

# Wilderness.net's Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness Fact Sheet



Credit:  
National Park Service

## Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness in 2014 and it now has a total of 32,556 acres. All of the wilderness is in Michigan and is managed by the National Park Service.

## Description

Sleeping Bear Dunes is as old as continental ice sheets and as young as the 1970 Establishment Act that set aside the Lakeshore for preservation of the natural resources and for public use. With miles of Lake Michigan shoreline and numerous inland lakes and

streams, this Wilderness is wonderfully water oriented, however, the most prominent features, and those for which the Wilderness is named, are the perched dunes above Lake Michigan. These immense sand dunes are “perched” atop the already towering headlands that are glacial moraines. The dune overlooks at the Sleeping Bear, Empire and Pyramid Point bluffs are about 400 feet above Lake Michigan. Those who have a lot of energy can take a hike on the Dunes Trail to Lake Michigan. This is the most strenuous trail in the area. While only 3.5 miles round trip, it is all sand and you will find climbing the dunes all along the trail to be a challenge.

Although the Lakeshore is long and narrow, it still has the depth for excellent representations of several northern hardwood and conifer forest types, abandoned farm site meadows, wetlands, lakes, streams, and bogs and splendid examples of glacially caused landforms. Whether you are on the sandy bluffs overlooking Lake Michigan, in a canoe on one of the many inland lakes, hiking the myriad of trails through the forest, or visiting the Manitou Islands in Lake Michigan you will have a wonderful opportunity for bird watching, wildlife viewing, and for just enjoying nature at its best.

## Leave No Trace

How to follow the seven standard Leave No Trace principles differs in different parts of the country (desert vs. Rocky Mountains). Click on any of the principles listed below to learn more about how they apply in the Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness.

1. [Plan Ahead and Prepare](#)
2. [Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces](#)
3. [Dispose of Waste Properly](#)
4. [Leave What You Find](#)
5. [Minimize Campfire Impacts](#)
6. [Respect Wildlife](#)
7. [Be Considerate of Other Visitors](#)

For more information on Leave No Trace, [Visit the Leave No Trace, Inc. website.](#)

## Location

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is located in Northwestern Lower Michigan along the shores of Lake Michigan. The visitor center is in Empire, MI about 25 miles from Traverse City. Most people visit the park via car, but you can fly to Traverse City and rent a car to drive to the park. Take a look at the [directions](#) page for driving or flying information.

## Area Management

The Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness is part of the 110 million acre National Wilderness Preservation System. This System of lands provides clean air, water, and habitat critical for rare and endangered plants and animals. In wilderness, you can enjoy challenging recreational activities like hiking, backpacking, climbing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, horse packing, bird watching, stargazing, and extraordinary opportunities for solitude. You play an important role in helping to *"secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness"* as called for by the Congress of the United States through the Wilderness Act of 1964. Please follow the requirements outlined below and use Leave No Trace techniques when visiting the Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness to ensure protection of this unique area.

Unless otherwise specified, no motorized equipment or mechanical transport, with the exception of wheelchairs, is allowed. This is generally true for all federal lands managed as designated wilderness.

## Contacts

**Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore**  
9922 Front Street  
Empire, MI 49630

Phone: 231-326-4700

## Links on Wilderness.net

### [National, Regional and Local Wilderness Organizations \(NGOs\)](#)

A listing of societies, organizations, coalitions and other wilderness-related advocacy and stewardship groups.

### [Career and Volunteer Opportunities](#)

A listing of sites providing information about wilderness- and environmentally-related career and volunteer opportunities.

## Applicable Wilderness Law(s)

Law	Date	Acreage Change (in acres)
Public Law 113-87	March 13, 2014	32,557

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Conservation and Recreation Act - Public law 113-87 (3/13/2014) To designate as wilderness certain land and inland water within the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in the State of Michigan, and for other purposes.

 [download 113-87](#)

## **General Trip Planning Information**

Those who have a lot of energy can take a hike on the Dunes Trail to Lake Michigan. This is the most strenuous trail in the park. While only 3.5 miles round trip, this may take as long as 3-4 hours as it is all sand and you will find climbing the dunes all along the trail to be a challenge. This is especially true on hot, sunny days. Be sure to wear sturdy shoes and take lots of water. Hiking through the dunes can be disorienting, so be sure to keep children within sight and if hiking with a group, and agree on a destination before leaving.