



2014-2015 Accomplishments

The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes had a positive impact on the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SLBE) in FY 2015. The organization made direct grants to SLBE of \$11,682.50 and in-kind grants valued at \$55,764.65 through a long list of projects this year. Some of the accomplishments are listed below.

Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail (SBHT) - The first segment of the SBHT (Dune Climb to Glen Arbor) was groomed for cross-country skiing over 20 times in the 2014-2015 ski season. The cold winter and frequent snows provided excellent ski conditions early in the season, but warmer weather in February and March ended the grooming early this year.

The first segment of the SBHT was completed in 2012 and the Friends had to address some maintenance issues during 2015. In some areas the gravel shoulders had settled exposing the edge of the asphalt tread and creating a 2-3" drop-off, which presented a safety hazard for trail users. A contractor was hired to backfill with gravel and compact the shoulders in these areas. The trail also experienced cracking and raising of tread where tree roots had penetrated the base under the asphalt. These areas were repaired and we hired a contractor to trench about 3 feet deep 2-3 feet from the tread along this whole 4-mile section to prevent future root damage. As it turned out, this maintenance probably saved large sections of trail when the August 2 wind storm uprooted trees along the trail. Many trees fell near the trail, but the trail surface was not damaged by root balls of fallen trees lifting the trail.

The second section of SBHT (Empire to Dune Climb) was completed in 2014. Two large projects on this section were started in 2014 and worked on this year: Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive Spur Trail was completed (\$534.60) and Donor Plaza (\$16,709.35) was nearly completed. Some additional landscaping on the Donor Plaza will be done in the fall of 2015. These projects were funded through private donations for the SBHT led by the Campaign Cabinet and Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails, Inc. (TART). After building new trail, a significant population of non-native common mullein grows in disturbed soil along the edge of the trail. The Friends had several groups of volunteers pulling the invasive mullein this summer.

The third section of the SBHT (Glen Arbor to Port Oneida Road) was completed in the spring of 2015. The ribbon-cutting ceremony was held June 17, 2015. The Friends installed interpretive and way-finding trail signs on the new segment.

A significant weather event occurred on August 2, 2015. High winds, heavy rain, and hail caused significant damage to the community and along the first segment of the SBHT from the Dune Climb to Glen Arbor. The Friends worked closely with SLBE management and the Park Tree Crew to organize volunteers to aid in recovery efforts to re-open the trail and assess damage on other hiking trail in the Park. Over the course of 6 days following the storm, 138 volunteers worked 1,052 hours to remove down trees and debris to open the trail.



The Friends continue to manage the SBHT Trail Ambassador program, which provides knowledgeable volunteers who answer visitor questions and provide regular reporting on the condition of the trail. There are 120 volunteers who ride, walk, or ski the SBHT on a regular basis as Trail Ambassadors. They provided 1,937 volunteer hours in 2014-2015. Of these volunteers, 35 are also members of the Trail Crew, which does heavy maintenance and grooms the trail for cross-country skiing in the winter. The Trail Crew provided 700 volunteer hours to do routine maintenance.

Trail use numbers and patterns are important data in developing trail operations and maintenance programs. The Friends installed 5 automated trail counters at strategic points along the trail in 2014-2015. The trail use numbers have not been compiled yet. They will be available in October, but early estimates indicate about 60,000 people used the SBHT in 2014-2015.

The Friends spent \$10,138.93 on SBHT operations and maintenance in 2014-2015. These funds were provided through donations from trail users and members of the Friends. All together, the Friends spent \$27,848.64 on the SBHT.

Interactive Map (IMAP) – Trail users expect to have trail maps available electronically on their computer, tablet, or smart phone. The Friends contracted with a GIS mapping firm (A Better Map) to create a web-based interactive map that allows trail users to view the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail map at many levels of detail and specify the trail features they are interested in. By drilling down in the map, trail users can get much more detail than is available on a paper map. Several thousand users per week used the IMAP. The Friends also built and installed an interactive kiosk at the SLBE Visitor Center. About 1,000 volunteer hours were provided to develop the IMAP, and consultant support cost \$6,149.

Kettles Trail in the Bow Lakes Area - The Bow Lakes area of SLBE contains 975 acres, of which, about 540 acres are currently owned by the NPS, mostly in the southern portion of the area, south of Lanham Road. The northern portion, most of which is still privately owned, contains the Bow Lakes and ponds. The southern portion contains several good examples of glacial kettles, steep valleys, and bogs. The proposed “Kettles Trail” is being planned for the southern portion and will be an earthen hiking trail, which will take visitors into this pristine natural area to observe glacial kettles, swales, and bogs. Accessibility for disabled visitors will be considered in the trail design. No funds were spent on this project in 2014-2015, but now that the Environmental Assessment has been completed, work will begin in 2016 to build the trail and provide way-finding and interpretive signs.

Bay-to-Bay Trail - This trail is proposed to be a water trail and hiking trail for multi-day kayaking and backpacking trips near the shore of Lake Michigan within SLBE. It is expected to run from Platte Bay to Good Harbor Bay and would require a few new backcountry campgrounds accessible to backpackers and kayakers. The hiking trail part of the project is expected to be an earthen single-track trail that will use existing trails or old 2-track roads as much as possible. The water part of the trail would be part of the Lake Michigan Water Trail being created along the entire Lake Michigan shoreline.



The Friends worked with the NPS RTCA program to create trail concepts and collect data. We also worked with a team of students from the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan to help document possible kayak launch sites, hiking trail options, and backcountry camping options. Concepts were developed for signs to mark trail routes, kayak launch sites, and campgrounds. The Environmental Assessment of this project is underway. The Friends paid \$400.16 for consultant fees in FY 2015.

Echo Valley Mountain Bike Trail – Early stage discussions have begun with interested members of the community, SLBE management, and the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) to develop concepts for a mountain bike trail in the area of the park south of Glen Lake known as the Echo Valley or Burnham Road area. No funds have been spent at this point, but some volunteer time has been used to prepare for an Environmental Assessment beginning in 2016.

Adopt-A-Trail - Thirty-five volunteers clean up trailhead parking lots, pick up branches and obstacles on the trail, and report to SLBE's Roads & Trails crew any large trees down or erosion problems. Over 100 miles of trails are monitored. Volunteers walk their trail once a month on their own schedule. After the windstorm on August 2, volunteers were dispatched to walk the trails and report damage. The Friends spent \$145.75 on training materials and volunteers provided 1150 hours.

Adopt-A-Beach - 125 volunteers contributed over 1,450 hours picking up trash and reporting safety and maintenance issues along 35 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline on the mainland. The volunteers record the trash they pick up and report it to the Alliance for the Great Lakes. Volunteers conduct at a minimum, one Beach Patrol at least once per month on the individual's schedule. Many volunteers are on the beach each week.

Adopt-A-River - This is the fourth year for this program to have volunteers kayak the Crystal and Platte Rivers and pick up trash along the way. River patrol is done on the individual's schedule, patrolling at least once per month. Volunteers logged 120 hours.

Adopt-A-Highway - MDOT has assigned the Friends a section of M-109 from Glen Haven to 0.25 miles south of the Dune Climb to "Adopt." We are required to clean the roadsides of trash in this section of highway three times per year. Volunteers logged 40 hours in 2015.

Accessibility Evaluation - The Friends are very supportive of projects that improve accessibility of Park facilities including trails and beaches. We contributed a grant of \$6,251 to SLBE to provide matching funds for a National Park Foundation grant to pay for an assessment of several hiking trails and Lake Michigan beaches to be conducted by Cindy Burkhour, Access Recreation Group. This study began in September and will continue through October, 2015. The Friends are providing volunteers to assist in the study and will provide web site and interactive map (IMAP) capabilities to make the information available to the public.

Visitor Booklets - The Friends worked with park staff to develop inexpensive guidebooks to provide visitors with more information about SLBE. There are now 13 booklets with approximately 70,000 booklets



distributed since beginning in 2006. The books are available at the Visitor Center, Platte River Campground, D. H. Day Campground, Cannery Boat Museum, and Maritime Museum. Booklets are available for a suggested donation of \$3 each or two for \$5. They are also available at the Empire Museum and Cottage Book Shop. The Friends spent \$5,429.16 to publish the booklets this year and collected donations of \$13,110.99.

Grants to Support Summer Interns – This summer the Friends provided a grant to SLBE to support two interns: GIS intern and NMI intern. The GIS intern spent the summer updating GIS data on park facilities, and the NMI intern spent the summer on North Manitou Island meeting and providing orientation to visitors to the island and assisted biologists with backcountry support. Direct funding to SLBE: \$4,852.

Volunteer Safety Vests – Adopt-A-Beach, Adopt-A-Trail, and SBHT Ambassadors wear bright orange Ambassador vests that identify them as Park volunteers. These vests are high visibility and Park visitors can easily find a Park representative on trails or beaches. Increased number of volunteers caused us to run out of vests this summer. The cost of 100 vests was split between the Park Volunteer program and the Friends. Direct funding to SLBE: \$579.

Distance Learning Equipment – The Friends purchased several components of a Distance Learning System that is being used by SLBE Interpretive Staff to interact with school groups in their classrooms before and after field trips. This makes school field trips much more effective. A Teacher/Ranger/Teacher was brought in to set up the equipment since he had set it up in his school. Equipment costs: \$1,896.22. The equipment was donated to SLBE as an In-Kind donation.

Automated External Defibrillators – Three AEDs and associated equipment were purchased for the SLBE Law Enforcement division. This was made possible through a grant from the Consumers Energy Foundation. The Friends are raising funds to purchase one more AED in 2016 to fulfill the SLBE request. The equipment purchased this year by the Friends was provided as an In-Kind donation. Cost: \$3,996.85

Carbon Dating Costs – Several potshards were found in the Sleeping Bear Point area of the Park, and the SLBE Interpretive division requested funds to do carbon dating on surrounding soil and wood fragments. The samples were taken by dating experts and taken back to their labs to process. The Friends paid for the laboratory analysis. This work was funded by a grant from Cherry Republic. Total cost = \$4,800.

Visitor Center WIFI – There have been numerous visitor requests for WIFI access at the Philip A. Hart Visitor Center. Visitors want to be able to search for lodging, weather, park attractions, and trail maps. The IMAP kiosk uses the public WIFI also. Having a public WIFI access also helps non-government official visitors and researchers to have internet connectivity without having to sign into the DOI network. The Friends purchased equipment to provide free WIFI at the Visitor Center. Cost: \$999.00

Port Oneida Historic Field Mowing – This is a cooperative effort between the Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes and Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear to mow fields in the historic district to maintain the historic



agricultural landscape. Mowing these fields prevents trees from growing in the historic farm fields and helps control the invasive spotted knapweed. Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear purchased a new mower (16-foot wide) and tractor in 2015. The Friends continue to train and coordinate volunteer efforts. We expect a new smaller mower (10-foot wide) will be needed in 2016. The smaller mower is used to open up fields by mowing around the edge of the woods and fencerows. It would also be used to mow around buildings and in orchards.

Miscellaneous Items – The Friends paid for several small Park requests throughout the year including food for some public meetings and black powder for the Lyle Gun demonstration, an Interpretive program held weekly during the summer. Cost: \$620.87