



You are Invited to Participate

The National Park Service (NPS) will be developing a Frozen Lake Surface Access and Use Plan at Voyageurs National Park (the park) and is seeking public input during a civic engagement period.

Since 1979, the NPS has plowed ice roads on Rainy Lake to provide a traditional mode of travel that was established prior to the creation of the park. Ice roads allow access to ice fishing locations and provide visitors with a unique way to experience the park in winter. Today, ice roads are established and maintained by park staff on Kabetogama and Rainy Lakes based on weather conditions, available staff, and resources. Visitors to the park operate snowmobiles along a designated trail system and on lake surfaces that trails cross. On portions of Rainy and Kabetogama Lakes, visitors also access the frozen lake area with ORVs (street legal vehicles, ATVs, UTVs, and other types of non-snowmobile vehicles) on areas away from established ice roads, which is contradictory to federal regulations. For purposes of this plan, an ORV is considered any non-snowmobile vehicle operating on the frozen lake surface. This planning effort aims to align park activities with established regulations and policies, while accommodating traditional access and activities to the extent feasible.

We invite you to participate in the planning process by submitting your ideas to help inform frozen lake surface management at the park. We would like to hear any thoughts and ideas you feel are relevant and important for this planning process. There are many ways to be involved, including attending an open house meeting and submitting electronic or written comments.

The information obtained during this civic engagement period will be used to develop and refine alternatives for frozen lake surface management, identify issues, and ensure the NPS has the information needed to move forward with the planning process.

After considering input received during this initial civic engagement period, the park will develop and refine preliminary alternatives and move forward with the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The NEPA process will include two more opportunities for public involvement, including a public scoping period held at the beginning of the process and a public comment period held for the NEPA document once it is available for public review.





Project Background

The park is located along Minnesota's northern border and encompasses approximately 218,000 acres, including approximately 85,000 acres of water, consisting of 30 lakes of varying sizes.

There are four major lakes within the park boundary. Kabetogama Lake is located fully within the park, while Rainy Lake, Namakan Lake, and Sand Point Lake are located only partially within the park boundaries. The park was established January 8, 1971 and the park's enabling legislation allows for winter recreation access, including the use of snowmobiles. The park's enabling legislation also allows for recreational fishing in accordance with federal and Minnesota state law. Ice fishing and access to frozen lake surfaces is a longstanding tradition in Minnesota. Plowing of ice roads on the frozen lake surface to access fishing locations predates the establishment of the park. Visitors use a variety of vehicle types to access these locations.

In addition to the issue of ORV use on the frozen lake surface, ice shelters have evolved from homemade shacks to campers that can be lowered onto the ice. Other than snowmobiles, the park does not currently have a plan that manages winter use, including access and use of the frozen lake surface. The park will be developing a Frozen Lake Surface Access and Use Plan that would establish goals and objectives for the management of vehicles and recreational opportunities on frozen lake surfaces.

Preliminary Purpose and Need

The preliminary purpose of the Frozen Lake Surface Access and Use Plan is to guide the management of access and use of frozen lake surfaces at the park while protecting natural and cultural resources and providing for a variety of visitor experiences, consistent with the park's enabling legislation and NPS regulations. In addition, the plan will establish management use zones by:

- Evaluating appropriate areas for ice roads.
- Identifying the types of vehicles allowed on different areas of frozen lake surfaces.
- Identifying the types of ice shelters allowed in different areas of frozen lake surfaces and determining how long they should remain in place.
- Determining appropriate uses of the Mukooda Truck Portage.

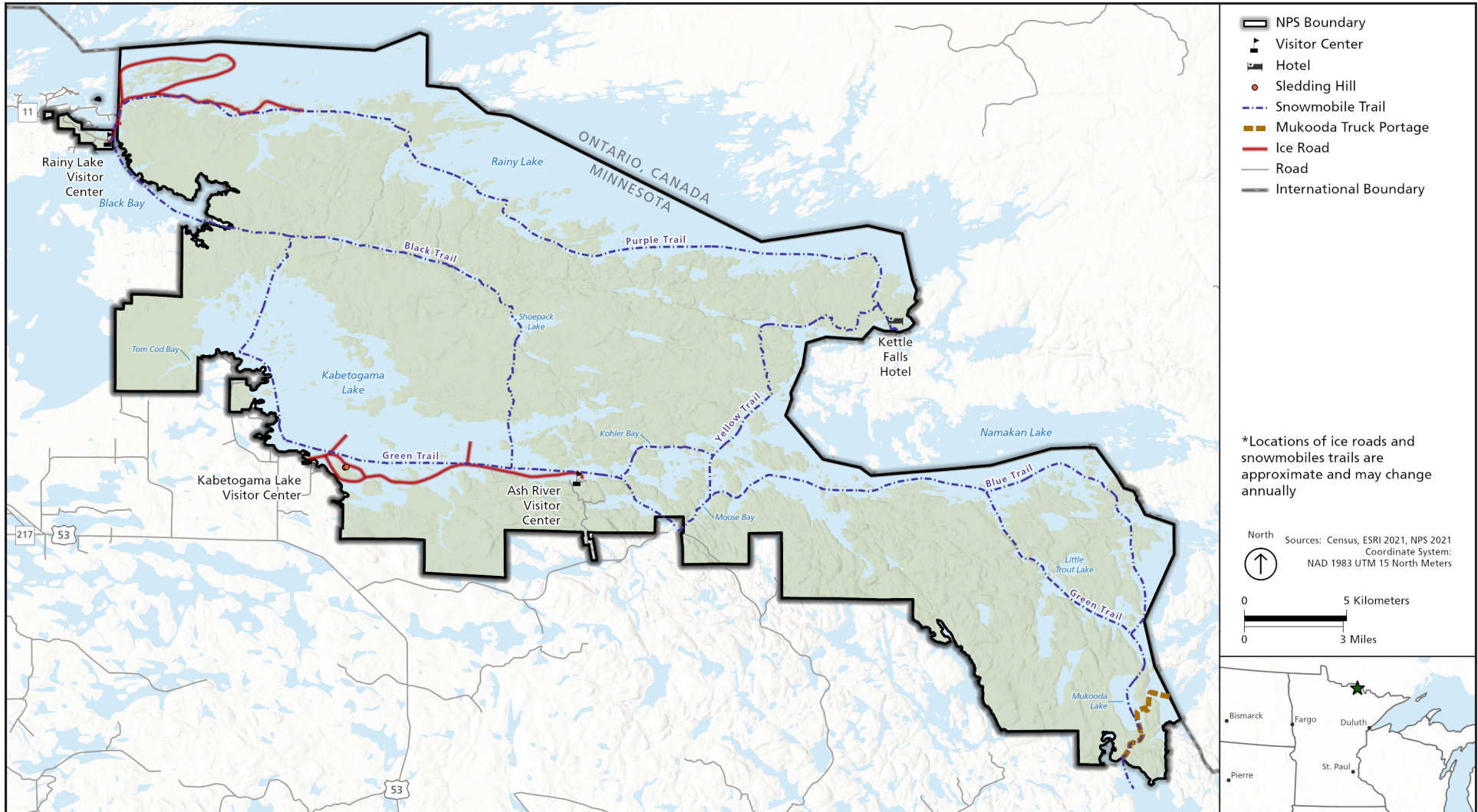
A Frozen Lake Surface Access and Use Plan is needed because:

- The park currently does not have a plan for management of the frozen lake surfaces other than for snowmobile use.
- Current park management of vehicles on frozen lake surfaces is not consistent with federal regulations governing the operation of vehicles off of park roads.
- Ice shelters have evolved from homemade shacks to campers that can be lowered onto the ice. An increase in the number and weight of ice shelters on the frozen lake surface could have adverse impacts on safety, visitor experience, and natural resources.





EXISTING CONDITIONS





Preliminary Proposal

The park has developed a preliminary proposal and is looking for public feedback on the preliminary proposal as well as other options for managing visitor use on frozen lake surfaces. The preliminary proposal would establish two management zones (moderate use and low use zones) to help ensure a range of visitor experiences would be available to park visitors.

Moderate Use Zone

The moderate use zone would be an area where it would be appropriate to see a moderate concentration of visitors participating in several activities. The map on page 5 displays the proposed zoning.

- Includes all of Kabetogama Lake and a portion of Rainy Lake.
- Park maintenance staff would establish and maintain up to 20 - 26 miles of ice roads based on weather conditions available staff, and funding.
- The park would establish an access fee to use ice roads (one-time use or seasonal pass).
- ORV use, parking, and ice shelter placement would be allowed within 300 feet from the edge of any NPS-designated ice road which is referred to as the ice road “parking area”.
 - ORVs must be licensed and/or registered by a state.
 - ORV use on a designated staked road across the Mukooda Truck Portage would continue to be authorized with a permit.
 - ORV use would not be authorized outside of park ice roads and associated parking areas.
- All types and sizes of ice shelters could be permitted within the following guidelines:
 - Transport of ice shelters by ORVs authorized only within 300 feet of the edge of designated ice roads, within the proposed parking area.
 - Beyond 300 feet from an ice road, all ice shelters must be transported by snowmobile or non-motorized methods.
 - Permanent ice shelters may be left unoccupied as long as they adhere to all state regulations.
 - No limit to the number of ice shelters in this zone at this time, but adaptive management strategies, including permits, may be considered if the density of ice shelters increases.
 - Users should be mindful of weight limits for access established by NPS guidelines.

Low Use Zone

The low use zone would be locations where less concentrated visitor use would occur in a more remote setting.

- Includes all of Rainy Lake east of Cranberry Bay, Namakan Lake, Sand Point Lake, Mukooda Lake, and interior lakes associated with a designated snowmobile trail.
- No ice roads would be established.
- No ORV use would be authorized; vehicles would be limited to snowmobiles only. Snowmobile operation would be in accordance with the park’s snowmobile management plan.
- All types and sizes of ice shelters could be permitted within the following guidelines:
 - Ice shelters must be transported by snowmobile or non-motorized methods.
 - Ice shelters must be occupied.
 - Ice shelters may be left longer term by Commercial Use Authorization permit holders with prior park approval.

Potential Resource Considerations

Based on preliminary planning efforts, the park has identified several issues associated with ORV and ice shelter use on frozen lake surfaces in the park. These issues include:

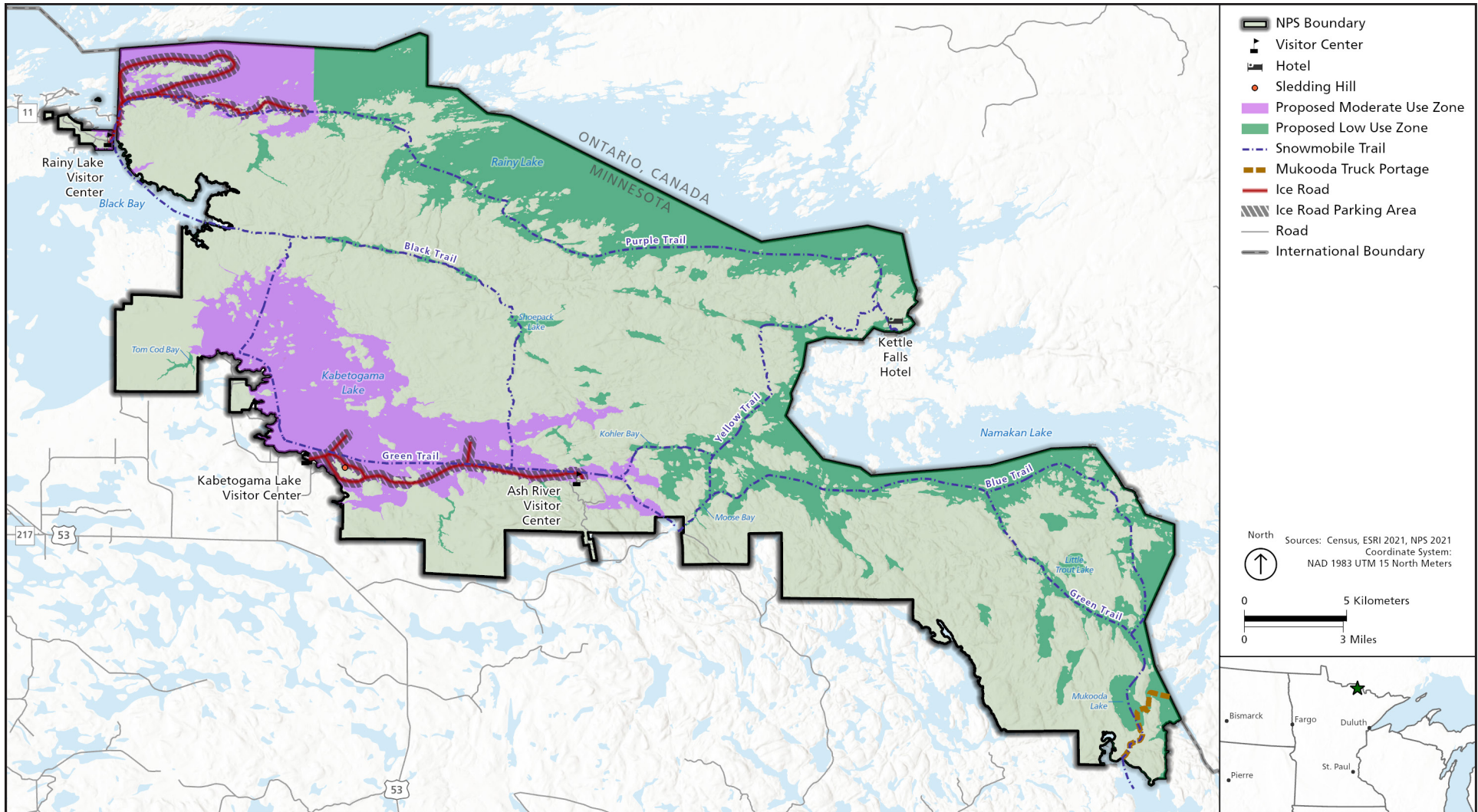
- Visitor Use and Experience, including Safety
- Soundscapes
- Lightscaapes, including Visual Resources
- Wildlife
- Socioeconomics
- Water and Air Quality

Are there other issues you feel the Frozen Lake Surface Access and Use Plan should consider?





PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL





How to Comment


The park will be using the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website to share project information and request public feedback. As part of this process, we are reaching out to gather input by initiating a public comment period. **The public comment period will close on May 3, 2023.**


Public comments directly inform this planning process. Park staff will review your comments as they work to define the scope of what the plan will cover and to develop alternatives to address the resource concerns and purpose and need for the project. The most useful types of public comments consider the following:

- Alternative approaches and ideas for addressing the purpose and need for the project
- The range of environmental and socioeconomic issues that need to be considered
- Other potential projects or actions that might affect or be affected by this project
- Information that needs to be considered (such as related research) and why
- Information on how you use the park and how a project might affect that use

You may submit your comments several ways:

 Submit electronically (preferred method): <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/VOYA-frozen>

 Mail:
Frozen Lake Surface Access and Use Plan
Voyageurs National Park
360 Hwy 11 East
International Falls, MN 56649

 Submit comments at any public meeting

NOTE: Comments will not be accepted except as specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Please note that your entire comment, including your personal information, may be made publicly available at any time. You can request that we withhold your personal identifying information from public view, but we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

MEETING SCHEDULE

The park will host two in-person meetings and one virtual public meeting. All meetings will be from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. Central Time. Park staff will give a brief presentation from 5:10 to 5:30 p.m. and will then be available to answer questions from the public via an open house format until 7:00 p.m.

- Tuesday, April 18:
Kabetogama Community Building,
9707 Gamma Road
Kabetogama, MN 56669
- Thursday, April 20:
AmericInn by Wyndham
2500 Keenan Drive
International Falls, MN 56649
- Wednesday, April 19: Virtual Meeting

To attend the virtual meeting from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m., please use this link and join the meeting 5-10 minutes early to test your connection.

- Meeting link:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83447266503>
- Or Telephone: If you would like to call in on listen only mode and not view the presentation, please call
US: +1 312-626-6799
Webinar ID: 834 4726 6503
- All meeting information is also available on the project PEPC page, under "Meeting Notices"
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/VOYA-frozen>