

Panel discusses outdoor opportunities for women



Moderator Mara Brogan

by *Cindy Park*

A group of Vermilion Community College students recently received valuable insight into the outdoor careers for which they are preparing themselves. In March a panel of eight women, representing six different organizations and agencies, shared their experiences and advice with VCC women interested in careers involving the outdoors.

The US Forest Service was represented by Superior National Forest rangers Nancy Hernesmaa and April Heesacker, and Barb Soderberg, retired Public Service Team Leader. Lori Schmidt, a VCC Instructor and curator for the International Wolf Center, was one of the local contributors on the panel.

Also participating were Amy Kireta, Research Fellow at the University of Minnesota Duluth Natural Resources Research Institute, Jen Westlund, Park Manager at Bear Head State Park, Mary Manning, a Conservation Officer with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and Penny Jeffers, National Staffing Director for Outward Bound.

The panel was moderated by VCC student Mara Brogan. Panel members discussed mentors and role models, working in a male dominated field, pay equity, harassment, networking, resume and experience building, and entering and advancing in a career. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions during the panel discussion, and to meet and speak with the participants individually following the program.

This event was a collaborative effort sponsored by the Ely Branch of American Association of University Women, the VCC Ironwomen and EMPOWER. Its development grew out of a concern that the young women at VCC, representing only about one third of the student population, at times felt overwhelmed by the male dominated campus in preparing to enter traditionally male dominated careers.

AAUW is an international organization that seeks to **advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research**. It has strengthened its relationship with the college recently as it has worked to make VCC a college/university partner



member institution. This partnership makes it possible to offer free E-student affiliation status to Vermilion students. Student affiliates can receive electronic versions of AAUW publications and access leadership development resources and other valuable information on the AAUW national website. It also provides them the opportunity to work with the local branch on campus and community projects.

This is the first time this type of event has been undertaken by the three groups sponsoring this informative evening. The enthusiasm expressed by the students and community members in attendance have raised the possibility of similar offerings for VCC students in the future.