

A Visit to the Dunes

Planning Your Visit

The best way to learn about the features of a dune ecosystem is by a visit or field trip. The eastern shore of Lake Ontario has about 16.5 miles (26.4 kilometers) of dunes. The four major dune systems are referred to as the Black Pond, Lakeview - Sandy Creek, North and South Sandy Pond and Deer Creek resource areas. These unique resources are either held by private landowners and conservation organizations, or are part of state owned and managed properties.

The first step in planning your visit is to select an appropriate area to visit. For example, Southwick Beach State park and the Lakeview Wildlife Management Area in southern Jefferson County maintain a dune trail. The Dune Trail Interpretive Guide is included in "Our Lake Ontario Sand Dunes: A Resource Notebook." This trail guide is also available at the park office. It provides a trail map and specific information on the ecology, plants, animals and use of this area.

Because dune ecosystems are fragile and in constant change, it is important to consider the impact your visit may have. The visit should not cause damage to the dunes, vegetation or wildlife. Some areas have been posted or closed to protect the dunes, plants, and wildlife. Existing regulations and management plans or policies need to be followed. You should also consider what are appropriate activities when visiting a dune area.

For example:

- You must stay on the trails where they exist and not climb on the dunes.
- You should avoid trampling dune plants.
- As a rule, collection of natural items is not allowed.
- Make sketches, take pictures, slides, or videos of your visit.
- Your visit should also be limited to the times of year when sensitive natural activities such as nesting are not occurring. Also, you should be aware that there are endangered, threatened, and rare plant and animal species in this area.

Your visit will also be enhanced by learning more about the rare plants and animals found in the dunes along the eastern shore of Lake Ontario. Further information about the dunes can be found at the Snow Memorial Library in Pulaski. The Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Coalition has established a dune resource collection there. The collection includes books, articles, and newspaper clippings about the dunes. When you visit the library, ask to see the "Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands Reference Library."



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Organizing and Previewing a Guided Walk

If you will be leading a walk for your family, organization, club or class, it is advisable to take a practice walk before the planned visit. During your preview walk, take pictures (slides or video) to show to others before the guided walk. It is also helpful to make notes using a tape recorder during your preview walk to supplement any written materials you have. You may need to visit the area more than once before the planned walk to become familiar with the features of the area. You should learn to recognize poison ivy. It is commonly found growing near or in dune areas.

Before your visit, make a list of things to look for during your walk. Be sure to include plants, animals, features of the dune ecosystem, evidence of people (positive and negative impacts), erosion, storm damage, etc.

There are other activities that you can do after or instead of a walk. You or your group can participate in a conservation project in your area or in the Sand Dune Appreciation Day activities held each summer. Sand Dune Appreciation Day usually includes a guided walk or canoe trip. Your group could also plan its own canoe trip or invite a speaker to your class or meeting. There are several federal, state, county, and local agencies as well as conservation organizations that can provide you with information.



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