



General Management Plan/Wilderness Study



Photo: Terry Phipps, NPS VIP

Dear Friends:

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, a unit managed by the National Park Service (NPS), is beginning the development of a new General Management Plan (GMP). Just as the name implies, this plan is intended to provide a general framework to guide park management decisions over the next 20 plus years. This framework will be based in part on a vision of what people wish to see at the National Lakeshore in the future. We need your help in describing that vision and developing the overall management philosophy that will enable us to achieve it.

The last GMP was completed for the park in 1979 and, since then, a number of issues and conditions have changed, thus requiring a new planning effort. Many of you may recall the past GMP planning effort between 1999 and 2002. That effort was halted in October 2002, principally due to public outcry over access issues and related wilderness uncertainties. We heard you and we will address your concerns. We recognize that Benzie and Leelanau Counties control most of the road rights-of-way in the park and closure of those roads is beyond our authority.

For this current planning effort, the NPS initially recommended first a Wilderness Study and then a GMP in sequence, but because of the need to complete the process in a timely and cost effective fashion, we will now be incorporating the Wilderness Study into the GMP. Unlike the most recent GMP effort, the planning will look at a range of alternatives for wilderness at the National Lakeshore, which may include reductions or increases in wilderness, or leaving the boundaries as defined in the 1982 legislation.

In developing a vision for the park's future, it is important to first review the park's purpose, its significance, and the potential for public understanding and enjoyment of the resources that the park preserves and interprets. Later steps in the planning process will analyze the fundamental resources that are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance, describe specific desirable resource conditions and visitor goals, and design management alternatives for achieving those conditions and goals.

As part of the planning process, we will meet with federal, tribal, state, and local government officials. We will also hold meetings and workshops to hear ideas and concerns from the general public and interested groups. Communication and cooperation with other governmental agencies, the local communities, and the general public will identify common interests and goals for the protection and preservation of this important national resource. You will have numerous opportunities to be involved in this process. The "Public Involvement Strategy" section in this newsletter details ways that you can participate and be involved.

With your help, we can develop a plan that charts a sustainable future for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Please share with us your thoughts, ideas, and vision for this national treasure.

Sincerely,

Dusty Shultz
Superintendent



What Is A General Management Plan?

Park planning is an ongoing process, and general management planning is the broadest level of decision making for national parks. GMPs are required for all units in the national park system and are intended to set management direction for 20 plus years.

The GMP for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is being developed by park staff and NPS planning professionals with participation by park partners, neighbors, and the general public to address the following questions:

- 1. What actions should we take to ensure that the park's resources are protected and preserved in good condition?**
- 2. What actions should we take to increase visitor understanding and enjoyment of the park's resources?**
- 3. What levels and types of visitor use are appropriate for various areas of the park?**
- 4. How can we work effectively with partners (other interested groups and individuals) to protect the resources and increase support for the park?**

Several possible visions for the park's future (called management alternatives) will be developed and analyzed before a preferred management alternative is identified. Evaluating a set of management alternatives enables the planning team and the public to compare the advantages and disadvantages of the various courses of action.

As a long-term vision for management of the park, the GMP will provide "big picture" guidance. The plan will not include specific facility designs, resolve all issues, or guarantee funding for actions being proposed. Future action plans may be needed to address specific activities and/or areas.

The GMP will be used to:

- Provide general direction and management philosophy
- Identify facility needs, functions, and general locations
- Define NPS roles and responsibilities
- Satisfy statutory and NPS policy requirements
- Identify costs and staffing needs

The GMP will not be used to:

- Develop detailed design plans for specific areas
- Guarantee funding for future actions and developments
- Resolve all park issues

What Is A Wilderness Study?

A Wilderness Study is an assessment of wilderness characteristics and values, as defined in the Wilderness Act of 1964:

- where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man—where man himself is a visitor who does not remain
- undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation
- which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable
- which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions
- which has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation

Lands and waters found to possess the characteristics and values of wilderness are formally studied to develop a recommendation to Congress for wilderness designation.

A Wilderness Study of the National Lakeshore will be incorporated into the GMP, and will take a fresh look at wilderness potential in the park. The planning will develop a range of alternatives for wilderness at the National Lakeshore, which may include reductions or increases in wilderness, or leaving the boundaries as defined in the existing *1981 Wilderness Recommendation*. This combined GMP/Wilderness Study planning document will be supported by a single environmental impact statement (EIS).



Wilderness At The National Lakeshore

In response to direction in the National Lakeshore's 1970 enabling legislation, a 1975 *Final Wilderness Recommendation* was prepared which included 35,060 acres in six areas to be designated as "potential" wilderness. The 1975 *Recommendation* was reviewed in the late 1970s as part of a general management planning effort. The 1979 *General Management Plan* recommended some changes to the 1975 *Recommendation*, such as excluding the Sleeping Bear plateau unit because of vehicular use on the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive (the former Hart Nature Trail). It also recommended excluding a "public transportation" corridor on South Manitou Island and several areas of private land on the mainland and road access to them. Based on this, a 1981 *Wilderness Recommendation* was prepared that included 30,903 acres of "proposed" wilderness. Of this acreage, 7,128 acres were "recommended" wilderness and 23,775 acres were "potential" wilderness. Best available information suggests that this recommendation was never transmitted to the Secretary of the Interior from the Assistant Secretary.

The 1982 amendment to the park enabling legislation (Public Law 97-361), required that areas described in the 1981 *Wilderness Recommendation* be administered to maintain their presently existing wilderness character "until Congress determines otherwise." NPS Management Policies in place then, and since that time, also require such management, which has now been occurring for nearly 25 years.

It should be noted, however, that due to the 1982 law, the proposed wilderness areas described in the 1981 *Wilderness Recommendation* will remain in effect until Congress acts on a new wilderness recommendation.

Purpose And Significance Statements

As we begin to develop a GMP for the National Lakeshore, it is important to affirm our understanding of Congress' intent in establishing this area as a unit of the national park system, and to confirm the importance of the area to the nation's natural and cultural heritage. We do this in a set of Purpose and Significance Statements that are derived from the park's enabling legislation, legislative history, and other special designations. These statements supplement the many laws, regulations, and policies that govern the national park system. Purpose Statements represent the reasons for establishing the National Lakeshore and come directly from the park's enabling legislation and other laws. Significance Statements describe the National Lakeshore's distinctiveness and help to place it in its regional and national context. Significance statements are tied directly to the purpose statements. Following are the draft purpose and significance statements as we begin this planning process.



Photo: Terry Phipps, NPS VIP



Draft Purpose Statement:

Congress established the National Lakeshore to:

- Preserve outstanding natural features, including forests, beaches, dune formations, and ancient glacial phenomena in their natural setting and protect them from developments and uses that would destroy the scenic beauty and natural character of the area.

And then to:

- Provide for recreational opportunities and protection of scenic, scientific, and historic features consistent with the maximum protection of the natural environment of the area.

Draft Significance Statements:

- The National Lakeshore contains compactly grouped features of continental glaciation, including post glacial shoreline adjustment, dune/swale complex, wind formed dunes, perched dunes, and examples of associated plant succession. These features are of global importance due to their relatively unimpacted state, the variety of features present, and their proximity to one another.
- The National Lakeshore preserves outstanding scenic and publicly accessible resources. Its massive glacial headlands, expansive Lake Michigan beaches, diverse habitats, superb water resources, and rich human history offer an unparalleled range of recreational, educational, and inspirational opportunities.
- The collection of historic maritime, agricultural, and recreational landscapes within the National Lakeshore is of a size and quality unique on the Great Lakes and rare elsewhere on the United States coastline.
- The National Lakeshore's native plant and animal communities are of a scale and quality rare on the Great Lakes shoreline. These relatively intact communities afford an opportunity to allow the continuation of the ecological processes that have shaped them.

Issues And Concerns

The planning team has compiled an initial list of issues or areas of concern to be dealt with through this GMP/ Wilderness Study. This list is a starting point and may be enlarged with agency and public comments. Throughout the planning process, the issues and concerns will be refined through public involvement and will form the cornerstone for the plan.

Access: Access to Lake Michigan beaches and other National Lakeshore resources is very important to park visitors. We recognize that Benzie and Leelanau Counties control most of the road rights-of-way in the park and closure of those roads is beyond our authority.

Conservation and Preservation of Park Resources: Natural and cultural resources are continually being impacted or threatened from inside and outside the National Lakeshore. How will the park protect these resources while accommodating an appropriate range of visitor uses?

Development: What development, if any, would be appropriate in the next 20 plus years? How can this development be accommodated with the least impact to the resources and values of the National Lakeshore? What development should be planned for the Benzie Corridor (Crystal Ridge)?

Management of New Areas: Since the completion of the earlier GMP in 1979, new lands have been added to the park. These new areas lack a comprehensive plan for their management. A 1982 amendment to the National Lakeshore's enabling legislation authorized a boundary revision to include the Bow Lakes and Miller Hill areas. Recently, lands along the Crystal River were added to the National Lakeshore. How should these lands be managed to provide for resource protection and visitor use and enjoyment?

Operations and Management: Given limited financial resources, what changes

might be necessary to most effectively and efficiently operate and manage the National Lakeshore?

Visitor Use: Most visitor use at the National Lakeshore occurs in the summer months, sometimes taxing park resources and infrastructure. How can the NPS continue to provide for an appropriate range of visitor experiences and opportunities while still protecting park resources and values?

Wilderness: Based on the 1981 *Wilderness Recommendation*, the National Lakeshore currently manages five areas as wilderness. As described earlier in this newsletter, a wilderness study will be incorporated into the GMP and will take a fresh look at wilderness potential in the park.

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Public Involvement Strategy

We welcome and encourage your involvement in this planning process. Because we know how much you value the National Lakeshore, we will be making a concerted effort to involve you to the greatest extent possible. We will use the following methods to keep you informed:

- newsletters
- informational leaflets
- website (frequently asked questions and answers, increased use of the Internet to provide updated information, articles that may be inserted into organizational newsletters, draft documents for review)
- public workshops and open houses
- recorded public meetings
- recorded wilderness public hearing
- meetings with interested groups upon request
- media kits
- news conferences

Throughout this process, as illustrated above, you will have several opportunities to express your thoughts and concerns about the future of the park, assist in the development and analysis of management alternatives, and review and comment on the draft documents.

The Planning Team

A multidisciplinary team representing a range of expertise will lead this planning effort. The team will include National Lakeshore staff, with assistance from the NPS Midwest Regional Office in Omaha and the NPS Denver Service Center. Specialists will support the planning team as needed. Team members include:

National Lakeshore

Dusty Shultz, Superintendent
Tom Ulrich, Assistant Superintendent
Michael Duwe, Environmental Specialist/Planner
Lee Jameson, Facility Manager
Larry Johnson, Chief Ranger
Dan Kriebler, Administrative Officer
Lisa Myers, Chief, Interpretation and Visitor Services
Steve Yancho, Chief, Natural Resources

Midwest Regional Office

Sandra Washington, Chief, Planning and Compliance

NPS Denver Service Center

Terri Urbanowski, Project Manager
Craig Cellar, Cultural Resource Specialist
Nola Chavez, Landscape Architect
Patrick Malone, Natural Resource Specialist

We Want To Hear From You

In this phase of the process (step 1 in the timetable), we are asking what you value about the park and what you think are the issues (problems, concerns, or opportunities) facing management. We are also asking for your vision. How do you think the park should look and operate 20 plus years from now? And, do you have any comments on the draft purpose and significance statements?

We encourage you to review documents and comment electronically. You may go to the park's website at <http://www.nps.gov/slbe>, which will provide links to this newsletter and how to comment. You are also welcome to mail comments directly to the park on the enclosed comment form. Postage is prepaid, so just fold the form, tape it, and drop it in a mailbox. Our mailing address is: Superintendent, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 9922 Front Street, Empire, MI 49630. Include your email address if you wish to be notified by email of future documents. Your comments via mail or email would be most helpful if received by us no later than **March 17, 2006**.

Please be aware that due to public disclosure requirements, the NPS, if requested, is required to make the names and addresses of commenters public. However, individual respondents may request that we withhold their name and physical address from the public record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. If you wish to withhold your name and /or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comments or check the box on the mail back comment form.

The next newsletter, Newsletter #2, will be available electronically through the park's website at <http://www.nps.gov/slbe>. A limited number of paper copies will be printed and available for review at park headquarters and area libraries. The park website will also include "Frequently Asked Questions and Answers" and other information about the planning effort.

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Planning Timetable

We expect this planning process to be a three-year effort, to be completed in fall or winter of 2008. The following table identifies the general planning activities, estimated dates, and public involvement opportunities:

	Planning Activity	Dates	Public Involvement Opportunities
1	Set the stage for planning (we are at this stage): Review draft purpose and significance, determine issues and concerns.	Late Winter 2006	The public is invited to attend open houses to learn about the planning process and offer ideas using the options described in the "Public Involvement Strategy" section
2	Develop Preliminary Alternatives: Identify a wide range of alternatives for the park's future and assess their effects.	Spring 2006 to Late Winter 2007	Attend public workshops to help craft the preliminary alternatives. Provide comments on the preliminary set of alternatives, which will be described in future newsletters.
3	Refine Preliminary Alternatives: Confirm the preliminary alternatives and consolidate alternatives, where possible, to get a set of alternatives from which to select the preferred alternative.	Spring 2007 to Summer 2007	Attend public workshops to refine alternatives. Provide feedback on ways to improve the alternatives (or a combination of alternatives), and suggestions for how to select the preferred alternative.
4	Prepare Draft General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement: Prepare draft describing the management alternatives and impacts; distribute to the public.	Fall 2007 to Spring 2008	Provide written comments on the draft document. Attend public meetings/hearings and provide comments.
5	Revise and Prepare Final General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement: Analyze comments, prepare responses to comments, revise draft document, distribute to the public.	Summer 2008 to Fall 2008	
6	Implement the approved plan: Prepare and issue Record of Decision and implement plan as funding allows.	Winter 2008 and beyond	Stay involved throughout the implementation of the approved plan. Let the park know what you think.

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Public Meetings Scheduled

Please join us in February for the following open houses. You will have the opportunity to comment on our preliminary purpose and significance statements for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and provide the planning team with the issues (problems, concerns, and opportunities) you think should be covered in the GMP/Wilderness Study.

Tuesday
February 14, 2006
3:00 – 7:00 PM

Sleeping Bear Dunes National
Lakeshore Visitor Center Auditorium
9922 Front Street
Empire, MI 49630

Wednesday
February 15, 2006
3:00 – 7:00 PM

Traverse Area District Library
610 Woodmere Avenue
Traverse City, MI 49686

Thursday
February 16, 2006
3:00 – 7:00 PM

Benzonia Township Hall
1020 Michigan Avenue
Benzonia, MI 49616



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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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