

Voyageurs National Park Association Newsletter

October 2017



VOYAGEURS
NATIONAL PARK
ASSOCIATION

Tom Gable

The Wilderness of Voyageurs and What it Means to Me

By Tom Gable

“When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron
feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.”

- Wendell Berry, *The Peace of Wild Things*

Many come to Voyageurs to boat, camp, fish, or snowmobile while experiencing the beauty of the outdoors. Yet, Voyageurs is a vast area with large tracts of wild, undisturbed forests in which people rarely step foot. It is these wild places that give Voyageurs an intrinsic value outside of the recreational activities that most come to the park for. However, I think

this intrinsic value of the park is rarely articulated, expressed, or appreciated.

I have spent the past four years studying wolves in Voyageurs National Park as both a graduate student and then an employee of the park. Much of my work entailed following wolves. Wolves cover large distances each day. As a result, to follow and understand them, I had to do the same. Thus, I have been fortunate to have an excuse to visit and experience parts of the park that few have ever seen or stepped foot in since the formation of the park in 1975. I have been fortunate to experience the park’s true wilderness.

But what is wilderness? Today there are increasingly more natural places, parks, and green spaces. While these areas are undoubtedly valuable, they are not wilderness. Many (such as Edward Abbey, Henry David Thoreau, and Sigurd Olson) over the past 200 years have discussed what wilderness really means and how to preserve it. To me, wilderness is much more a feeling than a definition as wilderness is not simply a piece of land that meets measurable criteria – though there is importance in defining wilderness so that it

Voyageurs National Park Association’s mission is to connect people to Voyageurs National Park, enhance the visitor experience, and protect the park for present and future generations. Learn more about the park’s nonprofit partner at Voyageurs.org.

Continued from cover

can be preserved. Indeed, I cannot strictly define, and often struggle to articulate, what I think wilderness is, but when in wilderness I know it. Although, the ‘feeling’ of wilderness always seems to come from the combination of solitude, silence, and the perception of physical isolation in the natural world. If one perceives that they are in a remote place, then it is wilderness. There are a multitude of scenic places in noisy areas that have exquisite physical beauty. However, because there is no solitude and silence, the experience is nothing more than what it is: a beautiful place in a noisy world.

The interior of Voyageurs National Park is a seemingly impenetrable forest with hundreds of beaver ponds, bogs and lakes. Traveling through these woods is challenging and, after a certain amount of time, a person feels swallowed by the forest. Covering even short distances can be arduous and take considerable time. However, therein is the beauty. Within minutes a person feels like they are in the middle of nowhere, lost in miles upon miles of wild forest. In a short while a person perceives wilderness and gains the esthetic and emotional benefits of being in a wild place. That is what Voyageurs is to me – a place of wilderness, a place to get lost, a place of quiet, peace, and solitude. In the truest sense, my soul feels rested and quiet when wandering through the woods of the park.

Often when traveling through the forest of Voyageurs, I am reminded of the prescient quote by Sigurd Olson:

“Here again was the silence, and I thought how rare it is to know it, how increasingly difficult to ever achieve real quiet and the peace that comes with it, how true the statement ‘Tranquility is beyond price’.”

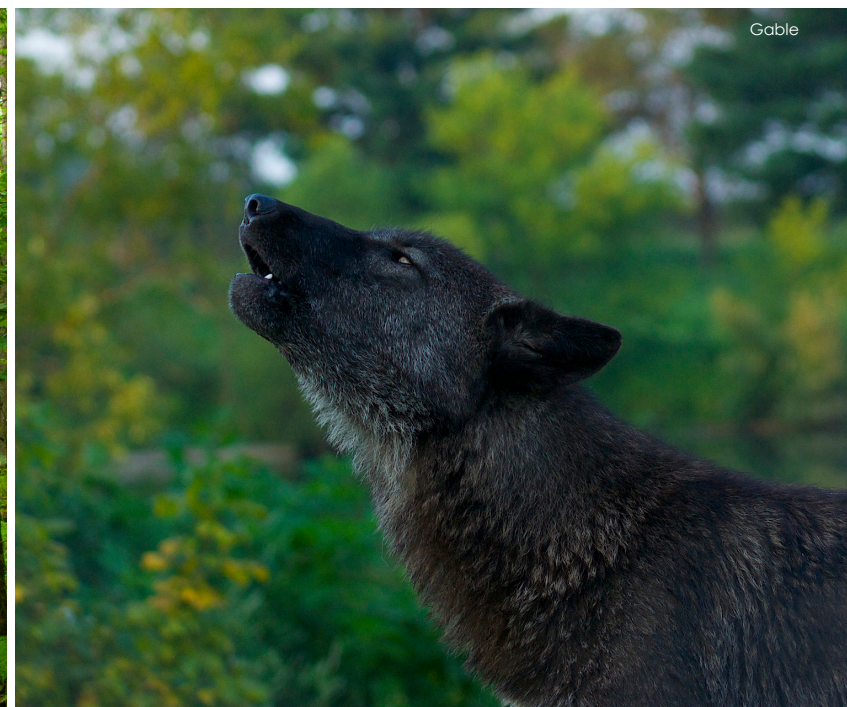
Here again was the silence and I thought how rare it is to know it.

In the busyness of the world with all its distractions, problems, and sadness, Voyageurs National Park is a refuge from it all. For a period of time, I can step out of the human world and

slip into the natural world. Each day creatures live and die, and yet there is an eternal quality to everything in Voyageurs. Over time, I start to feel and experience the fragility and resiliency of life, the changing of seasons, the rhythms of nature. During the spring and summer, the park’s treetops are invaded by thousands of singing warblers, vireos, flycatchers, and thrushes. With the coming of winter, these birds head south and different birds return from the far north of Canada. Flocks of delicately adorned white snow buntings heading south flit along the shorelines during ice-in. During the dead of winter, the soft whistle of the pine grosbeaks in the spruce trees– one of the most beautiful sounds of winter –dances across the frozen land.

The vast expanse of wild forest in Voyageurs supports many of the park’s elusive year-round residents such as the wolf, the moose, the bear, and the lynx. What they do, where they go, and how they live are a mystery. I often hope to catch a glimpse of these animals when I am in the woods, but I rarely ever do. Yet to know that they are out there is enough. What pleases me most is the possibility of seeing them. Without these animals, Voyageurs would lose much of that indescribable feeling of wilderness.

I recently moved to the Twin Cities to continue my graduate education. There is hardly a greater dichotomy between wilderness and civilization than going from spending every day in Voyageurs to spending every day in St. Paul. Instead of mile upon mile of untouched forest, it is mile upon mile of roads, buildings, and an endless stream of vehicles. Yet this only highlights the intrinsic value and importance of Voyageurs. The value is in knowing that, not far away, there is a vast wilderness, a place to escape the noisy and rushed world. The value is in the woods, the water, and the animals that live in the park. The value is in the possibility to perceive and experience wilderness, to sense true quiet and solitude, and to experience the seemingly eternal quality of the natural world as the busyness of life fades away. Voyageurs is a place where I feel a boundless freedom and a peace that comes with it.





Abdiel Nieves



Patty Martin

Christina Hausman Executive Director Voyageurs National Park Association



Voyageurs National Park gives us so much – from family campfires and shore lunches, to peaceful hikes and moments of solitude. There are few places in the world so rich in history and beauty, and opportunities to reconnect with yourself, your family, and your friends.

All of our National Parks are facing many challenges right now, from funding, to staffing shortages, to environmental concerns. Voyageurs is no different. But with your help, Voyageurs National Park Association is able to leverage the collective voice, hard work, and financial support of people who love the park.

We are entering the season of giving - an exciting time to give back to your park. VNPA continues to be a community funded organization with over 70% of our operating budget coming from park supporters like you. Gifts by our members are critical to the success of our organization as we support our park in new and innovative ways.

We will use your gifts wisely to help conserve land, protect our pristine waters, recruit volunteers for trails and projects, grow community and youth engagement programs, and ensure Voyageurs is just as beautiful for years to come. And in 2018, VNPA will begin raising funds to support ongoing restoration and visitor education projects at Kettle Falls and the Ellsworth Rock Gardens. We will also work in partnership with REI to build a new launching area for paddlers at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center.

Thank you for your partnership in these efforts!

Superintendent Bob DeGross Voyageurs National Park



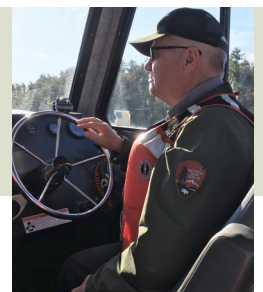
Fall is truly a spectacular time of year in the north woods. The air is cool, the leaves are changing, and on clear days the skies are spectacular. It's a great time to get out and explore the park by hiking trails, paddling the waters, or boating to your favorite fishing spot. So get out there and enjoy your park – in all seasons!

As we transition out of the busy summer season, we continue to work with all park staff and VNPA to finalize the park's five-year priorities. Thank you to everyone who provided input online or at community listening sessions this spring. We look forward to sharing our progress soon. The overall effort highlights the great partnership we have with VNPA. We are grateful to VNPA's supporters who make this possible.

Thank you to all the volunteers that assisted with this year's Volunteer Rendezvous. The main objective was to gather native seed that will be propagated in the park's greenhouse and eventually used to re-vegetate sites. This cattail removal project actually launched in 2016 as part of a multi-year wetland restoration effort. If you are out on the Oberholtzer Trail, you will see the progress the removal team has made.

Lastly, I want to share with everyone that Facilities Manager Bill Carlson will be retiring from the Park Service this year. He started out as an electrician in 1988, and worked his way to become the chief of facilities for the park in 2009. After Superintendent Mike Ward left for his new position in St. Louis, Bill acted in his place. Personally, I greatly appreciate the guidance that Bill provided me as I transitioned into the superintendent position. His wealth of knowledge has aided me greatly as I continue to acclimate to my new role. Thank you again Bill, and enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

Park and VNPA staff would like to thank Bill Carlson for his 29 years of service at Voyageurs, especially his efforts toward improving facility sustainability. Bill's sense of humor, humbleness, support of his team, and commitment to the park leave a legacy. We congratulate Bill on his many achievements and wish him and Dana the very best in retirement.



Park & VNPA Connect with Community to Build 5-Year Priorities

“I would like to see more history of the park preserved and maintenance of what already exists.”

“Voyageurs provides the best campsites bar none!”

“I feel like it isn’t very accessible to people who have never been there or to underserved communities.”

“It would be a major accomplishment to maintain its present quality despite budget cutbacks and environmental pressures.”

“I would like to see the park continue to maintain and provide the same experiences I have enjoyed for over 30 years. My vision would include protecting all natural, cultural, and historic resources while balancing recreational use.”

These are just some of the many comments received through community listening sessions and online surveys that engaged hundreds of respondents, ranging in age from 17 to 94, around the opportunities and challenges facing Voyageurs National Park. In the spring, NPS, in partnership with VNPA, launched a process to articulate the park’s five year priorities and improve communications about ongoing and future projects. Built on the park’s mission statement, foundation documents, planning efforts and past accomplishments, the priorities reflect public, partner, and staff input. Community input made it clear just how much park 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 as well as growing partnerships and community engagement for future work. We look forward to sharing the final draft with the public in 2018.



Volunteers Support Wetland Restoration *By Natalie Prescott, VNPA*

The National Park System truly is “America’s Best Idea.” Perhaps the most awesome aspect of the NPS is the connection it fosters between humans and our environment. We depend on the natural world for life’s basic needs – food, water, shelter, air – and as a place to play, learn, and be inspired.

When we come together to acknowledge the importance of and care for the lands we cherish, that is when reciprocity of this relationship manifests itself the most. At our Volunteer Rendezvous in September, volunteers donated a total of 238 hours of service helping with wetland restoration efforts. Despite the weather, volunteers harvested 7 large bags of wild rice and 20 bags of bulrush and other native seed. They also pulled 29 large trash bags of invasive plant species from the Rainy Lake Recreation Trail.

We were fortunate to be joined by William Perrault of the First Nations Seven Generations Education Institute and James Yerxa who shared with us a cultural demonstration of wild rice harvesting and traditions tied to the land.

Thank you to the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation’s Biodiversity Fund for their support of this project.

Park staff are currently working on a wetland restoration

project to remove invasive cattails and re-establish native species like wild rice and bulrush. The project is still in its preliminary phases as the best removal and management methods are tested.

This gathering of individuals connected to one another through Voyageurs was my first introduction to this northern treasure. In just the few days I had to explore the park and its surrounding communities, I was struck by the early autumnal beauty of the boreal forest, the serenity of the water, the elegance of the bald eagle and the enthusiasm with which everyone interacted with the land.

My name is Natalie Prescott and for the next year I will be working with VNPA as an AmeriCorps VISTA with a focus on youth programs and community engagement. As a recent college graduate and a Minnesota transplant, I appreciate being welcomed into this community and am excited to be working with Voyageurs. My passion for the outdoors and experience with environmental education and curriculum development prepares me well.

Collaboration between volunteers, students, members throughout Minnesota, and staff continues to reinforce the value of the creation of this National Park.



Photos by Christian Hedstrom, Wilderness Inquiry

First Experiences for Teen Ambassadors

The Teen Ambassador program continues to ignite a spark for conservation in Minnesota students who go on a five-day camping and learning expedition in Voyageurs with the Park Service and Wilderness Inquiry guides. They explore park careers, environmental stewardship, and experience camping, hiking, and paddling, many for their first time.

Other first experiences included: cutting onions, racing a canoe, tipping a canoe, lighting a stove, making a fire, searching for firewood, swimming in a lake, relieving oneself outdoors, hiking, setting up and sleeping in a tent, canoeing, eating pizza on the trail, eating a quesadilla on the trail, making s'mores, meeting a park ranger, visiting a National Park, cooking rice without soy sauce, cooking for a big group, doing yoga on rocks, pulling a leech off someone, being somewhere you can't drive to a store, having this many mosquito bites, being this far north, talking this much, being without my family, going on a pontoon, getting close this quickly to others, swimming to an island, not showering for five days, going on a long swim.

The goal of the National Park Teen Ambassador program is to offer a transformational and empowering experience for students that gives them an enduring connection to the outdoors. Please enjoy these testimonials from some of the 2017 Teen Ambassador cohort:

"The highlight of the trip was meeting people and spending time and staying away from most of the technology. Cooking the meals together and being able to spend time outdoor. The fresh air, the scenery and getting the junior ranger badge."

"I use to feel like it takes a lot of work to connect with the environment and to interact with it. It doesn't take a lot to unplugged and just enjoy being outside. Also knowing that a lot of people put work and time in reserving the environment have inspire me to try to do more."

"It did change the way I think about the world. It makes me want to protect the world and protect the wilderness more. It makes me want to be out there in the wilderness."

Thank you to our VNPA members, the Outdoor Foundation, the Messerli & Kramer Foundation, the Fredrikson & Byron Foundation, the Elmer L. & Eleanor J. Andersen Foundation, Hennepin County Green Partners, and Wilderness Inquiry for helping us keep this program free for participants.

"I am a member of VNPA because I want to give back to the people and programs that support the natural places that give so much to all of us."

- Chuck Nelson
North Saint Paul, MN
Volunteer, Member Since 2010

Paddling into the Past on Rainy Lake

By Eric Grunwald, National Park Service

It was a calm and warm mid-September day when my friend Jeff and I put our canoe in the water at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center boat ramp. Jeff is a park ranger at Grand Canyon National Park and I was excited to show him the sites of some of the most interesting historic events that took place on Rainy Lake inside what is now Voyageurs National Park. As we paddled away from the boat ramp the North Woods were in all their splendor. A loon dove under the water no more than 50 yards away and an eagle soared overhead. The very first hint of fall color shone on a few of the scattered aspens on the lakeshore.

We made quick time on the calm waters of Black Bay, and

many of the conveniences that one would expect in a town of the mid-1890s. Very early on in its existence Charles W. Moore wrote that the town had “eight drygoods stores, as many groceries, three hotels and restaurants... two newspapers, one livery barn, three laundries... one doctor and one lawyer.” Perhaps L.D. Chadbourne described the scene at Rainy Lake City best when he wrote in 1894 “The population of Rainy Lake City is 214, eleven of whom are females... there are places where you can get whiskey at 15 cents per small glass; or play any kind of robbers game that you are looking for.” Chadbourne concluded by writing “Every branch of business that is needed in a new town is well represented, especially the saloon business. There are only 16 saloons at present, but the people have faith there are more to follow.” There must have been a wild and transient atmosphere to the town, and just like many of the towns that sprang up overnight in the American West, the reason why Rainy Lake City was developed was to support the mining industry, in this case the only gold mines in Minnesota.

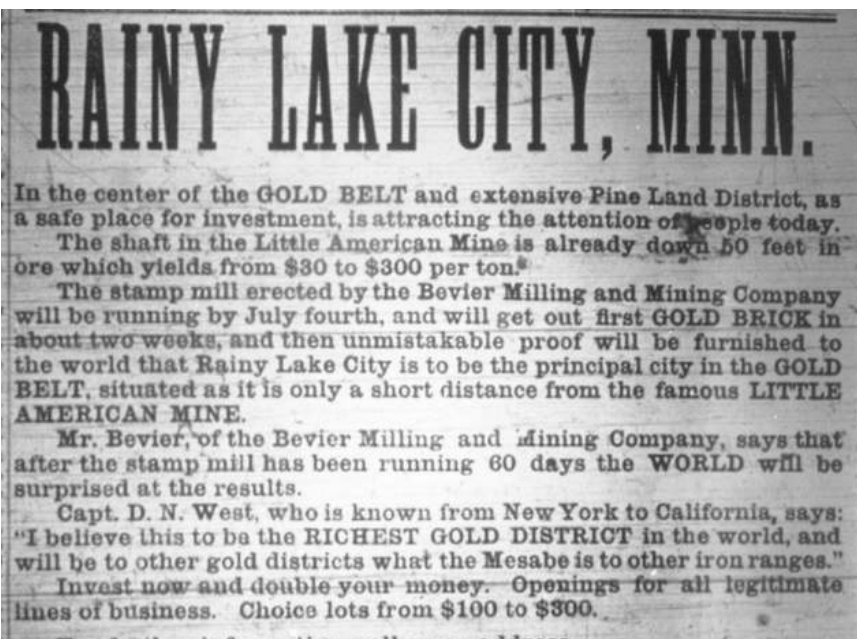
We walked the grassy road trace to the point where it seemed to disappear. Then, we turned around and started to make our way back to the canoe. As we walked, I swear I could almost hear the muted laughter and conversation of men drinking and playing cards. “This must have been quite the place in the 1890s” Jeff said to me as the canoe came into sight. Before we left Rainy Lake City we decided to head into the old log building that’s left unlocked for visitors to explore. I went on to explain to Jeff that the building that we were inside does not date from the Rainy Lake Gold Rush of the 1890s, but to a later date, the Prohibition Era of the 1920s. It is what was called a “blind pig” or speakeasy where patrons could get alcohol even though its sale was illegal. It seems even though Rainy Lake City was largely a ghost town by 1901, people were still drawn to the seclusion of the site well into the 20th Century.

before we knew it we were at the dock marking the site of Rainy Lake City. Today the city is no more than the grassy trace of an old city street. Though there are two buildings on the site, these buildings do not date from Rainy Lake City, but from a later time in northern Minnesota history. As we docked the canoe and headed into the forest, there seemed to be more going on in Rainy Lake City than met the eye. We walked the trace of what had been one of the town’s streets and I told Jeff a little bit about the town’s history.

In 1894 a small town, perhaps as large as 500 inhabitants, grew at the site where we walked. Rainy Lake City held

We got back into the canoe at the dock and started to make our way west on Rainy Lake. We had yet another destination in mind, the only Minnesota gold mine to ever turn a profit on Little American Island. While the winds had been calm on Black Bay, we were less sheltered now that we were on more open water. It is incredible how a wind as light as 5 miles per hour can make paddling more difficult. A few fishing boats passed us as we made our way to the north side of Little American Island and the dock for the trailhead.

Little American Island marks the site where, in 1893,





Jakob Widmark

prospector George W. Davis gouged out a sample of quartz from a vein on the island. The quartz sample was sent to Duluth to be assayed, or tested for gold, and sure enough the test showed an average of about \$98 worth of gold per ton of ore. Quickly, a party of men paid \$10,000 for the island. Jeff and I docked the canoe and walked the easy gravel trail to an old horizontal mine shaft, called an adit, now partially filled with water. We continued on the trail to the site of a vertical mine shaft. Besides the mining shaft, a pair of adits, and a large metal wheel, not much evidence remains of the mining operation on Little American Island. Due to the high costs of mining and processing the ore, and poor management, mining activity at Little American did not last long. In early 1898 all mining operations ceased there and the property was soon seized by the Itasca County Sheriff.

Our last stop of the island was an overlook of a portion of the Rainy Lake gold field. Not only does the site offer a wonderful view of Rainy Lake and islands dotted with boreal vegetation, it also includes an interpretive panel

complete with a map of other mining sites that are now within the boundary of Voyageurs National Park. With names like Bushyhead, Big American, and Hope-Still; each site seemed to beckon for us to explore further. Alas, the wind was starting to pick up, and Jeff and I did not want to get stranded, unable to make headway in strong winds. We opted to paddle the canoe back to the boat ramp near the Rainy Lake Visitor Center.

As we made our way back to the boat ramp, Jeff and I talked about all we had explored that day. We agreed that while in the 1890s men had seen value in the gold locked up in the rocks of what is now Voyageurs National Park, there is still great value in these lands and waters. Today the value lies not in material resources, but in the scenery of the North Woods, the animals that inhabit this area, the opportunity to canoe or motorboat on waters that were once plied by the voyageurs as part of a world-wide trade network, and the idea that all of it will be preserved not just for us, but for future generations of visitors to northern Minnesota.



Pints for the Park

Thursday, November 16
5:30-8:30 PM @ Bauhaus Brew Labs
 1315 Tyler Street NE, Minneapolis, MN

Join us for a special brewery event for friends of Voyageurs National Park. We'll raise funds on Give to the Max Day while enjoying brews, s'mores, trivia and more.

Info and RSVP at:
Voyageurs.org/pintsforpark



VNPA Events

Thank you to all who have attended our recent events including the Volunteer Rendezvous, Member Appreciation Breakfast, and Pints for the Park Night at Loony's Brew, and to our fall event series sponsors:

- Delta Dental of Minnesota**
- Bizal Built**
- Voyageurs Outfitters**

Check for additional information about upcoming events at:
Voyageurs.org/events



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Voyageurs National Park Association helped secure National Park designation for Voyageurs in 1975 and today serves as its nonprofit partner. VNPA represents a community of people who care about the future of Voyageurs National Park. Together, we:

- Advocate and educate to keep Voyageurs pristine and wild
- Provide financial and volunteer support for conservation, restoration, recreation & education
- Support public outreach and community engagement
- Partner with the Park Service to build the next generation of park stewards

VNPA depends on the generosity of individuals like you. Give today:

Voyageurs.org/donate



Voyageurs.org/GivetotheMax

Your donation will help leverage matching funds for your National Park during 'Minnesota's Annual Give-together.' Your gift supports recreation and conservation projects, connects kids and visitors to park experiences, and protects Voyageurs' pristine waters and wild character for future generations.

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Thank you to outgoing board member Corey Jansen for his service!

Meet New Board Members Jim Bizal & Megan Bond

Jim Bizal has extensive experience serving on several boards within his community and has spent the past 25 years exploring Voyageurs' Sand Point and Namakan Lakes with his family. When Jim isn't spending time with his family or giving back, he runs a home remodeling business in the Twin Cities.



Megan Bond has been active with VNPA since 2012 in a variety of roles including committee member, volunteer, and policy coordinator. Megan earned her Juris Doctor degree and masters in public policy at the University of St. Thomas. She lives in International Falls working as a judicial law clerk and enjoying all seasons on Rainy Lake.

