

Follow the Right Crowd!

Follow today's crowd of park visitors, who are helping to protect this magnificent park, by staying on designated trails and protecting the dunes. It's the right thing to do.

Park visitors climbing up and down dunes over the past forty years did not realize that they were causing damage to these fragile areas. What looks like simple sand paths, are actually places for erosion. Wind, rain, and snow on the bare paths over the dunes makes the dunes erode faster. If the dunes erode, they will get smaller and the Indiana dunes landscape we love will be no more. The damage was so severe at Mount Baldy that the National Park Service had to close some pathways so that dune grass and other native plants have a chance to grow without being trampled. These closed areas are fenced off and identified with signs.

Thanks to park visitors heeding the signs and fences at Mount Baldy, this effort has been a success! Visitors observing the signs and staying on only the designated paths have given dune grasses and cottonwood trees a chance to grow and stabilize the dune.

The same erosion problem is occurring at West Beach. Visitors have created more than 25 miles of paths up and down the fragile West Beach dunes. These paths of bare sand are not only unsightly, but are damaging the fragile ponds between the dunes, called pannes.



These pannes are a rare ecosystem that occurs nowhere else on Lake Michigan. Trampling dune vegetation and running down the dunes cause sand to erode into the pannes, eventually filling the basin and causing the pannes to disappear. Just one visitor straying off the designated trail and forging their own path can kill the critical dune plants that help stabilize the dunes and protect the fragile ponds. To preserve this special area, the National Park Service has closed many of the erosion-causing paths. This summer, park staff and volunteers at West Beach will be on duty to explain the importance of staying out of the closed areas so the dunes have a chance to regrow their protective cover of grasses and other plants.

You can help protect these dunes! Follow the crowd, do your part and do the right thing. Stay on designated trails and give the dunes a chance to heal and the plants a chance to grow. Bring your own shade and resist the temptation to seek shade under a lakefront tree where you would be trampling dune grasses. Encourage your family to swim and exercise along the beach, not running up and down dunes. There are designated trails where you can go through the dunes and get views from on high – stay on those marked trails. We want the spectacular Indiana Dunes to be here for your children's children. The actions you take during your visit will decide if these dunes are here for future generations.

If you would like to learn more, or would like to join our volunteer dune protection team, please contact us at the Indiana Dunes Visitor Center, 219-395-1682.

Take the Challenge!

1. Staying on official designated park trails will:

- a) Reduce the chance of getting poison ivy or ticks.
- b) Help preserve the park for others to enjoy.
- c) Help preserve the marram grass.
- d) All the above.

2. Which statement is wrong?

- a) Marram grass is a great dune stabilizer.
- b) Marram grass is like lawn grass. It can be walked on and recover quickly.
- c) Marram Grass has a fragile root system.
- d) All the above.

3. Are area closed signs enforceable by law?

- a) Yes, it is a violation of federal regulations to go beyond an area closed sign.
- b) No, it is not enforceable.

4. Which statement is wrong?

- a) You can climb to the summit of Mount Baldy from the beach.
- b) West Beach Succession Trail offers spectacular elevated dune views.
- c) Climbing any dune is permissible, as long as no one notices.
- d) Climbing dunes harm the natural resource.

5. The beach has very little shade. Which statement is wrong?

- a) Bring your own shade.
- b) Find shade under a tree on a dune.
- c) Wear sun screen.
- d) Drink plenty of water.

6. What are ways that you can help protect the park?

- a) Become a volunteer.
- b) Join a stewardship program.
- c) Share your knowledge of preservation.
- d) Stay on designated trails.
- e) All the above.