

**SPEAKER 1:** The tarp came up about 40 feet. I mean, it just ripped up the tarp, and we thought, OK, maybe we should try and get our things together.

**SPEAKER 2:** Yeah. And so then we all kind of stood up and realized that there was something else brewing. And I just dove. At this point, I can't even remember what it was that made me jump. But I actually do vaguely remember looking over like at a hillside that we could see. And I felt like I saw a wave of something coming and hearing what just like-- I think that Jen described it really well as far as the sound of a tree falling, and you wait to hear timber, except it was the whole forest, and it was coming your direction.

And so I saw that, and I thought, if now isn't the time to jump and dive for cover, there is no better time. And so I just dove out of the way. And honestly, two seconds later, there was a tree right where I'd been standing. So it was pretty intense.

**BOB KELLEHER:** Well, so it was just the one tree that came down, or were you what-- what else were you seeing?

**SPEAKER 2:** Well, we could see, I mean, just watching the trees falling coming towards us on the hillsides near us. And there were about, I don't know, at least five or six pine trees that fell in our direction. I think that there was one that landed where I was. But our tarp, we never got our tarp out from under the trees. It's still there. And we managed, I think, to scramble under the tarp and get most of our stuff out. But I mean, it's honestly a miracle that we all leapt out of the way because where we had been standing two seconds later, it was a huge pine tree was right where we were.

**BOB KELLEHER:** So you were then quite lucky in that you didn't actually have to portage out from there.

**SPEAKER:** No. We had been portaging a lot up until then, but we were past all of our portages at that point. And actually, luckily somebody had pulled our canoes up onto land because we were on, I think people call it big sag. I can't pronounce it. But the swells in the lake were just phenomenal. I felt like I was on the ocean.

**BOB KELLEHER:** As you were paddling out, what did you see?

**SPEAKER 1:** Well, the first thing we saw is we wanted to tell somebody our story. So the first person we saw, another canoeist actually decided to brave the waters. And his name was Mike. He was by himself. And we looked at his canoe, and it looked like someone had just pinched the front of his canoe. And we said, did you just experience what we experienced? Because we just had no idea of how big the storm was. And he said that he had gone under his canoe, and a tree had fallen right on top of it. So we looked at his canoe, and we congratulated him on his evidence because we didn't have any. We had to leave all of our tarp and equipment that was buried under this tree.

**BOB KELLEHER:** What were you seeing on the shores though? Were you seeing lots of trees?

**SPEAKER 2:** The trees were just blown down. I mean, it's almost like dominoes. You can just knock dominoes over. It's like a big hand just came and waved and knocked all these trees over. And there was like an island. We went by that almost all of the trees were-- it was a forested, wooded island, you could tell from the number of trees lying on the ground. But like all the trees were knocked over. And I've never seen anything like it.

**BOB KELLEHER:** Officially, the Forest Service has been preoccupied with the rescue operation. Spokesman Tom Kroll says the rescue search was continued at the request of the lake and Cook County Sheriff's department. Airplanes and helicopters have searched from the sky, while a small army of rescuers worked through the wilderness by canoe. Kroll says there's been no official damage assessment yet or any plans made for restoring the blocked portages and buried campsites in the Boundary Waters.

**TOM KROLL:** Oh, it could take a long time to open up all the campsites and portages again. And some may simply have to just be closed until they've regrown for some years and kind of rehabilitate themselves. But right now, we have those crews going in and cutting them out and just opening up as best they can.

**BOB KELLEHER:** Millions of trees were lost in both the wilderness area and across the Superior National Forest. While timber in the BWCA is likely to be left as it lies, downed wood in the superior forest outside the wilderness region might be available for harvest. But according to the Forest Service's Denise Dexter, a thorough analysis will have to be conducted first.

**DENISE DEXTER:** First off, we're going to try to arrange an aerial photo slides over the damaged areas that we would consider to try to salvage this timber, so that we can start that process. But that's going to take at least a week or two before we can do that because they're doing the search and rescue, and they don't want any extra planes out there.

**BOB KELLEHER:** Many of the region's boat portages are being hacked open by campers trying to get out of the area or by rescuers coming in. But there's little effort underway to reopen some of the region's hiking trails, which were certainly buried under tree falls. Martin Kubik founded the Kekekabic Trail Club, which maintains the 40-mile trail it's named for and several others in the BWCAW.

**MARTIN KUBIK:** I wonder if there is any Kekekabic Trail left. And we have a crew going out there this weekend to just assess the situation.

**BOB KELLEHER:** Kubik says the original trail is well mapped and can be located, but it may not be worth the effort.

**MARTIN KUBIK:** We can probably restore the trail. The question now is going to be whether the damage is so severe that it's beyond doing all this work with handsaws as we have been over the years.

**BOB KELLEHER:** But handsaws are the only tool allowed in the wilderness area, which restricts any motorized devices, including chainsaws. Rescuers have been given special dispensation to use chainsaws as they try to get people out. Kubik hopes his trail volunteers might be given the same dispensation.

**MARTIN KUBIK:** I just can't imagine. It would take a lots and lots and lots of people and lots of their times to clear all this damage from 40-mile long trail.

**BOB KELLEHER:** Because the Boundary Waters is wilderness, nature is allowed to run its course. Fire started by lightning are often allowed to burn themselves out, however long it takes. But massive acreage of downed trees could make future forest fires in the region a lot more intense. Deadwood might also create a new home for destructive forest insects, like the pine bark beetle or the spruce budworm. Forest Service entomologist Steve Katovich says insects aren't likely to be a huge problem, but they will likely cause some additional loss of trees over the next few years.

**STEVE KATOVICH:** Some additional trees will probably die, some of the standing trees in the area, especially those that have been injured or wounded, because the insects will probably move from in the next couple of years from the trees that have been knocked over, where they'll breed in high numbers, and then they probably will attack the trees that are nearby, especially those that have been injured.

**BOB KELLEHER:** However, he says the Forest Service won't consider insects in the BWCAW a serious problem because the wood there is unavailable for commercial harvest. Insects, like windblown trees and natural fire, are just considered part of what makes up a wilderness area. In Duluth, I'm Bob Kelleher, Minnesota Public Radio.