

Experience the Nordhouse Dunes

Exploring the Dunes



In the wilderness are 10 miles of trail that take you through hemlock and hardwoods. Dense forests cover rolling hills and give way to open stretches of sandy beach and towering dunes carved by wind, water and time. Lake Michigan's blue-green waters lap gently at the shore during the summer and violently reshape the dunes each winter. Small evergreens and flowering plants sprout from the sand where the wind is calm, their roots holding the sand in place. Here, rain, high water and snowmelt collect in pools of wetlands, providing an oasis for the dune's many residents. Many plants and animals from north and south exist here in a diverse habitat found nowhere else on earth.

The 3-mile walk along the shoreline to Ludington State Park may offer a glimpse of a shipwreck in the lake. Visitors may find a Petoskey stone, fossilized six-sided coral, lying on the shore.

Camping in the Dunes

Camping is permitted throughout the wilderness with a few restrictions. To protect the fragile environment and to maintain solitude and wilderness character, campsites must be more than 100 feet from trails, 200 feet from Nordhouse Lake and 400 feet from Lake Michigan. Developed camping is available at the nearby Lake Michigan Recreation Area. Group size in the wilderness is limited to 10 or fewer.

Fire Safety

- ◇ Minimize Campfire Impacts. Use camp stoves and keep fires small.
- ◇ Never leave a campfire unattended.
- ◇ Campfires are prohibited on the beach.
- ◇ Do not burn driftwood.
- ◇ Be sure that fires are cold to the touch before leaving.



Wildlife in the Dunes

This wilderness is a birdwatcher's paradise, with bald eagles soaring overhead, and songbirds and waterfowl flocking to the area. Many mammals occupy the Nordhouse Dunes, including raccoon, coyote, beaver, fox, white-tailed deer and black bear. A small lake provides habitat for amphibians. These residents adapt for survival in this harsh environment, with intense sun, little water or nutrients, and unstable terrain.



Piping Plover

Two species found in this wilderness are iconic to this area, and are found only in the coastal dune ecosystem of Michigan. The piping plover, a small shorebird, nests in cobbled, sandy beaches. It is federally endangered due to habitat loss and human disturbance. Pitcher's thistle, a federally threatened plant, takes five or more years to reproduce, requires mostly open areas to grow, and is easily outcompeted by non-native invasive plants.

History of the Dunes

The Nordhouse Dunes Wilderness Area encompasses 3,450 acres of National Forest System lands designated by Congress in 1987.

As recently as 16,000 years ago, glaciers covered the shoreline along what is now Lake Michigan. When the glaciers melted, they left behind a mess of boulders, sand, clay, gravel and other materials. Over time the rocks and boulders were eroded, leaving behind sand.

The sand was moved around by wind, creating small mounds, called hummocks. As the wind pushed more sand around, the mounds grew until dunes were formed. The dunes along the Lake Michigan shoreline are the largest collection of freshwater dunes in the world.

Lake Nipissing, one of the early stages of what is now Lake Michigan, was 25 to 30 feet higher than Lake Michigan. When the water level dropped, it left behind several remnants of ancient bays that are now coastal lakes, including nearby Hamlin Lake.

The Nordhouse Dunes are part of the Ludington Dune ecosystem, a series of U-shaped, or parabolic, depressions in a sand dune created when wind destabilizes the dune. The Ludington Dune Ecosystem also includes Lake Michigan Recreation Area and Ludington State Park.

Contact Information

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Fees

Recreation fees are required at most day-use sites and campgrounds. Check bulletin boards for fees and information.

You do not need a permit or reservation to visit the wilderness. Reservations for Lake Michigan Recreation Area can be made through www.recreation.gov or by calling 1-877-444-6777 (International 518-885-3639, TDD 1-877-833-6777)

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United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Nordhouse Dunes Wilderness Area



Dunes



Wilderness Trail



Nordhouse Lake

Huron-Manistee National Forests

Nordhouse Dunes Wilderness Area

This is a small wilderness with something for everyone, and the continued existence of this area depends on protecting and preserving the area’s unique resources, geologic features, and wildlife. To help protect the dunes visitors are asked to follow Leave No Trace (Int.org) principles.

What You Can Do To Help:

- ◆ **Plan Ahead and Prepare.** To ensure solitude for your group and others, and to minimize impact on the resource, travel in small groups. Group size is limited to 10 people. Bring a map, compass and GPS. Bring a water filter.

◆ **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces.** Stay on established trails. Camp at established campsites; keep camps small. Camp at least 400 feet from Lake Michigan and 200 feet from Nordhouse Lake and nearby streams.
- ◆ **Dispose of Waste Properly.** Pack It In; Pack It Out. Don’t leave trash or food. To protect water sources, use biodegradable soap and don’t wash dishes or people near sources of water. Bury human waste 6 to 8 inches deep. Bring a trowel to dig a cat hole.

◆ **Leave What You Find.** Leave rocks, plants, driftwood and other natural objects as you find them. Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species. Do not build structures or furniture, or dig trenches.
- ◆ **Respect Wildlife.** Do not follow or approach wildlife. Observe from a distance. Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely. Keep pets on a leash or leave them at home.

◆ **Be Considerate of Other Visitors.** Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experiences. Let nature's sounds prevail; leave radios and stereos at home. Camp away from trails and other visitors.

Trailheads	Fee Area	Drinking Water	Restrooms	Picnic Tables	Picnic Shelter	Pedestal Grills	Fire Rings	Playground	Observation Deck	Swimming	Latitude	Longitude
Nurnberg Trailhead	●		●	●							44.087500	86.244444
Lake MI Rec Area - Day Use	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	44.120833	86.391111
Lake MI Rec Area - Beach Access	●	●	●	●						●	44.119167	86.427500

Nurnberg Trailhead - From Manistee

- ◆ Travel south on US-31 for 7 miles.
- ◆ Turn right and travel west on W. Forest Trail Rd. for 2.5 miles.
- ◆ Turn left and travel south on Quarterline Rd. for 1.5 miles.
- ◆ Turn right and travel west on Nurnberg Rd. for 6.5 miles.

Lake Michigan Recreation Area

- ◆ Travel south on US-31 for 7 miles.
- ◆ Turn right and travel west on W. Forest Trail Rd. for 8 miles.
- ◆ W. Forest Trail Rd. becomes FR 5629. Continue west on FR 5629.

WILDERNESS REGULATIONS

These regulations meet wilderness management objectives and will be enforced.

- Group size is limited to ten people or fewer.
- Campsites and fires must be more than 400 feet from Lake Michigan and 400 feet inside the wilderness boundary, 200 feet from Nordhouse Lake, and 100 feet from trails.
- Mechanical and motorized vehicles and equipment are not permitted; this includes drones and all wheeled devices. *Wheeled coolers, bikes, snowmobiles, wagons, and carts are prohibited.*
- Beach fires are prohibited. *Driftwood, dune-wood, pine knots, and shipwreck timbers must not be burned or removed from the wilderness.*
- Cutting trees or other vegetation live or standing dead is prohibited, use only dead and down wood for campfires.
- Possession of glass containers is prohibited.
- Pack out trash. *Do not burn trash.*
- Bury human waste six to eight inches deep.
- Use of *horses* or *other pack animals* is prohibited in the Nordhouse Dunes.
- Fireworks are illegal on National Forest System lands and in the wilderness.
- Pets *must* be on a leash.
- Public nudity is prohibited and illegal.

Nordhouse Trails

●

Trail Junction

Roads

Wilderness Boundary

Ludington State Park

Private Property

Intermittent Streams

P

Parking

⛺

Picnic Site

H

Observation Platform

▲

Developed Campground

GA

Developed Group Camping

00.250.51

Miles

Big Sauble Point Lighthouse
(2.1 miles from
Wilderness Boundary)

NORDHOUSE DUNES WILDERNESS AREA

The map illustrates the Nordhouse Dunes Wilderness Area, which is bordered by Lake Michigan to the north and Ludington State Park to the south. The wilderness boundary is marked with a green dashed line. Key features include:

- Trails:** Dashed black lines represent various trails, including the Arrowhead Trail, Lake Michigan Trail, Middle Trail, Nipissing Trail, Nordhouse Lake Trail, Algoma Ridge Trail, and West Forest Trail. Distances along the trails are indicated by numbers.
- Lakes:** Lake Michigan, Nordhouse Lake, and Hamlin Lake are shown in blue. Intermittent streams are depicted with light blue lines.
- Roads:** Solid black lines represent roads, including Nurnberg Rd, Green Rd, and Quarterline Rd. Road numbers 5248, 5705, 5704, 5706, 5707, 5708, 5356, and 5629 are marked.
- Landmarks:** The Big Sauble Point Lighthouse is located 2.1 miles from the wilderness boundary. The Nurnberg Trailhead and Lake Michigan Recreation Area are also marked.
- Legend:** The legend identifies symbols for Nordhouse Trails, Trail Junction, Roads, Wilderness Boundary, Ludington State Park, Private Property, Intermittent Streams, Parking, Picnic Site, Observation Platform, Developed Campground, and Developed Group Camping.
- Scale:** A scale bar at the bottom left indicates distances of 0, 0.25, 0.5, and 1 mile.