

The COW Story



by



Canoes on Wheels was born in August 2008

One of our members had set up a canoe-based educational program for his high school students in Rochester, MN before his retirement. As he talked about this program, we adopted it on the spot and christened it "Canoes on Wheels" (COW for short).

Here's our idea

The program provides for the use of eight canoes, a trailer, and associated gear like life vests and paddles at no-cost to local schools and youth groups. The program additionally provides free educator workshops to help teachers and instructors learn how to manage canoe outings, and how to integrate these "activity-based" outdoor ecology, local history, and physical education activities into their schools' curriculums.

The idea was tested with our school, social, civic, and conservation partners and the responses were overwhelmingly positive. During the fall of 2008 we launched a community-based fund-raising effort.

COW Sponsors

- American Canoe Association
- Douglas County Environmental Reserve Fund
- Eau Claire Lakes Conservation Club
- FiredUpStudios.com
- Kiwanis Club of Friendly Duluth
- Murphy Oil Class Acts!
- National Bank of Commerce
- Northwest Outlet (Superior)
- Northwood Education Foundation
- River Alliance of Wisconsin
- Solon Springs Lions Club
- Superior Optimist Club
- Town of Solon Springs
- Upper St. Croix Lake Association
- Village of Solon Springs



A Collaborative Effort to obtain the gear

Assembling a full set of canoes and all the necessary canoe-related gear required the contributions from the major sponsors listed above, as well as many other local citizens and organizations – it was a real community effort.

At the same time we established school and youth group partnerships, and developed materials for educator workshops and a better understanding of the resource challenges that schools and youth groups face in northwestern Wisconsin.

COW Program Roll-out

Our first workshop was held in Solon Springs on April 25, 2009 – we were out on Upper St. Croix Lake ten days after ice-out. The first canoe outing was on April 29th on Upper St. Croix Lake. Ninth-grade physical science students were exposed to the wonders of the natural world and learned a bit about local history.



By the end of September 2009, the COW program had completed three workshops, participated in five parades/festivals, and completed twenty canoe outings (on multiple lakes and five rivers).



During our first year, numerous newspaper articles about COW have been printed and we have established strong relationships with Solon Springs High School, Douglas-Washburn County 4-H, and Grantsburg High School. We have found that the canoe equipment works well in support of general stewardship responsibilities, demonstration of cooperative efforts (paddling a canoe), and scientific studies such as: aquatic plant surveys, invasive species mapping, river assessments, mussel surveys, and water quality testing.

To be continued.....