

# Is There a Doctor in the Park?

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Great Lakes Inventory and  
Monitoring Network



## Monitoring Vital Signs of the National Parks

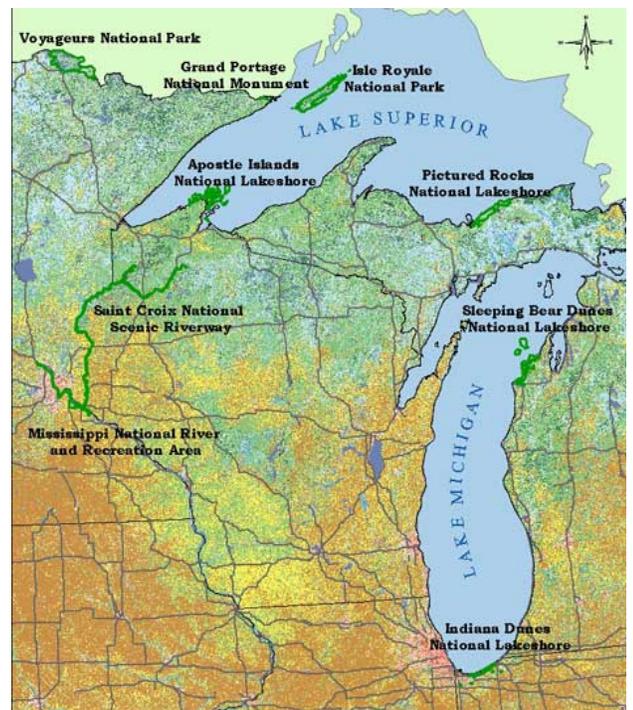


Just as a doctor checks a patient's vital signs – pulse, breathing, blood pressure – to determine how the patient is feeling, national parks have vital signs that give an indication of the park's health. Nine national park units in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana comprise the Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring (I&M) Network. Network biologists and park resource managers have identified 21 vital signs that will help us “keep a finger on the pulse” of land, water, and wildlife in the Great Lakes national parks.

### Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network

From the boreal forests of northern Minnesota to the sand dunes of southern Lake Michigan, the Great Lakes Network parks represent the major landforms and freshwater systems of the Upper Midwest. Because of their shared geography, the parks also share similar management issues, such as water quality. Focusing on those common issues, Network biologists are working with resource managers at each park to monitor the parks' vital signs.

The Inventory and Monitoring Program is part of the National Park Service's effort to *improve park management through greater reliance on scientific knowledge*. The Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network is one of 32 I&M networks across the United States. Network biologists work to implement long-term monitoring programs that individual park resource managers cannot undertake because of limited time, money, or staff.



### Vital Signs – “keeping a finger on the pulse” of the natural world

Measuring toxins in eagles and fish; checking water level, water temperature, and other chemical factors of inland lakes and rivers; and determining the age and composition of forests – these are just a few of the vital signs that Network biologists are tracking in coordination with national park resource managers. The information learned from these monitoring programs helps the parks to decide where more in-depth research is needed or when management action is required to protect the living treasures that make the parks special places. Because the data are collected the same way at each park, Network biologists can make comparisons between and among parks and estimate the health of the natural world across the Great Lakes region. Monitoring these vital signs today means we will see any warning signs of declining health when they first appear, take action, and reverse the decline before it's too late.

For more information about the Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Program, visit our website at <http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/glkn/>

