



Policy Conundrums, Disparate Voices* and the Wolves of Isle Royale

"Persons who visit Isle Royale do expect to see moose and hear about the wolves. If the moose disappear, there will be some disappointment on the part of the public. To manipulate the population in such a way as to preserve the moose, however, would not be fair to the public – this would be a presentation of an unnatural situation under the disguising name 'natural'".

"The coming of wolves to Isle Royale was the fulfillment of a dream for many researchers".

"If we had more ice in the past, then why weren't there moose and wolves in an earlier period on Isle Royale"?

"If wolves blink out, that's not the end of Isle Royale".

"A lot of national parks are short on predation".

"What is it about Isle Royale that causes even scientists to sound like they work for the chamber of commerce?"

"It would seem highly advisable... to reduce the moose population".

"We should be aware of the slippery slope of manipulation".

"...for wilderness and preserving the wildlife, flora, and the basic resource in a primeval manner."

"We've been crying wolf about Isle Royale for quite a long time".

"Wolves give Isle Royale status".

Potential Management Options:

- Allow nature to take its course and observe.
- Allow extirpation and reintroduce wolves.
- Augment the current population with mainland wolves.
- Others?



- Islands are naturally unstable ecosystems where colonization, extirpation, and large swings in population densities are common traits
- Despite being isolated, humans exert direct (introduction of species) and indirect (climate change) impacts to Island ecosystems
- With the exception of bats, we can only speculate with varying degrees of certainty how most mammals arrived to Isle Royale



- A "hands-off" management approach
- Wolves are one of the many wilderness resources found on Isle Royale
- All management decisions affecting wilderness must be consistent with the minimum requirement concept, a two step process:
 1. Is the proposed management action necessary or appropriate for the administration of the area as wilderness?
 2. If so, are the techniques and types of equipment needed to ensure impacts on wilderness resources and character are minimized?



- Instances of ice bridges have decreased by 70%
- Boreal forest transitioning to temperate is less favorable for moose
- Increasing occurrence of catastrophic events like forest blow down and wildfire are likely

WOLVES

Not a genetically distinct population
A natural and a cultural resource
Native, introduced or both?



- Preservation/restoration of natural functions and processes
- Maintain all native plant and animal species and their habitats
- Exotic plant and animal species should managed (up to eradication) if control is feasible and the exotic species interferes with natural processes and the perpetuation of natural features, native species or natural habitats



- Herbivory can alter forests
- The moose population is influenced by forage, wolves, climate, parasites and more not yet explained
- It is unknown how moose arrived at Isle Royale? Naturally or Introduced? Or Both?



Next Steps:

We expect our evaluation process to continue into the next year and then convene Park Service subject matter experts to discuss how we will address this situation within all of the policy, research and wolf management concerns, data collected over the last year and insight into public concerns. Please let us know if you would like to receive updates on this issue. You can also visit the park's website for updates at www.nps.gov/isro.

"If the last beaver on Isle Royale were about to die, would headlines about a 'death watch' appear? How about for a plant species or a species of bird? Not likely. Given the cultural weight heaped upon wolves by the Park Service employees and researchers, and given the similar weight implied from the American public, it cannot be denied that wolves are cultural resources as well as natural resources."

- Wolves and moose are key component of the Isle Royale experience for visitors
- Long-standing perception of a "balanced" ecosystem may be hard to overcome
- Can the complexity of this issue be communicated in a meaningful way for informed public input?

"Wolves are not in the enabling legislation; it's not the purpose of the park. And one of the problems we faced is that we have emphasized wolves and moose so much is that people come for that sole reason and that makes the decision harder to allow them to die."

"This looming extinction, the conjectured reasons for it, its effects on the ecology of the island, and Park Service policy reactions to it, offers, I believe, a preeminent and exciting opportunity to examine how nature preservation and natural resource management are construed in the late 20th century Park Service."

"Accordingly, permission is hereby given to carry out the release of about five wolves on Isle Royale.... The late Aldo Leopold urged that it be carried out".

*Debate regarding wolf and moose management on Isle Royale is decades old and storied. Starting in 1934 and ending in 2013, the quotes provided are from scientists and NPS managers, both past and present, who have pondered wildlife management on Isle Royale. To allow for your unencumbered consideration of their thoughts, the individuals responsible and the associated time period have not been identified.

"How risk-tolerant are you of losing wolves and the consequences that would incur?"