

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore General Management Plan



Summary of the 2011 General Management Plan/Wilderness Management Plan

The major focus will be on continuing the park's current management direction over the next 15-20 years. The plan addresses a number of issues raised during the 6½ year planning process that will provide clarity of direction for the future. Some minor changes will be made to improve access to developed areas on the mainland and a few of the inner islands, and add new visitor opportunities such as new trails or access to historic sites in non-wilderness areas. The park will continue to look and feel much the way it does today. All items with significant financial implications are subject to future budgets and there will be additional opportunities for public engagement on site-specific designs to implement the plan.

Management Direction Remains Unchanged – Preservation of natural and cultural resources remains a top priority. The current mix of recreational activities will stay the same. There will be no change in the number of public docks, although some will be relocated (probably Sand - East Bay), improved (Michigan, South Twin, Basswood, others in the future), or expanded. The Raspberry Light Station will continue to be the focal point for cultural resource interpretation and its cultural landscape will be rehabilitated consistent with plans developed but never implemented prior to the light station restoration. Wilderness management will remain consistent with current direction, with no net change in campsite numbers or trail miles, although there could be relocations. The NPS will continue to have visitor centers in Bayfield, Little Sand Bay, Stockton Island, and the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center. The park will continue to be a leader in sustainable practices.

Lighthouses – One or two additional light stations (choosing from the Sand, Outer, and Michigan lights) will be rehabilitated and the rest will continue to be preserved at current levels. NPS will continue to provide professional staff interpretation at Raspberry and add staff at one or more of the additional rehabilitated light stations. Major rehab work is anticipated at Michigan Island light over the next several years.

Life Estates and Former Use & Occupancy Properties – These structures are currently owned by the NPS, though current residents enjoy exclusive rights to their use under special one-time, non-renewable legal arrangements. If a life estate on Sand Island or Rocky Island naturally expires within the life of this plan, the properties will be made available for public use and access as follows:

- **Rocky Island** – Historically-significant structures associated with fish camps in the Rocky Island Historic District will be preserved and interpreted via waysides or brochures. One or more of the existing non-public docks may be rehabilitated and opened for day use.
- **West Bay Club (Sand Island)** – The main structure will be preserved and interpreted via waysides or brochures. A trail joining the West Bay Club with East Bay will be reestablished, if environmentally feasible. The dock will be rehabilitated for day use and overnight use by the public. If economically feasible, the West Bay Club may be rehabilitated for use as an overnight facility, replicating its historic use. If that is not feasible, camping will be permitted near West Bay.
- **Shaw Point (Sand Island)** – Historically-significant structures will be preserved and interpreted using a combination of park staff and waysides/brochures. The historic road between Shaw Point and East Bay will be reestablished as a hiking trail. One or more deep-water docks may be rehabilitated for day and overnight use by the public. If economically feasible, Camp Stella may be adaptively rehabilitated for overnight use by the public, replicating its historic use.
- The **Hansen Farm (Sand Island)**, which came under NPS management in 2006, is being rehabilitated. Historically-significant structures will be preserved and the surrounding agricultural landscape will be partially rehabilitated and interpreted using a combination of park staff and waysides/brochures. A new trail will connect the farm to the existing trail network.

Non-Wilderness Lands on the Islands – The NPS will explore new ways to encourage inexpensive public transportation to some of the inner islands – such as Basswood or Sand. If successful, a small amount of

basic infrastructure (e.g. toilets and a picnic shelter) will be added to accommodate small or large groups who visit these islands. While no new docks will be added, existing docks might be improved, expanded, or relocated to provide better public access. Additional individual and group campsites may be added on Sand, Basswood, and the non-wilderness portion of Oak, provided there was adequate demand and resource conditions on the ground were favorable. Non-wilderness areas on islands outside the inner island range will retain the current numbers of campsites. To reduce the potential for bear conflicts as well as to reduce serious erosion damage, about 2/3 of the Stockton Island campground will be relocated to Presque Isle, south of the dock complex, with 4-6 of the existing sites at the north end remaining. The new campsites will be designed to have the same or better amenities than the sites they are replacing, and would be located no farther from the dock than the existing campsites. Many will be shoreline sites with views as good as the campsites they are replacing.

Wilderness – This document also serves as the park’s Wilderness Management Plan, eliminating the requirement for a separate plan and Environmental Impact Statement. The 80% of the park’s land that is in the Congressionally-designated Gaylord Nelson Wilderness will continue to be managed as it is now. There will be no net change in the number of individual campsites or trail miles, but individual campsites or trails may be relocated if needed to protect resources. The Oak Island group campsite on the sand spit will be relocated to the non-wilderness area near the dock. Like at Stockton Island, the new camping area will be thoughtfully designed to assure a quality camping experience.

Mainland Unit – For the most part, the mainland unit from Little Sand Bay to Meyers Beach will be managed as it has been, with a few minor exceptions. A ramp will be constructed at Meyers Beach to improve handicap accessibility to the beach. A day use area for large groups will be added at Little Sand Bay to provide a place for educational activities. In addition, a small loop trail will be created in the Little Sand Bay area.

NPS Visitor Centers – While the current funding situation makes this a goal for the later years of the GMP, a new sustainable-design park visitor center will be built on, or near, the Bayfield waterfront, possibly in partnership with the City of Bayfield or the Bayfield Chamber of Commerce. Land acquisition or a lease would depend upon suitable property being available from a willing owner. (Park headquarters will remain in the old Bayfield County courthouse.) A centrally-located and accessible facility will provide opportunities for increased contact with visitors to the area, encouraging more people to experience the Apostle Islands. More people will learn about the natural and cultural heritage of the park and its gateway communities, even if they don’t get out to the islands. Architecture of a new facility in Bayfield could complement the historic waterfront industrial use of the area. The Little Sand Bay Visitor Center, currently in poor condition and not cost-effective to renovate, will be replaced with a more sustainable structure that honors the site’s rich history. The restored fishing boat “Twilite” would be a featured exhibit. The NPS will engage the gateway communities in the design and use of these new facilities. NPS will continue to be a partner at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center.

NPS Operational Facilities – Apostle Islands National Lakeshore is one of the few national parks which leases its primary administrative and operational facilities. Under the preferred alternative, the park headquarters will remain in the old Bayfield County courthouse (leased from the City of Bayfield). Space on the main floor currently occupied by the visitor center will be renovated for administrative use if/when that function moves elsewhere. At the expiration of current lease, the park’s operational center at Roys Point (including maintenance shops, dock space and fueling facilities for NPS boats, storage space, and some offices) will move to a facility with lower operational costs and higher sustainability. The GMP calls for a consolidated location with the new waterfront visitor center, but current financial realities means the park is working towards another lease for 10-20 years with hope for the consolidated facility in the later years of the GMP. The small number of ranger offices at Little Sand Bay will be moved either to park headquarters or to the new visitor center/operational center. A new (small) ranger station will be constructed at Meyers Beach to provide visitor services (i.e. orientation, interpretation, permits, search and rescue, law enforcement) at this increasingly popular part of the park in both summer and winter high seasons.