



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
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Empire, Michigan 49630-9797

IN REPLY REFER TO:

June 18, 2012

W42(SLBE)

Memorandum

To: Files

From: Superintendent, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

Subject: Written Determination and Designation of Route for Bicycle Use in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

In 2008, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore completed a General Management Plan (GMP) that established park management zones and proposed a hike/bike trail through the park. A Record of Decision that included management zoning for the trail was signed by the Midwest Regional Director in January 2009. Following the Record of Decision, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed that analyzed the impacts of specific routes and design standards for the trail. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the hike/bike trail was signed in August 2009.

Designation of this trail (since named the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail, or SBHT) as a route open to bicycle use requires a written determination that such use is consistent with the protection of the park area's natural, scenic and aesthetic values, safety considerations and management objectives, and will not disturb wildlife or park resources (36 CFR 4.30(a)). The Trail Plan/EA and the FONSI provide information and context for this written determination, and can be found by following the "Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail" link on the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore park planning website, <http://nps.gov/slbe/parkmgmt/planning.htm>, then viewing the documents listed on that page.

Except for routes designated in developed areas and special use zones, routes designated for bicycle use shall be promulgated by special regulation (36 CFR 4.30(b)). The planned route of the SBHT within the Lakeshore lies within developed areas or special use zones, as established pursuant to the Lakeshore's GMP. Specifically, the SBHT route was planned within the high use, experience history, and recreation zones in the Lakeshore. These zones are described in the GMP as follows:

The high use zone provides for visitor orientation, education, and other structured activities (such as ranger-led tours). High numbers of visitors enjoy and learn about the National Lakeshore. The experience history zone is managed primarily to preserve historic structures and landscapes. Moderate to high numbers of visitors enjoy and learn about significant historic activities, buildings, and landscapes. The recreation zone provides a wide range of recreational opportunities for moderate numbers of visitors. The active Lake Michigan beach area is within this zone, as is the 0.25 mile of Lake Michigan waters within the National Lakeshore boundary.

In contrast, the majority of the Lakeshore lies in the experience nature zone, and the SBHT route was planned to avoid this zone. The experience nature zone does not contain developed areas and is described in the GMP as follows:

The experience nature zone is the wildest, most natural management zone. Low numbers of visitors enjoy primitive recreation on foot or in nonmotorized watercraft. This is the only management zone in which wilderness may occur.

The management zoning for developed areas associated with the SBHT was specifically referenced in the GMP, as follows:

Several candidate areas for the hike/bike trail that are zoned recreation (an area near M-109 on the north edge of Alligator Hill; the Wilco Hill area south of Glen Haven, north of the Dune Climb and west of M-109; corridors or two-tracks east of the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive; the area southeast of the Lakeshore's Empire maintenance area and west of M-22; and the area between Peterson Road and north of Platte River Campground) will revert to experience nature if they are not needed for the M-22/M-109 hike/bike trail (except for county roads and the D. H. Day Group Campground, which will retain the recreation zone).

Because the planned route of the SBHT lies within developed areas and special use zones, the superintendent may designate it for bicycle use without promulgation of a special regulation. In order to minimize environmental impacts, however, there is potential for short distances of the SBHT to extend outside of developed areas as the exact route is surveyed. Because of this potential, the Lakeshore plans to pursue promulgation of a special regulation, and has submitted the draft regulation package under separate cover to the WASO Regulations and Special Use Office.

Park Significance, Purpose and Values

The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, a unit of the National Park System, encompasses approximately 72,000 acres along a 35-mile length of Lake Michigan's northeastern shoreline and two nearby islands in Leelanau and Benzie Counties in Michigan. Congress established the park in 1970 to preserve "outstanding natural features, including forests, beaches, dune formations, and ancient glacial phenomena...in their natural setting" and to protect them "from developments and uses which would destroy the scenic beauty and natural character of the area...for the benefit, inspiration, education, recreation, and enjoyment of the public..." (Public Law 91-479, October 21, 1970).

The Lakeshore's 2008 GMP confirms the park's purpose, and identifies its significance and the context in which the park's resources and values warrant designation as a unit of the National Park System. It states that the purpose of the National Lakeshore is to:

"preserve outstanding natural features, including forests, beaches, dune formations, and ancient glacial phenomena in their natural setting and protect them from developments and uses that would destroy the scenic beauty and natural character of the area, for the benefit, inspiration, education, recreation, and enjoyment of the public."

Significance statements capture the essence of the national park unit's importance to the nation's natural and cultural heritage. They describe the unit's distinctiveness and describe why an area is important within regional, national, and global contexts. The significance statements for the National Lakeshore are as follows:

- The National Lakeshore contains compactly grouped features of continental glaciation, including post-glacial shoreline adjustment, ridge/swale complex, wind-formed dunes, perched dunes, and examples of associated plant succession. These features are of global importance due to their relatively unimpacted state, the variety of features present, and their proximity to one another.
- The National Lakeshore preserves outstanding scenic and publicly accessible resources. Its massive glacial headlands, expansive Lake Michigan beaches, diverse habitats, superb water resources, and rich human history offer an exceptional range of recreational, educational, and inspirational opportunities.
- The collection of historic landscapes — maritime, agricultural, and recreational — in the National Lakeshore is of a size and quality unsurpassed on the Great Lakes and rare elsewhere on the United States' coastline.
- The National Lakeshore's native plant and animal communities, especially the northern hardwoods, coastal forests, dune communities, and interdunal wetlands, are of a scale and quality that is rare on the Great Lakes shoreline. These relatively intact communities afford an opportunity for continuation of the ecological processes that have shaped them.

The GMP, and its accompanying Record of Decision may be found on the Lakeshore website by clicking on the “Management,” “Park Planning,” and “General Management Plan / Wilderness Study links to arrive at: <http://www.nps.gov/slbe/parkmgmt/gmphome.htm>.

Bicycle Use on Designated Routes is Consistent with Management Objectives and Protection of Natural, Scenic and Aesthetic Values in the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and Will Not Disturb Wildlife or Park Resources

Park Management Objectives

Management objectives for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore have envisioned bicycle use on trails in the park since at least 1979. The 1979 GMP stated that “An integrated system of bicycle and hiking trails will be provided to link major features and to give visitors the opportunity to hike and bike the entire length of the mainland portion of the lakeshore.” It went on to say that “The National Park Service will work cooperatively with state and local governmental agencies to establish a bicycle trail system in the area. The trails will be designed to offer bicyclists a safe experience while allowing access to many of the lakeshore's outstanding features.”

In 2005, the park began working on a new general management plan to update the 1979 GMP. From the beginning of the planning process, substantial and consistent public review and response to the plan supported the designation of a bicycle trail in the park, including during public scoping (January to March 2006) and public comment periods (May 22 to July 7, 2006; October 11 to November 10, 2006; March 31 to May 14, 2007; and April 7 to June 15, 2008). The 2008 GMP confirmed the objectives of the 1979 GMP while recognizing that the National Park Service had limited capability to build and maintain a bicycle trail, stating,:

“The segments of M-22 and M-109 in Leelanau County through and near the Lakeshore comprise part of the state-designated Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route, a locally sponsored effort to preserve and enhance the natural, historic, cultural, and scenic resources and qualities in the area. The project has

received approvals from the federal and state departments of transportation and has also received funding for further planning studies. The efforts include plans to develop a hard surfaced/paved 25-mile nonmotorized hike/bike trail along these roads. The hike/bike trail would generally be separated from the road shoulder.

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is working with the Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route Committee on planning for a 27-mile nonmotorized trailway. The route would generally follow M-22 and M-109 through the National Lakeshore from the Lakeshore's northern boundary at County Road 651 to the Leelanau–Benzie County line at Manning Road south of Empire, Michigan. The trailway would connect visitor sites and facilities, including campgrounds, historic sites, beaches, trailheads, and other points of interest within the National Lakeshore. It would also provide a nonmotorized trail connection between the villages of Empire and Glen Arbor. The trailway would be on public land (either Michigan Department of Transportation right-of-way or National Lakeshore property). Where possible, the trailway would also be separated from the roadway to provide safe, alternative recreation and transportation opportunities for Lakeshore visitors and residents.

Grant funds and donations have been used to contract with an architectural, design, and engineering firm to conduct a pre-engineering study and environmental assessment to determine the trail route and alignment, design concept, probable cost and range of uses for a multipurpose trailway. The project falls under the umbrella of the Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route, designated in 2001 under the Michigan Department of Transportation State Heritage Route Program and coordinated by the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments. The Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route committee appointed a Trailway Work Group, which includes the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, the National Park Service, Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes, Michigan Department of Transportation, Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation (TART) Trails, local governments, and citizens. After completion and review of the environmental assessment and pre-engineering study, in cooperation with the Michigan Department of Transportation and the National Park Service, the Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route committee hopes to apply for Federal Transportation Enhancement funds to design and construct the trailway. The Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route Trailway is included in each action alternative. The goals of the trailway support the desired conditions for visitor use and experience at the Lakeshore.

The 2008 GMP/EIS and the subsequent Trail Plan/EA that provide for bicycle use on the SBHT in the park have been through public comment, subsequent internal review, comment analysis and response. Bicycle use has received substantial public support, and is consistent with the management objectives established in the 1979 GMP and confirmed throughout the development of the 2008 GMP/EIS. A Final GMP/EIS was printed, and a Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register in Fall 2008. The Record of Decision was signed on January 6, 2009.

The designation of the SBHT route as open to bicycle use is consistent with and implements elements of the park's purpose and values by providing exceptional recreational opportunities for park exploration, discovery and adventure. In addition, it provides transportation alternatives that help achieve the servicewide goals of reducing the agency's carbon footprint. As stated above, public input and comment throughout numerous park planning processes have revealed a high demand and desire that NPS provide bicycling opportunities at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

In summary, the need to identify a route for bicycle use in the Lakeshore has been established through the 1979 GMP and 2008 GMP/EIS as a general management objective of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. To implement that objective, the Trail Plan/EA and FONSI analyzed the impacts of bicycle use on the SBHT route.

Park Wildlife and Resources

The 2008 GMP/EIS called for allowing bicycle use on a new trail in developed areas paralleling roadways or traveling existing corridors within the Lakeshore, avoiding the undeveloped “experience nature” management zone. Determinations in the 2008 GMP/EIS analyzed bicycle trail construction impacts in a general way in anticipation of the more detailed EA that was prepared in 2009. The 2008 GMP/EIS described likely long term impacts on soils as minor; wildlife and vegetation negligible to minor; and wetlands as minor to moderate. The subsequent 2009 trailway EA and FONSI analyzed these and other impact topics in greater detail and confirmed the impacts on wetlands, water quality, topography, vegetation, wildlife, and soils as minor. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the NPS determination of *No Effect* for federally listed plant species, Pitcher’s thistle and Michigan monkey-flower, and the federally listed bird species, the Piping Plover. The Michigan State Historic Preservation Office concurred that the SBHT would have no adverse effect on historic properties.

The nationally significant resources and values in the park, including both cultural and natural resources, would not be impaired or significantly impacted by the designation of the SBHT route as open to bicycle use, as determined through the GMP/EIS and the Trail Plan/EA and FONSI that analyzed the potential impacts.

Further, it is reasonable to expect that designation of the SBHT as a route open to bicycle use may improve visitor satisfaction and resource protection in the long term. Allowing bicycle use on the SBHT would make the park more interesting and inviting to a large and growing national user group of bicyclists, who may not otherwise appreciate the NPS mission and values. Their support and appreciation of the park would contribute to the strategic goal of the NPS to become and remain relevant to new user groups and youth. By using bicycles, park visitors could more easily access many of the park’s interesting features and important natural and cultural resources that are too far along a trail for many visitors to hike during their length of stay. Bicycling visitors would have a myriad of opportunities to learn about and develop an enduring appreciation for the park’s outstanding resources and values. NPS will provide interpretive signage at appropriate locations at trailheads and along the SBHT to educate visitors about park resources and how to protect them. By providing meaningful, relevant and fun experiences for park visitors, managers can encourage the development of a large and growing constituency of people who appreciate the park and feel that its resources and values are important to them personally, and therefore will want to contribute to the protection and preservation of those resources and values.

Determination

Based upon the foregoing, and as required by 36 CFR § 4.30, the NPS determines that bicycle use in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore on the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail is consistent with the protection of the park’s natural, scenic and aesthetic values; consistent with the park’s management objectives; and it is anticipated that the bicycle use will not disturb wildlife or park resources.

Bicycle Use on Designated Routes is Consistent with Safety Considerations

The Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail will be constructed to American Association of State Highway Traffic Officials standards for non-motorized trails. These standards ensure safe riding opportunities, particularly in the ample space to safely signal and pass other visitors.

The 2006 NPS Management Policies state that NPS will “seek to provide a safe and healthful environment for visitors . . .” (Section 8.2.5.1.). Trail signs, information kiosks, brochures, and on-site volunteer “Trail Ambassadors” will inform visitors of appropriate trail etiquette and that the SBHT is

multi-use, for hiking and bicycling, and provide safety information, including trail direction and appropriate practices of yielding to others. The park will monitor activities on the trail and make safety related adjustments, as needed.

Determination

Based upon the foregoing, and as required by 36 CFR § 4.30, the NPS determines that bicycle use in the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore on the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail is consistent with safety considerations.

Recommended by: Tom Ullrich 6-18-12
Deputy Supt., Sleeping Bear Dunes NL Date

Approved by Dusty Schultz 6/18/2012
Superintendent, Sleeping Bear Dunes NL Date