United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Isle Royale National Park
800 East Lakeshore Drive
Houghton, MI 49931

In Reply Refer to:

March 14, 2024

Memorandum

To: Director, Office of Aviation Services

From: Denice Swanke, Superintendent, Isle Royale National Park

Subject: Royale Air Service, Inc/Isle Royale Seaplanes Seat Fare Exemption Request

Isle Royale National Park has an operational need to quickly transport personnel between the Park and Houghton, Michigan and Grand Marais, Minnesota. The Park is only accessible by boat or seaplane. There are four ferries total with the following trip options:

- Ferry from Houghton, MI to Rock Harbor, Isle Royale = 73 miles/6 hours
- Drive from Houghton to Copper Harbor, MI = 45 miles/1 hour. Ferry from Copper Harbor to Rock Harbor = 56 miles/4 hours
- Ferry from Grand Portage, MN to Windigo, Isle Royale = 22 miles/2 hours
- Ferry from Grand Portage, MN to Rock Harbor with up to four ferry stops =75+ miles/8+ hours

The closest NPS fleet amphibious seaplane is based in Ely, MN at the USFS Seaplane Base on Shagawa Lake. The NPS has an agreement with the USFS to operate and maintain the plane, however, its availability is subject to pilot availability in relation to USFS mission. As such, planes are often committed to other projects and are not available for daily passenger flights to Isle Royale.

Royale Air Service, Inc. DBA Isle Royale Seaplanes received OAS approval for seat fares in 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023. Previously, they maintained OAS approval for several years in the early 2000's. They have maintained an excellent safety record and provide the only flight service for visitors to Isle Royale National Park through a concessions contract and commercial use authorization. They currently maintain five aircraft and fly up to ten flights per day carrying a maximum of 48 passengers.

Isle Royale National Park and the U.S. Geological Survey request a waiver to purchase seat fares for transportation on Isle Royale Seaplanes to and from Isle Royale National Park per OPM-15. This would enable employees to efficiently get to the park and back to the mainland; each agency would be responsible for payment of their own fares.

This exception to policy will remain in effect for one year. The requesting bureau will monitor the following and notify OAS if any of the following occurs: 1) change of ownership of the vendor, 2) change of the vendor's Chief Pilot, 3) request of aircraft change by the vendor or 4) a reportable incident or accident by the vendor. If one of these criteria are met, this exception will be reevaluated.

In future years, subsequent requests will be submitted by 15 March and OAS will verify with the vendor if there have been any reportable incidents, accidents or FAA violations(s) over the last 5 years.

If you or your staff need further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me via email (denice_swanke@nps.gov) or call 906-231-4961.

Park Superintendent, Requestor: Denice Swanke Digitally signed by DENICE SWANKE
Date: 2024.05.23 14:15:13 -04'00'

Regional Aviation Manager, Concurrence: JAY MICKEY Digitally signed by JAY MICKEY
Date: 2024.05.23 13:35:00 -05'00'

National Aviation Manager, Concurrence: KRISTIN SWOBODA Digitally signed by KRISTIN SWOBODA
Date: 2024.05.23 12:38:54 -06'00'

USGS National Aviation Manager, Approval: DIRK HART Digitally signed by DIRK HART
Date: 2024.05.23 15:13:59 -04'00'

Chief, Division of Fire and Aviation Management, Approval: CHRISTOPHER WILCOX Digitally signed by CHRISTOPHER WILCOX
Date: 2024.05.23 15:23:31 -06'00'

USGS Executive Aviation Committee Rep. Approval: BRIAN WACHTER Digitally signed by BRIAN WACHTER
Date: 2024.05.23 16:00:34 -04'00'

Office of Aviation Services, Approval: SUSAN BATES Digitally signed by SUSAN BATES
Date: 2024.06.11 07:51:22 -06'00'