



Community Newsletter, September 2023

Superintendent's Office

Here you will find information from our various teams for the month of September. We are working on making improvements to the monthly check-in and website in the coming year and will be continuing to use the monthly check-in to keep our communities in the loop on all things Voyageurs. For updates go to:

<https://www.nps.gov/voya/learn/management/stateofthepark.htm>

During September the park presented to the NPS' Investment Review Board (IRB) related to future repaving of Ash River and Rainy Roads (this project may be funded in 2025/2026). The superintendent also attended the annual Voyageurs Conservancy onsite board meeting at Crane Lake and the annual Midwest Region (MWR) superintendent's workshop in St. Paul.

There were also a variety of outings with MWR Regional Director for Science, Resources and Stewardship, Rick Clark. This was the first time he had been to the park, and the visit gave him insight to some of the logistical challenges we face at Voyageurs. Site visits in the park included boating to various cabins that have reverted to the park through expiration of Use and Occupancies. Discussions related to the new Crane Lake Visitor Center lease, the park's Frozen Lake Surface Use, and the Rainy Lake Developed Area planning continued in September.

Employee Spotlight

Each month the park will spotlight a different employee. September's spotlight is Laura Bellasalma, Voyageurs new Supervisory Facility Operations Specialist. She comes to Voyageurs from Crater Lake National Park in Oregon.

Laura grew up in New Jersey but spent her summers in California with her grandparents near Santa Monica Mountains National Recreational Area and when she was younger, she spent her summers by Morristown and Thomas Edison National Historical Parks. Laura went to college at Florida Atlantic University for wildlife and forestry. After graduation, she worked in Florida before moving to Arizona. Eventually, she went back to college for her second Bachelor's degree in Science - Park and Recreational Management with a minor in Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University.

In 2006, while in school, Laura got into the Park Ranger Training Program. After completing the program, she became a seasonal park ranger (protection) at Devils Tower, then Lava Beds National Monument, and Mount Rainier. In 2011, she accepted a permanent park ranger (protection) position at Lava Beds National Monument eventually transitioning her career from protection to maintenance. In 2014, she started at Crater Lake National Park as a Facility Management Assistant and moved up to the Budget Analyst and Facility Services Assistant, into the Facility Management Systems Specialist (FMSS), Housing Manager, and Fleet Manager in 2017. Prior to coming to Voyageurs, Laura was in the Facility Manager Leaders Program (FMLP), worked at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore for her developmental activity, then went to Morristown and Thomas Edison National Historical Park for her directed field experience, eventually graduating from the program in April of 2023.

Laura relocated to the area in early May and looks forward to living in Minnesota in all seasons. Her time at Crater Lake has prepared her for wintery conditions. In Laura's spare time she enjoys camping, hiking, gardening, traveling, and exploring with her dog, Junior.



Administration and Business Services Team

Significant changes in administrative processes for recruitment, staffing, and contracting are being implemented to improve efficiencies regionally and nationally within the agency.

Administrative staff completed the many steps required to close out the park's fiscal records for FY23 ending Sept. 30, in addition to prep work for an averted October 1 government shutdown in September. The park's total base operation expenditures came within budget at approximately \$4.6 million. Notable projects included the \$443K construction project to build new camper cabins at Kettle Falls and the \$488K project in process to replace the Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center boat launch.

Natural and Cultural Resources Team

Zebra mussels appeared in the great lakes in the 1980s. Although this invading species is spreading, it can be stopped. For example, it took the mussels about 40 years to reach Rainy Lake and according to the Minnesota DNR, only about

4% of the state's lakes are infested. This year, park staff talked to over 7,500 visitors about the importance of stopping the spread of aquatic invasive species, and along with Kettle Falls Hotel, decontaminated 550 boats.

The Voyageurs Wetland Restoration Project treated 18 acres of invasive cattails around the Rainy Lake Visitor Center and in Bowman and Daley Bays on Kabetogama Lake. This year, there was a bumper crop of manoomin (wild rice) in Reuter Creek, a location we treated in 2021. The crop was so good, that we were able to harvest 53 lbs. of manoomin which we used to seed newly treated areas.

Interpretation, Education, and Recreational Permits Team

Environmental education programs for area school groups took place the last week of September, engaging 398 youth in land and water-based adventures!

Weekly ranger led Thursday Night Sky programs were held at Rainy Lake Visitor Center. Final boat tours of the season, including the ever-popular Friday night Starwatch Cruise on Rainy Lake continued through September, concluding 9/29. All total, over 7000 visitors enjoyed our summer boat tours and ranger led programs. Back this year was our North Canoe Voyage with 328 visitors experiencing what it was like to travel in a 26 ft. replica Voyageurs fur trade era canoe. Ash River and Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center operations closed for the season the end of September.

Reservations made as of Sept 30 for the following seasons:					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Camping Reservations	4308	5762	5997	5099	4748
Camping Visitors	16937	24412	26979	23241	21035
Houseboat Reservations	1554	2013	2085	1645	1574
Houseboat Visitors	9402	12005	12024	9716	8883

In September, Tawnya Schoewe, long-time Chief of Interpretation & Education retired. Thank you, Tawnya, for nearly 25 years of service at Voyageurs!

Visitor and Resource Protection Team

Staff responded to and contained a human caused wildfire near Mica Bay. LE ranger returned from a detail at Dry Tortugas National Park which needed support in their daily operations.

Rangers instructed and assisted Vermilion Community College at their law enforcement academy in Ely, MN. Every year our Rangers help train students in multiple disciplines and specialties that help meet their varying needs.

Rangers assisted campers stranded at a campsite on Rainy during a storm. All were brought to the visitor center and safely made it home. Staff also assisted the Kab first responders with a medical just outside the park. Great teamwork and we appreciate the local first responders in what they do for the community and the park!

Rangers are finishing up their yearly training and physical standards test.

Facilities Team

Work is well underway related to the Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center boat launch replacement project. Concrete has been poured and the contractor will be working on the rip rap around the ramp in October. They will be pulling what they can from shore on the coffer dam so snowmobiles can use the ramp in the early weeks of winter. The plan is to then remove the rest of the coffer dam later in January.

The team completed the Kettle Falls trail project portion that includes improving the Leaning Pines Villa walkways, taking down two hazardous trees with assistance from the fire crew, and replacing the company house leech field.

Contractors will be completed with a cabin restoration project at I.W. Stevens Island soon.

Crews are breaking ground on a new group campsite on Namakan Lake, on the North side of Namakan Island. The new site may be open by mid-summer 2024 once the work is completed.

A painting project continues on the Kabetogama and Rainy Lake visitor centers. Two maintenance structures and a public restroom near the Rainy Lake Visitor Center boat ramp have been completely repainted.

Three vault comfort stations along the Meadwood Road (Voyageurs Forest Overlook, Beaver Pond Overlook Trailhead, and Ash River Visitor Center boat launch) are being replaced with concrete structures. These are in addition to the one being replaced near the Kabetogama Visitor Center boat launch. Work should be completed by early November.

A culvert is being installed along the Moose River Grade to improve winter snowmobile trails.

Work at the park headquarters building in International Falls is ongoing; interior walls have been painted and carpet replaced, drain tile and concrete work was completed in front of the building and has now moved to the north and east sides of the building. Access remains disrupted and visitors are asked to call (218) 283-6600 when needing to enter the building.