



Community Newsletter, February 2024

Superintendent's Office

Here you will find information from our various teams for the month of February. We are working on making improvements to the monthly check-in and website in the coming year and will be continuing to use the monthly check-in to keep our communities in the loop on all things Voyageurs.

For updates go to: <https://www.nps.gov/voya/learn/management/stateofthepark.htm>

This month, the superintendent attended Frozen Lake Plan and Border Park Zone meetings, and met with one of the park's partners, the Jefferson National Parks Association. He also traveled to Grand Portage, MN mid-month to attend the Heart of the Continent Partnership meeting. He has been busy reviewing applicants to fill the Lead of Interpretation position and developing communication related to the upcoming scoping of the Frozen Lake Plan which will be held in June.

All divisions of the park participated in a Psychological Safety Stand Down in February, implemented by the NPS Occupational Safety and Health Program to promote a more inclusive and communicative workforce. The next Safety Stand Down that is part of this new initiative will focus on mental health and suicide awareness and prevention.

A pre-spring information session with the International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Board (IRLWWB) Water Levels Committee provided an overview of current watershed conditions. Key points relayed a low chance for flooding:

- Water within snowpack is at historically low levels of less than 1", reducing the chance of spring flooding
- Spring precipitation will be an important flood risk factor, and there is currently no strong signal for above or below normal precipitation in the long-range forecast
- You can view the most recent Spring Flood Outlook here: <https://www.weather.gov/dlh/spring-flood-outlook>

Employee Spotlight

Each month the park will spotlight a different employee. February's spotlight is Kendra Kersting, a winter field fellow at Voyageurs National Park specializing in dark sky work.

Originally from the southeast corner of Minnesota, Kendra's love for the outdoors grew at a young age during family trips to northern Minnesota. Night skies have always held special interest, especially in constellation mythology. This winter she has enjoyed star gazing with coworkers, learning about the park telescopes, and educating visitors on the night sky. Although she is no stranger to harsh Minnesota winters, she has been enjoying this year's milder temperatures and is eager to catch a glimpse of the northern lights.

Kendra first joined the National Park Service as a seasonal employee at Wind Cave National Park in 2018. Since then, she has spent her summers as a seasonal ranger at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve before happily returning to Minnesota. Last summer she served as a seasonal interpretation ranger for the Namakan district of Voyageurs, where she will be returning to again this summer. We are happy to have you back, Kendra!



Administration and Business Services Team

Becky Olson, administrative assistant at Voyageurs for nearly 12 years, has moved on to a remote position as a Human Resources Specialist with the northeast regional office of the National Park Service. Her years of dedication to Voyageurs are much appreciated, and we wish her the very best on the next chapter of her NPS career.

The administrative staff is still in a phase of transition, having seen significant turnover of staff in the past several months. The newest team member, Emma Misner, onboarded into her Budget Analyst position mid-February and has kept busy with trainings to become familiar with her new role.

The administrative division is preparing for the upcoming busy period of facilitating new hires and onboarding seasonal employees in the spring.

Natural and Cultural Resources Team

The division lead attended a listening session with the Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe and Voyageurs Conservancy. Staff continue to hire for their summer field season, while also drafting a proposal for a survey of aquatic invasive species in park lakes and planning for moose restoration work with the cooperative moose habitat planning team.

The wetlands and wildlife projects will both be assisted by a few extra positions this summer, made available through the Voyageurs Conservancy's Field Fellow program, and three Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Technician positions for the Kettle Falls portage are also being hired.

The park's Collections Specialist is conducting the mandatory annual inventory of museum collections, working on a historic structures prioritization spreadsheet, and communicating with the regional museum program to schedule a visit to the park's collections later this year.

The park's resource management staff worked with the park's fire crew to conduct prescribed cattail burns on both Rainy and Kabetogama Lakes and will be meeting with the MN Department of Natural Resources Biological Survey staff to hear updates on vegetation monitoring that has been occurring in Voyageurs.

Interpretation, Education, and Recreational Permits Team

Interpretation division and Voyageurs Conservancy staff participated in the second annual Boreal Stargazing week, a night sky celebration that partners with organizations like Expeditions in Education, the Friends of the Boundary Waters, Starry Skies North, the Superior National Forest, and others to offer in-person and virtual night sky events across the region. There were 511 participants at events held in International Falls, Duluth, and the Twin Cities, and over 42,000 students participated in virtual programs that connected classrooms throughout the nation to Voyageurs National Park. Regarding the virtual experience, one teacher wrote, "Pretty sure this was the best thing our school has ever participated in. Seeing snow for the first time made some kids cry. Thank you for being so funny and informative." The classroom shown here was watching from Lexington, SC!

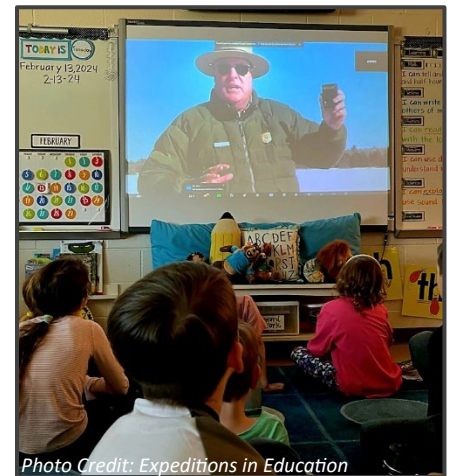


Photo Credit: Expeditions in Education

The Voyageurs Conservancy continues to play a huge helping role in facilitating new Field Fellow opportunities in the park, forming new partnerships for the Teen Ambassador program, and bringing a new cohort of teachers to Voyageurs through the second STEAM in the Park program in the summer of 2024, all while planning for their annual Spring Thaw fundraising event and helping provide snowshoe programs at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center.

Hiring has nearly wrapped up for the 2024 summer season, and we look forward to bringing on our next team of enthusiastic and knowledgeable interpretation rangers to staff our visitor centers and lead our programs and boat tours. The park's volunteer coordinator continues to work on recruiting VIPs (Volunteers in Parks) to assist the interpretation division with visitor center operations.

We have seen a small handful of winter campers this mild season – mostly at the primitive hike-in sites along the Kab-Ash Trail and frontcountry campsites located close to visitor centers.

Visitor and Resource Protection Team

Rangers continue to patrol on snowmobile trails as long as conditions allow travel and will be gathering traffic counter information to compile trail usage statistics.

Law Enforcement staff assisted the maintenance division in clearing vegetation around electric junction boxes and have been offering CPR training courses to permanent employees before the season ramps up.

Applicants are being reviewed for the Commercial Services Specialist position.

Facilities Team

Staff attended the Kabetogama Sanitary Sewer Line project meeting to gain an understanding of how the design team will work with the park on necessary surveys in the historic district.

In the Namakan district of the park, crews are brushing and falling trees to clear safe spaces around electrical junction boxes, building floater docks to be installed at some campsites and the Hoist Bay visitor destination site this summer, and the Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center had Starlink internet installed.

The Rainy district staff are busy planning for summer projects by compiling material and lumber costs, gathering information for a carpet replacement contract at the Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center to take place next fall, and servicing the boat fleet in preparation for summer operations.

Voyageurs has been selected as a host site for a Water/Wastewater Internship Pilot, which will host one 26-week Conservation Legacy intern to work with the park's Utility Systems Operator, Ben Line.

The park's facility manager and district leads from the Maintenance division traveled to the regional office in Omaha, NE for supervisors training at the end of this month.

Maintenance staff halted their ice-checking for establishing an ice road due to a lack of consistent ice thickness. Staff continued to ride park trails to monitor conditions throughout the month of February, which brought worsening conditions around pressure ridges (pictured right) and ultimately resulted in the early closure of all snowmobile trails.

Mainland snowshoe trails remain open and usable but can be traversed just fine in boots. We all look forward to a colder and snowier winter next year!



Photo Credit: Chad Nevalainen