United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
9922 Front St. (Hwy M-72)
Empire, Michigan 49630-9797

IN REPLY REFER TO:

November 15, 2006

L76(SLBE)

Dear Friends:

The National Park Service (NPS) has begun the process of planning for improvements to the Lake Michigan Overlooks 9 and 10 on the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive is a 7.4 mile self-guided auto tour that provides visitors insight into the history of the area, a sample of vegetative communities, and overlooks of Glen Lake, the Sleeping Bear Dunes, and Lake Michigan. This highly-visited site attracts over 200,000 people each year. These overlooks are situated in an area that allows visitor to view the fragile dune environment, Lake Michigan, and the Manitou Islands.

The perched dune bluff at this location is roughly 450 feet above Lake Michigan. The path from the parking area to the overlooks takes visitors directly across the top of the bluff face, and despite signs discouraging visitors from descending toward Lake Michigan, many do so. Many of these visitors are injured either during the descent, due to missteps or falls, or during the ascent, from heat injuries or exhaustion. The intense foot traffic in this location has caused considerable erosion of the dune face. Finally, maintaining the current configuration of the path and overlooks is becoming prohibitively difficult and expensive because of the blowing and shifting sand.

The NPS will be preparing an environmental assessment (EA) that will identify and evaluate a range of alternatives for improvements to these overlooks. The goal is to implement a sustainable method of providing visitors with safer access to these spectacular vistas, while also reducing maintenance costs and impacts to the dunes. We would like your ideas on how to best provide this important visitor opportunity and yet still preserve the natural resources of the area. We also need your input on what impacts and issues we should to consider as we plan how to achieve these goals. We request that you provide your comments to us by **December 31, 2006**. The comments you submit during this "scoping" phase of planning will be incorporated into the range of alternatives and impact analyses in the EA. The EA will be made available for further public review and comment, scheduled for release in summer 2007, when we will again solicit your input. Comments may be mailed to the National Lakeshore at the above address or electronically through a link on the park's website (www.nps.gov/slbe).

Sincerely,

Dusty Shultz

Dusty Shultz
Superintendent