



United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

In Reply Refer to:

April 7, 2026

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 Isle Royale and Houghton, Michigan. The Park is only accessible by boat or seaplane. There are four ferries in total with the following 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/Ozaagaateng, 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 only other option available within the region is Northwoods Aviation, who is carded through OAS. This outfit has a Cessna 185 Skywagon on floats, however, the base of operations is in Gaylord, MI and response time would be weather dependent and take 1-2 hours. This could be a resource in some circumstances as dictated by mission but would also cost more vs. Royale Air Service (\$430/hr vs \$160 interisland or \$282 one-way/\$406 round trip mainland to island).

Royale Air Service, Inc. DBA Isle Royale Seaplanes received OAS approval for seat fares in 2018, and 2020 through 2025. They have maintained an excellent safety record and provide the only flight service for visitors to Isle Royale National Park through a concessions contract. They currently maintain five aircraft and fly several flights per day carrying a maximum of 52 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 or intra-island as mission dictates. 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.

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:

Regional Aviation Manager, Concurrence:

National Aviation Manager, Concurrence:

USGS National Aviation Manager, Approval:

Chief, Division of Fire and Aviation Management, Approval:

USGS Executive Aviation Committee Rep. Approval:

Office of Aviation Services, Approval: