

## **Isle Royale Boaters Association May 2001 Special Newsletter & Action Alert**

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### **Annual Meeting and Dinner**

#### **Announcement**

The Annual Meeting of the Isle Royale Boaters Association will be held on Saturday, May 5, at the Northern Lights Restaurant in Houghton. The evening will begin with a cash bar and a prime rib buffet dinner will follow. The cost is \$20 per person. This meeting will include the annual election of officers. Send your reservations to Jim Markham. You can call him at (906) 482-2937, fax him at (906) 483-0486, or email him at [jmarkham@chartermi.net](mailto:jmarkham@chartermi.net). Make sure that you attend and hear about the court hearing from those that were there.

### **Court Hearing Set**

#### **Announcement**

Oral arguments on the IRBA lawsuit challenging the legality of the GMP will be heard by the District Court Judge, the Hon. Gordon J. Quist, on Friday, April 20, at 10:00 a.m. at the Federal Building, 110 Michigan NW, Grand Rapids, Michigan. IRBA members are encouraged to attend and show their support for the case.

### **NPS and the Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan - Act Before It's Too Late**

#### **Action Alert**

The NPS has issued Newsletter #3 for their Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan. The WBMP will supplement the General Management Plan (GMP) for Isle Royale. The stated purpose of the plan is to identify specific management tools and techniques that will be used in wilderness and backcountry areas. However, many aspects of the plan have an impact on boaters visiting Isle Royale.

The complete newsletter is eleven pages long—too long to include here in its entirety. You can get a complete copy from Isle Royale National Park, 800 East Lakeshore Drive, Houghton, MI 44931-9980. Also, ask that you be put on their mailing list for future newsletters related to the WBMP. Because time is of the essence in responding to these burdensome and ill-conceived NPS proposals, we have included a copy of the

preaddressed postage paid response form that was included with the newsletter. Let the NPS know what you think of this. The following is a selection of excerpts from the newsletter that may be of interest as you prepare your response and comments.

A significant focus of the WBMP will be to address management of visitor use levels. In the event that standards are exceeded in the various zones (which include the Open Water Motorized, and Quiet/No-Wake zones), the number of visitors dropped off and picked up could be adjusted to help control numbers of visitors entering the park.

Ferry services, including the seaplane and water taxi, will be retained. No expansion of these services will be allowed. The number of people permitted to disembark or be picked up at specific locations could be limited if necessary to prevent overcrowding or resource damage.

All commercial services, such as guided diving, hiking, and paddling trips, will continue under incidental business permits. To avoid resource damage and ensure adequate opportunities for noncommercial users, the operating requirements of the permits may be adjusted annually to control the number of people that each permittee will be allowed to bring to the island on a single visit or cumulatively during the season.

Several areas on the island were not designated as Wilderness in the park's Wilderness legislation. Because of changes in park plans and needs, the WBMP will evaluate these areas for possible conversion to Wilderness. There are eight areas of specific interest, which should be evaluated: Siskiwit Bay (100 acres), Moskey Basin (100 acres), 3-Mile (80 acres), Daisy Farm (160 acres), McCargoe Cove (120 acres), a portion of Malone Bay (100 acres), Belle Isle (40 acres), and a portion of Mott Island (180 acres).

## **PUBLIC RESPONSES TO NEWSLETTER 2**

Newsletter 2 asked for comments on a list of indicators and standards, their potential implications, and three possible options for applying these indicators and standards to manage visitor use levels at the park. Regarding the options listed below, responses from Newsletter 2 showed broad support for Option 3. In all, one-quarter of the responses favored Option 1, another quarter Option 2 and half of all the responses preferred Option 3.

**OPTION 1: Do not apply standards.** This option would allow for increased use any time during the season. This option represents the existing visitor use conditions at the park. Visitor use numbers and patterns for use would be limited only by transportation (ferry and seaplane) schedules. The majority of supporters of this option thought that crowding was not a problem or could be resolved through other methods besides managing visitor access.

**OPTION 2: Apply standards to reduce peak season crowding.** Option 2 would reduce overcrowding during the peak time of late July and the month of August and allow for increased visitor use during the off-peak time of the season. Many respondents

who favored this option suggested applying standards, either more or less restrictive, evaluating the effectiveness of management actions and revising as necessary to meet goals.

**OPTION 3: Apply different standards at different times of the season.** This option would reduce overcrowding during peak times and maintain historic visitor use levels during off-peak times. Those comments that supported this option mainly stressed the importance of preventing resource degradation and providing for a quality wilderness experience. Respondents who favored Option 3 stated that solitude and natural quiet were key factors in a wilderness setting.

## INDICATORS AND STANDARDS

As presented in Newsletter 2, suggested indicators and standards are listed in the table.

### FRONTCOUNTRYZONE

INDICATOR	STANDARD-A	STANDARD-B
People at one time at an interpretive site	No more than 50 people at one time	No more than 20 people at one time
Need to share campsites	On any given night, 5% or fewer parties will have to share a campsite	On any given night in the park, no parties will have to share a campsite
Boats rafting off	On any given night in the park, 5% or fewer parties will have to raft their boat off another	No boats will have to raft off

### WILDERNESS PORTAL AND BACKCOUNTRY ZONES

INDICATOR	STANDARD-A	STANDARD-B
Need to share campsites	On any given night, 5% or fewer parties will have to share a campsite	On any given night in the park, no parties will have to share a campsite
Trail/inland lake encounters	Hikers/canoers will encounter no more than 7 parties/day	Hikers/canoers will encounter no more than 5 parties/day
Boats rafting off	On any given night in the park, 5% or fewer parties will have to raft their boat off another	No boats will have to raft off

## PRIMITIVE ZONE

INDICATOR	STANDARD-A	STANDARD-B
Need to share campsites	On any given night, 5% or fewer parties will have to share a campsite	On any given night in the park, no parties will have to share a campsite
Trail/inland lake encounters	Hikers/canoers will encounter no more than 5 parties/day	Hikers/canoers will encounter no more than 3 parties/day

## PRISTINE ZONE

INDICATOR	STANDARD-A	STANDARD-B
Parties seen in the zone	90% of hikers will see 1 party or fewer per day in the zone and 50% will see no other parties	90% of hikers will see no other parties in the zone

## QUIET/NO WAKE ZONE

INDICATOR	STANDARD-A	STANDARD-B
Anchoring out overnight	No more than 5 boats anchoring within 1/2-mile of each other (or within sight or sound of each other)	No more than 2 boats anchoring within 1/2-mile of each other (or within sight or sound of each other)

## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON VISITOR DISTRIBUTION FROM THE 2000 SEASON

This information revealed that in 2000, when backcountry overnight use on Isle Royale was 9% lower than the previous year, standards for crowding in campgrounds and on trails were exceeded for several weeks between July and September.

**Campground and Dock Overcrowding:** If the park were to apply a standard of 5% or fewer boaters having to raft their boat off of another, standards would not have been exceeded during any weeks of the 2000 season. With a standard of 0% of boaters rafting off, standards would have been exceeded during two weeks of the peak season.

**Trail and Water Encounters:** We were unable to gather enough survey information from visitors about numbers of boats anchoring in the Quiet/No-Wake Zone to fully assess conditions. However, informal information from visitors and park employees suggests that current conditions would be within standard.

## **WILDERNESS & BACKCOUNTRY GOALS**

Based on public response, the planning team has identified the following overall desired conditions that would constitute goals for managing use of the Isle Royale wilderness:

- \* Eliminate or reduce the need to share campsites because of crowding at campgrounds
- \* Eliminate or reduce the need for boaters to raft off because of crowding at docks
- \* Maintain trail and paddler waterway encounter rates consistent with goals of various zones
- \* Maintain anchoring out density consistent with goals of Quiet/No-Wake Zone
- \* Maintain opportunities in spring and fall seasons to experience Isle Royale with the likelihood of encountering few other visitors
- \* Keep use levels consistent with the preservation of Isle Royale's natural and cultural resources

## **POSSIBLE MANAGEMENT TOOLS TO ACHIEVE GOALS**

Examples of management actions that could be used to achieve the goals stated above. Tools such as these would be called upon when standards are exceeded.

**Entry Quota:** When crowding requires reducing the number of visitors at a certain time or place, one strategy would be to use entry quotas to reduce the number of visitors coming into the park. At Isle Royale, this may take the form of limits on the number of campers that travel to the park on ferries, the seaplane, and private boats.

One scenario for the ferries and seaplane would be to set a limit on how many backcountry passengers that could be carried on each trip or during a given period. For the seaplane and the Voyageur more specific limits by locations are possible. These backcountry passenger limits would be adjusted to meet the standard of minimal or no sharing. Visitors with lodge reservations, group campers with camping reservations, and day passengers could be exempt from these limits.

Although current private boat visitation figures do not indicate that there is an immediate need to manage numbers, the number of private boats arriving at the park on a given day or week could be limited at some time in the future. The number departing from Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ontario, could be managed by an advance permit system.

**Backcountry Permit Information:** It may be possible to reduce some of the sharing of campsites by providing information to campers at the time they get permits. The new backcountry permit computer program that will be used this summer will allow campers to have better information about how many parties are already indicating that they plan to camp in a given campground. This will give some advance warning of potential bottlenecks.

**Reservations for Selected Sites:** Night-by-night reservations in certain small or isolated campgrounds may serve some visitors' needs. An example for hikers might be the North Desor and Little Todd Campgrounds on the Minong Ridge Trail. Some of the present and future boat-access campgrounds, such as Merritt Lane, Fisherman's Home, Wright Island, Crystal Cove, or John's Island might tend themselves to reservations.

**IRBA MEMBERS - SEND IN YOUR RESPONSE NOW**

The first question on the Response Form is about the potential management tools in the section "Possible Management Tools To Achieve Goals," directly above. The second question refers to the "Wilderness & Backcountry Goals," which is also on this page. The third question is about the possible Wilderness Areas listed on the first page of this newsletter.