



9922 W. Front Street, P.O.Box 545 • Empire, MI 49630 • friendsofsleepingbear.org

Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes 2018 Annual Newsletter

December 2018

Perspective

From the Chair

Our support of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore has been growing each year through increased volunteer hours and project funding. This past year we provided \$113,909 in financial support for the Park and our members reported over 11,000 hours of volunteer effort.



Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes has 618 individual members and 17 local business members. You are a member if you've volunteered for one of our projects or donated financially to the **Friends**. Our goal is to expand our support of the Park each year. Your dedication to supporting the Park and the **Friends** makes this possible.

We are an efficient all-volunteer organization. Only 4% of our budget is spent on overhead. When you donate, if you designate a specific project, 100% of your donation is used on that project. As an all-volunteer organization, we rely on many dedicated and skilled volunteers. If you would like to be part of our team, check out our web site to see how you can help.

Kerry Kelly

Beaches and Trails for ALL

Accessibility at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore means making it easy for everyone (people of all abilities) to get to a beach, experience a trail, launch a kayak, etc. Improving accessibility is a major emphasis of Sleeping Bear Dunes management and of **Friends** of Sleeping Bear Dunes.

We received a grant from the National Environmental Education Fund to continue our Trails and Beaches Accessibility Assessment in 2017 and 2018. Assessment reports describe trail conditions from the trailhead throughout the length of the trail with measurements and photos. This information is available on the **Friends** web site. A color-coded trail map describing easy, moderate and difficult trail segments for each hiking trail is available. This makes it easier for visitors planning a hike or a trip to the beach to choose the best destination in accordance to their abilities. Park staff uses assessment reports to make repairs and remove barriers.



We worked with the Park to install a hard surface beach walkway and deck with some benches at the Cannery Beach in Glen Haven. This allowed visitors with

enough funds to install a similar beach deck this coming spring at the Maritime Museum.

Some 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. To make it possible for people with limited mobility to experience some of these places, we purchased a Track Chair, an electric wheelchair with tracks instead of wheels. The tracks allow it to be used in soft sand, snow, and on steep slopes. The chair is very stable and has enough power to take on a hike for several hours without recharging the batteries.

The Track Chair will be available for FREE to visitors with mobility issues starting in May of 2019.

Advanced reservation through our web site is required. Initially, it will be available on the Bay View trail and at selected Park events. Volunteers will accompany visitors using the Track Chair to ensure safety and a good visitor experience. This program is the first of its kind in a National Park, and we hope to expand it in the future depending on our experience in 2019.

Overall, Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes spent \$42,775 on Accessibility programs in 2018.



Donate Today online at friendsofsleepingbear.org

I hope you will find in this newsletter at least one project that you want to support. Most of the funding for our projects comes 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. (See Page 4 for donation details.)

*Protecting resources and heightening visitor experiences in partnership with Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Volunteer Organization*

Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail

The Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail (SBHT) is about 20 miles long. Trail users can ride about 23 miles from Empire to Bohemian Road (CR-669) including the on-road trail routes through Empire and Glen Arbor. About 72,000 people used the SBHT between October 1, 2017 and September 30, 2018.

Seven automated trail counters installed at various points along the trail provide accurate trail use data, which we use to prioritize projects and set maintenance schedules. The busiest section of the trail is between Glen Arbor and the Dune Climb, which accounts for about half of the trail use.



The **Friends** of Sleeping Bear Dunes operates and maintains the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail. We have 78 Trail Ambassadors who reported over 1,200 volunteer hours in 2018.

Our Trail Ambassadors walk, ride, or ski the trail to assist trail users, answer questions, and report any trail

maintenance issues. The Trail Crew volunteers maintain the trail by installing signs, mowing and trimming grass along trail edges, blowing leaves and debris off the trail, and grooming for cross-country skiing. The 32 Trail Crew volunteers reported 1,371 hours in FY 2018.

The Trail Crew uses blowers to keep the leaves and tree debris off the trail each week between March and December. They also groom the trail for cross-country skiing between Glen Arbor and Empire from December through March.

The **Friends** made an agreement with the Leelanau Conservancy to assist them in grooming their Palmer Woods property for cross-country skiing in 2018. The Conservancy purchased a grooming roller and track-setter that was stored near the Crystal View trailhead, which allowed us to groom the SBHT between Crystal View trailhead and Port Oneida Road.



This year we installed benches and bike racks at various points along the trail. Four benches with accessible pads were installed.

Several local businesses in Empire and Glen Arbor supported the trail through

donations. Their logos are printed on the paper trail map and they have a presence on our online Interactive Map. We would like donations for benches and bike racks.

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.

A total of \$24,079 was spent on Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail maintenance and operations in FY 2018. These funds came from **Friends** of Sleeping Bear Dunes and Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation (TART), who manage the SBHT development fund and the long-term maintenance fund. These funds were used to repair some gravel areas, install hardened areas near interpretive signs and benches to improve accessibility as well as to conduct routine cleaning and grooming.



We also purchased a new John Deere Gator utility vehicle to make it more efficient for us to do trail maintenance on the sections of trail north of Glen Arbor.

Preventative Search and Rescue (PSAR)



Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore handles a significant number of Search and Rescue (SAR) events each year. Most of these occur at the Dune Climb or Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive #9 Lake Michigan Overlook.

The **Friends** supplemented the Park Law Enforcement staff with volunteers who provide

informational contacts with visitors to help them be prepared for the rigors of these hikes and climbs.

The number of 911 calls and Search and Rescue operations was reduced by over 50% in the last two years since this program was started.

We hope to increase the number of volunteers in the program next year so we can expand the time we cover these areas and potentially extend the program to other areas in the Park.

Nine PSAR volunteers provided 422 hours of service and made 13,188 visitor contacts.



New Kettles Trail to Open in 2019

The Bow Lakes area of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore contains 975 acres, of which, about 540 acres are currently owned by the Park. Most of the Park-owned land is south of Lanham Road.

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore staff from the Roads, Trails, and Grounds team led this project. It is not often that a national park creates a new trail, and we were privileged to be part of this process.

The Kettles Trail is an earthen hiking trail that will give visitors access to this pristine natural area to observe glacial kettles, swales, and bogs.

Significant progress was made this year developing this new hiking trail. The entire 3.5 miles of hiking trail was cleared and over half of the trail was completed. The first part of the trail from the parking lot to the overlook on top of a geologic kettle is a 4-foot wide universally accessible trail made of gravel and topped with diamond dust to create a hardened surface.

Most of the trail work was done with hand tools. Thirty individual volunteers as well as groups of volunteers like the Marion High School cross country team, Cherry Republic, and



CMU Alternative Break students worked over 500 hours on the project. In addition, we contracted with two youth work groups (SEEDS and YouthWork) for a total of 6 weeks to help with trail-building efforts. The **Friends** spent \$23,387 on this project in 2018.

In 2019 the parking lot and driveway will be built and Interpretive signs and a trailhead kiosk will be installed.



A rustic pad with an interpretive sign describing geological kettles and a bench will be built at the end of the accessible part of the trail.

We are looking forward to a ribbon cutting next summer.

Additional funding will be required to complete this project. We are actively applying for grants. Your donations are welcome.



Students Participate in Snowshoe Program



Over 1,400 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 winter. This program included an optional school visit by Park Rangers before the field trip and classroom follow-up activities.

The **Friends** paid transportation costs for the school groups and purchased new snowshoes and repair parts. Our contribution to this program was \$11,903. Because of its success, the National Park Foundation is providing a grant for the winter snowshoe program, but additional funding will be required.



“Adopt-A” Programs Rewarding for Volunteers

Many of our programs coordinate volunteers to do service projects on their own schedule, an hour or two at a time. One of the most rewarding parts of these programs is the opportunity for volunteers to interact with Park visitors,

answering their questions and providing background information about the park or the local area.

If you want to join one of these programs, go to our website and click the **Volunteer** button to register.

Our "Adopt-A" Programs

Adopt-A-Trail



58 volunteers clean up trailhead parking lots, pick up branches and obstacles on the trail, and report to Park's Roads & Trails crew any large trees down or erosion problems. All hiking trails on the mainland are monitored. Volunteers walk their trail at least once a month on their own schedule. Volunteers logged 1,852 hours.

Adopt-A-River



Two river cleanup events were held this year with about 10 volunteers in each group. A few volunteers also did river cleanups on their own schedule. A total of 100 volunteer hours were provided.

The Traverse Area Paddling Club also conducted three events to clean the Platte River. We plan to increase the river patrol activity on the Platte River and Crystal River in 2019.

Adopt-A-Beach

87 volunteers spent over 1,278 hours picking up 1,763 pounds of trash and reporting safety and maintenance issues along Lake Michigan shoreline. The volunteers record the litter they pick up and this information is sent to the Alliance for the Great Lakes.



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.

Six volunteers conducted these cleanups in 2018.

Membership & 2018 Financial Summary

Wondering how to become a member? It's easy!

- Volunteer in one of our programs
- Become a staff member
- Make a donation
- Of course we'd love it if you do all three!

Volunteer!

- If you are already a volunteer, just keep volunteering or try out some of our other programs.
- If you would like to volunteer, go to our website (friendsofsleepingbear.org). Click on the **Volunteer** button or the **How to Help** link and fill out the Volunteer Registration form.

Donate Today!

- Click the **DONATE** button on the web site: friendsofsleepingbear.org or
- Use PayPal to send donations directly to: treasurer@friendsofsleepingbear.org
- Mail a check to:

Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes
P.O. Box 545
Empire, MI 49630

Thank you for your past donations. Your continued support is very much appreciated.

Your Contributions at Work FY 2018 Support*

Project	Support
Accessibility Improvements	\$ 42,775.18
Kettles Trail	\$ 23,387.32
SBHT Operations	\$ 12,926.84
Snowshoe Pgm (transportation)	\$ 10,016.26
Snowshoes & supplies	\$ 1,886.94
Educational Publications	\$ 6,861.00
Wood Routing Machine	\$ 4,989.00
Maintenance Equipment (saws)	\$ 1,350.00
Museum Vacuums	\$ 1,293.95
Forest Treatment Equip.	\$ 2,101.14
Storm Recovery (trees)	\$ 1,345.08
Bark Ranger Supplies	\$ 1,422.10
Cavity Nesting Bird Screens	\$ 898.50
Park Concerts	\$ 900.00
Thoreson Restoration	\$ 891.13
Miscellaneous	\$ 865.06
TOTAL	\$113,909.50

* Fiscal Year runs October to September

