

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
Michigan

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



**General Management Plan/Wilderness Study Summary
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore**

July • 2009

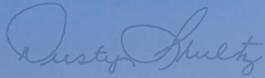
Dear Friends and Neighbors of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore,

We are very pleased to present to you the *Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore General Management Plan / Wilderness Study Summary*. This document is a condensed version, containing the key information of the 375-page *Final General Management Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement*. The completion of both documents depended on the participation of all of you and reflects your valued input.

The planning process for the *General Management Plan and Wilderness Study* began in 2006. National Lakeshore staff members conducted an extensive public involvement and outreach program throughout the planning process, meeting with more than 2,500 people at more than 90 informational gatherings.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again express my appreciation for your continued interest in and care for this very special place. Working together, we developed a final plan that maintains a variety of recreational opportunities while continuing to preserve and protect the nationally significant natural and cultural resources of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. We could not have done this without you. Please accept my sincere thanks. We hope to see you at the Dunes soon!

Sincerely,



Dusty Shultz
Superintendent



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Introduction • 1



OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL LAKESHORE

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (hereafter referred to as National Lakeshore, Lakeshore, or park) was established by the U.S. Congress in 1970 with the passage of Public Law (PL) 91-479 (see appendix). Part of the national park system, the National Lakeshore, which consists of a mainland portion plus North Manitou and South Manitou islands (71,291 acres total), is in the northwestern portion of Michigan's Lower Peninsula (see Region map). The mainland portion straddles the dividing line between Benzie and Leelanau counties. The Manitou Islands, in Leelanau County, are located to the northwest in Lake Michigan, about 7 miles from the nearest mainland shore. The nearest city is Traverse City, Michigan (population 15,000), which is 30 miles east of the Lakeshore. Smaller communities such as Empire, unincorporated Glen Arbor, and the town of Frankfort are nearer to the National Lakeshore.

Named after a complex of coastal sand dunes, the National Lakeshore features white sand beaches, steep bluffs reaching as high as 450 feet above Lake Michigan, thick maple and beech forests, and clear inland lakes. The National Lakeshore's most notable features — the ancient sand dunes — are products of wind, ice, and water action over thousands of years. During the Ice Age, continental glaciers spread southward from Canada, repeatedly burying the Upper Midwest under sheets of ice. These massive glaciers enlarged river valleys, carved out the Great Lake Basins, and left behind conditions promoting the formation of sand dunes. Over the years, prevailing winds blowing across Lake Michigan built beach dunes on low-lying shores and “perched” dunes on high glacial plateaus. Sculpted by the wind, the active dunes shift and advance over time, sometimes burying trees and creating “ghost forests” of stark, bleached trunks. The high, perched dunes afford spectacular views across Lake Michigan and of other glacially formed landscapes. The contrast between the open, sunny environment of the dunes and the adjacent lush beech-maple forests is striking.

Long before the area became a National Lakeshore, American Indians, lumbermen, merchant sailors, and farmers visited or settled here. Archeological evidence dates back to prehistoric Indians about 3,000 years ago. The Ottawa and Ojibwe migrated to the area in the 17th century to hunt, fish, and collect maple sap. French explorers, fur traders, and missionaries arrived in the mid-1600s. Not long thereafter, other groups settled in the area, and shipping on the Great Lakes increased, along with the region's population and commerce. Vast forests were cleared in the 1880s to supply lumber for construction and fuel for ships that sailed the Great Lakes. In the 1920s, lumbering subsided



One of many inland lakes

as the supply of hardwood dwindled. Subsistence homesteads evolved, followed by cash-crop farms and orchards. Visitors to the area found that its pleasant climate and stunning scenery made for a great place to spend leisure time.

Today, a lighthouse and U.S. Life-Saving Service stations, coastal villages, and picturesque farmsteads reflect the National Lakeshore's rich maritime, agricultural, and recreational history. The region surrounding the National Lakeshore is a popular vacation and summer home destination. In recent times the area has undergone considerable growth as homes and support services are built for expanding full-time and summer populations.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN / WILDERNESS STUDY

General management plans are required for all units of the national park system and are intended to establish the future management direction of those units. General management plans look 20 or more years into the future and consider the park system unit holistically, in its full ecological and cultural context and as part of a surrounding region. The *General Management Plan* provides comprehensive guidance for perpetuating natural systems, preserving cultural resources, and providing opportunities for quality visitor experiences at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. The purpose of the plan is to decide how the National Park Service (NPS) can best fulfill the National Lakeshore's purpose, maintain its significance, and protect its resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The plan does not provide specific and detailed answers to every issue facing the park, but rather is a framework to assist NPS managers in making decisions today and in the future.

The *Wilderness Study* element of the plan evaluates lands within Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore for possible recommendation to Congress for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system. Wilderness, which can be designated only by Congress, provides for permanent protection of lands in their natural condition that provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

Based on the *Wilderness Study*, the National Park Service will prepare a proposal for such a recommendation to forward to the U.S. Department of the Interior. However, by law, areas proposed as wilderness in the 1981 recommendation for the National Lakeshore will be managed as wilderness until Congress acts on a new wilderness recommendation.

This document is a summary of the approved *General Management Plan / Wilderness Study*. For more details please refer to the full, 375-page document.



Region

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore General Management Plan/Wilderness Study

U.S. Department of the Interior • National Park Service
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PLANNING ISSUES AND CONCERNS

WILDERNESS

The 1981 “Wilderness Recommendation” that was prepared for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore proposed 30,903 acres of wilderness. Of that total acreage, 7,128 acres were “recommended wilderness” and 23,775 acres were “potential wilderness.” (Recommended wilderness refers to lands that immediately qualify for wilderness designation. Potential wilderness refers to lands that have been identified for future designation as wilderness if temporary, nonconforming uses or incompatible conditions are removed or eliminated.) The 1982 amendment (PL 97-361) to the park’s enabling legislation requires that the areas proposed for wilderness in the 1981 recommendation be managed to maintain their wilderness character “until Congress determines otherwise.” NPS management policies also require such management, which has been occurring at Sleeping Bear Dunes for more than 25 years.

Public interest in and debate about the 1981 recommendation was renewed in the early 2000s, and that interest continues today. With the general management plan, the National Park Service reconsidered the issue of wilderness at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Thus, the National Park Service has determined, through this new *Wilderness Study*, which areas of the National Lakeshore should be included in a new wilderness proposal. **Because of the 1982 law, areas proposed as wilderness in the 1981 recommendation will be managed as wilderness until Congress acts on a new wilderness recommendation.**



Covered bridge on the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive

ACCESS AND MANAGEMENT OF ROADS WITHIN THE PARK

The National Lakeshore is traversed by many different types of roads, including county roads, NPS administrative and public roads, private roads, and state highways. Some roads provide access to Lake Michigan beaches or other park features, while others provide access to private property. There are some roads that do not access any particular feature or property, having formerly served private properties that are no longer present. Some roads are in areas proposed as wilderness in the 1981 “Wilderness Recommendation.” A few roads are NPS-owned and managed, but most road rights-of-way in the park are held by Benzie or Leelanau counties. The *General Management Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement* evaluated how roads support or impact National Lakeshore resources and visitor experiences. This information: (a) provides management direction for NPS-owned roads, and (b) provides information for the counties to consider in their road management programs. The counties control road rights-of-way in the National Lakeshore, so any decision to close county roads rests with them.

PROTECTING FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

In the *General Management Plan*, the National Park Service identifies fundamental resources and values (see following “Foundation for Planning and Management” section) that deserve primary consideration in planning and management for the National Lakeshore and outlines strategies to protect those values. Similarly, the National Park Service has identified what visitor opportunities or experiences fit with the purposes and maintain the significance of the National Lakeshore and developed strategies for supporting or enhancing those opportunities. To accomplish this, the National Park Service decided how to manage specific areas of the park (through management zoning) to protect and provide for these different natural, cultural, recreational, and visitor experience resources and values.

BENZIE CORRIDOR AND CRYSTAL RIDGE

The 1970 legislation that established the National Lakeshore authorized the establishment of a scenic southern entrance road to the park. To that end, the park boundary includes a corridor (the Benzie Corridor) on a ridge (Crystal Ridge) between Crystal Lake and Platte Lake. The National Park Service has acquired nearly 100 acres (about 10%) of the lands within the Benzie Corridor since the park was established. Land has become increasingly expensive in this area, however, and development continues to take place, which raised questions as to whether acquiring enough land for a scenic southern entrance was still feasible. In the *General Management Plan*, the National Park Service decided that the Benzie Corridor remains essential to the National Lakeshore’s purpose (e.g., for providing a scenic road or trail), and will continue to acquire property there on a willing-seller basis or via donations.

CROWDING AND OVERUSE

Some visitor facilities and areas of the National Lakeshore are crowded and congested during the summer. Areas that the public has expressed particular concern about include the Dune Climb, the Platte River and the area around its mouth, and beach access parking areas. Crowding and congestion affects visitor experiences, strains park infrastructure, and may result in harm to natural and cultural resources. The *General Management Plan* deals with issues of crowding and provides general direction for addressing user capacity at locations throughout the National Lakeshore.

MANAGEMENT OF NEWLY ACQUIRED PARK LANDS

About 1,720 acres of new lands have been added to the National Lakeshore since 1979, when the last general management plan for the park was prepared. In this new management plan, the National Park Service determined how to manage these new areas (e.g., the Bow Lakes, Miller Hill, and Crystal River areas) for resource protection and visitor enjoyment.
