



Community Newsletter, January 2024

Superintendent's Office

Here you will find information from our various teams for the month of January. 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>

The superintendent started the new year by hosting a meeting at the park headquarters building regarding Commercial Use Authorizations (CUAs) and attending several meetings across the state, including a town board meeting at Crane Lake, the Voyageurs Clean Waters project meeting in Cook, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources annual round table meeting in the cities. He also presented next steps of the Kettle Falls electric line replacement plan to the regional Infrastructure Review Board (IRB) and attended a Voyageurs Conservancy board meeting near the end of the month.

The superintendent participated in an all-superintendents call to learn about a new Psychological Safety Stand Down being implemented by the NPS Occupational Safety and Health Program, to be held for park staff in February. This initiative intends to take a more proactive approach in creating a culture of not just physical safety in the workplace, but one that supports mental and emotional health as well.

Employee Spotlight

Each month the park will spotlight a different employee. January's spotlight is Kate Loera, Voyageurs' newest administrative assistant.

Kate began her NPS career in January 2024 as an Administrative Support Assistant working with both Voyageurs National Park and Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

She grew up in Minnesota, near the Twin Cities, and enjoyed the typical winter sports, playing hockey from the moment she could walk! After receiving her high school diploma in 2012, she stepped off that stage and straight into a bus that dropped her off at a Marine Corps Recruiting Depot in Parris Island, South Carolina to start her Marine Corps career. Kate spent her time in service as a Supply Administrative Marine, became the first female Color Sergeant for the battalion's Color Guard, and became a Marine Security Guard. She was stationed overseas at U.S. missions in Munich, Germany; Beijing, China; and Abuja, Nigeria.

In 2020 she ended her career in the Marine Corps and started college at Kennesaw State University in Georgia. She completed a degree in International Affairs with a minor in German. Kate wanted to continue to serve her country, but in a different manner, and applied for her current position after graduation, which brought her back to lovely Minnesota! Kate enjoys playing with her two cats, antiquing, hiking, kayaking, lifting, and tolerates running. She is excited to continue exploring the great outdoors in northern Minnesota.



Administration and Business Services Team

New administrative staff have begun assisting with timekeeping and payroll, and continue to familiarize themselves with park programs through a variety of trainings.

Human Resources staff are busy processing rehires and new hires for the upcoming summer season, and our Administrative Officer was onsite to help onboard the newest administrative assistant to the team.

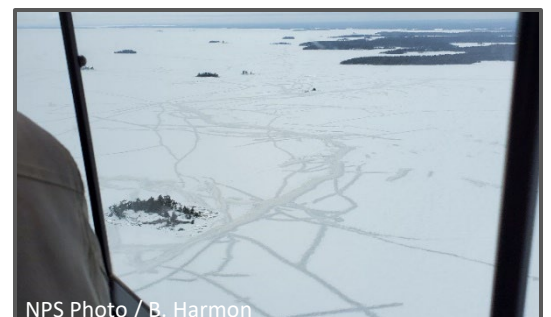
The administrative division is preparing property inventory sheets for each division to complete their annual reviews.

Natural and Cultural Resources Team

The park's Lead of Resource Management conducted an overflight to view ice conditions on January 10 and took this photo showing pressure ridges and very little snow cover on the east end of Rainy Lake.

Aquatics staff are working on a project that supports Environment and Climate Change Canada's development of a lake levels performance indicator for submerged aquatic vegetation.

The park's Aquatic Ecologist will be attending an executive committee meeting for the Minnesota Chapter of the American Fisheries Society and International Joint Commission (IJC) meeting regarding a U.S. Geological Survey project to develop a flood risk visualization tool for the watershed. He is also collaborating with other aquatics staff and agencies on studies about zooplankton vulnerability, Walleye and Lake Whitefish spawning areas in the park, and harmful fall algal blooms in Voyageurs lakes.



NPS Photo / B. Harmon

Cultural Resources staff are busy with a variety of projects, including meetings with the maintenance division and the Historic Preservation Training Center about work to be done on the saloon building at Rainy Lake City, securing a summer field fellow, completing a mandatory annual inventory of museum collections, providing historic landscapes recycling information for the park’s Solid Waste Diversion report, and making updates to the park map.

Interpretation, Education, and Recreational Permits Team

The interpretation division welcomed Barbara and Jim Fedders as winter volunteers and brought back Kendra Kersting, summer 2023 interpretive ranger, as a winter Field Fellow through the Voyageurs Conservancy. They will assist with visitor center operations and help develop and expand dark sky programming.

Park rangers and volunteers started welcoming the public at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center on January 5 and at the Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center on January 6. Traffic started off slow due to no snow and unsafe ice, but picked up as the month went on.

The park hosted its annual Night Light Snowshoe Hike on the Oberholtzer Trail as a part of the local Ice Box Days event. This included a new telescope viewing session on the Rainy Lake Visitor Center dock, in which visitors could view the Orion Nebula, a mountain range on the moon, and other celestial wonders. Despite less snow than normal, over 40 people enjoyed the tranquility of the Northwoods under clear, star-studded skies!

The Voyageurs Conservancy’s Education Specialist has been coordinating with park staff and other organizations to plan for a range of activities and programs for the upcoming Boreal Stargazing Week. This second annual night sky celebration is a region-wide event offering in-person and virtual night sky programming at Voyageurs National Park and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, as well as locations in Duluth and the Twin Cities.

Additionally, the Conservancy has been working with project managers and park leadership to secure more Field Fellow positions for this coming summer, while also writing grant proposals to support a variety of park programs and helping facilitate the first of several Tribal Community Engagement listening sessions.

Reservations made as of Jan 30 for the following seasons:						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Camping Reservations	833	1110	1897	2020	1866	1969
Camping Visitors	4358	6300	10835	11443	10583	10994
Houseboat Reservations	permits opened late	72	107	173	124	109
Houseboat Visitors	permits opened late	488	665	1055	802	621

Visitor and Resource Protection Team

Park visitation was low at the start of the new year due to no snow and unsafe ice, so law enforcement staff used a portion of this time to complete a variety of trainings. By the end of the month, snowmobile traffic had increased.

Planning is underway for staff to co-host a cross country ski event with the Local Polar Polers Ski Club on February 10 during the Boreal Star Gazing Week. The team is also planning for Law Enforcement regional training refreshers to take place at park headquarters later this spring and facilitating numerous CPR training sessions for park employees.

Law Enforcement staff worked with maintenance to assist in ice checking, trail staking, and the outfitting of two patrol vehicles. They are also collaborating with the Minnesota Climbing Association regarding a proposal to place permanent bolts on certain rock-climbing routes in the park and hosted both online and in-person Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) update meetings.

The vacancy for a new Commercial Services Specialist position to assist with related duties closed in early January, with that position hopefully being filled no later than April.

Facilities Team

Mechanics and maintenance staff continue to service and repair snowmobiles, drags, pull-behind sleds, and the rabbit groomer. Staff are also installing ice bars on maintenance building roofs at Ash River to minimize ice hazards.

Crews are working on the Kabetogama boat ramp retaining wall and have begun placing new dock cribs. Due to less ice-checking during the warm spell, crews were able to get a head start on the construction of some new floater docks as well.

A new sprinkler suppression system was installed at government housing and two circulating pumps were replaced at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center to repair the heating system. The Rainy Lake Visitor Center also received an internet upgrade with the recent installation of a Starlink satellite dish.

Maintenance crews packed the first loop of the Echo Bay Ski Trail and will track it if and when there is sufficient snow cover to do so.

Staff were busy getting park snowmobile trails established throughout the month, but unseasonably warm temperatures brought pressure ridges and snow loss. Conditions remain rough along portages and snow cover has continued to diminish. Extreme caution should be used by anyone who ventures onto the ice.

PLEASE NOTE: All snowmobile trails are now temporarily closed following recent rain and warm weather. Trails will reopen if and when the weather allows. View the most recent [Winter Trails Report](#) on our website.



NPS Photo / C. Nevalainen
Maintenance worker Jason Christenson inspects a pressure ridge on Kabetogama Lake that resulted in over one foot of standing water on top of the frozen lake surface along the green snowmobile trail.