



## Apostle Islands National Lakeshore

# Natural Resources Highlights

Winter 2009/2010

## Restoring the Cat Island Sandspit

If you visit Cat Island this summer, you'll find a very scenic stretch of sandspit, a boardwalk leading to a wilderness campsite tucked back in the woods, and a moldering privy, the first of its kind in the park. What you don't see is the years of planning and hours of staff and volunteer work that help make this sandspit look as "untrammled" as it does. Dune plants are a sandspit's main defense against the ravages of crashing waves during violent storms. Their shallow roots, which keep the sand in place, also make them very sensitive to human trampling. Just a small amount of foot traffic or a few times being crushed under a tent can kill these plants and create bare areas. Several bare areas were present on the Cat Island sandscape. Restoration of the sandspit began with the removal of solar panels and a well, a non-historic cabin, and a vault toilet. The campsite was relocated to a more durable location, a sustainable moldering privy was built using lumber recycled from the removed cabin, and a boardwalk was installed to direct visitors to the campsite. Then, thousands of native dune plants were planted to speed up the recovery of the sandspit. A total of 7,400 plants were used in restoration efforts on Cat Island and Long Island and previously restored areas on South Twin and Raspberry Islands. Special thanks go to the Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Program, numerous park staff, volunteers (including a Northland College class), NRCS's Rose Lake Plant Materials Center, and Wildflower Woods.



Building a moldering privy



Planting on Cat Island Sandspit

## New Tactics Help Managers Come Closer to Hitting their Mark



In the park's continuing efforts to reduce the severe impacts of deer browsing on Sand and York Islands (see "A Plant Community in Peril" Spring 2009), a variety of new techniques were used. Game cameras were placed at key sites on the islands to determine the distribution and movement patterns of deer and the services of specially equipped USDA Wildlife Service marksmen were utilized. Very good progress was made. In addition, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) staff collected biological samples from culled deer to better understand sex ratios, ages, and diet of the population. This information will be valuable for long-term management. As in past years, culled deer were donated to Red Cliff Tribal nutrition programs. Learning and adapting strategies and tactics to manage this issue is an ever evolving process, one that will continue into the future.

(continued on page 2)

## Apostles Longest Survey Soars On

The 2009 season marked the 35th year that colonial nesting birds have been monitored at Apostle Islands NL, making it the longest running monitoring project in the park - Sumner Matteson, Avian Ecologist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, has been involved since the beginning. The park provides important nesting habitat for herring gulls, great blue herons and double-crested cormorants. Every five years since 1974, Matteson has surveyed colonial birds along the Wisconsin shoreline of Lake Superior. In May, the number of nests and chicks are counted. In July, Matteson returns to count a sample of young birds on



Gull Island. Over the past 35 years, populations have fluctuated, but there are noticeable trends. The year 1994 was a very good year for colonial birds within the park - numbers peaked for both gulls and cormorants. In 2009, herring gull numbers were 30% lower than in 1994, but very similar to what they were 30 years ago. The double-crested cormorant population trends are less clear. Overall numbers in 2009 were 20% lower than in 1994, but on Eagle Island, the population declined 85%. The number of great blue heron nests on Eagle Island in 2009 was similar to previous surveys, but the colony seemed quieter than normal. Follow-up monitoring will occur on Eagle Island to check on the status of cormorants and great blue herons. Special thanks to Sumner and all of the volunteers that have helped with this project over the years.

## Rare Mammals Revealed



It's 7:25 in the evening of September 14<sup>th</sup> and a solitary wolf is strolling through a small opening on Sand Island. A tiny noise occurs, catching his attention. A motion-triggered camera, set to take a photo of anything that trips its sensor, has revealed his presence. This was the first photographic evidence of wolves in the park. The park began using wildlife cameras in association with deer management efforts, but the cameras are also revealing secrets about other mammals present on the islands. Another rare mammal captured on film was a bobcat. This was the first evidence of bobcat on Sand Island and only the second time a bobcat has been documented within the park. A more common species, the black bear, was frequently captured on film,

revealing that they're widely dispersed on Sand Island and were still active in late November. A bear was even photographed on York Island. The cameras have great potential for monitoring a wide variety of wildlife – it'll be interesting to see what's captured next.

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