# Sister Sites Arrangement

between

Quetico Provincial Park,
LaVerendrye Provincial Park,
Grand Portage National Monument,
Superior National Forest
&
Voyageurs National Park

Ontario Parks
Ministry of Natural Resources
Government of Ontario
Canada

United States Forest Service
Department of Agriculture
United States of America

National Park Service
Department of the Interior
United States of America

**BACKGROUND:**

The Ontario Parks Branch's Quetico and LaVerendrye Provincial Parks; the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) Superior National Forest; and the U.S. National Park Service's (NPS) Grand Portage National Monument and Voyageurs National Park have benefitted from cooperation concerning the management of parks and forests and other protected natural and cultural heritage sites for the purpose of conservation, preservation, recreation, and public education. The National Park, National Monument, National Forest, and Provincial Parks concerned here wish to establish a "Sister Sites" arrangement to further mutually beneficial cooperation of the 5.5 million acres (2.2 million hectares) managed by these agencies.

This Sister Sites arrangement builds upon the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation of Wilderness Conservation between representatives of Canada, United Mexican States, and the United States of America signed on November 7, 2009 in Mérida, Mexico, which states, "This Memorandum has as its objective the creation of a voluntary framework for cooperation and coordination among the Participants concerning the commemoration, conservation and preservation of wilderness areas." The two million acres (809,000 hectares) of designated wilderness between Quetico Provincial Park and Superior National forest are an existing example of this kind of cooperation.

Evidence of past collaboration between these five specific areas is recognized in the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842, which states "…that all the water-communications, and all the usual portages along the line from Lake Superior to the Lake of the Woods; and also Grand Portage, from the shore of Lake Superior to the Pigeon river, as now actually used, shall be free and open to the use of the citizens and subjects of both countries." Further examples of collaboration

include establishment of the International Joint Commission in 1909 between Canada and the United States "…to manage these [boundary] waters wisely and to protect them for the benefit of today's citizens and future generations," or more recently the Border Agreement for Fire Management and Suppression that benefits citizens and resources in both countries.

This Sister Sites arrangement is further reinforced by President Obama's *America's Great Outdoors Initiative* as outlined in the February 2011 *America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations* report. "The America's Great Outdoors agenda builds on the stewardship legacy championed by President Theodore Roosevelt more than 100 years ago." – a legacy which is associated with the establishment of Superior National Forest and subsequently Quetico Provincial Park in 1909. America's Great Outdoors Initiative will facilitate the conservation of "the extraordinary and diverse lands and waters that sustain, restore, nourish, and support us," and "the government empowering and partnering with people and communities to protect and restore the places they cherish."

## PARTICIPANTS: QUETICO AND LAVERENDRYE PROVINCIAL PARKS, SUPERIOR NATIONAL FOREST, GRAND PORTAGE NATIONAL MONUMENT, & VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK

The five protected areas manage lands and waters along ~300 miles (483km) of the Minnesota-Ontario border, from Rainy Lake on the west to Lake Superior on the east. This 5.5 million acres (2.2 million hectares) shares common prehistory, history, biotic and physical resources. Today many recognize the geographic wholeness of the region by such terms as "canoe country," "border waters," and "Heart of the Continent." It is an area that is highly sought after as a premier recreational resource linking one protected area with another.

The five protected areas share a great deal despite being segmented by an international border and different agency jurisdictions. All are dominated by water and forest rich in a shared cultural history. The parks, monument, and forest are all located at the headwaters of three major watersheds (to Hudson Bay, Atlantic Ocean, and to the Gulf of Mexico).

These transboundary public lands and waters share the common ideals of stewardship and preservation of the resources. The "Sister Sites" wish to increase their already substantial efforts to:

- provide visitor opportunities to experience these public lands and waters;
- provide holistic interpretation of the significance of and links between the sites;
- support sustainable social and economic development in gateway communities;
- preserve public lands and waters and their flora and fauna;
- maintain the wilderness character in managed wilderness areas;
- protect and promote cultural heritage and education;
- implement research, inventory, and monitoring programs necessary to achieve success in preservation, restoration, ecological integrity and resilience;
- encourage scholarship and programs which protect heritage resources;
- develop, enhance, and share volunteer programs to encourage involvement with all participants; and
- share and/or exchange staff and/or resources among the participants

## PURPOSE:

The purpose of the "Sister Site" arrangement is to promote national and international cooperation and support for the mutual benefit of all these special places, and to enrich the experience and training of the Site personnel. The relationship allows the Sister Sites to benefit by sharing experiences and approaches to collaboration, including local efforts to work with gateway communities, regional and local economies, friends groups and partner organizations. This may be accomplished primarily through the exchange of managerial, technical and professional knowledge, information, data, technology, training, and experience.

While all these Sister Site agencies have cooperated collegially for decades, this arrangement acknowledges the value of prior, current, and future cooperation.

## COOPERATION:

The "Sister Sites" will be guided by the three country *Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation of Wilderness Conservation,* which states that "the forms of cooperative activities…may include but are not limited to exchanges of technical and professional information; participation in joint seminars, conferences, training courses, and workshops in areas of professional and technical interest; joint planning and research teams; and exchanges of specialists. The type of activities carried out under this voluntary cooperative framework is subject to the availability of funds and personnel of each Participant and subject to the laws and regulations of their respective countries."

The Sister Sites will annually prepare a plan for collaborative actions to consistently advance this arrangement.

**UNDERSTANDINGS:**

Cooperation under this relationship should initially be 5 years. The term may be extended or modified in writing, or cooperation may be discontinued at any time by any Participant; written notification of discontinuation of that Participant's involvement should be provided.

Each "sister" agency is to fund its own participation in this relationship. It is generally understood that when one Participant collaborates with another, the sending Participant is responsible for the cost of travel and living expenses. Each exchange is to be negotiated individually and is dependent upon available resources.

Signed at Atikokan, Ont, on this 20 day of September 2011.

On behalf of
LaVerendrye Provincial Park

Lynda Horman

PARK SUPERINTENDENT

On behalf of
Quetico Provincial Park

PARK SUPERINTENDENT

On behalf of
Superior National Forest

FOREST SUPERVISOR

On behalf of
Grand Portage National Monument

Timothy Cochrane

PARK SUPERINTENDENT

On behalf of
Voyageurs National Park

PARK SUPERINTENDENT