



2016-2017 Accomplishments

The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes (Friends) is an all-volunteer non-profit organization dedicated to protecting resources and heightening visitor experiences in partnership with Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SLBE). The Friends has 315 household members, defined as volunteers or donors. There are often more than one individual in a household, so the number of individual members is greater than 315.

Our members provided about 9,000 volunteer hours to projects managed by the Friends in FY 2017, and many of our members volunteer for a wide variety of other projects managed by Park staff or by other non-profit organizations, like Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear.

The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes made direct grants to SLBE of \$9,853.13 and in-kind grants and activities valued at \$60,821.83 through a long list of projects this fiscal year for a total contribution of \$70,674.83. Some of the accomplishments are described below.

Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail (SBHT)

A latest section of the trail was built in 2016 and opened in October 2016. This brings the trail length to 17 miles. Trail users can ride about 22 miles from Empire to Bohemian Road (CR-669) including the on-road trail routes through Empire and Glen Arbor. About 65,000 people used the SBHT between October 1, 2016 and September 30, 2017. Six automated trail counters installed at various points along the trail provide accurate trail use data, which we can use to prioritize volunteer projects and set maintenance schedules. The busiest section of the trail is between Glen Arbor and the Dune Climb, which accounts for about 50% of the trail use.

The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes operates and maintains the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail. We have 78 Trail Ambassadors who walk, ride, or ski the trail to assist trail users, answer questions, and report any trail maintenance issues. Trail Ambassadors reported 1,438 volunteer hours in FY 2017. The Trail Crew volunteers are Trail Ambassadors who also do maintenance on the trail by installing signs, mowing and trimming grass along trail edges, blowing leaves and tree debris off the trail, and grooming for cross-country skiing among many other tasks. The 33 Trail Crew volunteers reported 702 hours in FY 2017.

Our Trail Crew installed directional and interpretive signs on the new section of trail this summer. The Trail Crew used a blower to keep the leaves and tree debris off the trail each week between March and December. They also groomed the trail for cross-country skiing between Glen Arbor and Empire from December through March. The Friends had an agreement with the Leelanau Conservancy to assist them in grooming their Palmer Woods property for cross-country skiing in 2017. The Conservancy purchased a grooming roller that was stored near the Crystal View trailhead, which allowed us to groom a portion of the trail between Crystal View trailhead and Port Oneida Road. Unfortunately, due to low snowfall amounts and warm weather, we were only able to groom the trail three times this past winter. This grooming program will be continued in 2017-2018.



This year we began working with Park Management to implement a program to install benches, bike racks, and picnic tables at various points along the trail. Donors can donate toward these trail furniture items. Four benches with accessible pads have been installed. Seven bike racks have been built by blacksmith volunteers at the Glen Haven Blacksmith Shop and were placed at historic sites along the trail in the spring of 2017. We will finalize our picnic bench design and install a few of these in 2018.

Some erosion issues on the crushed stone portion of the trail with slopes of more than 5% have caused loose stone and gullies to form. The Park's Roads and Trails Crew provided assistance in repairing some of the washouts and digging water diversion ditches in 2016 and the Friends contracted with AJ's Excavating to do additional remediation work in these areas in the spring of 2017. Our Trail Crew volunteers maintain these erosion control ditches and monitor trail conditions after each heavy rain. The erosion issues have largely been resolved. Some routine leveling and compaction of the trail may be required in the spring, but this is being monitored by Trail Crew and SLBE Roads, Trails, and Grounds personnel.

Our volunteers held several work bees to remove invasive weeds from the landscaping around the Donor Plaza at the main trailhead. This work helped to establish native dune grass and bearberry plants, which is filling in and establishing a native plant landscape.

The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes spent \$8,629.98 on trail operations and maintenance in FY 2017. The Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail Long-Term Maintenance Fund provided a grant for the cost of contracted erosion control measures (\$13,917) and bench installation (\$5,018).

Interactive Map (IMAP) for the SBHT

Trail users expect to have trail maps available electronically on their computer, tablet, or smart phone. The Friends contracted with a GIS mapping firm 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.

Here is the link: <http://friendsofsleepingbear.org/sbht-i-map/>

In 2017, we offered local businesses the opportunity to be placed on the map along with information about their products, services, hours of operation, and links to their business web site.

Ticket to Ride School Snowshoe Program

Over 1,180 elementary school students and their chaperones came to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore last winter to learn how to snowshoe and to explore trees and wildlife in wintertime. This program included an optional school visit by Park Rangers before the field trip and classroom follow-up activities. The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes paid transportation costs for the school groups and



purchased new snowshoes and repair parts. The total cost was \$7,151. Most of these funds were provided by a grant from The North Face Explore Fund. We also received a grant for \$10,000 from the National Park Foundation to support the snowshoe program in 2018.

Visitor Booklets

The Friends worked with park staff to develop inexpensive guidebooks to provide visitors with more information about the Park's cultural and natural resources. There are now 13 booklets with approximately 100,000 booklets distributed since beginning this program in 2006. The books are available at the Visitor Center, Platte River Campground, D. H. Day Campground, Cannery Boat Museum, and Maritime Museum. The Friends spent \$6,822 to publish the booklets this year.

Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive Interpretive Panel Design

Michigan artist, Oliver Uberti was commissioned by Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore to create interpretive art for new informational panels at stops along the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive. The current panels were developed in the 1980s and needed to be updated and replaced. In 2016, the Friends provided a grant of \$5,350 and in 2017, we made an additional \$5,350 grant. The new panels have now been installed at various points along the Scenic Drive.

Historic Agricultural Landscape Maintenance – Collaboration with Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear

Field clearing and maintenance to maintain historic agricultural landscape is led by Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear Dunes. The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes assist by coordinating volunteers in the mowing activity. About 900 acres were mowed by 7 volunteers, who provided over 300 volunteer hours of labor.

Trail and Beach Accessibility

The Friends are very supportive of projects that improve accessibility of Park facilities including trails and beaches. Beach wheelchairs purchased by the Friends are located at the Glen Haven Cannery and Maritime Museum. We also purchased a standard wheelchair for use by visitors at the Visitor Center in Empire.

We received an additional grant of \$17,500 from the National Environmental Education Fund (NEEF) to continue our Trails and Beaches Accessibility Assessment in 2017 and 2018. Several beaches and trails were assessed in 2017, and more assessment work is planned for 2018.

One of the suggestions resulting from the Beach Accessibility Assessment in 2017 was to install a hardened surface walkway and deck from the parking lot to an area closer to the water's edge. This proposal was discussed with Park management and staff and the Friends were given approval to purchase an Adawalk beach deck system from Michigan Lake Products in Elk Rapids. This was installed at Glen



Haven Cannery Beach in August, 2017. One of the concerns of Park staff was the need for routine maintenance, which would include sweeping off sand and filling in depressions in the sand at the edge of the platform due to use. The Friends set up a schedule of volunteers to assure that at least one person did routine maintenance each day and could report any maintenance issues to the Accessibility Committee for resolution. We also purchased a broom that was provided at the deck with a sign inviting Park visitors to help us by sweeping. Our volunteer staff noted that visitors were sweeping the deck several times per day! Park staff also asked our volunteers to sweep another NPS boardwalk to the beach on the other side of the Cannery to keep it in better condition. We hope to offer similar hardened walkways and decks at other beaches in the National Lakeshore in coming years.

We know that some of the trails and beaches at Sleeping Bear Dunes cannot be made accessible without damage to the natural resource due to either sandy soil or steep inclines. Our Accessibility Committee is investigating the possibility of purchasing a Track Chair, which is an electric wheelchair that uses tracks instead of wheels to move on terrain that is difficult for wheelchairs. We will be studying this concept with Park management and staff in 2018 and hopefully make such a device available for Park visitors on selected beaches or trails in the future.

The Friends will sponsor an Accessibility Open House in 2018 to publicize new accessibility features in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. The Friends spent \$26,641 on accessibility assessments and the purchase of the beach accessibility deck in Glen Haven.

PSAR – Preventative Search and Rescue

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore handles over 60 Search and Rescue (SAR) missions each year. Most of these occur at the Dune Climb or Peirce Stocking Scenic Drive #9 Lake Michigan Overlook. The Friends supported Park Law Enforcement staff to hire a college intern to develop the PSAR program to work with volunteers to educate Park visitors about the hazards they may face at these two popular park areas. The program was instituted in July and August with 6 volunteers and the college intern. Emergency calls were down 50% this summer and no SAR calls were received while PSAR volunteers were on duty. This program had a significant impact on reducing emergency responses in the Park this summer, and we expect to work with Park Law Enforcement to expand the number of volunteers in the program next year. With additional volunteers, we can expand the areas served to include some of the popular beaches. The grant to pay for the intern and purchase some emergency response equipment was \$3,503.

Social Media Intern

The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes supported a college intern this summer to work in the Interpretive Division and manage regular postings to social media for the Park. This intern also helped the Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes set up an Instagram account and updated our Facebook page. The cost of supporting this summer intern was \$3,000.



Teacher-Ranger-Teacher

A new project has been initiated to develop “Place-based Learning about Nearshore Ecosystems”. A local teacher was brought in to assist in this curriculum development through the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program. Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes provided a matching grant of \$1,350 to support this project.

2017 Water Adventure Expo

Drowning in Lake Michigan is one of the hazards faced by visitors to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Several organizations worked together to develop a 2-day event to educate Park staff, volunteers and visitors about the potential drowning hazards and safety precautions that can be put in place to mitigate the hazards. About 100 staff and volunteers attended the in-service training and over 300 people attended the public event at Platte River Point. Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes provided a grant of \$1,070 in support of this event.

Trail Maintenance Tools

The Roads, Trails, and Grounds Division of the Park and volunteers work to maintain safe hiking trails and beach areas. Over half of the Park hiking trails are in designated wilderness, which requires much more use of traditional hand tools rather than chainsaws and other mechanized tools. Use of chainsaws also requires significant safety training and only a few Park staff and volunteers have had that training. As a result, the Friends provided a grant of \$2,000 to purchase new traditional hand tools.

Underground Cable Locator

MISS DIG will no longer locate cables on Park property. This is especially critical when preparing for maintenance projects on North and South Manitou Islands. The Friends purchased an underground cable locator and donated it to the Park Roads, Trails, and Grounds Division. Cost = \$2,299.99.

GPS Units

GPS units are necessary for maintenance staff to document problems that need maintenance attention and to document repairs. The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes purchased two new Garmin GPS units and donated them to the Park. These GPS units were also used to document accessibility barriers on our trails and beaches as part of the Accessibility Assessment program. Cost = \$1,092.24.

Video Camera

A new video camera was purchased for the Interpretive Division of the Park to replace a 6-year old camera. The quality of this camera is superior and the lighter weight makes it easier to use in the field. This camera was used extensively this summer to create content for Park social media. Cost = \$1,159.98.



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. A portion of the trail from the proposed parking lot to an overlook on top of a geologic kettle will be hardened and made wide enough to make it universally accessible. Some work was done with the SLBE Roads and Trails crew to define the trail alignment and with Natural Resources to survey possible environmental impacts to plants and animals of the proposed trail alignment. No funds were spent on this project in 2016-2017, but work to construct the trail will begin in 2018.

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. We hosted the regional director of IMBA to tour the area being considered for the proposed Mt. Bike Trail. No funds have been spent at this point, but some volunteer time has been used to prepare for an Environmental Assessment beginning in 2018.

Adopt-A-Trail – Forty one 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. Volunteers logged 1,678 hours.

Adopt-A-Beach - 134 volunteers contributed over 2,014 hours picking up 2,500 pounds of 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.

Adopt-A-River - 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. We have been coordinating with the Traverse Area Paddling Club to clean the Platte River three times per year.

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.