

**National Park Service
75th Anniversary**

**VOYAGEUR
NATIONAL PARK**

**20th Anniversary
Celebration**

August 25, 1991

**International Falls,
Minnesota**

**Talk by
Elmer L. Andersen**

June 27, 1962, was a beautiful day in the Rainy Lake/Kabetogema area, as it so often is. Great billowing cumulus clouds drifted by in the clear blue sky. A gentle breeze provided just that ripple on the water to make it glitter like a sea of diamonds. Nature was at her finest and undoubtedly affected the spirits of the group that had gathered on an important mission. Included were Conrad Wirth, Director of the National Park Service, Howard Baker, regional director of the Park Service, Clarence Prout, Commissioner of Minnesota's Department of Conservation, U.W. "Judge" Hella, Director of the state Division of Parks, Sigurd Olson, noted conservationist and author, Russell Fridley, Director of the Minnesota Historical Society, Geo. Amidon of the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company, and Gov. Elmer Andersen.

The purpose was to seek consensus on the suggestion that the Kabetogema area was worthy of consideration and study for a national park. We toured all day, lunched at the Kettle Falls Hotel, did a little fishing, a lot of looking and wide ranging discussing. We seemed to be of one mind by the end of the day so I wrote out a memorandum which read as follows: "After touring the Kabetogema peninsula with Mr. Conrad Wirth, Director of the National Park Service, Mr. Howard Baker regional director of the Park Service, Mr. Russell Fridley, director of the Minnesota Historical Society, representatives of our Conservation Department and consulting with some private owners of property in the area there is a consensus of opinion.

"The Kabetogema area is an enormous recreational resource to a great degree still in its natural state. For many years it

has provided economic benefit, including vacation opportunities, for many people.

“It should be made available for use by more people while preserving its wilderness character for posterity.

“Having a National Park in Minnesota would be an asset for Minnesota residents and a great magnet for tourists.

“The Kabetogema Peninsula would add to the National Park system historical, recreational and wilderness values not now represented in the park system.

“For these agreed upon reasons the participants, representing state, national and private interests conclude that all parties should co-operate in detailed and comprehensive studies to determine whether a National Park should be established in this area, which could be called the Voyageur Waterways National Park.”
Sig Olson had suggested the name. For me

it was the beginning of a fantastic experience that continues to this day.

I greatly appreciated the invitation from Supt. Ben Clary to speak on this occasion. It has provided me with the opportunity to review files, renew friendships, and relive many wonderful experiences.

THERE WERE EARLIER EFFORTS

One has to go far back to find the beginnings of the Minnesota National Park idea. In 1891 Rep. G.J. Lomen of St. Paul introduced and obtained passage of a resolution memorializing Congress to establish a national park in northern Minnesota. Nothing came of that. Later in the 1890s the Federated Women's Clubs called for a national park in the Leech Lake, Cass Lake, Winnibigoshish area. That did not materialize but later the Chippewa National Forest was established there. M&O Paper Company proposed a

land trade for purposes of establishing a national park but when accused of trying to trade worthless rocky island for rich forest lands, withdrew the offer in surprise and disappointment. There may have been still others.

When Judge Hella became director of the parks division of the Minnesota Department of Conservation he reviewed a parks plan that had been established in 1938, and outlived its usefulness. A new plan was needed. Hella recruited the help of Chet Brown and Evan Haines, of the National Park service, to work with him in studying and appraising possible sites for new state parks. They started at the Iowa line and worked their way north, touring and viewing during the day and discussing their findings at night.

When they reached International Falls they toured the Kabetogema area and spent one evening discussing the situation

at the Rex Hotel. At one point Evan Haines suggested that Kabetogema could possibly qualify for a national park. Hella felt immediately it was a great idea and called his International Falls businessman friend Wayne Judy, asking him to come down to the hotel, they wanted to try out an idea on him. Judy came down and was immediately enthusiastic. Hella reminded Judy that it would certainly be a controversial suggestion and might make life difficult for him, but Judy said he would be willing to do all he could to bring it about.

When planning the dedication of Bear Head Lake State park Conrad Wirth, son of Theodore Wirth, the builder of the Minneapolis park system, and a native of Minnesota who had become director of the National Park Service, was asked to speak and spend an extra day to tour the Kabetogema area. There had already been

an internal memo in the Park Service reporting on the activities of Haines and Brown and their reaction to Kabetogema. It was received favorably by staff. That set the stage for that beautiful day in June 1962.

The Park Service then began its first official study and in Minnesota we began to seek support.

THERE WAS OPPOSITION

Opposition was immediate, firm and understandable. Boise Cascade had taken over M&O Paper Company and embarked on recreational land development in Illinois and western states and wanted to develop their Kabetogema land, not have it taken over by the government. They wanted to carve a park out of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area which would certainly enhance the value of their nearby land. Ultimately their land development projects went sour and were aban-

done. George Amidon, land manager for Boise, represented their opposition but always with dignity and respect. We all came to admire him greatly. He and I debated before many audiences and became fast friends. His graciousness was displayed when in 1988, in one of his letters, he wrote "And I am now willing to say I believe preservation of this unique and beautiful area was in the best interest of this and future generations". He cherished this land as much as anyone ever did and was largely responsible for having preserved its beauty so as to qualify for park status.

Many people wanted to keep things the way they were, they didn't want any more government ownership and they did not want their hunting, fishing and other sports disrupted. There were resort owners who felt it would not aid the area economically, that visitors to national

parks were canoeists, back packers and campers "who didn't spend any money". But there were also resort owners like Al Ostlund, the Nelsons on Crane Lake, the Drews who supported the park idea from the outset. The opposition was vociferous but later identified as in the minority.

ORGANIZATION OF VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK ASSOCIATION

Early supporters were not numerous but dedicated. George Esslinger, a resort owner and dog sled operator, and Judge Mark Abbot quickly joined Wayne Judy, and Wayne and George traveled far and wide in their search for support. Dr. Norman Baker, Fergus Falls, generated interest in his area and was key later in land acquisition for park benefit. A key development occurred in Minneapolis. Martin Kellogg was Chairman of a Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce committee to study ways to promote tourism to which

Chamber staff man Lloyd Brandt had been assigned. They became interested in the efforts for a national park, and secured the endorsement of the Board of Directors.

Meanwhile, Archie Chelseth and Bob Watson, working on public relations for H.B. Fuller Company were loaned to the park effort and had set up an office at Prior and University in St. Paul. They joined forces with Judge Ed Chapman of Minneapolis, an ardent conservationist and outdoorsman, who began to speak and work for the park as soon as he learned of the proposition. Watson and Chapman spent many a weekend traveling to all parts of the state meeting with any groups that would listen.

Wayne Judy, George Esslinger and Judge Abbot learned of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce action and wrote asking if they could come down for a

meeting. Out of that came the idea that there ought to be some kind of organization to further the campaign. A meeting was called in April 1965, to which about 50 people came. Judge Chapman presided and it was decided to organize and incorporate under the name Voyageurs National Park Association.

Judge Chapman did the legal work. The first board set up in the Articles and By Laws were Chapman, Lloyd Brandt, Martin Kellogg, Wayne Judy, George Esslinger, Sam Morgan, Glen Ross, Tom Savage and Elmer Andersen. Judge Ed Chapman became the first President of the organization.

Lloyd Brandt remembers that once when he was speaking of the enormity of the task this little group was undertaking that I said I had a secret weapon. That was Rita Shemesh, a dynamo of organizational effectiveness. We had worked together for

a number of years and had just completed a successful collaboration on the taconite amendment. We recruited her to become executive secretary. She had a natural love for the outdoors and quickly became completely dedicated and irresistibly optimistic about the income. She sought out every organization she could find for an endorsing resolution. They were publicized as they came in and began to develop an aura of activity and favorable reaction. Later, when we went to Washington she had a list of 1400 organizations that were backing the project. Another great recruit was Erick Kendall, a journalist and editor of news publication for one of the co-ops. He became editor of the newsletter. We all grieved at his early passing. We were a lean volunteer organization but needed some money. A fund raising letter was devised, Wallace Dayton and Wheelock Whitney agreed to let their

names be used and it was successful both in bringing in funds and gaining adherents.

In Duluth a geologist named Jack Everett became interested and felt it would be helpful if not all the support was centered in the Twin City area. So he, with Arthur Roberts, Ingrid Wells, and others formed their own group to hold meetings, and as volunteers came aboard book them out to address interested groups. Julia Marshall held a fund raiser at the Kitchee Gamee Club.

One of the very important developments was a meeting of Sig and Elizabeth Olson with leaders of the park effort, arranged by Marty Kellogg. At first Sig was concerned that a park might endanger his beloved wilderness canoe area but became satisfied and this revered couple then threw themselves into the effort. Their prestige brought organizational support

from conservation and environmental groups both within the state and nationally.

There has always been a soft spot in my heart for Don Fraser, present mayor of Minneapolis, then a representative in Congress. He was the first Congressman to publicly endorse the park project. John Blatnik came later — he always wanted to be sure a big majority of his people were behind anything he did. Once committed he became a tremendous and crucial force who never let down. Later when the bill was introduced which Blatnik drafted with the assistance of his then administrative assistant, now Congressman Jim Oberstar, all Representatives and Senators joined in sponsoring it.

Support that some feel was the single most important thing that happened, at least in the early stage, was the result of a survey conducted by the Northwest

Sportsmen Club. This was a group of conservative, respected north shore sportsmen. The survey indicated that a majority of the sportsmen in the area supported the idea of a national park. This exposed the opposition as a vocal but limited minority. It had great effect in generating support in northeastern Minnesota.

As to media support, they gave our effort notice which helped and gradually more and more newspapers provided editorial endorsement. The International Falls Journal was a holdout. Editor Harry Davey seemed closely attuned to Boise Cascade desires. Jack Finnegan of the Pioneer Press and George Peterson of the Minneapolis Tribune are remembered for their support.

OBTAINING CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL

In 1964 the National Park Service issued a preliminary plan and report recommending the Kabetogema area for national park status. This was exciting and encouraging news and brought the proposal to national attention. It now became necessary to step up our own national activity. In discussing with Russ Fridley who else of national stature we might recruit to help us, Charles Lindbergh's name emerged. We both knew him but Russ particularly had worked with him in restoring the Lindbergh home in Little Falls and establishing the Lindbergh Museum. Responding to a letter, Lindbergh indicated he was interested but must first visit the site which he had never done although he grew up in Little Falls. He would not give us advance notice of his

arrival, as was his custom, but would drop in some day for a trip to the area.

One day I received a call from Russ that Charles was at the airport ready to go. We lost no time joining him. On the way he expressed the desire to stop at Little Falls to visit the homestead and also to rent a plane at International Falls so he could fly over the area. Russ called Francis Einartson, manager of the International Falls airport, with whom he had served in the Army. There was an amusing exchange between the unidentified Lindbergh and Einartson on Lindbergh's competence to fly a float plane.

George Esslinger had made boating arrangements and met us. Lindbergh was thrilled with his visit, enthusiastically endorsed the park, generated publicity, wrote letters, recruited Congressional members and opened doors. In one letter to Esslinger he wrote: "What a wonderful

area it is, there in northern Minnesota with its islands and its island lakes. It would make one of the world's great National Parks. What a tragedy it would be to miss such an opportunity. I hope very much we won't."

There were others who assisted, Justice Wm. O Douglas, who was born in Minnesota, was one. Radio star Arthur Godfrey was another. He had a deep and active interest in conservation and gave us several minutes on his national radio show.

But there was still opposition at home. National Park Service representative John Kawamoto came to International Falls to present a plan. He was greeted by a large audience who interrupted his presentation and grew so boisterous that the program stopped until Ernest Oberholzer quieted the crowd.

Ober played another key role when Roy Taylor, Representative in Congress and

Chair of the sub committee on Parks and Recreation came to the Falls to conduct a public hearing. Ober was present and became upset at the negative attitude expressed by a number of resort owners. He sought recognition and gave the opposing resort owners a "dressing down" for their selfishness and short sightedness. He particularly scolded them for referring to park visitors as canoeists and back packers who wouldn't spend any money.

Taylor, who was friendly to our project held a hearing in Washington. It turned out favorably.

At that point our biggest hurdle was Chairman Wayne Aspinall who had promised that the bill would not get out of his committee and had told Taylor to delay action. We needed a miracle and a miracle came. In a primary election in Maryland in early 1970 the Chairman of the Public Works Committee of the House of Repre-

representatives was defeated for renomination and as the ranking Democrat on the committee, John Blatnik became the Chairman designate. Everyone in Congress wanted to get brownie points with the powerful new chairman. Blatnik was not slow about using the advantage. He asked Taylor to call a meeting of his sub committee and got word to Chairman Aspinall that the bill was coming out. Aspinall got the message and stepped aside. Taylor had the biggest attendance he ever had and the bill was passed unanimously and later cleared the whole committee, was passed by the House and sent to the Senate.

Throughout all of this Jim Oberstar was a tremendously hard and effective worker. When we got to the Senate we found that the information that passage of park bills was routine in the Senate as it depended on the House did not apply to Voyageurs. Roadblocks had been put up and our Sena-

tors were busy with other matters. We asked Jim Oberstar to come over and help us. We found that Interior Committee Chairman Henry Jackson and his staff had been convinced our project was not ready and they should waste no time on it. Through a friendly ranking Republican on the committee we obtained a hearing with Jackson and his staff and Sig Olson and I went to the meeting.

Our son Julian, on the faculty of Shoreline Community College in Seattle, gave us help by generating letters of support from key Democrats and environmental groups in Washington to Sen. Jackson which undoubtedly helped pave the way. Jackson and his staff were attentive as we poured our hearts out with intensity that the project was worthy, was ready and should be expedited. We had ample documentation. When we finished Jackson looked at his staff and asked. "Well, what

do you make of that?" A senior staff member said it was a far different set of facts than they had been provided and they now thought the project was ready and should move. "Let's pass it then," said Jackson, and pass it they did. President Nixon signed the bill on Jan. 8, 1971. One of Ed Chapman's prized possessions is a letter from the president and one of the pens he used in signing the bill — and surely a fitting memento to one who had started so early and worked so hard and long for a noble cause.

Great as we considered this achievement to be it was simply authorization for a park and before the park could be established there was much more to be done. Invite me back for the 25th anniversary celebration and I'll tell the rest of the story.

I do want to mention some people, from the early days, who should not be forgot-

ten but not attempt now to outline their contributions: Roger Williams, Michael Ames., Willard Munger, Irv Anderson, Bill Magee, Gordon Mikkelson, Bob Herbst, Calvin Rudquist, Senator Stanley Holmquist, Tom Newcome, George Ludcke, Al Marshall, Bob Ziemer, Dave Roe, Bill Holes, Ingrid Wells, Fred Witzig, Grace Lee Nute, Jim Kimball, Wayne Olson and I'm sure I leave out as many as I name. If there is one thing that has come home to me as I prepared for this talk it is how many people it took. The participants named are predominantly male but spouses were with us all the way and frequently provided the encouragement that kept spirits up when the going was tough. It can be a time for celebration and thankfulness that throughout a series of the most fortuitous circumstances a job got done that might have never happened if delayed longer.

REMEMBER THE NATIVE AMERICANS

One of the less addressed heritages of this marvelous area is the culture of the native Americans who were its first inhabitants. We should recover the history, honor the traditions, respect the descendants, and make the native American story a key part of the Voyageur National Park presentation.

75 YEARS OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

This is also the 75th anniversary of the National Park Service. That history is well told in literature available to you in the visitor center so I have but a few observations. In my own experience there is no agency or department of government for which I have greater respect and admiration than the National Park Service. Whenever you encounter the personnel they are well trained, knowledgeable and

highly professional. They also display a dedication and commitment to their work and concern for the people they serve. The personnel and the service deserves more support than they get. Much could be said about the needs to counteract age and erosion from overuse of some of the parks. Those closest to the situation are deeply concerned for both the personnel and the maintenance needs of the parks and other properties administered by the National Park Service. I salute them and hope we will all endeavor to be of more help and encourage our representatives in Congress to be responsive.

Finally, this is a celebration but not a conclusion. Not only must there be constant vigilance to protect the gains so far made but we must keep a vision of the future. The highway the Voyageurs traveled extended from Grand Portage to International Falls and beyond. There is

an enormous opportunity for cooperation between the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, interested individuals and organizations and counterparts in Canada to grasp the opportunity to extend Voyageurs to its proper and natural boundaries to become one of the truly vast preserved natural areas in the entire world where every form of outdoor recreation can be accommodated and basic values preserved for future generations.

We should never forget the reminder of Director Matt in 1987 that the National Park Service has the responsibility of preservation forever — forever — preservation forever. Also we can renew commitment to the mission “To conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will

leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Whatever my own future I know that if I keep the lob pines in my mind's eye I will stay on course and when I hear the wild free call of a loon, I'll know I'm in paradise.



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