The Natural History of the Bow Lakes-
Wetlands, glacial valley, ice block kettle and Miller Hill portion
of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

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SUMMARY

The areas assessed during our site visit in October were generally of high quality and many of the land features observed do not currently exist in public lands in the region. This is particularly true of the wetlands, the hardwood forest, and the ice block kettle. Furthermore, the sites are rich in interpretative subjects, particularly the wetland areas. An interpretative program centered on the wetland habitats would be unique to the region. Finally, the scenic panorama from Miller Hill is magnificent.

INTRODUCTION

The areas visited in early October were evaluated for their uniqueness, quality, and interpretative value. In addition, I considered whether similar sites might be located in other public lands located nearby. The purpose of this report is to present my findings and evaluation of the sites within the Bow Lakes region of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

SITE INTERPRETATION

Miller Hill. The view from Miller Hill of Glen Lake, the dunes and the surrounding area in general is magnificent. From Miller Hill, park visitors could enjoy a fine perspective of the picturesque setting of Glen Lake and the surrounding forest. Furthermore, the location of Miller Hill provides an opportunity for certain interpretative points suitable only for panoramas such as the one from Miller Hill. Geology, land-forms and some explanation of watershed dynamics could be nicely illustrated from this vantage point.

In addition to these interpretative points, Miller Hill provides an opportunity to convey a somewhat more subtle concept; that is the idea of man's interaction with nature. Miller Hill overlook would be a fine location to convey the idea that man must learn to blend with the natural setting rather than overcome it.

Wetlands and Ponds. This region has an excellent range of wetland and pond types and the quality of the sites on the whole is very good. Moreover, the interpretative value of the aquatic sites is exceptional. Any interpretative program established at these sites would be one of the few opportunities in Michigan where the public could be educated about wetland ecology. An interpretative program on bog ecology at the Waterloo Recreational Area in Washtenaw Co. would be the nearest similar interpretative program.

The sites examined during our visit represented a broad range of fresh-water and wetland habitats. The bog with its moat and center island of sphagnum moss, ericaceous shrubs and insectivorous sun dews is a fine area for a bog ecology program. The quality of the site is good with little disturbance around and within the wetland.

Equally, interesting is the calcareous fen which blends into two marl ponds. The vegetation in the fen is striking by way of contrast with the surrounding forest as well as the bog. This provides another aspect of a wetland interpretative program both for subjects particular to the calcareous fen as well as points that could be raised in contrast to the bog. There is an opportunity here to inform the public on a fascinating aspect of wetland ecology, that is the role of water chemistry on vegetation composition in wetlands. I know of no such interpretative programs in the northern temperate region

Glacial Valley and Kettle Hole. The glacial valley evaluated during the site visit was of high quality with a mature hardwood forest throughout its length. The spring flora in this valley is most likely excellent. The kettle hole was an exceptional site. Kettle holes are common in the area, but none are as clearly defined and large as the site visited by our team. An interpretative program at the site would enlighten the public and provide insights into glacial geology.