

High winds cause trouble on waters

By LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

"If they wouldn't have had life jackets on, it would have been a recovery not a rescue."

That's how Voyageurs National Park Chief Ranger Jim Hummel described the scene Sunday as 10 people ages 8-80 bobbed in the water, fighting 4-6-foot chops driven by high winds on Rainy Lake.

District Ranger Dave Little heard a mayday call for help at about 10 a.m. Sunday, when three of four boats traveling together swamped and capsized west of the Brule Narrows near Harbor Island.

Hummel said the boats were attempting to travel west from Rainy Lake's Brule Narrows, known for creating big waves in west winds where the channel narrows.

While the lead boat was OK, a second boat following was swamped and capsized tossing its people and contents into the churning water. Other boats, witnessing the trouble, attempted to turn to help and were swamped and capsized.

Wearing life jackets kept the weekend from turning tragic, said Hummel.

Tom Dougherty of Rainy Lake Houseboats, who happened to be in

the area at the time of the distress call, and VNP staff pulled the boaters from the water and brought them to the shore.

Hummel said an 80-year old man suffering from hypothermia from being in the water and weather for a period was taken to the Rainy Lake Visitor Center, where he was warmed.

"We had our hands full for a few hours," Hummel said, adding that the fall out — "the stranded, discouraged, or missing boats" — from Sunday's high winds ended at around 11:30 a.m. Monday.

On Kabetogama, VNP staff assisted stranded kayakers and located the owners of a floating boat. On

See **WIND** Page 7A

Monday, VNP staff received a report of a boat washed up, but that people were not involved. Turns out, according to Hummel, people were involved and later found. Duplicated reports with slightly different accounts made keeping track of the incidents difficult, he added.

But the rescue of the boaters should serve to remind people of how important it is to pay attention to the weather when boating. And to wear life jackets if the weather is nasty.

Hummel said some of the people involved in Sunday's dunking were experiencing "have to get home-itis" because it was Sunday and they needed to return to work Monday "and it almost cost them their lives. It's not worth fighting the weather and turning an enjoyable weekend into a tragedy."

