

Center for State of the Parks



INDIANA DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE

SNAPSHOT

Nestled between Gary and Michigan City, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore includes 15 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline within its designated boundaries and is composed of two large units that are separated by a large industrial complex and smaller noncontiguous satellite areas. The park also includes 596 acres of Lake Michigan waters.

Each year, nearly 2 million people visit Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore to hike, camp, ride horses, swim, fish, cross-country ski, and learn about the region's history through interpretive programs and annual events such as the Duneland Harvest Festival and Maple Sugar Time Festival.

HISTORY

Pleasant summer temperatures and abundant fish and wildlife made the southern shores of Lake Michigan an attractive place for early American Indians such as the Miami, Ottawa, and Potawatomi peoples. But the swamps and dunes of the Calumet region of present-day Illinois and Indiana initially presented barriers to early Euro-American settlement. In 1822, Joseph Bailly and his son-in-law, Joel Wicker, became two of the first documented settlers in the dunes. The land surrounding the dunes was logged in the 1860s, then converted to farms by Swedish and German immigrants. Extensive areas of



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Abundant resources and beautiful scenery have long attracted people to the Indiana Dunes region.

uplands and wetlands were cleared after 1850 for agriculture and pasture.

As the 20th century progressed, industrial, commercial, and residential development took root in the Indiana Dunes region. Such development involved ditching and draining wetlands, fire suppression, and building roads and railroads, which fragmented and degraded the landscape. Once the largest sand dune on the Indiana shore, the Hoosier Slide was mined and removed for use in making glass jars and plate glass. Development escalated in the 1950s and 1960s with the post-war economic boom. In 1966, dune conservationists convinced Congress to establish Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

Indiana Dunes' impressive biologi-

cal diversity and historical significance have garnered much attention. Biological diversity is among the highest per area compared to all national parks, and more than 1,100 native species of flowering plants and ferns have been documented at the park. Indiana Dunes is home to four national natural landmarks, lands that have been federally designated for their premier biological and geological features.

The Bailly Homestead, former home of some of the area's first Euro-American settlers, is a national historic landmark, the highest honor awarded to a cultural site. Century of Progress houses originally built for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

THREATS

- Since 2000, the park has lost 20 staff positions from its resource management, resource and visitor protection,



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maintenance, interpretation, management, and administrative divisions because there are no longer funds to support these positions. High priority projects such as threatened and endangered species protection, invasive plant control, historic structure and museum collection preservation, and dune protection remain unfunded. A plan is needed to guide wetland restoration at Indiana Dunes, but the park lacks the funds to gather baseline data and the staff needed to implement a plan.

- The park's dunes, which are home to unique vegetation communities, suffer from the effects of adjacent shoreline development. Natural dune construction processes have been halted, while the pace of erosion has increased, imperiling the park's namesake features.
- Ditching, draining, diverting, and dredging have seriously affected the park's lakes, streams, wetlands, and other aquatic resources. Riparian buffers and habitat were reduced, and the wetlands' natural filtering abilities were compromised. Contamination from aerial deposition, runoff, industrial pollution, and sewage system inputs from adjacent lands continues to affect park waters and wetlands.
- Industrial, commercial, and residential development surrounding the park harm air quality. Nitrogen deposition is high, which is of particular concern in the park's nitrogen-limited systems. Additionally, Indiana Dunes experiences pollution from ozone, sulfur dioxide, sulfate, and mercury. Particulates are also at critically high levels.
- Further documentation of resources through historic structure reports, cultural landscape reports, a traditional use study, a cultural affiliation study, and an updated historic resource study are needed in order

to determine the extent of cultural resources at Indiana Dunes and provide for their proper care and interpretation. Park staff have requested funding for several of these projects.

- Additional training opportunities are needed to supplement park staff knowledge about cultural landscapes, collections management, and ethnography. A well-trained staff can better guide resource protection and maintenance and can better interpret resources for visitors.
- Museum storage facilities are not adequate to house collections, and some items are at risk of being damaged or destroyed because there are no funds to install fire suppression and climate control systems.
- Invasive species such as black locust and reed canary grass threaten plant community diversity at Indiana Dunes.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- Park staff rehabilitate old home sites and agricultural fields by removing non-native species and replacing them with native plants from local sources.
- The park is home to five houses originally built for the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. Architects employed innovative construction methods and experimental building materials in efforts to envision homes of the future. The Park Service is using an innovative leasing plan to ensure the homes are preserved for the future. Participants receive use of the homes for 30 years in exchange for funding rehabilitation of the structures.
- In 2006, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and the Porter County Convention, Recreation, and Visitor Commission opened the Dorothy Buell Memorial Visitor Center. It is the park's only visitor center. Exhibits will be planned, designed, and built to fill the facility's 1,400-

square-foot exhibit hall once \$1.2 million is secured.

ABOUT NPCA AND CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

NPCA initiated the State of the Parks® program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policy-makers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

CONTACT US

For a copy of the full report on Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore published by NPCA's Center for State of the Parks, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org.

For more information on Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, contact NPCA's Midwest Regional Director, Lynn McClure, at 312.343.7216 or lmclure@npca.org, or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/indu. For media inquiries, please contact Tracey McIntire, NPCA media relations manager, at 202.454.3311 or tmcintire@npca.org. To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of this park, visit www.npca.org/take_action.