

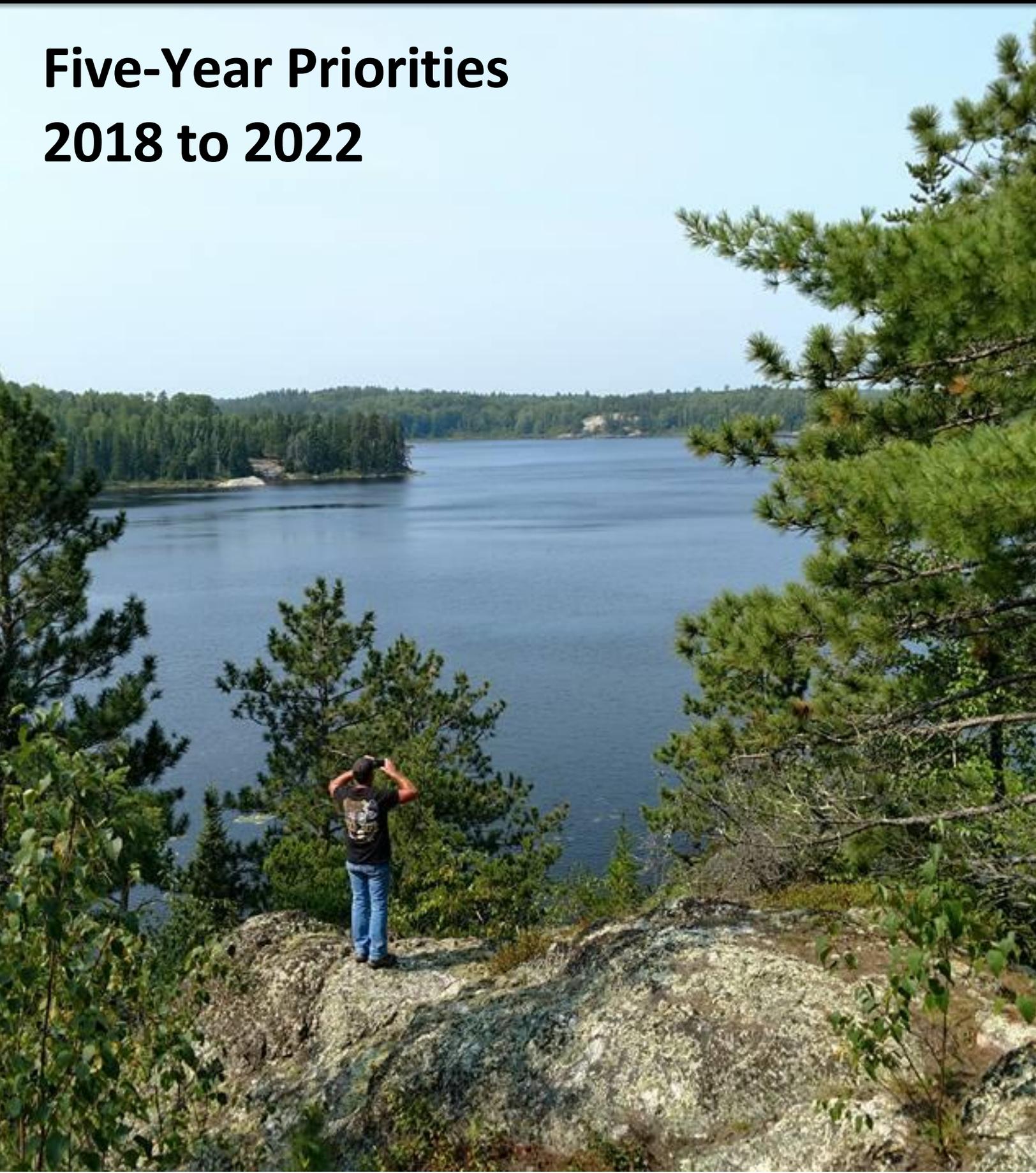
# Voyageurs

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of Interior

Voyageurs National Park  
Minnesota



## Five-Year Priorities 2018 to 2022





## Voyageurs National Park Five-Year Priorities – 2018 to 2022

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[www.voyageurs.org](http://www.voyageurs.org)

Voyageurs National Park Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting, promoting and enhancing Voyageurs National Park. VNPA provided assistance, through funding, community outreach, and direct participation, to aid the National Park Service with developing this strategic plan. The NPS looks forward to partnering with VNPA on several of the initiatives outlined in this document.



## **Message from the Superintendent**

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your interest in Voyageurs National Park (VNP), a landscape with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values along Minnesota's northern border with Canada. This document summarizes for the general public the National Park Service's (NPS) key programmatic priorities for VNP over the coming five-year period. Built on the park's mission statement, foundation documents, planning efforts, and past accomplishments, the priorities reflect public, partner, and staff input gathered through a variety of methods in May 2017, including three public listening sessions. This process was funded and coordinated in partnership with the Voyageurs National Park Association (VNPA). All told, nearly 300 people shared their hopes and visions for the future of VNP. Community input made it clear just how much our neighbors and visitors love Voyageurs' wild character, woods, waters, night sky, and camping experiences. We have listened carefully and are committed to working together to protect these core experiences. Ongoing community engagement is vital to the future of the park and we recognize the importance of working with our gateway communities, visitors, and other constituents.

While this plan does not include *all* that we do annually to plan, administer and maintain current infrastructure, and the organizational integrity of the park, the priorities outlined in this document show there is much the park hopes to accomplish over the course of five years. Given the pragmatic realities of limited budgets, staffing, and increasing staff workloads, more than ever, VNP relies on partnerships with our local gateway communities, Ojibwe and First Nation communities, local businesses, and non-profit partners such as VNPA, to achieve our shared goals for the Voyageurs region. For example, to expand recreational opportunities and maintain infrastructure important for visitors to connect with and enjoy the park, partnerships will be vital. Increasing our outreach to youth, a high priority for the park, will require new ways to partner with schools, volunteers, and others.

While VNP is well known and well loved by our local communities and by visitors from afar for its wilderness values, its vast lakes, and its world-class fishing – new audiences are realizing that the uniqueness of the park has something to offer them. As use grows, stewardship responsibilities grow as well. The NPS is committed to preserving and protecting this special place so this and future generations can enjoy the beauty and culture of northern Minnesota. This is an exciting and challenging time for Voyageurs National Park. We look forward to hearing more from you in the future and hope you have an opportunity to enjoy *your* park soon.

Sincerely,



Bob DeGross  
Voyageurs National Park Superintendent



### **National Park Service Mission**

"...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

*National Park Service Organic Act, 1916*

### **Voyageurs National Park Purpose Statement**

"The purpose of Voyageurs National Park is to preserve, for the inspiration and enjoyment of present and future generations, the outstanding scenery and geology, biological diversity, and cultural resources, within its vast interconnected waterways that shaped the historic fur trade in North America and constituted a part of the historic route of the voyageurs."

*Foundation Document, Voyageurs National Park 2016*

### **Voyageurs National Park Vision**

"The park and its diverse resources provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, scientific study, sport fishing, education, and appreciation of the North Woods lake country setting."

*Voyageurs National Park Business Plan 2007*

## **Voyageurs National Park Goals: Overview**

### ***Goal 1: Resource Protection***

**Protect the natural, scenic, cultural, historic, and wilderness resources of Voyageurs National Park and foster public stewardship of park resources.**

*Objective 1-1: Preserve and manage natural resources*

*Objective 1-2: Preserve and manage cultural resources*

*Objective 1-3: Inventory and monitor natural and cultural resources*

*Objective 1-4: Conduct applied research*

*Objective 1-5: Model green practices*

### ***Goal 2: Signature Park Experiences***

**Provide a range of visitor experiences and recreational opportunities to a diversity of audiences that connect people to the park and convey the importance of protecting the resources, values, and wilderness character of Voyageurs National Park.**

*Objective 2-1: Improve and maintain safety of visitors and employees*

*Objective 2-2: Provide interpretation and education opportunities and assess possibility for new potential*

*Objective 2-3: Maintain and assess current infrastructure and visitor facilities*

*Objective 2-4: Assess possibility and need for new infrastructure and visitor facilities*

***Goal 3: Public Engagement and Outreach***

**Strengthen public support and long-term stewardship through education, outreach, and partnerships that increase the public's understanding and appreciation of Voyageurs National Park and the National Park Service.**

Objective 3-1: Expand awareness and appreciation of Voyageurs National Park to new audiences, especially youth, to encourage understanding and appreciation of park protection for years to come

Objective 3-2: Strengthen enduring connections and collaboration with the park's neighboring communities and partners

***Goal 4: Maintain Leadership and Organizational Integrity***

**Foster strong leadership to support the mission, goals, and objectives of Voyageurs National Park and the National Park Service.**

Objective 4-1: Provide excellence in financial stewardship

Objective 4-2: Provide excellence in personnel management

Objective 4-3: Strengthen internal and external communication

## **Voyageurs National Park Description**

Voyageurs National Park is a place of scenic landscapes and interconnected waterways, and is rich in human history. Named for the French-Canadian canoe-men who traveled these waters in birch bark canoes from the Great Lakes to the interior of the western United States and Canada, the park preserves one of the most important segments of the economically and culturally transformative North American fur trade route. This historic route contributed significantly to the opening of the northwestern United States during the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Well before the voyageurs, the first people to travel to this region came thousands of years ago, after the last of the glaciers had melted away and left this low landscape of expansive lakes and wetlands. The earliest people came from the Paleoindian and Archaic traditions, while the more extensively studied Woodlands, Native American, and Euroamerican eras of park history occurred from approximately 2,150 years ago to the present. Nearly every major prehistoric and historic theme associated with human interaction and development of the northwestern United States is represented within park boundaries. This includes early hunters and gatherers, homesteaders, and immigrants who came to log, fish, hunt, trap, and mine. Hundreds of archeological sites remain as a record of the area's earliest human inhabitants. In more recent years, this landscape was also home to people who sought to make their living off the land through logging, mining, commercial fishing, and recreation.

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*Voyageurs National Park is rich in wildlife with three federally listed endangered species [Canada lynx, Northern Long-Eared Bat, Gray Wolf], 241 native bird species, 55 native fish species, 42 mammal species, 20 reptile and amphibian species, and 765 vascular plants species. Perhaps nothing symbolizes the Park's enduring primitive character as much as the presence of wolves. Voyageurs National Park is in the heart of the only region in the contiguous United States where the eastern timber wolf population remained healthy while it was eliminated elsewhere.*

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Located in sparsely populated northern Minnesota and sharing 55 miles of international border with Canada, the 218,000-acre park is part of a larger ecosystem that includes the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Quetico Provincial Park, although these areas are not located within the boundaries of Voyageurs National Park. Water levels in the park's four largest lakes are controlled by dams within and outside of the park's boundary and have been artificially controlled since the early 1900s for power generation, flood control, and other legally recognized uses. Three of these lakes are international waters. Rainy Lake, for example, is part of the U.S.-Canada border and is managed through international coordination.

The landscape has been shaped and carved by at least four periods of glaciation, revealing some of the oldest exposed rock formations in the world. Resulting topography of the park is rugged and varied; rocky outcrops are interspersed between bogs, beaver ponds, swamps, islands, small lakes, and four large lakes (Rainy, Kabetogama, Namakan, and Sand Point Lakes). Water covers about 38% of the national park. In the years since the last glaciation, a thin layer of soil has been created that supports the boreal forest ecosystem, the "North Woods" of Voyageurs National Park.

With a vast and diverse landscape to manage, developing and maintaining partnerships are a vital component of the park's administration. The park staff works closely with two partners in particular—the Voyageurs National Park Association and the Heart of the Continent Partnership. Created in 1965 to establish a national park in northern Minnesota, the mission of the Voyageurs National Park Association today is to connect people to Voyageurs National Park, enhance the visitor experience, and protect the park for present and future generations. The Heart of the Continent Partnership is a Canadian and American coalition of land managers and stakeholders that work together on cross-border projects to promote the economic, cultural, and natural health of the lakes, forests, and communities along the Ontario–Minnesota border.

Eighteen American Indian tribes are culturally associated with Voyageurs National Park. Historically various Native American groups inhabited the area. These groups were descendants of late prehistoric Algonkian-speaking groups, the Ojibwe, the Cree, and the

Dakotan-speaking Assiniboin. The Ojibwe were the primary occupants of the region during the historic period after about 1736, if not earlier. Four bands of the Bois Forte Ojibwe lived in what is now the park from at least the 1880s until the mid-1920s. The Bois Forte Ojibwe and Canadian Ojibwe First Nations retain strong cultural connections to traditional lands in the park.

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*The smooth and often exposed bedrock of Voyageurs National Park is part of the Canadian Shield, Precambrian bedrock that is some of the oldest on the planet, forming two billion years before the arrival of dinosaurs. What is now Voyageurs National Park was once an area where volcanoes erupted and cooled beneath an ancient ocean that no longer exists. Over time these rocks were folded and uplifted into mountains and then gradually worn down through the millennia. In more recent geologic times, glaciers scoured the landscape, removing weathered rock and leaving behind the polished basement rock visitors can see underfoot and along the shorelines of most lakes.*

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Visitors today come to the park to see and touch rocks half as old as the world, experience the life of a voyageur, immerse themselves in the sights and sounds of a boreal forest, view the dark skies, or ply the interconnected water routes. The national park is a place where visitors may leave roads behind for waterways. These unique values represent an enduring park resource and are further elevated in NPS policies for lands that possess wilderness characteristics. Approximately 58% of Voyageurs National Park contains sufficient wilderness qualities to be considered for wilderness designation and park managers integrate these values into planning, preservation, and management activities. The water, geology, and accompanying scenery, along with rich cultural and natural resources, give the park its national significance and make it worthy of protection for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

*Foundation Document, Voyageurs National Park 2016*



## **Voyageurs National Park Goals: Objectives and Priorities**

### ***Goal 1: Resource Protection***

**Protect the natural, scenic, cultural, historic, and wilderness resources of Voyageurs National Park and foster public stewardship of park resources.**

#### **Objective 1-1: Preserve and manage natural resources**

- Work to eradicate aquatic and terrestrial invasive plants and animals
  - Remove non-native/hybrid cattails and restore wetlands, as per related environmental assessment
  - Enhance muskrat populations to serve as natural control of hybrid cattails
  - Minimize spread of spiny water flea
  - Develop rapid response plan to potential zebra mussel invasion
- Maintain native plant nursery for restoration projects
- Maintain and improve water quality within the designated Outstanding Resource Value Waters that encompass the park
  - Work with gateway communities to assess potential of further implementation of centralized sewer facilities
  - Ensure compliance with established State and county gray water discharge regulations
- Develop Interior Lakes Management Plan to ensure lake ecosystem health, minimize the spread of invasive species, and provide reasonable access
- Work cooperatively with State, County, and Local partners to identify best practices for shoreline management to protect resources and maintain healthy lake ecosystems
- Acquire in-holdings from willing sellers in partnership with VNPA, restore sites to natural conditions to the extent possible, and retain historically significant properties when appropriate
- Manage to protect the wilderness character of the park

#### **Objective 1-2: Preserve and manage cultural resources**

- Preserve and manage cultural resources in the park, including archeological and ethnographic resources, historic structures, cultural landscapes, and historic objects.
  - High priorities for action over the next five years include:
    - Rehabilitate boathouse, Kabetogama Ranger Station Historic District
    - Maintain historic structures at Harry Oveson Fish Camp
    - Rehabilitate Jun Fujita Cabin
    - Rehabilitate I.W. Stevens log cabin
    - Maintain Kaukola Homestead
    - Continue routine maintenance of historic structures and cultural landscape features at Ellsworth Rock Gardens; seek funding for restoration of historic features
    - Determine treatment for collapsed lodge; rehabilitate ice house, sauna/workshop, and Chipfield caretaker cabin at the Ingersoll property

- Collect and share stories from people with personal knowledge of past events relevant to Voyageurs National Park and gateway communities
- Maintain a strong collaborative partnership with affiliated tribes
- Conduct collections condition survey to determine conservation needs of historic objects at the Kettle Falls Hotel and in the museum collection

Objective 1-3: Inventory and monitor natural and cultural resources

- Monitor water quality
- Inventory and monitor cold water fish habitat
- Monitor amphibian and wetland conditions
- Monitor mercury levels in water, dragonfly larvae, and fish
- Monitor effects of water level management in collaboration with the International Joint Commission
- Inventory and monitor zooplankton
- Study toxin production in harmful algal blooms
- Monitor air quality within the Class 1 Air Shed area that encompasses Voyageurs
- Monitor bird and mammal populations
  - Moose, white-tailed deer, gray wolves, black bears, raccoons, American beavers, bats [six species] bald eagles, forest breeding birds, common loons, double crested cormorants
- Assess effects of harvest on wolf populations
- Develop non-invasive methods of carnivore monitoring
- Inventory pollinators
- Conduct annual condition assessments of cultural resources including archeological and ethnographic resources, historic structures and cultural landscapes, and museum and archival collections

Objective 1-4: Conduct applied research

- Model changes in distribution of plants and animals due to climate change
- Study response of moose to extreme temperatures
- Study impact of spiny water flea on fish populations
- Assess impact of recovering bald eagle populations on fish and other prey species
- Assess population size of muskellunge – Shoepack
- Study the effects of lake level management on biological indicators
- Study the effect of wolves on beavers, moose, and deer
- Inventory and analyze pit features at historic Ojibwe sites

Objective 1-5: Model green practices

- Develop and implement a *Green Park Plan* to implement sustainable practices throughout the park
- Explore ways to encourage minimal impact recreational habits using *Leave No Trace* and *Tread Lightly* principles

## ***Goal 2: Signature Park Experiences***

**Provide a range of visitor experiences and recreational opportunities to a diversity of audiences that connect people to the park, and convey the importance of protecting the natural resources, cultural values, and wilderness character of Voyageurs National Park.**

### Objective 2-1: Improve and maintain safety of visitors and employees

- Assess frequently visited areas for potential hazards and mitigate to the greatest extent possible
- Improve emergency response communication system
- Develop a park wide backcountry communication plan
- Develop patrol boat replacement schedule
- Improve technology for navigational aid/hazard buoy placement and retrieval
- Maintain and ensure staff understanding of, winter operations and summer boat operations plans

### Objective 2-2: Provide interpretation and education opportunities and assess possibility for new potential

- Ensure on-going operation of park visitor centers
  - Investigate and explore opportunities to adjust hours/days of operations to meet visitor demand
  - Seek funding/support to fulfill consistent operation
  - Define on-going partnership with Orr visitor facility
- Provide a breadth of personal interpretive program opportunities for park visitors
- Encourage visitor compliance to park regulations through improved messaging
- Continually evaluate and assess the variety, location, and timing of interpretive programs (birding, history, art, natural science, etc.) and increase opportunities by exploring ways to encourage assistance from communities, partners, and cooperators
- Investigate feasibility and seek opportunities to expand tour boat opportunities and extend season
- Collaborate with schools (k-12, college undergraduate, graduate) to continue providing educational opportunities and to identify additional learning possibilities
- Identify ways to ensure education program sustainability through partnerships
- Develop and install interpretive exhibits related to natural and cultural resources within Voyageurs National Park that will enhance visitor understanding and ensure long-term protection
- Develop video introduction to camping and houseboat access that describes reservation/fee process and encourages use of *Leave No Trace* and *Tread Lightly* principles
- Explore ways to provide multi-media learning opportunities
- Update long range publications plan
- Create and update recreational guides and interpretive publications (digital and print) to include: paddle guides, walking trail guides, new Junior Ranger publications, and coloring book

- Work with Jefferson National Park Association to develop more Voyageurs National Park specific products
- Review and update *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*

Objective 2-3: Maintain and assess current infrastructure and visitor facilities

- Maintain and evaluate campsites in both backcountry and front country utilizing a variety of management alternatives including vegetation management, additional docks, vault toilet improvements, and additional hardening when appropriate
- Complete development of visitor destinations as defined in the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*
  - Kettle Falls Historic District
    - Complete development concept plan
    - Seek funding to develop and implement an interpretive plan
    - Develop trail opportunities in area
    - Redesign and replace overlook
    - Repair docks
    - Work with park concessionaire to implement updated *Historic Furnishings Plan*
    - Explore options for additional employee housing and guest units
  - Ellsworth Rock Gardens
    - Develop and implement interpretive plan
    - Provide accessible visitor facilities, move dock system, and increase docking capacity
  - Harry Oveson Fish Camp Visitor Destination
    - Implement site development plan and provide visitor facilities
  - Camp Marston Visitor Destination
    - Implement site development plan and provide visitor facilities
  - Rainy Lake City Visitor Destination
    - Assess implementation priorities and timeline for visitor facilities
    - Submit funding requests in accordance with priorities
  - Ingersoll Estate Visitor Destination
    - Prepare site development plan for visitor facilities
- Kabetogama and Ash River Park Access
  - Rehab boat launches
  - Complete Kabetogama Harbor dock system
  - Upgrade Ash River comfort station
  - Repair and improve Echo Bay comfort station
- Continue to fine tune reservation system to provide high level of customer service
- Maintain summer and winter trail opportunities, and assess needs for improvements or additional opportunities
- Improve signage
  - Improve parking signage
  - Update and replace worn/weathered signs
  - Improve directional signage along trails
- Assess parking needs, and modify as appropriate, at high volume launch sites

- Work with the community to develop a commercial services strategy that provides a range of services for visitors and assures on-going resource protection
- Work with houseboat companies to assess future needs for visitors that can be provided, while assuring on-going resource protection
- Rehabilitate Locator Lake Hiking Trail
- Rehabilitate Mukooda Campground and establish trail in Crane Lake area
- Assess management/use, identify next steps, and work with partner organizations to maintain Kab-Ash Trail
- Upgrade fuel stations
- Install fuel tank monitor at Ash River
- Replace roof of maintenance building at Ash River
- Assess future need for radio towers, considering conversion of radio technology
- Rebuild Ash River administrative bulkhead and dock system
- Assess operational needs (i.e. fleet management, boats and equip.)

Objective 2-4: Assess possibility and need for new infrastructure and visitor facilities

- Develop paddle craft access site at Rainy Lake Visitor Center
- Assess and implement NPS role in drive-to camping at Woodenfrog
- Explore and decide on visitor center option at Crane Lake with input from gateway community and potential partners
- Assess options for drive-to camping for both tents and RVs
- Continue implementing *Lakecountry and Backcountry Site Management Plan* and develop campsites, houseboat sites, and day use sites to the extent allowable while protecting resources
  - Explore best distribution of beach access and use
- Develop plan for expanded biking trail system, working with community partners
- Work closely with each gateway community to assess facility/services needs
- Increase accessible recreational opportunities for people with disabilities, where feasible



### ***Goal 3: Public Engagement and Outreach***

**Strengthen public support and long-term stewardship through education, outreach, and partnerships that increase the public’s understanding and appreciation of Voyageurs National Park, and the National Park Service.**

*Objective 3-1: Expand awareness and appreciation of Voyageurs National Park to new audiences, especially youth, to encourage understanding and appreciation of park protection for years to come*

- Stay connected and reach new audiences through social media and web presence
- Develop new distance learning tools and virtual ranger programs
- Increase public access to science and stewardship stories online
  - Continuously update park website and social media platforms
  - Adding new data and links to share research, monitoring data and collections materials virtually
  - Explore new methods of making collections accessible
- Increase youth work opportunities, working with partners
- Engage youth in park gateway communities and connect with youth communities in the Twin Cities area by continuing to partner with VNPA on the National Park Teen Ambassador program

*Objective 3-2: Strengthen enduring connections and collaboration with the park’s neighboring communities and partners*

- Develop sound messaging to inform public of primary park functions and goals
- Seek new ways to involve communities in citizen stewardship work
- Develop unified “one park” message that helps build a shared park identity across gateway communities
  - Continue to expand roving programs across all gateway communities
  - Encourage cross-communications and interaction with business owners serving visitors (lodges, guide services, equipment retail sales, rental agencies, restaurant owners, homeowner associations, etc.)
- Increase involvement with media partners – International Falls Journal, KCC-TV, and others
- Work with VNPA to host annual “state of the park” event
- Update communications toolkit and contact lists to expand engagement and education
- Work with VNPA and other partners to host events, programs, and experiences that engage leaders and the general public in the ongoing stewardship and celebration of the park
- Partner with “sister agencies” to explore ways to connect with new audiences locally, regionally and nationally
- Work with volunteers and partners to represent the park at major events throughout Minnesota (i.e. state fair, conventions)
- Identify new partner opportunities



#### ***Goal 4: Maintain Leadership and Organizational Integrity***

**Foster strong leadership to support the mission, goals and objectives of Voyageurs National Park and the National Park Service.**

##### *Objective 4-1: Provide excellence in financial stewardship*

- Achieve accountability in meeting federal mandates
- Steward financial resources wisely and efficiently, including building strong partnerships
- Update Budget Cost Projection module to reflect reasonable lease operations
- Explore ways to share resources with other organizations and NPS units
- Grow partnership with Voyageurs National Park Association, identifying shared goals and ways to obtain support

##### *Objective 4-2: Provide excellence in personnel management*

- Improve communication and knowledge between divisions
- Enhance shadowing opportunities between divisions and provide cross-training where needed
- Update Position Management Plan
- Offer Field Training Evaluation Program for law enforcement rangers
- Explore alternative ways of increasing staffing needs, when appropriate (i.e. staffing through other organizations, increasing volunteer opportunities, etc.)
- Evaluate options for providing additional employee/volunteer housing

##### *Objective 4-3: Strengthen internal and external communication*

- Conduct quarterly employee meetings and bi-annual all supervisors meetings
- Develop an annual “*State of the Park*” report format and materials that outline annual accomplishments
- Continue to develop partnership with VNPA to broaden the reach of the NPS at Voyageurs



## National Park Service Core Values

**Shared stewardship:** We share a commitment to resource stewardship with the global preservation community.

**Excellence:** We strive continually to learn and improve so that we may achieve the highest ideals of public service.

**Integrity:** We deal honestly and fairly with the public and one another.

**Tradition:** We are proud of it; we learn from it; we are not bound by it.

**Respect:** We embrace each other's differences so that we may enrich the well-being of everyone.

### Voyageur Staff: Core Values

During the employee portion of the strategic development process team members brainstormed core values important to them in their work with the park. Our next step will be to develop these values into a park core value statement that will tier off of the NPS core values. Values shared by team members included:

- |             |                   |
|-------------|-------------------|
| Integrity   | Care              |
| Flexibility | Vision            |
| Dedication  | Stewardship       |
| Willingness | Respect           |
| Pride       | Positive Attitude |
| Teamwork    | Compassion        |
| Hardworking | Supportive        |
| Motivated   | Open-minded       |
| Tenacious   | Transparent       |
| Humor       | Creativity        |

## **End Note**

The description of Voyageurs National Park's five-year strategic priorities above is only as good as the park's resource capacity to meet the objectives identified. Collaborations and partnerships can greatly increase the park's capacity to meet its objectives over the next five years. While this is an ambitious plan, not every objective suggested during the public listening sessions or through the online survey made it into the priorities. Some were not feasible because they did not fit into established federal mandates that direct park activities and operations, others because they are lower priority and fall outside of a five-year planning horizon. These can be added as Voyageurs National Park makes progress towards its goals. Each year the park will evaluate its progress and change the plan accordingly. Regular annual evaluations are excellent opportunities for public involvement. But you do not have to wait for an annual park review to share your thoughts. We encourage you to contact us at any time with feedback on your park experience, ideas for improvement, and interests in partnering.

