



Dear Friends,

Thank you for your continued interest in wilderness stewardship at Isle Royale National Park (Isle Royale). In the fall of 2022, the National Park Service (NPS) published a Notice of Intent to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a Wilderness Stewardship Plan (plan) for Isle Royale and gathered your input on the alternatives and resource areas that should be considered in the EIS. With publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register on July 14, 2023, the draft plan and EIS are available for public review. This newsletter provides updates on the draft plan and EIS and information on how to participate in public meetings and provide comments during the public review period.

This newsletter provides basic information on the purpose and need for the plan, and alternatives considered in the draft EIS. We are seeking your feedback on these alternatives and analysis included in the draft EIS to inform preparation of the final plan and EIS and subsequent record of decision.

I encourage you to participate in the public review period by reviewing the draft plan and EIS, attending a public meeting, and providing your feedback to the planning team. Information regarding the dates, times, and locations of public meetings is provided on this page, and you can find details regarding ways to provide a comment on page 6. You can provide comments on our NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/ISROWilderness>. Comments will be accepted for 60 days after publication of the Notice of Availability, until September 26, 2023.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Denice Swanke
Superintendent
Isle Royale National Park

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Virtual Public Meetings

NPS will hold two virtual public meetings. Each meeting will begin with a short presentation followed by time for questions and answers. Please register for the virtual public meetings at the links below.

Meetings will be held at the following days and times:

- August 3, 2023 at 5:00 pm ET <https://bit.ly/IsleRoyaleNPS>
- September 7, 2023 at 7:00 pm ET <https://bit.ly/IsleRoyaleNPS2>

PURPOSE AND NEED

A Wilderness Stewardship Plan is essential to preserve wilderness character through the process of establishing desired conditions and identifying future actions that are acceptable in Isle Royale’s wilderness. The integration of the qualities of wilderness character established in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act and the principles described in [Keeping it Wild 2](#), the interagency strategy for wilderness character monitoring, ensures the NPS will consider current and future actions at Isle Royale within the context of preserving wilderness character.

As developed through consultation, public scoping, and agency review, the **purpose** of this Wilderness Stewardship Plan is to outline strategies for preserving wilderness character, while also providing for the use and enjoyment of the park by current and future generations.

The NPS has identified the following reasons the plan is **needed**:

- The 1998 General Management Plan (GMP) specified that a wilderness and backcountry management plan was needed to guide management of wilderness resources and ensure consistency in such management over time. The alternatives identified in the EIS address needs that were identified in the GMP.
- [NPS Management Policies 2006](#) directs that each park containing wilderness must maintain an up-to-date and approved wilderness management plan to guide the preservation, management, and use of wilderness resources. This plan will meet that policy requirement.
- Changes in wilderness use, management actions, increasing visitation, and associated human-caused adverse impacts suggest an underlying need to more proactively manage human activities that directly or indirectly affect wilderness character.
- The park currently lacks a management strategy for the treatment and use of historic structures and installations in potential and designated wilderness.
- As nonconforming uses (e.g., occupancy of cabins through life-leases) end in potential wilderness areas (PWA), management planning is essential to ensure these lands meet the qualifications required for conversion to full wilderness designation.

ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVE A (NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE)

The no-action alternative consists of existing management practices as described in the 1998 GMP and as implemented through the Superintendent’s Compendium. Under alternative A, the park would continue to address the needs of wilderness stewardship in accordance with the GMP, which generally addresses how the park conducts activities within wilderness. The GMP does not include an overarching stewardship component designed to enhance wilderness character.

ALTERNATIVE B (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)

Alternative B focuses on enhancing wilderness character with specific emphasis on improving the visitors’ wilderness experience and providing for additional access opportunities consistent with the public purposes of wilderness.

ALTERNATIVE C

Alternative C focuses on enhancing wilderness character, by focusing primarily on improving solitude. Solitude is generally preserved or improved by management actions that reduce visitor encounters, signs of modern civilization inside wilderness, facilities, and management restrictions on visitor behavior. This alternative proposes eliminating commercial use within Isle Royale wilderness, which would further enhance solitude by reducing visitor encounters with large groups.

Key differences between alternatives include:

	Alternative A (No-Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C
Overnight Group Size Requirements	Existing group size is 7 to a maximum of 10. Organizations may not have more than 20 people camping on the island at one time.	Increases group size to 9 to a maximum of 12. Organizations may not have more than 24 people camping on the island at one time.	Same as alternative A, the park would implement monitoring to determine when changes to the group size limits would be adjusted.
Wilderness Permitting System	No change to existing permit system and no limit on total number of permits issued.	Visitors would be required to obtain backcountry permits in advance of their trip. A new permitting system and monitoring program would be established and campgrounds would be booked up to 85% of capacity in advance. The remaining 15% of campsites would not be booked in advance to allow for flexible itineraries.	A reservation system would be established allowing visitors to make night-by-night reservations of campsites for specific dates, and all itineraries would be fixed.
Day Use Group Size Requirements	Day use group sizes generally are based on the capacity of excursion vessels or ferries. The NPS would control group sizes through the appropriate permitting mechanism with group tour providers.	<u>Frontcountry zone</u> : Group size limit of 40 <u>Wilderness portal, backcountry, and primitive zone</u> : Group size limit of 24 (two groups of 12 or fewer). Hidden Lake and Lookout Louise would be exceptions, with group sizes of up to 40 people accepted. <u>Wilderness immersion zone (Off-trail)</u> : Group size limit of 8.	<u>Frontcountry zone</u> : Group size limit of 20 <u>Wilderness portal, backcountry, and primitive zone</u> : Group size limit of 10. Hidden Lake, Lookout Louise, McCargoe Cove, and the Minong Mine would be exceptions, with group sizes of up to 20 people accepted. <u>Wilderness immersion zone (Off-trail)</u> : Group size limit of 6.



ALTERNATIVES (CONT'D)

	Alternative A (No-Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C
Campground Management	No change to existing campground locations or configurations.	No campground would be established at Fisherman's Home or Crystal Cove. Two new wilderness campgrounds would be established, one on Wright Island and another on Johns Island to provide more opportunities for boaters, kayakers, and canoers.	All existing campgrounds would remain. Over time, the NPS would consider eliminating or relocating individual campsites within campgrounds to increase separation between campsites and promote solitude. Non-motorized campgrounds would be considered. 20 shelters would be removed from wilderness and converted to campsites where possible.
General Management Plan Zones	No change to Zones established in the 1998 GMP.	Various areas of the island would be rezoned to reflect current and proposed uses, including hiking trails and administrative uses.	Amygdaloid Ranger Station would be rezoned from backcountry to wilderness portal zone to reflect current and proposed ongoing use of the area for administrative use.
Winter Closure	No change to existing management, park would be closed during the winter.	The winter closure would remain in effect but would be reevaluated if open water existed during 100% of the winter season for at least five consecutive years.	The park would remain open during the winter season and would not be closed to public visitation.
Treatments for Historic Properties in Wilderness	The park would continue minimally preserving and maintaining these structures. Preservation activities are done opportunistically when funding, partnerships, and resources are available.	52 structures and installations in wilderness would be preserved, 23 structures would be stabilized, 7 structures would be removed, and 18 structures and installations would be allowed to molder in place.	40 structures and installations would be preserved, 34 structures and installations would be stabilized, 7 structures would be removed, and 19 structures and installations would be allowed to molder in place.
Conversion of Potential Wilderness Additions and Nonconforming Uses	All existing PWAs would remain potential wilderness.	All existing PWAs would be converted to designated wilderness except Davidson Island and Amygdaloid Island. Existing nonconforming uses would be evaluated for continuation or elimination under an MRA as part of the conversion.	All existing PWAs would be converted to designated wilderness. Existing nonconforming uses would be evaluated for continuation or elimination under an MRA as part of the conversion.
Concessions and Commercial Services	Various concessions and commercial services provided to visitors of the park would continue, subject to extent necessary determinations.	Guided hiking, backpacking, canoe/kayak trips, interpretive tours and education programs would be allowed in wilderness, pending an extent necessary determination.	No guided backpacking or guided canoe/kayak trips that use wilderness campsites would be permitted.

ISSUES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The EIS assesses issues and potential impacts related to two resources: wilderness character and cultural resources.

WILDERNESS CHARACTER

The NPS manages five qualities of wilderness character (untrammled, natural, undeveloped, solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and other features of value) which are derived from the definition of wilderness established in the Wilderness Act, Section 2(c). The analysis in the EIS considered potential impacts to four of the five qualities of wilderness as noted below.

Natural Quality

Trail and campground management could result in loss of ground cover, compaction of soils and erosion, and disturbance of vegetation and wildlife. Campground management could also result in revegetation and other habitat improvements. These human actions could alter ecological processes and have the potential to result in impacts to this quality.

Undeveloped Quality

Removal, preservation, or use of historic and administrative structures and installations in wilderness may impact the undeveloped quality of wilderness.

Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation

Campgrounds, trails, group size limits, permits, commercial guiding, closures and public use limits, the presence of facilities that decrease self-reliant recreation, and other management actions may impact the opportunity for solitude and unconfined recreation at Isle Royale. Actions outside wilderness, including the use of generators, may affect opportunities for solitude within wilderness. These actions may impact visitor self-reliance and self-discovery.

Other Features of Value: Historic Features

Preservation, stabilization, moldering, or removal of historic structures and installations in wilderness are impacts to historic features in wilderness. Preservation, stabilization and limited use of historic structures or installations in wilderness are sometimes necessary for purposes of the management of the area. This plan proposes such actions, consistent with the Wilderness Act, Section 2(c), including (4), where features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value exist in the park.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Potential impacts to three types of cultural resources are analyzed in the plan/EIS: historic structures and installations, historic districts, and cultural landscapes. Proposed treatments in the plan have the potential to result in adverse or beneficial effects to these resources. Beneficial effects on selected historic structures and installations and the historic character of their districts and landscapes over the life of this plan are expected from efforts to preserve historic structures and installations in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Adverse impacts on the historic integrity of historic structures/installations, their districts, and their landscapes, up to and including a reduction in the level of historic significance, could occur for individual structures/installations that are removed or allowed to molder.

**Are there additional impacts that should be considered in the EIS?
Share your thoughts with the project team (see next page).**

HOW TO COMMENT

When making public comments, please consider the following questions:

1. What other alternatives, alternative elements, or management tools should be considered?
2. What do you like and dislike about the alternatives, and why?
3. What additional issues or data should be considered in the existing environment or impacts analyses?



Get additional information and submit comments electronically at:
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/ISROWilderness>

Mail or hand-deliver hard copy comments to:

Isle Royale National Park
800 East Lakeshore Drive
Houghton, Michigan 49931

Please provide comments back by September 26, 2023.

Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than through the website and mailing address provided above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

NEPA PROCESS

EIS ESTIMATED SCHEDULE

The NPS is preparing this EIS in accordance with the [National Environmental Policy Act](#), which requires federal agencies to analyze impacts to the human environment for any major federal action. Important steps in the NEPA process and the anticipated timeline are as follows:

Fall 2022	Publication of the Notice of Intent; public comment period and preparation of public comment analysis report
Winter 2022/2023	Preparation of the draft plan and EIS
July 28, 2023	Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS published in the Federal Register
July 28-September 26, 2023	Public review and comment period (WE ARE HERE)
August 3 & September 7, 2023	Virtual public meetings
Winter 2023/2024	Final plan/EIS and newsletter released
Winter/Spring 2024	Prepare and finalize Record of Decision