

Post Office and Shipping Questions and Answers

There never has been direct USPS delivery to members' residences in Natural Lakes. If someone wants mail delivery, they need to rent a post office box in either the Boulder Junction or Presque Isle post office. This document has frequent questions and answers concerning mail and shipping delivery. Given the rural setting of Natural Lakes, mail and package delivery does require more planning and there can be issues. Hopefully this document will provide some options.

1. Can we have USPS mail delivery to our homes? If not to our homes, could we have mail delivered to mailboxes installed at the front entrance?

USPS mail delivery to our homes is not an option. USPS will not drive our 24 miles of private roads to deliver mail. The local post office also does not have vehicles that could handle our winter road conditions.

If we had postal boxes installed at the front entrance, NLOAA would be solely responsible for all costs associated with acquisition, installation, and ongoing support for the boxes. This includes acquiring USPS approved boxes for letters and packages. It also includes someone to manage the post office key distribution, manage change of box ownership, dealing with frozen locks, and other maintenance requirements. In effect, NLOAA would have to replicate the infrastructure and services already provided at the local post office.

To understand a rough cost estimate to NLOAA membership for postal boxes at the entrance consider:

- As of 2024, there are 312 members. 71 list a PO Box (70 in Boulder Junction, 1 in Presque Isle).
- Assume NLOAA acquired 80 boxes that are large enough to handle average size packages. Cost of a 4-box unit (without taxes/shipping) ranges from \$2200 to \$2800. Assume average price \$2500. Cost for 80 boxes is \$50,000. The post office would only provide this service with USPS approved boxes.
- 20 4-box units require a concrete pad up to 3x32 feet. NLOAA would need to hire a contractor for preparation and installation.
- NLOAA would have to hire a "mailbox manager" or find a full-time volunteer willing to manage the post office box assignments, manage keys, change locks, handle emergency mailbox access, and coordinate with USPS for changes of addresses and transfer of boxes.

If a package does not fit into the postal boxes at the entrance, the recipient would have to go to a post office to retrieve it, as NLOAA does not have a facility that meets USPS security requirements.

Bottom line is NLOAA would be asking 312 members to subsidize mail delivery for about 25% of the membership. At the February 2024 board meeting the NLOAA Board of Directors voted unanimously to **not** support the installation of post office boxes at the entrance. There are viable options available for mail delivery.

2. Why is my physical address not a legitimate mailing address? Why doesn't something addressed to my physical address automatically get routed to my PO Box?

NLOAA addresses are not part of a postal delivery route therefore, per the USPS, it is not a valid USPS address. As to rerouting, our post offices do not have the time or resources to manually sort and re-route first class mail addresses to PO Boxes. Several years ago, national USPS ordered that any first-class letters sent to our physical addresses in Presque Isle must be returned to sender. At the same time, national USPS also wanted to return all packages addressed to our physical addresses. Presque Isle and Boulder Junction post offices pushed back on the package order and said that they could handle the re-routing of packages to PO Boxes.

So, no first-class letters will get to you that are addressed to your physical address without special arrangements (see below). Packages addressed to your physical address will route to your PO Box if you have one.

3. Some websites or companies do not accept PO Boxes for delivery addresses, so what are my alternatives?

a. Call the company/organization to override the address.

A website may be built to reject PO Boxes; however, customer support may be able to override their system and allow a PO Box for you. It's in the company's best interest to get the address correct for your shipment, they should work with you to find a solution.

b. Call the Presque Isle post office and let them know there is a letter coming with your physical address.

If you have an important transaction that won't allow your license, contract, check, legal document, etc. to be mailed to a PO Box, fill out the address with your physical Presque Isle address. Next, call the Presque Isle post office (715 686-2240) and let them know a special piece of mail is coming for you and approximately when it might arrive. The Presque Isle post office will hold the mail for a short period of time. You must contact the post office to find out when the letter has arrived and arrange for pickup from the Presque Isle post office. The post office will not call you to notify you of its arrival.

4. How do I know which address to use for package shipping?

a. If company ships using USPS, and you have a PO Box, always use your PO Box

b. If company ships via UPS or FedEx use your physical address

One caveat. If the company says they use FedEx Smartpost, or UPS Sure Post, they are using USPS to do the "last mile delivery", meaning UPS or FedEx would deliver your package to the post office and then USPS is expected to deliver it to you. Obviously, that won't happen up here. Amazon is the best example of not providing you the details of exactly how something will be shipped.

This is less of an issue with FedEx, as they are transitioning Smartpost to FedEx Ground Economy which only uses FedEx contractors for delivery.

For UPS, the way to ensure UPS always delivers to your house is to sign up for UPS My Choice (\$20/year). UPS My Choice automatically upgrades Sure Post packages to UPS Ground which will come to your house. The service also provides alerts, delivery photos, and routing updates.

c. If you don't know how a company ships, contact them to ask.

It's worth your time to contact a company to find out how they ship. They will usually work with you to make the right choice for you as they don't want to deal with the return. This won't work with Amazon. In our experience, if the item is sold through Amazon but shipped from a third party, you may not know how it will ship.

5. I'm a seasonal resident. Should I forward my mail?

If you are here for a week or two, it's not worth your time to forward your mail (USPS doesn't do less than a three week forward). Even if you are here for a month, it may not be worth it. It can take a week for your post office to get the forwarding set up and working, another week for it to get here, and then you must start undoing it. It's best to have your local post office hold your mail and then specify someone who can pick up your mail while you're gone. Have a friend pick up your held mail, go through the mail over the phone, and then have your friend FedEx the important mail here.

6. I'm a seasonal resident. I don't want or need a PO Box. I must receive a package/envelope. How can I make this work?

a. Ship the package/envelope via FedEx/UPS to your physical address.

b. Ship the package/envelope addressed General Delivery at the local post office.

You must call the post office to let them know you are using this approach. They will not hold your mail unless they have been contacted ahead of time. For Presque Isle you would address your mail to your name, General Delivery, Presque Isle WI 54557. For Boulder Junction you would address it to your name, General Delivery, Boulder Junction WI 54512 (leave off the street address for the post office). If you call the post office, they will hold that mail for 30 days, if not notified it will be returned to sender.

7. How can I know what's coming to my PO Box?

USPS has a service called USPS Informed Delivery. Sign up for free at USPS.com. With Informed Delivery, you receive a daily email with a summary of everything coming to your PO Box. Most often it will provide a scan of the front of each envelope. In addition to a summary of first-class mail, it will have a summary of incoming and outgoing shipments with tracking numbers. The package tracking does have tracking numbers, but often not complete sender detail. Delivery timing can be off a day or two. The important information is to know something is on its way and this can often save you at trip to the post office.

8. Winter Shipping Challenges

FedEx and UPS will deliver to our homes as long as the drivers feel it is safe for them to navigate our roads. If the drivers don't feel they can get to your house they will leave your packages at the security shack at the Natural Lakes entrance. It's important if you ship something up here you check your tracking information. When FedEx and UPS specify "Other" as the delivery location for your package, check your front door first, but then go to the security shack. Sometimes you may hear from members to let you know you have something at the entrance, but there is no one checking there regularly. Frontier Lakes shares out entrance and they also may have packages left at the security shack.