

# VOLUNTEER SHOWCASE

August 2013, Minnesota

## Earth Team Volunteer Aaron Janz Shares His Experience with NRCS

As an Earth Team Volunteer, I recently I had the exciting opportunity to explore the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) in Northern Minnesota with a team of NRCS soil scientists to help map the diverse soils in the Arrowhead region. Mapping and understanding the soil in Minnesota is an important job as it helps homeowners and businesses make informed decisions related to the capabilities of the soil beneath their home or business. In this instance, mapping the soil in the BWCA will provide the NRCS and the US Forest Service with valuable soil information that will aid them in properly managing the BWCA so that future generations can enjoy its beauty.

The Boundary Waters excursion lasted six days and each day was full of surprises and new challenges. One of the challenges we ran into was portaging over wet rugged terrain. Portaging by itself can be difficult when traversing over rugged terrain with packs and canoes on your back. Add a little rain to the equation and it becomes a challenge, but I like challenges and it tested my physical stamina. It rained most of the time we were there but that didn't dampen our spirits. We continued to work in the rain when we could and found that the rain made the soil easier to dig and manipulate in our hands. At each unique soil sample site, we described the physical characteristics of the soil and noted the plant life community in the surrounding area. As an Earth Team volunteer, I was responsible for plant identification and learned to identify many plant species that I would normally overlook on a casual walk in the woods. It was fascinating to see the plant diversity in a relatively untouched wilderness area like the BWCA.

The team of NRCS soil scientists I worked with taught me a lot on this trip and I gained valuable field experience related to mapping soil, wilderness camping, canoeing, navigation, leadership, and working within a team setting. As an added bonus, I made some great new friendships along the way and learned valuable skills that I can use to help improve my surrounding community.



*(L to R) Earth Team Volunteer Aaron Janz, Tom D'Avello, and Myles Elsen*

Volunteering with the NRCS as an Earth Team Volunteer is a fantastic experience that I would highly recommend to anyone interested in soil, conservation, or improving the environment and community they live in.



The Earth Team is the volunteer component of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a USDA agency. For more about NRCS and the Earth Team, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

If you are interested in volunteering, call (888) 526-3227 or visit your local NRCS office to learn about volunteer opportunities.