

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

ISLE ROYALE

BOATERS ASSOCIATION

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- MEMO -

To: The Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

From: Frederick G. Bieti

Date: September 30, 1999

Subject: Request to testify re: **H.R. 1866** - To provide a process for the public to appeal certain decisions made by the National Park Service and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Fred Bieti.

I would like to thank Chairman Hansen, and the other members of the sub-committee for affording me an opportunity to testify at this legislative hearing, addressing the public input process which is intended to facilitate the public's participation in the development of management plans for their national parks. Participation implies a partnership and any partnership needs mutual trust to be successful.

> >I am the President of Z&R Electric Service, Inc. an electrical apparatus sales, service and engineering company in Iron Mountain, Michigan, serving industry throughout Michigan and Wisconsin. I have a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering, from Michigan Tech University, am a registered professional engineer in Michigan and Wisconsin, a member of the Michigan Tech Presidents Club and was recently inducted into the Michigan Tech Electrical Engineering Academy.

Following graduation from Michigan Tech, I joined General Motors and spent several years in various engineering and supervisory positions in the Warren, Michigan area before returning to the U.P. to join Systems Control Corp., a division of M.J. Electric in Iron Mountain, Mich.

In 1972 I started the consulting firm of F.G. Bieti & Associates and in 1976 purchased Z&R Electric Service located in Iron Mountain. In 1981 I was recognized by Michigan Governor William Milliken for activities

with the Michigan Conference on Small Business.

I have been a member of the National Society of Professional Engineers, IEEE, and various other professional organizations. I am a Director as well as the Secretary/Treasurer of the Agate Harbor Land Pool, Inc. located in Keweenaw County and have served on various Boards of Directors, including the First of America Bank, and currently serve as a Trustee on the Calumet High School C-L-K Foundation.

My wife Betty and I are regular visitors to Isle Royale National Park. I made my first visit as a boy in 1952.

I am the Legislative Liaison and COO of the Isle Royale Boaters Association Inc., a non-profit corporation comprised of civic minded citizens whose mission is to educate, represent and promote the interests of power and sail boaters, canoeists, sport fishermen, kayakers, backpackers and all visitors of Isle Royale National Park.

Many members of the association, including myself, have been active participants in the public hearing process that was held relative to the recently completed GMP for Isle Royale National Park. I would be pleased to share some of those experiences with your committee today.

My recent experience deals with the more than three years of public hearings and interactions with the NPS relative to the development of a new General Management Plan for Isle Royale National Park. As Isle Royale is this nation's only Maritime National Park.

H.R.1866 - Observations and Comments

VISITOR USE AND MANAGEMENT OF RECREATIONAL USE

AT ISLE ROYALE

In recent years Isle Royale National Park management has discouraged rather than encouraged people to come to the park to pursue inspirational, educational and recreational activities. Chief Ranger Pete Armington's statement to the outdoor news reporters has done real damage to the intent and spirit of this unique island park. That attitude has been harmful not only to Americans but to our neighbors to the immediate north--Canadians---who now ruefully refer to Isle Royale as "Isle Rule" and avoid visiting.

Rose Marie Renaud was forced to close her marine store when boat visits dropped from 157 to 35 since the attitude toward visitors at Isle Royale became one to "modify visitor behavior" per a 1995 letter. Canadians clearing customs at Isle Royale are required to pay a user fee for all aboard even if only taking five minutes to clear customs. Our Isle Royale "good neighbor" policy!

That derogatory terminology "Isle Rule" also stems from the Isle Royale National Park treatment of boaters during this entire general management plan process. The current park management has made access more difficult and demonstrated distinct unfriendliness towards boating visitors.

This attitude had contributed to the decline in boating and boaters interested in visiting the island over the past five years-a drop in boaters from 6,408 in 1994 to 2,790 in 1998. In addition, total island visitation has

fallen from 18,725 in 1994 to 15,312 in 1998 and the decline has continued during 1999 according to preliminary figures.

What is wrong? The answer is the attitude of park management. Despite this evidence of declining use and visitation at Isle Royale, the park pushed ahead with a management plan rooted in the false perception that the island was facing overcrowding and excessive use. During the hearings participants were never given straight answers to questions along these lines, apparently because park management had already arrived at their own conclusions and were not about to be persuaded by comments from the interested public at the public meetings which they held. Not until the final round of these public meetings did the public have an opportunity to confront the park planners and participating management with questions in sessions involving everyone who showed up.

Nor has the Isle Royale Park administration shown anything close to a commitment to provide access to the widest cross section of the public in the GMP. Indeed, the demolition of four major docks, and the removal of four Adirondack shelters located near two of those four docks, shows the utter disregard of this current park administration for disabled persons.

Moreover, the restrictive actions of the General Management Plan are not based on scientific research or other available support data. They are instead indicative of management imposing its will rather than policies based on sound reason. Governmental action such as this causes widespread disdain for the bureaucracy. This is the mood of Isle Royale today, The Park Service, which used to be a friend of the user, is now the enemy! What a tragedy. Isle Royale used to be the nation's leading maritime and island park, but no more.

When planning team sees fit to include, what appears to be, a misuse of EPA authority in the form of a letter stating:

"....A large part of the unique Wilderness experience that could be provided by Isle Royale, as an island Wilderness, could include the Wilderness shoreline looking out on waters also in Wilderness condition. None of the alternatives described in the DEIS however, provide a shoreline that looks out on Lake Superior open waters without motorized boats..."

this planning effort certainly appears biased. After all Isle Royale will likely remain an island regardless of the planners attempts to erase the Maritime features of this park.

THE OPEN HOUSE HEARING PROCEDURES

Three "open houses" were held. The public was instructed to stand in line and write their opinions down on large paper pads hung on the walls of the conference room. While some NPS personnel were available for chats no substantive answers could be offered at this point. Many people seemed quite uncomfortable with the approach, especially seniors.

In December of 1995 Newsletter 2 was mailed. It included a response form that provided little room for the response. The NPS later indicated they had run out of newsletters to send out to interested parties.

In June of 1996 Newsletter 3 came out indicating that " ...the majority of comments focused on fixing existing docks rather than building new ones .." and "...banning motorboats was not supported by most

people."

It would appear that these majority comments were ignored in the final plan.

Newsletter 3 listed reduced the number of issues from 25 to 18 and discussed 5 alternative concepts. However the Response Form allowed only two responses.

In November, 1996, Newsletter 4 came out and said "... in general the respondents favored maintaining motorboat use at Isle Royale as it is. Also mentioned was separation of user groups. (This separation was probably mentioned because the new kayaker user group has not been accommodated at all, and they have few available camping sites.)

Again, all of the above "public input" appears to have been ignored.

In March of 1997 Newsletter 5 came out. It announced that public meetings would be held at three locations offering a chance to "interact" with members of the planning team and two NPS planners from Denver. I would point out that the public had to get very forceful in order to actually make the public question period occur. NPS indicated the room was only reserved for a limited time and it was not possible to take question from the public. The public got so upset they - the public - moved their own chairs to an adjoining room in order to facilitate the question period. The NPS refused to take any questions during the presentation portion of the "open house". This whole series of meeting could hardly be called a public input process.

In July of 1997 Newsletter 6 came out. It summarized "public input" thusly.

350 Written Comments:

All of the draft alternatives received some measure of public support, but Alternatives A and D were the most popular. The reason most often given for preferring alternative A (the no-action or status quo alternative) was that this alternative treated all user groups equally or fairly. Some of you think that the park works just fine the way it is and that there is no reason to change anything. The most frequently cited reason for preferring alternative D was separation of different user groups. Additionally many said that existing ranger stations, docks and trails should not be removed.

March Public Meetings

In summary - 300 people attended and in comparison to the written comments (even) more people attending the public meetings expressed support for alternative A and more were opposed to C and E.

Bearing in mind that Alternative A was not even considered seriously ??

So much for the "public input" process.

AN APPEALS PROCESS IS NEEDED

A formal procedure for appeals would be open and the public would know what kind of review is being conducted by higher officials if any. This would inevitably expose the Agency to more public scrutiny. At the present time once a decision is in tentative form, the only possible appeal is an informal one, which is

what we went through to no avail. If there were an appeal above the Regional Director, who was the highest ranking official to sign off on the GMP for Isle Royale, the top ranking NPS officials in Washington, D.C. would know much more about what Superintendents of National Parks like Isle Royale are planning. More importantly, they would have an opportunity to overrule and modify the decisions of those Superintendents.

Finally, we urge you to provide that this formal appeal include both oral arguments and briefs before the top ranking Agency officials doing the review and handling the appeal. This will insure that the public will be heard at the highest levels and will maximize public exposure of the issues.

Reference material, including copies of Substantive comments, photos showing the poor state of visitor facilities, is provided for your information, in the attached Exhibit Brochure.

Thank you for taking the time to become involved in this issue and thank you for allowing me to contribute.

Sincerely,

Fred Bieti
Legislative Liaison, COO
Isle Royale Boaters Association

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