USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Welcome!

The USDA Forest Service (USFS) wants to hear your ideas and questions on preliminary strategies that enhance visitor access, protect resources, and improve visitor experiences in Grand Island National Recreation Area within the Hiawatha National Forest.

In April 2025, we invited you to help envision the future of Grand Island and identify key concerns. Your feedback was instrumental in shaping the preliminary strategies presented below. Your input will help inform the planning outcomes for Grand Island. Please continue reading to find out more!

Stay Involved

Please submit comments online by visiting ParkPlanning - Grand Island National Recreation Area Visitor Use and Experience Planning - https://parkplanning.nps.gov/USFS_GrandIsland

Project Website QR Code









About Grand Island

Grand Island is a popular destination for residents of and visitors to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Located in Lake Superior, it is about one-half mile from the mainland community of Munising, MI. The island features breathtaking overlooks, pristine sandy beaches, fascinating cultural sites, deep hardwood forests, and inland lakes. Visitors come to bike, explore, and appreciate nature, whether for a few hours or for a few days.

Developing a Vision for the Future

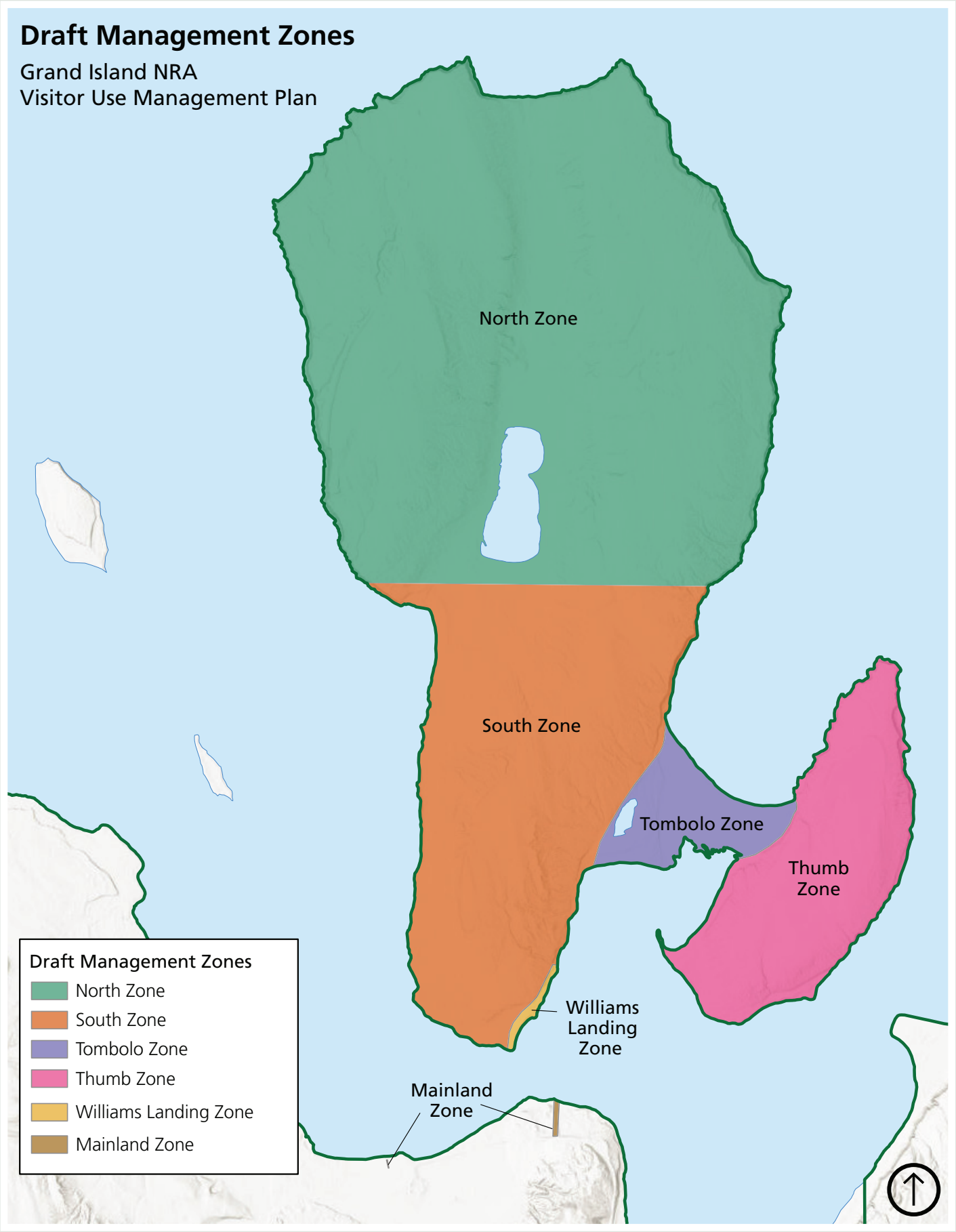
Visitation to Grand Island has steadily increased since the 1990s, reaching over 20,000 annual visitors in 2025. This growth has brought challenges, including increased pressure on sensitive natural and cultural resources, infrastructure limitations, and a degraded visitor experience.

To address these challenges, the USFS is developing a comprehensive Visitor Use Management Strategy. The strategy outlines short-, medium-, and long-term actions to ensure that Grand Island is a safe and sustainable recreation destination.

The plan will identify the following key elements:

- Desired conditions are statements of aspiration that describe resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services that an agency strives to achieve and maintain.
- Management strategies are approaches that work toward achieving desired conditions.

For additional information on the planning framework, please visit the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council Website - https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/VUM/Framework


Draft Management Zones
Grand Island NRA
Visitor Use Management Plan
North Zone
South Zone
Tombolo Zone
Thumb Zone
Williams Landing Zone
Mainland Zone
Draft Management Zones
North Zone
South Zone
Tombolo Zone
Thumb Zone
Williams Landing Zone
Mainland Zone

Desired Conditions and Management Strategies

Desired conditions are broad, qualitative descriptions that outline what the USFS is trying to achieve. These can differ by area. The plan includes desired conditions for the entire planning area as well as specific management zones, shown in the map of draft management zones on the previous page. The USFS uses management zones to define where desired conditions and appropriate management actions differ across the landscape, based on resource sensitivity, cultural significance, and appropriate visitor experiences.

The preliminary management strategies represent the proposed USFS approach for achieving the desired conditions island-wide as well as for each management zone. The preliminary strategies were developed based on public feedback, staff input, and subject matter expertise. While some strategies may apply across the entire island, others are site-specific. Implementation will depend on compliance, staffing, and funding availability.

Area-Wide Desired Conditions

Visitor Use and Experience:

- High-quality, low-impact recreation supports solitude, quiet, and clear wayfinding.
- Visitors depart informed and prepared: knowledgeable about conditions, regulations, wildlife behavior, and food-storage practices.
- Rustic, sustainable facilities and transportation systems blend with the natural setting; motorized access is minimal, preserving the island's peaceful character.
- Positive wildlife interactions, including observing bears in natural habitat, are part of the experience, supported by visitor education.
- Visitor use is managed to maintain a clean, litter-free environment where people can experience unspoiled nature.

Tribal Access & Indigenous Connections:

- Tribal Nations with ancestral ties to Grand Island, including the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and the Bay Mills Indian Community, have meaningful, equitable access for cultural practices, ceremonies, and traditional medicine gathering.
- Management decisions reflect the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples, informed by collaboration, consultation, and co-stewardship approaches that elevate Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
- Interpretation, planning, and education ensure Indigenous connections are understood as ongoing and alive, not solely historical.

Natural and Cultural Resources:

- Forests, wetlands, and shorelines remain ecologically diverse and healthy, supporting native species; invasive species are managed.
- Fire is used as a tool for ecological health, consistent with Indigenous land stewardship practices, to promote biodiversity.
- Cultural resources, including Indigenous sites, archeological features, and historic structures, are preserved and maintained in collaboration with Tribal partners.
- Historic structures are managed through a structure-by-structure evaluation framework: actively used structures serve interpretive, educational, or administrative purposes; others are maintained to preserve future management options pending further study.

Facilities and Services:

- Low-impact, rustic infrastructure is maintained to blend into the landscape and support sustainable recreation.
- Trails, roads, and campsites are managed to minimize erosion, protect habitats, and support visitor safety.
- Administrative and operational infrastructure is functional, well-maintained, and scaled appropriately to the island's management needs and visitor volumes.





Area-Wide Management Strategies

Education Strategies:

- **Pre-arrival education strategy.** Share consistent and timely information about regulations, current conditions, safety, resource protection, and cultural history across websites, signage, Recreation.gov, and staff interactions.
- **Better digital planning tools.** Enhance website and social media with interactive trip-planning, trail descriptions, and historical and cultural content.
- **Culturally grounded interpretation.** In collaboration with Tribal partners, add interpretation materials that reflect Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and Bay Mills Indian Community history and connection to the island.

Designated Campsite Strategies:

- **Reallocate campsites.** Expand sites gradually based on funding and demand. All sites would be permit-only through Recreation.gov.
- **Site delineation.** Prevent campsites spreading and limit social trailing through the use of physical markers, natural vegetation buffers, and tent pads.
- **Day-of reservations.** Explore options for same-day reservations to improve flexibility for visitors.

Random Camping Management Progression:

- **Prohibit random camping in the Thumb Zone** due to cultural and ecological concerns.
- **Phase 1:** Pilot registration system. Implement a voluntary registration system for all random camping for public-safety purposes. If conditions warrant, implement required registration for data-collection purposes. Additionally, provide robust education on regulations and leave no trace (LNT) principles. Conduct monitoring, including surveying random camping areas for impacts.
- **Phase 2:** Permit system. If monitoring shows nearing thresholds in certain areas, temporarily close heavily impacted areas for restoration.
- **Phase 3:** Prohibit random camping. If monitoring shows thresholds have been crossed, prohibit random camping where needed.

Human-Wildlife Conflict:

- **Education.** Provide clear messaging to visitors through trip-planning materials, signage at visitor-use locations, and digital education materials.
- **Food storage.** Additional bear boxes would be added to all sites (overnight and day-use) lacking this infrastructure. Bear poles and/or bear boxes would also be installed at all recreation residences and rental cabins.
- **Bear canisters.** Recommend the use of bear canisters in all overnight trip-planning materials.

Mainland Zone Desired Conditions

- A welcoming, well-organized departure point where parking infrastructure accommodates all user types without overflow and visitors leave informed, prepared, and oriented to the island experience.

Mainland Zone Management Strategies

- **Pre-arrival education.** Provide dockside education in coordination with the concessionaire.
- **Shuttle service.** Consider partnership opportunities to provide a shuttle service to Powell Point.
- **Mainland parking management.** Restripe the parking area to maximize the number of standard spaces.

Williams Landing Zone Desired Conditions

- A quiet, well-maintained arrival setting where historic structures have a defined stewardship pathway; recreational residences are managed consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Connects visitors to Grand Island's layered history and acknowledges that Tribal connection is ongoing.
- Provides seamless transition into the South Zone.

Williams Landing Zone Management Strategies

- **Williams Landing Education.** Build upon current signage to highlight key regulations, safety, and resource concerns. In collaboration with Tribal partners add welcome signage and materials.
- **Historic Structures Management.** Continue to manage historic structures according to law and policy. Conduct a historic property future use study. Consider allowing day-use at Stone Quarry with protective barriers.



North Zone Desired Conditions

- A backcountry setting accessible where natural soundscapes and wildlife corridors are intact, Echo Lake orients visitors to self-reliance expectations ahead, and the Northeast Point and West Overlooks offer scenic destinations with minimal infrastructure.
- Old North Light is stewarded through partnerships that make its history accessible to visitors.

North Zone Management Strategies

- **Old North Lighthouse Enhancements.** Site enhancements may include mowed pathways, managed viewshed, fencing for safety, interpretive signage, and restroom. Consider opening the lighthouse to tours.



South Zone Desired Conditions

- The hub of the Grand Island visitor experience, where the widest range of services is available in a characteristically rustic setting and the overall development footprint remains consistent with what current planning documents authorize.

South Zone Management Strategies

- **Mather Lodge.** Evaluate need for public access to view the lodge and explore options for adaptive reuse of one side of the lodge for administrative use (e.g., housing for staff and volunteers).

Tombolo Zone Desired Conditions

- A semi-primitive setting anchored by Trout Bay and Murray Bay where rare plant communities and archeological resources are intact outside designated areas and the zone's ecological and cultural sensitivity is visibly reflected in the visitor experience.
- Access primarily via trail or boat, with limited motorized use.

Tombolo Zone Management Strategies

- **Loon Call, Murray Bay, and Bermuda Campsites.** Consolidate Loon Call with Murray Bay Group Site, improve directional signage, add water-based direction markers to guide boaters, and decommission the existing trail to Loon Call.
- **Little Dune.** Relocate the bathroom to a more centralized location near the camping and boardwalk areas and increase the size of the restroom from a single to a double.

Thumb Zone Desired Conditions

- The most remote and wild experience on Grand Island, where the landscape itself rather than the infrastructure defines the visitor experience, the zone's wild and undisturbed character supports the privacy and respectful setting Tribal members seek for traditional practices and ceremonies.

Thumb Zone Management Strategies

- **Reduce camping on the Thumb.** Reallocate Cobble Cove and Flat Rock Campsites to other zones for safety and resource-protection needs.
- **Add Muskrat Point to reservation system.** Currently available as a first-come-first-served site, add it to the Recreation.gov reservation system.
- **East Channel Lighthouse.** Continue to work with private landowners and the community to maintain public viewing from the water.

Share Your Thoughts



Please share your thoughts and ideas on the development of the Grand Island Visitor Use Management Plan. This review is open for a 45-day period. Your input will help refine the desired conditions and preliminary strategies. We are seeking your responses to the following questions:

1. To what extent do the strategies address desired conditions and input from the last comment period?
2. Are there ideas or strategies we have not included that you think should be considered?
3. What other comments or suggestions do you have?

Please check out the project page
to stay up to date on the latest updates:
ParkPlanning - Grand Island National Recreation Area Visitor Use and Experience Planning - https://parkplanning.nps.gov/USFS_GrandIsland

Project Website QR Code

USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE