



# Foundation Document Overview

## Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

### Michigan



#### Contact Information

For more information about the *Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Foundation Document*, contact: [slbe\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:slbe_superintendent@nps.gov) or (231) 326-4700 or write to:  
Superintendent, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 9922 Front Street, Empire, MI 49630

## Purpose



*The purpose of SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE is to preserve outstanding natural features along the northeastern shore of Lake Michigan, including forests, beaches, dunes, wilderness character, and 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, for the benefit, inspiration, education, recreation, and enjoyment of the public.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The national lakeshore contains features of continental glaciation that 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, remote islands, diverse habitats, impeccable wilderness opportunities, superb water resources, and rich human history offer an exceptional range of recreational, educational, and inspirational opportunities.
- The collection of historic sites and landscapes—indigenous, maritime, agricultural, and recreational—in the national lakeshore is of a size and quality unsurpassed on the Great Lakes and rare elsewhere on the US coastline.
- The national lakeshore’s native plant and animal communities, especially the northern hardwoods, coastal forests, dune communities, and interdunal wetlands, are of a scale and quality that is rare on the Great Lakes shoreline. These relatively intact communities provide an opportunity for continuation of the ecological processes that have shaped them.



## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Geologic Processes**
- **Visitor Opportunities and Scenery**
- **Cultural Resources and History**
- **Ecological Communities and Processes**
- **Wilderness Character**

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive**
- **Historic Sites of State and Local Significance**
- **Archeological Sites**



## Interpretive Themes



Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The tall dunes and dramatic sweep of Lake Michigan shoreline at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, along with other more subtle glacial features, provide an outstanding illustration of glaciation and help people discover and understand the continually evolving surface of the Earth and how it influences the environment in which we live today.
- The spectacular, yet accessible, wilderness, sublime landscapes, and the beauty of Lake Michigan at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore beckon to all who seek opportunities for exploration, discovery, recreation, and solitude that fulfill the human need for inspiration and renewal through connection to the land.
- The diversity of landscapes and structures at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, including the towering sand dunes with a “cap” of trees called by the region’s Anishinabek people “Misha Mokwa” (Great Bear), illustrates the rich American Indian, maritime, agricultural, and recreational history of the area and provides an opportunity to understand and appreciate the traditions, struggles, resourcefulness, and heroism of the people who have lived here using the abundant natural resources for food, shelter, clothing, and commerce.
- The diverse post-glacial landscapes protected by Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore support relatively intact, but fragile, native plant and animal communities that continue to be shaped by natural ecological processes, affording people the opportunity to understand, cherish, and help save the rapidly vanishing natural heritage of the Great Lakes shoreline.

# Description

Named after a complex of coastal sand dunes, the national lakeshore features white sand beaches, steep bluffs reaching as high as 450 feet above Lake Michigan, thick maple and beech forests, and clear inland lakes. The national lakeshore's most notable features—the ancient sand dunes—are products of wind, ice, and water action over thousands of years. During the Ice Age, continental glaciers spread southward from Canada, repeatedly burying the Upper Midwest under sheets of ice. These massive glaciers enlarged river valleys, carved out the Great Lakes basin, and left behind conditions promoting the formation of sand dunes. Over the years, prevailing winds blowing across Lake Michigan built beach dunes on low-lying shores and “perched” dunes on high glacial plateaus. Sculpted by the wind, the active dunes shift and advance over time, sometimes burying trees and creating “ghost forests” of stark, bleached trunks. The high, perched dunes afford spectacular views across Lake Michigan and of other glacially formed landscapes. The contrast between the open, sunny environment of the dunes and the adjacent lush beech-maple forests is striking.

Long before the area became a national lakeshore, American Indians, lumbermen, merchant sailors, and farmers visited or settled here. The Anishinaabeg are the original people of this area dating back thousands of years. French explorers, fur traders, and missionaries arrived in the mid-1600s. Not long thereafter, other groups settled in the area, and shipping on the Great Lakes increased, along with the region's population and commerce. Vast forests were cleared in the 1880s to supply lumber for construction and fuel for ships that sailed the Great Lakes. In the 1920s, lumbering subsided as the supply of hardwood dwindled. Subsistence homesteads evolved, followed by cash-crop farms and orchards. Visitors to the area found that its pleasant climate and stunning scenery made for a great place to spend leisure time.

Today, a lighthouse and US Life-Saving Service stations, coastal villages, and picturesque farmsteads reflect the national lakeshore's rich maritime, agricultural, and recreational history.

The region surrounding the national lakeshore is a popular vacation and summer home destination. In recent times the area has undergone considerable growth as homes and support services are built for expanding full-time and summer populations.

