that. I mostly now just needed a break from work in order to relax. [I: Is that something you look for in a trip?] Definitely and the fact that cell phones don't work here is great. There was a time when people leaving on family vacation in the car and would be gone for a week and we'd be out of contact. But now if somebody's driving to work and they forgot their cell phone, they're gonna turn around and go home. They come up here for a week and just be away from everything. I enjoy that. Not that I don't care what's going on. It's just nice to know that work's not gonna get a hold of me and people aren't gonna call me for just trivial matters.

In the beginning of his interview when asked if he would consider any part of his trip to be a spiritual experience, Jason stated that he didn't consider his trips to hold a spiritual aspect because he was an atheist and linked the word to a belief in something greater. Without any other

probing or mentioning of spiritual, later, while talking about fishing from the canoe in the wind, he inserted the word saying, “I guess moments like those where I just have time to think about how small I feel in this big place, I think others may consider those spiritual thoughts.”

In contrast, Dan explicitly stated that he found his trips provided spiritual connections to a higher power. He made specific comments about getting away from technology:

Absolutely, very relaxing, we all spend way too much time with our cell phones, emails, and texts, but when you get up here, you can't worry about that, so it is absolutely relaxing . . . I don't know if it is because we break away from the demands of the everyday world and all the modern stuff that we have and it gives you time to be reflective and introspective, but being here allows you to be reflective and introspective and spiritual. I think it lets you get in touch with all of those things. It may be mainly because it gets rid of all of the distracters that keep you from being able to reach that.

From this quote we see that for Dan cell phones and other “modern stuff” is distracting but wilderness allows time for introspection, reflection, and connection. Having the quiet time is what is special to him. Also focusing on the quiet, Mark noted how amazing it is to leave behind the variety of noise that accompanies his job. He said:

There's always somebody looking for my input, my advice. I'm well known in the trade as somebody who – I wouldn't say a no-nonsense person because I do have my funny side, but I'm the sergeant major. I'm the guy with all the experience that even the higher ups will look to. And I'm very, very proud of that fact. So when I come here, I'm away from the cell phones and computers and the people, the noise, the machinery. We do a lot of work in the city and so it's the constant driving through traffic. Oh, I come up here with no phones ringing and I listen to that almost buzz sound of quiet. It's wonderful. Just words can't describe it. It's just wonderful. To listen to loons. Be serenaded by loons. To hear an eagle scream the other day, for whatever it was squawking about, and to watch him sail overhead, beautiful, just beautiful.

Here he spoke of his job as if it is something that he couldn't otherwise hide from or take a break from. Additionally, it seemed that the quiet that visitors found could become even more meaningful when wildlife filled the quiet with their wild sounds. With Mark, it was possible to draw that connection between the quiet and spirituality. He noted, “We look at everything, good

and bad, and know that God allows this to happen . . .that's why it is a spiritual thing, because we look at this and believe that at one time, all of North America was a wilderness . . . we've been blessed to be able to make this trip."

Rob, of a similar age to Mark, also stressed the importance of disconnecting from his everyday life and tuning into the surroundings. When asked if he feels different when in the wilderness, Rob specifically stated:

It is almost a sigh of relief that you are out of the hustle and bustle. The cultural pressures and all of that. Because in today's society, it is bricks and mortar and technology. You know, get the kids away from the iphones, the ipads, the I this and I that. It is good to get them where they can just get a chance to see how people have to react when everything they carry is with them; it is special to see them tune in to this environment.

Rob, who had said, "Oh, just being here is spiritual," and "We pretty much live the spiritual life," seemed to be stressing the importance of finding a space that didn't allow conveniences and technology. He seemed to be noting how nice it is to watch the boys in his scout troop interact in different ways than normal, without technology, and be immersed in activities where they were forced to carry all their belongings.

While some participants spoke of the technology they were able to leave behind, other interviewees instead referenced how the wilderness helped bring thoughts and feelings forward. After describing moments of spiritual thinking, Tom, a father travelling with his youngest of five kids was asked if the setting, beyond just escaping some of the obligations of daily life, contributed to those moments of thinking. He responded:

I definitely think so, you know you have your work life and your home life, and things are always chaotic as you're trying to balance that stuff . . .the fact that you're out here, in this, you know, you kind of lose, well I don't want to say lose a sense of that, but other things come forward, other thoughts and feelings.

In the middle of the quote he mentions the "fact that you're out here," seemingly stressing the

importance the wilderness setting. Almost redundantly, he later emphasized the point when the conversation was focused on why he takes trips in the Boundary Waters. He said:

I think it is just the escaping from all of the normal everyday stuff. You know maybe the things that you don't get a chance to think of or don't have a lot of time for; they come to the forefront when you are out here.

Again the idea of escaping became salient but rather than it depicting the visitor hiding from a reality in a self-destructive way, we see them finding time to consider things they normally don't have time for. This is not a case of simply being away from the everyday, but being away to something inspiring.

Deb, a PhD student on a trip with her family and friends, explained why getting away to a quiet place, away from an array of technology and her workload was clearly needed. She said:

This is what this area used to look like before it was developed and those roads and technology and everything else. I mean, obviously I use the word solitude even though clearly I'm not alone; I'm with a big group of people. But just, I think again, it's really getting away from it all. Getting away from the city and the cell phone and Facebook and sort of the hectic-ness of it. The PhD, getting away from the PhD for a little while. Getting away from the city and the job and that sort of thing, and just taking a few days to chill out and play cards or whatever and enjoy the scenery.

Though this comment doesn't include a reference to spirituality, we can see that the setting is clearly offering something different. The pace is clearly important, moving from "hectic-ness" to "chill" seems to be an integral part of "getting away."

In much of the cited data, it is difficult to distinguish particular moments that are more intensely spiritual than others. Often the participants conveyed that their whole experience is spiritual, that the feeling exists either constantly or frequently enough that it is hard to distinguish the bounds of particular experiences. What is clear is that the quiet, in its various forms, is helping to shape many of the experiences.

A more acute experience that was shared by Jeff. First, to frame Jeff's perspective,

consider the following exchange:

[Coming back to this trip in particular, would you say that you've had any spiritual experiences on this trip?] I'd say yes. I have been able to be really thankful for what I've got, I mean we are all getting along great . . . And to be around {his family} 24 hours and in the same canoe, I am really happy about it. To have a wife that is so into it . . . it is almost like team building. Mainly, I have the time to reflect on those feelings, that is what shapes the whole experience.

For him, moments where you can think about what matters, what is important, those seem to complete his spiritual experiences. Jeff explicitly addressed how the setting shapes his spiritual experiences by citing a movie quote, saying:

I think it's easier to be spiritual in the wilderness. If you've seen that movie *Razor's Edge*, Bill Murray says, "It's easy to be the holy man on a mountaintop, but it's hard when you're in society." But he kind of made it sound like if you're really going to, if it's really going to be of value, you've got to bring it down to the rest of the people. And I think that's hard. And I think that's – I don't know. I mean the church experience fails for a lot of people because they just don't feel it. Where I think it's a heck of a lot easier if you're up here. You know, like I think at a Y camp or another camp like – my wife worked at a camp where they had vespers and stuff like that, and I think it flows pretty well there, in the outdoors. Maybe even just in simpler times. Whereas in our stressful times we have now – well, I mean it's a different kind of stress. I mean we have like probably more leisure time than they ever did. But it's goofy. I think it's harder for the church to reach that stuff. I mean at least, for me, I would much rather go to a church that was outside than in. I can listen to a lot of stuff when I'm sitting out looking at the lake that maybe would be harder to listen to inside of a building when it's hot.

Here we get an explanation of how society was viewed as so different from the wild. Jeff seems to say that no matter your intentions it can be hard to address certain topics when the stresses of society are ever present. Interestingly, in his life he had once been a more active church member, and wanted to again, but clearly he has trouble finding the right amount of quiet and beauty in the church setting compared to the wilderness setting.

Quiet has clearly been identified as an important and a large part of many participants' experiences. For some, quiet was notably an important part of their spiritual experiences in the

BWCAW. The goal here was not to define specific subjective terms, but rather to describe and better understand the heart of experiences. Sometimes that is done by considering word meanings within the context they were used. The term quiet was often described as comprised of space and time.

While quiet was not always related to spirituality, it is important to note that many quotes on the topic depicted quiet as an outcome of being away from daily routines:

‘expectations/structure’; ‘people/technology’; ‘stresses/noise.’ Numerous visitors cited the relief of not having to respond to their phones and computers and some went as far as to say that they wish they could go back and not deal with them again. Quotes often captured how participant experiences with the quiet allowed them to feel more aware of what was personally important, and more certain and comfortable with themselves.

Clearly these processes are distinctly different for each individual. However, for most it appears their experience in the BWCAW provides a sense of calm and/or peace, and presents them with the time and space to have what many defined as spiritual experiences. As noted throughout the section, many of the themes are expanded on through the results.

4.2.4 The Importance of Primitive

In the Boundary Waters, there is a rich history of both the close-to-nature lifestyles of indigenous people and of the various explorers and fur traders living off the land. Today it may be hard to imagine living in that way and doing so over long periods of time. Despite that, it appeared easy for visitors to the Boundary Waters to imagine the way things were back in those times. Eric commented, “I remember thinking, if I look away from camp, this is probably how it looked 1,000 years ago, it was pristine, we couldn’t hear anything, we couldn’t see anything; just trees and water.” Like the indigenous tribes and voyageurs of the past, today’s visitors paddle the

lakes, most with wooden paddles and even a few with wooden canoes. They portage over the land between the lakes hauling their canoes on their shoulders, and make shelter along the shores where the reach of lakes often affords them distant views of the area. Some even fish and gather in order to eat or at least to supplement the food they brought along. It is also not uncommon to cook food on a fire in the fire grate. Compared to some of the rock and snow covered alpine wilds of the western states, the Boundary Waters may be considered more hospitable or survivable by primitive ways than other wilderness areas. Many interviewees spoke of the ways they compare themselves to those paddlers of the distant past or at least told of taking part in practices that were very different from their normal ways of life. Often the participants noted that the experiences had spiritual elements. For the purposes of this study, it is not imperative to define primitive in a certain way. The adjective rustic or verb roughing (it) could even be used interchangeably. The aim is to describe how wilderness often requires visitors take part in basic life-supporting tasks without the use of modern technologies, and to describe the important elements of those experiences. Some visitors appeared to find these experiences to be spiritual, while others found them to be just simply meaningful wilderness experiences. The goal here is to describe the variety of such experiences how some inspired or related to spirituality.

For some participants experiencing the primitive is less of a spiritual practice and more of a commitment to survival. On the first day of her four day trip, Linda, a mother of two travelling with her kids, her husband and her brother-in-law explained the reasons her and her family had for decided to visit the boundary waters. She said:

We just are here. My husband really wanted to and it finally seemed like we were at a good point with the kids; we have been camping for several years, getting more and more rustic as the kids get older, because it is getting easier. This is certainly more rustic than what we have done. To be honest, I don't think any of us enjoys the rustic part so much, for us {pause} I think we are just beginners and just trying to survive. I guess that

because this is a natural progression, it seemed like the right time to do it. I just hope we are up to the challenge and able to stay dry and fed.

Indeed, living in a rustic or primitive way can be challenging. For some, as seemed to be the case with Linda, taking part in primitive practices seemed to be difficult and potentially lacked enjoyable moments. Notably, Linda was at the beginning of her trip and her perspective on the experience may have changed by the middle or end of her trip, or not. While certainly there were those that didn't view primitive tasks and experiences as meaningful or spiritual, many participants communicated otherwise.

Speaking generally about various benefits of visiting wilderness, Deb, a graduate student who was visiting the area with her family and friends said:

I'd like to think that coming out here would sort of have a positive affect on most people, a spiritual effect. Obviously some people would probably not enjoy coming out and camping and having to use a latrine and not being able to shower for three or four days or 12 days or however long the trip is. But for most people, I'd like to think it is a positive character building experience, {pause} a good chance to just live simply. Especially considering, you know, you tend to have little trials and tribulations, like ours, and people tend overcome these things and remember how everyone can work together as a team and accomplish basic tasks that keep everyone healthy and safe.

The related back-story is that her group of eight had forgotten one large tent leaving them with only two two-person tents. The day before the group had spent a couple of hours fashioning a shelter from a tarp and a variety of downed tree limbs and pine boughs. Before the interview Deb explained that they had tried to design the shelter to catch as much wind as possible to keep the mosquitoes down, but simultaneously shield them from any rain. The act of building shelter was fresh in her mind and was often referenced in her answers. Deb's scenario was an outstanding example of how a wilderness experience forced some primitive problem solving. Without a third tent the group was forced to fashion a shelter out of minimal human made materials. For her it seemed to be an example of the wilderness having a spiritual effect. There appeared to be

something about the process of trying to live simply that reinforced group bonding and represented a positive or spiritual effect.

While various forms of technology, such as fancy tents, are certainly making their way into the wilderness, multiple participants emphasized the importance of approaching wilderness in a minimalist manner in order to support what Mary called the “wilderness experience.” Mary, a wilderness canoe guide, explained:

I don't let my girls {campers} bring in much, no music or battery games; with them I emphasize just bringing the basics. I like them to just experience a slower pace of life where they have to use their feet and boats. They have to set up tents every night and move around each day and cook food over a fire, just really simple, back to basics I guess. It seems like they appreciate that . . . I know that I find it spiritual to just have the basics and be creative.

Within her statement she used the terms *slower*, *basics* and *creative*. It seemed that those terms were elements of a primitive wilderness experience. She may have been emphasizing how the minimalist approach can facilitate visitors looking beyond their possessions, thinking about what the environment provides and allows. Mary later shared more on her perspective when asked what she meant by ‘spiritual’ in a particular instance:

Well, I mean, I just think about how proud I feel to be able to move so many miles and be dependent on myself and my body. I also just remember the basics, how clean the water feels and the fact that I can drink from nature. You know, I can eat blueberries right off the plants along the portage. You know all those simple things that we take for granted. [I: What are you hoping for them {campers} to think about when you bring it up the “basics?”] Just how simple it can be, and I know I say that a lot. I mean just the fact that people spent their entire lives paddling just to trade and experience different cultures and they always carried their food on their back or fished for it, hunted for it or picked it. I just really want them to realize how involved people were with their lives back then. I kind of feel like we move so fast paced now-a-days we don't really think about where did that meat come from, how long did it take for them to make this bun. I really want them to realize that it is a process.

To Mary, spirituality clearly involved elements of simplicity and getting back to the basics.

Notably the simplicity of the past paddlers' existences was present in her thinking and teaching. She appeared to be drawing comparisons between modern lives that have distractions that limit people from thinking about the basics and wilderness experiences that promote such thoughts. Her reference to being *involved* seemed particularly important in her comment. Whether it is being involved in moving a canoe and gear from camp to camp, or moving a berry from a plant to your mouth, the direct or immediate involvement seemed to be what is important to her and spiritual.

Like Mary, other interviewees seemed to voice that primitive could be defined as lacking signs or touches of modernity. Sarah explained:

My spiritual connection with nature, it just kind of reminds me of getting back to the basics of life, and the beauty of it. It's a good time for reflection with not a lot of distractions around. It's a good time to reflect. I don't know what it is about nature, about being able to go out and survive like our ancestors so long ago did. To just simply enjoy the beauty around you, and take note of the simple, natural things in life, I think that's a big part of it for me, too. There's so much here, it's not like you have to be in the hustle and bustle of everything. You can just look around you, and there's plenty to keep you entertained. You can survive off the land if you have to.

Beyond taking part in life-supporting tasks, Sarah more broadly emphasized how she enjoys the beauty of the basics. The reminder of those basics is something that she obviously described as a spiritual connection. It is however difficult to tell if that connection is definable as a spiritual experience, or simply a spiritual component of the broader wilderness experience. Notably, like others, Sarah referenced "surviving like our ancestors." It seemed that recalling history was one way participants were motivated to practice the basics, as well as a way that they found purpose and comfort in their actions.

Connecting with others was a common theme related to primitive experiences. Deb drew an association between experiencing the primitive and "communing with nature." For her

“communing with nature” represented spirituality considering she defined spirituality by saying, “sort of convening with nature, or finding community with nature; there you go, that’s a better definition for me.” Deb was asked to elaborate:

[I: What would you say entails, as you said, ‘communing with nature,’ as far as your experiences?] I think doing a lot of the tasks that camping requires just sort of gives you a feeling like you’re a part of it or you’re connected, compared to back at home. Here, while we do our things, we are seeing the different animals and seeing them in their habitat, and we are sharing their habitat, I think it is always kind of a realization – that we can get our water from the same place as others, and sometimes, like when fishing we are getting our food from the same place. I mean, it’s not always communing with nature. Sometimes it’s sort of going against nature, fighting the wind when paddling or having to carry all your supplies, but just being reminded that we are sort of connected . . . usually we’re so disconnected from nature that you sort of forget about how we can purify water and can cook over the open wood fire and that sort of thing. Those tasks make you think about the connections.

Her elaboration brought up many points. Deb clearly felt that she could connect with nature when in the wilderness and made “realizations” that involved understanding the sources of life-supporting things like water, and food. She seemed to say that when experiencing nature, sometimes she was learning how it works for her, and other times she was faced with the reality that it was working against us. Both of these realizations seemed to be evidence of Deb recognizing how dependent she is on her natural surroundings.

The following statement also captured that perspectives, though a distinct attachment to spirituality wasn’t made. Barb, the female college student with her boyfriend, was on her first trip into the boundary waters without her father. The pair saw the trip as a major challenge that they wanted to try to tackle together. Her response to a follow up question told of her feelings toward certain primitive aspects of their trip:

[How did you feel as you tried to navigate and were struggling?] It was frustrating . . . But the whole time, we just thought, okay if people could do this without maps we should be able to do it with maps. Like I thought I’d get mad or we’d start fighting or something, especially as the wind was making it hard for us to steer but we just took it slow and paid close attention to the shape of the bays and looked for the portage and found it. The map

didn't seem quite right but we figured it out . . . I guess that was just part of me wanting to see if I could do it; I was excited and both Josh and I knew that it was special.
 {pause} Other than finding the portages and campsites, there is a lot of stuff to do like that. Josh words it as like "fun chores." Like now we get to make our fire. Now, we get to collect wood. Now, I get to do dishes. It's chores, but it's still so fun because it's outside and special.

In her case "special" seemed to refer to a feeling of accomplishment. Though the more primitive tasks of navigating and doing camp chores may have been challenging, they were clearly important to her experience, evoked positive feelings, and seemed to remind her of past travelers who did similar tasks with less technology. Notably though, it wasn't clear that she considered the tasks to be spiritual experiences. Despite the lack of a reference to spirituality, Barb's comments demonstrated how tasks that may be tedious at home became 'fun' in the wilderness because they had to be done outside in different ways; ways that lacked modern assistance.

It is important to consider that while actually engaged in a primitive act, such as building a fire (without newspaper and lighter fluid), or cooking a freshly caught fish, it can be hard to process and reflect on the meaning/ importance of the moment. Sometimes it seemed that visitors reflected on the experience later in ways that were special or spiritual. Jason for example shared the following when he asked if water plays a role in his spiritual experiences:

There is something about when it's a windy day and you're struggling to stay in one spot to fish and I wonder why I'm doing this. Yeah. And just- 'survival sense' seems like an extreme term but that feeling is there. I guess I don't think about it until later, back home. Sometimes I just go to the refrigerator take something out, throw it in the microwave, my meal's done, throw it in the dishwasher. In moments like that I will recall how much work I did in the wild to accomplish the same thing. I think about how special it is that I can use my skills and do things without things like a microwave. Just being able to drink the water - of course filter it - but that's one thing that when I get home some people actually ask me, do you pack in your water? I say 'really'? - There are a thousand lakes there. I think about some of their comments and become proud of what I accomplished. I think that pride is spiritual. Like I think back on fishing, like I said, in survival mode, and then it may seem spiritual.

Jason's comments emphasize how certain primitive tasks are only considered spiritual upon reflection. It is important to note here that he was on a solo trip. His mention of the wind was especially appropriate considering the wind had been blowing consistently, night and day, for nearly five days. It is a great example of how a basic act such as keeping a canoe in one spot can feel difficult in the moment, but simultaneously may produce meaningful spiritual memories. It may be that wilderness provided Jason both an opportunity for primitive experiences, and also equally important, an opportunity to get away from the everyday, where things like microwaves can detach you from the reality of securing a meal without technology. Getting away clearly helped Jason you realize the differences between the primitive and modern.

Getting away to the primitive also seemed to help some participants let go of stressful concerns that were a part of their everyday. Amidst talking about how spiritual his trip was, one participant, Mark, began sharing some struggles he was having at work. He concluded those thoughts by explaining:

If we could have, we would have stuffed all that stuff in a locker or something like that before coming here. But you know, we get up here and all those cares get left behind anyway. You come out here and you end up talking about what's pertinent, right? There is always something to do that gives you perspective; I'll get the water, you get the fire started, and that type of thing.

Mark clearly explained that focusing on the basics such as getting water and starting the fire, remembering what is pertinent, helped relieve his stresses tremendously. It is difficult to say if he is pointing to those things 'to do' as spiritual, but Mark began that string of thoughts by saying, "To me, they're {referring to all experiences on his trip} all spiritual."

Similarly, other participants found comfort in practicing and knowing the basics. Talking about the outdoor skills that she and her husband have, Lisa stated, "It's a way of keeping us spiritually grounded I think. The world gets pretty insane sometimes, and it's just a way of

knowing that you're capable of living with little or nothing; no matter what happens I can survive." Having and practicing primitive skills clearly seemed to keep her "grounded." Notably, Lisa finds her whole life to be spiritual; where she defined spiritual as, "A freeness of being that allows me to be relaxed no matter the setting." Again the relation between practicing primitive skills and spiritual experiences isn't entirely obvious. Clearly some participants were identifying the spiritual connections on their own and others may have been signaling their importance as related spirituality without explicitly making the connection.

For some, primitive may have had less to do with the involvement in the basics and more to do with an opportunity to most simply see the primitive conditions that paddlers of the past had to deal with on a daily basis. The term primitive came up for Rob, a man in his late sixties, as he was recalling especially spiritual experiences from past trips. He said:

I have been marooned at some places for two-three days time because of the weather. But again, those are things that you have to learn to live with and that is how people lived for centuries. It sort of stunk but it was neat to see how being here, in this primitive place can mean that you adapt and deal. That is how they did it. I am not down on technology, I am just saying that you know, this place has its place also; it is important to see this side and respect it" (Rob, 2010).

For him, a seasoned scout leader, every year includes a trip into the Boundary Waters and recall that each trip in its entirety is considered spiritual. It was clear that he savored every moment of his trips and especially appreciated getting to "see this side and respect it," referring to the primitive side. His acknowledgement that he adapted and dealt with the situations seemed to demonstrate how primitive experiences can open people up to new ways of being.

For many, including Rob, it seemed that having and using primitive skills was an important part of what defines them. Another scout leader, Charlie, noted:

We ought to be able to get by with the basic skills. Ideally, we'd be able to find some edible food, be able to catch fish if we have to survive. It's a tradition for the troop to test

themselves like this, to go somewhere where they don't have the conveniences. And here they've hauled their canoes and all their gear across the portages. And on the way back, they had to haul it again. It is who we are, we know we are capable of it, and it is just so important to remember.

Hearing the words "tradition," "test," and "who we are" made it clear that completing tasks was highly important to this group. While his scouts may not have found the tasks to be spiritual, he seemed to view their growth as a spiritual step saying, {after they complete the tasks} "Their mental outlook on things will be a little different." Here it wasn't clear that the tasks were considered primitive, or that they were spiritual, but the above quote does emphasize how learning and practicing basic survival skills can be seen as evidence of individual development. Upon completing this interview I wished the group a safe remainder of their trip. Another member of the group commented that at this point they have their systems down pat and the rest of the trip should be smooth. The comment emphasized the stress they put on learning and completing tasks; it was clearly a core part of their experience.

Seemingly by the nature of her profession, Jen, a police officer travelling with her husband and their kids, had a similar take on the importance of having certain skills. She explained her connection to wilderness:

[I: Do you have a personal connection to wilderness, and if so how would you describe it?] Being able to know where we, as humans, came from and trying to in some way connect with that because I see us, in the United States anyway, getting so far away from that that I'm worried. And when we do have emergencies and things, I see people who can't survive without some little technological gadget that wouldn't really be necessary, but they don't know how to start a fire . . . Remembering and revisiting those skills is certainly part of the reason we come here. My husband is a real minimalist, almost spiritual about it. Figuring out what's important and how to make it part of yourself and how to just, like I said, keeping an eye on the weather and staying in tune with that during the day. Okay, do we need to eat sooner or later or things like that. Not having to eat because it's 12:00, which maybe keeps you closer to taking only what you need.

Making the connection to the past is obviously important to her and it is clear that learning certain skills is an important part of that. According to her, being a minimalist may be spiritual

for her husband. The beginning of the quote seems solely focused on the skills and survival, but towards the end we see the reference to conservation in a way that seems more values based. Interestingly, through the interview I constantly felt as though I was talking with a police officer, but I recall that in the moment, as she mentioned only taking what you need, I got the sense that their dedication to simplicity was equally, if not more important than safety.

Thinking back to the legal definition of wilderness, remember that it is a place where humans do not remain; a place they return from to the comforts of their everyday. In contrast to that everyday, visitors often exhibit primitive skills in order to survive and experience a setting that may lie in sharp contrast to their homes and daily habits. Tasks such as gathering water, setting up shelter, and preparing foods are almost always components of visitors' wilderness experiences can be considered primitive. In many cases these experiences seemed to inspire spiritual thoughts. Not everyone described wilderness experiences along these lines, but many participants explained that they value the *primitive* components of the wilderness experience in a spiritual manner.

From the data, it seemed that immersion in the primitive, a simple way of living, was part of participants' wilderness experiences and in many cases seemed sought out by visitors. Participants described how the tasks helped them remember the basic human needs. They rediscovered what it meant to survive as a human being were led to feel more grounded. Often it seemed that spirituality understood as a component of the process of re-discovery. The prefix 're' is applicable to not only to re-discovering, but to re-focusing and re-centering, on the important things in life, as described by some participants. For many interviewees, the primitive actions seemed evoke spiritual thoughts in the moment, or inspire spiritual reflections later on. Through the analysis, while more closely analyzing other elements of wilderness spirituality,

primitive experiences arose again and again. The raw, unfiltered, reality of living without the conveniences of home certainly appeared to spark many memorable moments and spiritually meaningful thoughts. In the next sections, novel experiences will be described and physical challenges reviewed, and in many cases connections to primitive elements will be highlighted.

4.2.5 Role of Novelty

Overnight trips into the BWCAW often included novel settings and activities. Not all novel experiences were relevant to this study of spirituality. Frequently novel elements were just described as fun. Other times novelty was aligned directly with spiritual experiences or combined with other attributes of an experience to be described as spiritual. What is important to consider throughout this section is that at times the novelty of an experience seemed to be a sole trigger, while at others we seem to see that it contributed in just a small way to explanation of the experience.

Novelty has several synonyms that are pertinent here: original, new, fresh, unique, and different. As in other sections, the term used by the participant will be used in the analysis and sometimes these terms will be clarified or more specifically defined. The goal here was to best understand how novelty shapes an experience and the outcomes. Similar to other setting elements, the line of questions did not specifically ask about the role of novelty within spiritual experiences, but rather novelty was identified as an important theme in spiritual experiences.

Mark, who when asked if he had any experiences he would call spiritual, said, “To me, they’re all spiritual,” explained how he felt different in the wilderness by saying:

I think what it is, what happens is the physical part of it is you’re getting out of – and somebody my age, 57 – you become very, you get into – and I don’t want to call it a rut, but you get into a very, you know, get up in the morning, press the button, the coffee goes on. Take the dog out for a walk out in the woods, come back. Eat breakfast, check over notes for the day, watch the weather, pack your lunch, go to work. And it’s all routine,

day in and day out. Here we might get chased by a bear again. Might see a wolf. Might just have a rainy day where we have to sit in the tent. And guess what? That ain't so bad. [I: Yeah. Why is that?.] Just the difference, right. You break that monotony of the everyday thing. So once you've broken that, now you go back – yes again, you'll repeat that same, get into that same groove of things like that. But just having broken it and I think of all the memories we got. And if somebody was to question me saying, "Well where did you camp the first night? And the second campsite, where was that?" I've got all those memories stored up on where I was. I've got pictures to show a lot of this. And oh, just little things that you pick up on the way. And all of this is something that breaks the everyday routine.

Importantly it was Mark's last day of his trip and he was headed back to work the following afternoon. The overarching element of his explanation was breaking out of a 'rut,' just doing something different, unpredictable. For him, escaping the routines of the everyday, the ordinary groove or 'rut,' seemed important for perspective. By noting how clear the memories are/will be in his mind, he captured how important the inherent differences in the experiences are. Clearly he desires and cherishes the breaks from his normal routines, and it seemed to be a contributing factor to why he called each experience on the trip spiritual. Additionally, we see that the unpredictable element of wilderness is important and valued. Bears, wolves, and rainy days are all cited as factors that make the place different and special. Even sitting in a tent for a whole day while it rains appears to be welcomed as it is a different experience. Later in the interview he further depicted the importance of novel experiences. He specifically recalled a time when one of his work superiors {Bob} asked where he had taken his vacation:

He expected me to say Florida or Hawaii or something like that. I told him {about the Boundary Waters} and described it. He goes, "Wow, where is it?" And he was just awestruck by this. And he brought his wife over and he started telling his wife about it. And she was something of a small-town girl, but he spoiled this woman, and because they were very rich, she says, "You know, Bob, you go live in a tent and shit out in the woods." I was immediately sad for Bob, because he will never get to see this, do this. His vacations are just like being at home in so many ways. I got to enjoy this, not once, but this is like I said, my 15th or 16th time up here. Who's better off in this world?

Mark was one of two participants over sixty years old. In both interviews with the older participants it seemed that wilderness experiences were exceptionally valued for their originality and the variety that they brought to the participants' lives.

Similar to others this interviewee described the whole of his wilderness experience as spiritual. Though it seems such declarations could provide clarity, they also muddy the phenomena and expand the boundaries of the spiritual experiences in a way that makes describing the heart of the phenomena difficult. What is clear from this interview is that the wilderness can provide novel and unpredictable experiences that are different and provide needed breaks from the everyday.

For Linda, the connection between a unique experience and her spirituality was very linear. It was her first time to a wilderness area and she had stated that she didn't have many expectations, but one hope she did have was seeing loons. It was only her first day in the wilderness. When asked if she would consider any of her experiences thus far to be spiritual, she responded, "I would say the most clear moment so far was seeing the loons right a way, it was like ah-ha, that is something unique you don't see everyday; that is part of God's creation and I am here to see it . . . and I hope to see it again." While she likely found the loon to be beautiful, she chose to point out how unique the experience is, how it was different from the everyday. Later in the interview she defined spiritual experiences as "Quiet, relaxed times, times where I am more in tune with what people have done in centuries past." The loon sighting occurred amidst her family busily packing the canoes at the put in. It seems then that the uniqueness of the scene was significant enough to be spiritual in a way that she doesn't normally have spiritual experiences.

Others similarly found specific scenes to be spiritual in novel ways. Lisa explained:

Well, there's just so much more to explore here. A person can come back so many times and come in at so many different points and see things that look similar yet very different. So it's those little new surprises that every place has that make the experience spiritual, they present themselves when you sit back and just watch and experience like watching the wind blow the waves towards us. That doesn't happen every place you go to.

For her, it seemed important to have an awareness of all that is going on around you in order to notice the new surprises that every place holds. In some ways, it seemed that a place holds as many spiritually related novel discoveries as a person is looking for. Through the entirety of the interview I got the sense that she could find what she called, "spiritual meaning," in nearly all of her experiences.

While talking about his boys having new and amazing experiences, Steve, a father travelling with his two sons and a friend, stated:

We came in yesterday, and right before we made the first portage from 1 to 2, there were two bald eagles that were 30, 40 feet above the water, fairly close to the water, and they were just cruising along, and not far from us at all, and that's one of those things. How often are you gonna see something like that, at that close range? You're not gonna see it in Minneapolis. So that's one of those things that makes the trip special in that way that we were talking about.

Steve, similar to the last two quoted, spoke of novel experiences but did not call them spiritual. He only used the term spiritual to define, "intentional situations where I am specifically taking time to pray." Here though, Steve appears to speak to the 'special' importance of being in a new place, a place very different from his everyday.

An outstanding example of how broader experiences with newness shaped experiences came from Sue, the woman who was traveling with the Minnesota Rovers group. She had found the group and been on a number of trips with them. This however was her first trip to the Boundary Waters. Sue explained:

I think there was a little bit of anxiety coming up, it is all new to me. But we were coming up with a group of guys that had been here, some of them three times. As a first

timer there was the anxiety of where are you going to be? Are we going to be able to find where we're going, find a campsite, do the portages, that kind of thing . . . and we found it, so it was good after that. We've not been lost yet. So we're doing all right.

For Sue, spiritual experiences are, "Times when you can sit down and reflect on some things, just times sitting down and just listening and watching what is going on." She described one of those moments, "Like this morning, as I had time to be by the lake on my own, I had one of those moments where I could think about how we as a group made it here; and I thought about how I have a stronger connection to them because of it." For Sue, the novelty of the situation seemed to present challenges that she took time to reflect on. She described those times of reflection as spiritual. While clearly the act of reflecting was not novel, the experiences she was reflecting on were, thus giving shape to the spiritual experience.

Notably, some participants spoke of seeking out novel experiences and considered the experience spiritual in the moment. Lisa, a middle-aged female, described a past experience in the Boundary Waters in the winter, "I talked a bunch of my roommates into building an igloo and sleeping out in the snow in the dead of winter." When asked what inspired her, she responded, "Just because it's – I just – the ability, sometimes is just being able to, just actually having the opportunity to do something that the average person doesn't do and doing it can be special or maybe spiritual." Lisa's winter experience may have been motivated by her spontaneity and daring nature but she seemed to find meaning in the experience. She appeared to recognize her abilities and make use of them.

Lisa likely would have agreed with Jim, who seemed to define novelty as a essential component of wilderness spirituality:

[I: Would you define wilderness spirituality different from a spirituality more generally?] I definitely think that it is unique, it is something that I know doesn't appeal to everybody, and because of that it is even more special to me. It is something that especially today, the vast majority of people can't unplug, can't turn off their facebook

and cell phones, it is an addiction almost. It obviously isn't unique to me but it is something that not everybody identifies with. It is a unique part of my personality I guess. [Great, so that is the end of my structured questions, is there anything that you would like to talk more about or emphasize?] Well, my main reason for coming to the Boundary Waters is because of how unique the experiences can be. . . Most people can't even fathom a place like this, so it is a very unique experience and I treasure that I can be this close to it, and then like I said as well, the ability to challenge to yourself, 'how far can we go today, how many of the packs can I carry, how can I physically challenge myself.

It is likely that the water/landscape of the Boundary Waters is notably unique in a way that many can't fathom it. Clearly for Jim, the setting's uniqueness contributed to his understanding of wilderness spirituality. Additionally, the opportunity to push beyond ordinary physical tasks and into challenges he may have provided experiences that helped shape his wilderness spirituality.

In summary, some participants experienced novelty as it seemed to arise, while others appeared to seek out novel experiences. When confronted with newness interviewees had the opportunity to reflect on the past, be surprised and feel special in the present and gain awareness for the future. Clearly, for some, experiencing newness in the wilderness is an emotional and at times spiritual process. The link between the emotional and spiritual will continue to be questioned. It may be that for wilderness visitors novelty is an input that leads to emotional experiences, or simply experiences where senses are more aware and more open what they call spiritual experiences.

4.2.6 Physical Nature

During wilderness experiences it seemed that the participants frequently had opportunities to physically challenge themselves. Sometimes the physical challenges were accompanied by mental challenges. Not only did they seek out challenges and engage in the expected challenges of traveling and camping in the wilderness, but often they seemed to encounter unexpected challenges that additionally shaped their experience. During the interviews

some participants recounted stories that included physical challenges, and occasionally accompanying mental challenges, that they considered spiritual. In other cases those stories were not specifically considered spiritual experiences, just simply fun, challenging, or fulfilling. Like other sections in *Being There*, the themes highlighted herein are revisited throughout the analysis.

For some participants, the everyday didn't seem to provide the time or space to adequately challenge themselves, and they described the physical nature of their wilderness experiences by comparing them. Jeff, for whom paddling is, as he said, "what my family does", noted:

I've done some really good things up here. I am always proud of the miles we cover. I mean it's not like competition, but in a way it is. I mean you have a goal and you set out to do it. There's some – we had some just tough days . . . It's an easy place to challenge yourself, I guess. And that's something that's hard to do in the 9:00 to 5:00 society. -
Jeff, 2010

To Jeff, the Boundary Waters seemed to be great for setting goals or as he put it, "A chance to challenge ourselves and throw all that other stuff out and really keep you honest." For him, the lakes and portages seemed to hold endless opportunities to assess his capabilities and come away feeling accomplished. The challenges appeared to bring an essential human-ness to the experience, allowing Jeff to gauge himself and keep him 'honest' about his abilities and limitations.

For some, it seemed that the wilderness experience in general promoted different mental states than normal. For Bill being in the different setting allowed him to give more attention to the demands:

I find that it is just easier to think than it is at home. There is something about your everyday routine here and the time and energy that you have, so here it seems there are a lot more physical demands, but a lot less other demands, so my attention can turn wholly

towards that. I can think about the energy I'm using and what I am getting done.

Indeed, contemplating the inputs and outputs may be something people don't always have the time and space to be aware of in their everyday. That altered mental seemed to allow Bill to confront challenges differently than everyday challenges. Bill defined spirituality by saying, "To me, {it is} how much time and effort you have to devote to studying and reflecting on what you do, how much you focus {pause} and resources you put towards it." Relating the quotes makes it clear that Bill's physical demands were contemplated in a way that he would define as spiritual. Such reflection seemed to give him perspective.

Similar to other themes, removing the demands of the everyday routine seemed to change visitors' perspectives on tasks. Being able to focus entirely on a physical experiences possibly allowed those experiences to be contemplated and defined in different ways than usual. When asked about whether or not he had any experiences he would call spiritual, Mike, a male college student, noted that being able to focus entirely on paddling from point to point was, "nice." He explained, "Focusing on it gives you a little bit more of an understanding of nature around me and an understanding of primitive people's spirituality." The comment is interpretable as giving Mike an enhanced awareness of his place in the world.

Linda similarly spoke of the way that the setting, different from the everyday, allowed spiritual experiences to unfold in a special manner:

There is something about the rhythm of the canoeing that allows you to focus. So it is anytime that you can focus on something that may be more of a physical act that doesn't require a lot of mental concentration. Out here there is so much less going on that I can just concentrate on what I want. Those are the times that allow for that closeness to God to occur. You know, your body is busy but your mind isn't.

Clearly some visitors found the simple nature of the physical experiences to support spiritual levels of thought and strengthen their bonds to higher powers. For Linda, having a mind that is not busy allowed for ‘a closeness to God’ that she considered spiritual.

The topic of the rhythmic element of paddling may be exclusive to lake wilderness areas, but it is likely that similar experiences are had with the cadence of walking, running, or swimming. When asked if water affects his spiritual experiences, Rob explained his magnetic connection to physical activities like paddling and swimming but also included running in his explanation, “Well you just get into a rhythm when you swim and paddle out here. It is just like your whole body is in tune and you are just pounding it out, and your breathing is not labored, but you are firing on all eight cylinders . . . it is like a runner’s high. “He previously had discussed running and mentioned his knees don’t allow it anymore. From the comparison, it is clear that running was equally important to him. He went on to say, “You are like ‘I could do this all week’ . . . you are in a zone and taking in everything around you.” For him, that ‘zone’ seemed to be a spiritual space of heightened awareness. Rob followed the comment by telling of story of riding his bike as a child and seemingly having an epiphany, saying, “I was riding along this country road and all of a sudden I thought to myself, it makes sense to me, there has to be a God.” Though he did not specifically discuss the physicality of riding the bike, he brought it up during that that conversation and it may therefore be the case that he found a rhythm on that bike that day amidst the country setting and made the realization, strengthening his bond.

The overarching theme of being immersed in the scene was highly present in other’s explanations of physical experiences as well. For many who visit the Boundary Waters, fishing poses both a mental and physical challenge that allows visitors to get wrapped up in the setting and a specific activity. With those challenges come rewards in the form of sizable fish, some of

which get released and some get consumed. While fishing may be seen as a distraction from the contemplative mood, for some it appeared to be as rhythmic as running with its casting and reeling actions. Most often though, the experience was referenced for its primitive, novel, and shared nature. The reason it is included here is because at its heart it is a physical challenge. The participants cited below specifically note how the fishing experience was spiritual.

Brian explained one of his fishing experiences:

We were out doing some fishing, and Kathy caught a very, very large northern pike. We didn't know if it was ever coming in, if she'd be able to land it or not, but she did. And, it was one of those 35 inch ones . . . She was so focused and then ecstatic, never caught anything like that. A really nice fish. Somebody put that fish there and that would be the Lord who got all those pieces in place to allow that fish to be large and we asked each other, 'Well, should we have that for dinner tonight? Pretty nice fish? You worked hard for it,' and like that we ate from the lake, it pretty much goes to the natural wonder, the miracle of what this earth is.

For Brian, spirituality is, "knowing that the Lord is always there." In that moment the fish seemed to be a gift from the lord, a reminder that he is always working. Later in the interview Brian spoke of wilderness spirituality as a sort of awareness and he seemed to have an awareness that the fish was part of a lesson; that physical effort and dedication can yield gifts.

For others, fishing was less attached to a gift from the Lord, and more important as a shared experience. John, who said, "The trip is spiritual from the time I start packing, to when I am here, to when I get home," explained:

The trips that I remember the most are the ones that had some extremely challenging aspect to overcome and the trips that don't really have any excitement are the one that I don't really remember much about . . . The fish we caught yesterday was something I will remember, so things like that that, things we will mutually remember down the road.

Here John is talking about sharing the memory with his nephew. Important to this quote is the fact that he had talked about how "memory showers" remind him of how important the

experiences here are. For John, the physical challenges of the trip seemed outstanding as moments that defined trips. Whether it was because they were viewed as encounters with a reality that is very different from the everyday, or because they are simply a physical test to overcome, the moments appeared etched in his mind forever. It is important to note that for him the memories coalesce into showers that have spiritual significance while for others, memories of fishing may just carry importance in that a person can be proud of catching a big fish, or be excited to share the fish story with others when they return.

Participants also noted other challenges such as those posed by travelling in variable weather as spiritual experiences. For Rob, weather seemed to shape a past experience that he shared when asked about specific spiritual experiences:

We ended up in two to four foot waves, if not five-foot waves. And winds were 20 or 25 knots. And you couldn't see the kayaks in front of you because they're in the drops of the wave. So it was a little – there were a couple of moments where you think why am I here? What am I doing, and this is above my comfort, people drown in stuff like this. But it's a challenge. A few times, I was like, *God, please make those waves stop*. But they'd keep coming. When it was all over with, after paddling for 17 miles in one day in that kind of condition, it's like wow, we did it, and it's like *I can do it*. So you know now, well, I've just advanced a little bit more, and you know, God knew I could handle it and I am thankful for that test.

While challenge may have initially made this is an uncomfortable experience, the scenario led to a direct connection with this Rob's spiritual beliefs. As mentioned with earlier themes, the experiences may shape how individuals approach tasks in the future. He seemed to have gained confidence and grown more comfortable paddling, from the noted experience.

While speaking about a seemingly less intense challenge, Chris explained:

We put in with a lot of other groups today, so my dad and my brother took off in a Kevlar canoe and I stayed behind with my mom and my sisters and got to carry the aluminum canoes a couple of times. . . the 180 {rod portage} was tough. [I: Did you carry both canoes?] Yeah, it was lots of fun {sarcastically}, but yeah no, now that I am here, now

that we have a campsite, this is one of the highlights of my summer, and I will certainly remember hauling those canoes. The challenge is what makes the reward so much more special.

Here, Chris, a college aged male, stressed how challenge is part of a balance in his wilderness experience. Though he didn't specify that the challenges he faced at the portages were spiritual, it seemed he was satisfied that his work had provided the opportunity to as he put it, "have time to think about things in a different way," {than he is able to back home}.

Overcoming a challenge and reflecting on the accomplishment was also a component of Beth's experience. She explained:

It {being in the wilderness} is just comforting. It's comfort. Even if it's a hard day, even if it's raining, even if it's buggy or it's a hard portage, I feel like I can handle each challenge. And no matter what, the sun will rise again, and I feel comfortable that we'll live to see the next day, and we'll survive no matter what . . . I'm not worried. I don't bother myself with worrying about too much of that stuff. I take the precautions, but I have never had an issue. There is something about the Freedom. The feel of freedom and feel of being powerful and powerless all at the same time. I feel strong. . .very strong that I am able to do this sort of trip, and I know how to do it. But I also feel weak because there are always new challenges. And at the end of the day, you're sore, and you can't lift the pack as well as you could the morning before.

Recall that Beth referred to wilderness by saying, "It's all entwined into one big, comfortable, spiritual home that I consider my second home." Beth's comment additionally seemed influenced by the fact that she had subluxed her patella two days prior which nearly led her cancel the remaining plans and head to a doctor immediately. Clearly, her hardship may have inspired her comment. Later in her explanation of overcoming her injury she twice noted how "powerful" she felt while pushing on after relocating her patella. For Beth, power seemed to be something she was seeking, though it was not power in the sense that she had control over others, or her entire situation. Instead her power seemed to come in the form of learning about and being comfortable with herself. In this case she learned that she could overcome the

challenge presented by the injury; she could feel powerless yet have confidence that she will see the next day. For her it seemed spiritual that despite the challenges she could feel free and confident.

For the interviewees, the physical components of the experiences were experienced in the form of rhythms and energy needed for traveling, experiencing acute injuries, dealing with weather, and taking part in physical activities such as fishing or long days of paddling and portaging. Experiencing challenges in the wilderness seemed to help some of these interviewees learn about and become comfortable with themselves, enhance their awareness of their position in the world, and strengthen their bonds to higher powers.

Part of being there is a committing to the variety of known and unknown physical and sometimes mental challenges. All of the included quotes seemed to capture how wilderness experiences can include those challenges and some of them were clearly viewed as spiritual or contributed to more broad spiritual experiences. The noted challenges appeared to be attached to the wilderness setting and most would be difficult to find in a persons daily life. Whether the challenges were planned or unplanned, many of the experiences seemed more meaningful because they were the sole activity taking place, the only phenomena on the minds of the participants.

Summary of Being There

The descriptions within the various sections of ***Being There*** included both subtle and explicit explanations of how the wilderness setting and associated activities contributed to both spiritual experiences and experiences that could best be called meaningful. Setting and experience qualities are commented on throughout the analysis but were given attention here in order to initially acquaint readers with participants' views. It is important here to recognize that

each participant had *committed* to their wilderness experience in order to *be there* and *experience* what they did. Additionally, each participant's unique understanding of the setting became important when sharing their individual experiences. For many of them, being in the BWCAW setting was spiritual most simply because of the time and space that they were afforded to think in different ways than they did in their everyday lives. Through the data it became clear that the quiet was often in opposition to the lives of visitors outside of the wilderness area. Specifically in the *Role of Novelty*, nuanced accounts of how the experiences were different from their everyday lives, and/or different from anything they had done before contributed to an understanding of how visits to wilderness, and in some cases the BWCAW in particular, can inspire spiritual thoughts. Additionally, the physicality participant experiences appeared, for many interviewees, to be spiritually meaningful in different ways.

4.3.0 Wilderness as a Sanctuary

The section *Wilderness as a Sanctuary* shares how wilderness, as a place and system of beliefs, specifically offered visitors a refuge that supported spiritual experiences. The chapter explains the ways that certain characteristics of wilderness interacted with participant's beliefs, thus inspiring spiritual thoughts and experiences. In the previous section a mix of subtle and explicit references to spiritual experiences were related to the setting and common activities. Here, while experiences and their meanings again vary from participant to participant, there are several consistent elements that surfaced that identify wilderness as a sanctuary. Through this section there are references in both the quotes and interpretations to higher powers. It is important to realize that because the study is continuing to lean on participant's definitions, higher powers can include: God, Mother Nature, Gods, and other greater forces that have powers beyond those of humans.

The section opens with *Immersion*, a segment focused on the ways that participant's bodies and minds seemed to become immersed in their surroundings, a process that appeared to inspire spiritual experiences. *The Importance of Edge* then looks at the ways that individuals viewed water and sky, and the interaction of the two, as windows to something bigger. Continuing the focus on something bigger, the section *God's Creation* identifies the ways that many participants viewed the wilderness landscape as a work of God(s). The section explains how spiritual experiences were shaped or limited by this viewpoint.

Wilderness as a Sanctuary concludes with two sections, *Living Without Judgment* and *Finding a Better You*, which both illustrate some of the ways that individuals spiritually experienced and described their personal interactions with the wild, as compared to their everyday. The two sections emphasize how individuals enjoy, seek, and require time away from their 'everyday' in order to spiritually develop through reflection, relaxation, questioning, and planning. The distractions of the everyday seemed to clearly be in opposition with the spiritual experiences being described by interviewees while in-situ. Through the entirety of *Wilderness as a Sanctuary*, visitor's various *perceptions of* and *experiences in* wilderness are related to their definitions of spirituality, yielding a description of meaningful characterization of wilderness.

4.3.1 Immersion

Immersion considers the importance of experiences that seemed to place both visitor's bodies and minds in direct contact with their surroundings. The term immersion is used to depict scenarios in which the whole of something is placed entirely into something else, usually for a specific purpose. Baptism by immersion, immersion therapy, and immersion journalism are a few examples. In the wilderness context, experiences of immersion included water, elements of a storm, soil, wood smoke, the sounds of nature, and combinations of these and other natural

elements. This section pays close attention to how visitors' sensory experiences were described and contributed to spiritual experiences. The experiences shared below seemed to include an element of being *present* and *aware* of being immersed. Each description is included because of the way it appeared to be a gateway experience to divine considerations.

Some interviewees specifically identified their wilderness experience broadly as an immersive experience and referenced the entire visit as spiritual. John noted, "I think every time I come up here it is {a spiritual experience}; that is why I come up here. If there was one vacation place, this is my, it is not just a vacation, it is just me letting go of everything, immersing myself in the experience". This was John's response to the third question regarding spiritual experiences. Later in the interview he used the term immersion within a description of his campsite saying, "We are at great campsite, sort of off the main track so we aren't just staring off at all the people, but instead we have a great immersion." His words seemed to signal that for him it is special to not see other visitors. John additionally explained an experience in a storm by saying:

You know, you are not under a roof, but under a tarp or a rain jacket or something, you are that close, that is a spiritual experience. In some of those experiences when you are confronted with Mother Nature; it is like, where is your breaking point? You know, you get scared, but you are feeling the power like we so rarely do.

Participants seemed to be saying that there are far fewer barriers to separate humans from the natural elements, making their power significantly more obvious. The confrontation in this case appeared to be frightening but inspiring, a feeling that John seemed to value and almost savor. In his description he mentioned a breaking point in a way that makes it clear he is thinking about his powerless place in the powerful setting. There seemed to exist an understanding that an unfortunate, unsafe outcome is a possibility, making the scenario feel that much more real and consuming. Being "that close," or that immersed, was indeed noted to be spiritual for John.

While talking about experiences that seemed to have immersive qualities, some visitors seemed to speak of a combined physical and mental state. Beth explained:

When you're on the lake and the wind is blowing, and it's all you can hear is the wind and the trees and the birds. And just the sound of your paddle in the water. I mean, I'm not a very religious person, but that's as spiritual, as close as it gets for me. I feel at home. I feel in my own element out here. . . even just thinking about sitting here on the ground; in the dirt. I feel cleaner here, even if I smell bad, I feel cleaner.

Beth's statement depicted how her physical situation led to mental feelings. In describing being on the ground, in the dirt, she demonstrated how the physical immersion led to feelings comfort. It seemed that the less of a physical barrier there was between her and the environment, the more likely she was to consider the experience spiritual.

For Nancy, a long time BWCAW visitor, the immersive qualities of past experiences seemed to remain with her over time. While talking about her mindset through the course of her trip she explained:

[I: What do you mean by missing it {the BWCAW?}] I think the smells and everything, just totally remind me of summers growing up, coming up to camp up here, the trips up here. Yeah, the smell, like smelling the wood smoke with the water, or the water with the soil where it's just like totally re-immersing my senses in those memories, all very happy memories. . . it is moments like that where I am reminded that I am spiritual, it is just like 'oh, that is how that felt'.

For, Nancy, a post graduate environmental researcher with a history of annual trips to the Boundary Waters during her adolescence, 're-immersing' her senses brought back happy memories, memories of a state of mind that reminded her that she is spiritual. For her the smells appeared to carry deep significance and during the current trip they appeared to bring her comfort and fulfillment. Though Nancy didn't specifically label the re-immersion as a spiritual experience, they led her to remember what it was like to be spiritual.

As previously mentioned, swimming was often cited by participants as something they did during their trip. In the following comment Sarah captured the sensual aspects of the

swimming experience for her. She noted, “Swimming through cold and warm spots, that’s just it – or like feeling rising and falling warm and cold water, feeling like I am really a part of it and the moment, I think that part of it is very connective, connecting me to nature.” Sarah went on to further describe the importance of swimming saying:

The best part of summer for me is the ability to actually submerge in the water, and really feel that total freeness of weightlessness that you only get when you’re in the water. You don’t get that weightlessness really anyplace else, and you don’t get it when you go in a chlorinated pool. [I: What are you thinking about when you are submersing yourself and feeling that weightlessness that you spoke of?] Well, I’m just feeling nothing, truly, just nothing, nothing, and that really wouldn’t be an emptiness nothing. It’s just a nothing, peaceful nothing. [I: That seems hard to put into words.] Right, yeah. Can’t really give it a word because it’s free, it’s weightless, it’s empty and full at the same time, and because all of a sudden you become part of everything that’s here.

Sarah’s description of the immersive process of swimming didn’t necessarily signal a spiritual experience, but it did signal that she was “part of everything” that was there. Later in the interview while talking about her history of spirituality Sarah noted, “I think that I have always had a strong connection to everything around me, all of the forces around me.” By relating the two quotes, it seemed that Sarah was talking about swimming as a spiritual experience of connecting with her surroundings. In that process she clearly noted feeling peaceful, and a part of “everything,” a descriptor that may involve a oneness with higher powers, such as the forces she had previously mentioned. As she noted, she didn’t feel empty, but instead “weightless” and “peaceful.” Even though she describes it as “just a nothing,” it is a “peaceful nothing.”

When asked if water influences his spiritual experiences David responded by saying, “It’s so calm, there’s just something about the quiet lapping when you’re sitting here {on shore} or in the boat and you close your eyes and you lay back and just float and listen to the wind and just that calm rocking. Water is unreal.” Notably, David’s comment demonstrates how visitors may both find themselves in a situation that they call a spiritual experience, and create

experiences that they consider spiritual by doing things like “close your eyes and lay back and just float.”

Through the interviews, participants spoke of being in the moment and mentally processing what their senses were experiencing. For some of them, it appeared that they were experiencing components of nature that they did not usually experience in everyday life. Visiting the wilderness, venturing into the wild, no matter the intentions, rituals, or expectations, seemed to entail a deep degree of *immersion*; experiences steeped in reality where a body’s senses were exposed to and interacted with wild elements, both natural, and elements of higher powers. The experiences often simultaneously involved visitors’ physical bodies and their minds. Through immersion processes, participants expressed thoughts and connections to spiritual feelings and higher powers. It is important to note that *Wilderness as a Sanctuary*, a separate section, examines the variety of instances where participants described being immersed in a setting created by a higher power.

4.3.2 The Importance of Edge

The Importance of Edge takes a close look at two aspects of the Boundary Waters’ setting that appeared to support acute examples of spiritual experiences. Often the word edge comes up when talking about wilderness, for example: visits to the edge of an unknown frontier, ecological edge effects, or a visitor simply feeling on the edge of their abilities. Certain experiences described by interviewees appeared to be situated on the edge of something more infinite. This edge is where the earth and sky come together, where participants seemed to feel closer to a variety of unknowns, both literally and figuratively. Appropriate to this idea, ‘Minnesota’ is a Dakota word that means, “where the water reflects the heavens.” This was the case in particular

for a few interviewees, while for others; there was simply something ‘special’ about the way the water and sky interacted.

For visitors paddling in the lakes of northeastern Minnesota, water serves many purposes. Participants describe the lakes and their water as “highways of travel” (Charlie), “the source drinking water” (John), “endless swimming pools” (Lisa), and a “fluid element of the scenery that constantly gives great views” (David). From talking with interviewees, it seemed that because the forests are so dense with multiple levels of vegetation, most visitors spend nearly all of their time on the water or near shorelines. Many participants at one point or another made reference to the beauty of the lakes, the greenery, and the sky above. Six participants in particular shared details on their experiences with water and sky.

The most general of the comments came from Tom. When talking about the setting he stated:

I mostly just admire it and sometimes I just don’t think at all and just let it soak in. [I: When you say soak in, what do you mean?] Everything, the water, the trees, the sky, the breeze. I guess I just turn off everything else and just soak in what is around me and take time to be thankful for it.

Tom later noted that in the wilderness he feels closer to a higher power, and when asked why he thinks that is he said, “I think it is just not having all that other stuff to think about, and just being able to think about this {pointing to the surroundings}.” Tom’s explanations seemed to couple to describe how the surroundings helped him forget about ‘everything else’ that is part of his everyday, and help him be ‘thankful’ for his surroundings and be closer to his higher power. His body language and use of the word ‘admire’ seemed to signal it was a rare occasion that he was able to ‘admire’ other places in that way. The final sentence of the quote demonstrates the outcome of the heightened awareness. “Time to be thankful” appeared to be the result of just letting things “soak in.”

For other participants, that line of thinking seemed to be the starting point for further observations of the water and sky in particular. Jen shared a story that reminded her of the in the interplay between the water and sky. While the story itself is relatively unimportant here, the scene in the story described the interplay between the water and sky. Jen said:

I'll tell you a story. When Mike proposed to me, we were up on Peter Lake, northwest of here a ways, sitting on a cliff that he absolutely loves and looking down. The waves were making diamonds on the water, the sun reflecting and stuff. And I said something about that, God, the sun is making diamonds on the water.' And he was like well, here's what they look like. And that's a proposal you don't forget, especially since he jumped off the cliff afterwards. And that's 1987, so 23 years ago. That glint off the water is very memorable. And we mention it every once in a while when we are here.

She later related back to the story when talking about spiritual experiences, "I find it spiritual to just watch the water sparkle."

Other interviewees seemed to get deeper into how water and sky influence experiences. While talking about spiritual moments John mentioned his interest in the sky, "Like the clouds, you know I don't really pay attention to a lot of things but when I come up here I start to see a lot more of mother nature . . . it brings out a good sense, a peaceful sense when you are surrounded by it." Like other participants, he seemed to express how the sky and clouds in particular were captivating and thought provoking. However, John made a comment that connects the observation and feeling with his spirituality. He noted:

I have so many memories of different landscapes and you know like the way the sun comes through the clouds and the feeling of the wind and the heat and usually I just have those moments of silence when I can just look into the sky and think about those things and it starts to dawn on me. . . [I: When you say dawn on me, what do you mean by that?] Remember, remember what I am doing and think about how I am a part of all of this. It is a spiritual thought that doesn't happen often enough so those are the things that I really appreciate.

Indeed he appeared to attach his looking into the sky to thinking about spiritual thoughts. Like the other experiences mentioned in this section, a variety of influences appeared to play a role in

the experience. However, for John, the sky in particular appeared to carry an enormity that inspired the feeling that he was “surrounded by” and “part of” something.

The most common references to the sky and water involved sunrises and sunsets. Nearly half of the interviewees referred to how either sunrises or sunsets were special times of the day. The following interview exchange with Mary captured her perspective on the interaction of the sky and water more during a sunset:

[I:What do you think it is about the sunset that inspires those spiritual feelings for you?]
I think that definitely on the water there is the reflective nature and how colorful it can be and how it changes, it is such a mystery to me, it is so effortless and such a mystery. [I: When you say mystery. . . can you elaborate on that?] I guess that there is a specific way to define it if you were to look in scientific terms, it is like light refraction and all of these other things. But, you don't see all the processes go on to make this happen or that exact moment when it starts changing, I don't know (laugh) it is just effortless I feel like.

Not only did Mary explain the experience with the term “mystery,” but she described why it is a “mystery.” Interestingly she used the word ‘effortless’ on three additional occasions during the interview. Each time it was done in reference to a natural process. For her, it appeared that the jump from understanding basic scientific processes, to experiencing a phenomenon as a whole, was a demonstration of the “mystery.” When Mary was asked specifically about the importance of water to her spiritual experiences, she said:

I mean when I look at water it is just this wonderful element that is crazy, I mean like you can travel by and you can survive by. Like I said, when it reflects the sky it is just this ease. I just think water, you know, I feel so in tuned with it, it is a part of us, we are a part of it.

In other interviews, participants mentioned that we are made up of water, but no other visitors cited the reciprocity; how we are a part of it as well. Discussing such relationships seemed easy for her, but I wanted to know about more specific experiences. When asked about a particular experience that included some of her spiritual thoughts, she explained:

Well yesterday we stayed at a campsite on Hudson Lake and the sky was just this bright pink and purple, and it looked water colored. It looked so amazing, like it couldn't even be real. We were actually having solos where all of us were in separate places where we couldn't see each other and that was one of those times where the water was just glass and it was a reflection and the line of the trees and as the night gradually came on, the sky was getting darker and the water took that on and I was just watching these two mediums, entirely change all the time, and it just, like I said, I can't explain it, it is one of those things that you just can't wrap your head around it and you are just able to witness it in that moment and you are like, 'Why am I here? What put me here in the spot so that I can feel this?'

The coming together of the water and sky seemed vividly memorable for her and clearly it inspired thought provoking questions. The story conveyed the depth of the moment, the way that she watched the scene over a period of time and took in the whole scene and questioned it. Interestingly, there is a confession in the story that she can't explain it, demonstrating how that scene seemed unexplainable. Indeed the interplay of the water and sky provided Mary with a very defined spiritual experience.

Alternatively to looking at the sky, or watching the interplay between water and the sky, Sue explained an experience involving just looking into the water. Prior to this quote Sue noted that she almost continuously has spiritual experiences while in wilderness which she defined as, "times where I am just able to think about what is important in my life." When discussing how water impacts her spiritual experiences, Sue said:

Just the beauty of it. When we were fishing, and you paddle, and you look down, and you see the bottom, and you see those huge rocks down there. And, again, sometimes you're like, well it is not scary, but I guess there is an awe to be able to see so far down with how clear the water is, it is just interesting because it is a world down there that I can see but never really get to; well I guess I could, but it is just sort of a mystery, a different realm down there. It makes me feel small and I just think about how big everything is . . . it makes you realize how insignificant you are.

The clear waters gave her a glimpse of something that she be described unknown, as a "mystery." Her experience stuck with her enough to share it and provides an example of how

water not only reflected, but held a “mystery” for some visitors. Sue seemed to know that she would never visit those depths, yet alluded that there is much to be explored there. She finds that “realm” to be a “mystery” and appeared to gain a certain perspective on her place/position because of that.

Another participant, Nancy, who describes spirituality as solely a wilderness spirituality and described her spiritual experiences by saying, “Just those “Ohh, this is how it feels” times. . .times when other things melt away and I have a new perspective.” Nancy spoke of one of those times:

The water, when it is still, like yesterday evening when it was still, with the moon and then the trees are reflected in the water. . . I have this book that has a line that I always think of when I am here, and it’s like, ‘The lake is wine and the evening is overfilled with beauty.’ It does feel like the rock is filled up with wine. [I: What is the importance of wine?] With wine, it’s like it is something more special than water.

For Nancy, water seemed to become something more, something that held ‘beauty’. The quote includes ‘wine’ which appeared to carry special meaning. Later in the interview, while talking about whether there was a connection between water and spiritual experiences, Nancy said, “Swimming though cold and warm spots is special . . . and I haven’t been swimming at night yet this trip, but like the weightlessness and especially if the stars are reflected in the water when you’re swimming, it’s just this feeling of cosmic floatiness.” I probed further to understand this statement asking, “When you say cosmic floatiness, can you tell me more about that?” She continued on to say, “Well, especially if it is warm and it just feels like space and water is all floating in space.” Nancy went on to explain that the resulting feelings are special, ones she only gets in wilderness, but she didn’t specifically call them spiritual, though the portion of the conversation had been framed that way. She said they are feelings of, “no worries” and that they have a “fleeting feeling.” The comment on the ‘fleeting feeling’ seemed very in line with the

remainder of her interview which included the sharing of some personal struggles that cause her a lot of mental turmoil. Nancy's explanation of swimming reinforced the idea that both water and sky can make visitors feel part of, or surrounded by something bigger. Through this interview it seemed that the moments such as being on the still water, or swimming under that stars sat in contrast to her daily life.

Towards the end of a long interview with Jeff, he explained how certain components of the natural setting seemed to facilitate him feeling a connection with God. When asked if he feels closer to God when in the wilderness Jeff explained:

I feel that connection the most {pause} in looking at the stars. I definitely think there's a supreme force out there that drives this, drives us. . . [What is it about the stars that make you feel it more?] Well, kind of the distance of it and just – also my wife and I were talking last night about how in Galileo's time they could tell when a new star came out. I mean just regular people would know that a new star was out there. That's just lost in our society. Even where I live, there's enough light pollution that you just don't see a lot of the sky. And it's kind of – it's too bad because its more entertaining than pretty much anything you could see on TV. I think- I like being able to look up at different times of the night. Being old enough, I have to get up every once in a while, so like last night, it was pretty clear sky and you can look at different constellations and stuff. And it's cool compared to the winter where you see Orion over along the skyline, and your're looking at Cassiopeia and think like that and other stars I wish I know what they were. It is just amazing.

Though there was an element of looking up at the stars that was simply 'cool' for Jeff, clearly the sky also inspired Jeff to have thoughts of something greater. Here he was particularly talking about connecting to the 'supreme force' through the amazing view of the sky that wilderness, and its lack of light pollution, afforded him. Jeff's comment not only referenced his interest in the sky and how it captivated him, but also emphasized his perceptions of how contemporary society doesn't promote/allow for such viewing; further supporting wilderness as different, a sanctuary for modern society.

Below, in the final piece of data for this section, Joe responded to a question about whether or not he believed in a higher power by saying:

You know, 90 some percent of people believe in something. I don't know . . . maybe there is more of a science aspect to it. Life is definitely unique, you know, why we are here, I have no answer to that, but I want to believe something . . . [I: When and where do you feel the closest to that which you just described?] Looking up to the sky. Whatever is out there. 'It' is not necessarily here to me, but out there in the stars and everything like that. You know we are just a tiny piece, we are minuscule. There is something out there, and I don't think we will know what in our life time but it is nice to know that there is something out there . . . the more I either see, or read, or hear, there is so much more that we don't understand about it. It is just . . . with the stars, it is like we can imagine, but that is it.

Joe's response highlighted how he felt that there is 'something out there,' but that he has uncertainty as to what 'it' is. Clearly viewing the sky and stars let him imagine what 'it' may be. Joe's reference to us just being a 'tiny piece,' to us being 'minuscule' communicated that the sky and stars provided him with perspective. Though Joe obviously referenced learning about 'it' through seeing, reading and hearing, he noted that those methods had been insufficient and viewing the stars was the best way for him to imagine it. Clearly, Joe signaled that viewing the stars and sky were the best way for him to get to the edge of that 'something out there.'

The water and sky, and their interactions, were indeed important to these participants. The interviewees cited here, each attuned to elements of the setting around them, seemed to think deeply upon the inherent mystery in their surroundings. They seemed to be talking about how their experiences in the wilderness, especially with the water and the sky, took them closer to an edge. For some it was a spiritual 'feeling', an affinity with things in their natural state of being. For others it is spiritually thought provoking. Their descriptions seem to tell a story of water and sky acting as a visual conduit to something bigger. Each provided a great example of how the setting facilitated and is at the heart of the phenomena.

4.3.3 *God's Creation*

As noted in the methods section, the sample was primarily Christian. When asked if they consider themselves part of a religious group, six answered they had no preference, one stated he was agnostic, and the remaining 23 responded either Christian, or a particular denomination of Christianity. Accordingly, roughly two thirds of the sample made an explicit reference to being in God's creation. The following data demonstrates the ways that participants spoke of their perspective shaping their experiences.

For numerous participants, there seemed to be a layering of wilderness characteristics that led to spiritual considerations and thoughts that a higher power was involved in creating the landscape. Dan, who noted, "I absolutely find that being out alone, or with a small group in the wilderness to be spiritual," went on to describe the layering of solitude and beauty. When asked when he tended to have spiritual experiences Dan explained:

Probably in the quieter and the more beautiful areas. . . I am probably not as spiritual in the middle of a portage with a pack on my back. Probably not quite as in touch with that part of my being. So yeah, the more solitude there is, the more you can connect to those sorts of thoughts and feelings. And then the more beautiful it is, you are just awed by what is around you, you think there had to be a grand design and they didn't need us to make this. A lot of people live in cities and towns where everything they see, man did it. . . walking on concrete, in a building, they have air conditioning, they have their cell phone; it is easy to think that everything is man centered because everything that we interface with, man created. But when we get out here that is not the case.

Dan's references to "solitude" and "beautiful" surroundings seemed to him providing the reasons for his perspective that "there had to be a grand design and they didn't need us to make this." He clearly described feeling "awed" in a way that is very different from any feeling a person could get in cities and towns amidst things created by man. Dan's comment introduced not only a grand design, but how different the wilderness is because we "interface" with a setting that is not "man centered."

Talking more explicitly about his connection to God, Rob provided a viewpoint on how wilderness is the most pristine version of God's creation:

You feel closer to God here. You know where I live, man built it. My cabin, I built it, you know, out of sticks and such that were provided for me by God, but this environment is, you are right there, God has total control over you, the wind the waves, the weather, all of that. That isn't bad, it is pristine, when you leave God alone, it is pristine. . . You feel better out here because you are closer to nature, or God, or whatever you want to call who created this. And in my view, if someone wants to think this is just an accident, they have got to be blind. This was no accident, this has to have been created by a force that is powerful, this can't just be an accident. This has to be passed on, or we are headed for the deep six. . . It is just so solid, it works so well. The sun comes up and has for millions of years.

His conviction was clear in this statement. As mentioned earlier, Rob was a scout troop leader who found the whole of the wilderness experience to be spiritual. Not only did he describe God's creation as "pristine," but acknowledged that God's creation needed to be left alone and passed on, or there will be trouble (the deep six). While some interpretations of wild places as being God's creation resisted the idea that humans are impacting it in a way other than God's desire, here, he was clearly stating that we as humans, and more specifically visitors, must interact with the landscape in a way that preserves it. Such an angle may have been responsible for heightening his sense of spirituality. Rather than it just being spiritual to be in God's creation, he seemed to be finding it spiritual to interact with God's creation in a way that will preserve it. He therefore seemed to find tasks like sharing the leave no trace ethic with others to be a spiritual practice. While being interviewed, another member of his group caught a 2-3 lb. bass and he advised them to put it back, noting they had no need to keep it for food that day. After the interview he referenced that as a spiritual choice, emphasizing that his interactions with God's creations are spiritual because he is helping to preserve and protect them.

Mark, who like Rob is near retirement and among the oldest paddlers sampled shared many of the same thoughts:

God is everywhere in a place like this. I think in a place like this, we can reflect on what god is and what God isn't. And what God has done for us . . .and when God has put a place like this here for us to enjoy, we have to feel awfully humble in that we've met or come to place where we should just feel awed and humbled that God has enabled us to be at this place at this time in our lives.

Within this section there are four distinct quotes from Mark. In this first one it is seemed clear how genuine he was and how humble his experiences made him. The reason that I cite him repeatedly is that he spent more time than others articulating his perspectives on wilderness as God's creation. He later said:

Well, we're religious people and so for us, it's, what an amazing place God has made. What an amazing place that is still yet unspoiled and that God has created these things for us to see and experience, but again remember, tread lightly. I mean this is a delicate place. And so to be able to come here, when very few people we know have ever had this type of experience. Oh, they go camping. They go in their little mini homes and plug in the electric and hook up to the sanitary. And I just smile. I'm a country boy that I know what real camping's about.

This second comment captured his amazement as well as his stewardship ethic and taste for the primitive. These factors seemed to combine, culminating in him starting to express his gratitude saying, "to be able to come here, when very few people we know have ever had this type of experience." In later comments, it will be clear how these perspectives inspire spiritual experiences for him.

Others similarly viewed the entire landscape as God's creation, but did so more hesitantly. David explained, "Everything out here is spiritual. I guess the way I look at it is all this is God's creations and very beautiful." Chris similarly shared his thinking but also seemed to be searching for and considering his beliefs, "You know, I guess {pause} there is just no way

that this {pause, motioning to the landscape} could of just happened by chance. It just wouldn't happen {pause} somebody's up there looking out for us.”

Alternatively, for Rob, cited above, each interaction with the landscape and with his fellow paddlers seemed to be shaped by his beliefs. He commented:

Oh, just being here is spiritual. Being boy scouts, we are of Christian beliefs. We pretty much live the spiritual life. We have a prayer at meals, and certainly live spiritual lives to service the Lord. We have two of our scouts, Eagle Scouts forever, and they are in the service- one of them is in Afghanistan right now and the other just returned. We have dedicated this trip to them and do our best for them and the Lord. I have been with the troop for almost twenty years, so I know a lot of these guys. Yeah, it is spiritual up here; there is no doubt about it. You are in God's space, the way he made it. There is nothing man made about it. It is the way nature intended it to be before we showed up.

In this comment Rob appeared to convey that he constantly had his higher power in mind. In this case we again not only hear his conviction, but see that God's space was described as the way “nature intended before we showed up.” This sentiment is identical to that shared in his earlier quote. Rob seemed to be constantly considering how he can serve/steward his very best.

As mentioned, for most participants, the acknowledgement that the place was created by God was more subtle. In the following quote the interaction of several previously mentioned attributes of spiritual experiences were noticed. Ed explained:

I think it's kind of a rhythm that you develop. On a short trip you're just trying to stay organized enough to get everything done. If you're here for a long period of time, you can develop a rhythm in how you live and how you travel and the day to day experiences become a little more of a rhythm. Then you begin to find time to have a more peaceful experience where you can say “okay, God has given us this place and I'm experiencing this complements of God.” There is a connection to creation that you may not get in a daily life and a work a day world.

Recall that Ed viewed his experiences as spiritually nurturing, but not spiritual experiences in a religious sense, moreover as a “gift from God.” In his comments, it appeared the factors of time/comfort, quiet, and God's creations were interacting. Ed didn't seem able to consider God's

creation until other factors had taken effect and he felt the “rhythm” of a certain way of living.

He went on to say:

I’m a very firm, practicing Catholic and as far as how that relates to the wilderness experience, I believe that there is a gift of creation. That all things in our lives are gifts and that creation is a component of that as a gift. How we experience that is up to us. It’s like many things that we are presented with by God. It’s a choice as to how we respond but I do think that creation and to me wilderness experiences are part of experiencing that gift.

It seemed that Ed was left with a choice based on his beliefs and chose to view the scenario as a gift. Eric additionally expressed the interaction between his religious perspectives and his interactions with the setting. Eric explained:

I am a member of Leighton United Methodist Church, and I know that other people may think of things spiritually and not have a Christian or religious connotation to it. But to me, for me, my spiritual experiences are intertwined. Because God created this, it is more religious than it is spiritual. That doesn’t mean that I discount someone else’s – their spirituality may be with nature or whatever. But for me, the two are intertwined.

Eric’s comment seemed to signal that all of his spiritual experiences were based on his religious understandings. In his final statement he drew a comparison between his experiences and those of people whose spirituality may be more nature based. For both Eric and Ed there appeared to be deep underlying religious beliefs that played a role in how they viewed and described the wilderness setting.

Revisiting some of Mark’s comments we see how viewing the Boundary Waters as God’s creation could have an impact on visitors spiritual habits. He explained:

When I am here I get more time to pray; when I say pray, it isn’t just asking God for this, asking God for that. A lot of them are thanking God, or just plain talking to God. A prayer doesn’t have to be a formal thing. I have them at home to but up here it’s {pause} I feel if there was a telephone exchange, here we’re in the same area code, I can take that much more time. I feel that much closer to God. At home it is still kind of a long distance call. Up here I can spend more time talking to the almighty. That is where the spirituality starts and from there it ripples through me.

He was one of five that mentioned prayers as a component of his spiritual experiences. His explanation got at the heart of how his prayers are influenced by being in the Boundary Waters. Early in the comment he made it clear that he was often thanking God. When asked to explain a bit more about that Mark stated:

That is why it's a spiritual experience, because we look at this and we believe that at one time, all of North America was a wilderness like this here. When more and more people come along, we realize that things are going to change, but we've been blessed to make this trip; having the health, time, and finances, we are lucky. We're blessed beyond belief, this is the frosting on the cake and we have to be thankful.

Interestingly, he later related part of his enjoyment of the place to the fact that during his short time in college, he was a forestry student. It seemed that Mark was relating his education to stewardship ethics.

To finish this section, we see the perspectives of two more participants. These final quotes serve to again put the Boundary Waters into contrast with the everyday, but they also remind us that Mark was a bit of an anomaly and most references to God's creation were more subtle. While the questions asked about participant beliefs in 'something bigger,' never were participants directly asked if they believed that God(s) had created the landscape.

Laura, a canoe guide on a final trip of her season with her family noted, "I think God, being a creator, this is more of what he had in mind than the city sort of thing, and that is kind of humanity run amok so to speak." Here again, acknowledging the wild as God's creation came with a reference to how humans have impacted other environs leaving places like the BWCAW to be examples of what he had in mind.

Dan, another self described "religious person" described many of his spiritual experiences as, "Just seeing the natural beauty; this isn't man made or man contrived, this came

about without any of man's work or management, this was someone else's design." Dan went on to say:

The beauty around you, that alone makes you feel more spiritual no matter what your religious background is. . . I am a Christian, when I get out here and see these things that are so gorgeous, I say, yeah, somebody created this.

Again the separation was made between the wild and 'man contrived' spaces. Dan clearly appeared to find the beauty to be input into spiritual experiences and an indicator that God created the space.

Religious conceptions have arguably long guided many people's attitudes toward wilderness. In this section, such attitudes and beliefs seemed to both guide spiritual experiences and inspire them. For many of the noted participants, being in a landscape they viewed as *God's Creation* seemed to help them focus on spiritual themes and enhance their various spiritualities. Other elements of spiritual experiences such as the primitive, quiet, challenge, and otherness of wilderness appeared to pair with those beliefs and play a role in experiences and perspectives.

4.3.4 Living Without Judgment

Through sections 2.1-2.4 there have been many examples of participants sharing ideas of leaving behind their everyday lives in search of things, including spiritual experiences, that wilderness seems adept at providing. Through the process, visitors' abilities to experience *wilderness as a sanctuary* seemed at least partly influenced by the presence, or most commonly, the absence of other people. In this short section *Living Without Judgment*, data related to finding refuge from the judgment of others and society was reviewed.

The first statement below, from Mary, is more ambiguous than the rest of the data in this section but representative of an occurrence that took place multiple times. Mary was explaining the importance of water in her spiritual experiences and stated:

I mean you can travel by it and you can survive by it. Like I said, when it reflects the sky it is just this easel. I just think water, you know I feel so in tuned with it, it is a part of us, we are a part of it. . . . That sounds so hippie-ish.

Mary seemed to find herself saying things that were from the heart but she knew that they sounded a bit unconventional, and as she said, “hippie-ish.” Additionally, while talking about her definition of mystery, cited earlier, Mary paused multiple times with an almost self-deprecating giggle, seemingly acknowledging that her comments may sound a bit “out there.” In these examples from Mary and in mannerisms, tones, and comments from others, it appeared that participants were saying things that they knew they may be judged by if they were talking to random group of people from their everyday lives. However, in-situ, comfortably sitting on the shores of picturesque lakes with no one else around, they seemed willing to talk uninhibitedly.

In many interviews there were references to feeling as though individuals could “be themselves” in the wilderness. While discussing why wilderness is more supporting of spiritual experiences than other natural areas that he visits, Ken stated, “And it’s not that I’m trying to be antisocial or anything, but sometimes you just like to have time off by yourself.” He then noted that in his ideal vacation you return, “physically tired, but mentally rested . . . with a clear brain.” Wilderness appeared to allow Ken time on his own that he needed to ‘clear’ his brain. The tone during the comment appeared to stress that while being alone is important, being away from others was what makes it restful for the mind.

When asked if there was anything he would like to emphasize about his noted ‘spiritual connections’ with wilderness, John talked about returning home from a trip and being able to reflect on it, and said:

If I am facing a challenge, I can look back at the good times that we had up here. . .
Whatever sorts of problems you may have in your everyday life, you can come here, or reflect on here and realize how unimportant they really are. This is definitely a place for

me to let go and be myself.

John appeared to stress how he felt he could disconnect and “be” himself while in wilderness.

While this is not specifically escaping judgment, he clearly wanted to stress that in the wilderness he felt like himself, and he liked that feeling. Recall that John called his whole experience in the wilderness spiritual. Further supporting the dichotomy between wilderness and the everyday, while talking about how his whole trip is spiritual, he said, “When I start to leave I have to retune my brain to be part of everyday life again. I don’t really enjoy it much, I would much rather be back here.”

While some participants spoke of being alone, or framed their comments as being away from others, Chris spoke about going to wilderness with the right group in order to be himself. He explained:

I feel that I can be myself more; you know with friends and stuff I just kind of have to, I don’t know, pay attention all the time, I have to be involved in everything that is going on. Up here, now, I can be involved as much as I want. I can just sort of wander off and be on a rock alone . . . and I like that.

The most important part of this excerpt is the context. His definition of spirituality was, “Believing that there is a God and having time to think that there is something helping us through, or guiding us through life.” During the short trip earlier in the summer he clearly felt as though he didn’t get the wilderness experience that he wanted. He considered the current trip a do-over and highlighted how he felt he needed this time because work was demanding. The work related stress and the stress of having to ‘be involved’ appeared to be in opposition to his spiritual experiences. His second trip was with his family who appeared to allow him more freedom. Chris’s comparison of two wilderness trips seemed to clearly develop how important Chris found his group to be.

Spiritual experiences were had in quiet times for Jen, times when she felt, “An internal source of power and calm where I can try to be in tune with whatever keeps us here and keeps the earth going.” When asked why she felt the connection to that more in the wilderness than at home, Jen responded:

Because you’re closer to it. You don’t have all the electronics and the cars and the interference. And, again, the trying to impress people instead of just connecting with whatever those forces may be. Not including mosquitoes, I think they were a mistake. If 9/11 happened while we were up here, we wouldn’t know about it. You have to start sorting out what you can control and what you can’t.

Clearly she felt as though she has ‘to impress people’ while in her everyday life compared to her time in wilderness. Important to this statement is the fact that Jen is a Police Officer and frequently spoke of enjoying the escape from the work related stress. It may have been that her job required, or gave her the sense that, she must be constantly vigilant and be a representative for the public department. Her reference to 9/11 seemed to signal that she felt more comfortable letting go of responsibilities and duties when in the wilderness. It appeared that Jen was glad to have the break and have the ability to spiritually connect with ‘internal sources of power and calm.’ Notably, her husband was also a Police Officer and according to her, “Living in a small community everyone knows us, even in our civilian clothes.” Though their jobs were slightly unique, her references to feeling like she was constantly having to impress people seemed to be a common sentiment.

Others more plainly noted that the wilderness let them be and think in their own ways, rather than feeling pressured to accept others’ beliefs. Deb explained:

It easier for me to feel a spiritual presence here versus a church setting. [I: What is it about this setting that creates that feeling?] The openness and the fact that it is so remote from other people. They are not forcing their beliefs on you or critiquing you; you can come to your own conclusions and think whatever you want about it. It’s just birds and

trees and rocks and water and turtles and loons and all that sort of thing. So no one is pressuring you to do this or that, and so you can just feel whatever you want.

Indeed for her, being surrounded by natural elements instead of others who are persuading and judging gave her a stronger feeling of a spiritual presence. The freedom that she spoke of was seemed sought after and appreciated.

In the above quotes participants appeared to explicitly note how being in the wilderness allowed them to be themselves, think for themselves, do what they wanted, and sometimes connect with the forces of something bigger. While each person has their own distinct list of factors that maybe motivated spiritual experiences, clearly for the participants quoted in this section, being in a place that was very different from their everyday appeared to allow them to be themselves. Whether or not they felt judged in their everyday life is not completely clear, but it was clear that with the right people and landscape around them, they didn't feel judged in the wilderness.

In many cases the absence of others seemed to support spiritual experiences in which participants were able to wholly consider topics such as their purpose and place in the world, the landscape as God's creation, and their fortune to be surrounded by such beauty. Likewise we have also heard from participants that others can be present during self-described spiritual experiences, as long as they don't interrupt the quiet or simultaneously seem to be having a similar experience to the visitor. A salient idea here is that individuals seemed to have spiritual experiences when they were comfortable with the people around them and felt as though they were free from the distractions of others and the distractions of culture.

4.3.5 Finding a Better You

Furthering the description of how visitors spiritually experienced wilderness as a sanctuary, there was a body of data that demonstrated how wilderness supported individuals

feeling like their best self during their spiritual experiences. Understanding the heart of what visitors meant when they described feeling like their best self was not always clarified but the trend is still notable.

To begin, consider the following statement from Chris:

Pretty much as soon as I get here. . . as soon as all of the travelling is done and we are unpacking and getting the campsite set up. After that it is time to relax, and that is when those feelings become present, just feeling like everything is right {pause}. . . here I can really enjoy life.

This comment seemed to exemplify how finding time to relax can a deeper experience than just finding time to rest. By saying “here I can really” in the last line, it seemed that Chris was comparing his state of enjoyment to others, outside of wilderness, where there may not be the feelings that ‘everything is right.’ The pause seemed to be Chris searching for the right words to convey the personal importance of having everything feel right. Similar to Tom in the previous section, Chris appeared to convey that certain feelings were not present until some responsibilities were completed. At that point relaxation could set in. However, more than just relaxing on a couch at home, Chris was hinting at spiritual feelings being present. Recall that Chris referred to his whole trip as, “one big spiritual embrace.”

Often it seemed one of the main reasons travelers traveled was to find the time and space to relax, but as noted, it seemed that relaxing was more than just resting the body and/or mind. Relaxing in the wilderness appeared to include additional components for many visitors. For Mary, a canoe guide for six teen girls, wilderness experiences and relevant spiritual experiences seemed to provide her with feelings of confidence and give her a sense of purpose. While talking about how spiritual experiences make her feel, “more connected in a variety ways,” she said:

I definitely feel more connected to my girls and feel more connected to . . . I feel more stationed in my life. I feel like being out here gives you more time to think about your

goals and what is actually important to you. So I guess I feel more sturdy and planted in what I believe in my life {laugh}.

Looking at the end of this quote, we see that Mary laughs just a bit after sharing her thoughts. This is another example of her sharing thoughts that she may not normally share with friends or others outside of wilderness, as she seems to feel that her words are a bit touch-feely. It may be that she was feeling comfortable in-situ, believing that I, the interviewer, as a fellow paddler, may understand more than a normal person from her everyday. Most importantly here, her use of the words ‘sturdy,’ ‘planted,’ and ‘stationed’ all indicated the comfort and satisfaction she gets from having time to contemplate her ‘goals’ and ‘what is actually important to you.’ It seemed that she found fulfillment and happiness in those moments. By saying she felt ‘stationed’ in life, she appeared to be conveying that her experiences gave her purpose. That perception may be related to her connection to her ‘girls,’ her campers, and also her connection to the natural world around her that she talked about frequently.

As has been noted, explaining certain feelings appeared to be a tricky task. Consider Tom’s comment on the role of solo canoe trips in his life:

You know people ask me why I do that and I try to explain it to them and they are like, “what?”. I know that it is one of those things where if they haven’t done it, people aren’t ever going to understand it. . . I know that I need that alone time; when you are by yourself and may lay here on the rocks for a couple of hours and watch the clouds and start thinking about all kinds of stuff. . . Why am I here? What did I do to get here? What have I accomplished in life so far? What is my next step?, those types of things. It is a little more difficult when you have (motioned to son). I need those times to really be me and take that time.

For Tom, spirituality means, “Believing that there is a God or you practice what you believe . . . and you are happy in your hopes and dreams.” The time and space that the solo trips provided appeared to allow for important questions to be considered. Here he conveyed the ways that he is able to ‘really be’ himself. His reference to demonstrates that he doesn’t always have the chance

to ‘really be’ himself, or to ask those important questions. Tom went on to emphasize how it can feel to find that time to consider these topics.

[I: You previously mentioned recharging your batteries, can you describe that more to me?] You know, work and family life gets a little chaotic and, you do the best that you can with your kids, raising them the right way, so, times with teenagers might be a little overwhelming, their head is in their phone so you think that you don’t understand them . . . so you come out here and you get a sense of who you are and what you are doing and that you are doing everything the best that you can.

Finding time to ‘get a sense of who you are’ and feel good about it seemed to be a difficult task for Tom in his everyday life. It appeared the ‘chaotic’ interactions with kids and his hectic daily life provided barriers to such feelings and thoughts. Joe similarly shared his perspective on the topic and said:

I sure like being away from it all, retreating to these quiet places. It is good for the mind, body, and I believe deep down inside it’s good for the soul; you can search that soul out are really take an inward look at yourself and where you are in life. Question where you are going. Think about your regrets, this type of thing. . . It is a lot of questioning. A lot of times I am just able to be proud here.

Joe seemed thankful for the time to question his life and appeared to become “proud” with himself in the process. When asked about what specifically he was proud of, Joe noted, “To get to a place like this and just proud of general accomplishments.” Similar to Tom, the process of self-reflection and assessment is one that seemed to lead to feelings of contentment. Almost an exact echo, when asked a follow up question about why he considered the whole of his wilderness experiences to be spiritual, John stated:

Whatever sorts of problems you may have in your everyday life, you can come here, or reflect on here and realize how unimportant they really are. This is definitely a place for me to let go and be myself.

John took the idea in a similar direction, noting how he is able to be himself, but he included “or reflect on here” demonstrating something new. He included the idea that he could reflect on his

experiences and achieve nearly the same feelings of letting go and being himself. Earlier in the interview he had noted:

You know the batteries get a little dull and this is for the recharge, they just need that refreshing. Coming back you have a different perspective. When you deal with the little challenges in the wilderness, it puts things into perspective. You start to not take things for granted like relationships with family. There have been times when I had significant life problems and I came up here and not necessarily solved them, but got a different perspective.

It seemed that the “different perspective” was important to him, reminding him of how to either deal with challenges or be thankful in his daily life. For John, Joe, Tom, and Mary, it seems that perspective afforded by their experiences made them feel like better people.

Bill similarly noted, “I find the time here to reflect in ways I don’t otherwise. You know, your time here on Earth and what kind of impression do you get to leave for generations behind you.” The recurring theme of visitors considering their purpose and how to best serve those around them was similarly shared by David who said, “Many times up here I start to think about the ways that I can help people and my wife and I think about things we can do with church or the community to reach out {pause} we are inspired to do our best when we are here.” David’s comment was on the heels of talking about how he would like to attend church more frequently. During this part of the interview it seemed that his experiences in the wilderness and his time for reflection had left him motivated to make some changes in his daily life. It did not seem that he was displeased with his accomplishments to date but rather than his times for spiritual reflection in the wilderness had given him a chance to think about new goals.

From each of the above quotes, it seems clear that the visitors’ experiences inspired them to be their best selves. Holding on to those feelings and perspectives can be hard and Brian referenced his attempt to do so saying:

. . . It is interesting; I really don't like to come from this low stress environment and plug right back into civilization. Because I leave behind the mental stress of work and constantly being attached to my cell phone, I am able to get to a whole different feeling up here. So when I return, I think; did it really matter how the baseball team did? Did it really matter, this and that? I learned a while back that it is important to slowly go back to the daily grind so that this doesn't become a long lost memory; so that I, we as a family, can re-immense a little more slowly; so now we may spend a day on the big lake near Duluth, or stay at a cabin somewhere on the way back. I think it helps me remember, or, avoid getting overtaken by constant communication with my job.

His response clearly described how feelings could be lost, and depicted his struggle to give himself and his family a slower transition that could allow for the feelings to carry over. Clearly Brian hoped that the slower transition allows them all to remember what is really important to them and not be overwhelmed with things that may not really matter.

For each of the visitors mentioned in this section, figuring out what is really important seemed to provide a happiness they don't always feel and that they hoped to carry forward. His comment came about after talking at length about the spiritual benefits his overall experience. It wasn't always clear that these feelings were spiritually relevant, but often appeared to associate with spiritual feelings and personal development.

Summary of Wilderness as a Sanctuary

These stories shared in *Wilderness as a Sanctuary* capture participant defined spiritual experiences that explain the how wilderness can be a refuge and safe haven from qualities of society including technology, judgment, and most simply, overly-busy lives. Not only did participants speak of escaping from their everyday lives, but also shared perspectives, thoughts and experiences that depicted how the setting provided a space that was wholly different, a sanctuary. The data seemed to communicate that the BWCAW inspired feelings that something bigger exists, reminded participants of their beliefs that wilderness was created by something

greater, and encouraged thoughts that the everyday does not. Each noted element appeared to contribute and in some cases define participant's spiritual experiences.

4.4.0 Steps to the Spiritual

During the interviews, many comments seemed to highlight back-stories that helped explain the phenomena of spiritual experiences in the wilderness. When asked about their connection or attachment to wilderness, participants shared details from past experiences in the wilderness that appeared to influence the ways that they interacted with the wilderness on their present trips at hand. Not only did they share general experiences but experiences laced with spiritual elements that seemed to help develop their present spirituality. In those stories, there appeared to be many examples of past inputs, behaviors and outcomes, but evidence of how those past lived experience directly relate to their present spirituality. Participants stories appeared to include: meaningful and powerful connections with other people and the wild natural world; habits they had that supported and promoted their spirituality; and processes of gaining spiritual habits and insights from an array of other people and media and in turn sharing those habits in a variety of ways. From those details it began to appear that some interviewee's wilderness spiritualities had a larger operational scale than just wilderness areas and that their spirituality and overarching relationship with the wilderness were dynamic and changing over their lives. The following two paragraphs more specifically explain the section titles and themes.

Solidifying Connections opens the section with examples of how participants describe connecting to past memories, other people, and wildness in spiritual ways. Each quote contains the term 'connect' and seemed to use it in a meaningful way. *Role of Ritual* holds examples of how visitors seem to have habits and rituals that shape their spiritual experiences. An example of a habit that relates to spirituality is the technique with which a visitor paddles their canoe, while

an example of a ritual is routinely going to a particular place or type of place, such as a rocky prow along the shoreline in order to experience the setting in a certain way. The next two sections, *Shaped by Mentors* and *Sharing the Wild* contain data that seems to explain the phenomena of spiritual experiences as potentially learned from others and as a component of the wilderness experience that visitors enjoy sharing with others. From multiple examples it seems there is a 'coming full circle' component of learning and teaching about the phenomena that some described as spiritual in itself.

The last two sections depict how broader elements of individual's lives and life courses play a role in their spirituality. In *Defining the Scale of Wilderness Spirituality* participants appears to stretch the physical boundaries of the phenomena and details on how experiences outside of wilderness can lead to wilderness spirituality are shared. The quotes in the section highlight how individuals appeared to share experiences and feelings related to wilderness spirituality outside of the physical boundaries of wilderness and the temporal bounds of their visit. Lastly, *Changing Relationships* introduces comments that appeared to relate the phenomena to the temporal life course of visitors. The section considers how spiritual relationships to the wilderness may change over time and alter as individuals pass through various phases of their lives.

4.4.1 Solidifying Connections

In this section the aim is to understand what participants meant by using the term 'connect' as related to spiritual connections formed between visitors and the past, other people, and the wild around them. Below, the quotes help explore how those connections play a role in the phenomena of spiritual experiences, and illuminate what they are connecting to. These

connections often appeared to be related to both moments described as spiritual experiences, or be significantly influential into broader spiritual relationships.

For Nancy spirituality is, “Feeling a sense of a higher power or a greater force and just being receptive to it, appreciative of it.” When questioned about having spiritual experiences Nancy explained the following:

It’s like I have to be out long enough to get rid of all that other noise, to be present and actually connect. So you know, I don’t – I really do feel like it’s external, there’s something external that’s coming in. I mean I do know that a lot of it is just my internal perception and like my brain quieting down and finally connecting here. But it does feel like there’s like an external vibe, and I kind of really feel that. It’s just like, “Ohh,” you really have to let go of all that other stuff though to have anything like that happen.

Similar to earlier examples in the section *Finding Quiet* and others, Nancy seemed to need time in the wild in order to settle her mind and have certain spiritual feelings. Amidst those feelings we see that she is connecting to an unknown external vibe, though she says that a large part of it is certainly internal. Nancy specifically said, “finally connecting here,” seemingly alluding to connecting both to the place around her and the higher power she had mentioned. Her apparent connection appears to be triggered by letting other distractions fade away. This quote is a great starting point because it introduces the difficulty of understanding ‘connections’ but also demonstrates its importance. The wilderness, with its seeming lack of constraints, provides time and space for her to connect spiritually in ways that she does not in other places.

As explained in the section *God’s Creation* many participants viewed the wilderness as God’s creation and therefore felt closer to God in that setting. Below we see that Chris used the term “connected” to describe those feelings:

I am more aware here {pause} like, I always know that there is a God, but here I feel more connected to Him like I said. When I get home, I am still very connected to Him. I feel connected all the time, but here and when we get back, it is different, I feel like it is a little stronger, or a lot stronger.

Recall that visits to the wilderness are a “spiritual embrace” for Chris. It seemed likely that feeling that strong sense of connection is part of his spirituality. In his quote we also see that the feelings of connection last and feel stronger. When asked what it is about the place that makes it easier to connect, Chris said, “It is just so quiet, I can think more out here; just think more, just more connected with less distractions.”

The term ‘connect’ additionally arose as Brian talked about his solo canoe experiences.

When asked why he described them as spiritual experiences, Brian said:

Because I’m doing it solo. It’s a time for me to be reflective and to communicate in my way but it’s a one-on-one time for me to work with the Lord to kind of clear my head from the past day and to prepare it for the coming day. [I: You mentioned solo there, would you say that you tend to have spiritual experiences more when you’re on your own or when you’re with groups?] Most intensely solo, I feel more connected with God, and experiences that I recounted for you. Kathy and I are churchgoers . . .and, it is nice to go to on Sunday, but that doesn’t connect so much with me. It’s a large church with a couple of very talented pastors. And, that’s good and read some scripture, but that’s not as spiritually deeply connected for me.

For Brian, connecting appeared to happen when he had the time and space to communicate and be reflective. The experiences he had recounted included, “The eagles I’ve seen soaring, we’ve seen three or four in the day plus that we’ve been here. And, so that immediately connects me to my God believing spiritual core.” Having time and mental space, as well as having triggers such as scenic wildlife appeared to connect Brian. The connection he spoke of seemed to be something he enjoyed on his own terms, not those of the church or other individuals such as his pastor.

David also spoke of viewing wildlife as a way to connect spiritually:

I love looking at nature as happening, and you certainly can consider that spiritual. Getting to witness things. We saw a bald eagle take a seagull one time. And it was loud and feathers everywhere, but it was cool because it had a yearling or something with it,

and it was teaching it how to hunt. We had watched it for a couple of days, and it would teach it how to dive and roll, and they were just doing these things. It was really cool to watch them. And the one day there was this seagull out on this little rock, and this thing just came down and just hit it, and just carried it over to another rock. And it was just walking on just one talon, and it's just walking up the side of a little hill. And then you just start seeing the feathers go everywhere. It was like whoa. I didn't know that they ate other birds like that. It was one of those times where you are there and feel connected to the event, it was definitely spiritual.

David's experience of 'witnessing' the wildlife indeed connected him. Just the use of the word 'witness' seems to emphasize the importance of the experience. Different from Nancy, Chris and Brian, David remarked that it was definitely was spiritual, but the connection was to the wildlife, not God or a higher spiritual power. It seemed to connect him spiritually in a way that he felt a part of scene, of the world around him, not just an onlooker.

Jeff similarly connected with the wildlife on a previous trip. He explained, "The connection to Mother Nature can just be so strong {pause} pretty spiritual. . .there was one trip I took up here in the off-season, until the last day, I'd seen more moose than people and that is pretty awesome." Recall that Jeff emphasized, "You get spiritual satisfaction out of these trips; that is what they are all about." It seemed that his connection to the wildlife around him was a great example of what the trips are all about for him. For both David and Jeff, the feelings of connecting to the local fauna seemed highly important, and apparently spiritual.

David additionally related past relationships to the wilderness experience at hand:

I grew up doing a lot of things with my father and now he's passed, so for me the connection to it, it is a way for me to go to the places that he loved and we spent time together. That is my deepest connection.

David seemed to be implying that the Boundary Waters is a place that his father would have loved and therefore he was connecting to his memories of his father. Such memories seemed to

weigh heavy on David. He spoke slowly and clearly about his father and called it his “deepest connection.”

When talking about spiritual experiences, Mary also told of connecting with the past, but had indigenous cultures in mind saying, “I spend a lot of time here reflecting on and connecting to Native American beliefs; they really believed in the connectedness of people to animals to the elements.” Remember that Mary defined spiritual as, “Nature possessing the ability to draw an inspiring feeling in people.” It seemed that she found inspiration in thinking about the Native American beliefs. Again we see that interviewees had the time to reflect and connect in ways that appeared spiritual and specific to the BWCAW experience.

Rob, who found the whole experience spiritual, talked about how connections with old friends easily arise on trips in the Boundary Waters:

Those are working relationships; some are old army buddies and those kinds of things. You know, forty-year relationships. The first night out around the campfire we just pick right up and talk about the old days. You know, oh here we are again, how many years has it been, that kind of connection.

By saying “here we are again,” Rob seemed to be signaling that connecting in the wilderness is easier and more instinctive due to how experiences in the wilderness appeared to promote direct, unmediated conversations and interactions.

Whether connecting with wildlife, higher powers, memories of experiences, or close friends, experiences seemed to be described as spiritual and carried meaning for these visitors. Though it can be difficult to assess what was meant by ‘connect’ and its derivations, it seems clear that many spiritual experiences are rooted in, or are at least enhanced by making connections. Many other stories and experiences also appeared to include important connections, but as previously noted, only connections where the actual term ‘connect’ was present were shared here. Time, space, and the lack of distractions again seems to be components of these

spiritual experiences, though more than that, the complexity of the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness was again apparent with a range of experiences being interrelated and layered to arrive at the phenomena.

4.4.2 Role of Ritual

From many participants there were comments that highlighted the ways that certain habits and rituals seem to lead to or enhance spiritual experiences they have on their trips. Within this analysis the difference between a habit and a ritual is very slight and formed out of participant explanations of the two. Habits appeared to be actions that a visitor did somewhat instinctively while rituals were more intentional with mindfulness and attention at their core. In both cases, the actions appeared to lead to similar types of spiritual experiences.

Beth explained her Boundary Waters experiences saying, “It is all entwined into one big comfortable, spiritual home, that I consider my second home.” She immediately went on to say:

I have so many habits that make this special. I mean, I learned how to camp at a YMCA, so there’s lots of little habits that they taught me. Don’t let the bottom of the canoe hit the rocks. Put it up on the sand. Lots of little habits. I never hang my food pack in the tree. I always put it back in the woods and wrapped in a tarp and tuck it under and put pots and pans on it. But there’s just – I see people paddling on the same side of the canoe, and I’m like what are they doing? You can’t do that. There’s just lots of little quirks and habits that I’ve acquired.

For Beth it seemed that carrying out small lessons learned from her days in camp was potentially a fulfilling and spiritual process. Regarding paddling skills it appeared that she understood how certain techniques were right or appropriate and when she and others were doing it the right way, it made her feel good, “comfortable.” The habits she referenced were clearly Boundary Waters related and seemed to be special because they add to how “special” the place is for her and seemingly contribute to it being a ‘spiritual home’ for her. To gain clarification on a comment

she was asked, “Would you say that you feel a closeness to ‘Mother Nature,’ as you said, a ‘closeness’ here that’s different than other places”, Beth noted, “Only because I’ve been coming here for so long, only because I feel my best here; I feel I know what I’m doing here, I’ve done it for years.” For Beth the repetition of the activities and her familiarity with certain skills seemed to give her comfort, confidence, and a closeness that she didn’t find other places. As noted, that closeness led to her calling the Boundary Waters a “comfortable,” and “spiritual home.” It seemed that the habits she practiced significantly contributed to that perspective.

Jeff similarly talked about habits he had. Amidst our conversation his dedication and interest in canoes was apparent and seemed to contribute to his stated spirituality. Jeff was asked, “Is there something about canoeing that you find spiritual?” and he responded:

I’m a canoer, and I just {pause} I like to see canoes travel well. I like to see people paddle with good technique. . . There is something special about paddling a tandem canoe. I’ve got a friend and we just need to paddle sometimes so we go out and we just talk about stuff you normally wouldn’t talk about. . . I guess everyone has their thing, but canoeing is pretty cool that way.

Jeff and Beth both seemed to have special feelings related to paddling habits that contributed to their spiritual experiences. Like Beth, Jeff found contentment in knowing that something was being done right. Remember Jeff cited the *Chariots of Fire* line about praising the Lord by doing something the right way. Clearly he found enjoyment in propelling a canoe properly and it seemed the tandem nature of the activity additionally allowed for meaningful conversation. For both study participants, doing something right, repeatedly, gave them some spiritually meaningful pleasure. It was almost as if finding that comfort, that correctness, was something that contrasted with their everyday lives where they may have had less control.

Later in the conversation, Jeff again reasserted how engrained his canoeing habit is by saying:

It's a family thing. I mean because that's like, one time I made a – when I got married, I made a shirt that had like, for the four brothers, I put a canoe on there because it's kind of like a family sport for us. And I don't know, it's something that we do pretty well and I've got a lot of canoes at home. So I'm not a kayaker. I'm a canoer.

Jeff's canoeing habit seemed to help define him. Jeff additionally discussed how time in a tandem canoe could lead to uncommon conversations that he found pleasing. For many people, understanding and taking pride in activities that define them seems to be a spiritual process.

For Jeff and Beth, the habits that they have acquired over time seemed to help shape feelings that are personally spiritual and/or lead to spiritual experiences. For the following visitors, Ken, Sue, Dan, and Nancy, we see how more intentional actions, rituals, led to spiritually meaningful experiences. The intentionality and deliberateness of their actions set these examples apart as rituals. While the actions may have had an instinctual element, there seemed to be a deliberateness that included expectations or hopes.

When Ken and Eric were asked if they would consider any of their experiences in the Boundary Waters to be spiritual, they replied:

[Ken:] This is my first time to the Boundary Waters, and obviously the high points are sitting on the shoreline, every evening, and in the case of yesterday, in the mornings, just enjoying the calm and the peace and all of that. [Eric:] This is what you come to the Boundary Waters for, the way it was this morning. Especially after the wind we have had the last few days.

Ken and Eric had intentionally been taking time to sit along the shore each morning and evening in order to experience the calm and peace of the setting. One way to consider this a ritual is to recognize that Eric felt that you go to the Boundary Waters for the types of experiences they had that morning. With that in mind they had intentionally been spending time along the shores in the morning and at nights, opening themselves up to that experience, seemingly looking for something that they knew would please them.

Sue similarly spoke of spending time along the shoreline of the lakes:

Typically, I'm the first one up, and what I usually do is get up, do whatever I need to do in the morning, and then come and sit down by the water and wait for the sun to rise and listen to the loons. And no one else is up, and that's what I like. To me, that's my, I know you say spiritual, but that's my time with God.

Indeed, Sue clearly had her "time with God" as a result of making her way to the water and waiting for the sun to rise. Her actions seemed to be a deliberate pursuit of a particular experience. She notes that she would rather call it her "time with God" than describe it as simply spiritual. Like Sue, Dan found himself going to the shoreline in the mornings. He explained:

It is so unreal to see a beautiful lake, like this morning, with fog everywhere and it was like glass, that makes you go wow. So it has that appeal. [I: Can you tell me a little about this morning and what you saw.] I always come down to the lake in the morning. . . today when I looked out there across the water, you go wow, this was worth it. I mean, you can't complain when you are looking out at this, watching the sun come up and there was fog everywhere. That's one of the moments where it was peaceful, quiet and beautiful. That's one of those moments that you look for and will remember.

It is easy to see how this is a ritual for Dan. He mentions that he looks for such moments and clearly found a special one. To clarify whether this was a spiritual experience for Dan, consider this question posed to him, "You mentioned that a lot of the trip has spiritual qualities, would you say that there are certain moments that are more spiritual than others?" Dan responded "The quieter and the more beautiful times . . . when you are just awestruck." By using the words "awestruck" and "wow," it appeared that Dan was trying to describe something that had sublime elements. For both Sue and Dan, it seemed that they had made a ritual out of time on the shorelines and in that intentional act they find experiences that are spiritually rewarding.

Nancy also made comments that indicate she searches for certain types of experiences. When asked if she had particular moments that she would consider spiritual, she explained:

Yeah, a moment when the water was flat and the moon was rising and the sun setting, then also when the mist was rising and we're paddling in the mist; it's more when it's

still, it's always when it's still, I feel that way. I seek out those still times, paddle early and late just for that reason.

Here Nancy noted that she mindfully searches for certain moments that she considers spiritual moments. She sought out those still times and remarked that she paddles the canoe early and late in the day for that particular reason. Such a ritual was more than a habit because she is giving her attention to the task for a particular reason.

For others, including Lisa, certain rituals provided spiritual experiences. About half way through her interview, Lisa responded to a particular question:

[I: Regarding your comment that you feel like you can be more spiritual here, is it mostly just the absence of the distractions or would you say there's other things that inspire spirituality here for you?] Definitely the wind blowing through the trees, absolutely, and then listening to the animals like later on tonight I'm sure that there will be a lot of wonderful animal sounds as the ones that are nocturnal wake up and start calling. This spring we were here, oh my gosh, it was wonderful the chorus of the animals waking up and preparing for their hunt for the night. . .It is exhilarating to know that humanity hasn't totally encroached on the wild. . .I am sure that I will try and listen tonight.

Lisa's ritual of listening to wildlife after dark is clearly one experience that inspires spirituality for her. Similar to others, simple actions seemed to become meaningful rituals because they included an attentiveness and thought process that led to spiritual thoughts and considerations. For Lisa it was not just exhilarating to hear the animals but to think about the fact that she was in a wild place where they still exist. In the quote she additionally mentioned listening to the wind blow through trees. Clearly there is pattern here of enjoying the sounds of the forest in a way that she considers spiritual.

While considering rituals, it is important to think about how being in the Boundary Waters can not only inspire some rituals, but also make others seem less important. Dan does both in the following quote:

I don't pray quite as frequently as I do back home, which may seem unusual based on my other comments that I feel closer to God, but I really don't find myself praying as much. [I: Why do you think that is?] I do think that I am at peace more here. After a hectic day, you know back at work and you lay in bed and you finally get to relax for those ten minutes before you go to sleep and you are tired of the rat race and you want some of that spiritual release or that connectedness, where as here, you do things to feel that all day long, you are living it all day, you are connected all the time so you don't feel like 'hey, I've got to make that spiritual connection now. . . I am done with everything else, so now let's stop and focus. Whereas here, it is always in the back of your mind so I don't have that real focused brief window to do that because you feel connected all day long. . . I can make choices throughout the day like, I'll go down to the rocks and just sort of sit there and enjoy it myself.

Here Dan is talking specifically about how being out of the hectic everyday lets him feel as though he doesn't need to assign time to his ritual of praying before bed. Important here is his comment that he "wants some of that spiritual release or that connectedness." Though it is unclear what he wanted release from, he may have been referring to the stresses of his everyday. He says that while in the Boundary Waters that feeling (of connectedness) was present all day for him. Most importantly Dan mentioned how he makes choices all day that play a role in his spiritual experiences; thus it appeared Dan was partaking in rituals. In particular he cited choosing to go down to the rocks and "just sort of sitting there and enjoying it" himself. The way the quote progressed we can see that in those moments he found the spiritual connection that he seemed to need on a daily basis, and the process seemingly was an example of how he was more present while in the wilderness.

Through the above quotes, we see that participants have rituals related to finding quiet, beauty, and wildness. The steps to these spiritual experiences are different from the mentioned habits because they are premeditated. The habits mentioned at the beginning of the section seemed to be experiences that were not thought about in that moment, but upon reflecting became a component of the participant's spiritual experiences. In the final quote provided below,

a ritual is described from the perspective of a trip leader. Charlie, a Boy Scout troop leader shared the following:

It's a tradition for the troop to do it, it's not a life changing experience for everybody, but I think for the boys, it's different. They've been somewhere where they didn't have the conveniences. And they've hauled their canoes and all their gear across the portage. [I: When you say life changing, what do you mean by that?] Boy to man kind of thing. Their mental outlook on things I think would be a little different. [I: What sort of kind of mental changes or their outlook, how do you think that changed?] Maybe the way they carry themselves. I don't think it's going to change them physically or maybe a little bit of maturity comes with it in the way they carry themselves. And other people look up to them that are old enough, they've been there, they did it kind of a thing.

Through this exchange, it was clear that Charlie considered this a tradition for the troop and saw it as a potentially transformative experience. Though the experience was not a ritual related to spirituality in the same way it was for other visitors, it is included here because the "tradition" seemed to be a mindful and attentive experience for the troop and its leaders. If it is the case that the trip was framed as a "tradition" where "boy to man" kinds of experiences are had, surely certain components likely take the form of rituals.

Separate from Charlie, the other visitors cited in this section spoke specifically about how certain habits and rituals influence spiritual experiences. In this sub section and others, it seemed that visitors routinely situated themselves to spiritually experience the Boundary Waters. The interviewees mentioned here were seemingly open to experiences, and some were apparently open to God. Whether by habitually doing things a 'right way' that fed them spiritually or continuing rituals of finding quiet that displayed how they are conscientious of potentially spiritual experiences, these participants talked about their personal behaviors that played a role in the phenomena. These all clearly fit into the category of *Steps to the Spiritual*.

4.4.3 Shaped by Mentors

Throughout this analysis references have been made to participants bringing their own perspectives, beliefs, and motivations to their experience at hand. In this section, the role of mentors in the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness is considered. The storyline developed during the interviews as the depth and importance of mentorship became routinely shared by the visitors. Visitors interestingly talked about their views being influenced by a wide variety of sources, not just typical parental or teacher mentors.

For Sue, spirituality was, “Knowing that you are loved and in a safe place. . . the feeling is definitely stronger when I am out here. . . being out here where creation occurred inspires a closeness.” Being a recently divorced single woman, Sue spoke about people that help guide her outdoor experiences, and about people that inspire her. She said, “Scott and Frank, they lead a lot of trips and are great, but there are a few women who are 10 to 15 years older than me, and it’s like I want to be like that . . . they are inspirational.” Sue’s comments pointed to the fact that having great leaders like Scott and Frank added to her feeling safe and loved, but also signaled that certain female mentors helped her consider the kind of wilderness traveler she wants to be as she ages. She described them further saying, “Two of those ladies I have taken trips with and they just make everything look easy, they seem to be in tune with their surroundings and just don’t seem to need much to be comfortable and happy.” The ladies’ simplicity she referred to seemed to signal a state of mind that she wanted to find. It seemed that as a divorcee she was looking for the peaceful state of mind that the other women demonstrated. Each of the six members of Sue’s group were members of the Minnesota Rovers, a group with the mission of connecting people with similar outdoor interests. It appeared that she had found the feelings of

being loved, feeling safe, and clearly viewed other women as mentors that could inspire her to enjoy such experiences for years to come.

Jen similarly talked about mentors but was more direct, sharing a moment where her husband pushed her through a physically tough experience. She explained, “He simultaneously teaches me about love and self reliance; yesterday on what we call iBitch ridge he helped me understand what I can put my body through {pause} I was shaking by the end, but it was amazing to have him push me through.” Jen considered spirituality to most simply be, “An internal source of power and calm.” In this case, however, her husband seems to be an external factor motivating her, but looking closer at the quote we see that he helps her understand for herself what she can put her body through. This trend of having spirituality be an introspective practice is seen again and again through this study, but we see here that it can be the gentle supportive push of a mentor that helps such realizations be made. While the pathway to such realizations isn’t entirely clear, it seemed that Jen’s husband’s trust in her skills gave her the confidence to do more than she thought she could.

Deb thought back on some of her early experiences in the wilderness saying, “My parents always took us on pretty remote, unique trips; it built character and I can still remember the trips and some of the crazy shenanigans, those are lasting memories, great bonding experiences.” Along with calling spirituality “communing with nature”, Deb also noted that spirituality is, “feeling part of a community.” Indeed her parents seemed to create “great bonding experiences” that made her feel part of a community, which as noted, is part of spirituality for Deb. Related to the trip at hand, Deb, who had brought her boyfriend from New Zealand mentioned, “I was glad my parents, who showed it to me, were able to join us.” She appeared to value the mentoring her parents provided and was glad that her parents were going to share the place with her boyfriend.

It was seemingly making him part of their community, a community that provided spiritual feelings for Deb, and it seemed she hoped it would do the same for him.

Talking about parents as mentors was common and after the semi-formal questions, David was asked if there was anything else that he would like to add. He took the opportunity to link his dad's passing to much of his wilderness spirituality. He stated, "I remember when I was little, he took me to my first Cub Scout meeting, and I don't remember what it was, I honestly don't remember at all what set it off, but he was just like, there is no way you're doing this; I am going to teach you the right way to do this." David explained the 'right way' saying, "My dad was a minister and he went about it teaching us about respecting wilderness, being safe, and leave no trace, things like that. . . I have so many memories of being in the wild with him, in the mountains of Colorado." David, who referred to spirituality as, "Finding the spirit within us and a pathway that leads us to follow certain teachings," seemed to be alluding to the "pathway" that his father would have wanted him to follow as he went on to say:

After he passed away, it never really felt like any community was really home . . . I got the urge to move to the mountains where more of my wilderness memories with him were set; it was a tough time in my life and I am glad I landed in a place that was really spiritual for me.

His comments suggested that his father's mentorship provided him with a pathway that included a stronger wilderness spirituality. David clearly seemed to benefit and find meaning from being in a place that was spiritual for him.

During his interview, Jeff also referenced his father saying:

I was thinking about my dad this morning. He passed away a few years ago; just loved this area. I was thinking about how much he would have liked seeing my kids fish. People always ask you what your dad does and I would say, "Well, he is a fisherman." I got to come up here with him a little bit and I just think he would have {teary pause} I think that maybe he's aware that we're here and aware that my kids are fishing and stuff, and I think he's pretty happy about it. And actually, they're fishing with his rod.

For Jeff, spirituality was, “what you believe, not just what you believe, but what matters to you.” Jeff’s mix of words and emotions seemed to convey how much his father mattered to him and how much he believed that his father would be happy about his and his families actions. Calling his dad a ‘fisherman’ emphasizes how important certain activities were to his father’s life, and how Jeff saw his father’s identity to be captured by the title “fisherman.” It appeared Jeff’s father had mentored him to experience the same pleasure and to share it with family. Indeed it seemed important to him that they were using his father’s fishing rod. It isn’t always possible to carry a tangible connection to a mentor into the wilderness, and Jeff was clearly pleased that he had the opportunity.

A father’s role in a current experience was also shared by Chris. In response to a follow-up question about who he normally travels into wilderness with, Chris explained:

My father has been a mentor . . .he brought me up here a bunch and taught me how to do stuff and he has just kind of showed me what camping is all about; not like state park camping, but being up here, boundary water camping. He taught me to appreciate it and how to enjoy my time here as much as I can . . .he taught me to enjoy the moments and slow down . . .I guess he taught me by doing these things, and spending time with me doing these things, he just always modeled them and I sort of followed along and really grew to enjoy the time.

For Chris, spirituality is, “Believing that there is a God, believing that something guiding us through life . . .I mostly think about it up here; I think about it at home as well, but not in the same way.” Recall that Chris found his walks and taking in his surroundings to be part of a “spiritual embrace.” From the above reference to “enjoying moment and slowing down” to the following comments, it seemed that he had been mentored by his father to practice some of those habits that he referred to as spiritual. He explained:

My dad is a big fan of the voyageurs and reads about them a lot. He likes to read about other people’s experiences in the Boundary Waters. . .When I’m up here he is fine with

me being as involved as I want. . .He taught me to just take it in, so he is okay with me wandering off and doing that.

His father clearly emphasized the importance of taking personal time to sit and watch the wild, and to slow down while in the wilderness. Moreover, his families' recent disconnect from their long time church left a gap that he seemed to fill with his relationship with the wilderness, as led to by his father.

Not all mentoring done by family members was done in situ. Sometimes, the words and sentiments of parents seemed to have spiritual implications even when conveyed outside of wilderness. While on a trip with just her boyfriend, Barb thought about her father, a mentor, in a way she describes as spiritual:

At a few moments when we couldn't find a campsite, it was disheartening. After figuring out where we were I felt very accomplished; before the trip my dad was like, 'I don't know if you can do that, kind of like, totally doubting me,' so when we finally had the campsite set up I almost wanted to call him. Just thinking about that and how proud he would be seems spiritual to me.

For Barb, the spiritual implications seemed to be a sense of pride related to her father. She had noted that spiritual experiences occur when, "I can relax and enjoy the peace." It appeared that by completing a task that would make her mentor feel some pride, Barb seemed to find peace and remarked that reflecting on her accomplishment seemed spiritual.

It seemed that having the space and time to consider mentor's thoughts was powerful for some wilderness visitors. For Laura, who was earlier described as seeing each trip as, "having a different spiritual connection," being in the wild through camp experiences let her relate to her mentor, her father. She said, "Because of my dad's interest, there wasn't really a question, we just went to camp and fell in love with it." Laura went on to describe how her connection to canoe camp was shaped and related to her father's experiences:

I definitely created a strong connection for myself at the camp over there, just a lot of great people. It's definitely a pretty historical lake, a lot of tradition and just stuff like that. And I think that was sort of my strongest connection because my dad had been there. It was like coming home. It was like telling him a story about it, he obviously knew exactly what I was talking about and would have a reciprocal story that he had experienced 30 years before, which is an interesting thing to have happen. Technology and things change so much, education and school, but it's a very generational thing. Sure, maybe they pack up different food every once in a while, but the same canoes that he used as a counselor and camper are the same canoes that I use. The exact same ones so it's like – and he's like, "Oh, yeah, I did that. Portaged out of Range River as a counselor." And I was like, "Yeah, it was kind of hard with those interim campers." He was like, "Yeah, it was a long day for me, too, 30 years ago." That was kind of a cool thing to be able to relate within that whole community.

She clearly calls this one of her strongest connections and refers to going to camp as coming home. While on the surface it may just have seemed to be a tradition, Laura appeared to find the experiences to be a foundational component of how she related to others and how she experiences places. Such comments exhibit the deep meaning of the experience, and highlight how important it is to have her father to speak with about the challenges, lessons, and successes. Her “spiritual connections” within each trip appeared to have been at least partly shaped by the pride that her father passed on to her.

Like Laura, Nancy was raised attending canoe camps during the summer and did some guiding as well. Nancy, however, seemed to be more impacted by literature related to the experience, and by the mentoring of the camp counselors. She captured the importance saying:

It wasn't even something I did with my high school peers; it was something like each summer I would go away to this camp and that would be my experience away from home, independent of my family. . . I looked forward to it all year; being out there with those people, it was my way of identifying, wanting to identify myself, 'now this is what I do.' I was just really focused and concentrating, and just all year long, looking forward to those times.

Before the trip at hand, Nancy had not visited the Boundary Waters in nearly sixteen years. Her past experiences included trips as long as forty-days. On the sixth day of this 'reunion' trip she

revisited a text, *Paddle Whisperers*. She noted, “Paddle Whisperers reminded me to slow down and also made me realize how sensitive and emotional I can be.” The book seemed highly meaningful in that it reminded her how to interact with the place in a way that was pleasing to her. Before that she hadn’t “slowed down” or seemingly settled in to her wilderness experience. Being able to reflect on past camp experiences, and a particular piece of literature carried meaning for her seemed to re-shape her experience, clearly mentoring her. Talking specifically about camp years and the influence of camp counselors, Nancy noted:

I wasn’t a huge socializer during the academic year so I would look forward to it all year. The camp trips, I would plan and think about them, the feelings from the previous trip would kind of linger, the words of the counselors, I always thought about them and how amazing they were.

Nancy’s tone seemed to demonstrate how much she valued the camps in her life, and how much she seemed to think they impacted her. Nancy’s experiences with literature and camp counselors seemed to be held dear and hold lessons that impacted her spiritual interactions with the place on the trip at hand. It appeared that the counselors’ “amazing” qualities helped make past experiences memorable and the text reminded her of how to experience the wilderness in a way that was spiritual and enjoyable for her.

Mark also spoke of experiences from his youth. He noted how important his parents were to him, referencing how they directly emphasized the relationship between nature and church:

They instilled in us that nature was kind of like going to church. This isn’t a place where you yelled and screamed, other than when you are playing in the water. . .My dad would take us on trails and point out different trees, and having been a carpenter he would say, “That is what 2 by 4s are made out of and that is what we’d make beams out of.” My parents made sure that we got to meet rangers. . .My parents modeled some things like finding beauty; they instilled in me that love for nature and when fishing and hunting, you took only what you could use, this type of thing.

Mark spoke of his experiences in the Boundary Waters saying, “To me, they are all spiritual.”

Indeed the quote above points to where he learned some of his beliefs. His parents emphasized not only how to act in nature, but also taught him how to perceive his surroundings. From the quote seemed clear that he parents intentionally aimed to provide certain experiences and teach certain actions that were related to spiritually experiencing the wilderness. For example Mark spoke at length about his current trip saying, “I always try to look around and see everything, there is so much to see, there is no way I can see it all, but I try to see things and just notice how different they are or how they are an important part of this whole place.” From this and other comments it seemed that Mark constantly viewed the place in a way that spawned spiritual thoughts of simply being thankful for the opportunity to observe.

For others still, parents did not directly teach or model, but instead were remembered through certain experiences in the Boundary Waters. Brian talked about how wildlife sightings invoked certain feelings:

Seeing those eagles conjures up many different feelings for me. . . Seeing them here, free, it is inspiring. Even more to the spiritual element, eagles are something that my parents enjoyed greatly and they have just passed away in the last year and a half, and two weeks ago, per their directions my sisters and I went to the Mississippi River and just below Redwing and married their ashes with the Mississippi River. As we spread them, eagles were soaring overhead. It was pretty spiritual, their soul was alive and well in that embodiment of the eagles. Every, every time I see them this week I have and will continue to think about them.

Brian seemed to consider this a spiritual connection to his mentors. While they can't certainly be called mentors of wilderness spirituality, memories of his parents and the spreading of their ashes obviously is something he called spiritual. It seemed that being reminded of people close to you, in this case seeing something meaningful to memories of them, informed certain levels of respect and gratitude. In that way, Brian's parents are continuing to mentor him, forcing him to be thankful for things, and in this case, thankful for something wild.

When asked about whether he would consider himself to have a relationship or special connection to wilderness, Charlie explained. “Yeah, definitely. As a kid growing up, my grandfather always went to Canada fishing; it was unfortunate, I never got the chance to go, but I think it was similar to this.” Though he didn’t share the experiences with his grandfather, he considers them to have helped shape his current connection. Yet again we see that imagining others, being reminded of them, or thinking of them because of context can impact visitors and guide their actions and appreciations. Charlie’s connection might not be called spiritual based on the interview, but his reference demonstrated how visitors sometimes look deep into their past and consider mentor connections.

Other interviewees shared more tangible examples of mentoring. Rob explained his development of a connection with the wilderness saying, “My neighbor was part Indian and his son and I got to be good friends; he took me fishing and hunting {pause} he got me started and once you are hooked there is no turning back; he taught me to respect all of this.” Recall that Rob stated, “It is spiritual up here, no doubt about it, we have to respect it . . .we lead very spiritual lives here.” With that hook provided by his neighbor, he was mentored to respect the wilderness in a way that seems to impact him even today.

Participants also spoke of mentors other than parents and neighbors as well. Linda examined her understanding of the place saying:

I guess I feel more of a spiritual connection to the past because I know that people lived here, this was their home, not all that long ago; I have read stories that include people living off this land and I feel that connection; I have loved to read about it, and now I can experience it. And if they can live that way, I know that I can for just a while. Maybe I can understand what they are saying when I read those books.

Linda was referring to Lousie Erdrich’s *Birch Bark House* series. She went on to share details of the Ojibwa family that lived on an island in the book and told of their homes and canoes made

out of birch trees. From the above quote we can tell that the stories had an impact on her experience of and connection to the Boundary Waters. The characters actions gave her confidence and appeared to give her things to contemplate and consider while she was in the wilderness. She called those “spiritual connections to the past.”

Jeff also spoke of being informed and excited by literature.

Oh yeah. Yeah, I've read a lot of voyageur stories and my dad had this book called *Grand Portage*, which was fictional. I don't know, one of my favorite guys was David Thompson, who was a surveyor. Well, that's what I do. I'm a surveyor, and so he's kind of my hero surveyor because that's what he really wanted to do. He didn't really care about the fur route. He just loved surveying. And he just, he made such a cool map and stuff. And so I actually have a picture of – I have a copy of his map on my wall in my office. Yeah, and he – I would love to get his book, *The Shoe and Canoe* that he always referred to.

Jeff's excitement while talking about literature and connections to past characters was a testament to how they inspired him. Recall that Jeff's family had a strong tradition of canoeing and he considered spirituality to be at least partly composed of “knowing what matters to you.” It seemed that the reading that both he and his dad have done helped him shape his feelings on what matters.

Written materials, fiction and non-fiction, friends, relatives, and parents were all mentioned as highly meaningful mentors that seemed to play a role in the interviewee's spiritualities. Often mentors passed on subtle habits such as paddle strokes, observation skills, camping techniques and general ways of interacting peacefully with the place and others. More pronounced rituals appeared shaped the way interviewees approached and managed their experiences in wilderness included teaching visitors to slow down, enjoy the scenes, take walks, listening for particular sounds, and viewing certain animal guiding their wilderness attachment and spirituality.

Within the comments, it is not always clear that participants are talking about the mentoring leading to spiritual experiences. However, when paired with participant definitions of spirituality and further stories of their experiences, it seemed that in the above cases, the mentors played at least some role in shaping the participants' spiritual experiences.

4.4.4 Sharing the Wild

About half of the participants described spiritual experiences that included an element of sharing with others. At times their comments seemed to complete the circle of earlier stories of being mentored. Within this section, there are multiple types of sharing discussed. Examples include: passively sharing an moment or experience, as in sitting on a shoreline during a beautiful sunset with a friend; actively sharing a lesson with or providing an opportunity for another person, as in teaching a friend or family member how to fish; or actively sharing a conversation or physical challenge, as in paddling a canoe into a headwind for multiple hours with a fellow paddler or speaking deeply with them while paddling. Through comments regarding each type of example, there were either direct references to the experience being spiritual, or there were elements of individuals' spiritualities involved. For many participants, the BWCAW seemed to hold opportunities for sharing that other natural places simply didn't.

Whether the experiences were with groups of people in general, or more specific "one-on-one" instances, it seemed that the time and place provided by the wilderness was important and unique. Sarah was interviewed along the shore while her husband and son played in the waters in front of their campsite. She explained that her brother-in-law's family had spent the previous two days with the family and some of her comments spoke to the 'special' time. She noted, "It is special to get back together with them; we live in the same town, it's not like we don't see each other all the time, we just haven't been to the Boundary Waters together for a long

time.” When asked why it is special, Sarah reflected, “There are no distractions; it is a slower and simpler way of life where we are coexisting with nature.” When asked how that impacts her time with others Sarah noted, “We are able to reconnect; I guess in that way that some may consider spiritual where there is just a peace to the situation with no phones or video games, we are just out here coexisting with it”. Sarah’s comments hinted at how she viewed time with others in the wilderness as more ‘simple’ and ‘peaceful.’ Her comments suggested that there is no time back in their hometown where the experiences with her brother-in-law’s family felt the same.

A component of the Boundary Waters experience that must be considered is that individuals almost always spend their traveling time in a canoe with one, and occasionally two other people. Jeff, who considered spirituality to be what you ‘believe’ and what ‘matters’ to a person, explained the canoeing relationship by saying:

There’s something special about a tandem canoe too because I got a buddy in Duluth and when we paddle and we just talk about stuff you normally wouldn’t talk about when you’re elsewhere, stuff that matters – I guess everybody’s got their thing, but canoeing’s pretty cool that way. And whitewater canoeing is also, it’s such a team deal, if you’re going to do it right, you really need to be in sync and you’ve really got to communicate. And I think that’s kind of special. Yeah, I think that helped bring my wife and I closer together just by doing that and not killing each other out there for 24 days.

Along with highlighting the communication required and the unique experience that canoeing is, Jeff additionally mentioned how his relationship with his wife was further forged by spending time together in a canoe on a 24 day wilderness trip. Numerous participants mentioned how spending time with others in the Boundary Waters is different that spending time with them in normal situations. This is surely an important part of sharing the wilderness.

Carol captured how special her moments with others were in the wilderness by stating, “When we met at the site, I just put my arms out and I hugged her and I said, “Good Job!

Because this year for her, she has done more physical than she has done in the last three years.” Her comment seemed to point to that moment being the pinnacle of her friend’s accomplishment for the year, or last three years. Carol went on to describe what is most important to her on trips into the Boundary Waters saying, “The attachment, remembering good times, like I said, how lucky we are to do this year after year. . .that’s the attachment, the friends, there is something really special about pulling this off, spending time together in this special way.” While her comment didn’t specifically include a reference to spiritual feelings, when asked how she would describe that ‘special’ feeling, she noted, “In my own way I guess I mean sharing the tranquility, just feel very lucky, emotional, a different kind of feeling.” Carol’s response, though not an allusion to spirituality, was clearly demonstrating how the BWCAW provided an opportunity that she doesn’t have other places; it provided a ‘different kind of feeling’ with respect to sharing experiences with others. Clearly for Carol, the experiences with her friends are special and inspire a distinctive feeling. The experiences could be called extraordinary. The respect and humility that Carol’s comments alluded to are sometimes associated with spirituality, but in this incidence that isn’t clear, but can be suggested or implied.

Nancy also spoke to sharing moments with others, and gave a thorough depiction of her perceptions of a certain moment. When asked about whether or not she had any specific spiritual experiences, Nancy explained:

Sometimes when I’m with others, when we’re just sitting there and – it’s like the other person has to be able to be sensing it too, for me to be sensing it. Otherwise the other person is a distraction or the group. You know, as a group though, I’m trying to think back on the groups. There were certain moments that everyone else is feeling it at the same time, and that’s also when I feel it. But if you’re with somebody and they’re like distracted or not aware of it or something, then it kind of – there are those moments where everybody just kind of freezes, everyone in awe of the same thing and it gets really quiet. Like I even noticed last night that we both tried to bring the canoe in without making a sound. But I hadn’t talked about that, but you know, we’re usually really aware

of that. [I: You just mentioned awe and kind of thinking that everybody's having that same awe moment. How would you describe that awe moment?] I feel like {pause} that we're all feeling the same thing in that moment, and I think that's the neat thing about church is that when everyone feels it at the same time, then it's kind of affirmation of what you're feeling.

Nancy's explanation of these shared moments went beyond those that others shared in that she alludes to a moment where the awe is sensed. Nancy additionally related that feeling to church, describing the affirming feeling of sharing something. This was an interesting twist in that indeed Nancy was talking about feeling stronger about the spiritual feeling when she was certain that others are experiencing similar or the same sensations. For Nancy spirituality is, "Feeling a sense of a higher power or a greater, not being, a greater force." In the depiction of those shared moments, she emphasized the importance of having her traveling companion not disturb the moment, which appeared to be something that can come about pretty easily. On the other hand, when those feelings are shared with one person, or with a group, the experience carries extra weight because of the affirmation.

Beth similarly told of a moment where a certain feeling was shared in a way that made the feeling stronger. When asked if there was a moment on her trip that she felt, as she described, the 'feeling' that comes with spirituality, she explained:

Walking through the water and slipping on the rocks and getting up to your waist and falling in more. It's just that it's fun to feel the water and working with it and against it. It might be going upstream. The other day, I could feel that, and I was hoping Sheah did too, and I think she did. I was like, "this is wild, right?" And she's like, "yeah. . . I love it." I felt spiritual then because I was working against the water, and it was something I couldn't control. It was nothing I could change.

Though the quote doesn't make it clear that Shea was feeling a similar spiritual feeling, Beth clearly values that Shea is there with her, experiencing the moment and enjoying the special 'wild' feelings. Whether or not it was affirming is unclear, but Beth found it fun sharing the feeling of working with and against the water. If Shea had not been similarly enjoying it, we can

speculate that Beth, as the leader of the group, may have focused more on making sure Shea was okay, rather than processing the experience of working with and against water.

Other interviewees discussed sharing the experience with others on a more broad scale.

Mark particularly spoke of spending time with his wife:

I guess the most spiritual part would be that I'm here with probably the one I cherish the most, by far, in the whole world, and that would be my wife. And this is our first time up here together, her second time only. And saying that with my closest, the one closest to me, my best friend in this world, how much better can it get? I mean this is the one I chose to spend my life with, and I'm spending seven days out in the wilderness with this person.

Mark went on to say, "Before our meals and before bed we pray, and thank the lord for getting us up here safe." Mark continued to emphasize "us" pointing to the importance of the shared experience. He provided more details about the relationship with his wife, and spoke of sharing camp chores and conversation. Though none of those comments were entirely telling of their spiritual importance, he made a summary comment capturing his sentiments, saying, "We just feel awed and humbled that God enabled us to be at this place at this time in our lives." Mark seemed to be speaking for his wife and appeared to understand her perspective clear enough that he thought he could represent it. Most notably he called sharing the trip with his wife the most spiritual part of his trip.

Jen also spoke of her spouse, but did more reflecting on past trips than on the current trip.

She explained:

When we were first dating, in fact, he proposed to me up here. Brought the diamond and the whole works. It was an adventure I had always wanted to do. And he brought me up here. And so we had a number of different experiences, both dating and right after we were married. We've actually brought some groups of six at risk kids through the police department, three adults and six kids. We did that three different years. So we've had a lot of experiences with it. We know how much it can open kids' viewpoints, give them perspective on the world, and we want to get our kids here a number of times before they're having jobs and girlfriends and going away to college, things like that.

Along with pointing out the past trips with her husband she emphasized wanting to share the experience with her children before they are too busy. In this quote Jen mentioned how the experience can “open kids’ viewpoints” and “give them perspective.” Both of those phrases seemingly relate to her comment that spirituality is, “An internal source of power and calm. . .keeps us in tune with whatever keeps us here and keeps earth going . . . [being in the wilderness] definitely gives us a chance to think more and try to be in tune with it.” It seemed that she enjoyed both gaining and sharing the new perspective and viewpoint with others. Jen additionally spoke of sharing the wilderness with other unknown visitors by saying, “We were canoeing through Cherokee here once and somebody was playing a flute; it was so cool, almost magical to share that.” Though it was unclear what was meant by ‘magical’ in this statement, it seemed that she was referring to an idea that she was pleased to hear someone else create music that was in tune with her feelings and perspective at that moment. By saying that she was able to “share that,” it seemed that it may have been affirming a feeling in the same way that others did.

Sharing experiences appeared to be something that multiple parents spoke of. In some instances the experiences seemed aimed at providing opportunities for kids, in others, it appeared equally, if not more so, spiritually beneficial for the parents. Tom, a father traveling with just his youngest son and their dog deep in the wilderness, spoke of the feelings that he experienced while sharing time with his son:

I was laying there watching him build this thing and I had no idea what he was doing and when he was done I was so impressed with it. It was a proud father moment . . . he got out the rope and did all the lashings and thought hard about the layout.

Tom was referring to watching son build a makeshift tent out of their kitchen fly, carefully selected downed branches, and some twine. To put the comment in context, consider that Tom referred to spiritual experiences as, “My battery recharge time. . . time to think. . . [and ask]

What have I accomplished in life so far?” From the initial comment, it seemed that the proud father moment had some spiritual elements considering he appeared to be reflecting on how he had accomplished having a son who made him proud. Tom later bolstered this line of thought saying, “I have learned more in the last twelve hours than I have in the last couple of months. . . moments like him building let me focus on him, let me realize and be proud of him as my legacy.” Referring to his son as his legacy directly relates the experience to his perspective on spirituality and having time to consider accomplishments in life. It was clear he felt extremely grateful to have alone time with his son in the wilderness; time to slow down, and share experiences a different setting.

Rob also spoke of sharing the time and space with youth. He however spoke of mentoring boy scouts, of which none were his own children:

It is all wrapped up, my role as an educator and the sense of accomplishment that we get from spiritual experiences, it is hard to separate the two; you feel better because you are closer to nature, or God, or whatever you want to call who created this, and you are sharing that. . . I do it because I don't have any sons myself, I therefore like to share it with young men who will potentially take care of it. I only get to pass through life here, like the blink of an eye, I am just trying to pass along the experience and the appreciation for it for the next generation of kids.

Rob emphasizes passing along stewardship ideals, but clearly entwines the spiritual experiences and notes how the combination makes him “feel better.” Unlike other interviewees cited in this section, Rob's motivation for the trip is made entirely clear; he sees his role as one of an educator and is trying to pass something along. Rob additionally spoke of trips with friends, but here he stressed the importance of spirituality within mentoring. He went on to specifically state, “It is hard to separate those feelings of accomplishment from the spiritual feelings when it comes to sharing a place like this with them.” The accomplishment seemed to be a feeling that comes

from the beauty that he has found, but it is important to note that there is a component of planning and implementation process that also was a source of accomplishment. Rob noted:

It is almost like a little victory, you are able to go and organize it and get it done and pass along a little bit of knowledge to somebody else and pass along a little bit of this wilderness experience to someone else. You know you always have to feel like you are contributing to something. Maybe that is just me, but you have to pass along practices and beliefs.

Indeed, by feeling he is actually passing along practices and beliefs, Rob seemed to be categorizing the teaching as a spiritual experience. It is important to note that Rob viewed the entirety of the Boundary Waters experience as spiritual such that it is hard to draw boundaries on his spiritual experiences, instead it is important to look at certain components of his trip as spiritually beneficial, or adding to the spirituality.

Deb similarly was hoping to share the spiritual components of the Boundary Waters with others, though her goals were not as clear. Deb explained:

I feel really good about this place. . . When I was planning my trip here from New Zealand, I really wanted my boyfriend to come and see the Boundary Waters. I wanted him to see Minnesota, sort of pristine nature, to feel the connection that I do.

Recall that Deb considered “communing with nature” and “feeling like you are part of it or connected” as main components to her spirituality. It seemed that here Deb was stressing her interest in sharing those feelings with her boyfriend who is from New Zealand and had never been to the United States before. There seemed to be a part of Deb that was proud of the place, a place that her parents brought her many times as a kid, and therefore she wanted to share it or show it off. Her words stressed how she wanted him to both see and feel the Boundary Waters in a way that would lead him to similar spiritual connections.

Like Rob and Deb, John spoke of the spiritual aspects of bringing people that are new to the experience. John explained, “I think teaching; all I hear about is the lack of kids getting out

and experiencing this, so this is my way of teaching.” John went on to say, “I think, now that I take people, I find that to be the spiritual surprise; their reaction to the experience, you know I love to see them enjoying the experience; it completes the spiritual circle.” He went on to say, “There is a starting point and an ending point and there are all those highs and lows that you go through; there is that accomplishment, making our lives better by doing something.” Each of these comments gave a great glimpse into John’s perspectives. John notably found it to be a “spiritual surprise to watch others learn and experience the Boundary Waters.” He seemed to mean that he gets as much or more enjoyment out of the novelty of their experiences as they do. The experiences certainly appeared to make his life better and he seemed convinced that others are similarly influenced by the roller coaster nature of wilderness experiences that he felt included an important amount of accomplishment. Not only are the experiences potential spiritual for his new-to-the-BWCAW group members, but John obviously found their reactions to be part of his spiritual experiences.

Providing others with experiences related to spirituality was also a priority for Laura. Laura spoke specifically about trying to provide and facilitate spiritual experiences for the campers that she was responsible for. Laura began by saying:

I try to impart the idea of spirituality on the kids that I lead, the idea of quiet and taking a lot more time and care out here. They wouldn’t take time in their normal city lives. I guess it starts with the wood canvas canoe, it is a case for care and respect.

Laura’s comments emphasized how she viewed her role as a canoe camp counselor as an opportunity to utilize the unique setting and experience to a spiritual end. Notably Laura contrasted the experience she was trying to provide with the “normal city lives” that she thought her campers lived. Laura clearly says that she sees spirituality as the idea of quiet and taking

more time and care. “Care” in Laura’s context seemed to refer to being mindful of actions.

Recall that Laura viewed spirituality as:

I believe there is something out there, a bigger purpose, everything happens for a reason. So, therefore, something must be out there, is my own personal opinion. But I think – yeah, but not necessarily an entity of any sort, but more of my spirituality comes from the connections I make with other individuals and how my interactions with them have created a bond between them and maybe someone else as sort of a whole circle thing.

In her definition Laura seemed to be saying that rather than focusing on connecting to a particular entity, she aimed at making connections with others and facilitating bonds between others. Obviously she spoke to the ‘whole circle thing’ similar to how it was described in the section introduction. Laura went on to explain her perspective on the spirituality of both the guiding and student experience. Laura stated:

I do a lot of travel out here, so each trip is a different spiritual connection, but, yeah, for me, it's a lot of respect in the sense that respecting a very gorgeous place and, yeah, definitely very much spiritual for me. [I: When you say that each trip can kind of have its own spiritual tone or such, what are some of those, other than respect, that you would say kind of come to be?] I think each trip has its own kind of flavor because you're traveling with a new group of students. At least for me, each one is different and so each one could have its own kind of shade of what perhaps my campers, or what I as a leader, would get out of it. It is spiritual in different ways, often in the sense that everyone really came together and felt really bonded to each other and had deep connections and conversation, that sort of spiritual connection. Or it could have been more of this young person or myself completed a portage and it was like that was a spiritual experience for me. I made it across that and it was very difficult. . . .Or learning – yeah, there's that click sometimes that you see in the kids' faces when they suddenly understand what wilderness travel is and seeing that could be a very spiritual moment for me knowing that they finally are starting to understand or having their own moment, whatever that might be. They can't usually articulate it. I have a hard time articulating it, but you can see it in their faces when they get in the canoe one day and they're like, "This morning is really beautiful. A little chilly, I'm pretty tired," but they understand.

Laura’s specific anecdotes helped clarify her perspective on what sharing spiritual experiences looked like to her. Her comments also include the quality of affirmation that is present in the

explanations presented by others. By noting that “spiritual moments” are hard to articulate “but you can see it in their faces,” it seemed Laura was trying to convey how simultaneously simple and complex the communication of these feelings and experiences can be. It seemed that Laura found watching others achieve a special moment or experience was potentially a spiritual process for her.

Many participants discussed sharing the experience with youth, newcomers, relatives, friends, and in Jen’s case, even with strangers. In most of the cases shared, the experiences were considered spiritual by the participants or had elements that make them interpretable as spiritual. The feelings elicited by sharing, teaching, or providing an experience were varied and at times indescribable but when given context the spiritual qualities were better understood. Contextual elements included the act of sharing the space of a canoe, knowing that others in the group were having similar experiences, giving others an opportunity very different than their everyday, and, as in most of the analysis, having the time and space for quiet. Additionally, references to “spiritual surprises” and “facilitating spirituality” helped define how important it was for some visitors to share the wilderness and spiritual elements of the wilderness with others. The ideas of affirmation and coming full circle were also apparent within the data on sharing the wild.

4.4.5 Defining scale of wilderness spirituality

Within the data there were a number of comments that spoke of the boundless nature of wilderness spirituality. Some participants explained their wilderness spirituality as being something that impacted many experiences and perspectives beyond the physical boundaries of wild spaces. In this section the term *scale* is used to capture the geographic range in which interviewees speak of having experiences or meaningful thoughts related to wilderness spirituality. Participants therefore had scales for their wilderness spiritualities beyond the

physical boundaries of the wilderness area. Boundless in this case means that interviewees spoke of having experiences related to wilderness spirituality outside of the boundaries of the wilderness area. The following quotes have been included because they specifically hold references to wilderness spiritualities being contemplated, acted upon, or utilized in physical spaces outside of wilderness boundaries.

During the interviews, there were no questions that specifically asked about the bounds of individual's wilderness spirituality. Occasionally comments were made that seemed to connect experiences outside of designated wilderness to individual's perspectives on wilderness spirituality. After defining his spirituality, Mark spoke about having feelings of awe while at home, saying:

Like I said, my God is everything in our lives. But I call this place a place of spirituality because I can reflect on my God and what he's all done for me and what he's put on this earth for his children, and man. Even when I am home, just thinking about it [the wilderness] puts me at awe and lets me be thankful. And when I think about that, you know, I must hold favor of some sort in God's eyes.

Within Mark's definition of spirituality, he stated how he characterized the feelings of awe, saying, "It comes from a place deep inside. . .when you hold a place or something in awe." His comments highlighted that he calls the Boundary Waters a 'place of spirituality' but can feel those feelings of 'awe' even when he is home. For Mark the spiritual feelings of awe seemed attainable just by thinking about the place, leaving him seemingly grateful and feeling individually special. Mark's description appeared to demonstrate how he can experience his wilderness spirituality far from wilderness.

For others, feelings associated with wilderness spirituality seemed to be especially present immediately after their trip, outside the boundaries of the wilderness. After talking about

specific spiritual experiences, Chris was asked if those moments impact him beyond the moment.

He responded:

When I get home, especially two to three weeks after, when life is back in full swing, I like to look back and remember being up here, spend time thinking about those times, remembering everything. I tend to just be happy and thankful for those moments I had.

Within Chris's definition of spirituality, he noted, "It is just a good time to be thankful." For Chris, similar to Mark, reflecting inspired thoughts of thankfulness. Chris noted how he became happy and thankful, but said that the feelings arose after having been back immersed in his everyday life for two to three weeks, when things have become busy. Indeed, it seemed Chris balanced his busier everyday life with memories of those quiet spiritual times on his own. It seemed that the experiences therefore transcended time and space, extending the scale Chris' wilderness spirituality and were important for him to reflect on and remember.

Balancing out the everyday with the memories and benefits from spiritual experiences in the wilderness seemed to be important for Ed as well. He communicated on how the experiences in the Boundary Waters impacted him during his everyday, saying:

After my last trip, I was fed for months. Way in the back, through all the turbulence, there was this thing that I carried with me that was meaningful and felt good. It is something that I can remember; I can return to those roots, so to speak, it's something that you can carry with you.

In his comment, Ed repeatedly referred to a "thing" that he was able to take with him, "something" that obviously was memorable. It seemed that it was more than just memories, possibly a feeling or emotion that reminded him of "those roots." The quote alone does not make it clear that Ed was referring to spiritual experiences playing a role in being emotionally fed. However, earlier in the interview, when asked how he defined spirituality, he had said, "I get fed emotionally by being on wilderness experiences, they feed the spirit. . . It feeds my spirit but it's not necessarily what someone might call religious." It seemed that Ed was very glad to be

able to remember certain components of his wilderness experience once he returned home to the “turbulence.” For each of the three mentioned, the act of reflection brought something important to their everyday life.

Laura similarly talked about drawing upon her spiritual experiences during busier times. She explained:

Yeah, it's definitely something I draw upon throughout the year. Oh, I remember that day on the beach or sitting there. It's definitely something I look forward to and draw upon throughout the year during a frantic exam or something like that. I think, "Once upon a time, there was a day where all I did was sit and read or paddled all day and it was a lot simpler than what I'm going through." And it's just a nice something to fall back on later or look forward to for the next summer, something like that.

A notable component of this quote is that she is speaking of being able to remember a simpler, calmer time amidst a “frantic” exam. Within her definition of spiritual experiences, Laura said, “times that bring a general feeling of peace and contentment.” Thus she seemed to be recalling feelings from her spiritual experiences, and like some other participants, she appeared to use those feelings to act in opposition to feelings created by her busier everyday life.

The examples provided above seemed to validate that wilderness spirituality is a beneficial part of the interviewees lives. Lisa, who claimed, “My whole life is spiritual, this [wilderness experiences] just feed it a bit more,” also spoke of striking an emotional balance in her everyday life. She noted, “I am way more at peace in my everyday at home and work because of this, generally ready to deal with whatever the good old world tends to throw at me.” Recall that for Lisa spirituality is, “A freeness of being that allows her to be relaxed no matter what she is doing.” Indeed, like others, Lisa signaled that she is fed by spiritual experiences in the wilderness and able to be more at peace on a regular basis, in her everyday, because of it.

Clearly these participants are all similarly using recollections and reflections to shape their emotions amidst a different setting than the Boundary Waters.

Nancy also spoke to the scale of wilderness spirituality by saying:

I think back on these trips, they stay with me for a while. Like that feeling of, you know, I grasped something out there. And I could think back on it and it was just like- I don't know. . .It's like everything is all right. Everything's great. This kind of deep sense of happiness, just by thinking back on it. It is so powerful.

Nancy, who described spirituality as, "Feeling a sense of a higher power or a greater, not being, a greater force and just being receptive to it, appreciative of it," seemed to leaning into her wilderness spirituality by reminiscing on that feeling that she "grasped something" and that there is a "deep sense of happiness." She noted that the feelings arose just by thinking back on it and remembering that "everything is all right." As with all of the participants mentioned in this section, there were no real trigger experiences other than attempts to calm themselves in the face of everyday forms of stress. Nancy went on to explain:

It is funny, this spring I was learning some relaxation techniques, and they're like, "Visualize a place where you feel the most peaceful," and I was visualizing sitting on one of these rocky outcroppings here in the Boundary Waters.

Though this comment from Nancy may not be related to wilderness spirituality, it appears that the Boundary Waters setting was an outstanding example of a place that made her feel "peaceful." Most notably, Nancy reflected on the "peaceful" nature even though she was 14 years removed from her most recent Boundary Waters experience. Mark, who was quoted to begin this section, also spoke of recalling a scene from the Boundary Waters to stand in opposition to what he describes as exhausting times. He specifically noted, "Sometimes, when times are exhausting back home, I can think of the memories and picture an experience, and I'll take out the map and I will mark places that I'd like to see up here." It is not entirely clear that he is recollecting a spiritual experience, but by taking into account that he considers all of his

experiences in the Boundary Waters to be spiritual, it seemed that he was possibly finding comfort and energy in his memories and was putting those memories in opposition to his exhausting everyday. For Mark it appeared that imagining new places to visit was additionally a therapeutic exercise and helped him imagine something other than the exhaustion of his everyday.

Jim, who described spirituality as, “being able to turn off distractions and relax and focus my mind,” also noted that he recollects memories when feeling like he is having a hard time. When asked if he feels different after returning from a trip in the Boundary Waters, Jim’s answer included the statement, “I am the happiest when I am out here. It is where I go in my head when I am having a hard time or I need to really relax.” It seemed that similar to others, Jim placed the calm of his wilderness spirituality memories against various stressors from his everyday life. Clearly the variable definitions of spirituality can impact the scale of the phenomena. Jim for example defined spirituality relatively loosely, making it easier to draw a direct connection between his spirituality and the process of going to that place in his head in order to relax.

For other interviewees, there are certain experiences outside of wilderness that could be considered triggers for spiritual thoughts. Dan’s explanation is one such example:

Some of the writers in magazines that I read, I subscribe to bow hunter magazine, they have some writers who are naturalists and are pretty spiritually connected and that comes out in their writing. So there are articles that make me think about those sorts of things and connections. It rekindles, or brings to the forefront of your mind that spiritual connectedness, connecting us with nature and other living animals. It is pretty special for me to read those.

The writings appear to act as a gateway to those feelings of spirituality connected to wilderness. When asked if he looks forward to reading the articles, Dan answered, “Yes, absolutely!” signaling the importance of the process.

Other participants, including Mary, spoke of relating to wilderness spirituality outside of wilderness. Here, the context of the individual's beliefs and perspectives seemed to influence her comment. Mary noted that 'wild' spirituality didn't always include being in designated wilderness, saying, "I spend a lot of time reflecting on Native American beliefs; they really believed in the connectedness of people to animals, to plants and to the elements. So I feel like I can find a wild spirituality in my everyday." For her the process of defining wilderness and spirituality exposed the notion that "wild" or wilderness spirituality is also experienced outside of wilderness. She noted that wilderness could be, "Anywhere where you can really think about where you are from." Her view of wilderness seemed to expand her operational scale of wilderness spirituality. Mary appeared to feel as though there were many places where she could "really think about where you are from."

Additional participants distinctly described their packing and travel routines as spiritual and entirely related to their wilderness spirituality. John explained, "I probably would go back to the moment that I actually pull the permit. It is that sense of anticipation and the traditions I have for getting ready." For John, it seemed that the process had numerous spiritual connotations, and the traditions he mentioned were possibly be viewed as habits or rituals that influenced his wilderness spirituality. Further bolstering this inference, John stated, "I actually start packing and have to watch Jeremiah Johnson, which I know tunes my brain and forces memory showers that help me prepare in every way. . . I always do things in a sort of order, the whole process is spiritual." He and others commented on the drive to wilderness areas as being a large part of their wilderness spirituality. Steve noted, "The slow separation that occurs, like as we left Ely, it is really important, lets us know how this is different, (pause) I think my son slowly realized how different it is here because of that drive; that is spiritual" (Steve, 2010). For both John and Steve,

there are examples of processes that helped visitors transition into a different mindset. Whether it is the transition in the landscape outside the car window, or the memories that flood the mind while watching a familiar film that has a wilderness setting, these triggers clearly led to spiritual thoughts and emotions.

For some participants, spiritual experiences are measured in seconds while deep in the designated wilderness, while for others the phenomena begins the moment they make a call to secure a wilderness permit for a particular trip. For others still their wilderness spirituality can surface whenever they are reminded in some way of their place in the world. Most notably though, multiple participants spoke of remembering or reflecting on their wilderness spirituality when their everyday lives became exhausting or stressful. These explanations emphasize that for a large variety of reasons, wilderness visitors employ vastly differing scales for their personal wilderness spirituality.

4.4.6 Changing Relationships

Many relationships that people have with other people and with distinct places change over time. Relationships with wilderness and wilderness spirituality appear to be no different. The ways that people experience places can change, and their perspective of, or attachment to the place can simultaneously change. In some cases the perspective and attachment may change because of the ways human bodies are able to experience a place. In other cases, because perspectives and attachments change, people may choose to physically experience the place in different ways. No matter the case, it is highly likely that relationships to a place like wilderness will inevitably change over time. Correspondingly, the spiritual relations that people have to wilderness may also change over time. The importance of this lay in the fact that while there are broad differences between individuals' wilderness spirituality, it is key to recognize that a

individual's own wilderness spirituality may change substantially through their life and be very different during different stages of their life as well.

While interviewing a wide range of ages for this study, there seemed to be certain statements that captured the ways that relationships were changing. Many of the comments were related to aging and ability, but others were related to simply trying new things.

David, who grew up backpacking in Colorado spoke about how the Boundary Waters became a place that he repeatedly visits. "This is the spot that we come back to every year, here in the Boundary Waters, it has become one of those places for us." By one of those places he was referring to an earlier comment he made, saying, "There are those really spiritual places where I just feel the weight lifted off of me." Notably, David described his earlier experiences as, "When I used to backpack in Colorado and even five years ago when I would come up here with buddies, things like God or our beliefs were never even thought about." David later described his current outlook, "Now I think I see things, and you can call them everyday miracles or things that there was a greater hand involved in creating; but they are keeping it all in good balance, God is everywhere up here and I notice those things." A definitive reason for change in perspective was not teased out in the interview. It is however clear that David had become more thoughtful on the topics of creation and other beliefs. Recall that David had described "everything up here" as spiritual. It is impossible to know if he would have held the same belief five years earlier, but if he had, it seemed it would have been less developed. It appeared that David had developed a more spiritual life and that the Boundary Waters experiences were part of the fabric of that life, almost as if his trips are a bit of a pilgrimage or at least a spiritual ritual.

Beyond David, Ken also made comments that made it seem like his relationship was changing with his age. Ken, who described his job as "really stressful" and full of "worry" noted,

“As I get older it becomes more important to me, and more important that I get out here into the wild. It seems like I need it more.” Though he wasn’t saying exactly what he needed more of,

Ken went on to say:

These days my job is very demanding. I get called a lot of times at 2:00 at night. I get called on Saturdays. I get called on Sundays. I get paged when I’m at Sunday School at church or whatever, and I just need time to, as they say, recharge my batteries.

Recall that Ken described a spiritual experience as a calm morning watching the fog slowly lift off the lake. It seemed that moments like these where there is very little demanded of him are what he considers “recharging.” For Ken there were some factors in his everyday life that appeared to be pushing him to desire more time in wilderness where he seemed to experience “calm” in ways he couldn’t elsewhere.

The trend of visitors feeling like they need more time in wilderness as they age did not explicitly surface again, but other participants did speak of their calling to spend time in wilderness. Brian, who was travelling with his wife and two younger daughters noted:

Those years that Kathy and I did not come because we were either expecting or having just delivered, and couldn’t make it up, there was a sense of longing or maybe even a little bit of a sense of loss for she and I that we weren’t able to be up here for three, four days and make that connection. This year we just had to make it work with the girls. I don’t think the escape meant as much before kids, but now we absolutely feel like we need to be up here for that three or four days.

Brian’s comments about his relationship with the wilderness relate to an idea that is sometimes called *maintenance*. For he and Kathy, missing out on their annual wilderness trip seemed to create a sense of loss and appeared to heighten their drive to “make that connection.” When asked what the main reason was that he and his family take the trips, he responded, “Probably like I was saying earlier, being able to unplug and just to be on God’s time, being able to go with the flow.” Without those trips, their desire became stronger and willingness to take on challenges, such as canoe camping with two young children, became greater. Similar to David,

their relationship has clearly become more important over time; though for them, that only became apparent through a process of being unable to enjoy it due to having kids that were too young to travel. Through the trip at hand Brian and Kathy's relationship, and potentially spiritual relationship, seemed renewed.

For others, factors such as bodily ability clearly instigated the change in how they experienced the wilderness. Rob, a self described 67 year old Boundary Waters veteran, explained, "I am a two portage paddler, I use to see how many miles I could do, but that got too hard; now I give myself time to enjoy it; and I think as you get older, you change the way you look at things." Recall that Rob, being a scout leader spoke clearly about his wilderness spirituality and how it was informed by being in God's creation and passing on a 'sense of stewardship' to the younger scouts. Rob was also the participant that spoke of paddling through five foot swells across larger lakes in his younger days just for the challenge, which he found to be a spiritual process. Clearly Rob had found that he has limits and focused on sharing the experience with others, which, as referenced earlier, he referred to as "entirely spiritual."

Other interviewees spoke of aging as well, albeit in different ways. While talking about specific spiritual experiences, Jeff noted:

Being old enough, I now have to get up every once in a while, so like last night, it was a pretty clear sky and you can look at different constellations and stuff. And it's cool compared to the winter where you see Orion over along the sky, and you're looking up at Cassiopeia and things like that and other stars, I wish I knew what they were. I mean quite bright, real bright stars. And then the moon was only half full, but boy, it was really kicking it out last night. Yeah, on a clear night, it's amazing what a half a moon can do. There is just so much otherworldly stuff to look at. As a young guide I never really got into the stars, I was always passed out from paddling so hard.

Though this is an odd experience to note as a change, it signaled that Jeff was taking a bit more time to absorb certain scenes around him while in the wilderness. Recall that earlier quotes from

Jeff stressed how he use to push himself and his campers to do as many miles as possible each day, and complete the toughest portages in the wilderness area. Indeed, on this trip with his wife, three daughters, and family dog, the pace was far slower than that which he described from his younger days. Though he did not seem to signal that his spirituality was any more or less developed than earlier in life, his pathways to spiritual moments certainly seemed to have changed.

Jeff later gave an explanation that captured his changing relationship based on other events in his life. He described:

This trip in particular has lots of spiritual elements. I guess the one thing is, I am at an age now, instead of friends getting married, they're getting divorced. I got some friends, they are running into some bad times. This trip is making me really thankful for what I've got. We are getting along great and to be with my kids 24 hours a day, and to be in a canoe, I am just really happy about that. It is a great feeling and I am thankful for it. My buddies aren't as lucky, unfortunately. I think about that at night or whatever and I just feel lucky to be in this situation.

This was clearly an element of his wilderness experience that Jeff had not previously been as concerned about. However, as he witnessed friends running into some bad times, thoughts on the spiritual element of being thankful for his family were obviously salient. This was indeed an example of a variety of everyday life factors playing a role on how time in wilderness is thought about and experienced.

Experiences changing a bit with age seemed to arise most when talking with males. Ed explained:

I am now a fair weather fan meaning that I don't like to come up when the black flies are in season. I'd rather be here when it is a little more comfortable. When I was 22, I didn't care. I'd paddle through the worst conditions and enjoy it; I'd go anywhere at any time but now for my own experiences and theirs [motioning to kids] I try to make it, concoct it as much as possible for a positive experience. . . I live in a suburb now, and because I

spent whole summers up here guiding, it has left a mark on me, and you gotta revisit the mark once in a while.

Again it was clear that in his younger years Ed was more interested in physical challenges, or at least didn't mind them. He'd transitioned to facilitating particular experiences for his kids as much as possible. In this quote the concept of *maintenance* was again discussed with Ed noting that once a place leaves a mark on you, you must return to it occasionally. More relative to his wilderness spirituality Ed went on to say:

Now, having the opportunity to get to destinations that are distant and remote are very valuable. Those experiences were very formative in terms of wilderness as a part of my connection to the world and if I'm, if I don't have these experiences at least on an occasional basis, I get grumpy.

Ed seemed to be saying that he valued the chances to get to remote and distant places more than he use to, noting that the wilderness is something that helps him avoid getting "grumpy." Though it was not clear if Ed was talking about a spiritual relationship changing, he had noted, "I get emotionally and spiritually fed by wilderness experiences." It may be that since he considers spirituality to be, "A connection between God and my world. . . not a connection to the land or whatever spirits people may have," that by saying "world" in the previous quote, he is signaling that the experiences are spiritual.

A very different relational progression was true for Bill, who was on a trip with his twin sons and their scout troop. He said, "When I was young I didn't get to do any high adventure trips or high adventure things at summer camps, so this is a great opportunity for me to relive things that I didn't get to do as a youth, to get out and see things that I never have before." It was Bill's first trip into wilderness, meaning that his relationship to wilderness and wilderness spirituality was likely just being forged, or changing by the day. Regarding spirituality, Bill noted that wilderness spirituality, "Gives a better understanding of nature and primitive people,

{pause} allows people to study and put resources towards focusing on worship.” Bill took time in his tent each night before going to bed to reflect in ways that were spiritual to him. His relationship with wilderness and his wilderness spirituality seemed to be significantly impacted by this opportunity to help lead his sons’ scout troop, showing that these relationships can develop at any age.

The final data for this section comes from Mark. Mark was the 57 year old travelling with his wife. Mark explained his perspective on encountering other visitors and how that perspective has changed over time, saying:

I have found out that I don’t have to be completely devoid of human contact to have these spiritual encounters. As a matter of fact, it’s a little nice to see somebody going by and say good morning and say somebody says, “Hey, watch out for that rock bridge on the west side of Lake Four.” Or somebody says, “Do you know of any good campsites?” So you pull up alongside, pull out your map. I enjoy that, both getting and receiving information. And sometimes it’s just a “Morning” or just a wave. Too far away for voices, so you just give a wave or a little hand salute like that, and that’s good. When I first started coming up here, well I’ll tell you, all I wanted to do was go as far and deep into Quetico as I possibly could. Oh yeah, that’s where it’s at. The farther in you go, the better. The farther away the people. But it was 30 some years ago now, and now I’m in my mid-50s, and you know what? It’s nice just to get in here a little ways where you don’t see a lot of people. But it’s nice to see people passing by and stuff. . .Just being where you can’t hear traffic noise and you don’t hear people screaming, yelling and stuff like that. Not that that’s horrible, but it’s nice to get away from it too.

In this long explanation it became clear that Mark’s perspective on finding solitude had changed over time. It was not entirely clear if the change is the result of having less physical ability to get deep into the wilderness, or if he is just simply more comfortable with seeing others in his older age. What was clear is that he finds himself able to have spiritual encounters even though the nature of his experiences has changed. It may have been that Mark was finding joy in seeing others have wilderness experiences and sharing their experiences. Or Mark’s everyday life had could have changed in ways that made him feel differently about experiencing the wild. In either

case, it was clear that his experiences were changing, yet he was finding new ways to identify them as spiritual.

Looking at the nature of the relationships between visitors and landscapes can clearly be used as a tool to understand the general quality of visitors' experiences, as well as the spiritual quality of visitors' experiences. The findings in this section exemplify how relationships are influenced by a number of factors including, personal abilities and values, family values, and cultural pressures.

The forging, maintenance, and negotiation of relationships between visitors and wilderness seemed to shape the spiritual relationships between these interviewees and the place as well. These perspectives and stories help characterize the temporal and dynamic nature of the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness. It is important to continuously note how the experiences are shaped by life courses and the participants' life worlds, constantly redefining how visitors will interact with the landscape.

Summary of Steps to the Spiritual

The data presented in *Steps to the Spiritual* shared a variety of perspectives and actions that contributed to experiences that participants defined as spiritual experiences in wilderness. The section analyzed the depth of the connections being made, worked to discover if the boundaries of the wilderness area were additionally the boundaries of wilderness spirituality and questioned how the inputs into spiritual experiences may change over time.

Notably, participants explained their connections with both others and the landscape as being deeper and richer due to shared spiritual experiences in the wilderness. While looking at influential elements of individual's life-worlds, it was found that many participants had mentors that shaped that way they viewed and lived their wilderness experiences. The mentors came in

many forms; books, guides, movies, but none were more commonly cited than parents. Being mentored additionally seemed to beget habits and rituals that were essential components of experiences allowing participants to find the spiritual elements of wilderness often seemed to be seeking out. Sharing the wilderness with others in ways that were often spiritual appeared to be a phase in the wilderness spirituality life. Sharing was importantly found to be a spiritual process in itself. Providing validation that spiritual experiences are an important part of wilderness experiences, the *scale* of wilderness spirituality was considered and found to be important as an rarefied space that some interviewees held in opposition to their busy everyday lives. The variety of results here all contribute to a depiction of wilderness spirituality experiences being a complex and meaningful component of wilderness visitor's experiences and spiritualities, and an ever changing element of their lives.

4.5.0 Explaining the Mystery

The fourth and final section of the results, *Explaining the Mystery*, considers the complexities of wilderness spirituality and provides participant comments and perspectives in order to examine those complexities. A section titled *Language and Spirituality* kicks off the segment and addresses the limitations of language. The aim of the study was of course to capture the interviewee's experiences and describe the phenomena of wilderness spirituality. The section considers the inabilities of language to adequately express and convey the actual experiences and the depth of the feelings in the moment and beyond. When attempting to grasp elements that are sometimes described as unknowable or beyond cognitive ability, it is important to note how participants reflect on or describe that disconnect. The constraints of language are considered and related to the overall findings of the study. The second section, *Spirituality and Wilderness Spirituality* assesses how participants differentiated wilderness spirituality from religion and

spirituality more generally. The section considers their expectations of spiritual experiences in wilderness and relates those to broader ideas of religious and spiritual experiences. It additionally highlights how variable definitions of spirituality were, and how some participants critiqued the term spirituality.

4.5.1 Language and Spirituality

Capturing the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness seemed limited by the ability of language to convey the complexity of participant's feelings and thoughts. The following data demonstrates that complexity through participant explanations of spiritual experiences and their definitions of spirituality. In many explanations the term *feeling* is used and the reason for this is considered herein. Those examples are followed by quotes from participants who related their spirituality directly to God or religious elements that helped them explain their perspective. The third focus is on participants who viewed spiritual experiences as processes rather than moments. The section ends with explanations from a few participants that spoke to ideas of faith and blind belief.

The difficulty posed by attempting to express feelings through words seemed to leave multiple participants struggling for perfect descriptors and falling back on explanations that left questions in both the minds of the interviewees and the researcher. The following quote from Nancy captures how some participants wished to be able to sense and interpret certain forces more deeply. While discussing spiritual experiences, Nancy explained:

Yeah, for me, it's just like really trying to figure out {pause} is this perception coming from within me or is there really this external force coming in? And I can kind of feel both, but having to let go of those other things has been [pause] I wish I could just switch my brain off and be more perceptive to it.

Understanding the roots and meanings of fleeting feelings was clearly a challenge that Nancy wished she had more power to control. In this quote the sense of confusion over whether feelings are coming from inside or outside of her being was apparent. She left the idea hanging, wishing that she could be more perceptive to it. Notably, like other participants, Nancy seemed to find that her mind had to be somewhat clear of other consuming thoughts in order to experience the special spiritual feelings.

Identifying the sources of spiritual feelings was identified as a difficult task for multiple participants. Mark expanded on the sources of spiritual feelings saying:

I understand that it means a lot of different things to a lot of people. Spirituality, to me, means that – it's that feeling, it's beyond the physical parts of things. It transcends the mental things. It's something deeper than that. It's something that – it comes from deeper than the bottom of your heart. It comes from someplace deep inside of one. Or, I guess that's where it appears to come from. Where you hold a place or something in awe.

Mark says that the feelings “appear” to come from deep inside of a person, alluding to the difficulty of pinpointing the source. Mark's admission that the feelings exceed the mental space and come from a unique spot that was capable of holding a place or thing in awe, spoke to his view that people can hold places and things in awe. Clearly the phrase “from the heart” is often used in our culture to express deeply held truths, but here Mark is going beyond that saying that the feelings come from “deeper than the bottom of your heart.” The description is emphasizing the simultaneous importance of the topic and the challenge that exists to convey the source of the feelings.

The phenomena of spiritual experiences was sometimes reduced to a word that carry's both richness and uncertainty: ‘feeling.’ The term was used extensively by participants in order to communicate experiences. Deb used “feeling” but captured the variability through an explanation of how her ‘feeling’ may differ from others. She said:

Sorry, I know I've been using this word about 18 million times, but I'm going to say it's a feeling, and it's different for everyone, I think. Some people, I think, feel more spiritual with other people in like a committee, like a church. It's a big community and feeling part of a community. And some people like me might feel more spiritual out in nature where there's less of a community, more of an affinity with things in their natural state of being. And yeah, I know that's such a generic term, but I would just say it's sort of like a feeling.

Even though the term was "generic," Deb expressed how her "feeling was more prevalent when she is in nature. Deb, who had expressed the feeling of "communing" with nature and others on her trip, fell back on the term "feeling" even though it is a "generic" term. It was impossible to tell, but while feeling can simply indicate momentary emotions, it seemed that Mark and Deb were referencing something greater, potentially a more rare and profound state of being.

In order to explain the intricacies of her spiritual experiences, Beth also employed the term feeling. She noted, "I think it just means a feeling that you get sometimes when you're happy and you are in a place that's beautiful and it makes you feel good that you {pause} I think it is just a feeling." In this explanation there was an attempt to think of a better word or phrase to communicate the feeling, but as evident, after the pause, Beth decided to again lean on the term feeling. During the interview certain words came to my mind that may have more adequately captured that 'feeling' reference: balanced, at ease, rightness, and harmonious. Even with these additions, the comment would have felt like it was missing an element of depth.

To understand what participants meant by the term feeling, it was important to see how their beliefs may or may not have shaped certain feelings. Recognizing that a feeling is present was often referenced as the spiritual experience in itself. Dan acknowledged this element of recognition and went on to qualify an experience as unique based on his individual outlook and religion. Dan noted:

I would say. . . I would probably say, just a recognition or a feeling or a sense that there is

a greater power, being, whatever you want to call it in life. Umm- I guess different religions, different people, feel very different about how that force interacts with them, or if it even interacts with people on a daily basis. That would be my definition.

It is apparent that Dan understood that each person would have a unique interaction with a force that is defined differently by so many. An interesting point is that many individuals described the experience as a “feeling,” yet as acknowledged, each person’s feeling was likely different.

One example of a unique perspective on the definition of spirituality and related spiritual experiences was communicated by Mary. Mary noted:

. . spirituality, I guess is a hard to define word. I am not religious, but spiritual, yes I am. Ummm, I definitely believe that nature possess the ability to draw an awe inspiring feeling in people, ummm. . .yes I have had spiritual experiences out here. [I: When you say nature has the ability, what about it has the ability for you?] I think the complexity and the processes like, how effortlessly a piece of grass grows or a tree, or how easily the weather changes and how it all seems to happen without effort but it is this complex system.

In this response Mary navigated her understanding of feelings of “awe” and related them to scenes that inspired that feeling of awe in her. While others may feel similar feelings when witnessing such processes, how we choose to communicate the feelings, and how people fit the experience into their broader understanding of the complex systems around them maybe unique. No participants explained spirituality in the same way. It is important to consider the bridge that participants made between the feelings and their relation to a bigger dynamic. Here Mary was viewing the “processes” as indicators but it will be seen that others rely on different indicators.

Because the term feeling was used in a variety of ways, often follow up questions were used to better discern the context and meaning of the word. When asked what the feeling felt like to him, Dan responded:

Ummm, I think just being able to slow down and relax; I think when you are rejuvenated, you have had time to relax and clear your mind and get in touch with your spiritual side. I am not sure how to describe being rejuvenated. I guess it is those things, having had time to be in touch with your spiritual side and get away from some of the day-to-day activities that worry you down. That is a tough one to define and describe to you. I know it when I feel it, but it is hard to put it words.

Similar to so many comments shared in other sections, Dan clearly saw a differentiation between the normal everyday and the feelings that are present in the wilderness. Dan noted that visitors are able to get away from activities that increase the pace of life and create worry. Notably, we are again left describing characteristics of the setting that supported the feeling, rather than the feeling itself. Notably, in this comment from Dan there is a reference to feeling “rejuvenated.” It seemed that there was again an explanation involving having the necessary time and space to complete tasks that were beneficial to Dan’s mental health.

Defining the forces at play that aid in the production of the “feelings” was a continuously difficult prospect for participants. Lisa attempted to describe her beliefs saying:

I definitely believe that there is a force, whatever you want to call it, but there is definitely a universal force that keeps things in check. And there’s people who call it God, there’s people who call it a universal force, but definitely something that lets us know that we are not totally in control of our own life. . . That’s only if you truly are connected. If you have no real connection to that force or that entity, then I don’t think that you are ever still enough to listen to it. So it’s that stillness, that quietness, that peacefulness that allows that spirit to enter in and to guide you, but you have to be willing to say I’m open to it. I want you to guide me. I want your help.

Like Dan, Lisa recognized that the act of being connected or open to the connection is often a large part of the phenomena of spiritual experiences. Lisa seemed to say that in order to receive feelings that there is something bigger, a person has to be still enough, quiet enough, and peaceful enough. It appeared that those qualities combined with a willingness to be open.

Being open and receptive was talked about by other participants as well. When Sarah was asked to clarify what she meant by being in the “mood” for spiritual experiences she said, “More relaxed, definitely more relaxed. More natural. I don’t know how to explain that.” Again the challenge of explaining and possibly the limits of language were noted as limiting in how well participants were able to convey their experiences. Sarah clearly spoke of not being stressed as a key factor in being open for spiritual experiences. She also called the mindset “natural” which may allude to being more in touch with natural surroundings, or she may have been referencing a more instinctual or intrinsic feeling.

Clearly there are concepts related to the receptivity and the actual sources of experiences that were difficult for participants to relate in the interview context. Jen spoke to these abstract ideas while she spoke of whether or not she believed in a higher power. Jen explained:

I believe that there is some sort of an organization to the universe that has been called God because there are people who cannot deal with abstract concepts. They have to name it and make it a personified deity. I don’t have to do that. I’d rather connect with those forces that somehow if we’re in tune with them make things work. And you can do that a lot easier out here. An internal source of power and calm. Again, that trying to be in tune with whatever keeps us here and keeps the earth going.

Jen alluded to an ‘internal source of power and calm’ that is easier to achieve in the Boundary Waters. Jen was okay just considering the higher power to be “forces” that “make things work.” While there was clearly still uncertainty in her answer, it seemed that Jen saw those “forces” around her, making things work. Jen had seemingly thought about the abstract comment and concluded that she would attempt to stay ‘in tune’ with it and appeared to have time for that in the wilderness.

Most notably, participants demonstrated that they had found time to consider higher powers. Chris, for example, said, “I don’t nearly have as much time at home as I do up here; here

it is like one big spiritual embrace and at home it is periodical.” His reference to a ‘spiritual embrace’ appeared to be his way of communicating the feeling that he had when in the Boundary Waters. Having the time for those feelings seemed to be a predictor of the feelings for Chris. What is unclear and seemed to vary by participant is whether the process followed a) given the time spiritual experiences may happen, or b) having time allows for recognition of spiritual things happening.

In each of the statements included so far, there have been elements of complexity with regards to explaining the actual phenomena of spiritual experiences. Whether participants utilized terms such as ‘feeling’, ‘embrace’, and ‘forces’, or they simply described setting and activity attributes rather than described the particulars of the experience, it seemed that for some participants it was difficult to employ language to produce definite and comprehensive explanations of lived experiences. While some participants attempted to express seemingly unexplainable experiences, others incorporated their religious beliefs into their explanations of the phenomena of spiritual experiences. These explanations related experiences to creation beliefs, bible teachings, and common understandings of God in order to communicate difficult to communicate perspectives.

As noted in the section *God’s Creation*, many participants considered the wilderness a pure form of God’s creation and therefore seemed more likely to have spiritual experiences there. In order to convey the meaning of certain experiences, some of those participants shared their feelings through religious language and church based anecdotes. Jeff explained his wilderness spirituality by calling on both religious language and an anecdote from a popular movie, saying:

This is a form of worship too, just coming out and enjoying God’s creation. I think he made this for people to enjoy and to take care of. And I think (pause) one of the things

my wife has said to me too when we we're talking, she says, 'You know, I'm glad that I got a husband that does these things in the right way, the way God would want. You care about not letting stuff get in the lake and about caring for the canoe and stuff like that.' I don't know. I think it – I mean there's another – in the movie *Chariots of Fire* they talked about how you can praise the Lord by peeling a spud, if you peel it to perfection. I don't know. I just think if you do things right as well as you can, I think that's spiritual. And whether that satisfies God or not, I don't know. But I think you get a spiritual satisfaction yourself and I guess that's what you're striving for. It is what this trip is all about.

While some participants tried to describe the feeling of spiritual satisfaction, Jeff related the feeling to whether he is satisfying God or not. Jeff's reference to *Chariots of Fire* represented another way for him to convey the feelings he gets by doing things in a way that create spiritual satisfaction. He conveyed that he always attempts to do things the 'right' way such that he is able to praise the Lord, seemingly as a form of worship. In his explanation, he stated that he didn't know if he was satisfying God or not, but that all he could do was strive for that goal. That desire to satisfy had been a part of other participants' explanations such as Mark and Rob's references to stewardship. The point here was that Jeff related his approaches to finding spiritual satisfaction to religious elements of choosing the right and praising the Lord through actions.

Other visitors also conveyed their spiritualities through religious lenses. David defined spirituality as, "The spirit within us and the way that that leads us to follow the teachings that we've been given through the Bible." By relating the concept to the teachings that the Bible provides, David provided a short succinct answer that led to numerous other concepts. The answer however doesn't specify which teachings in particular, or how the "spirit within us" actually facilitates experiences. Despite the use of seemingly grounded religious ideas, David's answer doesn't actually suggest what this experiencing of spirituality actually feels like.

The common thread of experiencing something wholly different than the everyday also surfaced among those that used religious language to convey their spirituality. Mark explained:

Like I said, my God is everything in our lives. But I call this place a place of spirituality because I can reflect on my God and what he's all done for me and what he's put on this earth for his children, man. . . When I come up here, God allows me to, like I said, it feels like I'm so much closer to him, like I'm in that garden. . . Why that is, I don't know. Again, I have to say solitude because I don't have so many other things to deal with. I can concentrate on what's important.

Mark continually spoke of feeling closer to God while in the wilderness and here he gave the specific reason of solitude in juxtaposition to his everyday busyness in order to explain why. The interesting piece was that Mark thought he had conveyed his perspective by saying "I can reflect on my God" and "God allows me to . . . feel like I'm so much closer." These statements that relate Mark to his God are his attempt to get across his spiritual feelings. When asked to expand on his views of God's relation to spirituality Mark went on saying:

Spirituality, can I put my finger right on it? No, I guess it's like saying, "Well, can you touch a person's soul? Can you see a person's soul?" Does it matter? Does it take up space? No, not as far as we know. But we all talk about having a soul. We all talk about spirituality. Again, when I talk of spirituality, I think of things that are related directly to God because again, in our beliefs, we believe that God made everything.

The answer didn't necessarily use any language that expanded our understanding of how Mark experienced his spirituality, but rather demonstrated how committed his perspectives were in his relationship to God. Clearly, by introducing the abstract concept of a "soul" Mark was able to communicate how spirituality is simultaneously abstract and full of meaning.

By relating spirituality to God some interviewees were able to develop their ideas. Mary also related her perspective to God but did so by explaining how she believes God has become an explanation for something that is in some ways inexplicable. Mary stated:

I don't think it. . . everyone wants it to mean God, everyone wants it to mean that greater power, that mystery, that we just can't define that put us here, that explains us. I guess for me, my spirituality just really defines . . . this is hard . . . to put it in words . . . it defines what, like why I think I am here. . . People want it to mean God, but I don't really believe

in that so I guess when people say spirituality, I think about my connectedness with that essence that put me here or the chain of actions that it took to put me here. I don't know, the mystery of being an egg and sperm and coming to life (laugh) . . . just all of that stuff. The complexity. I mean for me, it is really a thing of systems; it is so biological, so scientific. For me, spirituality doesn't define a God, but a process. Just a moment of awe when you feel like you can't explain things with science.

Mary utilized the beliefs of others as a counter to her beliefs. She acknowledged that people struggle to define the mystery and conveyed her connectedness is to an 'essence.' Mary later referred to the chain of actions, the systems, as the 'synchronicities.' Her definition of spirituality was well developed in that she acknowledges the complexity but also traced the connection back to concrete scientific processes such as the "mystery of being an egg and sperm and coming to life." Her laugh seemed to signal that these are awkward topics to discuss and topics that often don't get discussed in everyday life. Even for Mary, a college student with a solid grasp on biological and ecological concepts, science didn't seem to be able to explain everything. As noted, she viewed spirituality as a process and certainly it seemed that explaining how that process was mystifying was the best description she could provide.

Other participants similarly viewed spirituality as a process, or at least saw it partly as a process. Unlike Mary they didn't place their spirituality within a religious context or in juxtaposition to religious perspectives, but similar to Mary they noted the compounding effect of experiences in wilderness. Steve noted:

I am not sure if it is a process or if it is just the minute you sit in a canoe, and push off shore, it starts. It's not just any one thing, where oh, this occurred, or that occurred, and now it is good. It's just the fact that you're out here amongst, in some ways the wilderness, and enjoying the process that it has to offer.

Steve was clearly pointing to a culminating sense in order to describe his spirituality. For Steve, like for Mary and others, there appeared to be a process of realizing over time how special the offerings of wilderness may compound to become a spiritual experience. Sarah spoke to the idea

of compounding by recounting various moments that added to her sense of peace. Sarah responded to being asked to explain what she finds spiritual about the Boundary Waters, by saying:

It is a peace, a calm most of the time, I should say. It's relaxing. Listening to nature, hearing the call of the loons. Almost always when I crawl into bed at night, hear the loons calling back and forth, that is very peaceful. Sitting around the campfire, star gazing, or whatever your doing, it's peaceful and relaxes the mind, body, and soul.

Her answer holds references to at least three different activities, again pointing to the interacting effect of experiences resulting in spiritual feelings. For Sarah, simply relaxing the mind, body, and soul seemed to be the end result, but the statement was made in a way that made me as the researcher feel there was more there.

The complexity of the term spirituality also seemed present in some responses. In order to define the term, Jeff highlighted the challenges of constantly pursuing a spiritual existence.

Jeff explained:

It's a big term for me. I think it probably means different things to different people. You asked me what it means to me. I think to me it is about what you believe, not just what you believe, but also what matters to you. What's deep? You know, it's kind of an intrinsic value that, I think, like dogs don't have, but people do. At least – I don't know if all people do. I think some people lose that spirituality or lose that feeling. Or maybe they have it deep down, but they just aren't listening to it. But that's the problem too, it is like even if you – I don't know. I mean it seems like you always fail. And so that's kind of the crushing deal about the whole thing. It's like there's no perfect human, so you're always failing. You try and maybe it's just in the trying. I know I'm going off on a lot of tangents, but the Special Olympics model is, if I can't win, let me be brave in the attempt. I really like that model and I think at least if you're trying, you're doing the best you can. And I think there's a lot to that. I think you've got to kind of listen to that stuff because I think if you get too far away from it, if you get too far away from what you believe and what you think is right, then I think something inside you kind of dies. I think you get problems that way. And it's just not good for you mentally. And I think that reflects in your life. It's like I read this book on Mother Theresa and the nuns of Calcutta. And they were actually extremely happy people and they were working in this awful area, but they

loved it. And I think part of it was because they knew that they were doing what they wanted to do, and felt they were making a difference.

Here Jeff used two anecdotes to emphasize the importance of the ‘intrinsic value’ of spirituality. It seemed that Jeff realized his initial answer, culminating in ‘what’s deep?’ wasn’t complete and that he needed some examples to round out his definition. The examples Jeff provided most notably speak to notions of having faith and blind belief in order to find spiritual satisfaction. Jeff had referred to doing things ‘right’ in an earlier quote and seemed to put faith in the thought that he was pleasing higher powers by doing things that way. The examples provided here clarify his previous point and further developed the idea that for some people spirituality most simply a process of following a path, or taking part in activities that “feel right.” Jeff specifically mentioned that if this skill or concept goes unused within a person, they may lose it. Jeff seemed to capture the idea of guiding feelings as he spoke of Special Olympians as well as the nuns of Calcutta. His own path was discussed earlier through his comments on making his father proud by having his family out on a whole-family-adventure, and teaching his kids to fish with his late father’s fishing pole. Though unsure of whether he was following his intended spiritual path, he explained that he had to think that his father would be proud. For Jeff, this practice seemed to hold moments where the process seemed so right that certain unexplainable feelings were experienced.

David’s comments were similar to Jeff’s, as he said:

Everything out here is spiritual. I guess the way that I look at it everything is God’s creation and very beautiful. [I: By everything, do you mean the experiences too?] I mean, it’s a tough question to answer. It’s hard to make a simple answer. But you put it just to faith, and maybe faith is what you’re growing up being taught to believe. But I think you see things, and you can call them every day miracles or things that there was a greater hand involved in creating everything and keeping it all in good balance. . . . Faith has multiple meanings. I mean, the reason you believe is not something tangible. You have faith, and some people I guess use their beliefs so they describe it as faith.

David's comments support this notion that there is an element of faith that helps describe the intangible. He specifically notes that it is a "tough question to answer" and that "it's hard to make a simple answer." To emphasize the mystery, similar to Mary, David noted that certain things can be considered "every day miracles" or instances that a "greater hand" was involved in. Most importantly, David acknowledged the intangible nature of the spiritual and leaned on faith and beliefs to validate the importance of spiritual things and experiences.

The last quote for this section comes from Nancy who seemed to analyze the importance of simply believing. Nancy explained:

I don't believe in God, but I feel like I do believe in the earth. I do believe in an energy, or I feel it. When I think of the word believe, to me, that's a logical process in your head. [I: Yeah.] And so when they're like, "You just have to believe it," to me that's saying like, "You just have to accept it, even though it doesn't add up." But I feel more like I can feel it or sense it. I can say, "Yeah, I can feel or sense the earth when I'm in . . .," – and I can honestly say that. I thought for a long time it would be horrible to say, "I don't believe in God." I thought I would never come out and say that, but now I do say I believe, just not in God.

Like Mary, Nancy used her disbelief in certain elements of religion to position her beliefs. Interestingly, she explained how the term 'believe' became important to her and captured that importance by talking about sensing it, feeling it. Her final statements about having and proclaiming certain beliefs spoke to their importance and the personal challenge that Nancy seemed to overcome.

Through the previously presented results sections, there seems to be a tension between what is plainly a wilderness experience and what is a spiritual experience. The tension has been addressed by presenting individual participant definitions of spirituality and spiritual experiences. The data presented here supports this approach, acknowledging the individuality of

perceptions, the difficulty in drawing definite boundaries around experiences, and some of common contextual elements that make some experiences similar.

From this section we saw that while some viewed spirituality as a tangible search for the sacred, others clearly viewed it as culminating in sensing love or in realizing ultimate answers to questions concerning who they were as humans and what their purpose was. Sometimes spirituality was viewed as indescribable feelings, other times it was nested within religious language to provide meaning. In other instances spirituality was conveyed as a complex process that could not be captured by the description of a singular moment, and finally spirituality was portrayed as dependent on, or an act of belief or blind faith. Through many of these illustrations, language seemed challenged to and at times fall short of communicating the entire phenomena of spirituality. Participants appeared to leave some ideas hanging, wishing they could further support them with more definite explanations.

4.5.2 Spirituality and Wilderness Spirituality

Understanding participant perceptions of spirituality was always understood as an essential element of this study. Throughout this study the question of whether or not interviewees perceived spirituality and wilderness spirituality to be independent, interrelated, or one in the same became increasingly interesting. Additionally, it is interesting to note whether spirituality was viewed as different from religion. Firstly, if visitors viewed spirituality as a phenomena that was entirely related to wilderness, then how could they compare spiritual experiences in wilderness to those outside of wilderness? Secondly, if thought to be identical and related to religion, would participants use religious language to describe spirituality and would their descriptions be related entirely to wilderness or not? To address these questions, close attention was paid to the context and content provided by the participants during the analysis.

Additionally, trends such as spiritual expectations and perceptions of the relation between spirituality and wilderness spirituality were followed and are reported on below. Expectations are sometimes looked at as significant determinants of experiences. A question that this study addressed was whether participants held expectations related to spiritual experiences. When having expectations of spiritual experiences was related to the progression of the conversation, a follow up question was asked about whether a visitor expected to have spiritual experiences in the wilderness or not. Linda answered the question by saying:

Yeah, I hope to feel different and have some special moments, I was thinking about that earlier today. And yeah, I think I would call them spiritual. I don't know what I hope for, just that it will have impacted me. [How would you expect to feel different?] I guess just what we have talked about, more relaxed, more in tune with what people have done in centuries past.

It seemed that though Linda had considered the topic of expectations, she didn't know exactly what those expectations were. Though the expectations may be broad and loose, Linda clearly demonstrated that individuals may be looking for meaningful or "special" spiritual interactions with the wilderness. Other participants spoke with more conviction about their perspectives on expectations. Deb said, "You don't come here and have those experiences by accident; you sort of have to search it out and you're really looking for some solitude, some peace and quiet."

Other participants seemed to take the experiences as they came rather than be searching for them. When Charlie was asked if he comes to wilderness expecting to have spiritual experiences, he responded, "Not expecting, no. I think that it's something that just happens. There's a moment when you have a spare minute, and that's the way it happened for me." The visit to wilderness was Charlie's first. It would be interesting to see how his view of such experiences changed during his second trip which he had planned to take later in the summer.

Other more experienced participants shared Charlie's outlook. Lisa explained:

No, I try not to have too many expectations {spiritual expectations} about trips. It's more about the unexpected wonder. [I: Wonder, excellent. When you say unexpected wonder, can you give me an example of that?] The wind blowing through the trees, listening for owls, seeing eagles soaring in the sky, watching the ripples on the water.

Similar to Charlie, Lisa seemed to find herself amidst spiritual experiences in moments when she had a spare minute, a minute to take in the setting attributes around her. As noted, not every participant was asked about expectations. However, there were obviously different approaches to having expectations. Other participant's expectations were discernable based on how they spoke of their spiritual thoughts. Chris noted, "When I am at home, I mostly have spiritual thoughts about being up here." Chris's family had stopped going to church in the recent past due to some social issues. It seemed that Chris enjoyed time for reflection and felt as though wilderness visits were the best opportunity for it.

Comparing wilderness spirituality and spirituality in general, along with spirituality and religion, allowed a better understanding of how perspectives on wilderness, as a setting for the phenomena, are comparable to other places including less wild natural areas. Participants sometimes made their perception of the relation between spirituality and wilderness spirituality clearly known. Eric explained:

I know that it is an individual thing, I don't feel that there is a wilderness spirituality because to me, I hear spiritual and I think of God, Jesus Christ and all of that. For me the wilderness is just a setting in which any person's spirituality can be practiced. It is an opportunity to get away from people, have time by myself, it is calm and stress reducing; my blood pressure is probably pretty low right now. I know that for others there is a wilderness spirituality different from spirituality in general.

Eric's view made it clear that for him there was only one spirituality; that wilderness is simply another setting for his normal spirituality which is focused on 'God, Jesus Christ and all of that'. Eric seemed more committed to religion than any other participant and in his case, committed to his protestant beliefs. Interestingly though, Eric described the wilderness setting as an ideal place

to practice his beliefs. As noted previously in *God's Creation* there were several participants that appeared to interrelate their spirituality with their religion and view wilderness as a place where they can feel closer to God. When asked if spirituality and wilderness spirituality were different, Rob responded, "No, it is all part of the same. This happens to be something that God created that I really enjoy. God has created a lot of other things that I really enjoy too." Rob spoke at length about how spiritual the whole experience is, especially passing on wilderness stewardship ideals to his boy scout troop. Clearly, for Rob wilderness is a place where spirituality is simply practiced, rather than feeling that there is a separate spirituality, but it is seemingly an ideal place to practice it.

Ed spoke to the idea that wilderness spirituality may be viewed differently, but for him it was most simply an extension of his 'faith life in Christ'. Ed articulated:

So I'm dancing a little bit here to say I think wilderness spirituality can be a component of at least in my world, a faith life in Christ knowing that from the standpoint of creation, it's a gift as opposed to, I don't come here to worship the land; or to worship the spirit of the land; or to worship whatever it is that other people may come here for in terms of wilderness spirituality. I'm here and I'm grateful that it exists and I enjoy the experiences that I have here but I just simply consider it a gift, an extension of my religious spirituality.

Indeed it was clear that Ed's perspective was that some other people may have wilderness spiritualities that are based on different relationships to the land or other entities than his own. It is notable that he and Rob shared the idea that wilderness was a special place where their normal spiritual habits can be amplified, but should not be considered separate of different simply because they are in the wilderness.

To build on this idea, Bill related to the difference by considering the perspectives of others such as Ed and Rob. Bill stated, "I know a lot of people who are spiritual based on their beliefs, whatever printed material they follow; whereas if you come out here, it gives you a bit

more understanding of nature and primitive people's spirituality." By relating belief-based spirituality to perspectives based on nature and primitiveness Bill seemed to say how various forms of spirituality are independent. Remember that Bill's definition of spirituality included "how much time you spend worshipping God," but here we see that to him wilderness spirituality included how much time nature and certain primitive elements were considered. It appeared that Bill was highlighting how wilderness promotes unmediated forms of worship that may rely on authentic elements rather than a script or text to follow. When talking about spiritual moments in the wilderness Bill later noted, "It is in the stillness and aloneness, the way you are kind of absorbing the natural things here, it is a nice."

For other participants that were more unsure of their beliefs in God, the differences between spirituality and wilderness spirituality appeared less clear. Deb explained:

No difference. I believe that there is some sort of an organization to the universe that has been called God because there are people who cannot deal with abstract concepts. They have to name it and make it a personified deity. I don't have to do that. I'd rather spiritually connect with those forces and somehow if I'm in tune with them, make things work. And you can do that a lot easier out here.

For Deb, there appeared to only be a difference in how a setting can make it easier to "spiritually connect." Deb had previously noted that visitors likely came to wilderness with expectations to find spiritual experiences. Deb, who grew up taking trips in the Boundary Waters with her parents, would likely agree with Dan's perspective. Dan also believed that there is no difference between spirituality and wilderness spirituality saying, "Not necessarily, I can't see a difference . . . When you come to wilderness for a second or third time, you do sort of know that you are going to have very different moments like that, different because of the wilderness but not different in terms of a different spirituality." Dan, who said that spirituality is, "a recognition or a feeling, or a sense that there, is a higher power," appeared to just view the phenomena as

something most likely to occur in wilderness but also verified that he expected some ‘different moments which seemed to mean spiritual experiences. Carol alternatively intertwined her expectations with her perspective on the differences between wilderness spirituality and spirituality in general. She mentioned, “I don’t know that I’ve been out here and haven’t had some kind of experience that I could probably call spiritual; they’re not different, just in a different place; I think it just happens because that’s just what happens out here, but I don’t expect it.” Carol didn’t consider herself a very spiritual person but her spirituality could be attached to accomplishments with friends. Clearly, depending on how a visitor defined spirituality, some definitions, such as Carol’s, are far less dependent on the setting, and more on interactions with others.

Somewhat opposite from Carol, Jen spoke of spiritual experiences as opportunities for introspection. “Some people absolutely can’t handle the alone, the quiet, the wind, all of which I love, and need; they would rather be connecting with other people in a way that is spiritual. I’m more introspective and consider my spirituality here a wilderness spirituality.” When asked about her spirituality at home Jen noted that she attends a United Universalist Church. She specifically said, “I am spiritual at home, sometimes doing yoga, and sometimes in church, but unfortunately that all [church] gets too political and you have to think about the groups; its not a wilderness spirituality.” There appeared to be a difference for Carol related to the setting characteristics. Such a perspective was likely the easiest to draw conclusions from about the inputs into spiritual moments. Earlier, Carol had referenced her “spiritual journey,” one that was related to wilderness experiences, and could seemingly be viewed as separate from her spirituality at home.

In assessing a difference between spirituality and wilderness spirituality Brian dealt with

the question by saying:

There is certainly a spirituality in the global context . . . wilderness spirituality is definitely a big component of that. Of my total spirituality it is more than 50%. [I: Can you tell me more about global spirituality?] It is an ability to respect the Lord; you know in the city, the hubbub of city life and the stress of parenting, other than my morning run it is hard, it is put on the back burner. Here it is always on the front burner, it is the kind of environment we choose to put ourselves in.

In Brian's reference to the global context he was able to demonstrate how encompassing his spirituality is. As his answer developed, that global spirituality was viewed by Brian to be heavily composed of wilderness spirituality. His answer was helpful in that it was a reminder of how varied definitions of spirituality were, and how in many ways it didn't matter how we name the spirituality, it is just important that we recognize how it may manifest for different individuals and how they make meaning from the experience.

One individual, Nancy, provided a nice glimpse into the importance of wilderness spirituality for her. She began by saying, "For me, it is more powerful here. This is kind of the only time that I kind of build on my spiritual thoughts." To more definitively answer the question about whether there is a difference, Nancy said:

Well, for me spirituality is wilderness spirituality. I don't have what I would call a church spirituality. I think that people really do love church and aren't just going to it for social reasons, there are many reasons we go to church, but when I see people really enjoying the church experience, for them it is like what I get here. So yeah, I don't frown upon it. It is just not- it just doesn't do it for me.

In this quote Nancy was acknowledging that different settings carry different value for various individuals. For her, wilderness was on its own in terms of supporting her spirituality and seemingly providing her with enjoyment, comfort, and a sense that a higher power exists.

While acknowledging the variety of perspectives on spirituality, it is important to consider that a few participants found the term spirituality difficult to relate to their personal

experiences. On the other hand, many embraced the term spirituality. The differences contribute to an understanding of how variable perspectives are, and how dynamic they can be on individual levels. When asked if he would define any of his experiences as spiritual, Ed said:

Not necessarily but it is a big, {pause} to me it's, I get fed emotionally by being on wilderness experiences. I wouldn't necessarily call it a spiritual experience because it's brief. It feeds the spirit though. It feeds my spirit but it's not necessarily what someone might call religious. So I come from organized religion but I am fed emotionally and spiritually by being in wilderness. What I find is right now there's a difference between being here for a short period of time and being in a destination like this for a week or a month. So in the past when I've been here for really long periods of time, I felt kind of spiritually connected to things but maybe not like a Native American would.

For Ed, the temporal component seemed to determine his comfort with using the term. Ed's experience as a canoe guide spending his whole summers in the Boundary Waters may have spawned this angle, but as previously noted, Ed viewed wilderness experiences as a gift from God and not entirely spiritual experiences.

Jim critiqued the term spirituality noting how it had become a cliché that seemed to be an easy out when people haven't fully formed their beliefs. Jim stated:

It seems like today a lot of people use that word but really don't have a definition for it themselves. They say that they are spiritual but they don't believe in any higher power. So I try, personally try, to avoid that word I guess because I feel that it has become kind of cliché in today's society, where people don't want to identify with a certain religion or certain spirituality, but they just say that they are spiritual.

Through the study there were a few moments when participants had difficulty defining the term, giving support to Jim's assertions. There were however other times when participants spoke with ease about their views which were likely not easy to articulate, partly because of how different they were from more common definitions of spirituality and religion. Mary, for example, explained:

I don't really believe in God, I guess I just really believe in energy and the cycles of life, and the processes and I don't really think there is a greater thing that created us. I feel like we have evolved from microorganisms, and I do feel like it was a supernatural thing. [Regarding that energy that you referred to, when you are here do you feel closer to it or not?] I feel more involved, like I understand it a bit more. I feel like you can see it too, I mean that personal belief, you can just see how things were small then became big. Just that process, more closely, more intimately.

Mary's comments signaled how some individuals do think deeply about the terms. She had developed a perspective partly based on evolution, and partly based on, as she noted earlier, a "feeling" or an "essence." Each of these quotes demonstrate how difficult the topic is to bound and describe, giving support to the phenomenological methods employed within. The in-situ interviews additionally provided moments where inferences could be made about individuals perspectives.

Through the comments in this section, the variety of interpretations of spirituality as related to the phenomena of spiritual experiences was made clear. While there can be a wilderness spirituality that exists independently for visitors, contemplating that visitor's perspective on spirituality outside of wilderness can help to discern its bounds and meanings. Additionally, when participants spoke of spirituality in religious terms, their thoughts were relating to more than just their religious contexts. They simultaneously seemed to be considering how the setting and wilderness specific experiences were shaping their perspectives. Comments did not seem bound by religious language in a way that made them irrelevant to the study of spiritual experiences in wilderness.

Summary of Explaining the Mystery

This final section of the results addressed many of the difficulties of studying the highly subjective and socially constructed terms wilderness and spirituality. The goal was to speak to the difficulties of explaining a highly complex and variable phenomena and additionally address

how wilderness spirituality was perceived by the study participants in relation to spirituality more generally and various elements of religion. Most importantly, the data depicted how spirituality and spiritual experiences often contain multifaceted elements that language is sometimes unable to adequately communicate. By talking about 'feelings' participants hoped to communicate their experiences, but sometimes seemed to feel unsuccessful. The data highlighted how spirituality and spiritual experiences were often described as processes and sometimes depicted as containing multiple elements that accumulated to result in participant defined spiritual experiences. Furthermore, the role of religious beliefs, expectations, and definitions of spirituality were found to be influential but varied. While some interviewees related their wilderness spirituality to their religious beliefs, others put the phenomena in opposition to church based definitions. Through the analyses the data demonstrated that inputs such as time, space, openness, belief, and blind faith were all potential components of spiritual experiences in wilderness in addition to the factors identified in the three previous sections. Most notably, through many of the comparisons and definitions, spiritual experiences in wilderness were again often identified as sitting in opposition to experiences of everyday life. Wilderness spirituality was depicted as a resulting, sometimes expected, outcome of experiences in a place that offers a vastly different reality than the everyday of the interviewees.

5.0 CHAPTER 5- DISCUSSION

“The more we delve into the mysteries of nature the more connected we feel and the more the symbiosis of all things and events around us feels obvious . . . In a world so overpopulated, we still manage to find the last few untouched areas, where we become pioneers and where our perspective on the world around us forever changes.” ~J. Wester, 2012: 60

5.1.0 Introduction

In wilderness, study participants found that social constraints and expectations were minimized, cultural information to be processed was reduced, and primitive and immersive ways of being were practiced. Connections were made with self, other travelers, the natural world, and powers greater than imaginable. In these conditions, participants’ relationship with an array of spiritual themes was often kindled, stoked, and/or sustained. For many, the resulting experience was a spiritual antidote to the everyday.

The narrative of this research has further developed antecedents, processes, and lessons from spiritual experiences in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and advances the understanding of a) visitors’ perspectives of wilderness as different from the everyday; b) the role of antecedents in spiritual experiences, including mentors, memories, and religious and spiritual perspectives; and c) the growing impact that cultural changes have on spiritual experiences in wilderness. As visitors committed to wilderness experiences filled with novel, primitive, physical, and quiet elements, they found the time and space necessary for spiritual practices and processes. They described wilderness as a setting where they could manage the information they were required to process and engage in habits and rituals that support contemplation of spiritual themes. This study depicted the ways participants engaged the wild (space free from intentional human control), immersed themselves in simple ways of being, and escaped information technology that was often said to command their everyday. In those ways

participants developed their relationship with themselves, other humans, powers greater than themselves and the wild landscape. While wilderness managers may feel challenged in their abilities to provide opportunities for spiritual experiences in wilderness, this study stresses the importance and significance of the experiences, and identifies many examples of what managers could and should be working to protect.

Depending on how participants defined spirituality, their experiences vacillated between enjoying the quiet and possibly making meaningful connections with other travelers and the natural surroundings, to feeling both internal and external forces of the divine and discovering themselves in ways they never had before. This discussion section highlights the quality of the relationships experienced between visitors and themselves, others, the wilderness surroundings, and higher powers.

By studying participants' lived experiences in-situ, their habits, rituals, and expectations were discovered and related to the phenomena in a way that identified the complexities but stressed the importance of the experiences for the participants. The wilderness, it seemed, provided something different from daily life.

A vast majority stressed the quiet they discovered and the range of thinking brought on by wilderness. While characteristics such as solitude have received much attention in the past, we now turn attention to how the 'everyday' impacts the spiritual sanctuary the wild provides. Solitude and other traits are no less important, but now visitors seemed to be impacted by how everyday life is changing rapidly for many, which only strengthens the value of spiritual experiences in wilderness. As it becomes more difficult in our daily lives to find the time and space to re-connect with others, with the greater powers, and with different paces and practices

of living, the more managers will be expected to protect these opportunities in wilderness, thus preserving wilderness character.

5.1.1 Study Overview

This topic was selected in order to better understand and describe the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness. The research herein sought to describe the phenomena and attend to gaps in the literature including, but not limited to, determining the most influential components in the wilderness experiences and spirituality relationship, understanding the importance of wilderness-based spiritual experiences given the stress experienced by many people in everyday society, and describing the components and pathways of spiritual experiences in wilderness. Identification of these gaps in the literature and an opportunity to conduct research in Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness led to the following research questions: 1) What is the *phenomena* of spiritual experiences in wilderness?; 2) Are there elements of *designated wilderness*, both *similar* and *different* from other natural landscapes that inspire visitors to have spiritual experiences?; 3) What are the most influential *antecedents*, *conceptual frameworks*, and *outcomes* associated with the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness?; 4) What role does *water* play in spiritual experiences in wilderness?; and 5) How are the terms *wilderness* and *spirituality* defined and lived?

Using a methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, I aimed to answer the noted questions and both consider and build upon previous work. The study specifically examined the lived experiences and life-worlds of randomly selected overnight visitors in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Upon close examination of the results from in-situ interviews with 32 overnight paddlers, the theme of wilderness acting as a spiritual antidote to the everyday time and space for spiritual experiences in a way that participant's everyday lives did not, emerged.

Additional themes that not only confirm past studies but add to the field included the importance of mentors within the phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness, the increasing desire of wilderness visitors to escape information technology, and the boundless nature of wilderness spirituality.

5.1.2 Chapter Organization

The chapter began by introducing the findings of the study and the study overview. The chapter continues by sharing reflective perspectives on *Methodological Considerations* to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the study. The considerations are followed by *Concluding Thoughts*, a series of remarks on the dominant theme of wilderness as an antidote to the everyday, as well as other notable contributing and independent themes that surfaced in the data. The section is structured to concentrate on the study questions noted above. It first addresses *The Phenomena* looking at the complexity of the experiences, next, *Untamed* highlights the participant described similarities and differences between wilderness and other natural areas. *Facilitated Journey* then focuses on the life-worlds of the participants by considering the antecedents, conceptual frameworks, and religious beliefs. *Water Reflection* discusses the role of water in spiritual experiences, and lastly, *Bounds of Wilderness Spirituality* situates the phenomena within participant's broader human nature connection by emphasizing the importance of participant definitions and relationships. To conclude the thesis, *Recommendations for Future Work* is a section that is meant to provide substantive suggestions for future researchers as well as wilderness managers. To end this study I have included two quotes from Sigurd Olson in the section titled *Last Words*.

5.2 Methodological Considerations

This thesis subject was difficult to study due to the variable participant understandings of spirituality, and the limitations of language to precisely convey the complex physical and emotional phenomena of spiritual experiences in wilderness. Luckily, hermeneutic phenomenology is adept at providing rich data, allowing important themes to surface out of the data, and placing comments within their appropriate context. The process allows for both individuality and patterns to emerge.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is sometimes questioned for its *trustworthiness* to provide an accurate fit between experience and language. The aim was therefore to address *equivalence*, *credibility*, *originality*, and *quality* as well as possible. In order to manage these concerns, the phenomena of spiritual experiences were examined in-situ. Additionally, as the researcher, I was also able to experience the study area's landscape and take part in the overnight canoe camping experience, just as the participants did. Through those experiences I felt better positioned to understand participant's comments and know when to ask for clarification on terms and phrases that were situation specific. Most importantly ample interview data was provided that allowed readers to make inferences for themselves. The shared data and inferences are intended to stand on their own as relevant and informative. A reality of this study, and the process of a hermeneutic phenomenological work, is that there are many ways to interpret the text (interview transcripts), thus this is only one interpretation and therefore a limited piece of research.

Despite the challenges of the study, I believe the interview style and cyclical approach to the analyzing and presenting the data proved effective in illuminating the most salient and developed themes. Like other phenomenological studies, I believe this study was able to identify the fundamental elements of the lived experiences and has progressed understanding. The results

here have, as expected from a phenomenology, discovered new complexities. While previous studies had identified numerous factors that have contributed to spiritual experiences in wilderness, the results here have further described the multifaceted processes that take place leading up to and as part of those experiences.

Notably, the sampling process employed may be considered a limitation. The findings are only applicable to the individuals sampled, which in this case was predominately Caucasian and Christian individuals. The aim was to sample for a range of spiritual experiences, however, due to the lack of availability of more ethnic and religiously diverse visitors, the sample lacked some diversity that may be found within individuals with more diverse backgrounds. The results may have included greater variability if more ethnicities and religions were represented in the sample.

Lastly, this study was conducted in only one wilderness, and a unique one at that. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is a well used lakes based wilderness. This is not a limitation of the study since the results are not meant to be generalized to a broader population. It is merely an important component of the study due to the distinctive travel method of canoes, and the water dominated landscape.

5.3.0 Concluding Thoughts

5.3.1 *The Phenomena*

The most important question considered in this study was addressing what the phenomena of spiritual experiences is. These research findings most directly point to the phenomena being a function of visitors having **time** to *think* and *be* differently than normal, in a **space** that is *free* of everyday distractions and stresses, and *full* of beauty and newness. Wilderness therefore emerged as an **antidote** that was described as necessary and sitting in opposition to interviewee's busy lives that lacked such ideal time and space for them to consider

spiritual elements. Each participant answered questions regarding spiritual experiences differently. However, it became clear that by committing to a wilderness and engaging in novel, primitive, and physical actions, many participants exhibited openness to experiencing moments or full trips that they described as spiritual.

Numerous factors contributed to visitors experiencing the time and space they depicted as important to spiritual experiences. Within the results the term 'quiet' was used to capture the beauty, size, solitude, and power noted by the participants as the defining characteristics of wilderness that support spiritual experiences. Though there were a multitude of reasons these became defining terms, the simple fact that wilderness ensures an absence of motors and focuses on the importance of human powered travel was adamantly stressed by nearly a third of the sample. Participants stressed the benefits of wilderness areas being motor free and some, believing my research to be persuasive in nature, asked that I fight for continued protection from motorized travel. To some of them that included airspace and they were quick to point out the increase in flyovers they have seen over the last twenty years. This defining feature of wilderness needs to be continually considered on numerous levels, including airspace, and never underestimated.

Most notably, the leading storyline of the 'quiet' wilderness as a spiritual antidote to the everyday relates closely to William Hammitt's 1982 study of wilderness campers. Hammitt found the most important aspect of wilderness solitude was that the 'natural environment' provided 'cognitive freedom.' Similar to the results herein, participants were found to seek and benefit from an environmental isolation in which they had a strong degree of control over the information they must process (Hammitt, 1982). The themes of immersion, finding quiet, living without judgment, finding a better you, and solidifying connections all provided rich examples of

how participants were able to manage the amount of information they had to process and therefore benefited from *thinking* and *being* in ways that were often described as spiritual. Perhaps in our society, where communication and updates happen so instantaneously, these are themes that are more and more prevalent in wilderness visitors.

Descriptions of spiritual experiences were shared in nearly every section of the results in an attempt to communicate their intricacies and variability. The descriptions of the experiences ranged from moments in time where quick realizations were made or peace was felt, to whole lives being considered spiritual and/or participants speaking of altered states of being where feelings were arising from within and/or entering from external sources. The experiences often included feelings of calm, peace, balance, happiness, harmony, grace, Godliness, comfort, awareness, and immersion, as well as profound contemplation of higher powers greater than oneself, inner feelings, purpose in life, position in the world and environment, relationships with other people and environmental elements, connectedness, and personal achievements.

Importantly, the spiritual experiences defined in the results often arose from teachings, habits, rituals, and the sharing of interviewee described spiritual moments. These themes combined to not only depict wilderness as an aesthetic sanctuary where visitors were able to manage the information they had to process, but captured the sacredness of the space. Participants appeared to treat wilderness as a sanctuary from the arrest of cultural demands. Wilderness experiences fed visitor's spirits as the space was recognized for providing asylum from everyday stresses. The participants described not only gaining new perspectives, appreciations, connections, but they spoke of being renewed, rejuvenated, relaxed, recharged, and refocused.

5.3.2 *Untamed*

An important question to this study and the field of nature based spirituality is whether or not wilderness is different from other natural spaces in terms of its ability to support spiritual experiences. In the introduction, literature review, and results, this question was considered, but here it is important to take a broad look at the findings. Consider the following quote from Thoreau. He wrote, “Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness” (Thoreau, 1854:557). As described herein, wilderness has long been many things, including a symbol that stands juxtaposed to society as Thoreau has noted. Through this study it appeared that for these participants wilderness remains a symbol that stands in opposition to a technological society and provides the escape, balance, mysteries, time and space that they sought. Thus it seems to remain that many humans need to know and experience the symbolism of wilderness. That symbol could more accurately be called a compilation of elements. Baylor Johnson poetically highlighted this perspective on visiting wilderness writing:

We enter the wilderness with all our senses and all our being: feeling the rain or breeze; smelling its pine and sage; hearing the water, the crack of lightning; seeing the world anew with each shift of light or perspective; not least, we know in our elemental core how our journey has entwined us- our comfort and our fate- with this landscape.
- 2002: 30

From the interviews and analysis it became apparent that the participants sought a real aesthetic, a collection of setting attributes and specific ways of experiencing them and often aligned it with spiritual and religious perspectives. Wilderness aesthetics have been studied and emphasized as important to visitors by Schafer (1969;1972), Ulrich (1983), Kaplan (1989), Manning (1989), and Nash (2001), yet their spiritual significance is only beginning to be developed. From this study it should be recognized that the combination of beauty, size, solitude

and power accounts for emotions and perspectives described as spiritual. Participants were led to spiritual feelings of awe based at least partly upon the aesthetics of the wilderness space.

Descriptions of spiritual experiences and spiritualities included expectations and desires to disconnect from an ‘information society’ in order to discover the quiet and awe that wilderness clearly provided. While some research has focused on how technology such as GPS units and ultra light gear change visitor expectations and behaviors (eg. Borrie, 2000; Freimund & Borrie, 1998), this study shows how our digital culture is affecting visitors’ wishes for and reactions to spiritual experiences in wilderness. As noted, participants routinely expressed the importance of being able to manage the amount of information that they have to process, but they were also looking for the antidote and it seems they found it in the wilderness aesthetic which simultaneously acts as a symbol, an opportunity, and a lived sanctuary. By escaping communication technologies and feeling free from having to perform in digital spaces and maintain their constantly-judged digital selves, participants found themselves, others, and higher powers.

The importance of the aesthetics seemed to be amplified as participants settled into the wilderness and considered their place within the immense structure of the world. During the study I was driven to consider what makes those experiences meaningful, what makes them a thing that participants consider worthy of remembering, savoring, and learning from. Beyond those ideas found in the results, I found myself turning to philosophical propositions from the past and got caught on Heidegger’s fourfold. Maybe the explanation for what turns an experience into a ‘thing’ significant enough to value lay in the relationship between the thing and the fourfold of Earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. In this fourfold Heidegger hoped to provide the language to depict the character of ‘things’ that help us understand the world (Strong, 1995).

Related to this study it seemed that many spiritual experiences were, as Heidegger labeled them, at a ‘gathering point’ of the fourfold. It seemed that while in wilderness, more than anywhere else, visitors contemplated and reflected on the connections between the Earth, sky, divinities and mortals, gathering perspective on many of life’s big questions.

Without an aesthetic free of human made structures, machines, and devices, it seemed that many participants would not have been able to have the depth of experiences that they did. It seemed that too often that when asked about natural areas outside of designated wilderness, places were described as maintained, designed, or overrun. Many of the descriptions alluded to places other than wilderness being controlled by humans. Hearing repeated comparisons between the wilderness and other natural areas left me thinking about the human’s need to treat land as a resource that tends to be overpowered by machinery and techniques of control. Wilderness seemed to be understood as the last landscape where participants were able to struggle with and against the land and were able to develop a powerful and raw relationship with it in the process. Repeatedly, participants ‘felt the weight lifted’ when they entered the wilderness, when they turned off their phones, when they left their computers behind. Wilderness clearly acted as both a symbol of and opportunity for a free existence where spiritual themes were both varied and prevalent.

5.3.3 Facilitated Journey

During this study participants cited experiences centered on doing the right thing, being a good person, protecting and stewarding. All of these experiences were nested in perceptual frameworks, based on both similar and different antecedents, and involved a variety of outcomes. At times the experiences were related directly to individuals’ religious beliefs, and other times

descriptions of the actions surfaced without such references. Other times, the beliefs of various mentors shaped the experiences.

Beyond living up to instinctual desires to do the right thing, the aesthetic draw of the mode of being in the wild landscape appeared to consistently facilitate participant defined spiritual experiences. The BWCAW is a landscape rich with biodiversity, captivating views and opportunities to practice primitive ways of being. These factors, both alone and in combination often seemed to facilitate experiences with spiritual themes. As visitors thought about and lived in the wild, there were demonstrations of grace, thankfulness, and awe; all of which were spiritually meaningful.

A storyline that developed during the interviews and was the depth and importance of mentorship within the pathway to spiritual experiences. Fiction and non-fiction, visual media, guides, friends, relatives, and parents are all sources of highly meaningful mentoring. Often mentors passed on subtle habits and/or pronounced rituals that shaped the way interviewees approached and managed their experiences in wilderness, guiding their wilderness attachment and spirituality. A variety of mentors impacted the experiences and outcomes of nearly all interviewees. Coming full circle, many of participants discussed how sharing the experience with their youth, or with relative newcomers resulted in outcomes such as spiritual well being. One individual told of bringing at least five different small groups of first time wilderness visitors. He noted, "I think, now that I take people, I find that to be the spiritual surprise; their reaction to the experience. I love to see them enjoying the experience; it completes the spiritual circle." Through these processes, visitors seemed to have spiritual experiences facilitated for them, and facilitate for others.

Notably, it seemed that at the foundation of some participant's actions and explanations of their practices was the idea that humans inevitably ruin or spoil things that were once pure, perfect, pristine, and original. This is not a new or 20th or 19th century idea, but was introduced by American Jonathon Edwards in the mid 18th century (Edwards, 1741). It is important to notice that participants repeatedly felt that the removal or absence of human's works allowed God's work to shine. From that perspective it seemed that a deeper closeness was felt in the wilderness, a place where all man's petty distractions are stripped away.

5.3.4 Water Reflection

Likely the most defining characteristic of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is the water. Upon starting this research much consideration was given to Stowkowski's work on the symbolic importance of water in recreation. The fourth guiding question was to consider the symbolic, novel, and utilitarian roles of water. As the analysis unfolded, the theme of water was all at once omnipresent but seemingly not deep enough to deserve its own section. Numerous quotes indicated the consistent importance of water as a beautiful and fluid setting aspect, a variable (based on winds, weather, and paddling strength) pathway for canoes, and a life-sustaining element for all life forms. Quotes captured the meaningful ways participants immersed themselves in water, listened to water, and watched the land/waterscape. Though water was identified by a few participants as a dynamic symbol of the wild, of life, and of power, each of those quotes tended to reference other themes that were seen as more salient. It was likely that on its own, question nine did not demand deep enough consideration of all the ways that water enhances wilderness experiences and spiritual experiences in particular. Notably though there was an unexpected theme, *The Importance of Edge*, that emerged demonstrating how the water and sky can act as windows to unknowns. The idea that the sky and water can

interplay and present views that are mesmerizing and thought provoking was shared by multiple participants. The thoughts and questions that arose were considered spiritual and can easily be considered an important part of the aesthetic of this wilderness.

5.3.5 Bounds of Spirituality

In this section bounds refers to the physical and temporal boundaries of spiritual experiences in wilderness. Many of these findings were based on interview conversations related to the fifth guiding question on how participants defined the terms wilderness and spirituality. During the interviews visitors often illuminated experiences that seemed to be a product of time and space. In the results there was evidence that those experiences could transcend wilderness boundaries and the temporal boundaries of the wilderness visit. The evidence seemed to validate the importance of understanding participant definitions. The shared experiences and explanations forced consideration of the broader relationship between humans and their wilderness experiences. This research has emphasized the importance of spiritual experiences in wilderness within the broad field of personal and spiritual development. Notably though, Paul Heintzman, the most published researcher on the topic of nature based spirituality, has recently been speaking of spirituality as ‘spiritual well-being’ and sometimes ‘mental health.’ This is marking a shift in spirituality being more broadly recognized in the field of human health and development. At the heart of the issues of human health and development is the simple assertion that humans are disconnected from nature. Scholars and writers have been exploring the growing disconnect between humans and nature for the last twenty years. In 2005 journalist Richard Louv popularized the term *nature-deficit disorder* in his book *Last Child in the Woods*. The book examined the growing cultural trend of children having limited interaction with nature. Other authors such as David Orr, David Sobel, and Joseph Bharat Cornell, to name only a few of

hundreds, have also addressed the growing disconnect between humans and nature and its impact on self-esteem, self-image, and sense-of-community. Louv's 2005 book gained better traction and readership than most because it dealt with children, a portion of our population that seems most pure and malleable. Louv's assertions and concerns were not new but have since been stressed and in some cases acted upon by pediatricians, educators and land managers. With his medical-like reference to a disorder, he hooked into the humans' self-important tendencies. Notably, he made it clear that it is not a formal diagnosis but a way to describe the psychological, physical and cognitive costs of human alienation from nature. Recently Louv has worked to relate his message to people's lives of all ages in his book *the Nature Principle* (2011). During an interview about his new book Louv asserted:

The future will belong to the nature-smart- those individuals, families, businesses, and political leaders who develop a deeper understanding of the transformative power of the natural world and who balance the virtual with the real. The more high-tech we become, the more nature we need. –Louv, 2011

All four noted authors stress contact with real nature as an essential component of human health and well being, as well as an essential contributor to the health of our ecological support systems. But most importantly, Louv's assertion sounds like a call for more spiritual connections to be made. He speaks of the innate 'need' for nature and highlights the 'transformative power of the natural world' and emphasizes experience with the 'real.' In that way, he seems to be advocating people of all ages develop a relationship with nature, a relationship that has many similar attributes, or the same attributes to a spiritual relationship with nature. As was demonstrated by this study, participants sometimes initiated, and sometimes maintained their relationship with wilderness or nature more generally through their visit. That relationship appeared to be capable of producing emotive and restorative feelings back at home. In that way, it must be acknowledged that wilderness experiences, and especially spiritual experiences are not bounded

by lines on a map, but rather by mental capacity and visitor's desires to recall those experiences when faced with the stressful realities of the everyday.

5.4 Recommendations

Doing the Right Thing- Research

In many senses, studying this topic was an exercise in moving between individual perspectives to sample level perspectives and back, but the research also considered references to the cultural scale. In this case, there appeared to be an interaction between participant's spiritual experiences in the wilderness and their perceptions of the sustainability of the landscape. 'Doing the right thing,' is a topic that needs greater attention from wilderness experiences researchers. It may be that the phrase needs to be described and defined to confirm that visitors are talking about the same thing. Additionally research could explore and describe the interaction between participant perceptions of a range of environmental conditions, and their motivations and expectations to experience the landscape in particular ways, especially spiritual ones. The more time people spend in human dominated spaces, it may be that they need more opportunities to steward that which is still natural and shows little evidence of human control.

The Role of Religion- Research

Additionally, related to participant perspectives, I believe there is a need for an updated look at how wilderness in particular is experienced based on faith-based antecedents and changing religious cultures. This study addressed the topic, but less directly than seemed necessary. The data on those perspectives was shared in *God's Creation*, however more energy could be focused on how foundational religious beliefs affect spiritual experiences. Such a study would benefit from the freedom provided by collecting data outside of the wilderness where more exacting and thorough questions can be asked about participant's religious beliefs and their

role in wilderness spirituality. Spiritual Tourism specialist Jane Rogers recently pointed out some relevant trends. She noted that there is 1) a decline of allegiance to religious doctrine, 2) a movement toward development of the self and interconnectedness with the earth, 3) a development of and increase in secular pilgrimages, and 4) a decline of people participating in religious institutions and ceremonies and an increase of those who claim they are spiritual but not religious. The question at hand is how will/ how are such trends influencing wilderness spirituality?

Rhythm and Flow- Research

In their explanations of spiritual experiences, many interviewees referred to various forms of rhythms and flows related to physically experiencing the landscape and their spirituality. Participants often related these ideas to their spiritual experiences stressing that they add significance. Whether they spoke of the rhythmic paddle strokes, the mesmerizing droplets of water falling from the paddle, the ecstasy of physically parting the water and propelling a canoe, or the physicality of working slowly but steadily against a wind and eventually realizing a goal, participants clearly found spiritual enjoyment from the style of engagement that the Boundary Waters requires. Future research may also focus on the importance of activity types to spiritual experiences in wilderness. Recently Thomas Peace (2009) penned an article titled, *Journeying by Canoe: Reflections on the Canoe and Spirituality*. The article is a review of relevant literature on the Canadian canoe culture and considers how the canoe is an avenue for spiritual experiences. The article clearly makes the case that canoeing is very frequently a spiritual experience. There needs to be a fresh look at the topic since it seems a great opportunity exists to conduct a comparative study on spiritual experiences between various recreation types. While Schmidt and Little (2007) sampled individuals who had taken part in a variety of

activities, a study could further address the role of those the activities. As society changes and becomes increasingly in need of spiritual experiences to balance their stressful lives, there exists a need to know which recreation types are capable of producing the greatest of spiritual benefits.

In addition to the physical factors of the activity, this research uncovered additional references to the time needed to settle in and feel comfortable enough to engage in spiritual experiences, or the time needed to mentally relax and open up to the spiritual elements of a BWCAW visit. Clearly comfort and time interactions varied by individual but appeared to explicitly exist for many. There were times during the study when I considered if wilderness experiences needed a 'minimum stay' requirement in order to ensure that participants gained all the available benefits of a wilderness visit. While the idea is in place in certain wilderness areas, such as river floats that demand a certain number of days, or hikes that have entry and exit points, it seems that there exists an opportunity to expand on the Heintzman and Mannell (2003) study that looked at spiritual coping and time pressure.

Spaces for All Spiritualities- Management

Friesen (1996) pointed out that though a secular agency is unlikely to make land management policies solely based on spiritual values, which may be inspired by religious doctrines, law does not prohibit an agency from recognizing or enhancing opportunities for the non-doctrinaire aspects of spirituality. Following this study I am in full agreement and suggest increased attention be paid to the spiritualities of wilderness visitors. The first amendment to the Constitution has most significantly impacted the management of public lands regarding religion and spirituality stating, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting free exercise thereof" (U.S. Constitution, amend. 1). Firstly, the term 'congress' has become interpretable as all of the federal government, secondly, Supreme Court decisions have

led to the general understanding that government can't privilege one religion over another, and that they can't privilege religion generally over non-religion (Burton, 2002). The findings herein demonstrate that managing wilderness in ways that support spiritualities neither privileges one religion over another, or privileges religion over non-religion. Spiritualities were sometimes attached to beliefs about creation, but spiritualities were also described by those who characterized themselves as not religious. It seems that wilderness spiritualities should therefore not be viewed as not privileging religions over each other or non-religion. As spirituality increasingly becomes an element of socially accepted definitions of human health, managers will need to work to understand the topic and the deep importance it carries in the relationships that humans have with natural places, especially wilderness areas.

From the Outside In- Management

As wilderness experiences continue to be studied and managed, there needs to be an increased emphasis on the context of visitor experiences. Not only do managers need to be aware of and knowledgeable about the qualities that they are managing for in the wilderness, but they must understand the influence of the physical and cultural characteristics of the places that visitors are arriving from. While frameworks such as LAC (Limits of Acceptable Change) and the ROC (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) will continue to prove useful, this study and others have demonstrated how participants are consistently looking for and expecting something drastically different than their everyday life. As everyday lives change, land managers must recognize and provide quality recreation experiences. The recommendation here is that managers should consider how visible their management approaches are, and how much their work is maintaining wilderness as starkly different from the everyday of visitors. More accurately, managers must consider how their presence or the impacts of management can reduce or

diminish the very qualities visitors need in their wilderness experience. If for example wilderness rangers are confronted and have an audible 2-way radio with them, immediately the valued feelings of isolation and remoteness may be reduced and the experience may be impacted. Other examples include managers using trail closed signs instead of covering a closed trail with an impassable amount of branches. The point is that in this study participants routinely spoke of how important it was for their spiritual experiences to be in a place with a very limited human presence.

Approaching Research with Care- Management

Additionally, managers must improve their assessment of the non-secular components of wilderness spirituality. From this study it was apparent that language can be limited in its ability to express the depth and complexity of experiences. Through continued research and reading, it is my hope that the spiritual experiences in wilderness are appropriately considered as the highly beneficial experiences they are. It is important to consider the social acceptability of talking about the spiritual elements of any experience. For example, in the in-situ interview it was okay for Mary to describe her spiritual connections to the landscape in ways that she later noted sounded 'hippie-ish' but she didn't seem likely to post such comments to Facebook where hundreds of 'friends' would read them; nor did it seem likely that she would add them to a comments section of quantitative study of wilderness qualities. While visitors may be accustomed to describing their experiences without sharing the spiritual aspects, when studied closely, it becomes clear that something more comes through in wilderness settings, and it takes a concerted effort to discover it.

Water Views- Research

On another note, water was consistently described as an important factor in participants' spiritual experiences. They spoke of traveling on it and physically interacting with it, and at times it was the most influential factor in a spiritual experience because it could individually create spiritual experiences through its aesthetic qualities. This study set out to explain the symbolic, novel, and utilitarian roles of water and it is my feeling that it only began this process. While water trickled into many descriptions and was even a focal point in *The Importance of Edge*, upon reflection there seems to be much more to explore about the symbolic, fluid, and life-giving nature of water. Just as rhythms and flows interacted with visitors' biomechanics, water lends itself to tactile interactions in ways that are rare and were described as spiritual. However, questions remain: How does water quality impact wilderness experiences? How does fishing specifically influence spirituality? How does it impact the experience to know that wilderness water bodies contain invasive species? These are questions that need attention.

Widening the Scope- Research

In 2003, Heintzman and Mannell initiated a shift in the field of leisure and spirituality by moving from studying general experiences of spirituality to examining spiritual well-being. The multifaceted findings herein support a continuation of that shift. Spiritual well being appears to better address a holistic health perspective that includes pertinent findings from this study such as the value of mentors, the importance of quiet, and the critical role of time. In line with Kaye's recommendations, the more that studies of wilderness spirituality focus on placing the benefits in psychological (secular) terms, the more likely those results will be noticed and utilized by land management agencies.

Sharing- Research

Beyond focusing just on the development of self, many of the findings supported ideas of altruism and community in the way that participants shared experiences on a number of levels. Notably, Nash postulated, “Wilderness symbolizes the unexplored qualities and untapped capacities of every individual” (1982: 89). One such capacity is their ability to facilitate a variety of meaningful experiences for others. As the results depict, sharing experiences was often personally satisfying and sometimes seemed to be a stage of the spiritual relationship between visitors and wilderness. Important here is the observation that more can be learned about wilderness spirituality by focusing on the spiritual benefits or spiritual development those visitors may discover through the sharing process. While I don’t have specific recommendations, this is a field that should become of greater interest and concern as the age of wilderness visitors increases and the field of spiritual mentorship in wilderness gains traction.

Longitudinal Studies- Research

Notably, many of the stories shared during interviews about attachment to wilderness dated all the way back to spiritual experiences had during childhood and adolescent years. There certainly exists an opportunity to better capture the role of spiritual experiences on the long-term development of relationships with wilderness. Studies like Heintzman’s (2007), where the benefits of spiritual experiences were investigated over time, have the potential to extend the understanding of the bounds of wilderness spirituality. His study however, was limited to a 10 month duration. Within the results, the term maintenance was used to discuss sustaining close relationships between visitors and wilderness. Such a study could develop the field of mentors of wilderness spirituality, as well as better identify the role of spirituality in gateway experiences.

As a Metric- Management

More broadly, it seems apparent that if spiritual experiences in wilderness are beneficial and described as positive, then they should be given increased attention by managers. Since spiritual experiences are clearly facilitated by solitude, primitive, and unconfined types of recreation, seems that managers should look to visitor defined spiritual experiences as indices of ‘outstanding opportunities’ for those types of recreation and as a metric of ‘wilderness character.’ If the experiences themselves are protected and continually provided, then managers will have been successful.

5.5 Last Words

Previous studies demonstrated that amidst the wild, many visitors express that they are immersed in *something* different, *something* real, *something* capable of inspiring them. That *something (it)* needed and deserved further investigation. After considering wilderness spirituality over an extended project, it seems more important than ever that humans reserve the time and space to discover a spiritual antidote to their everyday. Through the study, wilderness and wilderness experiences were explained as being in contrast to normal human dominated settings and existences. The multitude of contrasting characteristics appeared to lead to opportunities to develop ideas of self, purpose, relation to others and the world, and spirituality outside of the schedules and judgments of a regular existence. Within the recommendations there were substantive recommendations to continue certain threads of this work as well as apply the learned lessons to new management projects and the long term protection of ‘wilderness character.’ The research on this topic is only beginning.

In reflecting I am reminded of a John Muir quote that has lived in my wallet for almost 15 years. The quote reads:

Thousands of tired, nerve shaken, over civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home . . . and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.
 ~ Muir in Wellman, 2005: 128

Looking back on the history of wilderness areas, we can easily see the spiritual overtones and predictions of the human/nature relationship. Influential conservationist Sigurd Olson suggested that that the “real function [of wilderness] will always be as a spiritual backlog in the high-speed mechanical world in which we live” (Olson, 1946). The early wilderness advocates had a vision that their efforts would aid the mental and spiritual health of visitors. Their predictions have since been explored by in a variety of ways and will continue to be. The point here is that measuring these relationships is challenging, but worthy of continued work.

After thousands of my own words, words other researchers, and words of my research participants, I give the last words of this work to Sigurd Olson who is commonly called the original paddling philosopher and poet as well as Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness advocate. These two quotes speak of the same spiritual experience using language differently, but notably in ways that others sometimes cannot.

“The sun, a round red ball, on the horizon, {was} separated from me by leagues and leagues of primitive wilderness. It hung suspended, swelling, glowing, palpitating with energy. For a brief moment I experienced the sensation of feeling the earth move away from the sun. Nothing akin to it had I ever felt. Here I was, an atom of life on the rim of the world, watching it turn. Never before had I experienced anything which placed me so in harmony with the infinite.” ~ Olson, 1961: Journal Entry 20 January, 1930

“The sun was trembling now on the edge of the ridge. It was alive, almost fluid and pulsating, and as I watched it sink I thought that I could feel the earth turning from it, actually feel its rotation. Over all was the silence of the wilderness, that sense of oneness which comes only when there are no distracting sights or sounds, when we listen with

inward ears and see with inward eyes, when we feel and are aware with our entire beings rather than our senses. I thought as I sat there of the ancient admonition "Be still and know that I am God," and knew that without stillness there can be no knowing, without divorcement from outside influences man cannot know what spirit means." ~ Olson, 1956: 130-131

Appendix A – Participant Information

STUDY NAME	Yr Born	Gender	Nat./Ethnic	Religion	Home Address
Jim	1982	M	Caucasion	Protestant	Maple Grove, MN
Mary	1991	F	Caucasion	No Pref	Ashland, WI
John	1973	M	German/American	No Pref	Oakdale, MN
Rob	1943	M	Caucasion	Protestant	Sioux Falls, SD
Mike	1991	M	Norge/Eng/Germ/Am	Protestant	Plymoth, MN
Linda	1967	F	Caucasion	Lutheran	Plymoth, MN
Bill	1966	M	Caucasion	Catholic	Lisle, IL
Barb	1989	F	Norge/German/Irish	Christian	Caledonia, MN
David	1980	M	Scandanavian/Am	Protestant	Breckenridge, CO
Charlie	1967	M	German/Am	Catholic	Pendleton, IN
Beth	1986	F	Caucasion	No Pref	Minneapolis, MN
Joe	1951	M	Caucasion	Protestant Unitarian	Apple Valley, MN
Jen	1961	F	Germ/Finn/Am	Univ.	Spicer, MN
Sue	1963	F	Caucasion	Christian	Andover, MN
Nancy	1976	F	Caucasion	No Pref	Missoula, MT
Carol	1966	F	Caucasion	Catholic	Ingleside, IL
Tom	1970	M	Caucasion	Lutheran	Gurnee, IL
Chris	1991	M	Caucasion	Catholic	Cambridge, MN
Dan	1961	M	Caucasion	Lutheran	Hallsville, MO
Mark	1953	M	Caucasion	Protestant	Lannon, WI
Laura	1988	F	Caucasion	Protestant	Hudson, WI
Eric	1964	M	Caucasion	Protestant	Huntsville, AL
Ken	1956	M	Caucasion	Methodist	Huntsville, AL
Sarah	1965	F	Caucasion	Lutheran	Bloomington, MN
Lisa	1956	F	Caucasion	Catholic	Stillwater, MN
Steve	1962	M	Caucasion	Catholic	Apple Valley, MN
Ed	1964	M	N. European Mutt	Catholic	Shoreview, MN
Brian	1958	M	German/American	Protestant	Stillwater, MN Alexandria, MN
Deb	1983	F	American	No Pref	/Dunedin, NZ
Kevin	1968	M	Swiss/American	Agnostic	Louisville, CO
Jason	1973	M	Caucasion	No Pref	Lee's Summit, MO
Jeff	1965	M	Germ/Scand/Am	Christian	Deluth, MN

*Appendix B****Demographic Information Sheet*****-INTERVIEWER SECTION-**

Time: _____
Location: _____
Setting Characteristics: _____

-PARTICIPANT RESPONSE SECTION-

Please write responses on line provided or circle the appropriate response category:

In what year were you born? _____

Are you male or female? _____

In what city and state is your current permanent address? _____

Most people in this country think of themselves as Americans. However, in addition, is there a particular nationality or ethnic group to which you think of yourself as belonging?

What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed? _____

What field of study are you/were you most focused on during your studies?

What is your job or career title? _____

Do you consider yourself to be Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim or some other religion, or do you have no preference? _____

How many times did you visit a wilderness area in 2009 (guess to nearest 5 if more than 15)? _____

Did you visit wilderness areas more or less in 2008? _____

How many people are on this trip with you today? _____

How many nights have you so far spent in the BWCAW on this trip? _____

How many nights total do you plan to spend in the BWCAW on this trip? _____

Appendix C

SUBJECT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Title: Phenomenology of Spiritual Experiences in Wilderness

Project Director:

Directed by Ian Foster, University of Montana, ian.foster@umontana.edu, College of Forestry 32 Campus Drive, Missoula, MT 59801 406/396/9562.

Project Advised by Professor Bill Borrie, Department of Society and Conservation, 406/243/4286.

Special instructions:

This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the project director to explain them to you.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to describe the array of spiritual experiences that occur for wilderness visitors. The data will be used to further the general understanding of spiritual experiences in wilderness and their role in the relationship between humans and wilderness.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will engage in an unstructured conversation for 15-40 minutes. If the conversation lasts longer, you will be made aware and your permission will be requested in order to continue. You will also be asked to complete a demographic information sheet.

Risks/Discomforts:

There are minimal chances for risks and discomforts as the procedure only includes conversation and the topics covered are not generally considered sensitive. Additionally, the questions are not intentionally designed to probe into issues that could evoke sad or otherwise negative thoughts or memories.

Benefits:

There is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study. You will have the opportunity to articulate and reflect on components of your wilderness experience in a way that may allow you to process and remember, therefore benefitting you.

Confidentiality:

Only the researcher and his faculty supervisor will have access to the files and your identity will not be known. If the results of this study are written in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, no identifying information will be included. The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet. The audiotape will be transcribed without any information that could identify you. The digital data will be erased within two years.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in or you may withdraw from the study at any time. During the interview you may pass on any question asked.

Questions:

If you have any questions about the research now or during the interview, do not hesitate to ask. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Chair of the IRB through The University of Montana Research Office at 243-6670.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Statement of Consent to be Audio Recorded:

I agree to be audio taped and understand that audio recordings will be destroyed within two years and that no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

Appendix D*Recruitment Script to Ensure Full Disclosure*

“My name is Ian Foster. I am a student at University of Montana and I am conducting research about various components of the wilderness experience. Would you (or anyone in your group) be interested in participating in an interview that will last 10 to 30 minutes?”

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