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Forest Service wants historic station razed

To wildlife researchers, the Depression-era complex of log and stone cabins near Ely has historical significance.

By: **News-Chronicle, news services**, Lake County News Chronicle

To wildlife researchers, the Depression-era complex of log and stone cabins near Ely has historical significance.

To its owner, the U.S. Forest Service, the buildings are a money pit.

In the distant past, internationally known researchers have used Lake County's Kawishiwi Field Laboratory and Forest Research Center to conduct pioneering studies of wolves and bears. Nine of the dozen buildings are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places but are not yet on the list.

The Forest Service says it would cost more than \$1 million to renovate the research station, so it plans to demolish the buildings. They are in various stages of disrepair, many from insect infestations eating at the log structures.

The agency had a public meeting Tuesday to discuss future plans for the site. Written public comments will be accepted until Tuesday.

The Forest Service released a report analyzing alternatives for the historic and other structures at the laboratory. It sits on land managed by the Superior National Forest.

The Forest Service has said it would like to destroy the buildings "due to their high maintenance costs and poor fit with the Northern Research Station's mission."

But some say the area is simply being cleared to make way for mineral mining.

Nearby property owner Bob Tammen said "the reason I'm skeptical is because we're surrounded by mining proposals and a lot of us suspect that they're trying to make it easier for copper miners to come in to northern Minnesota."

Part of the research land sits next to areas proposed for the Duluth metals and Franconia projects. The Forest Service says the land would remain under Superior National Forest control.

"On Birch Lake, we'd all be affected by mining industry and so far, in Minnesota, the mining companies have not been good neighbors," Tammen said. "We're better off to support the family resorts on Birch Lake than to support a Canadian copper mining company that wants to tear up our back yard."

The Kawishiwi buildings exhibit various levels of deterioration, including some wood rot and powder post beetle infestations. The Forest Service has operated the laboratory since 1955 but has not conducted any forest research there since the 1980s.

The current tenant is the U.S. Geological Survey's Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, which does wildlife research.

"We trap and radio collar wolves, its part of an ongoing study that's been going on for three decades now," said Walter Lousberg from the center."This puts us in a bit of a difficult situation. Right now we do not have any additional buildings or facilities other than the Kawishiwi lab."

The Forest Service has done a lengthy report on the site and some options outside of tearing down the buildings. They include:

- No action, or continuation of current use with no additional restoration;
- Increase in Forest Service maintenance funds;
- Transfer of the buildings to a different owner;
- Transfer of management and use of the buildings to a different party while retaining ownership;
- Relocation of the buildings;
- Demolition after architectural, landscape and engineering documentation.

Download the full report at www.nrs.fs.fed.us/projects/kawishiwi, or request a copy of the report by contacting Rick Sindt, who is also taking written comments on the proposal to destroy the buildings: Richard Sindt Engineering & Facility Services USDA Forest Service – Northern Research Station 1992 Folwell Ave. St. Paul, MN 55108 or by by facsimile at (651) 649-5285. Comments will also be accepted by email at rsindt@fs.fed.us.