

NORTH COUNTRY NOTEBOOK

Senator Nelson on the "Slumbering" Islands

The preservation of the Apostle Islands as a national park or recreation area has long been a goal of Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin.

Early in 1963, work began in Washington on the actual drafting of legislation to incorporate most of the islands and some of the mainland shore into a national recreation area to be administered by the federal government.

In a candid conversation with *Wisconsin Tales and Trails*, Senator Nelson spoke his mind on the Apostle Islands.

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Why do you feel that the Apostle Islands should be incorporated into a national park or recreation area?

The woods, the waters, and the wildlife of America face the threat of progressive destruction from the spiraling pressures of population growth, industrialization, pollution, and decay. The challenge facing our natural resources has been outlined by Secretary of the Interior Udall in his book, *The Quiet Crisis*. In many sections of the country and in many other lands, the natural resources disaster has already occurred.

Northern Wisconsin, and especially the Apostle Islands region, still remains relatively unspoiled. Yet this makes the area all the more vulnerable to unwise development and exploitation.

Much of the North is economically depressed at a time when the rest of the nation is booming as never before. The deserted beaches of Lake Superior, the slumbering islands themselves, and the thousands of acres of cool green forest are in danger of being turned into another recreational slum such as we see in many parts of America.

Land is cheap. Many owners are tempted to sell to any kind of buyer. Real estate promoters have sounded out local governments on the idea of promoting huge land deals — hawking "acres in the woods" to gullible people through high-pressure advertising. Individual owners of farms and forest are tempted to subdivide to get the maximum return.

Wouldn't this private speculation bring tourists and dollars to the area?

Added together, these pressures could trigger a small-scale, short-lived tourist boom, which would attract a small amount of commercial investment, but the final result could be the loss of a great national treasure, along with the loss of an opportunity for sustained development which could help to solve the long-range economic problems of the North.

If we fail to preserve a major section of our beautiful Northland almost immediately, we will sell out our citizens who love the beauty of nature and we will also sell out the future of Northern Wisconsin.

Recreational development offers the main hope for the North today. Its major industries — iron ore, railroading, fishing, farming, and lumbering — are all in financial difficulty. The North may offer a great opportunity for business and industry some day, as our population continues to grow, but at the moment the trends are all in the other direction.

Sound recreational development takes time and careful planning. Hasty, ill-considered development could ruin the great potential which the North offers.

This vast Northland needs a single, outstanding recreational resource because it is not widely known and appreciated today. A national park or national recreation

area, clearly labelled on the maps of American travelers, would identify this area for the entire nation.

If we are going to attract more tourists, we must be prepared for them. We must have something worth seeing, and we must protect what we have so that it can be enjoyed by many people over a period of many years.

What advantages would there be in placing this area under federal control?

An Apostle Islands park would make a logical link in a developing chain of natural resource facilities — Pictured Rocks and Sleeping Bear Dunes in Michigan; the bridge over the Straits of Mackinac; the Great Circle Highway around Lake Superior; the Voyageurs National Park proposal on the north shore of the lake; the Quetico-Superior Wilderness region and Isle Royale National Park. This co-ordinated network of outstanding recreational resources would fit the natural flow of tourist traffic. It would combine the rich and colorful history of this area with its outdoor beauty. It could stimulate related commercial development of taste and dignity and lasting economic benefit.

How much actual work has been done in making this area a national park?

The United States Department of the Interior has now completed a proposal for a detailed study of the project. Secretary Udall has appointed a special task force to make the study, headed by Harold C. Jordahl, Madison, who is the Interior Department's regional co-ordinator for the Upper Mississippi and Western Great Lakes area. Mr. Jordahl was formerly our State Director of Resource Development. He will work with representatives of the National Park Service, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and state and local officials.

Wisconsin's Governor Reynolds and the Bad River and Red Cliff Indian Tribal Councils have been asked to participate.

Slowly and carefully, we are developing a sound proposal to preserve much of the best of this priceless area, and make it available to all our people and their children — for their long-range enjoyment and for the well-being of an area which has long suffered from economic handicaps.

