

Completing Public Ownership of Voyageurs National Park... One Parcel at a Time

By Kelly Fuller

When long-time Rainy Lake resident Frank Pavek put his 3.4 acre property in Dove Bay up for sale, the staff of Voyageurs National Park faced a challenge.

This highly visible shoreline property is inside the boundaries of Voyageurs National Park, where it is seen by nearly all visitors who enter the Park through Rainy Lake. As a result, it was at the top of the Park's list of properties inside Voyageurs to acquire if they were ever put on the market.

Since the Park didn't have the funds to buy the Dove Bay parcel, Park staff turned to VNPA. We formed a partnership with the Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota to purchase the property. Thanks to the collaboration between the two nonprofit groups and Frank Pavek's willingness to see his property included in the Park's public lands, the parcel will be protected from potential new private development. It is being held in trust until federal funds can be appropriated to add it to the Park.

There are 52 private properties remaining inside Voyageurs National Park, and most have been in stable ownership since the establishment of Voyageurs in 1975. But when they are sold to new owners, these inholdings pose one of the greatest threats to the future integrity of the Park.

The owners of private inholdings within the Park's boundaries retain full development rights to their properties, restricted only by county zoning regulations. Each time these parcels are sold to new private owners, the risk of property subdivision, new development on pristine land, and home improvements not in keeping with the character of a National Park increases significantly.



Dove Bay property

The issue is a reminder of the complex history of Voyageurs National Park. Much of the land that became the Park was in private ownership when Voyageurs was established.

To preserve the wonderful Voyageurs region for the benefit of all Americans, the Federal government contacted private landowners. Many families made a profound personal sacrifice and sold their land to the government for creation of a National Park. Others also sacrificed by opting to receive a smaller payment in return for the legal right to occupy the property for a set number of years or until the death of its then-current owner. However, some landowners chose to keep their properties. As a result, Voyageurs National Park is today a patchwork of private and public properties.

VNPA is committed to helping acquire the remaining private properties within the boundaries of Voyageurs National Park for inclusion in the Park's public lands by working respectfully with landowners who choose to put their inholdings up for sale.

Through the generosity of the WM Foundation and the Dayton family, we have started a revolving fund to help acquire these private inholdings. The Wallace C. Dayton Voyageurs National Park Legacy Fund honors Wallace Dayton, a prominent Minnesota conservationist and supporter of Voyageurs National Park. The Hyatt family has also chosen to aid this project by designating the Legacy Fund as a recipient for charitable contributions in memory of Henry Hyatt, who deeply loved the Voyageurs region.

Completing public ownership of land within the boundaries of Voyageurs National Park will take many years. It is unlikely that we will raise enough private funds to buy all of the private inholdings as they become available. We will seek federal appropriations so that more parcels can be purchased. Properties acquired through the Legacy Fund will be held in trust for the public until Congress appropriates the necessary funding, so they can be included in the Park's public lands.