National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Federal Lands Transportation Program Fact Sheet

# Water-Based Transportation Systems

Access to and within the National Park System has been a defining experience for generations of visitors.

The National Park Service (NPS) coordinates the planning and implementation of transportation systems that improve the visitor experience and care for national parks by:

- Preserving natural and cultural resources.
- Enhancing visitor safety and security.
- Protecting plant and animal species.
- Reducing congestion.
- Decreasing pollution.

NPS is committed to being a leader in pursuing strategies that can help make park units more enjoyable, cleaner, quieter, and more sustainable for present and future generations.

For more information, visit nps.gov/transportation

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**March 2015**
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*Water-based transportation systems are integral to the experience of many National Park visitors. In fact, in 2012 and 2013 four out of ten of the highest use alternative transportation systems in the National Park service were water-based systems. In 2012 there were nearly 13 million passenger boardings on these systems.*

## The need for water-based transportation

Many National Park units are located on islands which are primarily accessed by ferry. These ferries provide a vital transportation link for staff and visitors to get to the parks, and allow for food and other essential cargo transportation. In fact, some water-based systems provide the only visitor access to parks or sites.

In 2013, there were 40 water-based systems. Some of the ferries are owned and operated by the National Park Service, others are operated by approved concessionaires. In addition to the ferries themselves, the water-based systems include piers, marinas, constructed waterways and other waterfront systems. These systems accounted for 30.5% of all National Park transit systems.

The most used transit system in the National Park Service is the ferry system at Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, which provides the only visitor access to the islands.

Water-based transportation also provides visitors the opportunity to enjoy the scenic beauty of parks from outside their personal vehicles. Additionally, park staff can provide beneficial interpretive tours and other educational services during water transportation rides.

Visitors aboard the concessionaire operated Fort Sumter tour boat (NPS photo)

## Channel Islands National Park in California

Channel Islands National Park encompasses five remarkable islands and their ocean environment, preserving and protecting a wealth of natural and cultural resources. Isolation over thousands of years has created unique animals, plants, and archaeological resources found nowhere else on Earth and helped preserve a place where visitors can experience coastal southern California as it once was. Public boat transportation is available year-round, provided by the park concessionaire. In 2011 the primary access to Santa Rosa Island, a 700' Pier, was replaced because it was failing. Without a pier, the only access to Santa Rosa Island is by fixed-wing aircraft and beach landing.

Santa Rosa Island and Pier (NPS photo)

The Ranger III (NPS photo)

## Isle Royale National Park in Michigan

A rugged, isolated island where wolves and moose abound far from the sights and sounds of civilization, Isle Royale offers unparalleled solitude and adventures for backpackers, hikers, boaters, kayakers, canoeists and scuba divers. Isle Royale National Park is located in the northwest corner of Lake Superior. This Wilderness Island contains a road-less backcountry. There are four ferries and one seaplane that provide service to and from Isle Royale National Park. One ferry, the Motor Vessel Ranger III is the largest piece of moving equipment owned and operated by the National Park Service and the largest passenger ferry providing service to Isle Royale National Park. The Ranger III is 165 feet long, 34 feet wide, 648 ton vessel that carries 128 passengers. Transportation services depart from Houghton, Michigan, Copper Harbor, Michigan and Grand Portage, Minnesota.

## Statue of Liberty National Monument in New York

"The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World" was a gift of friendship from the people of France to the United States and is recognized as a universal symbol of freedom and democracy. The park is comprised of two separate islands, Liberty Island and Ellis Island. The Statue of Liberty is on Liberty Island. Ellis Island, the former federal immigration station, is currently a national museum of immigration. Visitors arrive and depart Liberty Island and Ellis Island via ferries operated by a park concessionaire. These ferries had nearly 8 million boardings in 2012, and leave from two locations: Battery Park, at the southernmost tip of Manhattan, and Liberty State Park in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Riding the ferry offers visitors a memorable view of the Statue of Liberty. (NPS photo by Kathleen Sullivan)