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Authors

Friesema, H. Paul

Friesema, Sarah J.

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- ARTHUR F. McEVROY is Professor, Department of History, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

INDIANS AND THE NATIONAL PARKS

Of The Great Lakes

H. Paul Friesema with Sarah J. Friesema

*Workshop Paper for the Conference on The National Parks
of the Great Lakes
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There are 10 national park units located around the Great Lakes devoted to preserving and interpreting areas and events of the Great Lakes region. This paper analyzes the relations between the 10 park units and American Indians.

The Indian groups located around the Great Lakes can be called Woodland Indians. They share many cultural traits, and have developed similar adaptations to the Great Lakes environment. Many of the Woodland tribal groups who occupied the Great Lakes region at the time of European settlement have disappeared from the region—either by removal, or through cultural destruction and absorption. Nevertheless, the Indian population around the Great Lakes is growing. This Chippewa and (growing) remnants of the related Ottawa and Potawatomi currently live in close enough proximity to be said to border Apostle Islands, Isle Royale, Grand Portage, St. Croix, and Voyageurs. Other Chippewa and related groups live close to Indiana Dunes, Sleeping Bear Dunes, and Pictured Rocks. Most active issues of NPS-American Indian concern in the Great Lakes are actually issues of NPS-Chippewa (Ottawa-Potawatomi) relationships.

Even though none of the Great Lakes park units has a primary mission to deal with Indian matters, many Native American issues face these parks. Nine of the park units have critical Indian archeological sites and artifacts; some parks interpret historical and social transformations involving Native people as major themes; a number of parks are located around existing reservations and communities; some parks are involved in current conflicts about Indian fishing rights; some parks contain Indian land within their boundaries; and a number of parks seem to be possible subjects of American Indian Religious Freedom Act concern.

Examining relations between Indians and the National Park Service is important for many reasons. The Indians of the Great Lakes are the original inhabitants, and American Indians are increasingly active in pursuing claims to maintain or reestablish traditional activities. This is part of a general Indian awakening that is affecting all natural resources policy, including that of the National Park Service. This pressure upon the NPS is felt in the Great Lakes, and seems likely to increase in the near future.

Indian rights and relationships with the National Park Service are developed in general legislation such as the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and in specific statutory requirements that are part of the authorizing legislation for national park units. Congressionally mandated NPS responsibilities toward Indians, in authorizing legislation, occur for Apostle Islands, Grand Portage, and St. Croix among Great Lakes parks. More general language in legislative directions about most of these parks which require the NPS to interpret Indian use and occupancy as part of the program authorized in these Acts. The NPS also has adopted a system-wide interim directive on Native Americans, known as Special Directive 78-1 (adopted February 6, 1978). This policy directive has been in the process of revision for at least two years, but has not yet been published in draft form. Substantial policy disputes appear to be as yet unresolved. The current general policy statement in Special Directive 78-1 is:

In carrying out its mandate for the conservation and public enjoyment of park lands and their resources, the Service, consistent with each park's legislative history, purpose and management objectives, will develop and execute its programs in a manner that reflects informed awareness, sensitivity, and serious concern for the traditions, cultural values and religious beliefs of Native Americans who have ancestral ties to such lands. This policy includes developing means for reasonable access to and non-recreational use of sites with traditional, ceremonial or religious significance; the involvement of Native Americans in the decision-making process where their traditions and cultural values will be affected by park programs; and providing technical assistance or participating in cooperative activities or programs related to Native American culture history, cultural traditions, or cultural resources.

Indian Land Rights Within the National Parks

Significant Indian land rights remain within the boundaries of Apostle Islands, Grand Portage, St. Croix and Voyageurs. In addition, Chippewa are claiming continuing Aboriginal ownership of Isle Royale National Park. It is possible that other land claims will emerge in these park units as part of the Indian awakening.

The most extensive land rights in National Parks of the Great Lakes are in Grand Portage and Apostle Islands. Grand Portage National Monument is entirely within the boundaries of the Grand Portage Indian reservation, which is home to the Grand Portage Band of Chippewa. This NPS unit was established in 1960 when the Chippewas conveyed land for the park to the Park Service. As part of that conveyance, the band was guaranteed many rights, including a general easement to use the park lands to log their own lands, for fishing and boating, for access to their own property, and for access to traditional hunting and trapping grounds.

Much of the mainland unit of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore lies within the reservation boundaries of the Red Cliff band of Chippewa. The authorizing legislation for Apostle Islands precludes NPS acquisition of most Indian land. Tribal law applies within the boundaries of Indian reservations, of course, so the Red Cliff Indian Conservation Code is the legal basis for regulating fishing, hunting and trapping within much of this park, for both Indians and visiting non-Indians.

The St. Croix Band of Wisconsin Chippewa owns land within the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. The legislation authorizing the St. Croix National River forbids the Secretary of the Interior from acquiring Indian lands, so long as the Indians are protecting their land. The Park Service and the St. Croix band have signed a mutual management agreement for that land.

Five separate tracts of Chippewa land lies within the borders of Voyageurs National Park, and other parcels are scattered along the park boundaries. The Minnesota Chippewas have been adamant opponents of restrictions on the use of their lands, and this has affected the designation of land uses within the park for such things as wilderness recommendations. Areas are being designated for non-wilderness so that Indians can maintain ORV and other access to their lands.

It is not contemplated that Indian land rights will be extinguished. These Indian land rights can significantly affect park resources, as in the wilderness recommendation for Voyageurs or the application of the band conservation code to users of the mainland section of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

Chippewa Services at Great Lakes National Parks

The Chippewa bands at Grand Portage and Apostle Islands have a variety of ties to adjoining park units based on agreements struck when the parks were created. Many of these deal with arrangements whereby the Chippewa provide services for the Park Service and for park visitors. The jobs and opportunities created with the parks were the major inducement to obtain Indian support for their creation.

It would appear that the Park Service has engaged the adjoining Indian groups in about the way they were directed or encouraged to do by the authorizing legislation. But the (incomplete) record does not suggest that the NPS has actively sought out Indians beyond what was mandated. There seem to be some important opportunities to engage Indian groups in serving park visitors at least at Isle Royale, St. Croix and Voyageurs.

Indian Archeological Sites

Significant Indian archeological sites are known to lie within all the Great Lakes NPS units except Perry's Victory. These sites are from historic as well as prehistoric times. Some are sites of quite recent times—occupied and used by currently living Indians, including fishing camps at Isle Royale and Apostle Islands, and cemeteries and burial grounds at Pictured Rocks, Voyageurs, and Apostle Islands. The lack of NPS resources to fulfill its unambiguous mandate to preserve archeological sites is a significant problem throughout the region and even Systemwide.

Under Indian pressure, the NPS has become increasingly sensitive to issues such as disturbance of burial sites, displaying of Indian artifacts, etc. So the excavation and interpretation of archeological sites—historic or prehistoric—is an increasingly difficult and delicate task for the National Park Service.

Interpretation

Each of the 10 Great Lakes national park units has an interpretive commitment that includes interpreting some aspects of Indian life or Indian-European historical relations, at least as a secondary theme. A review of these parks' Interpretive Prospectuses and current Statements for Interpretation reveals some problems in the interpretive activities. Some of the problems of interpretation may spring from limitations in the sensitivity of park officials to Indian issues. For example, the interpretive plan at Perry's Victory proposes that to deal with Commodore Perry's victory and General Harrison's successful campaign the stress should be on "the importance of Perry's victory and Harrison's follow-up campaign in bringing an end to the menace of the Indian tribes allied with the British." Some concern for understanding the Indians' position would seem appropriate, but does not appear in interpretive materials.

In many parks Indian issues are interpreted with sensitivity and skill. Chippewa and other Indians are themselves involved (or will be involved under current plans) in major interpretive programs at Indiana Dunes, Grand Portage, Apostle Islands and Voyageurs and are more occasionally involved in interpretive efforts (largely in craft demonstrations) at other national park areas of the Great Lakes. Because there is a close connection between the Chippewa bands and the national park units at Apostle Islands and Grand Portage, the Indians at those parks play a major, legally-based role in the interpretive program. A still more effective Indian interpretive program is possible at the Great Lakes national park units.

Many anthropologists and observers have noted the revitalization and even rebirth of traditional Indian craftsmanship in a number of tribes in the last decade. Notable are the Chippewa and Potawatomi tribes where, for example, traditional ribbonwork and clothing is being produced again after a long absence. It seems both possible and desirable for the National Park Service to nurture this cultural rebirth by featuring craft demonstrations at the parks, offering employment to traditional craftsmen, and actively promoting and assisting the Indians to market crafts in the concessions at all the parks of the Great Lakes.

Indian Commercial Fishing in the Great Lakes

Treaties between the United States and the Great Lakes Indians allow the Indians to continue to fish in the upper halves of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, and in all the American part of Lake Superior, in return for the extinguishment of Indian title to much of the land in the region. Unrestricted Indian commercial fishing is the cause of an intense conflict in the upper Great Lakes.

The intensity of opposition to unrestricted Indian fishing stems from the fact that the revitalized but now threatened Great Lakes fishery has created marvelous sports fishing for salmon and trout, providing a great stimulus for tourism. Many who visit the national parks of the Great Lakes do so in conjunction with sports fishing. This stimulus for park visitation is most pronounced at Sleeping Bear Dunes where the mouth of the Platte River is a major entry point for fishing on the Lake, but it also is significant at Indiana Dunes, Apostle Islands, Grand Portage and Pictured Rocks. So if Indian fishing depletes the stock, or if the State of Michigan decides that, because the Indians rather than sportsmen will be the beneficiaries, and so stops its stocking program, supported in large part by sportsmen's licenses, there may well be sharp reductions in visitor days at Great Lakes national parks. Sportsmen groups are pushing the State of Michigan to stop stocking at this writing. In any case, the NPS has a deep stake in the resolution of the Indian commercial fishing issues, and seem likely to be drawn into the conflict.

Indian Traditional Religious Uses in The Parks

Both the recent American Indian Religious Freedom Act and Special Directive 78-1 provide for protection of traditional ceremonial and religious sites for religious and ceremonial purposes. These enactments allow gathering and use of natural resources for religious and ceremonial purposes by American Indians. These are not absolute rights, but they are important ones. It is not clear what traditional religious and ceremonial uses actually occur within park boundaries in the Great Lakes region, in part because Indians tend to be secretive about such things. But it is clear the Indians have tended to conduct ceremonial observances around major natural features likely to be incorporated within national park units. More complicated AIRFA questions may arise in these parks over traditional subsistence and food gathering activities of Woodland Indians. Many hunting and gathering activities were deeply bound with religious meaning and ceremony. For the Chippewa, Ottawa and Potawatomi, the religiously and ceremoniously significant food quest included gathering and cooking maple sugar in the spring, hunting of deer and bear, and the gathering of wild rice. These activities still are important to contemporary Woodland Indians. Whether these activities ought to be treated as religiously related, and thus given protection, is a closer question. It is clear that Chippewa have engaged in these types of activities in the recent past within Apostle Islands, Grand Portage, Isle Royale, Pictured Rocks, St. Croix, Voyageurs, and perhaps Sleeping Bear Dunes.

Conclusion

It is clear that there are many ties between Woodland Indian groups and the Great Lakes national parks. Some significant problems for park administrators stem from issues involving Indians. These problems all seem to be related to a broad Indian awakening which is influencing the Chippewa, Ottawa and Potawatomi Indians of the Great Lakes. This Indian awakening simultaneously creates a great many opportunities for the NPS to improve upon the preservation, outdoor recreation, and historical interpretation missions of these parks. If the Service should take advantage of these opportunities, that effort can in turn be of great help to the Indians, whose continuing presence as distinct cultural groups in the Great Lakes area is fragile.

To mount an effective Indian policy for the Great Lakes parks may not require great resources. What is called for is sympathetic, creative leadership rather than major budgetary reallocations. Each of these national park units has so many other diverse responsibilities that it seems necessary to provide park administration with some expert help and program direction toward Indian appreciation. The right regional specialist, devoting attention to Indian issues of these parks, could head off potentially major problems, while substantially improving the programs of these parks.

NOTE ON SOURCES:

The primary sources used in this analysis are the planning and environmental documents for these parks located in the NEPA Library at Northwestern University. These documents include STATEMENTS FOR MANAGEMENT, MASTER PLANS, and GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLANS, INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUSES and STATEMENTS FOR INTERPRETATION, WILDERNESS REPORTS, just completed RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS, as well as ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS and ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS prepared for activities in these parks.

Background information on Woodland Indians was gathered from standard library sources. A useful introduction to the INDIANS OF THE GREAT LAKES AREA is a twenty-five page leaflet of that title prepared and distributed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The paperback book by Robert E. Ritzenthaler and Pat Ritzenthaler, THE WOODLAND INDIANS OF THE WESTERN GREAT LAKES (New York, American Museum Science Books, 1970) is a particularly valuable and interesting overview of what is known about the Great Lakes Woodland Indians.

H. PAUL FRIESEMA is Professor, Environmental Policy Program Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

CARRYING CAPACITY

In Great Lakes National Parks

Thomas A. Heberlein

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Carrying capacity is the level of use beyond which impacts exceed acceptable levels specified by evaluative standards. Carrying capacity identifies a number for one parameter, use level. It assumes a fixed and known relationship between use level and impact parameters, and the capacity will change if other management parameters alter that relationship. It also will change if management objectives are altered or user populations change radically. Carrying capacity determinations require objective measures of the impacts of management alternatives which are distinct from evaluations of those impacts.

There are really four types of recreational carrying capacity depending on the nature of the most limiting impact. *Physical capacity* deals with space parameters, such as the capacity of a hot springs for soaking. *Facilities capacity* refers to man made or institutional elements such as parking lot size, marina dock space, or park staff. *Ecological capacity* refers to user impacts on some aspect of the biological or physical environment, water quality, site erosion, or flora or fauna availability and distribution, and *Social capacity* refers to the impacts of other humans on the visitor's recreational experience, such as encounters with other visitors doing the same or differing activities. A capacity is exceeded when