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South Haven Area Recreation Authority and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy to Open Porter Legacy Dunes on Friday, June 19 - New Accessible Lakeshore Natural Area in South Haven

SOUTH HAVEN, Mich. —South Haven Area Recreation Authority (SHARA) and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) are excited to announce the opening of Porter Legacy Dunes on Friday, June 19th. Porter Legacy Dunes will be a new fully-accessible natural area located adjacent to Pilgrim Haven Natural Area on the Lake Michigan shoreline. The community is invited to join SHARA and SWMLC for the grand opening on June 19th at 11:00 am. Guests will have the opportunity to explore the loop trail and the boardwalk, enjoy scenic views from the elevated overlook, and celebrate this important addition to our community's natural and recreational resources. The preserve remains closed to the public until that time.

Porter Legacy Dunes is a beautiful, intact, 48-acre forested backdune just south of SWMLC's Pilgrim Haven Natural Area, which is known for its sweeping lake views and peaceful natural setting. SHARA and SWMLC worked together to protect Porter Legacy Dunes in 2020, with the support of a generous grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), as well as significant matching funds provided by SWMLC and its donors.

In 2022, SWMLC received a \$100,000 legacy grant from Entergy-Corporation to design and begin development of the trail system at Porter Legacy Dunes. SWMLC and SHARA worked closely with the National Park Service and graduate students from the University of Michigan on the design of the trail system.

In 2024, SHARA secured a \$300,000 MNRTF development grant to build the first phase of the new trail and boardwalk, supported by major additional funding from SWMLC and several of



SWMLC's generous private donors, as well as a \$100,000 grant match from Visit South Haven that helped make the award possible. This first phase of the trail and boardwalk system include an accessible ½ mile loop trail, and a spectacular boardwalk that winds through scenic dunes leading visitors to an elevated viewing platform at the top of the sensitive dune complex. The boardwalk and viewing platform offer breathtaking views of Lake Michigan and the surrounding shoreline, while also protecting this rare, backdune habitat and the species that live there. Thoughtfully designed with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) guidelines and conservation of the natural area in mind, the project ensures that people of all ages and abilities can experience and enjoy the beauty of southwest Michigan's lakeshore. Preserve visitors must stay on the trail and boardwalk (and off the dune and other natural areas) to ensure the protection of the sensitive habitats.

"The Porter Legacy Dunes boardwalk creates an opportunity for everyone to connect with nature and experience the incredible beauty of our lakeshore," said Chris Van Hekken (SHARA Director). "This project reflects our community's commitment to accessibility, conservation, and public recreation."

"Porter Legacy Dunes continues our strong partnership with SHARA," added Mike Larson, SWMLC Executive Director. "We're excited for this opportunity to manage and protect the rare natural features of this beautiful preserve, and to be part of creating more ways for people to enjoy and learn about nature, while also protecting it for the future."

Although construction of the boardwalk is complete, additional amenities are still needed to make the site welcoming, comfortable, and easy to enjoy for all visitors. Planned improvements include visitor support features such as seating areas and interpretive signage.

Porter Legacy Dunes offers both a recreational destination and a lasting investment in accessible, natural outdoor experiences for many future generations.

SHARA owns the property and will maintain the human-made infrastructure on the preserve, while SWMLC will protect the unique conservation values at Porter Legacy Dunes.

Community sponsorships and donor support will play a key role in providing the finishing touches and ensuring the long-term enjoyment of this unique natural asset.

For sponsorship opportunities or additional information, please contact:

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