



444 Barker Road, Michigan City, IN 46360 219-879-3937 www.savedunes.org

**Hearing On House Resolution 573
“Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Corrections Act”,
June 5, 2008 before the
House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Subcommittee Members:

My name is Thomas Serynek. I am a life-long resident of Gary, Indiana. I am a 4th grade teacher in Gary and have taught in Gary for over 40 years. I am here to present testimony on behalf of Save the Dunes Council, a grassroots conservation organization in Northwest Indiana founded in 1952 to protect and restore the Indiana Dunes and all natural resources in Indiana’s Lake Michigan watershed for an enhanced quality of life.

I currently serve on the board of directors for Save the Dunes Council and served as president from 1988-2003. I have presented testimony to Congress on numerous occasions during that period to support protecting and expanding the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, at just over 15,000 acres is a small but biologically significant part of the National Park system. Unique dunes, wetlands, beaches, and forests are but some of the habitats represented. However, many of these habitats are small and fragmented and this is a main reason this legislation, H.R. 573 is needed.

Save the Dunes Council thanks Congressman Visclosky for his continuing leadership to protect and manage the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, for over 25 years. We also want to thank Congressman Joe Donnelly, a co-sponsor of this legislation for his support and leadership. We note that each of these Congressmen’s districts contain part of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

Today you consider small, but very important changes in legislation impacting the Indiana Dunes. Save the Dunes Council supports H.R. 573 and we commit to work toward its passage. If it becomes law, it will enable the Secretary of the Interior to accept donations of land from individuals and businesses who own property adjacent to the

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore but outside the authorized boundaries. In addition, it would clarify that the Secretary could accept land now in public ownership due to tax delinquency as long as those taxes are satisfied.

Save the Dunes Council Testimony on H.R. 573 – Page 2

Following are the reasons we think this legislation is extremely important and timely.

The first change, **Section 2 Clarification of Contiguous Lands** is consideration of donations of land to the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore that are ‘contiguous’ to the Lakeshore. We support this change.

Some time ago, we at Save the Dunes Conservation Fund proposed to donate approximately 6 acres of land to the National Park that was adjacent to the park, but separated by a railroad. The definition of ‘contiguous’ was vital to the issue and Save the Dunes pointed out at the time, Indiana Department of Natural Resources uses the definition to include lands that are adjacent as ‘contiguous’ as long as they were only separated by a road, right-of-way, or railroad. This change will make it clear that future donations can be accepted.

Save the Dunes Council also supports the second change, **Section 3 Authority to Acquire Lands by Payment of Delinquent Taxes**. Although this section would apply in relatively few cases, the lack of this opportunity has prevented acquisition of important areas authorized by Congress to be included in our Lakeshore.

There are areas within the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore where properties have reverted to local or county government due to unpaid property taxes. The properties are now in limbo and many have reverted to local units of government. There is no incentive to redeem these lots since any new owner was not an owner of record at the time of the dunes bill and not subject to reservation of use provisions. These properties are off the tax roll, but continue to be a burden to local government. This legislation would clarify that the Secretary could accept land now in public ownership due to tax delinquency as long as those taxes are satisfied. Therefore, we support the Section 3 provisions to resolve this issue.

Save the Dunes Council supports H.R. 573. We want to thank the Committee for your time and will be happy to try and answer any questions you have.

Thomas C. Serynek
Current board member and past president, Save the Dunes Council

