

THE SAND DUNE REGION AS A NATIONAL PARK.

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The almost unanimous popular approval given the project to make a National Park in the Sand Dune region of Northern Indiana has far exceeded the hopes of the most enthusiastic originators of the idea. Letters have been received from people who live several hundred miles from the Dune region asking what they can do to help to preserve the Dunes as a National playground and park.

Senator Taggart introduced a resolution in the Senate in which the Secretary of the Interior was asked to investigate and to report to Congress at its next session the desirability of establishing a National Park in the Dune region. The Secretary appointed Mr. Stephen T. Mather who has the National Parks of the United States under his supervision, to conduct a hearing in Chicago and to investigate by a personal study the Dune area.

The hearing was conducted October 30, 1916, in the Federal Building in Chicago. There was not a dissenting voice from the twenty-five or more men and women who spoke. Artists, scientists, financiers, representatives of womens clubs, landowners, all were of one accord. They believed that the Dune area should be saved and that it can best be done by the National government.

Blatchley in the 22nd Annual Report of the State Geologist says in his description of the Dunes:

"The dunes constitute the most striking and characteristic feature of the shore line. They are great sand ridges, sometimes continuous for a mile or more, but more often broken or cut by 'blow-outs' into isolated rounded hills. The highest of these hills in Porter County is Mt. Tom, in section 12 (37 north, 6 west), northwest of o'd City West. Its crest is 190 feet above Lake Michigan.

Northeast of Miller's, Lake County, are a number reaching a height of 150 feet above the lake. In some places, notably about Dune Park, Porter County, the ridges are for long distances wholly destitute of vegetation. Their bared surface, 50 to 100 feet in height, with the sand piled just as steeply as it will lie, gleams and glistens in the sunlight and reflects the summer's heat with unwonted force. Other ridges and rounded hills, especially those back some distance from the lake, are often covered with black oak, northern scrub pine (*Pinus banksiana* Lamert), stunted white pine (*Pinus strobus* L.), and many shrubs and herbs peculiar to a soil of sand. The roots of this vegetation form a network about the sand grains and prevent the leveling of the dunes. In time, however, a tree is uprooted, or a forest fire burns off the vegetation. The protecting network of rootlets is destroyed. A bare spot results over which the winds freely play. A great storm from the

north or northwest scoops out a small bowl-shaped cavity, and carrying the sand either south or southeastward, drops it over the hillside. The cavity is cut deeper and wider by succeeding storms, and a great 'blow-out' in time results. Where a few years before stood a high hill or unbroken ridge now exists a valley, or a cavity in the hillside, acres, perhaps, in extent, and reaching nearly to the level of the lake. The sands which once were there now constitute new hills or ridges which have traveled, as it were, a greater distance inland. In many places the drifting sands have wholly or partly covered a tall pine or oak tree. Where but partly covered, its dead (sometimes living) top projects for a few feet above the crest of hill or ridge. One may rest in its shade and not realize that he is sheltered by the upper limbs of a large tree whose trunk and main branches lie far beneath him embedded in the sands."

There are about thirty-three miles of shore-line in Lake and Porter Counties; of this there are about twenty miles between Gary and Michigan City unoccupied. The dunes district varies from three-fourths of a mile to a mile or a little more in width. It represents the present beach merged into the Tolleston beach of Lake Chicago.

People who have seen dunes in many parts of the earth say that the Dunes of Indiana are unique in many respects and differ from all others in the relation they bear to the adjoining regions. They are located in an area of sufficient rainfall for all kinds of farming of their latitude, and they are located on the shore of one of the largest bodies of fresh water on the earth.

The chance to study one phase of geology is here unsurpassed, and the botanist finds almost a paradise in the study of rare plant types. "The tamarack swamps are worth going miles to see." The flora is considered most diversified in the country. The students of bird life have an opportunity to see bird residents and bird visitors perhaps not equalled in any area of like size in the United States.

The Dunes region is within reach of several millions of people at the present time, and in a generation hence the population about Lake Michigan will undoubtedly be more than doubled. All of the large national parks are in the west and it is impossible for most people to go to them. The Dunes can be reached in a few hours ride at the longest by great numbers who would thoroughly enjoy them and be benefitted by an outing in such a place. There is something here for everyone. The hills, the valleys, the steep slopes of sand and their difficult climbs, the various kinds of vegetation, the outlook over Lake Michigan and the lands to the south, furnish enjoyment to every visitor to the region. The air here is the purest, the chance to get from every care is the best. No noise, nothing to disturb or prevent a day of keenest pleasure. He would have a dull intellect indeed who would not enjoy a day's outing in the Dunes.

The historical associations connected with the southern shore of Lake Michigan are many and belong to the early history of Michigan, Indiana,

and Illinois. It was along the Lake Michigan beach that all of the overland communication occurred between Fort Dearborn and Detroit in the early part of the last century.

It would be a national calamity, "a calamity against nature" if the Dunes are not saved. "There is no other spot with anything like the artistic, scientific, historical and sociological characters and advantages so near a great center of population." The government of the United States should provide this playground for the millions of boys and girls of the present and of the centuries to come.

What is to be done must be done soon because the lands are rapidly becoming more valuable and if not obtained by the government will be given over to manufacturing purposes.

Let us hope that our Congress will rise to the occasion and give to central United States this great area which is known to the scientists of the whole world as the most unique of its kind, as a National Park. And further may we ask that the Park be named for our Hoosier poet, The Riley National Park of America.