

Public Scoping Period

Scoping is the first step to involve the public in the environmental impact analysis process. Scoping includes holding meetings and providing opportunities for the public to comment either at those meetings or through other methods described below. The NPS uses your comments to identify all relevant issues and concerns that could be associated with the project and to ensure that we consider all of the possible alternatives for evaluating the impacts of PWC use at the park. There are several ways to provide comments:

- Attend a public scoping meeting;
- Submit comments online at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/piropwc>; or
- Mail or fax comments to:
Superintendent
ATTN: PWC Environmental Assessment
P.O. Box 40
Munising, MI 49862
Fax: (906) 387-4025

In order for your comments to be the most useful in developing this Environmental Assessment, please submit them by November 9, 2012. Public comments will not be accepted via email.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment –including your personal identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. Comments submitted by individuals or organizations on behalf of other individuals or organizations will not be accepted.

Public Scoping Meetings

Tuesday, October 23
6:30 - 8:00 pm
Alger Heritage Center
1496 Washington Street
Munising, MI 49862

Wednesday, October 24
6:30 - 8:00 pm
Marquette Federated Women’s
Clubhouse
104 West Ridge Street
Marquette, MI 49855

Thursday, October 25
6:30 - 8:00 pm
Burt Township Community Center
E21738 Brazel Street
Grand Marais, MI 49839

Format

Following opening remarks and a presentation by NPS staff, the meetings will be in an open house format to provide you with opportunities to discuss your interests and concerns with NPS staff.

Mailing List

If you wish to receive future updates on this project, please send an email to PIRO_personal_watercraft@nps.gov and include your email address. If you do not have an email address, please contact the park at 906-387-2607 ext. 201 to have your name placed on the mailing list. Public comments will not be accepted at this email address. The mailing list will be used solely to communicate information related to the park’s PWC planning effort.

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
PERMIT NO. G-83




National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore
P.O. Box 40
Munising, MI 49862

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore
Michigan

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Personal Watercraft Use Environmental Assessment

Scoping/Preliminary Draft Alternatives Brochure
October 2012

You’re Invited!!
Your Participation Will Help Shape This Plan

Because of your interest in the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore (Pictured Rocks/park), we are requesting your input for developing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for evaluating personal watercraft (PWC) use at the park. The National Park Service (NPS) requests your participation in the project planning process to identify potential environmental impacts, issues, concerns, and alternative concepts associated with PWC use at the park. The NPS would like to discuss the proposal and gather any thoughts, ideas, or comments that you may have regarding this project.

Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your interest in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

Pictured Rocks is a very special place, and I am committed to managing the park in full compliance with applicable law and policy.

The use of personal watercraft at Pictured Rocks continues to be a challenging issue and I strongly encourage all park stakeholders to take advantage of these scoping meetings and other opportunities for public input to share with us your issues, concerns and opinions as we work to formulate alternatives regarding the use of PWC and carefully analyze the environmental consequences of those alternatives.

I look forward to meeting you and listening to you at these public scoping sessions and throughout this important planning process. For those of you who are unable to attend one of these public scoping sessions, this newsletter provides additional information on how you can receive information and offer your input.

Sincerely,

Jim Northup
Superintendent



Project Background

The NPS completed an EA for a special regulation to allow PWC use at the park in September 2005. In October 2005, Pictured Rocks implemented the special regulation that allowed for the limited use of PWC on the surface of Lake Superior within the park, between the park’s western boundary near Sand Point, to the east end of Miners Beach. The regulation also required that PWCs operate in full compliance with State of Michigan regulations pertaining to PWC use. Under this regulation, PWCs are not allowed to operate in any other portion of the park.

As a result of a lawsuit filed in 2008, the U.S. District Court concluded that the analysis in the previous EA was inadequate. The court allowed PWC use to continue at the park under the existing regulation, but required the NPS to initiate a new planning process to address the court’s concerns with the analysis in the previous EA. This planning process will produce a new analysis of the environmental consequences of PWC use in the park and, like the previous EA for PWC use, could result in selecting an alternative that would continue the current management of PWC use, expand PWC use along the Pictured Rocks shoreline, or ban PWC use within the park.



Purpose and Need For Action

The purpose of taking action is to evaluate PWC use in Lake Superior at Pictured Rocks to ensure the protection of park resources and values while offering a variety of visitor experiences consistent with the NPS Organic Act, the park’s enabling legislation as amended, and the park’s mission, purpose and significance as articulated in the park’s 2004 General Management Plan (GMP). The NPS needs to take action at this time to address the inadequacies in the previous Environmental Assessment for PWC use at the park, as identified in the 2010 U.S. District Court opinion.

Project Issues

Water Quality
PWC engines can discharge gas and oil emissions directly into the water, resulting in potential impacts to water quality.

Air Quality
PWC engines emit hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxide, and carbon monoxide which are known to impact air quality.

Soundscapes
Noise from PWCs can negatively impact the experience of park visitors, especially those desiring a more natural or serene experience.

Wildlife
PWC movement and noise can disturb wildlife, especially waterfowl and shorebirds, potentially impacting reproductive success of these species. PWCs can also contribute to the spread of exotic species, such as the quagga mussel.

Special Status Species
The park’s shoreline provides important habitat for sensitive species including piping plovers, peregrine falcons, bald eagle, osprey, merlins, and loons. These species may be disturbed by PWCs in the same way as described above for wildlife.

Visitor Conflicts and Safety
PWCs operate in areas that are currently used by swimmers, kayakers, commercial cruises, and other boaters. Increased park use could result in overcrowding in popular areas, increasing the potential for visitor conflicts and safety concerns.

Backcountry and Wilderness
Park visitors’ backcountry and wilderness experience could be negatively affected by noise from PWC use adjacent to backcountry and designated Wilderness areas in the park.

Park Operations
Managing PWC use may impact park operations by requiring additional staff and funding for law enforcement, resource protection, and visitor education and outreach.

Cultural Resources
PWC use has the potential to impact cultural resources at the park such as underwater shipwrecks, the Au Sable lighthouse cultural landscape, and Native American sites and resources.



Project Objectives

- Evaluate whether PWC use is consistent with the park’s purposes and values as identified in the park’s 2004 General Management Plan.
- Provide a variety of visitor experiences, including primitive, backcountry, and wilderness experiences.
- Ensure the safety of all park visitors and reduce the potential for conflicts between uses.
- Provide protection for threatened, endangered, and other protected species and their habitats.
- Minimize adverse impacts to water and air quality.
- Minimize adverse impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat.
- Protect cultural resources from adverse impacts.
- Minimize operational needs and costs associated with the management of PWC use, if PWC use is authorized.



Preliminary Alternative Concepts

The NPS is currently in the process of developing draft alternatives for PWC use at the park. We are seeking your input on what alternatives should be analyzed in this planning effort. Preliminary alternative concepts include:

- Manage PWC use under the existing special regulation for the park. PWC use would be allowed to operate on the waters of Lake Superior within the boundaries of Pictured Rocks from the western boundary of the lakeshore up to the east end of Miners Beach.
- Prohibit PWC use at Pictured Rocks.
- Allow PWC use on Lake Superior along the full length of the park (approximately 42 miles), within the park’s 0.25-mile jurisdictional boundary. PWC users could land anywhere on shoreline.

The following measures could be added to the current regulations to better manage PWC use and better protect resources at the park:

- Restrict PWC use to only those with 4-stroke engines or best available technology.
- Implement a permit system for use of PWCs on Lake Superior within the park.
- Restrict PWC use adjacent to sensitive areas (Beaver Basin Wilderness, Grand Sable Dunes, and Chapel Beach).