

Visitor Services Project
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
Report Summary

- This report describes the results of a visitor study at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (NL) during July 12-21, 2009. A total of 1,158 questionnaires were distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 696 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 60.1% response rate.
 - This report profiles a systematic random sample of Sleeping Bear Dunes NL visitors. Most results are presented in graphs and frequency tables. Summaries of visitor comments are included in the report and complete comments are included in the Visitor Comments Appendix.
 - Thirty percent of visitor groups were in groups of two and 21% were in groups of four. Sixty-eight percent of visitor groups were in family groups.
 - United States visitors comprised 98% of total visitation during the survey period, with 57% from Michigan, 10% from Illinois, and smaller proportions from 37 other states and Washington, D.C. International visitors were from 12 countries and comprised 2% of total visitation.
 - Forty-seven percent of visitors were visiting the park for the first time in their lifetime and 25% had visited six or more times. Seventy-eight percent of visitor groups visited the park once during the past year and 5% had visited five or more times.
 - Forty-two percent of visitors were ages 36-60 years, 25% were ages 15 years or younger, and 9% were 66 years or old.
 - Eight percent of visitor groups reported physical conditions that made it difficult to access or participate in park activities or services.
 - Prior to this visit, 82% of visitor groups were aware that Sleeping Bear Dunes NL is a unit of the National Park System.
 - Most visitor groups (94%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Prior to this visit, visitor groups most often obtained information about Sleeping Bear Dunes NL through previous visits (66%) and friends, relatives, or word of mouth (48%). Most visitor groups (92%) received the information they needed. Sixty-eight percent indicated they would prefer to obtain information for a future visit from the park website.
 - For 56% of visitor groups, visiting Sleeping Bear Dunes NL was the primary reason for visiting the area.
 - Sixty-five percent of visitor groups stayed overnight within one hour of the park; of these, 25% spent two nights in the park and 33% spent five or more nights in the area outside the park. Of the visitors who stayed overnight inside the park, 55% tent camped in developed campgrounds, while of those staying outside the park, 66% stayed in a lodge, motel, cabin, vacation rental, bed & breakfast, etc.
 - Of visitor groups that spent less than 24 hours visiting the park, 29% spent three to four hours. For those who visited for more than one day, 55% spent two to three days. The average length of stay was 39.5 hours, or 1.6 days.
 - The most common site visited by visitor groups was the Dune Climb (61%), followed by the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive (56%) and the beaches (42%).
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- The most common visitor activities were walking, hiking, dune climbing (83%), and general sightseeing (78%). The most important activities were walking, hiking, dune climbing (34%) and general sightseeing (22%).
- Fourteen percent of visitor groups attended a ranger-led talk or program. Of those who did not attend a ranger-led program, 51% indicated that a lack of time prevented them from doing so.
- The visitor services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were the park brochure/map (83%) and the restrooms (82%). Nearly all visitor services and facilities were rated as above average in their importance and quality.
- The resources/attributes most commonly rated “very important” or “important” were clean water (96%) and clean air (95%).
- The average group expenditure in the park and the surrounding area (within a one-hour drive) was \$702, with a median (50% spent more and 50% spent less) of \$300. The average total expenditure per person was \$199. Sixty percent of visitor groups had two adults covered by expenditures and 39% had no children covered by expenditures.
- Fifty-two percent of visitor groups were aware that the park operates year round. Ninety-nine percent of visitor groups visited the park in summer. Sixty-two percent of visitor groups would consider visiting the park in a season other than summer, and of those, 91% would consider visiting in the fall.
- Most visitor groups (95%) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at Sleeping Bear Dunes NL as “very good” or “good.” Less than 1% of visitor groups rated the overall quality as “very poor” or “poor.”

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho at (208) 885-7863 or the following website <http://www.psu.uidaho.edu>.

