



Foundation Document Overview

Isle Royale National Park

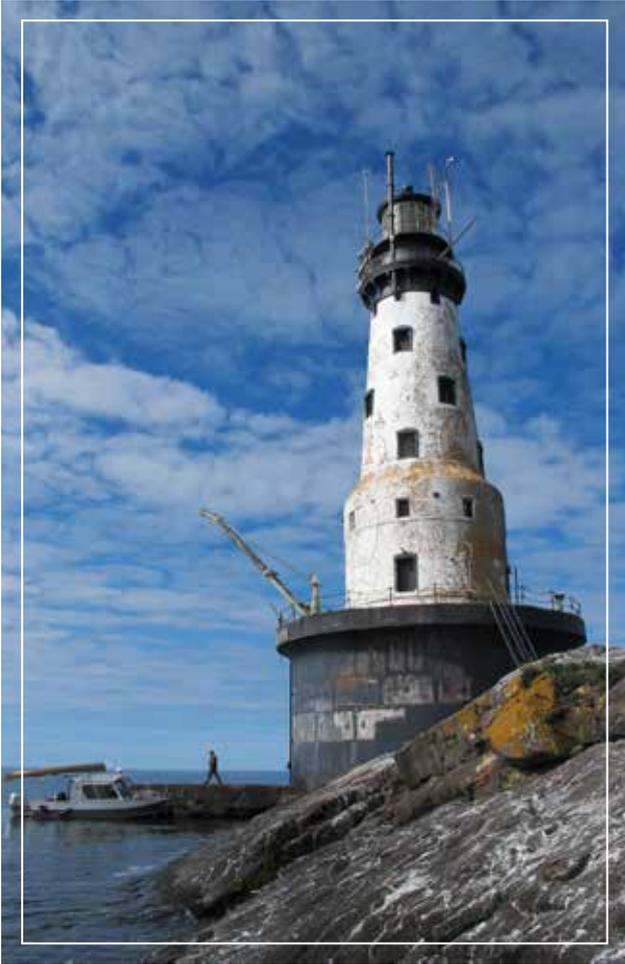
Keweenaw County, Michigan



Contact Information

For more information about the Isle Royale National Park Foundation Document, contact: isro_parkinfo@nps.gov or (906) 482-0984 or write to:
Superintendent, Isle Royale National Park, 800 East Lakeshore Drive, Houghton, Michigan 49931-1896

Purpose



The purpose of ISLE ROYALE NATIONAL PARK is to set apart a remote island archipelago and surrounding waters in Lake Superior as a national park for the benefit and enjoyment of the public and to preserve and protect its wilderness character, cultural and natural resources, scenery, and ecological processes. Additionally, as a unit of the national park system, Isle Royale National Park provides opportunities for recreation, education and interpretation, and scientific study.

Significance

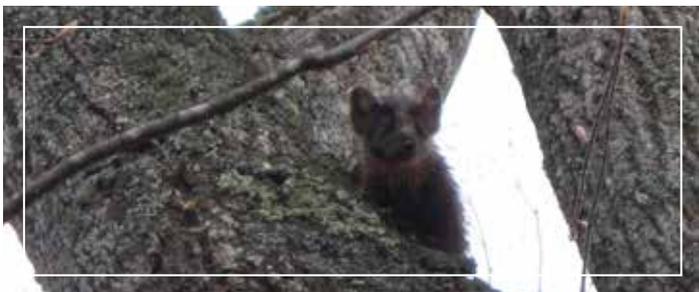
Significance statements express why Isle Royale National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **Largest Island Archipelago.** Isle Royale, the largest island in Lake Superior, and its more than 400 smaller accompanying islands, comprise a complex and remote freshwater archipelago surrounded by the largest freshwater lake in North America, Lake Superior. This distinctive setting influences and shapes Isle Royale's natural, cultural, maritime, wilderness, and scenic resources.
- **Isolation and Isolated Character.** The nautical distance from shore and natural setting of the rugged Isle Royale archipelago starkly contrasts the usual sights, sounds, and modifications of an increasingly populous and mechanized civilization, and provides an exceptional opportunity to experience solitude and isolation. A visit to Isle Royale requires passage across a vast and often dangerous open expanse of water.



Fundamental Resources and Values

- **Geology, Copper, and Distinct Topography.** The visible billion-year-old Greenstone flow forming the island's main ridge reveals one of the oldest, largest, and longest-lasting lava flow events on Earth. Inclusions of some of the purest forms of native copper known to exist on the continent and other rare minerals found within volcanic and sedimentary layers of rock, distinguish the geologic resources of Isle Royale. Uplifted layers of these rocks create the park's distinctive ridge and valley topography.
- **Habitat and Refuge for a Unique Assemblage of Self-Sustaining Cold Water Fish.** Isle Royale's distinct topography continues underwater, providing habitat for rare lake trout morphological variants and one of the last viable populations of coaster brook trout.
- **Scientific Study and Research.** Isle Royale provides exceptional opportunities for study and research within a minimally disturbed setting.
- **Scenery and Scenic Resources.** The forces of nature are readily visible as the dominant element that has shaped and continues to shape the stunning scenic character of this relatively undeveloped, rugged archipelago. Brilliant and diverse colors are boldly displayed along the intricate margins of the rocky shoreline and within the dense forest interior. Ever-changing seasonal and atmospheric conditions on the vast, open expanse of Lake Superior introduce an additional dynamic to the distinctive Isle Royale scenery.
- **Archeological Mining Sites and Resources.** The archeological resources of Isle Royale contain an assemblage of copper mining sites and features spanning more than 4,000 years. The precontact component of this story is unmatched in quantity and in quality anywhere else in the Lake Superior Basin including the copper-rich Keweenaw Peninsula of Michigan. Unlike the more accessible sites on the Keweenaw Peninsula, the isolated setting of Isle Royale led to the preservation of these archeological sites.



Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Excellent Water Quality and Clarity**
- **Geologic Resources**
- **Native Fish Populations**
- **Maritime Character**
- **Scenic Resources**
- **Wilderness**
- **Island Biogeography and Ecology**

Isle Royale National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Living Laboratory**
- **American Marten**
- **Avian Resources**
- **Other National Register Listed or Eligible Properties**

Description

Isle Royale National Park includes the primary island, known as Isle Royale, and more than 400 smaller islands, which together form a complex, forested archipelago surrounded by the deep, cold waters of Lake Superior. Located in the northwestern section of Lake Superior, 14 miles off the Canadian shoreline, 75% of the total 571,790 park acres are submerged. The rocks of the Isle Royale island cluster exhibit more than one billion years of geologic processes, including successive volcanism, sedimentation, uplift, and erosion.

The park was formally authorized on March 3, 1931, and was officially established on April 3, 1940. Since establishment, the park has been managed with a focus on backcountry-based recreation, in concert with the protection of natural and cultural resources. In 1976, 132,018 acres of the park's surface land base, or 99% of the total 133,788 land acres, were designated as wilderness or potential wilderness.

This heavily forested archipelago is in a zone of transition between two major North American ecosystems or biomes—the boreal coniferous forest and northern hardwood forest. Treeless meadows on ridgetops, as well as bogs and beaver meadows in the lower valleys, are interspersed throughout the dense island forests. The climate of the park is strongly affected by Lake Superior and is characterized by short, cool summers and long, cold winters. Fog is frequent near the lakeshore, especially in the spring.

Aquatic habitats account for more than 75% of the park and encompass a wide spectrum of environments, from the waters of Lake Superior to inland streams, beaver ponds, lakes, marshes, swamps, wet meadows, and bogs. Lake trout, within the Lake Superior waters surrounding the park, and extremely rare coaster brook trout are two especially noteworthy species found within Isle Royale National Park. Except for birds, the biodiversity of Isle Royale is generally lower than that of the mainland, due to the isolated island characteristic that restricts migration of terrestrial organisms from outside populations. Wolf and moose, together on the island only since the late 1940s, have become a classic study in predator/prey relationships. For many visitors, the park's wildlife embodies the essence of Isle Royale's wilderness character.

Evidence of human use, activity, and habitation can be found throughout Isle Royale and in the surrounding waters. As a rich source of fish, wildlife, plants, and minerals, Isle Royale has attracted human visitors and residents for millennia. Cultural resources ranging from lithic scatters of chipped stone to lighthouses reveal a rich history of human use spanning from Archaic times (ca. 3000 BC) to the present day and reflect a rich, freshwater maritime history.

