

Sand Dunes: Shifting Sands and Community Stewardship

Our dunes aren't just piles of sand—they're lively, ever-changing guardians of our coast. Shaped by wind, waves, and resilient native plants, these natural features protect our communities while offering incredible beauty.

The striking stretch of sand on Minnesota Point is a scenic and recreational treasure that acts as a protective barrier against coastal storms and erosion. It only does so if it is stabilized by native plants, such as American Beach grass, which is found only on Minnesota Point in Minnesota. Plants catch and hold the shifting sands, even as nature's forces continuously reshape them.

Yet, our dunes are fragile. Small disturbances—whether from off-trail wandering, removing native plants, or inadvertently introducing invasive species—can upset this natural balance. Protecting these dynamic landscapes is a shared responsibility, and every action counts.

How You Can Help

- **Stick to Established Trails Always.** Use the designated pathways or boardwalks when accessing the beach. New or unofficial trails can channel wind in ways that increase erosion and weaken the dunes. If your usual entry is too steep, consider temporary, low-impact solutions like a rollout ladder or a combined path.
- **Support Native Plants.** Native vegetation is the backbone of dune stability. When plants like American Beach grass flourish, they trap sand and build the dunes naturally. For any revegetation efforts, use only local native species and be sure to coordinate with local conservation staff—especially since state-protected plants require special permits for removal, planting, and propagation.
- **Respect Property Lines and Public Lands.** Remember that a good portion of our dunes and beaches are public property. Always check with local authorities before starting any activity that might disturb these areas. Understanding permit requirements avoids unintended harm to this fragile ecosystem.
- **Help Manage Invasive Species.** Invasive plants can easily overrun the native species that our dunes depend on. Check wheels, shoes, and beach gear to be sure you are not carrying invasive plant parts or seeds. Learn to recognize them and consider using free tools such as EDDMaps to record and monitor their spread. Your participation in documenting these species can significantly aid local conservation efforts.

Our coastal dunes are a living legacy—beautiful, dynamic, and essential for protecting our communities. With thoughtful stewardship and each of us doing our part, we can keep these natural wonders vibrant and resilient. Whether you're a lifelong resident or a curious visitor, every mindful choice helps preserve the dunes for generations to come.

For more information, please contact:

For guidance regarding potential disruption of plants: DNR Regional Plant Ecologist, Karen Updegraff, karen.updegraff@state.mn.us

Questions regarding public property and shoreland alterations: Planning and Development Division at the City of Duluth: planning@duluthmn.gov

For inquiries related to public waters permitting and construction adjacent to Lake Superior: DNR Area Hydrologist, Brianna Speldrich, Brianna.Speldrich@state.mn.us

