



Foundation Document Overview

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

Indiana



Contact Information

For more information about the *Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Foundation Document*, contact: indu_superintendent@nps.gov or (219) 395-1882 or write to:
Superintendent, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, 1100 N. Mineral Springs Road, Porter, IN 46304

Purpose



INDIANA DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE was established to preserve certain portions of the Indiana dunes and other areas of scenic, scientific, and historic interest and recreational value in the state of Indiana for the educational, inspirational, and recreational use of the public.



Significance

Significance statements express why Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The park contains exceptional biological diversity, especially plant communities; there are more than 1,100 native plant species on more than 15,000 acres.
- Geological processes are responsible for the formation and ongoing evolution of the impressive dunes, wetlands, and other landscape features of the park. The geologic record of three ancient dune systems, remnants of ancient shorelines, is preserved in the park, as is a mix of eastern deciduous forest, prairies, oak savanna, wetlands, pannes, rivers, and remnants of boreal forests that occupy the dynamic landscapes created by these geologic processes.
- The park preserves cultural resources from 10,000 years of human occupation. These archeological sites, museum collections, cultural landscapes, and historic buildings are related to human interaction with the natural environment, settlement, urbanization, the rise of environmental conservation, and ecological restoration in Northwest Indiana.
- For more than 100 years, the dunes and plant communities in the park have been natural field laboratories for scientific studies of ecology. The theory of ecological succession was developed from research conducted here. Today the park has long-term and new research projects occurring in many natural resource disciplines.
- Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, as one of the first parks specifically created to bring national parks close to urban areas, provides outstanding scenic beauty and varied outdoor recreational activities on the Lake Michigan shoreline. The park is approximately 50 miles from Chicago, the third-largest metropolitan area in the country.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Biological Diversity**
- **Lake Michigan Shoreline**
- **Dunes**
- **Educational Opportunities**
- **Recreational Opportunities**
- **Scientific Study**
- **Archeological and Historic Resources Related to Early Settlement**
- **Other Resources Related to More Recent Human Activity**
- **Partnerships/Community Engagement**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Remarkable Species Diversity**
- **Legacy of Scientific Inquiry**
- **Human Use of the Lakeshore Over Time**
- **Natural Setting for Millions of People**
- **Reflects National Struggle to Balance Urbanization, Industry, and Conservation**



Description

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (hereafter identified as the park) is in northern Indiana along the southern shore of Lake Michigan, between Gary and Michigan City, Indiana, approximately 50 miles southeast of Chicago. The more than 15,000 acres that comprise the park include 15 miles of Lake Michigan's southern shore. It is made up of a series of noncontiguous tracts located in LaPorte, Porter, and Lake Counties and is near 15 cities and towns. Indiana Dunes State Park, Calumet Prairie State Nature Preserve, and Hoosier Prairie State Nature Preserve are located within the designated boundaries. They are owned and managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

The park is approximately 50 miles from Chicago, the third-largest metropolitan area in the country, and draws nearly two million visitors each year. As a leading destination for recreation in the state, it offers many outdoor recreational amenities, such as hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding trails; campsites; beach access points; a visitor center; picnic tables and shelters; paddling locations; and interpretive programs. While many visitors come for recreation, the park also features many natural and historical resources. These include three dedicated Indiana state nature preserves, four national natural landmarks, one national historic landmark, and many historic structures, cultural landscapes, and archeological sites that are listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

In contrast to these natural and historic features, the park surrounds three residential communities, abuts three major steel mills and two fossil fuel electricity-generating stations, includes three major railroads, numerous transmission lines, pipelines, two U.S. highways, one toll road, one interstate highway, and miles of roads and streets within or adjacent to its boundary. The proximity to vast urban, suburban, and rural settings creates an audience of tremendous scope and diversity.

In 1899, Henry Cowles, a botanist from the University of Chicago, brought international attention to the intricate ecosystems of the dunes with the publication of an article titled *Ecological Relations of the Vegetation on Sand Dunes of Lake Michigan*. The Prairie Club, including Cowles and others, pushed for creation of Sand Dunes National Park, but the attempt failed in Congress in 1916. In 1926, after a 10-year petition by the State of Indiana to preserve the dunes, the Indiana Dunes State Park opened to the public. The state park was relatively small in size and scope, and the push for a national park continued. In 1949, Dorothy Buell became involved with the Indiana Dunes Preservation Council. The efforts of Buell resulted in a Save the Dunes Council in 1952.

Save the Dunes Council began a nationwide membership and fundraising drive to buy land for preservation, despite efforts to further develop the area for economic activity. Their first success was the purchase of 56 acres in Porter County—the Cowles Tamarack Bog. The movement also gained congressional support through the work of then Illinois Senator Paul H. Douglas, who spoke to the public and Congress in a drive to save the dunes.

The long national campaign for creation of the park reflected an evolving environmental conscience within the American public. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Cowles, Buell, Douglas, and others, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore was established by the U.S. Congress as a unit of the national park system (Public Law 89-761) on November 5, 1966, in order to “preserve for the educational, inspirational, and recreational use of the public certain portions of the Indiana Dunes and other areas of scenic, scientific, and historic interest and recreational value in the State of Indiana.”

