



Community Newsletter, April 2024

Superintendent's Office

Here you will find information from our various teams for the month of April. We are working on making improvements to the monthly check-in and website in the coming year and will be continuing to use the monthly check-in to keep our communities in the loop on all things Voyageurs.

For updates go to: <https://www.nps.gov/voya/learn/management/stateofthepark.htm>

This month, the superintendent attended a Zone meeting with superintendents from MN, WI, IA, and northern MI. He also met with the Voyageurs Conservancy's Executive Director to prepare for their annual Spring Thaw fundraiser, which he attended in Minneapolis on April 25.

Other tasks included interviewing for the new lead position for the park's interpretation division, hosting the annual Houseboat Operator Meeting at the headquarters building, reviewing documents related to the Frozen Lakes Access Plan, finalizing changes to the commercial use authorization (CUA) conditions for houseboat support services, and working to finalize future management fees related to the CUA program.

Employee Spotlight

Each month the park will spotlight a different employee. April's spotlight is Jesse Gates, the Education & Dark Sky specialist at Voyageurs Conservancy.

Jesse was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He has worked as an Interpretive Park Ranger and an Education Technician for several years at Bryce Canyon National Park as well as one summer at Acadia National Park. It was through his experience within the National Park Service where he developed a love for the starry night sky.



In 2020, Voyageurs National Park officially became a certified International Dark Sky Park, and Jesse arrived shortly after to help the park build out their new interpretive dark sky programming. After spending one summer as an interpretive park ranger at Voyageurs National Park, he landed a job with Voyageurs Conservancy, the official nonprofit partner of the park. At Voyageurs Conservancy, he continues to build the dark sky programming through offering guided constellation tours and telescope observation sessions, planning the annual Star Party, and teaching about the importance of night sky preservation. Additionally, Jesse has helped to rewrite and present the educational curriculum for K-5 students that brings classrooms directly to Voyageurs National Park.

His favorite part of the job is spending hours underneath the stars, sharing his favorite galaxies and nebulae through the telescope, and on lucky nights viewing the colorful display of the auroras. His goal is to communicate the complex scientific concepts in a manner that is easily understood, share his knowledge and passion with everyone, and create an environment that openly invites anyone that is curious about the night sky to join him.

Outside of work he enjoys playing music, learning new languages, traveling internationally, and making friends with all the local dogs.

Administration and Business Services Team

The park's administrative officer (AO) has been entering new property into the park database in preparation for our annual inventory reporting. She is also serving alongside the superintendent of Grand Portage National Monument as a Subject-Matter-Expert reviewer of applications for the administrative officer position that will become available upon her retirement in June.

Newer staff to the team continue to take a variety of trainings to expand their knowledge and abilities to assist with a growing number of park processes and tasks in the areas of accounting, housing management, new staff onboarding, and human resources.

Natural and Cultural Resources Team

The park's new Truxor amphibious machine arrived this month, which will notably improve the park's wetland restoration work. The Truxor is more rugged, powerful, and versatile than the previous machine. With its multiple attachments, crews can perform cattail cutting, cattail leveling, and native seed planting. Thank you to the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Voyageurs Conservancy, the National Park Foundation, Jefferson National Park Association and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council who were vital in helping us purchase the unit and the necessary attachments.



The division's fisheries technician is working on permitting required for the 2024 interior lakes fish survey, the updating of lab safety and protocol documents, and compliance for aquatic ecology projects. He is also working on datasets and report figures for the water quality-based zebra mussel risk assessment manuscript.

The aquatics lead is working on revisions to the park's Little Shoepack muskie population assessment report and proposals for International Joint Commission (IJC) funded work on aquatic vegetation in support of performance indicator modeling for lake level management.

Interpretation, Education, and Recreational Permits Team

The interpretation division has completed nearly all of their seasonal hiring and Volunteer-In-Parks (VIP) recruitment. Supervisors are now preparing for several weeks of seasonal training to begin the first week of May.

We have welcomed a new team member, Billy Flynn, who will serve as a Visual Information Specialist that is shared between Voyageurs National Park, Apostle Island National Lakeshore, and Ice Age Trail National Monument. In this role, Billy will collaborate with staff in the design of publications and waysides, and assist with various aspects of digital content, website management, and social media. He works remotely but will travel to Voyageurs in May to partake in some seasonal training.



Ranger Mark Miller points out destinations in the park to attendees at the Voyageurs Conservancy's annual Spring Thaw fundraiser.

The Voyageurs Conservancy held its annual Spring Thaw fundraiser in April, which garnered over \$90,000 in funds that will go toward supporting education, programs, and preserving the wild character of Voyageurs National Park well into the future. A video from the event sharing the story of how this important community of supporters and partners impacts the park can be viewed at vimeo.com/939094127. Conservancy staff also continue to assist the park with planning for summer programs and providing spring field experiences to local school groups.

The summer 2024 boat tour and program schedules were added to recreation.gov and became available for reservations on April 15. A total of 1,646 boat tour tickets and 122 north canoe program tickets were sold on opening day, but plenty of availability exists for those still planning their summer adventures!

All three visitor centers will be open 7-days per week from 9 am to 4 pm starting May 24th to after Labor Day.

Visitor and Resource Protection Team

This month, Voyageurs law enforcement rangers hosted a Search and Rescue (SAR) training at VNP headquarters with St. Louis County.

Staff are working with the park's fire crew to help plan and facilitate several in-house wildland fire trainings and members of the fire crew assisted with a burn at Theodore Roosevelt National Recreation Area.

Rangers are assessing their Emergency Medical Services (EMS) needs for the season, updating the park's EMS plan, and have completed their annual firearms and property inventory reporting.

Law enforcement staff have been busy preparing for an Outdoor Education Day event at park headquarters and for the upcoming Motorboat Operator Certification Course training that many new seasonal staff will be partaking in later this spring. They are also developing a rough plan for setting buoys in place starting at the end of the month, depending upon weather.

Miranda Challeen, former administrative assistant for the park's law enforcement division, was selected for the park's first Commercial Services Specialist position and has onboarded into her new role. Congratulations, Miranda!



A sherp ATV used by the St. Louis County Sheriff's dept for search and rescue operations was on site during training.

Facilities Team

Maintenance staff welcomed back the first four of their seasonal staff this month and are busy getting all winter equipment cleaned up and stored for the season.

Mechanics have finished servicing the park's boat fleet and have begun getting them put into the water at the Rainy Lake, Kabetogama Lake, and Ash River harbors. Inspectors were recently on site to conduct fire extinguisher checks in all boats.

IT staff met with Paul Bunyan to address getting internet and Wi-Fi set up at the Whispering Pines park housing area and is evaluating network and security needs at the new Crane Lake Visitor Center building.

In the Namakan district of the park, seasonal hiring has been completed and applicants are being reviewed for field fellow selections recruited through the Voyageurs Conservancy. A comfort station is being built for the Namakan group campsite, more floating docks are being constructed, and work is finishing up on the Kabetogama boat ramp, retaining wall, and the maintenance of associated signage and waysides. Crews have also started to put the harbor docks together for the season.

The Rainy district staff are finishing up their seasonal hiring, finalizing a vacancy announcement to fill a water/wastewater intern position that will be in the park for 26 weeks, and have begun working on repairs to the fire suppression supply line at Kettle Falls.