

ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

Corridor Plan and Environmental Assessment for Southern Langlade County, Wisconsin



Prepared by:

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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document analyzes alternatives for locating and developing the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (NST) through southern Langlade County in Wisconsin and proposes implementation of the “Preferred” alternative.

On October 3, 1980, an amendment to the National Trails System (16 U.S.C. 1241 et seq.) authorized establishment of the Ice Age Trail as a National Scenic Trail (NST). To date, Congress has authorized the establishment of eleven NSTs—“extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass.” These trails are patterned after the renowned Appalachian NST. NSTs are intended to provide superlative experiences compared to other trails.

Congress only authorized a general route for the trail. The National Park Service (NPS) and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) are coordinating and facilitating the planning process to determine a more specific route for the trail in each county or multi-county area. A planning team was formed to evaluate corridor and possible trail route options and conduct a public involvement process in southern Langlade County.

The proposal is to establish a planned and mapped “Corridor of Opportunity” within which lands for the trail may be acquired, developed, managed, and protected for the southern Langlade County portion of the Ice Age NST. This will help guide agencies and private volunteer organizations in their efforts to secure a route for the trail. The Corridor of Opportunity is approximately 3-6 miles wide. Since all participation in the Ice Age NST is voluntary, this width allows flexibility when locating the trail. A decision to not adopt the preferred alternative would limit some Federal participation in this County, but it would not preclude the work continuing as described under the No-Action Alternative. Each segment of trail will be developed as funds and approvals allow. The goal, however, is a continuous completed trail.

The Langlade County portion of the Ice Age Trail contains a diversity of geologic features left by the last glacial advance. It generally follows the undulating terrain of the Hancock, Almond, Summit and Parrish Moraines left by the Green Bay and Langlade Lobes. This landscape reveals a dramatic contrast between the hilly terrain of the forested moraines and the vast, nearly level outwash plain they encompass. The plain, known world-wide as the Antigo Flats, is dominated by vast agricultural fields. Depending on the route, it is expected that when complete

the Langle County portion of the Ice Age Trail will be between 70 and 75 miles. Today, more than 54 miles of the trail have been established from the Lincoln/Langle County line to just northeast of Mueller Lake Park in the Towns of Polar and Evergreen. The actual alignment of the remaining trail in southern Langle County between the Town of Evergreen, and the Marathon County line to the southwest is dependent on the willing cooperation of affected landowners.

A “No Action” alternative has been identified. Two other possible alternatives—Alternative 2 & 3--were presented to the public for review and comment as part of the planning process. While the southern halves of both corridors are identical, Alternative 2 focuses on the terminal moraine. Alternative 3, located behind the terminal moraine, concentrates on capturing the existing public lands and facilities in this area. The “Preferred” alternative, Alternative 4, represents a combination of both Alternatives 2 and 3.

The “Preferred” alternative provides the potential to link a number of public properties including four state fishery areas, the Steffen Memorial Forest, County Gun and Bow Range, Mueller Lake Park and several local parks. It contains the communities of Polar and Elmhurst, with the City of Antigo located immediately north of the proposed corridor. Collectively, these areas may provide support facilities such as trailheads, parking, food, water, lodging, and phones. The corridor encompasses an intricate patchwork of native woodlands, pine plantations, cropland, open grasslands, and wetland areas. Among the natural resources found within the corridor are a white cedar-dominated seepage swamp, spring ponds, outstanding trout streams, springs and deep kettle lakes. Well-placed scenic overlooks could provide dramatic views of the expansive Antigo Flats and the Parrish and Summit Moraines beyond. A number of possible trail route options within the corridor were identified and evaluated, and can be found in Appendix A.

The 1983 Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use of the Ice Age NST states that the trail is primarily intended to be a hiking trail. This management approach helps ensure that it provides a high quality walking/hiking experience. It also reflects a high level of consideration for private landowners who allow the trail to cross their property or who live near the trail, who are generally more willing to accept a hiking trail than a trail with activities that have more impact on the land, or are more intrusive in terms of sight and sound. Other compatible recreational activities such as bird-watching and snowshoeing are encouraged. In addition, the trail may accommodate cross-country skiing on ungroomed segments that are designed and constructed for this use. Development of a low impact trail using careful design and construction techniques will result in no significant impacts to natural, cultural, social, and economic resources.

Developing and managing the Ice Age NST through southern Langle County may produce minor negative impacts. Negative impacts on the human environment are generally limited to a perceived increase in nuisance level. Experience has shown that these concerns do not materialize after the trail is constructed. As a group, hikers tend to be environmentally conscious and responsible, and typically do not trespass or litter. At public open house meetings, concerns were expressed about interference with hunting, logging, and potential conflicts with motorized use. The trail’s authorizing legislation prohibits motorized use; however, snowmobiles may be

allowed on designated sections. Currently, some existing portions of the Ice Age NST in Langlade County, particularly those located on logging roads, allow snowmobiles.

Positive benefits for trail users and neighboring landowners would include recreation and fitness opportunities. Other benefits may include aesthetic beauty, open space, natural resource protection, and higher property resale values. Local communities may also experience bolstered economies and increased local pride.

Written comments on this Trailway Plan and Environmental Assessment will be accepted by the NPS, for purposes of compliance with Federal requirements, and by the WDNR, for purposes of compliance with State requirements until June 14, 2013. Address your comments to:

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	BACKGROUND ON THE ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL.....	1
CHAPTER 2:	PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION.....	5
CHAPTER 3:	ISSUES AND CONCERNS.....	13
CHAPTER 4:	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CORRIDOR PLANNING PROCESS IN SOUTHERN LANGLADE COUNTY.....	17
CHAPTER 5:	DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES AND PREFERRED ACTION.....	19
CHAPTER 6:	CORRIDOR’S AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.....	35
A.	LOCATIONAL DESCRIPTION OF SOUTHERN LANGLADE COUNTY.....	35
B.	CORRIDOR’S PHYSICAL RESOURCES.....	36
	Geology.....	36
	Soils.....	39
	Water Resources.....	40
	Air Quality.....	40
	Visual Resources.....	41
C.	CORRIDOR’S BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES.....	41
	Ecosystem.....	41
	Invasive Species.....	42
	Wildlife.....	43
	Fisheries.....	43
	Threatened and Endangered Species.....	43
D.	CORRIDOR’S CULTURAL RESOURCES.....	44
E.	CORRIDOR’S SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES.....	45
	Population Trends.....	45
	Communities and Businesses.....	46
	Land Use and Land Ownership.....	47
	Recreation Resources.....	48
	Public Health.....	50
	Tax Base.....	50
CHAPTER 7:	CORRIDOR IMPACT ANALYSIS.....	51
	<u>IMPACT ANALYSIS SUMMARY.....</u>	<u>51</u>

	Impacts Common to Both Alternatives.....	51
	Differences Between Alternatives.....	51
	<u>DETAILED IMPACT ANALYSIS</u>	52
A.	IMPACTS TO PHYSICAL RESOURCES.....	52
	Geology.....	52
	Soils.....	53
	Water Resources.....	53
	Air Quality.....	54
	Visual Resources.....	55
B.	IMPACTS TO BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES.....	56
	Ecosystem.....	56
	Invasive Species.....	57
	Wildlife.....	58
	Fisheries.....	58
	Threatened and Endangered Species.....	59
C.	IMPACTS TO CULTURAL RESOURCES.....	59
D.	IMPACTS TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES.....	59
	Communities and Businesses.....	59
	Land Use and Land Ownership.....	60
	Recreation Resources.....	61
	Public Health.....	62
	Tax Base and Fiscal Impacts.....	62
	Land Acquisition and Development.....	63
	Estimated Cost of Land Acquisition.....	63
	Estimated Cost of Trail Development.....	64
E.	SUMMARY OF CUMULATIVE IMPACTS.....	65

CHAPTER 8:	PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, CONSULTATION, AND COORDINATION, DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	67
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Appendices---Table of Contents.....	73	
A.	IDENTIFICATION OF POSSIBLE ROUTE OPTIONS.....	75
B.	TRAIL DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT STANDARDS.....	109
C.	NPS PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT FOR THE ICE AGE NST.....	115
D.	MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (NPS, WDNR, IATA) and ICE AGE NST VISION AND ATTRIBUTES.....	117
E.	PROGRAMMATIC AGREEMENT BETWEEN NPS AND STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.....	137
F.	CORRESPONDENCE.....	147
G.	LEGISLATION AND STATUTES.....	165
H.	REFERENCES CONSULTED.....	167

List of Maps

Map 1-1	State of Wisconsin with Ice Age NST.....	3
Map 2-1	State of Wisconsin with Langlade County and Project Area.....	7
Map 2-2	Langlade County with existing Ice Age NST and Public Land.....	9
Map 2-3	Southern Langlade County with existing Ice Age NST in 1983.....	11
Map 5-1	Southern Langlade County Ice Age NST Corridor Alternatives.....	27
Map 5-2	Southern Langlade County Alternative 4, “Preferred,” Corridor, Southern Half....	29
Map 5-3	Southern Langlade County Alternative 4, “Preferred,” Corridor, Northern Half....	31

Figures	Figure-1	Wisconsin Glacial Lobes.....	36
	Figure- 2	Geologic Features within the proposed Langlade County Ice Age NST Corridor.....	37

Table of Tables

Table-1	Population Trends.....	45
Table-2	Estimated Land Use in proposed Ice Age NST Corridor.....	47
Table-3	Cost of Trailway for Ice Age NST.....	64

