

FRIENDS OF SLEEPING BEAR DUNES

P.O. Box 545
Empire, MI 49630

*Protecting resources and heightening visitor experiences
in partnership with Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore*

friendsofsleepingbear.org
December, 2014



Perspective

From the Chairman

By Kerry Kelly



The **Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes** is an all-volunteer organization. We depend on people like you, who want to apply your skills and life experiences to making Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore a great place to visit. About 250 of you volunteered to work on projects described in this newsletter and many of you supported these projects through your generous donations. This kind of active involvement from our community creates the energy that makes us successful. THANK YOU!

Being a volunteer isn't all work. The projects we do usually involve interaction with friendly people in a most beautiful setting. You may have the opportunity to work with dedicated and capable Park staff and other volunteers. It is a great way to meet other people with similar interests and make a positive difference at your National Lakeshore.

Of course, we also need financial support! We work hard to keep our overhead very low. If you donate to any specific project, 100% of your donation will be used for that project. Donations not specified for a particular project provide operating funds and allow us the flexibility to do projects that come up unexpectedly throughout the year.

Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail

The Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail (SBHT) is a large community project, broadly supported by numerous organizations, local businesses, governmental units, and many individuals. The **Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes** is proud to be part of this cooperative effort. We operate and maintain the trail, which includes blowing debris off the trail each week, designing and installing signs and grooming the trail for cross-country skiing in the winter.



The first 4.25 mile segment of trail between the Dune Climb and Glen Arbor opened in 2012. Since then, over 150,000 people have used it. Most folks walked or rode bikes with family or friends. The second 5.5 mile segment of trail between the Dune Climb and the village of Empire opened in July, 2014. While the first segment is relatively flat and easy, this second segment is more challenging with some steep hills. In 2015, the segment

from Glen Arbor to Port Oneida Road will be done, and in 2016 the segment to CR-669 will be open!

Eighty four SBHT Trail Ambassadors (volunteers) bike, walk or ski the trail on a regular basis to be able to answer visitor questions and to look for maintenance problems. A Trail Crew of 28 volunteers do heavy maintenance and grooming. Combined, they provided over 2,500 hours.

It's fun to be an Ambassador. This year, our Ambassadors handed out coupons for a free ice cream cone at Cherry Republic to kids "caught doing something right". Parents and kids alike were thrilled to be rewarded for wearing helmets and obeying trail etiquette. Consider becoming a Trail Ambassador or member of the Trail Crew or make a donation to maintain the trail:

friendsofsleepingbear.org.



FRIENDS OF SLEEPING BEAR DUNES

The Kettles Trail—Ready to Start Building!

The Kettles Trail will be an earthen single-track hiking trail starting at a small gravel parking lot near the corner of Baatz Road and Fritz Road in Leelanau County. The trail will go through a meadow to the woods and follow existing 2-track roads to Lanham Road and loop back to the main trail.

A spur trail will be built to an area that overlooks a bog where interpretive signs will be installed to educate hikers about the unique, fragile bog habitat. Other areas along the trail have been identified for possible interpretive signs to explain the geo-



logical features near the trail like kettles and wetlands. The deep snows in this area make it an outstanding place for snowshoe hikes in the winter. Birding is especially good because of the water sources and tree cover.

The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes supported this project by paying for an expert to facilitate and document the Environmental Assessment process (EA). The EA was completed in October, 2014 with a Finding of No Significant Impact, so Park staff can begin developing plans for construction of the trail, parking lot, and interpretive signs.

Interpretive signs will be designed and manufactured this winter and the proposed trail route will be studied through the spring and summer of 2015 to assure that there will be no significant impact on plant and animal life where the trail will be built. Once this is completed, Park staff and volunteers



will build the trail and contract for the parking lot to be built. We hope to have the trail open for hikers by the fall of 2015.

Watch our e-mail newsletters for requests for volunteers to build the Kettles Trail in 2015. We have also learned that the parking lot will be much more costly than originally expected, so please consider making a donation to help us finish the trail.

The Bay to Bay Backpacking & Paddling Trail

The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore General Management Plan includes “a bay-to-bay trail for hikers and Lake Michigan paddlers to parallel the mainland shoreline within the Lakeshore. On land this trail will make use of active beach areas or existing disturbed areas and corridors to the extent possible”. In 2013, the **Friends** worked with NPS Roads, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program and a group of graduate students from the University of Michigan to assist in early stage data collection for this project.

The **Friends** raised funds to pay for student housing and to hire a consultant to facilitate

and document the Environmental Assessment, which began in the summer of 2014. The initial scoping began with an opportunity for Public Comment in August through



October of 2014. Public involvement was very high for this project, and that input is being used in the planning process.

A variety of possible alternatives will be evaluated through the EA process conducted by Park staff then the alternatives will be made available for more Public Comment.

The trail concepts include information about Lake Michigan access for kayak launches and a single-track earthen hiking trail that will likely be about 35 miles long running from Platte Bay to Good Harbor Bay. Additional backcountry campsites will be needed for multi-day hiking/kayaking.

Echo Valley Mountain Bike Trail

Since the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore General Management Plan was published in 2009, a number of people in the community have expressed interest in exploring the possibility of developing a mountain bike trail within the park. The GMP states, “The wooded area (“Burnham Woods”) south of the Glen Lakes and east of M-22 is zoned recreation to allow consideration for a possible future designated mountain bike trail system.”

The **Friends** received approval to work with Park staff to begin early stage scoping of this project. We are researching other mountain bike trails recently built in our region and are working with the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) to develop some initial concepts to be used to frame a future planning process. We hope to create a trail system that includes trail loops for beginners, intermediate, and advanced Mountain Bike Riders.

In addition, we will meet with other local organizations that manage mountain bike trails to learn best practices in design, building, operations, and maintenance of such a trail.

We hope that the official park planning process for this project will begin soon. One of the first steps in that process will be a request for public input. Watch our e-mail newsletter for updates.

FRIENDS OF SLEEPING BEAR DUNES

Trail & Beach Accessibility

Many of the visitors to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore have physical limitations, and as the population of the US ages, more people find it difficult to experience the trails and beaches of our National Parks. As a result, the Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes is focusing effort on making our Park more accessible to as many people as possible.

The Friends sponsored an Accessibility training for Park employees during their annual training program this spring to heighten their awareness of accessibility issues. One of the things we found was that many of the barriers require only simple, often inexpensive changes to trails, restrooms, or other facilities to make them much easier to use. This helps everyone.

We also obtained a grant from the National Environmental Educational Fund to bring in an expert on accessible design to conduct

a couple of 2-day workshops for training Park staff and volunteers. In an effort to expand the impact of this training, we also invited Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Leelanau Land Conservancy, TART Trails, Disability Network of Northern Michigan, and the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments.



Some of the workshop attendees had physical or visual disabilities and helped other attendees better understand design features that impact their ability to use trails and beaches.

The workshop began with classroom activities to learn about the legal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the reasoning behind the law. We learned that the standards set by the ADA are "minimum standards" - the worst we are allowed to do. We began to understand that changes to assist people with disabilities help us all, especially as we get older.

After a lunch break, the class went on some trails and facilities at the Dune Climb to test what we learned. Having the opportunity to experience these Park facilities in a wheelchair was eye-opening for those of us who have never sat in a wheelchair before. Little things that we never noticed before became huge obstacles for us. And try to hike a trail blindfolded to simulate vision impaired!



As a result of these activities, the Park has developed a list of projects that we can work on together to improve access to some of our trails and beaches. We will work with Park staff to prioritize the projects and begin working on them in 2015. Funding and volunteers will be needed to complete these projects, so if you are interested in helping, contact us on our web site.

Sunset Shores Beach Stairs

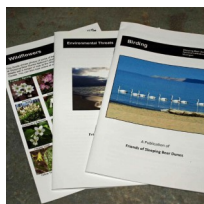


Over the past several years, the Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes has worked with Park staff and Cherry Republic to build beach access stairs at road ends in the Port Oneida Rural Historic District in areas where the beach is many feet below road level and difficult to reach. In 2014, we built stairs at the end of Sunset Shores thanks to a gift from an anonymous donor. Fifteen volunteers donated 250 hours to complete the stairs. Other stairs are located at the end of Lane Road and about a mile north of there.

Education & Information

Visitor Booklets

Thirteen inexpensive booklets give visitors a quick way to learn historic or scientific information about Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. **Friends** published over 7,000 books in 2014 and have distributed over 60,000 since we began in 2006.



make this experience more meaningful, our Rangers are setting up the ability to video conference with teachers and students in the classroom before they come to the Park to prepare them for what they will see on their trip. They can also do follow-up classes after the students return to school to reinforce the lessons learned while at the Park. The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes purchased some of the equipment that will enable Distance Learning.

Distance Learning

Schools love to bring students to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore for field trips where they can experience nature and history of the agricultural or maritime culture represented in the Park. In an effort to

Digital Signs at the Visitor Center

Nobody wants to spend their vacation waiting in line! One way to reduce this is to make important information readily available. We made a grant to purchase several electronic signs that can be easily updated.

Donate Today!

I hope you will find in this newsletter at least one project that you want to support. Most of the funding for our projects come from individuals like you, who have a passion to make Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore an even better place to experience nature, history, and recreate.

Leave a legacy for generations to come by supporting one of these projects with your time and financial support.

You can donate on our web site:

www.friendsofsleepingbear.org

Or mail a check or credit card info to:

Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes

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FRIENDS OF SLEEPING BEAR DUNES

Adopt Your Favorite Part of the Park

Adopt-A-Beach

With over 35 miles of Lake Michigan beaches on the mainland and about 50 miles of beach on North and South Manitou Islands, there is no shortage of beaches to adopt. Our volunteers take this "adoption" to heart. We often here, "My Beach" when issues are reported!

Volunteers patrol Lake Michigan beaches on their own schedule throughout the spring, summer, and fall picking up trash and reporting safety and maintenance issues. Volunteers make a report after each patrol on our web site. They record the type and amount of trash and this data is shared with our partner, the Alliance for the Great Lakes, who maintains a database for all Great Lakes beaches. This year, our volunteers worked over 1,000 hours and picked up over 2,000 pounds of trash.

Walking your beach on a regular basis allows you to experience how dynamic our beaches are. This year, high water levels resulted in dramatic erosion of Pyramid Point, Sleeping Bear Point, and along Good Harbor Bay. The beaches



"shrank" this summer. We often had to walk up in the beach grass because the beach was under water. You never know what you will find either. We've found docks, stairs, commercial ice makers, and several large historic shipwrecks! This large shipwreck from the 1800's washed up near the Dune Climb Trail this November!



Adopt-A-Trail

Thirty five volunteers patrol over 100 miles of hiking trails at least once a month on their own schedule. They remove down branches and report larger issues to the Park Roads and Trails crew.

We try to get out on the trails in early spring each year to clean up the down trees and branches from the winter snows before most of the hikers get out on the trails. Big storms bring the biggest issues for our trail, so we like to have our volunteers out on the trails after big winds.

In 2015, we plan to do accessibility evaluations on many of our trails. We want to be able to describe the trail surface, changes in slope, locations of beautiful overlooks and access points to Lake Michigan on our trail maps and at the trailhead so trail users will know what to expect before they start hiking. Our Adopt-A-Trail volunteers will be involved in doing these evaluations.

Adopt-A-Highway

The Michigan Department of Transportation has assigned the Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes to a section of M-109 from Glen Haven to just south of the Dune Climb entrance. We clean the roadsides of trash in this section 3 times per year. We are thankful that visitors to Sleeping Bear Dunes are very conscientious and do not litter very much!

Adopt-A-River

In its fourth year, this program has several volunteers who kayak the Crystal River and Platte River to pick up trash and report safety or maintenance issues. We also worked with the Traverse Area Paddling Club to do a couple of clean-ups on the Platte River each summer.



Supporting Internships

Involvement of youth in service to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is a high priority for the Friends. Each year, we support a couple of summer interns on projects identified and supervised by Park staff. Our support often pays for their summer housing and sometimes a stipend. This year, we supported two exceptional students in projects that had a big impact.

Campground Recycling Program

In Michigan, many beverage containers (bottles & cans) can be redeemed for a deposit. We were finding many of these containers in our campground waste containers, so a summer intern was brought in to evaluate the feasibility of collecting these containers and redeeming the deposits.

We learned that the difficulty and hazards of collecting and separating the redeema-

ble containers from all of the other recyclable waste was daunting and the process that had to be used to redeem the containers was very time-consuming.

As a result of this study, a recommendation was made to institute a comprehensive recycling program in our campgrounds and other high-use areas like the Dune Climb. This program would be done in cooperation with a local recycling company.

Fire Suppression Intern

It is important to assure the fire-safety of the buildings throughout the Park. All park buildings were evaluated.



My Story - Kerry Kelly

I retired ten years ago, and started volunteering for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. I've been fortunate to be able to be able to do a wide variety of projects that take advantage of my background and my love of the outdoors. There's nothing better than being in a beautiful place doing something that makes a difference.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about. We were working with a team of volunteers and Park staff building beach access stairs. Then after working every day for two weeks, when we are just about finished, an extended family arrives. Grandma is a little unsteady and a newborn in her mother's arms are thankful to have the new stairs to get safely to the beach!

You can have a similar experience. If you are interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities, check out our web site: www.friendsofsleepingbear.org.