

Scientists Investigating Mystery Holes on Mount Baldy



A casual observer might think that, after more than an century of robust scientific inquiry at the dunes, we would have discovered almost everything about the park and its resources. Last year we were reminded that there is still undiscovered mystery under foot. Literally. In June of 2013, a curious 6-year old boy entered a deep hole he found on the slope of Mount Baldy. To the horror of his friends, family, park staff, a researcher and other bystanders, this hole closed up trapping the boy under (what was later discovered) eleven feet of sand. Today, the family reports the little boy is just fine. The cause of the hole remains a mystery.

Park staff continue to monitor this temporarily closed area of Mount Baldy, and have been working with others to understand what is happening to this giant moving dune. Ground penetrating radar studies by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), identified a large number of anomalies below the dune's surface, but analysis by scientists from the National Park Service, Indiana University and the Indiana Geological Survey have not yielded answers on how these holes form. Scientists report that the holes are very short-lived, remaining open for less than 24 hours before collapsing and filling in naturally with surrounding sand.

Additional work is planned this summer as part of a more comprehensive investigation of the dune. This study will include mapping of openings, depressions, and anomalous features, the use of multispectral Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR) and coring to develop a better understanding of the overall internal architecture of the dune, and detailed GPR and coring of some of the anomalies identified in the EPA report.

“Mount Baldy is one of the most visited sites in the national lakeshore, attracting thousands of visitors each year” said Deputy Superintendent Garry Traynham, “but the continued development of these holes in the dune surface poses a serious risk to the public. Our first obligation must be to the welfare of our visitors who are here for an enjoyable outing.”

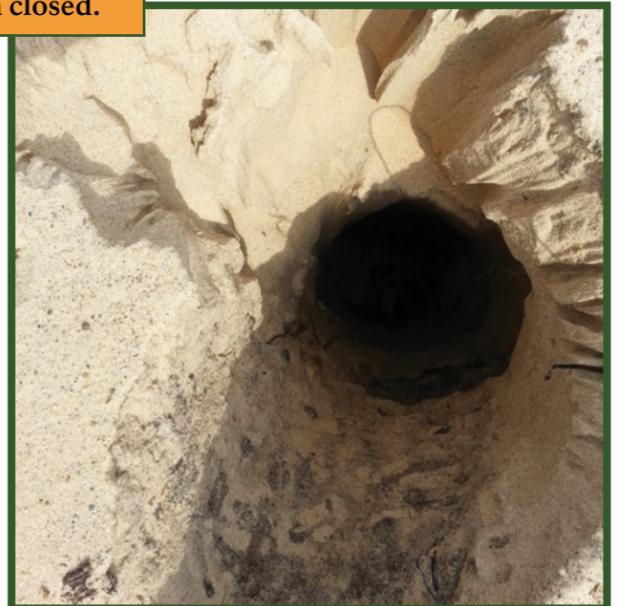
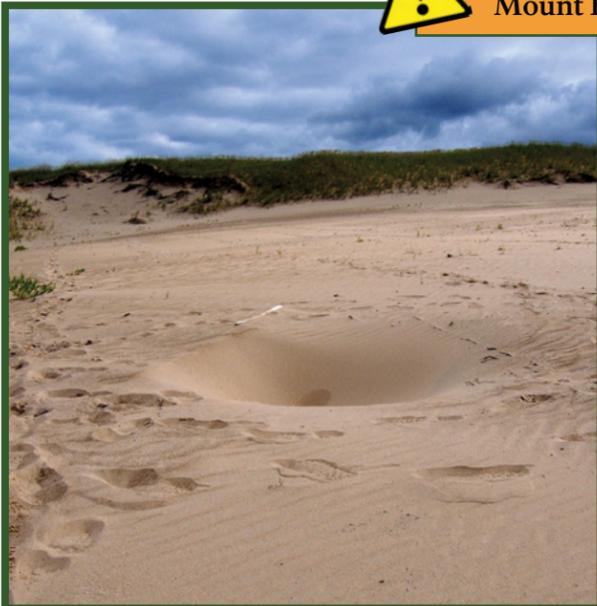
The timeframe for this additional research is expected to last well into the fall. To ensure the public's safety, Mount Baldy, its parking lot, trail, and the beach in front of the dune will remain closed to all vehicular and pedestrian access while the investigation continues. During the research work, the park's resource managers will continue planting marram grass on portions of Mount Baldy where the native dune grass used to grow. The extensive root system of marram grass holds sand in place and may also help prevent holes from opening up on the dune's surface.

All other beach access areas within the national lakeshore remain open and visitors are asked to stay on the established trails to prevent erosion and subsequent resource damage. For more information, and to view the EPA's Geophysical Survey Report, a Core Study, photos, video, and graphics on the Mount Baldy research, go to the national lakeshore's website at: <http://www.nps.gov/indu/parkmgmt/mount-baldy-dune-investigation.htm>.

The long-standing legacy of scientific inquiry, exploration, and discovery continues in your national park. Like us, are you curious as to what other unknown mysteries may be around the corner or underfoot?



Mount Baldy, adjacent parking, trails and beach remain closed.



Welcome From our New Superintendent, Paul Labovitz



“We are glad you chose to visit one of our nation's special places, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Welcome back, or if this is your first visit, get ready for a great National Park experience! We are here to protect and interpret the unique dune habitats and shoreline at the southern end of Lake Michigan. This is a place to connect with the natural world and enjoy four-season recreational opportunities. This is a place to better understand the possibilities of protecting sensitive ecological areas interspersed with industries that have co-existed for almost a century. World class birding, terrific camping and some of the nicest Great Lakes beaches are available just a short trip from Chicagoland. Learn more about how we all work in partnership to provide this national treasure for the enjoyment of our neighbors and visitors. Welcome and have an enjoyable and safe visit.”



Paul Labovitz most recently served as the Superintendent of Mississippi National River and Recreation Area in St. Paul, MN. He began his career with the National Park Service in 1988 and worked in Philadelphia, PA, at the Northwest Regional Office and in Brecksville, OH with the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. He is a native of Philadelphia, PA. We now welcome him as the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Superintendent.