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**SHARING THE SHORE: HYBRIDITY AND DEVELOPING ENVIRONMENTALISMS  
IN THE INDIANA DUNES**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR MILLER  
PROFESSOR DYL**

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**Abstract**

This thesis centers on the Indiana Dunes National Park, located in Northwestern Indiana, and the implications of this hybrid landscape on modern American environmentalism. Through secondary source research, historical analysis, and interviews with Miller Beach residents and a park ranger, this research concludes that the Indiana Dunes demonstrate an environmentalism that exists outside of the nature-culture binary. By incorporating the park into existing cities and industrial developments, the Indiana Dunes can be seen as a model for an environmental justice-driven space that diverges from the historic elitism of the National Park service. This research concludes that, while hybrid landscapes come with their own challenges, the hybridity of the Indiana Dunes ultimately points to a bright future for the National Park Service, one that makes public green space accessible and that radically rethinks what it means to be a National Park.

*Key Terms: Hybridity, Indiana Dunes, National Park Service*

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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*The land that is now called the Indiana Dunes is the ancestral homeland of the Miami and Potawatomi peoples. In the 17th century, white settlers forced these communities to move off their lands, although many Miami and Potawatomi still reside in the area and continue to be stewards of the land. Among these communities are the Miami Nation of Indians of Indiana, the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi, and the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians (Toupal, 2006). I acknowledge that I am a guest on their land, and that this acknowledgement cannot serve to rectify the violent histories of settler colonialism and forced removal in what is now known as the United States.*

*Whose wasteland is whose garden; whose garden is whose wasteland?*  
—Barrie Jean Borich, *Apocalypse, Darling*, 2018

## **Introduction**

On October 3rd, 2020, I visited the Indiana Dunes National Park. I had only been once before, a few years earlier, and during that visit I didn't stray far from the parking lot. Then, it didn't strike me as anything notable. This second visit, however, was profoundly different.

My day began at the visitor's center, a wood-paneled space that, if not for the abundance of Dune-related memorabilia, could be found in Yellowstone or Yosemite instead. My roommates and I were greeted by a woman in a green vest who cheerily explained the geography of the park. Holding a map out in front of her, she moved a finger fluently over the dotted lines, noting the various trails we could walk during our visit. "I dare you to be disappointed," She repeated several times. "It won't happen." We thanked the woman and headed into the park.

We opted for the West Beach Trail Loop, a 1.4-mile hike through previously mined sands that terminates at the shore. The route consisted of 250 wooden stairs with boardwalks connecting the steps where the path flattens out. The few visitors in the distance were like ants rolling over steep hills. On either side of the path were looming trees, seeming anomalies, sprouting out of the beige sand.

When we finally descended onto West Beach, I was stunned. Not because of any exceptional beauty—although it was a nice beach—but because of the stark shift in tone. To my right were billowing smokestacks and clusters of steel mills. To my left was the skyline of Gary, Indiana, famed Steel City. Directly across from me were the skyscraping buildings of Chicago. A couple of seagulls wandered the shore, waiting for crumbs from the visitors that weren't there.



October 3, 2020. Indiana Dunes West Beach. Courtesy of author.

Maybe it was the gloomy sky that day, or the general vacancy due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the beach felt almost apocalyptic. It was as if multiple worlds—the urban, the natural, the industrial—had been haphazardly dropped down next to one another. I knew then that this was a unique place. Not only because of the natural beauty that I had seen on my hike, but because of this feeling that I was having at that moment. An unease. The understanding that the park was far more complicated than was let on by the green-vested woman at the visitor's center.

Later that fall I spoke about this visit with my grandfather. He grew up in Chicago and spent his childhood summers at a cabin in the Indiana Dunes. Though he was the youngest and assigned all the unpleasant maintenance tasks, he loved it there. They would play softball and poker; they would run into the clear lake water; they would seek refuge from the hot concrete Chicago summers. He recalled going back to the Dunes when he was my age, home from college, when steel mills were being erected. He sat on the shore with his cousin and reminisced

about their childhood there. He said he knew that things were changing then, and that the Dunes of his childhood would soon be gone.

Now, many mills that were built in my grandfather's youth are no longer active. Many still are. Along with the steel mills, a Port of Indiana was opened at Burns Harbor in 1970 (*Ports of Indiana*, 2021). The Dunes opened as a state park in 1926, became a National Lakeshore in 1966, and became a National Park in 2019. Today, the state and national parks together encompass 15,000 acres of duneland (*What We Do (U.S. National Park Service)*, 2020). Standing on West Beach, scanning the horizon, one might at first think the Indiana Dunes landscape to be fragmented, split into cities, industry, and what remains of the park.

Rutherford H. Platt describes the Indiana Dunes as a place of intersection. He calls these points of convergence "vortexes." Geographically, the Indiana Dunes sit at the center of the Midwest, and therefore of the country at large. Politically and culturally, the Dunes bring together Northern and Southern ideologies, which have manifested in tensions over political beliefs and priorities (Platt, 2014). Ecologically, even, the Dunes experience a mixing of climate zones, earning them the title "the birthplace of ecology" (Engel, 1983).

I argue, however, that the Dunes are more than just a point of intersection. These seemingly disparate elements have come together to make a new kind of landscape: a hybrid landscape. The hybridity of the Indiana Dunes is ultimately their legacy. There is no way to talk about the political movements to save the Dunes without talking about industrial motivation to destroy them. And there is no way to talk about the industrialization of the Dunes without talking about Chicago, Illinois, Gary, Indiana, and environmental justice in these urban centers. What, then, does the hybridity of this space reveal about modern American environmentalism and the future of parks in an urbanized and industrialized world? And why does this matter?

Ava Tomasula y Garcia classified the Indiana Dunes as a hybrid space in her article for *BELT Magazine* entitled “What Indiana Dunes National Park and the Border Wall Have in Common”:

Categorizing what is “natural” and what isn’t is hard to do at the Indiana Dunes. Rolling sand barely covers the sight of factories gulping air and emitting smoke. Milkweed and coneflowers bloom among the remnants of the Nike missile defense site, built during the Cold War to defend Chicago’s heavy industry from Soviet attacks. This hybrid landscape offers an opportunity to develop a holistic conceptualization of “the environment,” one that envisions a healthy future for everyone (and every place), rather than drawing nostalgic, hazardous boundaries between natural and unnatural.

Drawing on her classification, I will expand upon the notion of hybridity by grounding it in primary source research and exploring its implications on modern American environmentalism.

Through my research, I find that the hybrid landscape of the Indiana Dunes highlights an urban-industrial American environmentalism, one that becomes increasingly relevant by the day. In a rapidly urbanizing world, conservation can no longer focus on pristine parks and idyllic landscapes of the centuries prior; the Dunes, not Yosemite, illuminate the future shape of environmentalism. The hybridity of the Indiana Dunes shows that conservation is not binary, divided between natural and urban or industrial. It makes room for disparate priorities and distinct environmentalisms. While grassroots organizing to save the Dunes has historically been driven by suburban white women in pursuit of recreation, the hybrid model of the park shows an opportunity for conservation that is deeply tied to urban-industrial centers and to environmental justice efforts.

## **Methodology**

In Chapter 1, I will explain the relevant theory that contextualizes my research. This includes an exploration of hybridity in the context of environmental studies, an overview of the construction of wilderness by the National Park Service, and an explanation of how parks are managed and how histories of racism and classism affect their management today. In Chapter 2, I will provide an historical overview of the Indiana Dunes, exploring the themes of midwestern progressivism, common-pool resources, civic engagement, Gary, Indiana, distinct environmentalisms, and local and industrial conflicts. In these two chapters, I will draw on secondary sources to establish context for my primary source research.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I will draw on primary sources to examine the development of urban-industrial environmentalisms through the lens of hybridity at two distinct points in time. In Chapter 3, I will analyze Stephen T. Mather's Report on the Proposed Sand Dunes National Park Indiana from 1917 to better understand the earliest perspectives on an Indiana Dunes National Park. I will organize various perspectives on the Dunes into themes, shedding light on the many visions for what an Indiana Dunes National Park could look like. This analysis will reveal developing environmentalisms and inform the legacy of the park today.

In Chapter 4, I will look at the present day to develop an understanding of current perspectives on the park. I conducted interviews with five individuals: four residents of the Miller Beach community in Gary, Indiana and one park ranger at the Indiana Dunes National Park. To find research participants, I posted in the Miller Beach Facebook group. To connect with the park ranger, I contacted the Indiana Dunes National Park directly. The semi-structured interviews lasted around 30 minutes and took place over the phone.

## Chapter 1: Relevant Theories

### *Introduction*

The relevant discussions that contextualize my research are notions of hybridity, constructions of wilderness, and the historical and ongoing exclusion of people of color from natural spaces. These scholarly conversations highlight the complexities of the Indiana Dunes as a hybrid landscape, and the importance of inclusivity in park management. Examining the Dunes through the lens of hybridity allows for a rethinking of natural spaces, and the discussion of traditional wilderness thinking highlights the ways in which the Dunes have diverged from the historical mission of the National Park Service. Additionally, the discussion of racism and classism in park management provides valuable context for the need for accessible park spaces.

### *Hybridity*

The *Dictionary of Human Geography* defines hybridity as “a condition describing those things and processes that transgress or disconcert binary terms that draw distinctions between like and unlike categories of objects such as... culture/nature...” (Gregory et al., p. 361). The value of hybridity in environmental studies has been debated by scholars. American historian Richard White (1995) writes about the *organic machine*, a product of both nature and human construction. He uses the example of the Columbia River, highlighting how human intervention and natural processes have become inseparable and must be understood as one unit. No matter how much human intervention has taken place, the river will always be tied to larger organic structures. He claims that in order to accept altered landscapes, one must understand them as a whole, as a single entity that is both organic and mechanical (White, 1995).

On the other hand, environmental historian Paul Sutter argues in his essay “The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History” that the field of environmental history

has come to focus so much on hybridity as a concept that it risks ignoring the specifics of landscapes and the ways in which human expansion has indeed caused harm to the planet. If every landscape is hybrid, he questions, then what is just a landscape? He claims that humans have indeed changed landscapes in dramatic ways, and an overemphasis on hybridity masks some of these realities (Sutter, 2013).

His unique perspective challenges my argument that the Indiana Dunes are a hybrid landscape, and that the notion of hybridity is increasingly useful in an urban and industrial world. Therefore, while I find this framework useful in considering the role of urban-industrial parks in the modern world, it should be recognized that at some point, landscapes are simply landscapes. As parks become more and more integrated into spaces that are not understood as natural, relying too heavily on the notion of hybridity might reinforce a nature-culture binary that is unproductive in reimagining natural spaces as they become modified by human influence.

### *The Construction of Wilderness*

As a National Park, the Dunes are part of a long history of constructed wilderness on the part of the National Park Service. William Cronon (1995) argues for a reconsideration of the notion of wilderness. He draws upon the notion of the sublime landscape as a product of romanticism but claims that the more American ideology is that of the frontier. These two ideologies are embedded in the idea of American wilderness. He argues that in the process of gaining protection, wilderness came to be associated with sacred values, marked by the spiritual settings of the earliest American National Parks. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Cronon argues, the sublime wilderness had been domesticated as a result of increasing tourism, although it still carried spiritual connotations. Additionally, frontier expansion into the so-called

wilderness came to symbolize a democratic American ideal: “wild country became a place not just of religious redemption but of national renewal, the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American.” (p. 75). Cronon also highlights the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from what was considered uninhabited land, contributing to the illusion that National Parks were preserved in their pristine state. This myth of vacancy both contributed to and reflected the ideological separation of humans and nature. Ultimately, Cronon argues that the concept of wilderness is profoundly unnatural: “It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny” (p. 78). These ideologies of nature and wilderness reveal the values of the National Park Service in its early days, as Indigenous peoples were forced off their land for the preservation of constructed landscapes.

Roderick Nash (1970) argues that the notion of the national park represents American ideals, incorporating notions of wilderness into governed spaces. This concept, he claims, has been exported around the world. He cites three factors that contributed to the development of national parks. The first is the notion of wilderness; the second is a democratic ideology; the third is land; and the fourth is sufficient funds to preserve that land. Nash’s theoretical framework highlights the ways in which parks symbolized “control over nature” (727). These factors contributed to the eventual creation of national parks, which were steeped in notions of wilderness.

In his book *Imposing Wilderness*, Roderick P. Neumann (1998) details the “Anglo-America nature aesthetic” (p. 15). He traces the natural ideal back to eighteenth century England, explaining that pastoral landscape paintings “served as models for the British aristocracy to re-create the pastoral in their estate parks, now often represented as remnants of a distant English past and its origins in nature” (p. 16). He goes on to explain that nineteenth century English

romanticism was rooted in the middle-class ability to travel to “sublime” natural landscapes, which heavily influenced the development of early American aesthetics. Neumann argues that the development of national parks in the United States was a product of both pastoral and sublime ideals: “‘Framing’ nature in painting, whether pastoral or sublime, transformed it into picturesque scenery, where the observer is placed safely outside of the landscape” (p. 17).

In *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, Mark David Spence (1999) argues that the 19th century ideal of wilderness contributed to the view of nature as pure and uninhabited. The belief that natural land should be set aside contributed to the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their land: “The fact that Indians continued to hunt and light purposeful fires in such places seemed only to demonstrate a marked inability to appreciate natural beauty” (p. 14). Ultimately, Spence argues that the creation of national parks in the United States was rooted in a constructed view of wilderness that preceded natural preservation and forced Indigenous peoples onto reservations and into cities. However, indigenous practices on land that would be designated for national parks continued in many ways. Spence examines this history in Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Park, emphasizing that the accepted view of wilderness erased the history of Indigenous peoples as stewards of the land: These “romantic visions of primordial North America have contributed to a sort of widespread cultural myopia that allows late-twentieth-century Americans to ignore the fact that national parks enshrine recently dispossessed landscapes” (p. 16).

### *Managing Parks*

Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872 and was the first national park in the United States (Nash, 1970). In 1916, Woodrow Wilson signed into law the “Organic Act,” which

created the National Park Service (*What We Do (U.S. National Park Service)*, 2020). Today, there are 28 different designations for public lands. Among these designations are national monuments, national forests, and national seashores and lakeshores. All of these lands are considered national parks (*America's Public Lands Explained*, 2016). There are currently over 400 national parks and destinations, which are managed by the National Park Service. Within the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service operates with a budget of over 275 billion dollars (*What is the National Park Service*, 2014). The state park system consists of over 6,600 parks, providing for two and half times more visitors than the country's national parks. Rather than receiving federal funding like national parks and lakeshores, state parks receive about 41% of their funding through state governments (Walls, 2009).

While National Parks reap the benefits of federal protection, Scott Lehmann (1995) identifies these public lands as a source of tension. He explains that federal lands are either managed by specialized agencies such as the National Park Service or generally managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The governance of federal public lands takes place in the nation's capital, however, contributing to a disconnect between the people and land management statutes. Lehmann critiques the privatization of land and the accompanying philosophy that privatization leads to higher productivity of land (Lehmann, 1995).

Karl Jacoby elaborates on the management of public lands in his 2014 text, *Crimes Against Nature*. Jacoby argues that the conservation movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sparked conflict between rural communities and legislators. He argues that traditional practices in rural and Indigenous communities such as hunting and fishing were redefined and construed as crimes in the context of new laws: "Law and its antithesis—lawlessness—are therefore the twin axes around which the history of conservation revolves" (p.

2). Furthermore, the conservation movement was positioned as an appreciation of sublime nature by civilized city-dwellers. In this way, racism and classism became deeply imbued in the new legislative landscape.

Issues of race and class in nature have persisted in natural spaces. In *Black Faces, White Spaces*, Carolyn Finney (2014) explains how the dominant American environmental narrative is based upon whiteness and Western ideologies. According to Finney, “This narrative not only shapes the way the natural environment is represented, constructed, and perceived in our everyday lives, but informs our national identity as well” (p. 3). Finney cites numerous ways in which Black individuals have been excluded from mainstream environmentalism, including historical and modern-day hostility towards people of color in rural and natural areas. She emphasizes the importance of cultural and historical differences in the construction of an American environmental narrative: “Our efforts to engender respect and inspire active participation in the care and management of our forests and parks means embracing the cultural experiences and environmental values of all segments of American society” (p. 9).

Unequal access to natural spaces, as well as disproportionate exposure to environmental risk, poses a threat to wellbeing. In the 2000 National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public, 35% of white respondents had recently visited a park site, as compared to 14% of Black respondents (National Park Service, 2001). These data, while out of date, provide valuable context for the history of racial disparities in parks. They reveal unequal access to environmental wellbeing, highlighting the environmental injustice present in national parks and the need for more inclusive park spaces.

In an analysis of national, state, and regional studies, Floyd (1999) found that a higher percentage of white Americans visited national parks than Americans of color. He proposes four

theoretical perspectives to explain this disparity: the marginality hypothesis, the subcultural hypothesis, assimilation theory, and the discrimination hypothesis. The marginality hypothesis suggests that the disparities can be attributed to a difference in socioeconomic resources due to historical inequalities. The subcultural hypothesis proposes that different norms and value systems dictate inclinations for different leisure activities. Assimilation theory employs ethnocentric views to suggest that an increase in visitation among people of color is associated with assimilation to whiteness. Lastly, the discrimination hypothesis explains that perceived discrimination negatively impacts park visitation (Floyd, 1999). These perspectives on park management highlight a history of racism and classism on the part of the National Park Service, one which contextualizes the ongoing fight for equal access to environmental wellbeing.

### *Conclusion*

Discussions of hybridity, wilderness, and park management are valuable in considering the functioning of the Indiana Dunes as an inclusive space. As a national park, the Dunes must reckon with racist and classist histories that are deeply intertwined with American environmentalism. From an environmental justice perspective, the hybridity of the Indiana Dunes provides an opportunity for inclusivity and environmental wellbeing for nearby residents. Through my research, I will examine the ways in which the hybridity of the Indiana Dunes have historically supported accessibility, as well as the ways in which they have faltered and continue to do so. Through this discussion, I hope to highlight the potential for a bright future for the park, one that can serve to support environmental justice and park access for all people.

## Chapter 2: An Historical Overview of the Indiana Dunes

### *Introduction*

After the Civil War, development in and around Chicago expanded south, hugging the shore of Lake Michigan. The Calumet region of Indiana saw its dunes, marshes, and prairies traded in for industrial development (Engel, 1983). The first of these projects was the Standard Oil Company Refinery in 1889, and then the Inland Steel plant in 1901. This plant would become the largest in the nation. In 1906, the United States Steel company bought 9,000 acres of land along the shore, clearing the land for what would become Gary, Indiana (Engel, 1983 p. 4).



October 22, 1906. Open Hearth Furnace Installation. Courtesy of Indiana University U.S. Steel Gary Works Photograph Collection, 1906-1971.

Today, the Indiana Dunes are one of the top ten most biodiverse parks in the National Park System, housing nearly 1,200 native plant species. State and federally classified endangered wildlife also reside in the park's boundaries (Save the Dunes Conservation Fund). The melting of the Wisconsin glacier during the last ice age formed Lake Michigan, as well as beaches, dunes, and wetlands. The two older dune complexes in the park are characterized by oak forests,

whereas the two younger dune complexes are homes to various stages of plant succession (*Natural Features & Ecosystems*). The ecological diversity of the Indiana Dunes is what initially spurred calls for their protection.

However, when Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, proposed an Indiana Dunes National Park in 1916, the idea was not widely accepted. It took 50 years for the establishment of a National Lakeshore, and a little over 100 years to become a National Park (Gonzales, 2017; Hopkins, 2019). In 1983, J. Ronald Engel wrote of the Indiana Dunes State Park and National Lakeshore that “[b]oth are truly people’s parks” (Engel, 1983, p. 4). This history has been documented by many scholars, who focus on themes of urbanity, industry, politics, and activism. I argue that the complex history of the Indiana Dunes mirrors the complexities of the hybrid landscape and informs the identity of the park as an activist space.

### *Midwestern Progressivism*

The first recorded plan for conservation of the Indiana Dunes was written in 1903, when botanists at the University of Chicago proposed to purchase 1,150 acres of dunes, encompassing a wide array of biological specimens (Engel, 1983, p. 75). Botanist Henry Cowles conducted research in these dunes, popularizing their ecological diversity and eventually earning them the title “The Birthplace of Ecology” (Engel, 1983). Engel (1984) identifies the ecological ethic developed at the University of Chicago as one of the primary origins of the Dunes movement, one of the longest running environmental struggles in the country’s history. In addition, he draws connections between Indiana Dunes activism and distinct environmental qualities of place, which he roots in Midwestern Progressivism. Engel (1983) is a prominent scholar on this topic, and I will rely on him heavily to explain Midwestern Progressivism.

Midwestern Progressivism and grassroots efforts to protect the Indiana Dunes were inextricably linked to Chicago's settlement houses, early 20th century shared spaces that provided resources and social services to community members. According to Engel (1983), "If, as Plato said, the end of every story is inherent in its beginning, the Dunes movement may be justly considered a creature of the settlement houses" (Engel, 1983, p. 56). He writes of these spaces as democratic havens, committed to self-governance and self-creation. Settlement houses were places in which members of the privileged classes would reside in order to provide services and establish connections with immigrants and other city residents, contributing to a more widespread understanding of systemic injustices (Hansan, 2011). In 1908, a committee of the Chicago branch of settlement houses conceived of taking weekly walks around the Indiana Dunes. These events, which would come to be known as "Saturday Afternoon Walking Trips," gave social workers, community members, and others associated with the settlement houses space and time to be outside (Engel, 1983, p. 57). That same year, the Lake Shore and South Bend Electric Railroad, also known as the South Shore, was completed, connecting the South Side of Chicago with Michigan City, Indiana. The South Shore facilitated easy access to the Indiana Dunes from Chicago, creating stakeholders in Illinois for the protection of the Dunes (Engel, 1983, p. 62). The Henry Booth House even held annual summer camps in the Dunes and, in the 1910s, would hold early campaign meetings for a Dunes park (Engel, 1983, p. 57).

Settlement houses were also present in Indiana. Leaders of the Dunes movement in both states were associated with these settlement houses, including Stephen Mather, first director of the National Park Service and an affiliate of the Hull House in Chicago, Bess Sheehan, Dunes advocate and affiliate of the Campbell Friendship House in Gary, Indiana, and, in later years, Dorothy Buell, president of the Save the Dunes Council and affiliate of the Gary Neighborhood

House (Engel, 1983, p. 57). Maureen Flanagan (1990) argues that most historians of the Progressive Era neglect the role of women in politics. She claims that “[b]y ignoring women as political reformers, historians assume that women have little or no political history, at least until we can count their votes” (p. 1033). Individuals such as Bess Sheehan exemplify the political engagement of women during the Progressive Era, and the value of having women’s voices be heard.

Engel (1984) distinguishes the Midwestern Progressivism adopted by many settlement-house affiliates from the “economic conservationism” of the U.S. Forest Service and the “spiritual individualism” of the Sierra Club during the 20th century. The former prioritized the efficient use of natural resources, while the latter supported each individual's spiritual experience in nature. Engel argues that Midwestern progressivism, on the other hand, was steeped in “visions and themes of cooperative communal existence” (p. 8). However, Engel ignores the conflicts in this so-called “social democracy,” specifically the battle over locality. He fails to question whether the Chicago progressives had a right to dictate the development of the state of Indiana and the fates of those who lived near the Dunes.

Along the same lines as Engel, Platt makes a distinction between the environmentalism of the Midwestern Progressives and other popular environmental ethics. Whereas the dominant Thoreauvian ideology was that man and nature are separate, and must be kept that way, Dunes advocates sought an integration of the urban and the natural. This resisted white male environmentalism and placed emphasis on the industrial threats to urban wellbeing (Platt, 2014). However, both Engel and Platt ignore the reality that those pressing for the preservation of the Dunes were predominantly white and wealthy. While advocates envisioned an accessible park for the residents of the cities of Chicago and neighboring Gary, their approach to

environmentalism was inherently exclusionary.

### *Common-Pool Resource*

The Indiana Dunes have long been seen as a common-pool resource (Platt, 2014; Platt et al. 1994; Engel 1983). Platt (2014) supports Engel's argument that the Dunes movements were rooted in Midwestern Progressivism, also tracing these connections back to the development of the South Shore Railroad in 1908. He notes that what made the Dunes movement distinct from other environmental and conservation efforts of the early 20th century was that the Dunes were made to be an accessible place for all people. Platt (2014) explains that Chicago progressives sought to make the Dunes a resource for the entire community, even though the academics at the University of Chicago first identified them as worthy of protection for scientific research. The notion of a communal resource is supported by Engel as well. He writes that, when the Dunes were identified by Midwestern progressives, they were already serving as a "defacto public park--an 'everybody's land'" (p. 235).

Platt, Rowntree, and Muick (1994) also look at shifting perspectives on natural spaces. In their chapter of *The Ecological City: Preserving and Restoring Urban Biodiversity*, they claim that the 1980s brought changes in urban and rural life. They argue that the preservation of ecological sites can benefit the city dwellers, not only in terms of recreation, but also in appreciation for a different kind of world. Cities that previously depended on rural tracts of land for natural resources began to expand into these same landscapes. Those spaces left over, they claim, have become valued in a new and radical way, as urban dwellers see recreational and ecological benefits to undeveloped land. They call these the "urban commons." Their theoretical discussions of city-adjacent nature explore the different ways in which the Indiana Dunes have

been—and can be—valued by those living in nearby urban areas.

The above explorations of the Indiana Dunes as an historical common-pool resource highlight the value of the Indiana Dunes landscape to its neighbors. When efforts to protect the Dunes began in the 1910s, there was already large-scale public engagement. These efforts therefore emphasize the social accountability of communities to their shared resources and reveal how perceptions of collective ownership foster activism.

### *Civic Engagement*

The Indiana Dunes have inspired much civic organizing since the early 20th century (Engel 1983, 1984; Smith and Mark, 2009; Mullen, 2015; Platt, 2014). Grassroots movements to protect the Dunes from encroaching industry have a prominent place in the history of the landscape and the ultimate acquisition of the National Park designation. Activism took place both in Chicago, Illinois, and in Northwestern Indiana. Engel (1984) argues that the Indiana Dunes movement demonstrated a desire for social democracy. These communal ideas were what sparked passion for the Indiana Dunes, as they were seen as the domain of the public.

As a religious scholar, Engel (1983) adopts a spiritual perspective on this activism in his book *Sacred Sands*. He makes the argument that the many aspects of the Dunes movement, including the settlement houses, ecological preservation efforts, and artistic movements, exemplify a “religion of democracy.” From his point of view, the Dunes Movement grew out of a desire for a more democratic way of life, which persisted in the face of industrial and political pushback. These desires came from a place of spirituality, with the Dunes as the sacred center. Engel makes this spiritual connection by drawing parallels between the sand hills and the desert landscapes of many a “Promised Land” (Engel, 1983, p. 88).

Other scholars (Smith and Mark, 2009; Mullen, 2015; Platt, 2014) support this notion that the Dunes catalyzed social activism. Smith and Mark argue that the conservation efforts of people other than scientists supported the preservation of land in the United States. They discuss the role of Henry Cowles in educating students who would go on to form the Ecological Society of America in 1915, which sought to protect land through purchase later in its organizational history. Individuals connected to the Ecological Society of America also went on to establish the Ecologist Union in 1946, which engaged with democracy through lobbying efforts to preserve natural areas. These approaches to conservation inspired the creation of the Nature Conservancy in 1951, which is the largest environmental organization in the world today. Smith and Mark credit the advocates of the Dunes region, including members of the Save the Dunes Council, for the success of the Nature Conservancy (Smith & Mark, 2009).

Mullen (2015) argues that the Indiana Dunes were distinct from other coastal parks in that the support came from local organizations that put pressure on Congress, the Department of the Interior, and industry to protect the land. She claims that these coalitions succeeded despite failure in earlier decades because they had been cultivated during national seashore legislative efforts of the 1960s, which set the stage for these fights. According to Mullen, “[t]he successful passage of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore legislation shows how National Seashore creation became a national movement throughout the early 1960s, one that tapped into coalitions of the growing environmental movement” (p. 235). While the early signs of democracy written about by Engel (1983; 1984) were strong, Mullen does not see them as successful until later coalitions gained political traction in the mid-century.

Platt (2014) also writes about the 1960s as a political turning point for Dunes coalitions. However, he makes a distinction between "social upheaval" of other movements of the decade,

such as feminist, civil rights, and anti-war efforts, and the "polite revolution" of traditional conservation that existed among suburban white women (p. 126). He writes critically of these coalitions:

On the one hand, open space served as a respectable "sheep's cloak" to conceal the "wolf" of exclusionary zoning. Opening the suburbs to affordable housing, minorities, and the poor... was not their cup of tea. Automobile-centered, single-family suburbia worked just fine for them and their friends, except there was becoming too much of it. The real problem for them was not to dismantle the suburban growth engine but to manage it and direct it away from their "backyards." (p. 127)

Though he does not classify this environmental work as radical, Platt does note that the organizational techniques of many women-led coalitions in the 1960s diverged from traditional conservationism. Inspired by the work of the Save the Dunes Council in the decade prior, women engaged in public walks, wrote petitions, and utilized maps and photographs to inspire the protection of nearby tracts of land, rather than far off locales. While Platt acknowledges the effective techniques of coalitions led by wealthy suburban women, his critique of the polite revolution and its exclusionary tactics provides an important counterpoint to the utopian perspective of Engel.

### *Gary, Indiana*

Situated at the southwestern end of the park is the city of Gary, Indiana. S. Paul O'Hara writes about Gary, Indiana as a city cloaked in outsider narratives. These narratives are not actually representative of the city, he argues, but rather a mechanism for casting onto one place larger American anxieties about industrialism, racial tension, crime, and poverty. He writes that "Gary had long held the seemingly paradoxical potential to be whatever people wanted it to be," highlighting how public fears about desegregation contributed to a narrative of urban decay (O'Hara, 2011, p. 137). At its inception in 1906, Gary was developed as a company town,

attracting European immigrants to work long laborious hours in steel mills. Black Americans migrating North after the Civil War found work in these mills, filling vacancies in positions with low-wages and poor working conditions (Hurley, 1995).

According to O'Hara, Gary was "part model industrial city, part disposable mill town, and part industrial periphery at the edge of Chicago's urban reach" (O'Hara, 2011, p. 137). Outsiders consistently pointed to the city as a flawed model, with Woodrow Wilson even campaigning against the city due to what he perceived to be "an un-American site of unchecked power" in 1912 (O'Hara, 2011, p. 137). This theme of Americanism repeats in O'Hara's exploration of the city. Gary was seen as a warning to the country: a place where American vices such as corruption, violence, and sexuality were left unattended. These realities amplified the already existing racial tension in the country: "If the national question was one of race, then Gary sat at the center of that discussion" (O'Hara, 2011, p. 142).

However, these narratives were not accepted by all. O'Hara explains that many saw Gary as an opportunity for Black political power to flourish. In 1972, the National Black Political Convention convened in Gary, bringing together activists from across the country to discuss civil rights and Black politics. Gary was also home to one of the country's first Black mayors, Richard Hatcher. However, the election of Mayor Hatcher contributed to massive white flight from the community, leaving Black residents to be charged with the alleged decay of the city amid harsh industrialization (O'Hara, 2011, p. 143). This blame and fear contributed to negative perceptions of Gary around the country.

Those who historically bore the brunt of the city's pollution were its residents, predominantly members of the Black community and the working class. However, these heavily polluting industrial sites were also providing employment for Gary residents. Scholar and

historian Andrew Hurley's book explores environmental inequality in Gary in the twentieth century through the lens of race and class. He discusses pollution as an agent of reorganization that worsened these inequalities, arguing that the mainstream environmental movements of the era served to create new environmental problems and injustices. He details the environmental activism of working-class people and African Americans in the city, and how these efforts often came into conflict with industrial efforts. Hurley concludes his text with a quote from C.S. Lewis: "What we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument." (Hurley, 1995, p. 182). Through this lens, Hurley reveals the environmental inequalities perpetrated by industrial powers over Gary residents and contextualizes the fight for an accessible public park.

### *Distinct Environmentalisms*

Grassroots movements in the 1950s such as the Save the Dunes council were predominantly led by middle class suburban women. This distinct form of environmentalism is described by Hurley (1995) as middle-class environmentalism in which women, seen as stewards of the domestic sphere, campaigned for recreational space for their families. In her dissertation, Mullen discusses these coalitions of women, highlighting the work of Bess Sheehan in the Progressive Era and Dorothy Buell, founder of the Save the Dunes Council, in the 1950s. Mullen notes that citizens fighting to protect the Dunes were often suburban white women living in wealthy neighborhoods near Lake Michigan (Mullen, 2015).

The League of Women Voters was one active organization in the 1950s. In 1952, Dorothy Buell organized a group of women dedicated to the formation of an Indiana Dunes park. They wrote letters advocating for the park and engaged in private fundraising. Beginning in the

1950s, this middle-class environmentalism established networks of volunteers and made connections with men in the legislature that could support their efforts. In this case, senator Paul Douglas from Illinois gave a voice to these coalitions in Congress. He brought the first National Lakeshore bill to the Senate in 1958, but politicians in Indiana were still partial to a port. However, this bill brought national attention to the Save the Dunes Council and supported their future work (Mullen, 2015).

Mullen argues that successful efforts to protect the Dunes often centered around the values of recreation and leisure, signaling that the coalitions prioritized the desires of upper middle-class women with the means to take weekend trips with their families. While community activism in the mid-century highlighted the voices of women in a unique way, this particular kind of environmentalism alienated those without time or money to participate in outdoor leisure (Mullen, 2015).

Andrew Hurley also draws attention to working-class environmentalism and African American environmentalism in Gary. According to Hurley, working-class environmentalism was made up of mostly European immigrants who chose to protect their wages within unions rather than pushing back against industry. African American environmentalism, on the other hand, recognized racism as the leading cause of environmental and health inequality and mostly approached the issue systemically, looking at poor labor standards as the most imminent threat of public health and safety (Hurley, 1995). Mullen notes that suburban women were able to address issues of air pollution through the issue of parkland, which was a less controversial topic than work-related hazards (Mullen, 2015).

The distinctions between different forms of environmentalism highlight how the Dunes movement came to be dominated by middle-class white women whose interests diverged in ways

from the views of the working class and Black populations. Hurley's book sheds light on the nuances of midwestern environmentalism and the competing interests beyond industry versus people, as well as the ways in which middle class environmentalism neglected the ecological inequities affecting working-class and Black residents of Gary. These environmentalisms manifest in the perspectives of unions on the Dunes.

### *Local and Industrial Conflicts*

Concerns about industrial pollution date back to 1899, when Henry Cowles took note of the impact on pine trees near oil refineries in Whiting, Indiana (Engel, 1983, p. 242). Since then, pollution has increasingly become a threat to the residents of northwestern Indiana and the surrounding landscape. The growing population of Chicago incentivized steel companies to construct mills and plants on the same dunes that conservationists fought so hard to protect. Companies such as the North Chicago Railway Mill Company, U.S. Steel Corporation, and Standard Oil established a presence in northwestern Indiana. In the 1950s, Bethlehem Steel proposed a port in northwestern Indiana, assuring residents that it would support the struggling economy there (Engel, 1983). Mullen argues that the attitude of these steel companies was one of arrogance. They were confident they could continue to expand their territory without pushback. Gary was the city most affected by this heavy pollution, yet environmental activism did not gain public traction until the rise of middle-class environmentalism (Mullen, 2015).

In 1959, the Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) finalized plans for a \$30 million generating plant, a substation, a transmission corridor, and a port to supply water to neighboring companies as well. During this time, concentrations of sulfur dioxide in the Gary-Chicago industrial area were 1.6 ppm, “a full **25% more** than London’s levels during the deadly

‘Great Smog’ incidents of the 1952” (Mullen, 2015, p. 252).

Mullen (2015) claims that many Indianans living in industrial areas could not afford to travel to National Parks for recreation, and therefore valued the Dunes for its accessibility. Although middle-class environmentalists spurred activism surrounding the Dunes, United Steel Workers supported the National Lakeshore, as did the United Auto Workers Union. However, many other steelworkers’ unions opposed the National Lakeshore, due to potential economic benefits from a new port at the controversial Burns Ditch location. According to Mullen, the Lakeshore was seen by many opponents as a benefit to wealthy residents and an economic blow to locals. This also spurred distrust for Illinois Senator Paul Douglas, who was seen as an outsider trying to control the fate of Indianans. Mullen writes, “Indiana had sat on the sidelines while Chicago built their factories and skyscrapers; now Chicago wanted to prevent Indiana from doing the same, from catching up?” (pp. 255-256).

Ultimately, the presence of Midwest and Bethlehem Steel did not spur economic growth in the state, but rather resulted in toxic pollution and few jobs (Mullen, 2015). Mullen argues that the eventual establishment of the National Lakeshore in 1966 came about because of development at Burns Ditch and other sites. She claims that the threat of destruction was a key factor in the protection of the Dunes, creating a new type of park made up of what could be salvaged (Mullen, 2015).

In his chapter of the book *Congress and the Environment*, Kyle (1970) argues that the development of the steel industry alongside the Dunes beaches earned the landscape a “Jekyll and Hyde” reputation, as many looked favorably upon the new job market while others saw the industries as threats to the natural landscape. Kyle identifies the issue of locality as one of the primary conflicts of the Dunes movements, arguing that it has roots in the American federal

system. This created tension with Indiana residents and government officials who believed that industrial jobs were best for their communities.

Kyle also analyzes why environmental protection often falls by the wayside politically, citing the imperfection of political and economic systems that fail to incorporate the environment's value to humankind into their models. Parks pose little to no opportunity for profit, making them undesirable choices for privately owned land. Further, he explains that rural county zoning commissions, such as the one in Porter County, rarely are compelled to address urban problems such as public park access. He writes that "everyone appears to recognize the necessity for natural environmental preservation as long as it does not happen in his particular county or state" (p. 27). Kyle reveals the ways in which urban and industrial development can take precedent over conservation, as the former are often seen as more profitable.

### *The Push on Congress*

Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, was an advocate for an Indiana Dunes National Park as early as 1916 (Gonzales, 2017). In that year, he held public hearings wherein community members could proclaim support for the park. However, Congressional support for the project would not be present for another fifty years (Gonzales, 2017). Gonzales (2017) argues that the shorelines of the United States are central to understanding the Park Service's role in land preservation in the mid-twentieth century. She writes that "the federal attempt to create Sand Dunes National Park left lingering questions: could beaches ever be nationally significant landscapes, and if so, would the Park Service take the initiative to protect them?" (p. 20).

Advocates at the Mather Hearing struggled to convince Congress that a national park

could look different from those that had come before. Landscape architect Jens Jensen used existing models of national parks to defend the Indiana Dunes, claiming that their peaks were comparable to the Adirondacks and the Rocky Mountains. However, it would take a large shift at the governmental level to push for the protection of a sand dunes park. Gonzales writes that “as the push for saving the Indiana Dunes began, so began the push to industrialize the dormant, cheap, industrially-zoned land along Indiana’s northwestern shoreline.” (Gonzales, 2017, p. 251). Efforts to continue industrializing the shoreline led to democratic responses. Community Dunes councils, many Indiana unions, and Hammond, Indiana’s Chamber of Commerce all fought for a park, arguing that local residents were entitled to natural space without having to travel for it (Gonzales, 2017).

From 1955 to 1956, The Park Service’s Mission 66 funneled \$1 billion towards national parks recreational infrastructure (Gonzales, 2017, p. 22). The protection of National seashores and lakeshores took off, especially with increasing activism surrounding them. When legislators began to move forward with buying seashores and lakeshores for public parks, they opted for a one-size-fits-all approach. However, residents of distinct communities pushed back against the idea that all shores could be managed identically (p. 23). The National Lakeshore was finally established when Illinois Senator Paul Douglas initiated a compromise: federal funding for a public port in exchange for a national lakeshore.

In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Act, in order “[t]o retitle Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore as Indiana Dunes National Park, and for other purposes” (H. R. 1488, 2017-2018). This event was an element of the largest coastal land acquisition effort in U.S. history (Gonzales, 2017). Gonzales (2017) argues that these victories for Dunes advocates came to be because the governmental push to protect National

Lakeshores and Seashores established these landscapes as worthy of protection. She notes that, due to shoreline conservation efforts and Mission 66, the public began to appreciate beach landscapes in a new way. Gonzales ultimately argues that the protection of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is owed to shifting ideas about what constitutes valuable land. Urbanization in the first half of the 20th century pushed public attitude towards protecting beaches. Along with governmental shoreline conservation efforts and Mission 66, the Dunes eventually earned their National Lakeshore designation. This shows how changing public perception contributed to governmental action and ultimately the preservation of land.

### *Conclusion*

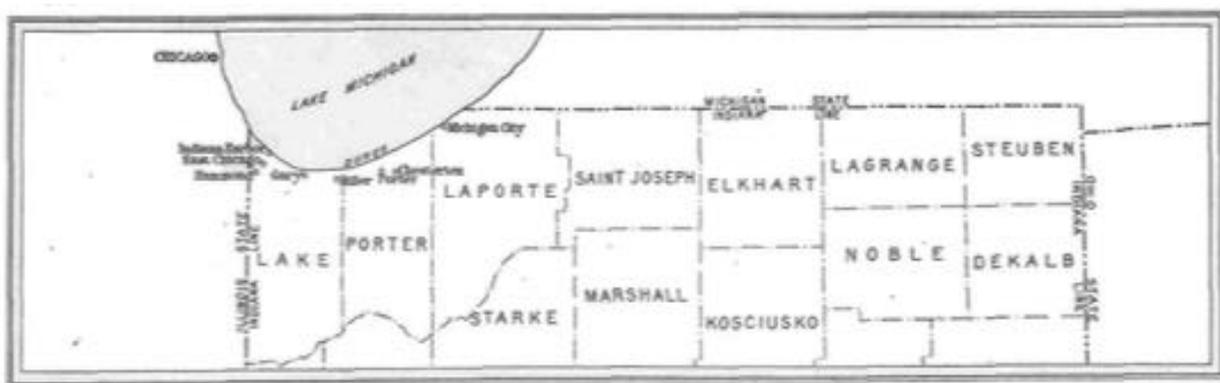
Many scholars have written about the history of the Indiana Dunes National Park as one of conflict and subsequent activism. The ongoing threats of industrialization have put the health and safety of individuals at risk, and endangered a landscape valued by many for its ecological diversity, recreational opportunities, and natural beauty. However, what is missing from the literature is an understanding of the Indiana Dunes as a hybrid landscape, one that incorporates the lived realities of urban residents into a space that is industrial and natural. By framing this history as binary and by understanding the Dunes as distinct from industry, scholars reinforce the separation of natural and built landscapes. Hybridity has been embedded in the Indiana Dunes landscape since the beginning of the century, with Gary's development, early Dunes activism, and urban growth occurring simultaneously. To understand this landscape and its implications for future urban and industrial parks, I will look at its history through the lens of hybridity. Further, I will examine how this hybrid landscape fits into the history of the National Park Service, examining the development of environmental ideologies within the movements to

protect the Indiana Dunes.

### Chapter 3: Visions for the Dunes: Hearing on the Sand Dunes National Park Project

#### *Introduction*

On October 30, 1916, Director of the National Park Service Stephen T. Mather held a hearing in Chicago on the topic of a proposed Sand Dunes National Park, which was to encompass all lakefront property in the northeast corner of Lake County and Porter County, Indiana. This region, connecting the cities of Miller and Michigan City, was about 25 miles in length 1 mile wide (Mather, 1917, p. 8) At the time of the hearing, the region in question was privately owned and would need to be acquired through purchase or donation (p. 11).



Indiana Counties. Courtesy of the Report on the Proposed Sand Dunes National Park Indiana.

The hearing was attended by an estimated 400 individuals, with over 40 speakers defending the merit of a national park in the Indiana Dunes (p. 6). Speakers expressed support using a wide variety of themes. Among the most common were beauty, accessibility, refuge, national good, and utility. I argue that these themes represent the earliest visions for the Indiana Dunes National Park, and therefore remain a part of the historical and cultural identity of the park. The appeals to a variety of themes show early signs of the Dunes as a hybrid landscape, as early twentieth century advocates recognized the value in having public green space available in close proximity to industrial and urban centers in the early 20th century. Further, speeches made at the hearing point to the environmental ideologies of Dunes advocates, which both adhered to

and diverged from the traditional thinking of the National Park Service. Though this period aligns with the conservationist movement of the early twentieth century, I will be using the term environmentalism to explain the developing environmental ethics of Dunes advocates.

### *Beauty*

Many speakers appealed to the beauty of the Indiana Dunes, arguing that they should be preserved because of their aesthetics. Among these supporters was Chicagoan and landscape architect Jens Jensen, who opted to compare the Dunes to other parks in the United States:

In fact, the only thing in the world that we have that has any similarity at all to the Adirondacks and the Rocky Mountains is our dunes over in Indiana. The 200 feet of Mount Tom look just as big to me as the Rocky Mountains did when I visited them some years ago, and bigger to me, in fact, than did the Berkshires when I made my pilgrimage to those wonderful hills of Massachusetts (p. 24).

Jensen's description highlights how he and many others saw the Dunes as the crowning achievement of Midwestern nature, with no other comparable landscapes in the region. He chose to situate the Dunes in the conversation of other national parks in an effort to show the inherent likeness of these places. By claiming that they look even taller than the Berkshires of Massachusetts, he strove to communicate how the Dunes were overlooked in comparison to American mountain ranges.

This evocation of the Dunes' beauty was just one technique used by advocates at the Mather hearing, although it permeated the core of many other arguments. It shows how, for many, beauty was enough a reason as any to preserve this landscape. Furthermore, it highlights how mentions of industry were left out of the discussion. To argue for the Dunes as a National Park, the appeal to beauty was one technique that neglected to address the complications of the landscape. No prior National Park, not the Adirondacks or the Rocky Mountains or the

Berkshires, shared territory with steel mills. And so, defenders of the Dunes' beauty did not choose to acknowledge this complex reality.

This perspective on beauty is important in the visions for the Dunes. It shows how desires to acquire a National Park title led to an oversimplification of a hybrid landscape. Furthermore, the argument that beauty was sufficient reason to purchase 25 miles of duneland can be seen in the context of nineteenth century ideals of wilderness. The notion that unspoiled tracts of land should be conserved and set apart from society was central to the mission of the National Park Service in the development of Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Parks (Spence, 1999), and similar arguments were made at this hearing. The desire to preserve the majesty of the Indiana Dunes therefore was inextricably linked to settler colonial American ideas about what constitutes valuable land. However, beauty was the value that underlie the entire hearing. If the Dunes were not considered beautiful, there would be no popular support for their preservation. Therefore, while this argument was, in many ways, reminiscent of early American environmentalism, it also paved the way for more radical ideas about what could become a National Park.

### *Accessibility*

In many ways, arguments for the Indiana Dunes National Park diverged from the historical mission of the National Park Service. Whereas parks had historically only been accessible to those with the means to travel, Dunes advocates saw the park's central location as invaluable to the general population. For many individuals from Illinois and Indiana, the ability of city-dwellers to access the park via train or short car ride was a unique asset that many other parks did not share. Chicagoan Julius Rosenwald highlighted this distinction in his speech: “[a]ll

of our national parks are where there are practically no people surrounding them... Now, we are talking here about establishing a park... right in the heart of a thickly populated district” (p. 40). From the perspective of Rosenwald, the density of the surrounding area was an asset to the park. It made possible the appreciation of natural land, which historically had been reserved for an elite few.

In his introductory speech, Mather stated, “I have no doubt... that there are other dunes in the United States which do equal [the Indiana Dunes]. But I am quite sure that if they do exist, they are not as accessible as these Indiana Dunes are” (p. 8). In contrast to Jensen and Cowles, Mather did not argue that the Dunes were superior in terms of beauty. He did argue, however, that they were superior in terms of accessibility. The appeal to accessibility marked a shift in National Park thinking, as beauty was not the only consideration. Establishing parks for the good of the people was a central idea in the Mather Hearing, revealing how urban residents began to fight for parks in their backyards. This legacy of urban involvement would later manifest in grassroots organizing for an Indiana Dunes National Park, establishing a new process for the national protection of land.

A previous mayor of Gary, A. F. Knotts, made a similar argument about the value of a park for urban residents:

[T]his national park is not to be a playground for scientists, botanists, geologists, zoologists, artists, and nature lovers only, but from an industrial standpoint, it is to mean something to the common people, the workers. The people who work, who live over on the west side here in Chicago, who never see the lake, the people who live in Hammond, in East Chicago, in Whiting, in Indiana Harbor, in Gary, and can not get to the lake.... In short, we want a park, and we want it on Lake Michigan, and we want it between the railroads and the lake, and where we do not need the land for industries (p. 85)

Knotts emphasized the value of park space for working people, and the importance of the Lake for general wellbeing. He positioned the Lake as a common resource that should be available to the working population of the region and argued for the acknowledgement of those

who work long days in the steel mills and are not able to travel far for refuge. Knott's speech reveals the roots of environmental justice in the vision for the Dunes. At their conception, they were seen as a place for the working people of the industrial shoreline. From this perspective, the Dunes were not envisioned to be protected wilderness, unmarred by human influence, like many national parks before it. Rather, advocates sought for the park to be established among existing cities. In this way, the concept of natural protection was subverted. By bringing the park to the people rather than the other way around, Dune supporters reconsidered the popular understanding of humans and nature as distinct.

The argument for accessibility also reveals the Dunes to be a hybrid landscape, as the existence of cities and industry near the park was seen as an asset, rather than an obstacle. Speakers envisioned an integration of the urban, industrial, and natural, emphasizing the role of accessibility in this integration. While supporters of accessibility diverged in their priorities from supporters of beauty, the aesthetic of the Dunes was still an integral part of the argument.

### *Refuge*

Refuge was a common theme at the Mather hearing, as the Dunes were conceptualized as an escape for urban dwellers. In his speech, A. F. Knotts emphasized the park as a refuge in order to protect laborers from exploitation: "[T]he people who want to locate industries all the time, and exploit labor all the time, had better think a little about the welfare of the laborer" (p. 85). Knotts saw refuge in nature as essential to wellbeing. In an urban and industrial space, access to public land for recreation was declared to be a right of the industrial laborers, not simply the middle class. In this way, the notion of refuge as present in 19th century wilderness ideologies was redefined, with an emphasis on accessibility. This was evident in Knotts' speech

when he said that the “people who work 364 days in the year and would like to have at least one day in the year to get to the lake, they can not get there now” (p. 85). He positioned refuge as a human right, one which could be addressed by an Indiana Dunes National Park. Furthermore, the simple presence of the Lake was not sufficient in the establishment of a refuge. With industry and transportation threatening the shore, the preservation of the Dunes would be required to ensure the effective utilization of natural resources. Knott’s statement reveals that desires for equitable refuge were present at the conception of the National Park.

Knotts’s emphasis on welfare was echoed by other speakers who saw the Dunes as a place of refuge. One of these speakers was the spokesman of the Prairie Club, T. W. Allinson, who argued that “[t]he people need wide open spaces of country, not merely for the refreshment of their bodies, but for the recreation and refreshment of their souls as well” (p. 58). Speakers defending the park on the basis of refuge emphasized the value of recreation and leisure for everybody. It was no longer positioned as a luxury for those with disposable time and income, highlighting the Dunes as a hybrid landscape. Further, Allinson’s emphasis on the soul highlights a spirituality surrounding his experience with nature. In the context of early American environmentalism, this spirituality is consistent with the sacred values imbued in the development of early national parks.

Dr. Graham Taylor similarly stated, “I often wonder what I can do for my neighbors on the West Side, in the tenement house and industrial district.... to give them a chance to get acquainted with God’s green earth, of which some of them have actually never caught even a glimpse” (p. 36) Taylor also detailed a spiritual calling to nature. His invocation of religious imagery reveals how support for the Indiana Dunes National Park fit into the larger context of the historical preservation of land by the National Park Service. There is a tension in how

supporters of the Dunes talked about refuge. On one hand, the traditional notion of refuge was subverted when Knotts emphasized recreation as a need for the laborer. On the other hand, Allinson and Taylor spoke about refuge as a sacred experience, drawing upon late nineteenth century notions of the spiritual frontier.

Jens Jensen also spoke about the need for refuge, revealing his own privilege:

What are we doing for the tens of thousands of people in this noisy, grimy, seething city, who need to revive their souls and to refresh the inner man as well as the outer?... Think of the good Indiana folk. The only outlet they have to Lake Michigan is right there, the only outlet that is left for them. That is the only breathing place they have on the shores of beautiful Lake Michigan, and there is nothing left to the great State of Indiana if that wonderful piece of country is done away with (p. 26)

There was a tone of condescension when he spoke of and on behalf of the “good Indiana folk,” as well as when he dismissed the entire state of Indiana were it to be rid of the Dunes. Jensen reveals a Chicago-based ideology, one that would cause tensions later in the political battle to protect the Dunes. The origins of this local conflict are visible in his speech and in the hearings, which were largely dominated by speakers from Chicago. While there was some representation of Indiana residents at the hearing, the perspectives of individuals employed by industry were not heard. Jensen’s statement shows that, while visions of equity and accessibility were present in the earliest visions for the Dunes, a middle to upper-class environmental ethic still prevailed. This environmentalism prioritized recreation and leisure for those who could afford it, with refuge as a central component. Jensen’s statement reveals that, while refuge was intended for all people who resided near the park, this perspective was problematized by its roots in an elite environmentalism. Given that Jensen did not himself have experience working an industrial job in Northwestern Indiana, he failed to address the need for refuge from a place of understanding.

*National Good*

Patriotism was also deployed as a reason for preserving the Dunes as a National Park.

Appeals to the benefit of the nation were abundant, as speakers made the case for a National Park rather than a state park. Secretary of the General Education Board in New York, Dr. Abraham Flexner emphasized the role of national interest when he addressed Secretary Mather:

People who live in the city of New York have just as near and dear an interest in the preservation of recreational zones and educational facilities on the shores of Lake Michigan as they have in the preservation of similar objects in Yellowstone Park, or the Yosemite Valley, or Niagara Falls, or in the city of New York itself (p. 23)

In so arguing, Flexner claimed that the preservation of the Indiana Dunes was not just a local issue. Designating the Dunes as a National Park would ensure its protection by the national government and declare its value to the country. Flexner likened the Dunes to other National Parks, a tactic that is seen over and over in the hearing. This classification of the Dunes as a national concern supported the efforts of Chicagoans who took ownership over the landscape, as they could argue that the Dunes did not really belong to the state of Indiana, but to the country at large.

Earl H. Reed, an author and artist who produced work about the Indiana Dunes, made similar arguments. He claimed that “[i]f the region was already a national preserve we would listen with as little patience to the man who proposed its destruction for commercial purposes as we would to one who advocated the complete absorption of Niagara Falls for power uses, or the installation of blast furnaces in Yellowstone Park” (p. 28). Here, the preservation of the Dunes was framed as consistent with national interest, and the Dunes were compared to other valuable sites in the country. This strategy reveals how early Dunes advocates felt a sense of personal ownership over the landscape as American citizens. Furthermore, this highlights how the

establishment of an Indiana Dunes National Park would solidify the park's status as nationally valuable, encouraging changes in public perceptions of the Indiana Dunes.

John O'Leary, president of the Chicago Association of Commerce, also made a case for the national preservation of the park, with even more explicit ties to the theme of national good:

In the political campaign just closing the great parties are united on one need-- Americanization... One of the problems of Americanization is to bring to people an understanding of their connections with our national affairs. This applies not only to the foreign born but to the American born. The establishment of a beautiful reserve by our Government, available to these citizens, will no doubt convey to them some thought of a fatherland interested in them and their welfare (p. 35).

His argument incorporated political interest into the discussion, claiming that the government could show that it cared about the common people through the preservation of a park. Further, he emphasized the role of parks in fostering unity. O'Leary's perspective on Americanization and his invocation of the term "fatherland" emphasizes a connection between national parks and American identity. In many ways, this argument is both radical and traditional. On one hand, recognizing the Indiana Dunes at the national level would contribute to a complete reshaping of national park aesthetics, placing value upon complex and historically unappreciated landscapes. On the other hand, the integration of American identity with the taking of Indigenous land is very much in line with the historical operation of the National Park Service.

Further appeals to national good were made by Dr. Graham Taylor who saw a National Park as "a great unifier of the diverse elements of our population" (p. 51), Professor C. F. Millspaugh on behalf of the Wild Flower Preservation Society of America, who argued that "[t]he need is national not local (p. 51), and T. W. Allinson who stated that "[t]he greatest asset of the American people does not lie in its power to create great cities, or in the possession of a wonderful soil, of great mineral wealth, timber wealth, or what not; but it is the possession of a great manhood" (p. 56). Furthermore, president of the Outdoor League Mrs. John Worthy

claimed that “it is a matter strictly for Chicago people... Neither is it a matter for the State of Indiana... It is a matter for the Congress the United States, unquestionably” (p. 73). All of these speakers were believers that the preservation of natural landscapes was an undeniable responsibility of the federal government, one that revealed the strengths of the country. This shows how the fight for an Indiana Dunes National Park became intertwined with developing American environmentalisms. While the roots of these developing environmentalisms could be found in the settler colonial history of the National Park service, many supporters believed in the national merit of urban and industrial parks for the people.

However, appeals to national good were further problematized by T. W. Allinson, whose views centered on the assimilation of immigrants into the country via the parks system:

When we say, as we do continually, that it is our province to assimilate the immigrants and make them a part of us, make them good Americans, we must not forget the tremendous importance of recreation, which is as much a part of a natural life as anything else (p. 57)

Allinson’s argument shows that some appeals to national identity rested in principles of assimilation and erasure of immigrant identities, revealing how recreation could be used as a nationalist tool. Further, he positioned outdoor recreation as an inherent part of American life, showing how the values of the National Park service came to be deeply intertwined with notions of nature. While Dunes advocates envisioned a park for the country, visions such as Allinsons revealed the flaws in the creation of a single national identity.

### *Utility*

The Dunes were also supported for their public utility. Earl H. Reed argued that the country’s “noble landscapes... are just as vital to our intellectual life as our pictures and books” (p. 28). In a similar vein, Professor Rollin D. Salisbury compared the Indiana Dunes to a “great

library,” claiming that “things of this sort are useful and important, just as really as libraries are” (p. 42). Further, Professor Albert F. Probst defended the Dunes for scientific research for a number of nearby universities (p. 75). These perspectives on the Dunes’ utility for educational purposes reveals a purpose beyond recreation. Utility was emphasized because of the park’s proximity to a number of people and industries. In this way, the hybridity of the landscape was seen to facilitate the use of the Dunes for educational purposes.

Professor Rollin D. Salisbury from the University of Chicago further argued that the Dunes were useful not only to the people but to the surrounding industry:

It is true that a large part of the dunes already have disappeared, and more are going. I do not think we should stop their removal altogether, because the head of Lake Michigan is so advantageously situated for industrial development, that industries must have a foothold there; but every new industrial center that is established there is an added reason why we should save a large and representative tract, which can never be despoiled. Not only the people who are here now need it, but all those added centers of industry are going to need it very shortly; and all their descendants, as well as ours, will need it in the future (p. 41).

Salisbury’s speech reveals how the Dunes rested in the principle of utility, not only for individuals but for cities and industries as well. He appealed to the future generations and industrial developments that will rely on the Dunes for relief and refuge, signifying how utility is a long-term reason to preserve the landscape. Additionally, he advocated for the preservation of remaining tracts of land, highlighting the early stages of formation of a hybrid landscape. The park was to be created in and around existing development, providing environmental services to its neighbors. Salisbury discussed this need, emphasizing the interplay between people, industry, and the Dunes.

The Mayor of Gary, Indiana, R. O. Johnson, also acknowledged that industry “seem[s] to play a necessary part in the economy of our country” (p. 61). However, he emphasized the human component of the hybrid landscape, stating that “while we are concerned with them, let

us not forget to look forward to a time when we will be manufacturers of great men and women, of better manhood and womanhood and better citizenship” (p. 61). Mayor Johnson provided an important perspective from an Indianan who was less quick to villainize industry than individuals from Chicago. His defense of industry as an essential component of the landscape reveals how the hybridity of the Indiana Dunes was necessary for the functioning of a complex area, and how developing environmentalisms would need to grow to accommodate the developmental needs of a place.

It is important, however, to consider who, if anyone, had rights to decide what to do with the land. The last speaker at the hearing was William H. Cox, a Pottawatomie man who provided a valuable and largely overlooked perspective. He explained that the Indigenous peoples of the Indiana Dunes territory never ceded their land, and the government had broken a treaty to carry out development on that land:

The Indians have never parted with their right to this land--no tribe of Indians. The United States made 81 purchases from the Indians, including 5,000,000 acres, in larger and smaller areas of territory, and secured from the Indians the right for the citizens of the United States to run their boats on the waters of Lake Michigan, free of charge. That is all the rights they got... Now, the Government, which never bought that land of the Indians, refuses to buy that portion of the lake shore, but proposes to allow railroads to go to work and appropriate it, and permit anybody and everybody to take the Indians' land, and occupy it, and get the full benefit of it (p. 96).

This valuable comment was dismissed by Mather, who claimed that it was “not at all germane to the subject under discussion” (p. 97). Cox’s statement begs the question: Does anyone have a right to develop this land? While Dunes advocates were concerned with equitable distribution of resources by the federal government, they neglected to address the illegitimate right of the government to the Dunes. Furthermore, Cox’s point reveals the ways in which the Indiana Dunes were still aligned with the history of the National Park service and how, even as a new model for a national park, rested on the violence of settler colonialism.

*Conclusion*

Early Dunes advocates at the 1916 hearing reveal the diversity of perspectives on the value of an Indiana Dunes National Park. While they were passionate about its merit, the Dunes would not become a State Park for 10 years, as the country turned its attention to the war effort (Cockrell, 1998). Still, the earliest visions for a National Park are seen in a consolidated manner at this hearing, with many appeals to beauty, accessibility, refuge, national good, and utility. These early ideas about what constitutes a valuable park informed the later development of the park as an institution. In many ways, the Dunes were seen to be an accessible refuge for working people and a site of utility for all Americans. In many other ways, early visions for the Dunes revealed local tensions, assimilationist ideals, and settler colonial histories. The Mather hearing marked an historical moment in which environmentalisms were evolving to include new hybrid landscapes, yet still embodied historical ideologies. By understanding the legacies of the Indiana Dunes, those affiliated with the park can make efforts to support positive change and growth.

## **Chapter 4: Views from the Park: The Indiana Dunes Today**

### *Introduction*

To consider how early Dunes visions informed the present day, I conducted interviews with members of the Indiana Dunes community. I spoke to four residents of the Miller Beach neighborhood in Gary, Indiana to better understand different perspectives on the park within a local community. In addition to these four residents, I interviewed a park ranger from the Indiana Dunes. These conversations revealed themes of the Dunes as a hybrid landscape, as well as complications in industry, diversity and inclusion, and management efforts. The interviews highlight many ways in which early Dunes visions manifest in the park today. Additionally, the interviews reveal new challenges and concerns among those with close relationships to the park. The interviewees will remain unnamed to protect their privacy.

### *The Dunes as a Hybrid Landscape*

One recurring theme throughout the interviews was the categorization of the Indiana Dunes as a unique hybrid landscape. According to one Miller Beach resident, in addition the sand dunes, the Lake, and the diverse ecosystems within the park, the urban-industrial nature of the Indiana Dunes makes it special:

This National Park starts at the very tail end of the south side industrial complex of Chicago. You know, that's sort of amazing, too, because even when you hike some of these Dune areas, you can see steel mills in the background. So that juxtaposition is kind of interesting... It's part of the whole history of industry in America.

She noted that being able to observe the freighters from the park trails provides a valuable look into the functioning of rust belt America. According to this interviewee, part of the allure of the park is that it represents American history. In this way, the park goes beyond the nature-culture binary and engages with the reality of industrialization in the United States. This idea was

supported by another interviewee who claimed that “It makes for a more interesting... experience when you’re going through different types of neighborhoods and businesses and natural areas.” More than simply supporting the park for its accessibility, these interviewees believe that the hybrid nature of the landscape is a benefit. This reveals a modern environmental ethic that embraces landscapes not traditionally valued by the National Park Service.

Another interviewee, a Miller resident and representative of the activist organization Save the Dunes council, cited hybridity and fragmentation as aspects of the park that make it distinct:

It is one of the first urban parks. And that does it make it distinctly different. We’re a National Park, as is Yosemite, and some of these other places where people are thinking wild and wilderness. And while we have a wild and a wilderness, we do have more communities nestled within. We do have industries. So these other uses are stuck right in the middle. Not to mention, we’re very fragmented. Rather than a continuous landscape, there’s plenty of spots that the park does not own within its own boundary. So it does make it a different experience.

She described these differences as both benefits and challenges. There is an ongoing struggle to ensure that these components—the natural, urban, and industrial—live in harmony. But, according to her, the park is invaluable to urban residents. She sees it as “a place that can enhance their quality of life.” Her comments reveal the complications that accompany hybridity, as different priorities compete for attention. However, she comments on the value of working collaboratively to support the functioning of this unique landscape. Additionally, the park attracts potential residents to Northwest Indiana, which she cites as a great benefit to the region.

The park ranger that I spoke to described the Indiana Dunes as completely intertwined with the surrounding communities. He commented that, while a large percentage of the visitors come from the surrounding areas, the park is also a destination. He cited the fact that the park is on I-94, a major thoroughfare:

I-94 goes... from Detroit to Chicago. Just think of the millions and millions of people that drive by, and they see that typical sign: Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Now that it’s a National Park.... They pull in to just take a look at it.

According to him, the fact that the park is situated in an accessible location supports tourism and engagement with the park's resources. He sees this as a benefit to both park visitors and the Indiana Dunes National Park. This is reminiscent of the perspectives of early Dunes advocates who believed that a park in the middle of the country was greatly needed. Furthermore, it reveals how the title of National Park supports the park in reaching new visitors.

Additionally, this interviewee emphasized the role of the park in providing for urban residents:

Everyone wants to go and recreate... A lot of people do at least, but don't ever get to Yellowstone... And so think of these folks that can jump on the South Shore [Railroad]... and the next thing you know... they get dropped off in a National Park.

The park ranger's perspective on accessibility echoes the visions of many Dunes advocates, who envisioned a park that could be easily reached by train. As opposed to many National Parks before it, the Indiana Dunes today provide recreational benefits that are easily accessible. This reality supports environmental justice in the Dunes, as refuge is attainable. This interviewee also claimed that the greatest stakeholders in the park are "the plants and animals," with the second greatest stakeholders being "the people that come and enjoy this park." While he emphasized the inherent value of biological diversity, he also acknowledged that the Lake and the Dunes provide valuable refuge to visitors.

Another interviewee also emphasized the inherent value of the space:

It's... one of a dwindling number of natural places that we have on planet Earth... I think people need natural spaces to connect with, in addition to just preserving them for future generations and [the] environmental wellness of our planet.

This interviewee pointed to the environmental services provided by the park and made a case for the ongoing preservation of the fragmented landscape. Her comment emphasizes the importance of balance in managing the park amid the risks of encroaching development. Her emphasis on "natural places" also positions humans and nature as distinct, highlighting the persistence of

these binaries for some residents. Even so, this interviewee believes in the value of the park for future generations. Inherent value of the landscape was mentioned by many interviewees who defended the right of the plants and animals to exist peacefully.

Overall, interviewees' perspectives on the hybridity of the landscape highlight an embrace of the park's unique features. They see this hybridity as a benefit to residents and an attractive feature to visitors. While some interviewees pointed to challenges with park fragmentation, there was a general sense that the park's urban-industrial nature supported the community in making use of the green space. This reveals an environmentalism that is deeply tied to that of the early Dunes advocates and diverges from that of the National Park Service. Interviewee perspectives highlight the ways in which the communities, industries, and park lands have become intertwined over time, and how this is seen as an asset to residents.

### *A Complicated Industrial Picture*

While many interviewees found the hybridity of the landscape to be a positive thing, the conversations I had revealed a complicated picture of the industrial dynamic. According to the park ranger, the park has a good working relationship with industry. Given that they share a lakeshore, he claimed that there is a need to find ways to work together:

They're right here. I mean, you have a National Park, and then you have industry, then you have a state park, then you have industry.... We're a piecemeal of a park. So we have to work within that. We must.

His comment reveals a collaborative effort that takes into account the necessity of an industrial economy. A similar approach is taken by the Save the Dunes Council who claimed to work collaboratively with industry while still striving to hold them accountable.

This notion was supported by another interviewee who claimed that the industry has just as much a right to the lakeshore as the park, given that they were there first. However, this

interviewee also acknowledged that some aspects of the industry have done harm. For example, the establishment of the Port at Burns Harbor damaged the beach. Furthermore, she cited the fact that the park blocks industrial expansion as a positive thing. This interviewee considered the pollution better than in her youth in Miller Beach. She also noted that pollution-related risks can be more quickly identified and shared due to increased testing and social media communication. Still, she noted that the risks are not completely negligible:

I've always... looked at it as somebody has to live in an area that makes things that we need. And they were there first. And so as technology gets better, and industry cleans up, they do advance... So sometimes there's an odor in the air because of the refineries in Whiting. Or you see the blast furnace of the mill open up, and that is actually... really cool. And then you do see sometimes big puffs of black smoke... and you hope they are doing their part to be kind to the water and not dumping stuff in. But then again, it's better than it was. And we swam in it the whole time and we're not glowing yet. So I think we're okay.

Her perspective on pollution reveals a need to reconcile the practical aspects of industry with the prioritization of human health. This Miller Beach resident accepts that the occasional odor and visible air pollution are inevitable symptoms of living in an industrial area. While another interviewee felt the industrial aspect of the park makes it unique, she also worries about pollution. When she used to drive along the Lake as a child, she recalled the odor produced by the steel mills. Since regulations have been loosened under the Trump administration, she observed that the scent has gotten worse. While she doesn't believe that air pollution deters park visitors, leaked chemicals from the steel mills have led to closed beaches in the past, specifically in Portage.

There are also a host of environmental justice issues that come with this pollution. One interviewee acknowledged that the communities directly adjacent to the Dunes have primarily been wealthier. Additionally, she shared that the areas most heavily impacted by industrial pollution are primarily low-income communities of color. This is supported by the Hoosier

Environmental Council's "Assessment of Environmental Justice Needs in Northern Lake County Communities" which found that "communities of color and low-income populations in Lake County face disproportionate environmental burdens and related health risks from the extreme concentration of polluting industries in the area" (p. 3). Therefore, while the park provides valuable refuge from harsh industrial conditions, environmental harm is experienced unequally in the nearby communities.

Perspectives from inside the park show that feelings of safety amid industry fluctuate. While some individuals express interest in the functioning of industrial sites and an understanding that industry is necessary in many ways, there are also fears about safety and pollution. These concerns are validated by the history of pollution in the area. In October of 2019, for example, a chemical spill led to massive fish die-off and forced the park to close one of its beaches (Thiele, 2019). However, residents still understand the situation to be better than it once was. Furthermore, residents look to the federal government to regulate pollution and keep them safe, citing the Trump administration's rollbacks as causing harm. These findings reveal the necessity to balance the need for industry with the protection of residents from environmental harm.

### *Challenges in Management*

Interviewees pointed to many challenges in the management of the park. According to one Miller Beach resident, aside from protecting the land from the encroachment of industry, the increased number of visitors after the Dunes became a national park has done harm. This interviewee took issue with the way the park positions the deterioration of the land:

[The park] tell[s] us we're contributing to the deterioration of the Dunes when it's really [the park] that [is] causing the deterioration because they are publicizing this and

bringing so many people [to the Dunes]... Because we cared for it. And the people that come don't love it like we do, and they don't care for it.

She pointed to issues of land stewardship, highlighting that the local community is better suited to maintain the land than visitors. This point can be seen as the threatening of a common-pool resource, which is only maintained by communal care. This comment points to the differing priorities of the park and local residents. Many interviewees acknowledged that, when the National Lakeshore became a National Park, the dynamics changed greatly. According to the park ranger, attendance nearly doubled, but the park was given no additional staff or funding from Congress. He further explained that the park partners with Porter County Tourism, whose main focus is economic development. This priority differs from that of the park, which is more concerned with park stewardship than economic growth. While an increase in visitors positively benefits the local tourist economy, it also poses risks to the landscape.

Another interviewee grew up in the Miller Beach neighborhood and spent her youth in the Dunes, before it was a National Lakeshore. She noted that there were very few visitors back then, and that children ran freely throughout the space. Since the park has become regulated, she observed that the number of visitors has increased significantly. She commented that she doesn't use the beaches in the summer, because they are so crowded with visitors. She believes that many Miller Beach residents don't use the park's beaches, but communities further inland likely do. This reveals the ways in which an increase in visitors makes local residents less inclined to make use of the Dunes.

However, another interviewee works to attract more visitors to the park. Originally from a suburb of Chicago, she moved to the Miller Beach neighborhood three years ago to be closer to the Indiana Dunes. She also became involved in a local tourism group called Visit Miller Beach. As a member of the South Shore CVA, the regional tourism bureau, and Visit Miller Beach, this

interviewee and others try to bring in more people. After collecting data, the Visit Miller Beach group found that the area of the park with West Beach and the Douglas Center receive only 2% of the park's total visitors. She said that the data "brought to light the fact that the Gary locations don't get visited, even though they're just as beautiful." She noted that Gary's reputation causes people to believe they might not be safe visiting the south end of the park. Furthermore, the lack of signage in the Miller Beach area contributes to the low number of visitors. She also shared that the Porter County Tourism Bureau often overlooks Lake County, where Miller Beach is located.

These differing perspectives point to the challenges facing park management. While an increase in visitors supports revenue for the park and the surrounding communities, there is a risk that the park will be too crowded for residents to make use of the space. Even within the park's boundaries, local groups have identified disparities in how the spaces get used, with the Gary locations receiving fewer visitors. This generates questions of how to best manage the land. Furthermore, these interviews reveal conflicts over accessibility. Ideally, the park should be available to every person, supporting public access to natural spaces. However, some residents identify visitors as a threat to the park, raising questions about the best ways in which to balance park stewardship with an open and welcoming attitude.

### *Diversity and Inclusion*

The park and community organizations alike have worked to engage nearby residents. Although the hybrid model of the park supports accessibility, studies have revealed that Black residents of Gary have been less likely than white residents to participate in park programming (English, 2006). According to a 2009 visitor study from the Indiana Dunes, 95% of questionnaire

respondents identified as white, and 2% as Black or African American (Holmes et al., 2009). English (2006) conducted focus group discussions to identify barriers to park engagement among Black Gary residents. The major barriers included “a lack of information about interpretive public programs, a lingering perception of racial discrimination at the park, a lack of appreciation for nature and/or the outdoors, and a lack of interest in National Lakeshore program offerings” (English, 2006, p. iv).

One interviewee spent a year as an AmeriCorps volunteer in the Indiana Dunes, running an environmental education program for children in Gary. She observed that in some instances, children of color growing up in urban areas such as Gary have a fear of the woods, explaining that “[i]t’s a matter of access. If you are not used to growing up in the woods, then it’s quiet. It’s a little bit primordial to a certain extent.” In her own experience growing up near the park but not accessing it regularly, she noted that there was “a bit of a mystique to it.” According to her, it is problematic that children in Gary don’t have access to the park because it is so close. As a child, she didn’t visit the park very often. Even as an adult, she struggled to partner with schools to bring children to visit the Dunes. She claimed that this highlights the priorities of the education system, which values outcomes over experiences.

Through her work as an environmental educator, she hoped to support students in forming a relationship with the outdoors and taking ownership over their interactions with nature. While she didn’t have data to share, she recalled conducting surveys with the students that indicated a positive experience with the learning process. She emphasized the importance of living in the present as a way to calm anxieties and promote wellbeing. Furthermore, she shared that knowledge about how to conduct oneself in nature can be empowering. Even if students don’t choose to pursue science or biology, she emphasized the importance of learning about the

world outside of their own communities, learning how to solve problems, and understanding the nonhuman world. She hoped that those experiences in the Dunes were positive for students and made an impact on their lives.

The goal of taking students on walks was to minimize fear through exposure. In her own experience growing up in Miller, as in her experience as an environmental educator, she noted that spending time outdoors can be very therapeutic. However, she shared that as an AmeriCorps volunteer, she was not paid enough to continue working in that position. She emphasized that the people who can afford to work in those positions often aren't from the community that they are trying to serve. This points to a larger issue of a lack of employment opportunities in the Gary area.

The park ranger I spoke to has worked in his position for over 30 years, and he has seen the impact that environmental education has had on the community. He stated that it is important to help people “to appreciate this park and other parks... and hopefully they gain an appreciation to the point where they become stewards of this great nation and all the things we have.” He said, “That’s why I’m a park ranger. To share this beautiful resource.”

Additionally, I spoke to interviewees about diversity in park management. One interviewee representing the Save the Dunes Council acknowledged that the organization has struggled with diversity in the past but is making efforts to diversify its board now. She also mentioned the need for ensuring inclusivity of the Dunes, and the long-term goal of supporting a park that “serve[s] all people.” Additionally, the park ranger shared that park staff are undergoing diversity and inclusion training, with increased virtual opportunities during COVID-19. These trainings are conducted by the National Park Service and are well attended.

Furthermore, the park is conducting outreach to engage local residents who historically may not have felt welcome in the space.

These discussions about diversity and inclusion highlight an ongoing tension in the Indiana Dunes, wherein people of color living near the park do not always feel welcome in the space for a variety of reasons. While environmental education and diversification efforts exist to rectify these disparities, histories of racism in natural spaces remain. These interviews reveal the ways in which thoughtful engagement with the surrounding communities is required to promote environmental justice in the Indiana Dunes, and ensure that the benefits of the park are accessible to all people.

### *Conclusion*

These interviews revealed that, even within one community, there are great disparities in how people view and use the park. Whether it is the right of industry to take up space or the benefits of visitors coming to use the park, perspectives vary greatly. However, all individuals that I spoke to had a great affinity for the Indiana Dunes National Park and believed adamantly in its value for the surrounding communities. While some interviewees acknowledged that some residents of color have not historically felt comfortable or welcome using the park, community engagement and environmental education efforts are present with the goal of making the Indiana Dunes an accessible place for all people. However, there is still much work to be done. Equal access to environmental amenities is crucial for the achievement of environmental justice, and this requires the park to engage thoughtfully the discriminatory history of the National Park Service. These interviews highlight the many ways in which the hybridity of the Indiana Dunes contributes to its modern-day complexity. Furthermore, the interviews reveal the need for an

environmental ethic that takes into account environmental justice, as well as urban and industrial needs.

## Conclusion

My findings reveal that, from their inception, the Indiana Dunes have been conceived of as a hybrid landscape, one that provides valuable environmental services to urban residents in the industrial center of the United States. These early visions have permeated views of the park today, as residents of a neighboring community value the park for its complexity and its accessibility. However, the management of this landscape does not come without its challenges. Environmental safety, diversity and inclusion, and common stewardship of the land are all issues identified by residents that persist today. While the hybrid model of the Dunes has historically supported accessibility and inclusion, there are still obstacles to overcome with racial equity in the park. This issue is deeply tied to environmental justice and the equal right to environmental refuge. As one of the few urban-industrial parks in the United States, the Indiana Dunes National Park must actively work to be a space that serves all people, and that protects them from the risks of industrial pollution. Its hybridity comes with a responsibility.

This is important because the Indiana Dunes National Park can set a precedent for future parks in an increasingly urban and industrial world. Since its early days, the park has allowed for a reframing of natural spaces and a reconceptualization of the role of the National Park Service. From an environmental justice perspective, devoting time and money to parks near urban and industrial areas makes green space more accessible and contributes to overall wellbeing. The Indiana Dunes are an example of a radical new environmentalism that, while not without its challenges, can be applied more broadly to urban and industrial spaces. As a non-continuous park, developed out of local activism and preserved amid threats of growing industrialization, it is an example of participatory conservation that embeds humans in the natural landscape. The Indiana Dunes resist the notion of wilderness as constructed by the National Park services and present a new model for environmental justice in the country.

In his U.S. Senate speech in 1958, Dunes activist and Illinois Senator Paul H. Douglas spoke of the preservation of the Dunes as a fight that fits into a larger narrative of American environmentalism:

The problem of the Dunes is a symbol of the crisis that faces all America. It is as though we are standing on the last acre, faced with a decision as to how it should be used. In actuality, it is the last acre, the last acre of its kind; in essence it foreshadows the time not too far removed when we all will, in all truth, be standing on the last unused, unprotected area, wondering which way to go (qtd. in (Engel, 1983, p. 233)).

This unique landscape forces us to consider how we choose to use our last acres. Will we let them disappear, incorporated into the growing developments of our cities and industries? Or will we let them flourish together?

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