

INDIANA DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE – During a storm in October of 2014, huge waves washed away between 75 and 115 feet of beach and dune at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore’s Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk. On May 14th, park staff placed fencing along the remaining dunes at the site to help stabilize them and reduce the impact of future storms on that part of the lakeshore. Visitors and park neighbors are asked to help by staying out of the fenced areas so native vegetation has a chance to regrow and stabilize the dunes.

Portions of the national lakeshore, including Portage Lakefront, are particularly vulnerable to erosion from storm waves because their beaches have become narrower due to “sand-starvation.” This situation is caused by nearby harbor structures that prevent the normal cycle of sand deposition onto the beach. The national lakeshore’s Shoreline Restoration and Management Plan calls for 74,000 cubic yards of sand to be placed on the Portage Lakefront beach each year to replace what is being intercepted by the harbor structure.

With no immediate funding available for placing sand on the beach, stabilizing the dunes becomes even more critical to protecting the shoreline at Portage Lakefront. Dune grass, and other vegetation, is necessary to stabilize dunes. The new fencing is designed to keep visitors from leaving the beach and designated walkways and trampling the dune’s vegetation. More than 135,000 people visited Portage Lakefront in 2014 and damage to dune vegetation is evident. This spring, park staff counted 38 illegal trails where dune vegetation had been killed by people trampling it along a stretch of beach that is only 2/10th of a mile long. If this damage is not stabilized with dune grass, a blow-out is likely to occur placing the stability of the surrounding area at risk, including the Portage Lakefront’s pavilion and nearby private property in the Town of Ogden Dunes.

In addition to protecting property, stabilizing this area will also help protect the area’s natural resources. Despite being just over 100 acres, Portage Lakefront is home to thirty species of rare plants, including one, the Pitcher’s thistle, that is on the Federal Endangered Species List.

The National Park Service and the City of Portage, who manages the site, are working together to provide access while protecting Portage Lakefront. National lakeshore staff will be investigating the possibility designating a trail from Ogden Dunes into the Portage Lakefront area. Until a new trail is designated, access to Portage Lakefront must be made using existing designated trails and roads. Anyone caught in closed areas is subject to ticket or arrest. All visitors are urged to do their part in helping to protect these important, but very fragile dunes.

For more information about Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, contact the park’s information desk at 219-395-1882 or check out the webpage at www.nps.gov/indu.