

Isle Royale Wolf/Moose Update

The 36th annual wolf/moose winter monitoring program at Isle Royale, still in progress as the deadline for this issue of *Park Science* arrives, has produced surprising results.

When park staff left the Island last fall, only 11 wolves remained. Based on the last several years of intensive research and monitoring, the predicted future for the Isle Royale wolves was of eventual extirpation, primarily due to loss of genetic variability. In short, despite an apparent lack of disease problems and ample food supply, the wolf population was not rebounding from historic low levels.

Imagine the surprise and excitement of the park staff and principal investigator Rolf Peterson when 18 wolves were found in January. Even more importantly, for the first time since 1988, more than one pack successfully raised pups to winter. Two of the three packs produced young; the Middle Pack produced four pups, while the East Pack also produced four. The alpha male of the Middle Pack died in January, so the current count is 17, although there is a loner still unaccounted for on the Island. The eight pups surviving to winter represent the largest number of pups in several years.

Information on the moose population is less complete at this time, although the population is expected to be at similar levels to 1993—that of about 1,900 animals (the highest population in approximately 60 years).

Finally, another rare event—the forming of an ice bridge from Isle Royale to the North Shore of Minnesota and Canada (approximately 15 miles across Lake Superior)—has occurred during this severe winter, offering at least the potential for immigration of wolves to the Island. The original movement of wolves across the ice to the Island in the late 1940s, the foundation for the existing wolf population, was an extremely rare event. It would take another rare set of circumstances were it to happen again.

Jack Oelfke

Isle Royale Natural Resource Specialist

Dr. Rolf Peterson

Michigan Technological University