



Foundation Document Overview

Voyageurs National Park

Minnesota



Contact Information

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Purpose



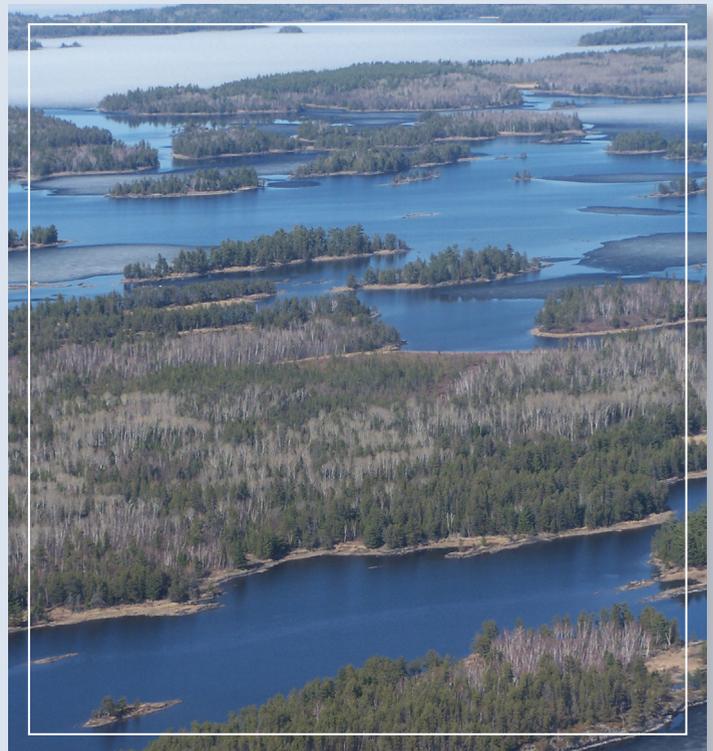
The purpose of VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK is to preserve, for the inspiration and enjoyment of present and future generations, the outstanding scenery and geology, biological diversity, and cultural resources, within its vast interconnected waterways that shaped the historic fur trade in North America and constituted a part of the historic route of the voyageurs.



Significance

Significance statements express why Voyageurs National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The voyageurs further developed the North American fur trade route established by native people. The route, recognized for its transformative economic and cultural exchange, became the international boundary between the United States and Canada.
- Lakes rather than land have defined movement across the remote landscape of northern Minnesota for thousands of years and continue as the primary means of access throughout the seasons. The vast network of interconnected waterways supports visitor access to a variety of recreational activities in a setting renowned for its quiet solitude, undeveloped shorelines, and radiant night skies.



Significance

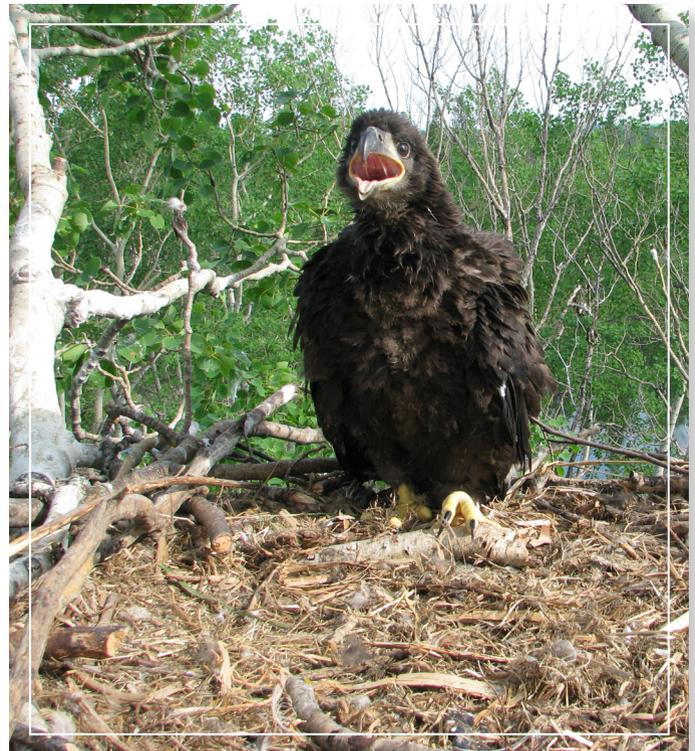
- Located at the southern end of the Canadian Shield formation, the bedrock underlying the park is among the most ancient in North America. Most of the geologic features found within the park are of Archean age (2.5–3.8 billion years old) and are of global significance for their relative rarity and exposure.
- The park’s abundant historic structures, cultural landscapes, ethnographic and archeological resources, and museum objects tell the story of 10,000 years of human relationships with the environment uniquely dictated by the interconnected waterway system.
- The park’s central location in a massive, interconnected international waterway system exemplified by the dynamic interrelationships of its resources in the boreal forest transition zone and extreme climate, provide outstanding scientific and educational opportunities. The park contains the most complete and extensive Precambrian geologic features in the U.S. as well as extraordinary aquatic and terrestrial resources, including the rare lake sturgeon, 230 bird species, and the iconic moose, gray wolf, and bald eagle.
- Encompassing nearly 218,000 acres including 134,000 acres of forested woodlands, 84,000 acres of water, 645 miles of undeveloped shoreline, and more than 800 islands, the park protects a biologically rich system of plant and animal life found within the “edge” zone of the Canadian Shield and the northern boreal forest. The park is part of a larger, relatively pristine ecosystem of 2.7 million acres that includes the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (USA) and Quetico Provincial Park (Canada).



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Aquatic Ecosystems**
- **Waterways**
- **Terrestrial Ecosystems**
- **Clean Air**
- **Geologic Features**
- **Scenery and Wild Character**
- **Recreation**
- **Historic Resources, Cultural Landscapes, and Museum Collections**
- **Scientific and Educational Value**



Description

Voyageurs National Park is a place of scenic landscapes and interconnected waterways, and is rich in human history. Named for the French-Canadian canoe-men who traveled these waters in birchbark canoes from the Great Lakes to the interior of the western United States and Canada, the park preserves one of the most important segments of the economically and culturally transformative North American fur trade route. This historic route contributed significantly to the opening of the northwestern United States during the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Well before the voyageurs, the first people to travel to this region came thousands of years ago, after the last of the glaciers had melted and left this landscape of expansive lakes and wetlands. Nearly every major prehistoric and historic theme associated with human interaction and development of the northwestern United States is represented within park boundaries. This includes early hunters and gatherers, homesteaders, and immigrants who came to log, fish, hunt, trap, and mine. In more recent years, this landscape was also home to people who sought to make their living through logging, mining, commercial fishing, and recreation.

Located in sparsely populated northern Minnesota and sharing 55 miles of international border with Canada, the 218,000-acre park is part of a larger ecosystem that includes the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Quetico Provincial Park, although these areas are not located within the boundaries of Voyageurs National Park. With a vast and diverse landscape to manage, developing and maintaining partnerships are a vital component of the park's administration (including two partners in particular – the Voyageurs National Park Association and the Heart of the Continent Partnership). Water levels in the park's four largest lakes are controlled by dams within and outside of the park's boundary and have been artificially controlled since the early 1900s for power generation, flood control, and other legally recognized uses. Three of these lakes are international waters. Rainy Lake, for example, is part of the U.S.-Canada border and is managed through international coordination.

The landscape has been shaped by at least four periods of glaciation, revealing some of the oldest exposed rock formations in the world. Resulting topography is rugged and varied; rocky outcrops are interspersed between bogs, beaver ponds, swamps, islands, small lakes, and four large lakes (Rainy, Kabetogama, Namakan, and Sand Point Lakes). Water covers about 40% of the park. In the years since the last glaciation, a thin layer of soil has been created that supports the boreal forest ecosystem, the “North Woods” of Voyageurs National Park.

Eighteen American Indian tribes are culturally associated with Voyageurs National Park. Historically various Native American groups inhabited the area. These groups were descendants of late prehistoric Algonkian-speaking groups, the Ojibwe, the Cree, and the Dakotan-speaking Assiniboin. The Ojibwe were the primary occupants of the region during the historic period after about 1736. Four bands of the Bois Forte Ojibwe lived in what is now the park from at least the 1880s until the mid-1920s. The Bois Forte Ojibwe and Canadian Ojibwe First Nations retain strong cultural connections to traditional lands in the park.

Visitors today come to see and touch rocks half as old as the world, experience the life of a voyageur, immerse themselves in the sights and sounds of a boreal forest, view the dark skies, or ply the interconnected water routes. The national park is a place where visitors may leave roads behind for waterways.

