



Photo Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy/Emily Clegg

The Inland Buffer Zone

Protecting the First National Lakeshore

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Alger County - In 1872, Congress established Yellowstone National Park as an area for recreation and enjoyment that would be protected by the Secretary of the Interior. Its designation inspired a national park movement that spread worldwide. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the act that created the National Park Service – a new federal bureau in the Department of the Interior responsible for protecting the then 35 national parks and monuments.

“The inland buffer zone at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore was a novel idea to the National Park Service when established and is still a unique arrangement within today's system of parks.” Bruce Leutcher, NPS

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Munising C Staon October 15, 1966. Congress designated this area as the first national lakeshore. Their ambition, at least in part, was to protect the diminishing shoreline of the Great Lakes, much of which was lost to private ownership.

The establishment of this first national lakeshore was made official on October 6, 1972. The 71,397 acres of the Lakeshore were divided into separate ownership and management zones. The first section, which is directly adjacent to Lake Superior - the federally-owned Shoreline Zone - was established like any other national park – to preserve natural and cultural resources while providing opportunities for recreation.

The Significance of the Pictured Rocks National Shoreline

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore offers the public an amazing view of Lake Superior's shoreline. The Pictured Rocks cliffs rise perpendicular from the lake – about 200 feet high – creating cascading waterfalls

with rock formations behind. With five square miles of pristine sand dunes and twelve miles of undeveloped beach, the untouched beauty of the area is staggering.

But the shoreline offers more than beauty. Bedrock geology and glacial landforms have created a unique topography marked by inland lakes, vegetation and streams. The Park lies in a transition zone between boreal and eastern hardwood forests with flora and fauna found only in the Lake Superior Basin. The Park's jurisdiction extends a quarter mile over the surface of Lake Superior along the length of the park.

The Creation of the Inland Buffer Zone

An inland portion of the park was established as the Inland Buffer Zone (IBZ). With only small tracts now in federal ownership and the majority in private or State of Michigan ownership, the purpose of protecting this area was to stabilize the character of the land, water and other properties found within this zone.



Log in Pictured Rocks.

Photo Courtesy of the TNC, Emily Clegg

It's the only such buffer zone arrangement in the National Park Service, and it was created as a unique compromise, enabling areas of the park to be privately owned and utilized for timber production – as long as it was done sustainably and with public access to recreational areas. Congress created this buffer zone to protect and preserve Lake Superior's shoreline and inland lakes, as well as the watersheds and streams.

Forestry and other resource management activities compatible with the area's preservation and recreational use are allowed in the IBZ, but resource use that depletes the area of its natural resources would be secondary to maintaining the beauty of the lakeshore. The IBZ has both national and state forest land, as well as large privately-owned commercial forests and small private parcels.

According to Bruce Leutcher, Chief of Science & Resource Stewardship at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, the inland buffer zone has “served its intended purpose quite well by protecting the lakeshore's streams, lakes and overall natural character from encroaching development while supporting the regional economy.”

Leveraging utility and preservation within the boundary of a single unit of the National Park Service makes Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore a unique example of how conservation and economy can coincide.

More Information

<https://www.nps.gov/piro/index.htm>

<https://www.nps.gov/index.htm>

<https://www.nps.gov/piro/learn/historyculture/upload/PRNL%20Administrative%20History.pdf>