



The Current

Spring/Summer 2025



Adjusting to the Times

By Ted Gostomski, Network Science Writer

This is a very different—and difficult—year for all of us. Everything everywhere has changed, including the network’s monitoring programs. Even this newsletter is later than usual because constant uncertainty about our future makes it difficult to know what to prioritize for now and what to say about the future.

The worst of the changes has been the loss of staff all across the NPS. We are suffering an attrition of talent among our friends and colleagues in parks, in program and regional offices, and across the Inventory and Monitoring Division (IMD) through early retirements, deferred resignations, voluntary separations, and “consolidation” out of the National Park Service and into the Office of the Secretary of the Interior. Here in Ashland, we lost IT Specialist Kelly Garrison and I&M Regional Program Manager Shauna Marquardt. Departures from our shared office space included Midwest Fisheries Biologist Jay Glase. Additionally, an intern we were ready to hire took another job while funding for their position with us hung in limbo.

For the longest time, it appeared that no monitoring would happen this summer because travel was restricted to emergencies only and credit limits on travel and purchase cards were dropped to \$1.00. Rules loosened up in the spring such that travel was made possible if approved by the Associate Regional Director and the traveler’s charge card was temporarily activated.

But then, in early May, we received indications

Guidance related to upcoming travel

Announcements, NPS
Published 3/4/2025

As of Monday, February 24, 2025, all employees should follow the below travel guidance.

Travel NOT related to national security, public safety, or immigration enforcement

- All travel that is **NOT** related to national security, public safety, or immigration enforcement should be cancelled if it begins on Wednesday February 26, 2025 through the end of March 2025. A decision on travel not related to national security, public safety or immigration enforcement occurring after March will be made at a later date.
- Local travel that is greater than 50 miles but inside of a park boundary that requires the use of a TA should be suspended until further guidance is received from the Department.

Travel restrictions imposed in February created uncertainty about the network’s ability to do field work in 2025. EXCERPTED FROM INSIDENPS

that a Servicewide RIF would likely affect the entire IMD, from the Central Support Office in Fort Collins to each of the 32 networks. RIF actions, it was believed, would come within days to weeks and with little advance notice. Planning and preparation for the field season was effectively derailed, and for several weeks we focused our energy on contingency and continuity planning. Then, on 22 May, a court-ordered injunction was issued, temporarily halting agency RIF processes. Given this reprieve, we’re moving forward as best we can.

Contingency Plans

The vegetation monitoring crew is at Grand Portage (GRPO) this year, a smaller park that requires ecologist Jessica Kirschbaum to hire just two seasonal crew members. Fortunately, one of those people is Erin Blow. Erin has been part of the vegetation monitoring crew for nine seasons, first joining in 2016 (this would be 10 seasons if not for COVID cancelling all field work in 2020). What that means is, though this will be Erin’s first visit to GRPO, she has been with the monitoring crew at every other park in the network. Erin knows

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Wildlife Biologist Position Added to Great Lakes Network

The network has talked for years about creating a wildlife biologist position that could take on at least two monitoring programs being overseen by others and always as a collateral duty: amphibians and bats. Landbirds was also considered in that set, but finding someone with skills in all those areas was a long shot. Even though our amphibian and bat monitoring rely on acoustic recordings, making technological proficiency the more important skill set, there is still a need for understanding the ecology of the wildlife species. There were also questions of cost and whether or not we could or should add a new position to our organizational chart. But when a new job took our long-time assistant data manager to the Fish and Wildlife Service, it was decided to change that box in our organization chart from assistant data manager to wildlife biologist.

In December, Jessica Joganic became the network's first wildlife biologist. Originally from Phoenix, Jess holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology from Arizona State University and a PhD in biological anthropology from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She conducted postdoctoral research at the University of Bordeaux in Paris, completing various projects on cranial growth and variation in humans and other primates. After deciding to switch fields, Jess earned an Master's degree in wildlife biology and conservation from Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland, where she studied the impact of stream restoration efforts on floodplain invertebrate communities.

Jess has broad research interests across both terrestrial and aquatic systems, but particularly loves landscape ecology questions and studying birds. She has studied vervets in South Africa, baboons in Zambia, frog camouflage in Costa Rica, birds and forestry on the Olympic Peninsula, and fish with the U.S. Geological Survey at Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio. In other fields of



Wildlife biologist Jessica Joganic.

study, she assisted with a study of Eocene mammals in Wyoming's Big Horn Basin and research on the Buddhist diaspora in India and Tibet.

Jess started her career in the NPS as a Scientists-in-Parks (SIP) intern working with native freshwater mussels in the Midwest Region, then moved into a seasonal ecologist position at Buffalo National River in Arkansas planning for early detection of aquatic invasive species.

Moving to Ashland from Missouri in the midst of a more traditional Great Lakes winter, there was some requisite acclimation to the challenges of snow and ice. She handled it all very well and is now settled in and charging ahead. Welcome, Jess!

2025 Field Season Schedule

Park	Amphibians	Contaminants- Dragonflies	Landbirds	Vegetation	Water Quality
Apostle Islands	Mar–Aug	June–October	June	n/a	n/a
Grand Portage	Mar–Aug	June–October	June	June–August	n/a
Indiana Dunes	Mar–Aug	June–October	June	n/a	May, Jul, Sept
Isle Royale	Mar–Aug	June–October	June	n/a	May–Sept ²
Mississippi River	Mar–Aug	June–October	June	n/a	n/a
Pictured Rocks	Mar–Aug	June–October	June	n/a	June–Sept
St. Croix Riverway	n/a ¹	June–October	June	n/a	Apr–Nov ³
Sleeping Bear Dunes	Mar–Aug	June–October	June	n/a	June–Sept
Voyageurs	n/a ¹	June–October	June	n/a	June–Sept ⁴

Amphibians — Network, park, or tribal staff will visit each site between 1 August and late September to collect SD cards, service the song meters as needed, and prepare them for the following spring.

Contaminants-Dragonflies — Samples will be collected by a contractor at APIS, GRPO, ISRO, and SACN, and by park staff and volunteers at the other parks.

Landbirds — Surveys are conducted by park staff, volunteers, and contractors.

Vegetation — Conducted with a team of two cooperators led by Jessica Kirschbaum.

Water Quality — Conducted by Alex Egan (ISRO), Tony Vitale (PIRO), Rick Damstra (SACN), Chris Otto (SLBE), and James Smith (VOYA).

¹ Monitoring is conducted using a U.S. Geological Survey protocol.

² Includes assisting with nearshore water quality monitoring on Lake Superior.

³ Monthly sampling generally first full week of each month April–November with additional invertebrate sampling July–August.

⁴ Includes sampling for mercury in water from a subset of lakes.

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what she’s doing, and while Jess’s travel to GRPO has been approved, having an experienced crew member gives her the flexibility she needs to complete this year’s work.

Landbird monitoring is completed each June by a collection of park staff, volunteers, and contractors, but with the loss of park staff and a limited ability to use allocated funding, not everything will be done this year. Retirements this spring cut the resource management staff at Apostle Islands down to two people, one of whom is a seasonal employee and the other, though permanent, is not officially a supervisor. Workload has not decreased commensurate to staffing, though, so with time and boat fuel at a premium, landbird monitoring is not a priority this year.

Similarly, inland lakes water quality monitoring has begun at most parks, but changes at Indiana Dunes have forced the park to drop their water quality sampling in favor of higher priority projects. Collection of dragonfly larvae for mercury contamination monitoring will continue at all nine parks as will amphibian monitoring.

The first round of water quality sampling on the St. Croix River was tentatively planned but then had to be cancelled when, despite having his travel approved ahead of time, Rick Damstra’s travel charge card was not activated in time for him to go. One round of data was lost, but both Rick and his card are now active.

Preparing for the Worst

Permission to resume some travel and operations would normally be bright spots for a program



Erin Blow drove the boat at Voyageurs in 2016. In 2025, she may have to drive the vegetation monitoring program. NPS PHOTO

whose entire purpose is based on field work. But “normal” is no longer in our vocabulary, and a more significant threat hovers over us.

In late March, network staff were notified by IMD leadership that “the fallout from staffing losses due to retirements, hiring freezes, [and] probationary employees who did not return highlighted the need for transition planning

and knowledge transfer processes when people leave.” Continuity planning and knowledge transfer became an exercise to document everyone’s key roles, collaborations, and agreements to make it easier for a monitoring program or parts of our workload to be carried forward. We also backed up all of our monitoring data onto hard drives that will be sent to a park in the event that NPS Inventory and Monitoring programs are eliminated, and we compiled a list of Data Store links for each program so parks will be able to easily access our datasets after our departure.

Along with transferring knowledge, we began looking for places to transfer property that might be left idle after the potential dissolution of IMD. Boats and water quality sampling equipment were the biggest items for which we identified new homes and prepared transfer paperwork should it become necessary.

Another part of our continuity planning was to forward-fund some of our monitoring projects so they can be completed by partners and cooperators without us. Landscape dynamics, dragonfly larvae collection for contaminants monitoring, and even our forest vegetation monitoring are financially secure and will be carried forward this year

regardless of any adverse actions that may affect the network.

Finding Joy Amid the Chaos

We continue to do good work when and where we can and within the confines of the current situation. In March, network staff took our show on the road to a community open house hosted by the Mashkiiziibii (Bad River) Natural Resources Department. Along with the usual hand-outs, we brought along examples of sampling equipment and a “sound show” of things captured in the field by our remote amphibian recorders.

In May, network staff served as canoe and kayak paddlers in support of a native mussel inventory SACN and a university partner are conducting on all 100 miles of the Namekagon River. Also, data manager Cyrus Hester and wildlife biologist Jessica Joganic traveled to Isle Royale to participate in the Motorboat Operator Certification Course.

Aquatic ecologist David VanderMeulen and [Dragonfly Mercury Project](#) collaborators at the U.S. Geological Survey and NPS Air Resources Division have begun a study to model spatial and temporal drivers of mercury risk in the Great Lakes Network parks. In addition to our dragonfly mercury data, the study will also make use of our long-term water quality data to identify relationships between water chemistry and landscape characteristics with mercury concentrations measured in dragonflies collected at GLKN parks. Ultimately, they hope to predict mercury contamination risk to fish, wildlife, and human health in park lakes.

“Nothing feels like it has a period at the end of the sentence right now.”

No one knows for sure what’s ahead for IMD or the NPS, and a weariness has set in from being in a persistent reactive state to the uncertainty. For now, we have done everything we can to prepare our program and ourselves for whatever may come.



Network staff shared information, examples of sampling equipment, and an interactive “sound show” at a community open house hosted by the Mashkiiziibii (Bad River) Natural Resources Department. NPS / T. GOSTOMSKI



Wildlife biologist Jessica Joganic and data manager Cyrus Hester took the Motorboat Operator Certification Course on Isle Royale. NPS PHOTO / A. EGAN



Snorkelers look for native mussel beds in the Namekagon River. PHOTO BY MARK HOVE / UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Working Together

In May, the network and the Grand Portage Band Trust Lands Agency (Trust Lands) reached an agreement to collaborate on amphibian monitoring at Grand Portage National Monument, which resides entirely within the exterior boundaries of the Grand Portage Reservation. Trust Lands staff will maintain the songmeters at long-term monitoring locations along the old portage trail and send data collected at those sites to GLKN for processing and publication. GLKN will provide troubleshooting assistance and annual resupplies. GLKN will also share results and work with Trust Lands staff to interpret findings.

This is the network's first cooperative monitoring agreement with a tribal entity.



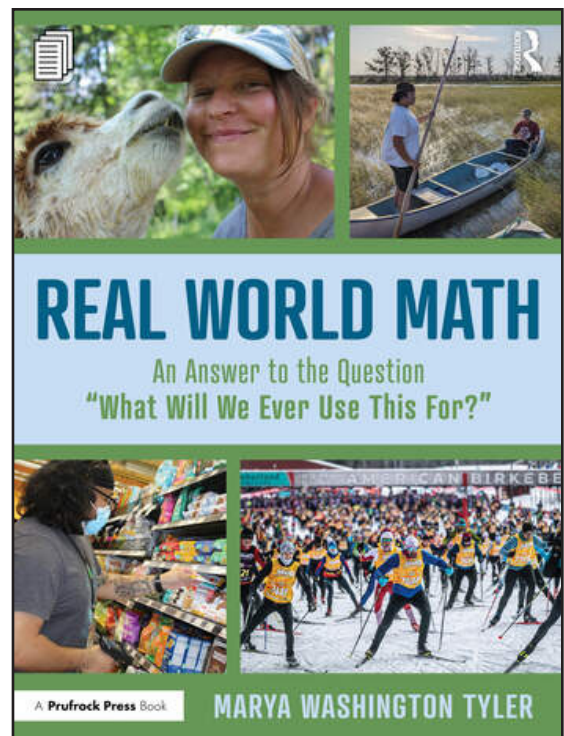
Five Minutes of Fame

A glimpse into the world of bird biology through the work of network biologist, Ted Gostomski, is part of a new book for elementary and middle schoolers called *Real World Math* (Prufrock Press, 2025). Written by a former teacher and local author, Marya Washington Tyler, the book “bring[s] math to life with 200 real-world problems encountered in 20 fascinating careers.”

Real World Math shows how people use math every day. Ted's profile includes a brief summary of how we conduct songbird surveys then poses eight questions for students to solve including “what time do I want to arrive [at the first bird survey point if I have to be there half-hour before sunrise, the sun rises at this time, and it takes this much time to get ready and travel to the site]?” Then, after looking over a table of data from surveys at one park, students are asked to calculate the ratio of frugivore (fruit-eating) bird species to omnivore species.

“It's the kind of book I wish I had when I was younger,” says Ted. “I have struggled with math my entire life. My parents sent me to summer school when I was in second or third grade to help me

improve my math skills, and they were kind of stunned when I changed my college major to biology because science requires math. My mom will be so proud of this.”



Real World Math shares the every-day math found in 20 different careers, from bakery manager to state trooper and alpaca farmer to bird biologist. Published by [Prufrock Press](#). COVER PHOTO © PRUFROCK PRESS

New Reports, Publications, and Data Packages

All of these reports and data packages can be found on the Great Lakes Network website: www.nps.gov/im/glkn/reports-publications.htm or by using the DOI (digital object identifier). Great Lakes Network staff are indicated in **bold blue** text.

Burner, R.C., **A.A. Kirschbaum**, **T. Gostomski**, and D.G. Peitz. 2025. US national park units as breeding bird habitat: A comparison of species prevalence and land cover across the midwestern and central United States. Science Report NPS/SR—2025/317. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.36967/231260>.

Damstra, R.A., and **C.M. Hester**. 2025. Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway invertebrate data package by the Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.57830/2313034>.

Damstra, R., and **D. VanderMeulen**. 2025. Great Lakes Network 2006–2024 large rivers water quality monitoring data as of 2025-03-15. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.57830/2309369>.

Egan, A., and **D. VanderMeulen**. 2025. Great Lakes Network 2006–2024 inland lakes water quality monitoring data as of 2025-03-21. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.57830/2309514>.

Gostomski, T., and **C.M. Hester**. 2025. Great Lakes landbird monitoring data package by the Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.57830/2312784>.

Sanders, S., and **J. Kirschbaum**. 2024. Forest vegetation monitoring protocol (version 2.1): Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network. Science Report NPS/SR—2024/166. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.36967/2305281>.

Stottlemeyer, R., S.J. Tassone, and **C.M. Hester**. 2025. Long-term water quality conditions in sentinel streams at Isle Royale National Park and Grand Portage National Monument. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.57830/2311531>.

All Data All the Time

Data packages and datasets, including aerial imagery, are now available on the network website under “Reports and Publications” and on each of the monitoring program pages.

NPS.gov / Home / Reports & Publications / Data Packages and Datasets

Data Packages and Datasets

All Data All the Time

- 2025 [Great Lakes Landbird Monitoring Data Package by the Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Network](#)
- 2025 [Great Lakes Network 2006-2024 Inland Lakes Water Quality Monitoring Data as of 2025-03-21](#)
- 2025 [Great Lakes Network 2006-2024 Large Rivers Water Quality Monitoring Data as of 2025-03-15](#)
- 2025 [Indiana Dunes National Park Aerial Imagery 1938](#)
- 2025 [Indiana Dunes National Park Aerial Imagery 2004](#)
- 2025 [Indiana Dunes National Park Aerial Imagery 2005](#)
- 2025 [Indiana Dunes National Park Aerial Imagery 2013 \(CIR\)](#)



Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
Grand Portage National Monument
Indiana Dunes National Park
Isle Royale National Park
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
St. Croix National Scenic Riverway
Voyageurs National Park

The Current is published twice a year for Great Lakes Network park staff, our partners, and others interested in resource management at Great Lakes region national parks.

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