

#### What's Inside

DARK SKY PARK CERTIFICATION

NATURE AT HOME

THE VOYAGEURS CLASSROOM

WARBI FR WATCH

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

>>>

# Taking Care of Our Neighbors and Our Park

CHRISTINA HAUSMAN RHODE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I know you care deeply about Voyageurs National Park. With so many sheltering in place, we wanted to send you an expanded newsletter to enjoy at home. Through caring and advocating for Voyageurs' waterways, wildlife, and skies, we strengthen our connection to this place and to each other. We can work together to continue to treasure and protect this awe-inspiring place. Because of you, our work is very much active today. When future generations look back to this time of crisis in our nation, I hope they'll see that we didn't lose sight of the wild and pristine places that feed our soul and rejuvenate our spirits. While it will be a season like no other at the park, we believe our world will heal. Thank you so much for your support! I look forward to being with you out on the water and trails, and celebrating life outside together in the near future.





Current park operations and visitor information can be found online at Voyageurs.org/visitorinfo



#### **A Letter from the Superintendent**

BOB DEGROSS, VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK

As I work from home in April, it's clear that this is not going to be a normal summer. We are all attempting to understand what actions we need to take to assure the health of ourselves, our families, and our friends.

At the park, we have been establishing measures to assure the safety of visitors, gateway communities and the team that cares for this special place. Our ability to house seasonal park and concession staff has been greatly impacted by the current circumstances. To ensure social distancing and safety, the park reduced its housing capabilities from 45 staff, to only 19 seasonal NPS and concession staff. As a result of this reduction, and state and federal guidelines, we've implemented many operational changes including the suspension of boat tours. We know how much the tours were enjoyed by visitors; we didn't make this decision lightly.

We recognize that spending time in nature provides an important stress release. Please check our website for the most up-to-date visitor information and guidelines. While exploring the outdoors, we encourage people to remain mindful of social distancing.

Now more than ever, I am grateful for park staff and supporters like you and the VNPA community. Many park projects are still active. Because of you, we've launched a Dark Sky Initiative in anticipation of receiving Dark Sky certification this fall, added land to the park, and engaged hundreds of kids in environmental education. VNPA is critical in helping us reach the public virtually, enhances our environmental education programs, and provides important funding for projects at Kettle Falls and a new hiking trail.

Thank you for supporting our official Friends partner. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience." This is definitely a time for patience.

# Virtual Events & Programs

We miss you!

Join us for a Night Sky Explorer series with "Astro Bob" where the whole family can learn about night sky viewing techniques and apps, and current sky events like comets and meteors. Via Facebook Live and Zoom every other Tuesday at 4 p.m.

Other opportunities like an exclusive member series, Ask a Ranger (Kids Edition), and Behind the Scenes of Voyageurs will launch in June.

Voyageurs.org/events

#### **Photo Contest**

Every year, visitors help us celebrate the beauty of Voyageurs National Park and the memories we make there by submitting their photos to our annual photo contest. Whether it's a soaring eagle, your kids splashing around, or the Milky Way above, send it our way. Your images help us protect and share this special place. Thank you for participating. Winners receive prizes from our partners like REI, Patagonia, and Simms Fishing.

Voyageurs.org/photocontest

#### **Winter Challenge**

**Thank you** to the 48 winter adventurers who completed our Voyageurs Winter Challenge by sledding, snowshoeing, and skiing throughout the park. Voyageurs is a place best explored year-round!









# PROTECTING THE NIGHT

MEGAN NOETZEL, VNPA

Visitors to Voyageurs National Park can look up and unlock hundreds of years of history. The forests and wildlife of the park thrive on the rhythmic cycle of day and night. Dark skies are not only a starry wonder, but necessary for ecosystems, human health, and the preservation of cultural heritage. This is why Voyageurs National Park Association, the National Park Service, and regional partners have embarked on a joint initiative to preserve regional darkness. To ensure that our night skies are unimpaired for generations to come, Voyageurs National Park is applying for Dark Sky Park certification from the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA).

#### Why Dark Sky Park Certification?

Dark Sky Park certification is responsive to a growing concern that threatens the wild character of Voyageurs: light pollution. Dark skies are becoming scarce as technological advances have engulfed our skies with artificial light and these negative impacts are increasing rapidly. The New

World Atlas of Artificial Night Sky Brightness states that approximately 80% of North Americans are unable to see the Milky Way due to light pollution.

Disappearing dark skies create several environmental and societal consequences. According to the IDA, artificial light has been found to alter breeding and foraging behaviors in wildlife and affect the growth rate of trees. Light pollution is especially harmful for nocturnal birds' flight patterns, whose predation habits rely on dark skies.

Exposure to artificial light is also detrimental to our own health, as it disrupts the circadian rhythm, resulting in poor sleep quality and weakened immune systems. Researchers are continuing to study the impacts of artificial light and human health.

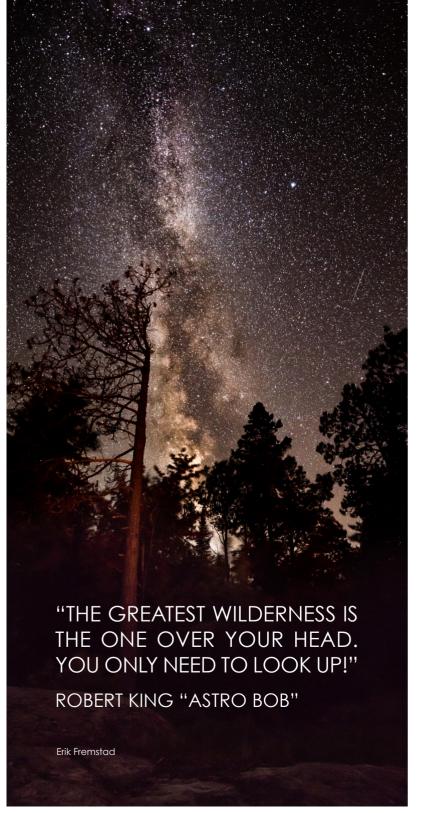
Lastly, losing our starry skies disconnects us from generations of cultural narratives. The Ojibwe star map is culturally significant to Northern Minnesota. These constellations have stories associated with them and many correspond with seasonal changes. French-Canadian voyageurs, gold-miners, lumberjacks, and commercial fishermen are some of the many groups who also utilized the stars. Light pollution erases the ability to connect with the constellations and these historical narratives. As a community of people committed to the stewardship of Voyageurs National Park, we have a responsibility to protect the sanctity of our dark skies.

# LEARN MORE AT VOYAGEURS.ORG/DARKSKIES

STARGAZING TIPS

CONSERVE DARKNESS AT HOME

ATTEND A VIRTUAL PROGRAM



#### What Does This Certification Mean?

Dark Sky Park certification does not carry any legal or regulatory authority, but it affirms the park's commitment to sustainable light use and public education to reduce light pollution and protect the night sky. This joint dark sky initiative is a continuous and evolving process.

The first phase of dark sky preservation focuses on light fixture changes in the park. By using "dark-sky friendly" light fixtures in parking lots and park facilities, Voyageurs National Park is significantly reducing its light pollution output. These fixtures direct light downward and often utilize warmer colors and motion sensor activation. VNPA helped fund the first round of lighting changes. The park's goal is to reach 100% "dark-friendly" lights within the next 10 years.

In 2019, Voyageurs National Park hosted a graduate student who measured the luminance of the sky in different areas of the park to gather data for the certification process. VNPA provided sky quality meters for the project. The luminance of the sky needs to be at least 21.2 magnitudes per square arcsecond (22.0 is the darkest possible sky) to obtain Dark Sky Park certification. From a purely visual standpoint, this means that you need to be able to easily see the Milky Way. In July 2019, the park's skies were regularly hitting much higher values.

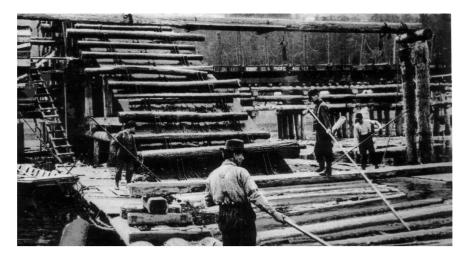
Surrounding neighborhoods, businesses, and communities are not required to change their lighting practices in response to this certification. However, there are a multitude of environmental and economic benefits to this transition. Dark sky tourism is a growing travel trend. VNPA will provide resources to business and cabin owners, and host programs and special events to welcome visitors and community members to join this initiative.

This is an exciting pursuit for Voyageurs National Park and its surrounding communities. Many U.S. National Parks have achieved Dark Sky Park certification, and additional park areas near Voyageurs such as BWCAW and Quetico Provincial Park are also seeking certification. If all of these areas become certified, this could become the first International Dark Sky Region! We hope the Dark Sky Park certification will inspire visitors to discover the park's cosmic treasures and preserve its unparalleled beauty for generations to come.

### **HOIST BAY**

Trace the
Path of
the Railroad

LINDSAY BRANDT, VOLUNTEER



Voyageurs National Park may be named for the famed French-Canadian voyageurs who plied the waters of the park's lakes during the fur trade, but the area's history runs much deeper. From the first people in the area that is now Voyageurs almost 10,000 years ago, to loggers, early resort visitors, and modern-day boaters, the park's tree-lined shores and sparkling lakes are filled with countless stories and layers of history.

In much of the park, the human story is hard to find. As you boat by red and white pines that seem to stretch up to the sky, past bald eagles soaring down to snatch a fish from the water, it's easy to imagine that these lakes and forests have always been the same. But at some of the park's many visitor destinations, you can catch a glimpse of the area's human past.

At Hoist Bay, the remnants of two major periods in the area's history are on display. As you navigate your boat into the bay, one of the first things you might notice is the pieces of wood that jut up out of the water. You might see just a few out in the bay, or if the lake is low you might be able to tell that they extend all the way back to the shore. These are the remains of what used to be a railroad trestle that stretched out into the bay.

In the early 1900s, the logging industry was booming. The Virginia and Rainy Lake Lumber Company operated 143 logging camps in their 20 years of operation; 31 of which were in or very near the area that is now Voyageurs. In 1913, the company extended its rail line to Hoist Bay.

Logs would be cut at other camps around the area during the winter, then either hauled by sleigh or stored until they could be transported on the water. After the lake thawed, logs were corralled into huge booms on Namakan Lake, then towed to Hoist Bay. A steam-powered hoist would haul the logs out of the lake and onto waiting railroad cars, which were then transported to the company's mill in Virginia.

By the time the tracks and equipment were dismantled in the late 1920s, millions of board feet of timber had been transported through Hoist Bay. Most of the area's largest red and white pines had been felled, and the landscape had forever changed.

While the forest was no longer the same as it had been before the logging era, Hoist Bay's story was far from over. Around a decade after the closure of the hoist operation, Ted and Fern Monson purchased the land. A few buildings remained from the old logging operations, and over the years the Monsons built the property into a thriving resort. The red-roofed buildings you can see today remain from this resort, as does the ice house.

You can still trace the path of the old railroad through the woods, or stand looking out from the old resort buildings to the remains of the railroad trestle. Along with other historic visitor destinations, Hoist Bay is a reminder that we protect not only the animals, plants, and the natural world of Voyageurs National Park, but also the stories that are woven into this landscape. And each time we visit Voyageurs, our own stories become a part of the park's history as well.



#### Tips from the master of social distancing, I.W. Stevens

In his nearly 50 years of living alone on his Namakan Lake island, he found lots to occupy his time: "Because of my recent illness, I had to take things easy that summer. There was an abundant crop of luscious blueberries that season and most of my time was spent in the berry patches. The result really was something to crow about. I canned 165 quarts of blueberry sauce. (I hadn't figured out the recipe for blueberry-rhubarb jam at that time.)"

## Warblers of the **North Woods**







Black-throated Green Warbler (Silver Leapers/Flickr); Blackburnian Warbler (Matthew Smith/Flickr); American Redstart Warbler (Becky Matsubara/Flickr)

HAILEY BURLEY, NPS

Voyageurs is home to many iconic North Woods species like moose, wolves, and beavers. However, a hidden gem of this park can be found scattered throughout our forest floors and treetops. Break out a pair of binoculars and hit the trails to experience the diversity of warblers Voyageurs has to offer.

Voyageurs National Park was identified as an Important Birding Area (IBA) by the National Audubon Society; over 240 bird species have been identified here, with 68 of those being Species of Greatest Conservation Need or Species of Conservation Concern.

A recent study published in the journal Science found that while raptors and wetland birds have made comebacks, the number of birds in the United States and Canada has declined by 29 percent over the last 50 years. Among the worsthit groups in the study were warblers.

The highest density of breeding warblers on the continent is found right here in Northern Minnesota, and with 24 species calling the park home, it is one of the most important protected areas in the state for species diversity and habitat conservation.

What exactly is it that draws these birds to the area? Voyageurs has an assortment of protected habitats, part of a swath of relatively untouched wild area stretching across much of northern Minnesota. Voyageurs is where the southern edge of the boreal forests meets the northern tip of the hardwood forests. The diversity of shapes, sizes, and species of trees provide a wide selection of nesting options.

April provides a wonderful time to begin looking for warblers as they have molted into their flashiest colors and are ready to hit the runway of the North Woods to sing their hearts out. You'll need to look high and low. "Warbler neck" is real. Your reward for dealing with mosquitos, black flies, and neck strain will be a gorgeous array of avian colors.

Seldom seen at bird feeders, warblers' main food source is insects which they follow on their migration.

While these pint-sized songbirds are some of my favorites to search for, many people often enjoy some of our larger species in the park. Over summers at the park, you're likely to see Bald Eagles, Common Loons, Herring Gulls, and American White Pelicans.

Simply noticing the beauty of birds is a great step towards starting a lifelong journey of becoming a birder, and supporting the ongoing conservation of these species.

#### GETTING STARTED WITH BIRDING

A great place to start is by getting a field guide. If you're going to bird in a specific area, check online or at a local nature center to see if they have a checklist of local birds. If you're planning on birding in Voyageurs National Park, you can go to www. voyageurs.org/birding to see maps and download a checklist and bird guide.

It can help to set a plan by picking a bird and going to find it. The best way to do so is by using your field guide to pick one you're reasonably sure lives nearby or by using the plethora of online resources like the "explore data" page on ebird.com

For birding around Voyageurs, a personal favorite spot of mine is the Echo Bay Trail. I hope to see you out in

the field, and looking up soon!



Yellow Warbler (Andrew Weitzel/Flickr)





## Voyageurs Classroom

#### Meet Jackie La New

In keeping with its mission to connect people and the next generation to Voyageurs National Park, VNPA recently hired me as its first-ever Education and Outreach Coordinator. Besides enhancing VNPA's growing community engagement programs, my position supports the development of the Voyageurs Classroom Initiative.

Each year, the Park Service presents hands-on environmental education to over 1200 students who participate in ecology boat excursions, snowshoe hikes, science days and other sessions. The park has extremely limited resources to sustain and grow its youth environmental education and has asked VNPA to help them innovate in this area. With support from donors like you, VNPA will help drastically expand youth engagement by implementing a suite of programs for children, college

students, and families.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we serve the public in the short term, it has also opened new ways of engaging youth. I would like to introduce myself and tell you about VNPA's initial virtual learning efforts.

With BA and MS degrees from the University of Michigan (Go Blue!) my background includes directing university and community recreation programs, teaching Physical Education majors how to teach and engage K-12 students, and volunteering as an Interpretive Ranger at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Arizona. As Education and Outreach Coordinator, aka the Voyageur Explorer, I get to explore and learn about the park, and show and tell other people about it. How cool is that?

In response to the Stay-at-Home order in Minnesota, our team worked quickly to create a new website with activites and resources, launched a virtual sky watching event series, and developed a new distance learning opportunity geared towards 3rd/4th graders - *Become a Wolf Expert*.

I am looking forward to meeting more VNPA members and introducing more kids to this amazing place.

Park-it from Home

VNPA is bringing the park to you. So families can *Park-it at Home*, a new webpage offers a collection of resources for kids, adults, and teachers that includes videos, the new *Become a Wolf Expert* series, podcasts, history articles, coloring pages, a new Jr. Ranger book, Night Explorer Jr. Ranger book, and more.

Voyageurs.org/parkathome

"I believe in public lands and there is just something special about the north woods and Voyageurs National Park. It's where I saw my first northern lights. It's the smell of birch and pine. It's the call of the loons. It's a unique place. And I want to keep it that way." - VNPA Member

#### You Make VNPA Happen

Like most organizations, both Voyageurs National Park Association and the park have been changed by COVID-19. Though some activities are limited, Voyageurs is open. Its northern lights, fresh air, and outdoor experiences will continue. As the park's charitable partner, VNPA's work continues today, even in this new reality. We are actively working on several land protection projects, new trail work, and creating virtual environmental education opportunities for kids and families.

While it will be a season like no other in the park, we believe our world will heal. Through this, we know people need others to feel hope and positivity about the future. VNPA is a beacon that continues to build partnerships and programs to ensure that the park is here for generations to come. Now more than ever, people need wild and pristine places to feed their soul and rejuvenate their spirit.

As a community-funded organization, none of our work happens without support from donors like you. We recognize

this is a challenging time for many. If you are in a position to



give, we are grateful to those of you remembering Voyageurs National Park Association with your giving.

If you have not yet made a gift this past year or it is time to renew your membership, please do so today and help us raise an additional \$10,000 during our spring member campaign. Or consider a monthly sustainer gift which provides a reliable source of financial support so VNPA can continue its valuable work. Know that gifts large and small help sustain the park's lands and waters, and programs that connect the next generation of conservationists to the outdoors.

As one of our members recently said, "The park is an asset for the state of Minnesota and for northern Minnesota. I tell people that parks needs an associations. The Park Service has very limited funds. This is our park. If there wasn't an association of people to do this work, no one else would."

Join us as we make Voyageurs National Park our park. Please give using the enclosed envelope, or online at Voyageurs.org/give. Thank you!

"Now more than ever, we're seeing how the strength of our community and the health of our environment are intertwined. As we retreat to natural spaces, we find much-needed solace. gratitude, and joy. The public trails and parks around us are being used as never before by individuals and families seeking mental and physical relief during this challenging time."

- Mortenson Family Foundation, VNPA Supporter

#### **Sulfide Mining**

Even a small amount of acid mine pollution from the Twin Metals project would impact waterways throughout the Rainy River watershed, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park, some of the cleanest waters in our country.

The current administration illegally renewed two Twin Metals Minnesota LLC-held hardrock mineral leases and cut short a public process and science-based review of the environmental, social, and economic impacts of proposed sulfide-ore copper mining in the watershed. VNPA opposed these actions, working with several partner organizations.

Rep. Betty McCollum introduced bipartisan legislation to protect our waters from harmful impacts from sulfide-ore copper mining. The bill would remove this threat permanently from our watershed and protect these national treasures for generations to come. Contact your representative telling them to support H.R. 5598 to protect Voyageurs and the BWCAW.

#### **Wetland Restoration**

A hybrid species of cattail is pushing out native plants, converting park wetlands to monotypic stands of cattail, and creating floating mats of cattail in open water which is hazardous to visitors. There is an estimated 500 acres of invasive hybrid cattail in Voyageurs. The park, along with many partners, has launched a multi-year wetland restoration effort to restore biodiversity. In 2019, the park's team mechanically removed hybrid cattails in 17.3 acres of wetland near the Rainy Lake Visitor Center. Post-treatment surveys were conducted and over 19 acres of wetlands were seeded with a lakeshore mix, softstem bulrush, and wild rice. Muskrat populations were introduced as a natural biocontrol. Post-treatment surveys will continue through 2020 to measure the success of native seeding, muskrat foraging preferences, and efficient wetland treatments.



#### **Future of Kettle Falls**

The National Park Service gathered public input on a proposed site development plan for the Kettle Falls Historic District in Voyageurs National Park. The plan provides the park with a road map to enhance the visitor experience at Kettle Falls, including potential improvements to employee housing options; overnight opportunities for visitors like camping or camper cabins; improvements to recreational amenities and day-use areas, landscaping, accessibility, and wayfinding; and access for boats, houseboats, and seaplanes. The plan will be released soon for additional public comment.

#### **Ellsworth Rock Gardens**

In 2019, park crews wrapped up a two-year project at Ellsworth which included an accessible trail system, a larger dock, interpretive media, and other improvements. VNPA provided funding for educational signs and future restoration of historic features at the site.

#### Thank You Volunteers

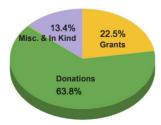
102 volunteers contributed 15,801 hours of service at Voyageurs National Park in 2019!



#### **Statement of 2019 Financial Activities**

#### **SUPPORT & REVENUE**

Grants		\$66,050
Donations		\$187,360
Investment Income		\$1,002
Miscellaneous Income & In Kind		\$39,260
	Total Revenues	\$293,672
EXPENSES		
Program Service		\$253,830
Management & General		\$32,508
Fundraising		\$19,484
	Total Expenses	\$305,822



#### Revenue

Donations 63.8% Grants 22.5% Misc. & In Kind 13.4%



#### **Expenses**

Program Service 83% Management 10.6% Fundraising 6.4 %

#### Statement of Financial Position

#### **ASSETS**

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$180,975	
Restricted Funds	\$209,737	
Land & Equipment	\$203,901	
Other Current Assets	\$285	
Total Assets	\$594,898	
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS		
Accrued Expenses	\$1,377	
Equity	\$593,521	
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$594,898	

Includes both restricted and unrestricted amounts at 12/31/2019 (unaudited)



#### **Love Your Park**

Over **5,463 people** participated in VNPA *Love Your Park* events and programs including our Pint of Science series, special summer and winter educational programs at the park, a shoreline clean up day, classroom visits, dark sky programs, and regional outreach throughout Minnesota to kids and outdoor enthusiasts.



#### **Voyageurs Wolf Project**

VNPA provided grant support to the Voyageurs Wolf Project which continues to study the summer predation and reproductive habits of wolves in the Greater Voyageurs Ecosystem. The project, a collaboration between the University of Minnesota and the National Park Service, was nationally recognized several times in the media this past year. This includes first-ever video footage of wolves hunting for freshwater fish and consuming blueberries! VNPA also works with the VWP on events and public education. In 2019 we hosted a watch party for their debut on PBS Nature's *American Spring Live*.



#### Youth Ambassadors

The National Park Teen Ambassador program connects youth from all over Minnesota to Voyageurs and environmental stewardship. In 2019, **21 Ambassadors from 14 different high schools,** ranging from the Twin Cities to Grand Marais to Virginia, came together for the camping trip of a lifetime. Ambassadors also completed a civic voice workshop with partner National Parks Conservation Association to learn how they can help protect parks through public advocacy.

Zubeda, from Minneapolis, shared, "One thing I'll tell my family is how much I've learned from this trip, and what I've been missing out [on]. Definitely going to do more camping."





#### **Dark Sky Initiative**

The National Park Service is working in partnership with VNPA and neighboring public lands to secure Dark Sky Park certification. VNPA is supporting the park by coordinating local community engagement, sponsoring educational programs that celebrate starry skies, and funding new educational materials and signs, as well as facility and equipment needs like lighting fixture changes and sky quality meters.

#### **Land Protection**

Voyageurs National Park Association completed the transfer of **6 acres** to the National Park Service, permanently adding the site to Voyageurs National Park. Support for this conservation project was made possible by the Wallace C. Dayton Voyageurs National Park Legacy Fund and the National Park Foundation. The site preserves boreal forest and shoreline habitat on the Kabetogama Peninsula, on the Rainy Lake side.



# Ron Howkins

# Visitor Experience & Recreation

VNPA is funding a new hiking trail near Mukooda Lake, giving backcountry paddlers and boaters more recreation opportunities. This project will build the first hiking trail in the eastern half of Voyageurs. The trail compliments additional site work including efforts to improve campsites and canoe and dock access. The first section connecting to the Filben Cabin to the south was completed in 2019. By 2021, there will be 3 miles total of new hiking trail at Mukooda. Thanks to REI and the National Park Foundation for their project support.

#### Thank You 2019 Supporters

#### \$5,000 and above

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Rainy Lake Inn & Suites at

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