

Outreach and Partnerships

As pointed out in the Superintendent's Forward to this business plan, management of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is all about connections. A ranger's connection to this land makes her passionate about protecting its resources. Connections between supervisors and their staff help the Lakeshore operate more effectively and efficiently. The connection between the Lakeshore's mission and the goals of partner organizations are what make those relationships so valuable. But the most important connection is between the Lakeshore staff and the American people it serves. Charged with preserving and protecting this special



place for the enjoyment of all, the Lakeshore can never fully accomplish its mission without the support and assistance of the American public, especially those people who live or summer in the surrounding area. This has been one of the most important lessons the Lakeshore has learned since its establishment.

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is fortunate to have a well-informed and active local community that cares deeply about the park and its resources. As such it is incumbent upon park managers to engage community members in its planning and decision-making efforts. The Lakeshore's recent attempt to develop a new General Management Plan (GMP) illustrated this need. During this process, the park's outreach efforts were not effective and public outcry forced the Lakeshore to stop development of the draft plan before the Lakeshore could incorporate the input received. This was especially true with respect to issues surrounding the existing Wilderness Recommendation and access to the park.

To rectify this situation, the Lakeshore is making a concerted effort to facilitate open communication with the public and to rebuild rapport with stakeholders. Members of the management team are meeting with the public in a variety of small group settings to explain existing legislation regarding wilderness and how it affects Lakeshore access, already identified as issues of particular concern. From these discussions the Lakeshore hopes to form a strategy that resolves these issues in a manner that achieves the Lakeshore mission and supports a broad range of public interests. This approach has been well-received so far and embodies the public interaction the Lakeshore hopes to continue into the future. As discussed on page 33, the Lakeshore has identified strengthening its external affairs and partnership efforts as an ongoing priority.

As the public and interest groups become more involved in Lakeshore planning and more familiar with its legislated mission, their interest in and ability to support that mission will also grow. A group that feels strongly about a particular park resource or form of recreation, for example, may choose to play a role in protecting that resource or mitigating the impacts of that recreation. In such instances, a formal partnership provides an opportunity for the group to dedicate some of its resources to a cause that furthers the missions of both the partner and the Lakeshore. The Lakeshore benefits from several such partnerships already, with groups such as Eastern National, the Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes, Shielding Tree Nature Center, Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear, the Glen Arbor Art Association, Glen Lake School, and the Manitou Islands Memorial Society.

Formal partnerships like these increase the Lakeshore's ability to achieve its mission to preserve and protect outstanding natural resources and to provide the public with opportunities to enjoy and appreciate them. Further, as a unit of the National Park Service, the Lakeshore's mission includes the preservation and interpretation of the many significant cultural resources it contains. Now more than ever, the Lakeshore can benefit from partnerships with nonprofit organizations that have relevant missions, passions, and expertise. Partnerships are becoming an increasingly effective means for the National Park Service to both fulfill parts of its mission and foster a shared sense of stewardship that is so crucial for the future of the parks. Numerous additional opportunities exist and the Lakeshore hopes that increasing its own outreach efforts will encourage development of new partnerships, such as project agreements or historic leases.

The National Park Service encourages parks to use a collaborative approach to operations, management, and planning. Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore



recognizes that it will never be able to fully accomplish its mission without enthusiastically embracing this approach and incorporating it into every aspect of management. This business plan has made explicit the intent of park managers to more fully include communities and organizations in the management of this nationally recognized treasure. The Lakeshore's management team is committed to devoting more of its time and resources to expanding outreach and partnership efforts. The Lakeshore hopes to better engage the public in its planning and decision-making, and to attempt to solicit direct support of the park mission through the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships. The park looks forward to continuing existing relationships and cultivating new ones in order to better serve the American public and manage the resources it has been charged with protecting.

Site Restoration



Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore was created in 1970 from over 1,700 separate tracts of land. While this composite configuration was the only way to preserve the nationally significant resources for public enjoyment, it also created significant challenges in the management of those natural resources. As the Lakeshore purchases private parcels, it is also acquiring the developments associated with them, including houses, dumps, gravel pits, and pine plantations.



The Lakeshore's first priority after acquisition, and one that is usually quickly accomplished, is removing any visible non-historic structures. Merely doing so, however, does not fulfill the NPS mission to promote the natural communities and processes that existed before human habitation. Untreated former homesites fragment surrounding landscapes, reduce native species habitat, and encourage the establishment or expansion of invasive plants. Aggressive non-native plants, such as spotted knapweed, baby's breath, and garlic mustard are rapidly overtaking native plant communities. Many of the sites are located in critical dune areas, threatening the preservation of these fragile landscapes. The survival of federally protected plants such as Pitcher's thistle is also threatened. It is essential to treat homesites with recently removed structures before exotic vegetation increases, creating a greater danger to the rich native flora and fauna of the region.



Restoration of former homesites is a major initiative at the Lakeshore. These photographs show the progression from recently vacated homesite to restored natural area.

In the past five years, the Lakeshore has taken significant strides to return approximately 1,000 tracts of land to their natural condition. This tremendous undertaking is the result of a collaborative effort between employees from both the Natural Resource and Maintenance Divisions, as well as partner groups and volunteers. First, all manmade structures and nonnative materials, such as buildings, driveways, fences, utility lines, fill dirt, gravel,

and debris, are removed. Then, exotic plants are cleared and landscapes are contoured and rehabilitated by covering bare soil with forest duff. To reintroduce native plants, the park has been actively working with the Glen Lake High School for seed collection and plant propagation services. This has provided an opportunity for advanced biology students to work with younger children to grow the plants. In spring, the students and natural resources staff plant the nursery-grown seedlings to establish or augment native plant populations. In other instances, native plants from surrounding areas are transplanted onto the disturbed sites. It is expected that additional native plants will return to most sites once the topography is reconstructed and the foreign materials removed. After a few years, the casual observer won't notice the old site amid the beautiful scenery of the Lakeshore.

As a result of these efforts, the condition of the Lakeshore's natural resources has greatly improved. Restoring disturbed areas improves soil conditions, re-establishes natural hydrologic functions, reduces exotic species, and re-vegetates critical habitats. Furthermore, the Lakeshore has sought creative ways to utilize removed materials for other needs in an effort to reduce costs. For example, the nonnative black locust trees, which are rot-resistant, have served as water bars on trails, and the pine timber from plantations has been used in restoring barns. This comprehensive project has afforded the Lakeshore an opportunity to network with the local professional community and collaborate with partner groups to accomplish its goals. The Lakeshore hopes that the techniques it has developed will serve as a model for similar restoration initiatives in other NPS areas in the future.

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