



Impact Statement

William Shin, Grade 9

Where Dedication Becomes a Landscape, 2026

Digital Art

Northwood High School, Irvine, CA

Unsung Hero: Dorothy Buell

“You’re a woman, you wouldn’t understand such things.”

Those dismissive words were uttered to Dorothy Buell when she fought to save the land that would become Indiana Dunes National Park. Still, instead of silencing her, they sparked one of the most important grassroots conservation efforts in American history. Dorothy Buell started as a figure who wasn’t much recognized, with no political ties, until her actions resulted in a lasting environmental impact, followed by federal support. Furthermore, her dedication to achieving her goal shows that leadership is primarily focused on persistence and responsibility rather than fame or power, which is what inspired me to start on this artwork. In the early 1900s to 1940s, Dorothy Buell moved to Indiana as she began to connect with the landscape and environmental aspect of the dunes. Until then, the expansion of machinery in the Indiana Dunes threatened the natural contents, so Buell worked to raise awareness in order to prevent industrialization in the land that was deeply connected to her, despite not having any political connection at that time. Through petitions, campaigns, and organized advocacy, even federal officials led to the establishment of the protection of the Indiana Dunes, along with the development of a national park there. Her impact not only raised a council to protect the environment but also proved that citizens can successfully challenge large industries.

Within the depiction of Buell’s success in preserving the Indiana Dunes, Dorothy Buell is seen holding legislation with her right hand, implying government involvement behind the action. Additionally, she is carrying a Piping Plover in her left hand along with rocks and seeds around the bird, “guarding” the bird from any unseen threat during the process. Furthermore, the penny necklace Buell is wearing illustrates the student donations used to buy land for preservation, along with a crowd in the back as they helped save the natural aspects from being jeopardized by the industrial movement of the Indiana Dunes. Lastly, both the wildlife and the glowing patches surrounding Dorothy Buell and at the back contains different kinds of plants, not only because of biodiversity but shows the significance on why it meant a lot to Buell as to the foundation of the “Save the Dunes” council, especially how the wild lupines symbolizes the importance of dreams that connect to Dorothy Buell’s goal to preserve the Indiana Dunes. During the process of making this project, I took inspiration from premade Indiana Dunes posters on the internet to construct an idea for the background and used Adobe Photoshop to display a smooth and graphical design to balance realism and stylization. Plus, I used historical

photographs and information to draw out Dorothy Buell herself and her activism to ensure my artwork is historically accurate to real events.

Developing this artwork influenced a mindset to think about ongoing environmental issues and how individuals can address them with determination to resolution. Buell's heroic actions are a testament to how an individual can spark a process of local actions that lead to a larger outcome, especially by working together to achieve a common goal. I hope my audience can understand how important it is to preserve an environment from any signs of threat as long as effort is made. I plan to share this artwork through social media, especially by sharing it with my friends and encouraging them to understand the significance of Dorothy Buell's actions and strive for the greater good.

References:

"Dorothy Buell (U.S. National Park Service)." [Nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov/people/dorothy-buell.htm), 2024, www.nps.gov/people/dorothy-buell.htm.

Buell, Dorothy. "Dorothy Buell: Sands of Time | about the Hero."

Lowell Milken Center, 5 Apr. 2018, www.lowellmilkencenter.org/programs/projects/view/sands-of-time/hero. "History - Save the Dunes." Save the Dunes, 7 Feb. 2025, savedunes.org/history/.