



Frozen Lake Surface Access and Use Plan



Civic Engagement Meetings: April 18-20, 2023



Agenda

- Project Location and Background
- Existing Conditions
- Issues and Resource Considerations
- Legal Concerns
- Preliminary Purpose and Need
- Preliminary Proposal
- Next Steps and How to Comment
- Open House Meeting and Questions



Project Location

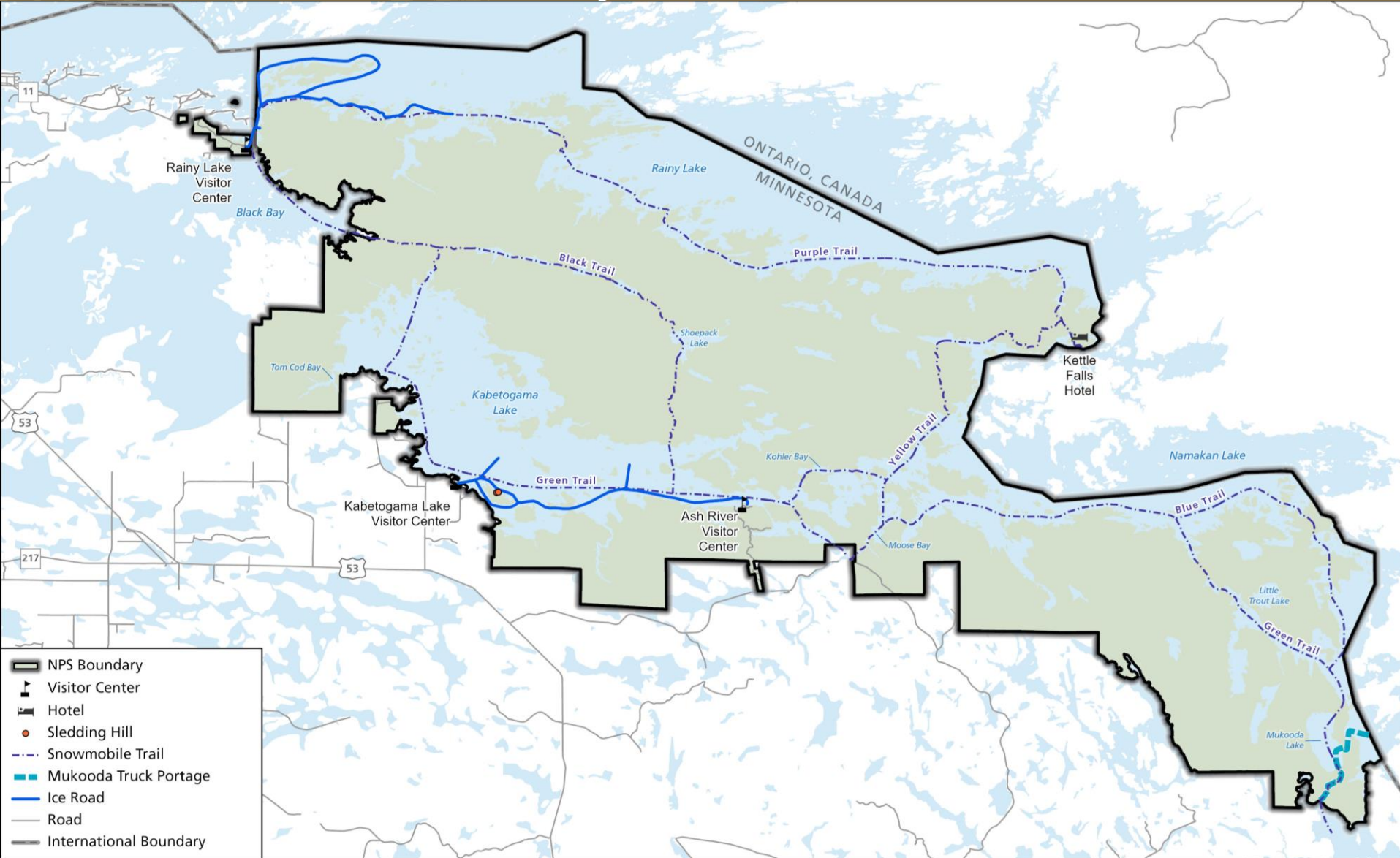
Voyageurs National Park contains four major lakes:

- Rainy Lake
- Kabetogama Lake
- Namakan Lake
- Sand Point Lake





Project Area





Project Background

- Park enabling legislation specifies for allowing recreational fishing and includes provisions for winter sports, including snowmobile use.
- Management plans and special regulation for snowmobiles on the frozen lake surfaces and specific land portages.
- Past plans and regulations do not address off-road vehicle use (street legal, ATVs, UTVs and others) on frozen lake surfaces.





Project Background

- Prior to, and since park creation motorized vehicles have traditionally used the frozen lake surface for access to ice fishing and other winter recreation.





Existing Conditions

- The park currently plows and maintains ice roads for private vehicle use on Rainy Lake (13 mi) and Lake Kabetogama (14 mi) when conditions allow.
- NPS ice roads established on Rainy in 1979 and Kabetogama in 2010
- Generally, ORVs (off-road vehicles) including street-legal vehicles, ATVs, UTVs may operate on the ice roads.





Existing Conditions

- Ice fisherman plow “spurs” for ice shelter placement. These plowed areas can be up to 300 feet in length, must branch off of the park’s ice road, and may not intersect snowmobile trails.
- Visitors and winter resort owners use snowmobiles and motor vehicles to transport portable ice shelters to dispersed areas on the frozen lake that are not adjacent to park-maintained ice roads.



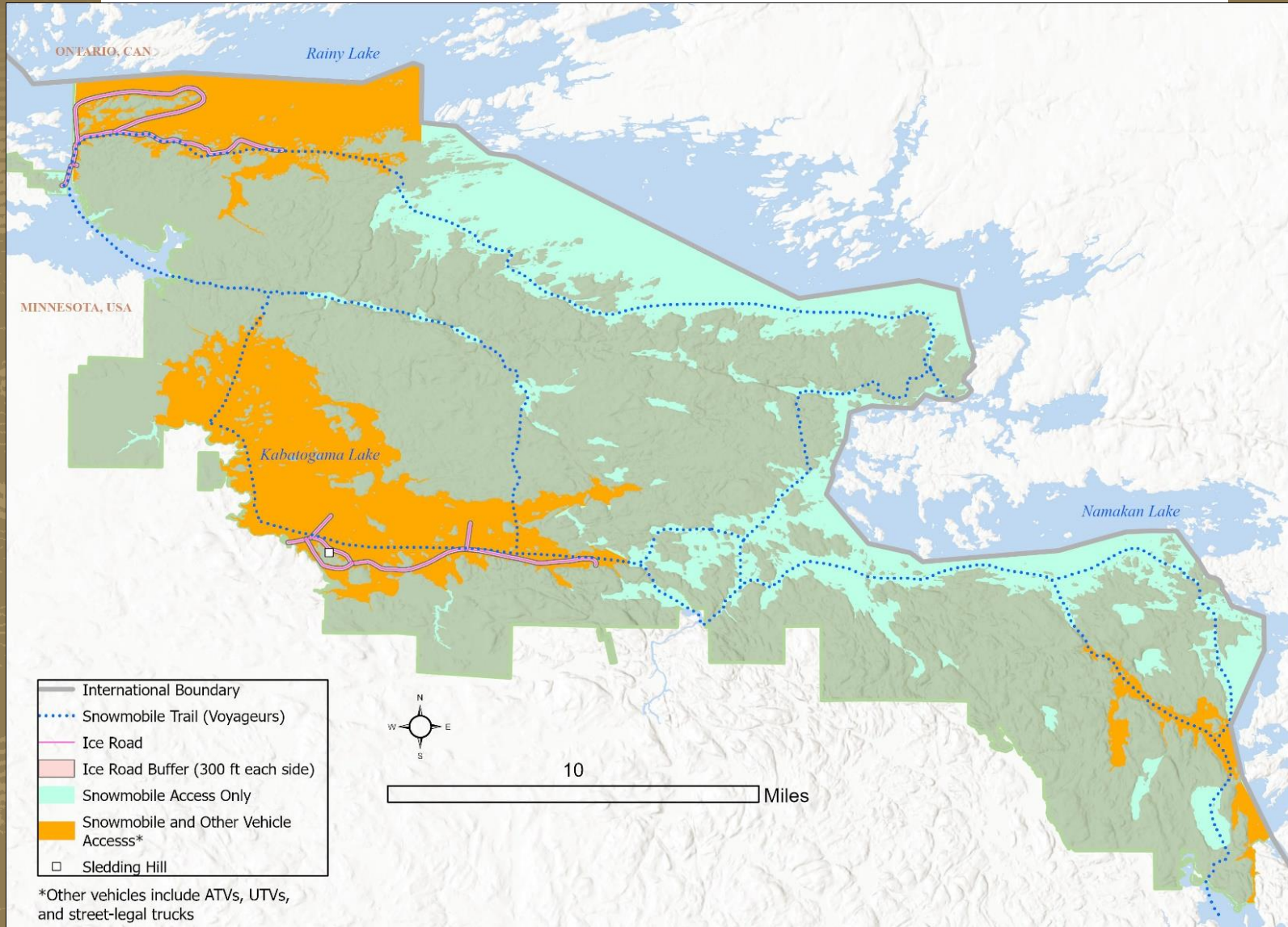
Voyageurs National Park

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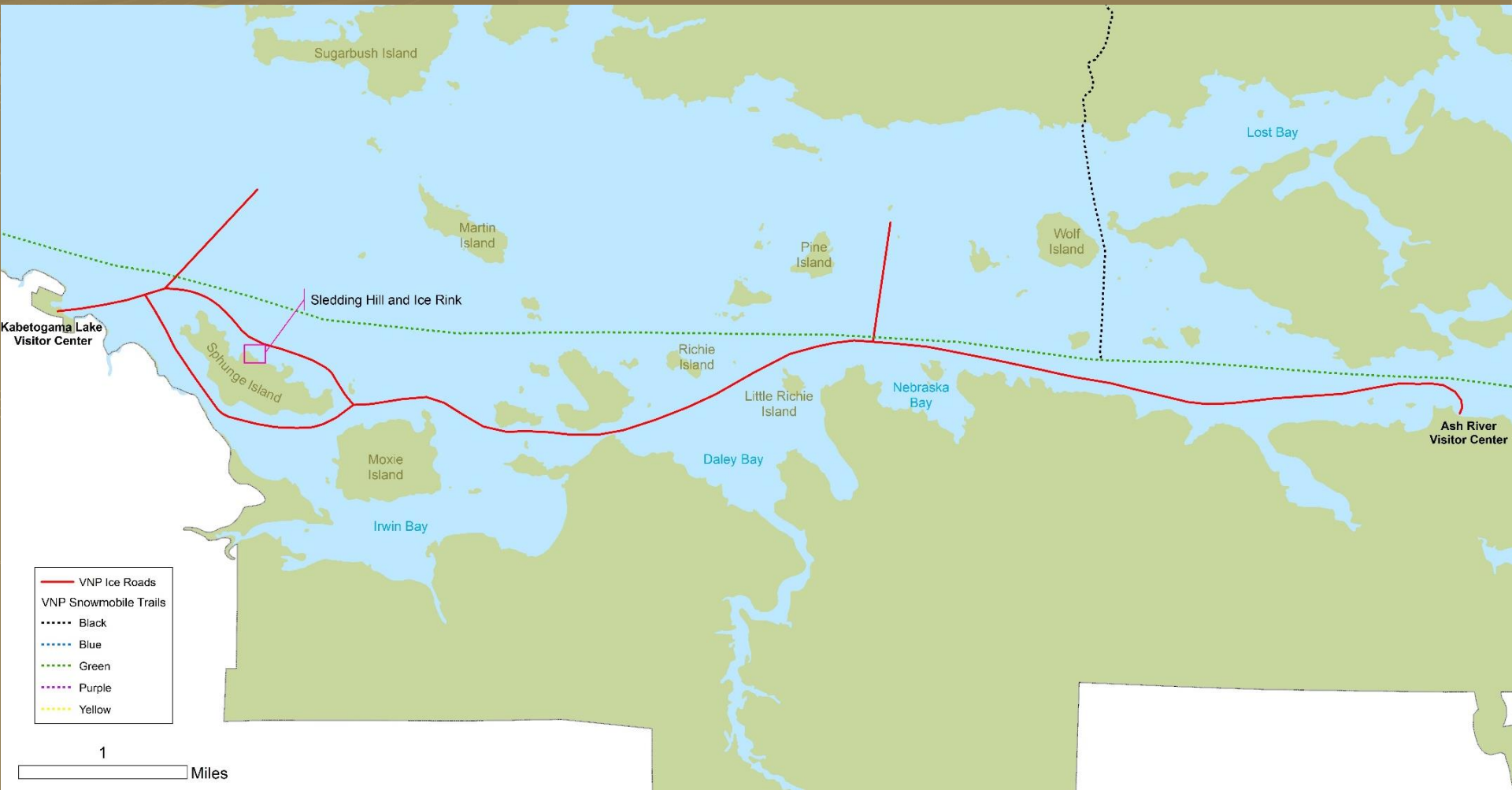


Existing Ice Roads, Snowmobile Trails, and Areas where vehicles could access without traversing a land portage.



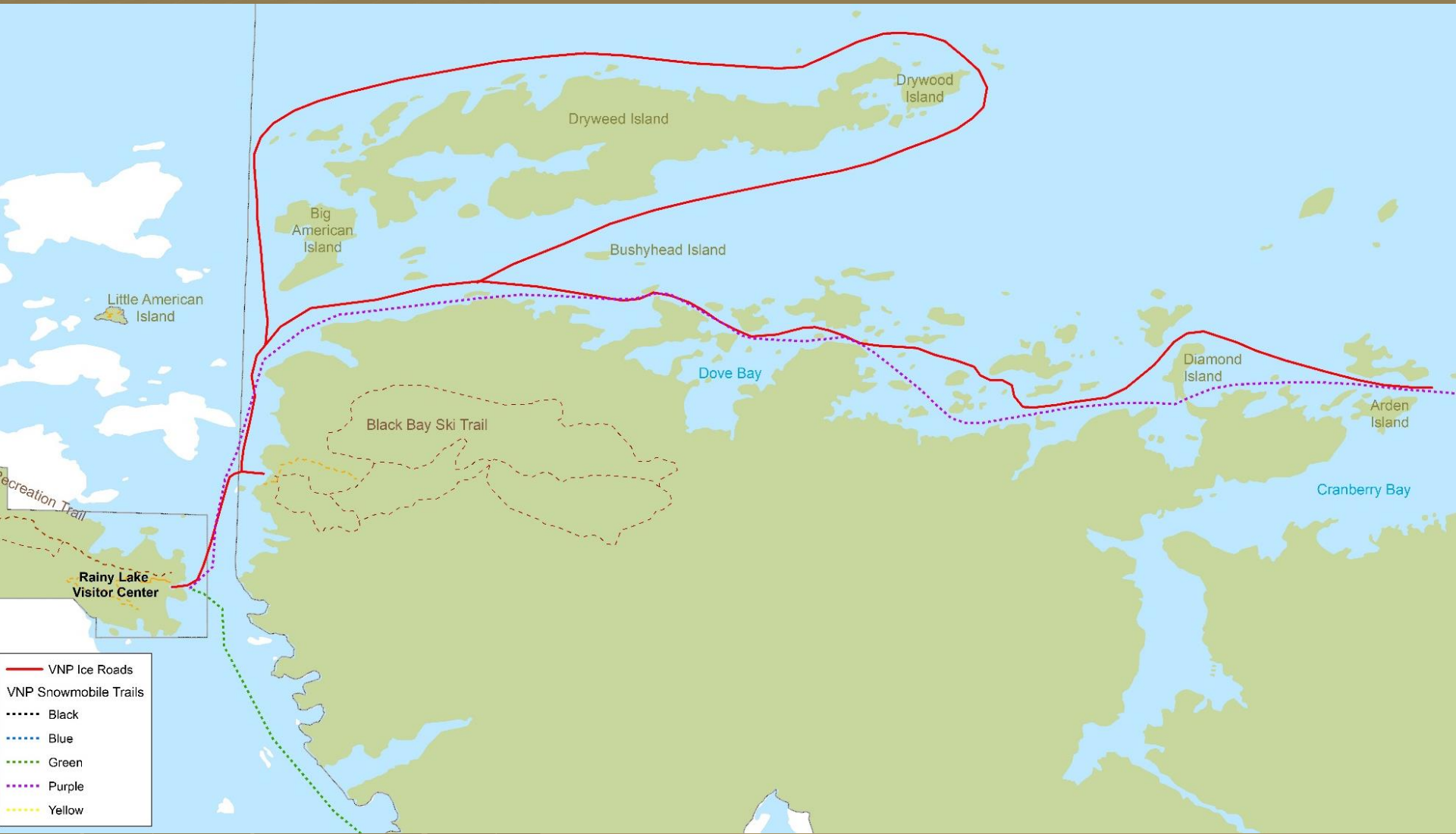


Kabetogama Ice Roads (14 miles)





Rainy Lake Ice Roads (13 miles)





Issues

- Ice shelters have evolved from homemade shacks to campers (“ice castles”) that can be lowered onto the ice.





Issues

- Technology and vehicle types





Issues

- This plan aims to define allowable use to minimize or avoid adverse impacts to visitor experience and natural resources.



Ice fishing derby on nearby lake (not at VOYA)



Potential Resource Considerations

- Wildlife
- Visitor Use and Experience
- Safety
- Water Quality
- Air Quality
- Socioeconomics
- Acoustic Environment (Soundscapes)
- Viewshed Impacts and Night Skies
- Fisheries



NPS Regulations on Vehicle Use

- The use of motor vehicles off park roads is inconsistent with 36 CFR § 4.10 (“Operating a motor vehicle is prohibited except on park roads, in parking areas and on routes and areas designated for off-road motor vehicle use. Routes and areas may be designated only in national recreation areas, national seashores, national lakeshores and national preserves.”)



Legal Concerns Regarding Existing Management

- Dispersed motor vehicle use (not snowmobiles) on the frozen lakes is inconsistent with 36 CFR § 4.10
- NPS-created and maintained ice roads are Class IV park roads for purposes of NPS regulations





Preliminary Purpose

The preliminary purpose of the plan is to guide the management of access and use of frozen lake surfaces at the park while protecting natural and cultural resources and providing for a variety of visitor experiences, consistent with the park's enabling legislation and NPS regulations.



Preliminary Need

A plan is needed because:

- The park currently does not have a plan for management of the frozen lake surfaces other than for snowmobile use.
- Current park management of vehicles on frozen lake surfaces is not consistent with federal regulations governing the operation of vehicles off of park roads.
- Ice shelters have evolved from homemade shacks to campers that can be lowered onto the ice. An increase in the number and weight of ice shelters on the frozen lake surface could have adverse impacts on safety, visitor experience, and natural resources



Preliminary Proposal

Establish Moderate and Low Use Zones

Moderate Use Zone (purple area in map on following slides)

- Approximately same length of NPS plowed ice roads
- Implementation of ice access fees on NPS ice roads
- Transport and placement of ice shelters by ORV only within 300 feet from each side of park ice roads, as an associated parking area
- Beyond 300 feet from an ice road, all ice shelters must be transported by snowmobile.
- ORV use only allowed on park ice roads and in parking area
- Long-term placement of ice shelters allowed



Preliminary Proposal

Low Use Zone (green area in map on following slides)

- Motorized access by snowmobile only
 - no NPS ice roads or ORV use
- Ice shelters permitted only when being actively used

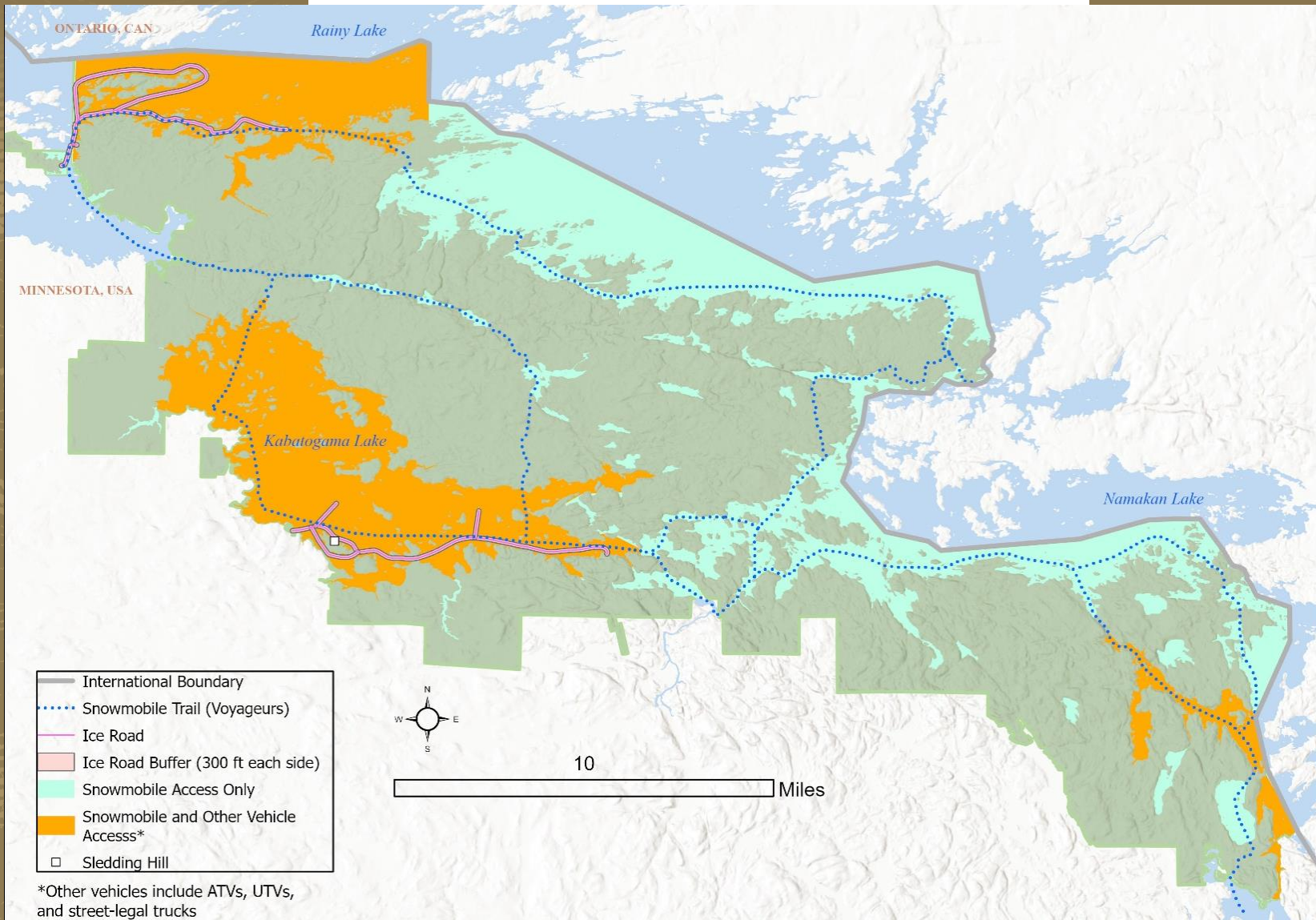
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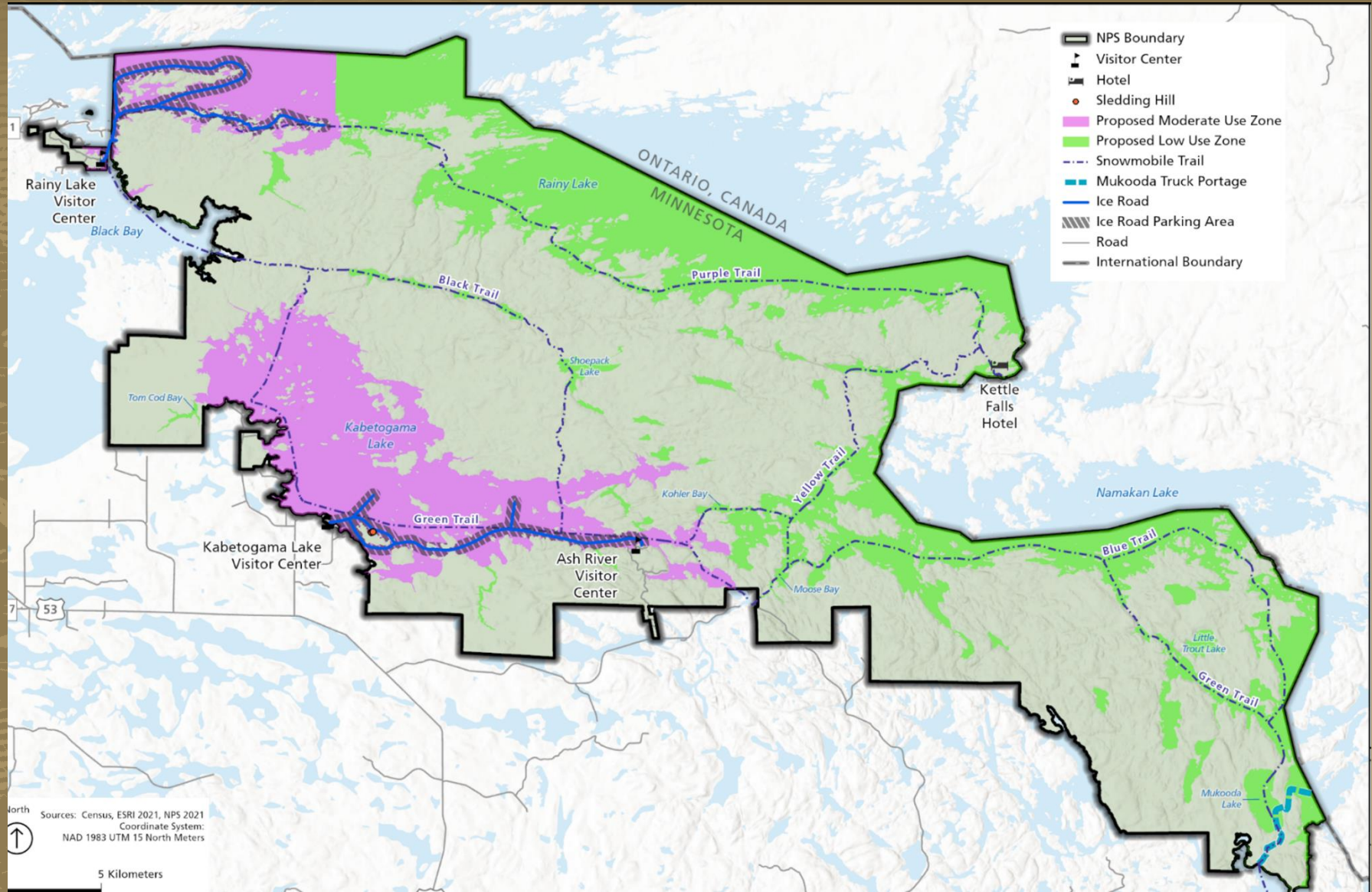


Existing Ice Roads, Snowmobile Trails, and Common Areas of Dispersed Vehicle Use



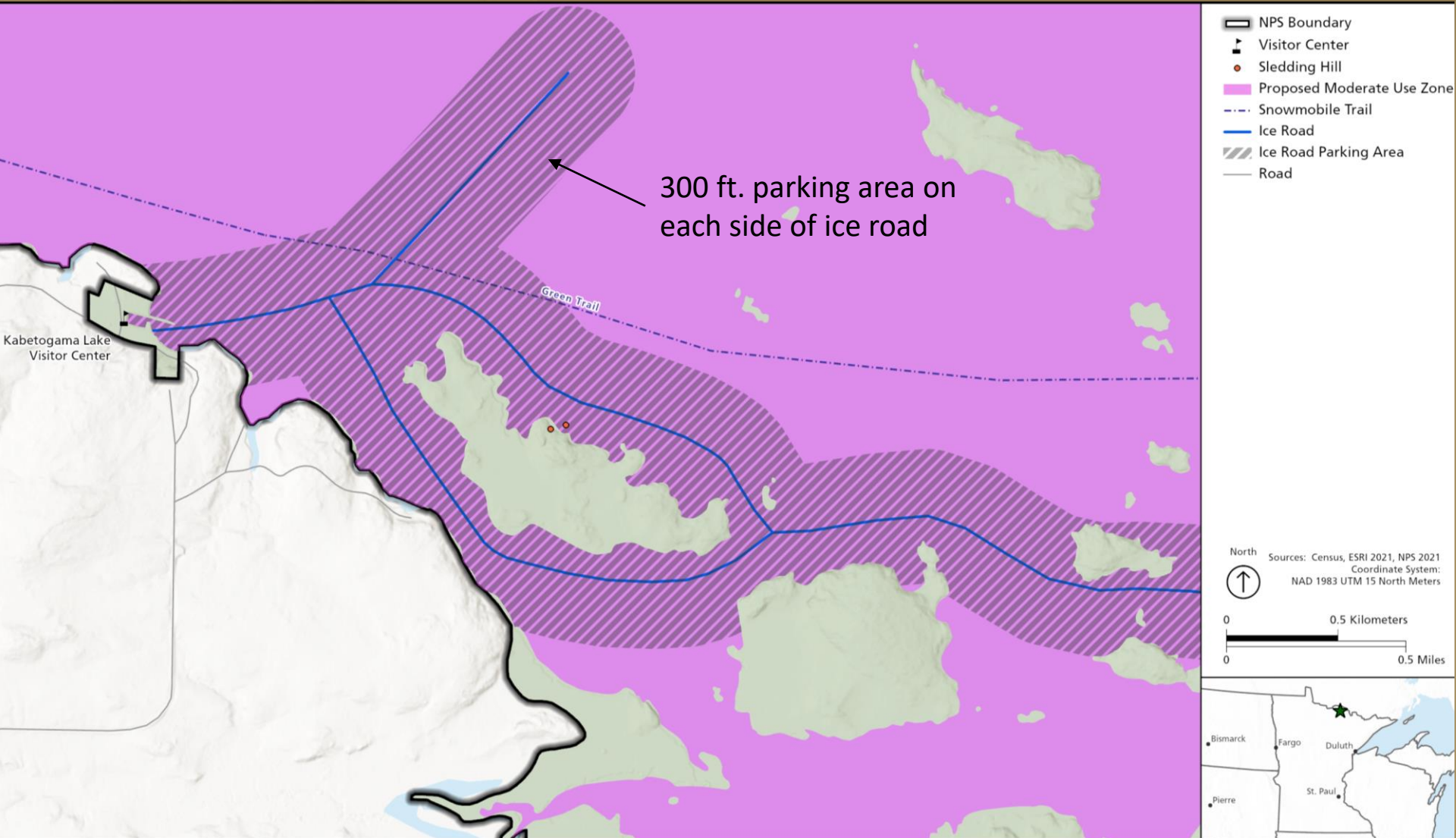


Preliminary Proposal Zones Map





Closeup of Proposed Ice Road Parking Area





Preliminary Proposal

- Represents only one option for frozen lake surface management at the park
- An important purpose of civic engagement is to gather public input on this proposal and get ideas on other potential options for frozen lake management
- We would also like to hear public opinion on environmental or visitor experience issues that are associated with ORV and ice shelter use on frozen lake surfaces at the park
- How do you use the frozen lake surface and how might this project affect you?



Next Steps

After considering input received during this civic engagement period, the park will develop and refine preliminary alternatives and move forward with the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

The NEPA process will include two more opportunities for public involvement, including a public scoping period held at the beginning of the process and a public comment period held once the NEPA document/plan is available for public review.

Your participation is crucial to a successful planning process!



How to Comment

- Fill out a comment form at tonight's meeting
- Submit a comment online at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/VOYA-frozen>
- Mail comments to:

Frozen Lake Surface Access and Use Plan
Voyageurs National Park
360 Hwy 11 East
International Falls, MN 56649

Public comment period ends June 3, 2023



Open House and Questions