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Sleeping Bear Dunes NL News Release

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Kettles Trail Plan / Environmental Assessment Available for Review

EMPIRE, MI - Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (National Lakeshore) Superintendent Dusty Shultz announced today the availability of the *Kettles Trail Plan and Environmental Assessment* (EA) for public review and comment. This document evaluates alternatives for developing a trail system ("Kettles Trail") on federal lands in the Bow Lakes area of the National Lakeshore.

The Bow Lakes area is a detached section of the National Lakeshore, created when a 1982 amendment to the National Lakeshore's enabling legislation authorized a boundary revision adding it to the park (Public Law 97-361). Currently, only the southern half of the Bow Lakes area is owned by the NPS and the proposed trail system would be confined to these federal lands lying south of Lanham Road. A trail system on this property was generally described in the 2009 *General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement* (GMP). The EA represents a continued commitment to preserve significant park resources and is compatible with management zoning in the GMP.

Under Alternative 1 (the "No Action" Alternative), no new trail system or parking would be developed on federal lands in the project area within the National Lakeshore. The site would remain undeveloped and visitors would continue to access the area via un-maintained former two-track roads for activities such as hiking, nature observation, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and hunting. Existing "social" trails (informal trails) and two-tracks leading onto adjacent private property would continue to be used.

Under Alternative 2 (Kettles Loop), 1.9 miles of designated trail would be constructed, along with a six to eight vehicle parking facility at the southwest corner of the project area. Visitors would access the area for activities such as hiking, nature observation, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and hunting.

Horseback riding, camping and bicycling would not be allowed. The primary feature of interest along this trail would be an area of dry kettles at the north end of the project area. The trail would be a single track primitive trail with a typical maintained trail tread width of approximately three feet. In the winter, the trail would be un-groomed, but available for visitor use. Universal accessibility would be a consideration of the primitive trail design and final alignment.

Under Alternative 3 (Kettles Loop and Bog Overlook), 2.1 miles of designated trail would be constructed, using the same alignment as in Alternative 2, with the addition of a spur from the Kettles Loop to an overlook above the bog. Access to the bog overlook would require constructing a new trail of less than 50 feet from an existing two-track road to the overlook. The bog overlook is not envisioned as a formal structure, but rather a flat natural surface viewing area with a barrier around the edge (posts, vegetation) and interpretive signage. As in Alternative 2, universal accessibility would be a consideration of the primitive trail design and final alignment.

The Preferred Alternative, Alternative 4 (Kettles Loop and Bog Access), includes the trail routes, signage, interpretation, and parking described in Alternative 3, and adds a spur from the bog overlook about 0.1 miles to a bog edge overlook, resulting in a total constructed trail length of 2.2 miles. The bog edge overlook would be a hardened elevated surface (such as wood, a composite material or metal) due to the wetness of the area, especially in the spring, and would not protrude into the bog so as to minimize impacts to the bog and to the vista from the bog overlook above. As in Alternatives 2 and 3, universal accessibility would be a consideration of the primitive trail design and final alignment.

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The National Lakeshore would like your thoughts on these trail alternatives. They encourage you to comment on the EA until the public comment period closes on **June 30, 2014**. The document may be electronically reviewed on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at parkplanning.nps.gov/SleepingBearKettleTr or the National Lakeshore's website at www.nps.gov/slbe. Paper copies are available for review at the National Lakeshore Visitor Center in Empire. A very limited number of paper copies and CDs are available upon request.

You are encouraged to submit your comments electronically through PEPC. Alternatively, you may mail comments to: Superintendent, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 9922 Front Street, Empire, MI 49630.

A public open house on the project is scheduled for **June 4, 2014** from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Philip A. Hart Visitor Center Auditorium in Empire. Park staff will be available to answer questions about the project. Comments may also be submitted in writing at the open house.

We look forward to receiving your thoughts and opinions concerning the *Kettles Trail Plan and Environmental Assessment*. For more information, please contact Kevin Skerl, Chief of Natural Resources, at (231) 326-4750.

For more information, please visit their website at www.nps.gov/slbe/.

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