



Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore



**Final
General Management Plan
Wilderness Study
Environmental Impact Statement**

October, 2008





IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
9922 Front St. (Hwy M-71)
Empire, Michigan 49630-9797

D18 (SLBE)

October, 2008

Dear Friends and Neighbors of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore:

We are very pleased to present to you the *Final General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement* for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (National Lakeshore). The completion of this document depended on the participation of all of you and reflects your valued input.

The planning process for this *Final General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement* began in 2006. Throughout the process National Lakeshore staff conducted an extensive public involvement and outreach program. As we go to press with the final document, National Park Service (NPS) staff have met with more than 2,500 people in more than 90 informational meetings held throughout the planning process.

We want to express our gratitude to the many of you who provided comments on the *Draft General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement*. The draft plan was made available for public review between April 7 and June 15, 2008. Public hearings were held in Honor, Traverse City, and Glen Arbor, Michigan, on June 3, 4, and 5, 2008, respectively, with a total of 196 people attending. A total of 292 comments were received via letters, electronic mail messages, Web responses, and comments transcribed from the public hearings.

The *Final General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement* was crafted from the valuable input we received on the draft plan, and we have revised the preferred alternative based upon your input. Perhaps the most significant changes are that the Cottonwood Trail into the dunes from the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive has been removed from proposed wilderness, and electric motors will be allowed on Otter, Tucker, and Bass (Leelanau County) lakes. To see all the significant changes to the preferred alternative, and for information on the wide range of comments received and our responses to those comments, please refer to the "Comments on, Changes to, and Responses to Comments on the Draft Plan" section in chapter 6 of this plan.

Copies of the plan will be available at:

- Libraries: Benzie Shores District Library, Darcy Library of Beulah, Glen Lake Community Library, Leelanau Township Library, Leland Township Library, Library of Michigan, Suttons Bay Bingham District Library, and Traverse City District Library

- On the Internet (follow instructions and link from the park website at www.nps.gov/slbe)
- Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Visitor Center

Following distribution of the final plan and a 30-day no-action period, a “Record of Decision” will be signed by the National Lakeshore superintendent and the NPS regional director documenting the selection of the alternative to be implemented.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for your continued interest in this very special place. Working together, we have developed a final plan that maintains a variety of recreational opportunities while continuing to preserve and protect the natural and cultural resources of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. We could not have done this without you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Dusty Shultz".

Dusty Shultz
Superintendent

Final
General Management Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
Benzie and Leelanau Counties, Michigan

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore was established by the U.S. Congress in 1970 by Public Law 91-479. Part of the national park system, the National Lakeshore, which consists of a mainland portion plus North Manitou and South Manitou islands (71,291 acres total), is in the northwestern portion of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. The mainland portion straddles Benzie and Leelanau counties. The Manitou Islands, entirely in Leelanau County, are located about 7 miles to the northwest in Lake Michigan.

The National Lakeshore's last *General Management Plan* was completed in 1979. Since 1970, most of the 71,291 acres in the National Lakeshore's boundary have come into federal management. Private development adjacent to and near the National Lakeshore is continuing to increase. The National Lakeshore faces new resource and other management challenges as a result of these changes. In 1982 a boundary revision was authorized, in a legislative amendment, to include the Bow Lakes and Miller Hill areas, and more recently, lands along the Crystal River were added to the National Lakeshore. This current *General Management Plan* will provide management direction for these new lands. Recent studies have enhanced the National Park Service's understanding of the resources in the National Lakeshore. Desired conditions and general (conceptual) direction for management of these resources need to be defined.

The *Wilderness Study* considerations in this plan provide a public forum for evaluating lands within the National Lakeshore for possible recommendation to Congress for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system. The *Wilderness Study* is included because of public interest and because inclusion saves time and money. Wilderness, which can be designated only by Congress, provides for permanent protection of lands in their natural condition, providing outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

The document examines five alternatives for managing the National Lakeshore for the next 20 or more years. It also analyzes the impacts of implementing each of the alternatives. The **no-action alternative** reflects current conditions and activities at the Lakeshore. It is provided as a base-line against which to compare the other alternatives and includes 30,903 acres managed to maintain their existing wilderness character. In the **preferred alternative**, the Lakeshore is valued primarily for preservation of its natural resources, and for the opportunities it provides for visitor enjoyment of the natural, cultural, and recreational resources in a scenic outdoor setting. Lands proposed for wilderness designation include 32,100 acres and no developed county roads. In **alternative A**, the Lakeshore is valued primarily for conservation of its natural resources. Lands proposed for wilderness designation include 33,600 acres and no developed county roads. In **alternative B**, the Lakeshore is valued primarily for its recreational opportunities in scenic outdoor settings. Lands proposed for wilderness designation include 14,400 acres and no county roads. In **alternative C**, the Lakeshore is managed so that most visitor use is concentrated in selected areas, with more natural, primitive conditions promoted in the rest of the Lakeshore. Lands proposed for wilderness designation include 23,200 acres and no developed county roads. The five alternatives are summarized in table 2 (in the pocket at the end of the document). The key impacts of implementing these alternatives are summarized in table 4 and detailed in chapter 5.

This document has been distributed to other agencies and interested organizations and individuals for their review. Following distribution of the final plan and a 30-day no-action period, a "Record of Decision" will be signed by the National Lakeshore superintendent and the NPS regional director documenting the NPS selection of an alternative for implementation.

SUMMARY

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL LAKESHORE

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (hereafter referred to as National Lakeshore, Lakeshore, or park) was established by the U.S. Congress in 1970. Part of the national park system, the National Lakeshore consists of a mainland portion located in Michigan's lower peninsula plus North Manitou and South Manitou islands (71,291 acres total).

PURPOSE FOR THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN / WILDERNESS STUDY / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

General management plans are required for all units of the national park system and are intended to establish the future management direction of a park unit. General management plans look 20 or more years into the future and consider the park system unit holistically, in its full ecological and cultural context and as part of a surrounding region. This *General Management Plan* will provide comprehensive guidance for perpetuating natural systems, preserving cultural resources, and providing opportunities for quality visitor experiences at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. The purpose of this plan is to decide how the National Park Service (NPS) can best fulfill the National Lakeshore's purpose, maintain its significance, and protect its resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The plan does not provide specific and detailed answers to every issue facing the park, but rather is a framework to assist NPS managers in making decisions today and in the future. The National Lakeshore's last *General Management Plan*, completed in 1979, is outdated. New areas have been added to the Lakeshore at Bow Lakes, Miller Hill, and the Crystal River, and

many individual parcels within the original boundary have been acquired. New information about the significance of natural and cultural resources in the Lakeshore has been recognized. Private development adjacent to and near the National Lakeshore has increased, and this trend has accelerated in recent years. The National Lakeshore faces new management challenges as a result of all these changes. This new *General Management Plan* will update the management framework for the National Lakeshore, address changing issues and conditions, incorporate new resource information, and provide management direction for these new park lands.

The *Wilderness Study* element of this new *General Management Plan* evaluates lands within Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore for possible recommendation to Congress for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system. The *Wilderness Study* is needed because of public interest in developing a proposal that improves upon the 1981 "Wilderness Recommendation." Including the *Wilderness Study* in the *General Management Plan* saves time and money because the two processes have similar environmental compliance and public involvement needs. Wilderness, which can be designated only by Congress, provides for permanent protection of lands in their natural condition that provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

Wilderness studies typically result in a recommendation to Congress to designate all, some, or none of the lands possessing wilderness character as part of the national wilderness preservation system. Based on the *Wilderness Study* included in this document, the National Park Service anticipates preparing a proposal for such a recommendation to forward to the U.S. Department of the Interior at the conclusion of this planning effort. However, by law,

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areas proposed as wilderness in the 1981 recommendation for the National Lakeshore will be managed as wilderness until Congress acts on a new wilderness recommendation.

MANAGEMENT ZONES

Management zones prescribe how different areas of the National Lakeshore would be managed. Four management zones have been developed for the National Lakeshore — the high use zone, the experience history zone, the recreation zone, and the experience nature zone. The high use zone provides for visitor orientation, education, and other structured activities (such as ranger-led tours). High numbers of visitors enjoy and learn about the National Lakeshore. The experience history zone is managed primarily to preserve historic structures and landscapes. Moderate to high numbers of visitors enjoy and learn about significant historic activities, buildings, and landscapes. The recreation zone provides a wide range of recreational opportunities for moderate numbers of visitors. The active Lake Michigan beach area is within this zone, as is the 0.25 mile of Lake Michigan waters within the National Lakeshore boundary. The experience nature zone is the wildest, most natural management zone. Low numbers of visitors enjoy primitive recreation on foot or in nonmotorized watercraft. This is the only management zone in which wilderness may occur.

The alternatives presented in this document each propose a different configuration of the management zones within the National Lakeshore based on the overall concept for each action alternative. (The no-action alternative, which describes existing conditions, has no management zoning.) In every management zone, the Lakeshore intends to preserve and protect natural and cultural resources to the greatest extent possible given available funds.

THE ALTERNATIVES

Five alternatives, including the preferred alternative, for future management of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore are presented in this document. The alternatives were developed through a lengthy public involvement process, described in detail in the “Public Involvement, Including Scoping” section in chapter 6. Each alternative is consistent with maintaining the National Lakeshore’s purpose, significance, and fundamental resources and values; the alternatives present different choices for how to manage resources, visitor use, and facilities within the Lakeshore. The alternatives are the no-action (“business as usual”) alternative, the preferred alternative, alternative A, alternative B, and alternative C. Each alternative includes a wilderness proposal. Note that the acreage figures for the various wilderness proposals are estimates based on small-scale maps. Maps of the alternatives are provided in the back pocket on the inside back cover.

The No-Action Alternative

The no-action alternative primarily reflects current conditions and activities at the National Lakeshore. This alternative is provided as a baseline against which to compare the “action” alternatives. As directed by Congress in 1982, the National Park Service would continue to manage lands proposed for wilderness in the 1981 “Wilderness Recommendation” (30,903 acres or 43% of the National Lakeshore) to maintain their existing wilderness character. Natural resource management programs would continue to emphasize protection of natural resources and processes. Efforts to preserve as many historic structures and landscapes as possible would continue.

Visitor orientation services, interpretive activities, visitor access and facilities, and recreational opportunities would remain much as they are now.

The National Park Service would continue to acquire lands within the Benzie Corridor on a willing-seller basis (subject to available funding) for future development of a scenic road, which would include bike lanes/trail. (However, the road and bike lanes/trail would not be expected to be built within the life of this plan.)

The key impacts associated with implementing this alternative would be in the areas of visitor opportunities and use and wilderness character. Visitors seem satisfied overall with most current opportunities in the Lakeshore. Maintaining the current access, scenic resources, range of visitor opportunities, experiences, and recreation-oriented facilities would have a long-term, minor to moderate beneficial impact on visitor opportunities and use. Some visitors would prefer some additional improvements in recreation-oriented facilities, a few additional visitor opportunities, or a reduction of crowding on the Platte River, and the lack of these would result in a long-term, minor adverse impact on these visitors. As the result of ongoing management of nearly 31,000 acres to maintain its existing wilderness character, as directed by Congress, the National Lakeshore would continue to include extensive, largely natural undeveloped areas where outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive, unconfined recreation would continue to be available. Impacts of the no-action alternative would continue to be mostly beneficial, moderate, and long term — but there would also be some continuing localized, minor adverse impacts on wilderness character. Impacts on historic resources, natural resources, regional socioeconomics, and NPS operations would not differ substantially among the alternatives.

Preferred Alternative

Under the preferred alternative, the Lakeshore would be valued primarily for preservation of its natural resources, and for the opportunities it provides for visitor

enjoyment of natural, cultural, and recreational resources in a scenic outdoor setting. About 32,100 acres (45% of the National Lakeshore) in the north, central, south, and island areas of the Lakeshore would be proposed as wilderness. No developed county roads are within areas proposed for wilderness.

Based on the emphasis placed on natural resource conditions and experiences in this alternative, the experience nature zone would extend across much of the Lakeshore. Some selected areas would be zoned high use or recreation to allow for possible future recreational opportunities.

Based on the emphasis placed on opportunities for enjoyment of cultural resources in this alternative, the experience history zone would encompass most of the National Lakeshore's historic resources. Historic structures and landscapes would be preserved at a minimum and managed as specified for the management zone in which they lie.

Visitor orientation services, interpretive activities, visitor access and facilities, and recreational opportunities would remain much as they are now except that a few trails and backcountry campgrounds would be added and new designated campgrounds would be provided on North Manitou Island; Valley View campground would be removed; parking at the end of Esch Road (and possibly at Platte River Point) would be improved; the possibility of improved boat access near Platte River Point could be studied; motorized boats would not be allowed on North Bar Lake; electric motors would be allowed on Bass Lake (Leelanau County), Tucker Lake, and Otter Lake; there would be improved access at some inland lakes; the Glen Lake picnic area would be upgraded; occasional ferry service for day trips to North Manitou Island would be allowed; concession auto tours to near the Giant Cedars area would be considered; and the Crystal River access area would be upgraded or relocated.

SUMMARY

The National Park Service would continue to acquire lands within the Benzie Corridor on a willing-seller basis (subject to available funding) for future development of a scenic road and/or a bike/hike trail (determined and evaluated via a future study). The road/trail would not be expected to be built within the life of this plan.

The key impacts associated with implementing this alternative would be in the areas of visitor opportunities and use and wilderness character. Increased access and visitor opportunities related to additional recreation-oriented facilities would have a long-term, moderate beneficial impact on visitor opportunities and use. Implementation of user capacity management strategies would have a long-term, minor beneficial impact on visitor opportunities, but potentially long-term minor adverse effects on use. The removal of Valley View campground and disallowing gas-powered motorboats on two inland lakes would have long-term, minor, adverse impacts on visitor opportunities and use. The increased visitor opportunities and facilities would have a long-term, minor, adverse impact on natural sound and the night sky. Establishment of 32,100 acres of designated wilderness in all three portions of the mainland and on both islands would permanently protect wilderness values (naturalness and opportunities for solitude or primitive, unconfined recreation). Impacts of the preferred alternative on wilderness character would be mostly beneficial, moderate, and long term (permanent), but there would also be some localized, minor adverse impacts. Impacts on historic resources, natural resources, regional socio-economics, and NPS operations would not differ substantially among the alternatives.

Alternative A

Under alternative A, the Lakeshore would be valued primarily for conservation of its natural resources. About 33,600 acres (47% of the

National Lakeshore) in the north, central, south, and island areas of the National Lakeshore would be proposed as wilderness. No developed county roads are within areas proposed for wilderness. Based on the emphasis on natural resources conditions and experiences in this alternative, the experience nature zone would extend across most of the Lakeshore. Historic structures and landscapes would be managed as specified for the management zone in which they lie.

Visitor orientation services, interpretive activities, visitor access and facilities, and recreational opportunities would remain much as they are now. However, interpretive opportunities relating to natural resource themes would be emphasized. On South Manitou Island, concession-operated farm tours would stop at the west end of Chicago Road and continue on foot from there, a few trails and campgrounds would be added and Valley View campground would be removed, NPS-owned Tiesma Road would be closed, motor boats would no longer be allowed on Bass Lake (Leelanau County), and the Glen Lake picnic area would be removed.

The National Park Service would cease acquisition of lands within the Benzie Corridor. No scenic roadway or trail would be developed. The National Park Service would recommend that the Lakeshore's enabling legislation be amended to remove the Benzie Corridor from the boundary. This would require congressional action.

The key impacts associated with implementing this alternative would be in the areas of visitor opportunities and use and wilderness character. Increased access and visitor opportunities related to modest additional recreation-oriented facilities would have a long-term, minor to moderate beneficial impact on visitor opportunities and use. Implementation of user capacity management strategies would have a long-term, minor beneficial impact on the visitor experience, but potentially long-term minor adverse

effects on visitor use. The loss of some vehicle access, visitor opportunities, and recreation-oriented facilities (e.g., Tiesma Road and Glen Lake picnic area) would have long-term, moderate adverse impacts on visitor opportunities and use. The removal of the Benzie Corridor from the Lakeshore boundary would have long-term, minor to moderate adverse impacts on visitor access and opportunities, scenic resources, natural soundscapes, and the night sky. Establishment of 33,600 acres of designated wilderness (the most of any alternative) in all three portions of the mainland and on both islands would permanently protect naturalness and opportunities for solitude or primitive, unconfined recreation. Impacts of alternative A on wilderness character would be mostly beneficial, moderate, and long term (permanent), but there would also be some localized minor adverse impacts on wilderness character. Impacts on historic resources, natural resources, regional socioeconomics, and NPS operations would not differ substantially among the alternatives.

Alternative B

Under alternative B the National Lakeshore would be valued primarily for its recreational opportunities in scenic outdoor settings. About 14,400 acres (20% of the National Lakeshore), all on North Manitou Island, would be proposed as wilderness. No county roads are within areas proposed for wilderness. Based on the large extent of the recreation zone in this alternative, natural resources might be modified to provide for a variety of recreational activities. Historic structures and landscapes would be managed as specified for the management zone in which they lie.

Visitor orientation services, interpretive activities, visitor access and facilities, and recreational opportunities would remain much as they are now except that a few trails and campgrounds would be added and some new campgrounds would be designated (to replace dispersed camping on North Manitou

Island), parking would be improved at Peterson Road and the end of Esch Road, facilities would be expanded and improved boat access could be studied at Platte River Point, motorized boats would be allowed on Shell and Tucker lakes, access would be improved at a few inland lakes, a few picnic areas would be upgraded, occasional ferry service for day trips to North Manitou Island would be allowed, concession auto tours to near the Giant Cedars area would be considered, and the Crystal River access area would be upgraded or relocated.

The National Park Service would continue to acquire lands within the Benzie Corridor on a willing-seller basis (subject to available funding) for future development of a scenic road. The scenic road would include bike lanes (or in some stretches a separate bike trail, as appropriate). For cost and impact comparison purposes, the scenic road was assumed to be built in year 25 of the plan.

The key impacts associated with implementing this alternative would be in the areas of visitor opportunities and use and wilderness character. Increased access and visitor opportunities related to additional recreation-oriented facilities would have a long-term, minor to moderate beneficial impact on visitor opportunities and use. Implementation of user capacity management strategies would have a long-term, minor beneficial impact on visitor experiences but potentially long-term minor adverse effects on visitor use. The removal of dispersed camping on North Manitou Island would have long-term minor adverse impacts on visitor opportunities and use. The increased visitor opportunities and facilities would have a long-term minor adverse impact on scenic resources, natural sound, and the night sky. Establishment of 14,400 acres of designated wilderness on North Manitou Island would permanently protect wilderness values therein. However, there would be no wilderness protection on the mainland or South Manitou Island, so naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive

SUMMARY

recreation would be substantially reduced there. Alternative B would have long-term (some permanent), minor beneficial and minor to major adverse impacts on wilderness character. Impacts on historic resources, natural resources, regional socioeconomics, and NPS operations would not differ substantially among the alternatives.

Alternative C

Under alternative C the Lakeshore would be managed so that most visitor use is concentrated in selected areas, with more natural, primitive conditions promoted in the rest of the Lakeshore. About 23,200 acres (32% of the National Lakeshore) in the central, south, and island areas of the Lakeshore would be proposed as wilderness. No developed county roads are within areas proposed for wilderness. Within the high use and experience history zones there would be less emphasis on managing the Lakeshore for natural conditions. Outside those concentrated use areas, the Lakeshore would be managed for more natural conditions. Historic structures and landscapes would be managed as specified for the management zone in which they lie.

Visitor orientation services, interpretive activities, visitor access and facilities, and recreational opportunities would remain much as they are now. However, more structured interpretive opportunities would be offered in concentrated use areas and more self-guided opportunities would be offered elsewhere. A few trails would be added; the D. H. Day campground would be upgraded and/or expanded; there would be new designated campgrounds on North Manitou Island; concession auto tours to near the Giant Cedars would be considered; facilities at the ends of County Road 669, Esch Road, and Platte River Point would be expanded; access to a few inland lakes would be improved; the Glen Lake picnic area would be upgraded or expanded; and the Dune Climb facilities would be upgraded.

The National Park Service would continue to acquire lands within the Benzie Corridor on a willing-seller basis (subject to available funding) for future development of a scenic nonmotorized hike/bike trail. For cost and impact comparison purposes, the scenic trail was assumed to be built in year 25 of the plan.

The key impacts associated with implementing this alternative would be in the areas of visitor opportunities and use and wilderness character. Increased access and visitor opportunities related to additional recreation-oriented facilities would have a long-term, minor to moderate beneficial impact on visitor opportunities and use. Implementation of user capacity management strategies would have a long-term, minor, beneficial impact on the visitor experience, but potentially long-term minor, adverse effects on visitor use. The increased visitor opportunities and facilities in the high-use zones would have a long-term, minor, adverse impact on scenic resources, natural sounds, and the night sky. Establishment of 23,200 acres of designated wilderness in the central and south portions of the mainland and on both islands would permanently protect wilderness values (naturalness and opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation). However, wilderness values in several areas (north portion of the mainland, Otter Creek area, and southeast portion of South Manitou Island) would no longer have wilderness protection. Impacts of alternative C on wilderness character would be long term (some permanent), minor, and adverse and beneficial. Impacts on historic resources, natural resources, regional socioeconomics, and NPS operations would not differ substantially among the alternatives.

THE NEXT STEPS

This *Final General Management Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement* includes letters from governmental agencies, substantive comments on the draft

document, and NPS responses to those comments. Following distribution of the final plan and a 30-day no-action period, a “Record of Decision” will be signed by the National Lakeshore superintendent and the NPS regional director documenting the NPS selection of an alternative for implementation.

Although this *Final General Management Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement* provides the analysis and justification for future National Lakeshore funding proposals, this plan does not guarantee future NPS funding. Many actions would be necessary to achieve the desired conditions for natural resources, cultural resources, recreational opportunities, and facilities as envisioned in this plan. The National Park Service will seek funding to

achieve these desired conditions; although the National Lakeshore hopes to secure this funding and will prepare itself accordingly, the Lakeshore may not receive enough funding to achieve all desired conditions. National Lakeshore managers will need to continue to pursue other options, including expanding the service of volunteers, drawing upon existing or new partnerships, and seeking alternative funding sources, including the philanthropic community. Even with assistance from supplemental sources, Lakeshore managers may be faced with difficult choices when setting priorities. The *General Management Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement* provides the framework within which to make these choices.

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