

Ron Porritt

Wolves, Moose, and Michigan's Isle Royale National Park



My first trip to volunteer for the Wolf-Moose Project had us on snowshoes in three feet of snow, but I found my first moose and started a journey through the whys and hows of wilderness. This is the story of Michigan Wolf-Moose Project, an ecosystem, and how Isle Royale may be a bellwether of the world we give to our grandkids.

Michigan is justly proud of the moose of Isle Royale. When people were pushing for Isle Royale to become a national park, the moose population was heralded as one that exceeds the total moose population of all of our national parks and monuments moose were a marquee element that allowed Isle Royale to become a national park in 1931. There is a story here a drama that is still unfolding.

Without a predator, the moose population was fruitful and multiplied to the point of devastating the vegetation. People tried to do things like feed the moose and trap some to translocate to Michigan's UP, but this was all inadequate. In the 1930s and 1940s, people talked about taking wolves to the island as a key predator, but before people did anything, wolves went on their own around 1948. The wolves were also fruitful and multiplied. People questioned what would happen with this duo, isolated as they were, on an Island in Lake Superior. Would the wolves kill off the entire moose population, or would a balance of nature, create something akin to our ideal of primeval America. In those days, we understood little of the predator-prey relationship and, in 1958, Durward Allan of Purdue University obtained backing to start the Wolf-Moose Project. This project is now known all over the world and has been very successful. They have spent the last 64 years collecting data and observing life cycles of wolves and moose not apart from, but as part of an ecosystem. This presentation will be about the project, what is it like to be part of the project, the people that keep it going and how the project extends beyond Isle Royale.

By-the-way, you can volunteer with us.

I first volunteered for the Wolf-Moose Project in 2013. Since then, I have created a web site that sought to educate people (non-biased as I could muster) about the project, the ecosystem, and the dilemma of human intervention when a wilderness area is in need. I also wrote many letters, talked with, and visited park service people about the issues. My other presentations have included fifth graders and MSU retirees. My love for the project and close relationship with the primary people of the project give me a good handle on the ins and outs of the subject. A video of the MSU presentation is available here (https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/MSUspace+11-14-2022/1_9j74gaf6 .

