

## Parknership: A Twenty-first Century Model at Keweenaw National Historical Park

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**IN THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS), I'M SURE THAT STEPHEN MATHER** never thought for a moment that his strategy for bringing America's national parks to prominence among the citizens of the United States would be equally applicable in the twenty-first century, some ninety-four years in the offing. He relied upon key partners to promote the national park idea, instill pride in the hearts of America's citizens, and to develop infrastructure that would both increase visitation and elevate visitor appreciation for our nation's most significant natural and cultural resources.

Mather needed a way to bring visitors into the national parks, and the nation's fledgling railroads needed to expand services to the west, increasing ridership along the way. Bryce Canyon Lodge and Grand Canyon Lodge are examples of the Union Pacific's "Loop Tours" building program. Those, together with Old Faithful Inn and Paradise Inn at Mt. Rainier, provided accommodations that were hard to resist for an American public growing eager to travel.

Even though there were many cultural national park units across the country, Mather's grand solution was to develop partnerships that emphasized the vast expanses of natural resources in the west to capture the imagination of the American public. And that solution worked in dramatic fashion. But perhaps it worked too well.

Once the national parks developed a strong connection with the American public, those partner relationships became less critical to the survival of the NPS and to individual park units. National park units developed an aura of autonomy: we neither needed nor really wanted the help of others outside of the agency. National parks could stand strong, proud, and forever on its own resources – natural, cultural, and human resources. The NPS was a proud bunch, and rightfully so considering its tremendous accomplishments and the dedication of its ranks. But perhaps a bit too proud for its own good.

As scientists such as George Wright and advocacy groups such as the Sierra Club educated, coerced, and, at times, forced the NPS to be ever more vigilant about caring for its resources using the best possible methods—methods based in solid science—the NPS once more found itself in need of relationships different than those to which it had grown accustomed.

Nearly one hundred years after Mather's foray into the partnership arena, we once again find

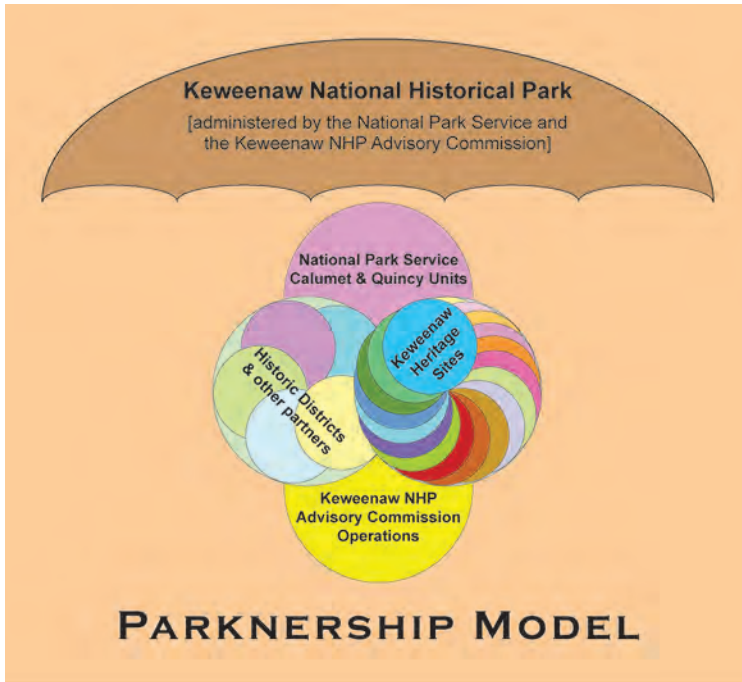
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ourselves needing to establish strategic partnerships—albeit very different from those in the past—if we are to continue to accomplish the mission of the National Park Service.

It is time to go back and re-examine the tenets of the Organic Act, and rethink how we could best fulfill the mission of the NPS. Congress provided direction by legislating, in a variety of ways, the engagement of partners to fulfill our mission—to do the important work of the National Park Service, but without the inordinate amount of federal funds previously available for such work.

Enter Keweenaw National Historical Park (NHP), established in 1992 through a tenacious grassroots effort by the people of the Keweenaw Peninsula in Upper Michigan’s Copper Country. Although the “park” encompasses only 1,860 acres within the legislated boundaries of its two



units—and owns less than 150 of those acres—it has legislatively mandated influence across more than 800,000 acres of the region in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula that provided critical resources to America’s—and the world’s—great Industrial Revolution. There are hundreds of historic resources throughout the Keweenaw, and a myriad of intangible heritage resources to be preserved and interpreted for the public. It is, after all, the largest “small park” in the system. The congressional intent of the legislation was to provide a way to care for the nationally significant resources that document the nation’s first major mineral rush, without overburdening taxpayers with the funding required to accomplish such a monumental task.

The mission of Keweenaw NHP is to preserve, protect, and interpret the natural and cultural resources relating to the copper mining industry for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future genera-

tions *through cooperative efforts and partnerships* with state and local governments, public and private entities. The NPS at Keweenaw NHP is the facilitator in this grand partnership scenario.

There are four key components that comprise Keweenaw NHP:

1. The National Park Service.
2. The Keweenaw NHP Advisory Commission, which was the first permanent commission in the national park system.
3. Copper Country communities, including residents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, historic district commissions, and other state and local government agencies.
4. The Keweenaw Heritage Sites, a collection of nineteen private, nonprofit organizations, universities, state parks, and commercial entities that preserve twenty-six sites and the historic resources under their care, providing the vast majority of the interpretive opportunities for visitors.

Together, the four components provide a cohesive national park experience while preserving the local passion for its heritage resources.

In this twenty-first century national park model, the National Park Service is no longer considered to be “the park.” Rather, we prefer “the National Park Service *at* Keweenaw National Historical Park” to more accurately describe our relationship in the park. We illustrate this concept graphically with Keweenaw NHP—“the park”—portrayed as an umbrella, and the component parts beneath it, none emphatically more important than its other partners. Since it is a

national park, we start with the NPS as the administrative component of the park, providing both focused direction for the broader concept and professional technical assistance to its various—and numerous—partners.

Continuing with the legislated mandates of the park, the second component of the model is the Keweenaw NHP Advisory Commission, authorized by the park's enabling legislation to “carry out historical, educational, or cultural programs which encourage or enhance appreciation of the historic resources [with]in the park[‘s legislated boundaries], surrounding areas, and on the Keweenaw Peninsula.” This authorization expanded the ephemeral boundaries of “the park” beyond the two units, to now encompass more than 800,000 acres across Upper Michigan's Copper Country.

The third component under the umbrella takes in all of the communities across the Copper Country, including the residents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, historic district commissions, and other state and local government agencies with which the NPS engages in both formal and informal partnerships. Currently, the National Park Service at Keweenaw NHP actively partners with forty to fifty of these key entities to protect the vast cultural and natural resources throughout the park. These partners engage in district- and community-specific projects, as well as region-wide initiatives that bring together twenty-five, thirty, or more partners in concerted, collaborative efforts that benefit each of them.

The final component of this twenty-first century partnership model is the Keweenaw Heritage Sites group: nineteen non-federal organizations that administer twenty-six sites, providing the bulk of the park's interpretive experiences. While the Keweenaw Heritage Sites cover an area greater than 110 miles in length, they are marketed as a single destination through a variety of media. Visitors are directed to each site through an NPS-coordinated wayfinding system that is indicative of the symbiotic relationship between the Keweenaw Heritage Sites and the National Park Service at Keweenaw NHP.

The four components that comprise Keweenaw NHP result in a partnership that is unique within the National Park System. It is so unusual that we have devised a special term for it: this concept is most accurately described as a “parknership,” a national park that embraces a concept of *mutual benefit for all partners* involved in broad-ranging collaborative efforts.

While the National Park Service is no newcomer to partnering, it has never addressed partnerships with such a holistic approach. Broad-ranging relationships, such as the “parknership” that is Keweenaw NHP, are becoming the new way of doing business for the NPS. The federal government no longer has perennially deep pockets to care for the nation's natural treasures, nor its cultural heritage. This new model has all partners contributing to the mix, whether financially, or in-kind, or simply with a passion for the resource. America needs a new, collaborative stewardship model to care for its great places, and the “parknership” model demonstrates successful collaboration. Challenges abound on the road to the right mix, defining roles and responsibilities along the way, but the prize lies in the proper care and feeding—and perpetuation—of our irreplaceable resources. Partnerships—or, more accurately, *Parknerships*—are key to continuing the successful accomplishment of the mission of the National Park Service.