

Center for State of the Parks



SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE

SNAPSHOT

Located on Michigan's Lower Peninsula, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore includes 65 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, thousands of acres of sand dunes, nesting habitat for 160 bird species, historic farm buildings, lighthouses, and lifesaving stations, and evidence of ships that sank offshore.

Each year, more than 1.1 million people visit the 71,290-acre park, located on Michigan's Lower Peninsula, to hike, camp, swim, fish, hunt, climb the dunes, and learn about the region's history and culture.

HISTORY

When Europeans arrived in the 19th century, the Sleeping Bear Dunes region was home to the Ottawa, Chippewa (Ojibwa), and Potawatomi peoples. The Potawatomi eventually moved further south, but the remaining groups lived together mostly peacefully, sharing hunting and fishing territory until 1836, when they signed the Treaty of Washington. This treaty ceded the tribes' rights to portions of both of Michigan's peninsulas, including the Sleeping Bear region.

New settlers made extensive use of the region's abundant natural resources. Trapping of furbearing mammals and logging were primary activities, followed by commercial fishing and agriculture. Extensive lumbering began in



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the area in the late 19th century, in large part, to fuel the steam-powered commercial shipping vessels that traveled the waters of the Great Lakes. By 1910, forest resources had been depleted. As large-scale timber harvesting declined, agriculture took its place. Because soils in the region were not of high quality for agriculture, farming declined to low levels by the early 1920s.

During the early to mid-20th century, recreational development came to the forefront as a way to enjoy and prof-

it from the region's lakes, streams, geological features, and landscapes. Sportfishing, hunting, swimming, and boating are still favorite activities.

In 1970, Congress established Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore from more than 1,700 individual tracts of land to preserve the "outstanding natural features, including forests, beaches, dune formations, and ancient glacial phenomena.... for the benefit, inspiration, education, recreation, and enjoyment of the public."

THREATS

- To round out understandings of historic resources and guide interpretation at Sleeping Bear Dunes, the park needs an updated historic resource study, an ethnographic overview and assessment, American Indian traditional use study, collection of oral histories, and a comprehensive interpretive plan. Hiring a staff historian would allow the park to pursue some of this research, but currently no funds are available to hire this position or begin work on additional historical research projects.
- Sleeping Bear Dunes is home to 366 historic structures ranging from lighthouses to outhouses. Even with assistance from volunteers and partners, the park still has a difficult time keeping up with maintenance needs. Deferred maintenance costs at Sleeping Bear Dunes are about \$11.2 million, while the cost of needed rehabilitation tops \$8.8 million.
- White-tailed deer pose problems for ecosystems on North and South



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Manitou Islands. The deer were introduced to North Manitou in the 1920s, and since that time they have decimated palatable species such as yew. Migration onto South Manitou has park managers concerned for vegetation communities there.

- Invasive plants and animals, as well as forest pests and diseases, threaten biodiversity at Sleeping Bear Dunes. The park has plans in place for combating non-native plants, but it lacks funds to put these plans into action. Sea lamprey and zebra mussels have wreaked havoc on native aquatic species, and more research is needed to determine how to best control them.
- Overall, water quality in Lake Michigan has improved during the past few decades, though the ecology of the lake is in dire condition because of invasive species. Lake Michigan, Glen Lake, and other lakes within the park are included on the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's 303(d) list—a list of water bodies that do not meet water quality standards because of pollutant levels. Chlordane, polychlorinated biphenyls, and mercury are of concern.
- An archaeological overview and assessment is under way, which will help park managers identify all archaeological resources, prioritize their preservation, and interpret them for visitors.
- A single staff person works just one day per week caring for the park's 75,383 museum objects, which range from historic fishing vessels to prehistoric pottery shards. To better manage the collection, the park needs a full-time position.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- In 1986, Sleeping Bear Dunes initiated an extensive program to monitor

piping plovers, a federally listed endangered shorebird that is affected by habitat loss and development. There are only three small populations of this bird remaining in the world, with an estimated 5,000 birds total. Park staff and partners closely monitor the plovers' activities, build fences to protect their nests from predators such as gulls and raccoons, and document nest success. This program has shown much success as the number of nesting pairs of plovers in the Great Lakes region has increased from 17 pairs in 1986 to 59 pairs in 2005. This program relies on year-to-year funding through the coastal program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Continued funding is always uncertain; without it, the park would be unable to continue to protect the plover.

- Park staff have restored five former gravel pits, and they are working on restoring six more. Removing human-made structures from these and other sites, restoring their natural topography, and revegetating them with native plants is an important park goal.
- Park staff, volunteers, and partners work together to protect and maintain historic structures. For example, the Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear organization recently restored the Charles and Hattie Olsen Farmhouse in the Port Oneida Rural Historical District. The Michigan Barn Preservation Network offers training to the public and to park staff and volunteers about historic structure preservation, while participants help restore some of the park's historic barns.
- In July 2007, the Park Service proposed restoration of the riverbank along a portion of the Platte River in Benzie County to its natural state. The project is in the public comment phase.

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 Sleeping Bear 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 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 Sleeping Bear 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/slbe. 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.