



A Brief Lakeshore History

On October 15, 1966, the 89th Congress of the United States passed Public Law 89-668 authorizing establishment of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Alger County, Michigan “... in order to preserve for the benefit, inspiration, education, recreational use, and enjoyment of the public, a significant portion of the diminishing shoreline of the United States and its related geographic and scientific features.” Upon signature into law by President Lyndon Johnson, Alger County became the home of America’s first National Lakeshore - Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

During 1957-58, the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, conducted a survey of the Great Lakes shoreline to determine areas suitable for inclusion in the National Park System. Of the almost 5,500 miles of Great Lakes shoreline studied, the survey team identified 118 miles. “By virtue of its unique and spectacular scenery unmatched elsewhere on the Great Lakes, the Pictured Rocks area of Alger County, comprising 43 miles of shoreline,” was identified as one of these potential units of the National Park Service.



Early plans for the National Lakeshore prepared in 1961 recommended a park 100,000 acres in size. By 1962, as a result of concerns voiced by the local forest products industry that too much timber land would be removed from harvest by a park of that size, the acreage was reduced to about 61,000 acres. By the time legislation was passed, the size of the Lakeshore had been increased slightly to 71,397 acres, comprised of two distinct acquisition, development, and management zones, a shoreline zone (33,550 acres) and an inland buffer zone (37,850 acres).

The shoreline zone was established to preserve its scenery and outstanding natural features and to provide the benefits of public recreation. The inland buffer zone was created to stabilize and protect the existing character and uses of the land, waters, and other properties as they were on December 31, 1964. It was the intent of Congress that the inland buffer zone preserve the setting of the Lake Superior shoreline and inland lakes, and protect the watersheds and streams. Sustained yield timber harvesting and other resource management activities compatible with the preservation and recreational use purposes outlined in the legislation were also permitted within the inland buffer zone.

The shoreline zone was to be acquired in its entirety by the National Park Service. The inland buffer zone was to remain in private and state ownership for the purpose of continuing sustained yield timber harvesting compatible with the preservation and recreation use purposes of the legislation. With sufficient lands in federal ownership to provide a manageable Park Service area, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore was formally established as a unit of the National Park System in ceremonies held on October 6, 1972, at Bayshore Park in Munising.

Distinguished guests and participants in the ceremony were Governor William G. Milliken, Michigan Senators Robert B. Griffin and Philip M. Hart (the primary proponent in Congress of the National Lakeshore), and the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, the Honorable Nathaniel P. Reed. Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore’s first Superintendent, Hugh Beattie, hosted the establishment ceremony. There have been five Superintendents subsequent to Mr. Beattie; Robert Burns, Donald Gillespie, Grant Petersen, Karen Gustin and the current Superintendent, Jim Northrup.

In the years since the 1966 authorization of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, emphasis has been on the identification of resource data needs and the improvement and expansion of existing public use facilities. A major planning effort spanning four years was completed in 1981 resulting in the first General Management Plan (GMP) to guide facility development and management. That planning effort significantly altered development objectives in the direction of “core” facilities at strategic locations throughout the Lakeshore, elimination of the concept of a shoreline road through the lakeshore, and expanded cooperative resource management and facility development programs with other public agencies and the private sector. After numerous public meetings and the resulting public comment, a revised GMP was completed in November of 2004.

Today, the National Lakeshore shoreline zone has been acquired by the National Park Service. Various developments and trail systems offer opportunities for numerous outdoor recreation activities between the Lakeshore’s western gateway in the City of Munising and its eastern gateway at Grand Marais in Burt Township. Development and operation of the National Lakeshore continues to progress as outlined in the primary management documents including the Resource Management Plan and the General Management Plan.



At Munising Falls, Miners Castle, Sable Falls, and the Log Slide, modern visitor information and interpretation facilities and trail systems have been developed. Symbols of the maritime history of Lake Superior are preserved at four former Coast Guard stations at Sand Point, Munising, Grand Marais, and at Au Sable Point on Lake Superior west of the Grand Sable Dunes. The Au Sable Light Station is perhaps the

finest example on the Great Lakes of late 1800's vintage masonry lighthouses.



Significant developments were initiated following formal establishment of the National Lakeshore in 1972. The former Miners area county park was re-developed as a day use area with the construction of modern restrooms and a trail and walkway system to access and view the Miners Castle and beach areas. In 1981, a modern interpretive center, restrooms, parking area and walkway system were completed at Munising Falls. The former Sand Point Coast Guard station donated by the City of Munising in 1968 was converted into the lakeshore headquarters.

The years 1983 through 1985 witnessed rehabilitation of the National Lakeshore's three vehicle access campgrounds. The camping capacity was increased at two campgrounds (Twelvemile Beach and Hurricane River).

In 1983, significant actions were completed at the Grand Marais gateway to the National Lakeshore to improve public information and interpretation facilities. The Grand Marais Maritime Museum opened its doors in 1985, culminating significant assistance and support by the local community. A modern visitor contact station was opened at the former Abrahamson farmhouse. In addition, several of the structures and land comprising the Grand Marais Coast Guard Station were acquired on a perpetual lease basis from the Coast Guard for use as a year-round office, maritime museum, and seasonal quarters. Completing facility improvement actions in the Grand Marais area, the Sable Falls trail system was reconstructed in 1983-84.

The years 1985-86 saw initial steps to improve road access to the National Lakeshore. Utilizing special highway improvement funds under the Federal Lands Highway Program (FLHP), paving of Miners Castle Road was completed in the fall of 1986, a joint project with the Alger County Road Commission, Michigan Department of Transportation, and the federal Economic Development Administration. A similar joint project with the City of Munising and Michigan Department of Transportation on Sand Point Road was also completed in 1987. Other FLHP program projects completed include the Miners Falls Road and the Sable Falls and Grand Sable Visitor Center parking areas and access roads. The Federal Highway Administration is the primary funding agency for the FLHP program.

In 1998 the Alger County Road Commission completed realignment and paving of H-58 from the Grand Sable Visitor Center to the Grand Sable Lake overlook. Continuation of this project has occurred with paving of H-58 from the overlook to the Log Slide Road.

Management of the inland buffer zone by the Lakeshore was created by the Congress "...to stabilize and protect the existing character and uses of the land, waters, and other properties within such zone..." The Lakeshore is the only unit of the National Park Service that has a legislated buffer zone, and zoning planning has evolved over the years in order to meet the intent of Congress. Based on recommendations contained in the National Park Service "Land Protection Plan" for the National Lakeshore, both Alger County and Munising Township enacted zoning ordinances for the inland buffer zone which can help

ensure the "stabilization and protection of the existing character and uses of the land, water, and other properties" and still permit property development by its owners. The City of Munising and Burt Township have also formulated ordinances that meet the intent of the "Land Protection Plan" recommendations.

Other accomplishments directed by the General Management Plan include the cooperative construction and staffing of the interagency Visitor Information Center with the U.S. Forest Service in 1988. In 1992 the Lakeshore maintenance building on H-58 was constructed and the maintenance function was relocated from the Sand Point headquarters area. The Log Slide day use area was renovated and upgraded to permit access by larger vehicles and disabled visitors in 1999 and a logging history display structure was built in 2001.

Park legislation was amended by Congress in 1996 to add former Grand Marais U.S. Coast Guard facilities to the park (P.L. 104-333 sec. 203) and again in 1998 to delete the requirement for the scenic shoreline road (P.L. 105-378).

Staffing has changed in recent years with positions remaining unfilled after vacancies and new positions being added to the park staff. In 1991, an Education Specialist was added to the park staff to develop and manage an education outreach program in local school systems. Staff has also increased within the Science and Natural Resources Division with the addition of forest ecology, aquatic, and wildlife management staff. Increased data collection on endangered species, park wildlife, aquatic systems, and forest health has been of primary concern.

From an annual visitation of 271,575 in 1972, its year of establishment, public use of the National Lakeshore has grown to 383,705 in 2004. The value of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore to the people of Alger County and the nation can be measured in its importance as the first National Lakeshore, the opportunities it offers through its facilities for visitor recreation, and its use by hundreds of thousands of visitors yearly, combined with the associated benefits those visitors bring to the local economy.

The true value of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore rests in the lands, resources and history it preserves for present and future generations. The Great Lakes shoreline is pristine and development pressures exist. Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore preserves 42 miles of that pristine lakeshore. Significant lakeshore development, planning and management progress has been witnessed in the past three decades. To meet the challenges of further road improvements, scientific baseline data collection, visitor services, and continued facility development, federal, state, and local actions visitor services, and continued facility development will be working together in the future.

