



September 2, 2022

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT CORRIDOR PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Ice Age National Scenic Trail
Marquette County, Wisconsin

BACKGROUND

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), also referred to as a Corridor Plan, to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action to designate a corridor for land acquisition and management of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (NST) within Marquette County, Wisconsin. When complete, the Marquette County portion of the Ice Age NST will be between 45 and 55 miles. The actual length of the remaining trail between the Marquette/Columbia County line and Marquette/Waushara/Adams County lines is dependent on the route. Each segment of trail will be developed as funds and approvals allow, with a goal of a continuous completed trail through the county. The proposal is to establish a 2-5 mile wide corridor within which lands for the trail may be acquired, developed, managed, and protected for the Marquette County portion of the Ice Age NST. This plan will help guide agencies and private volunteer organizations in their efforts to secure a route for the trail.

This document records (1) a Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended; (2) a finding of no effect to federally listed species or their habitat as required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Section 7; and (3) a finding of no historic properties affected as required by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Section 106, as it relates to the development of this plan. Trail development or any planning for the trail outside the scope of the EA will require further analysis. This EA is available on the National Park Service Planning, Environmental and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: [Parkplanning - Marquette County Ice Age NST Corridor Planning Process \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/parkplanning-marquette-county-ice-age-nst-corridor-planning-process).

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR FEDERAL ACTION

The Purpose and Need of the EA is to identify and evaluate potential corridors where a route for the Ice Age NST could be established in Marquette County, from the Columbia County line north to the

Waushara and Adams County lines. Although the Ice Age NST's Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use of the Ice Age NST (Comp Plan) of 1983 designated a general route for the trail, the development of a corridor will help identify locations for the trail to get the trail off roads. The maps in the Comp Plan frequently identify roads as "Connecting Road Segment to NST" where there was no trail in existence and no specific off-road trail was identified for the future. This alignment was displayed on the maps even though it was known that these road routes could not serve as the route of the Ice Age NST long-term. The Comp Plan states that the Ice Age NST, "should be a continuous overland (off-road) trail." The roads identified on the maps were placeholders for a future alignment that would need to be determined through a detailed analysis. This planning work was identified as a priority action in the Comp Plan, "Detailed planning for the location and construction of new trail segments needed to make the Ice Age NST a continuous off-road trail as identified in this plan should begin as soon as possible as a cooperative effort between the Ice Age Trail Council (now Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA)), Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), and the NPS."

This plan is consistent with the general guidance of the Comp Plan and supports statutory requirements of 54 USC § 100502, specifically the requirement to address measures for preservation of resources, types and general intensities of development, and the identification of visitor carrying capacities.

In addition, this EA addresses the Secretary's responsibility in section 7(a)(2) of the National Trails System Act [16 U.S.C. 1246(a)(2)] to:

"select the rights-of-way for [the Ice Age] national scenic [Trail] . . ." The act goes on to specify: "That in selecting the rights-of-way full consideration shall be given to minimizing the adverse effects upon the adjacent landowner or user and their operation. Development and management of each segment of the National Trails System shall be designed to harmonize with and complement any established multiple use plans for the specific area in order to ensure continued maximum benefits from the land. . . . In selecting rights-of-way for trail purposes, the Secretary shall obtain the advice and assistance of the States, local governments, private organizations, and landowners and land users concerned."

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Three action alternatives and a No Action Alternative were considered and discussed throughout the public involvement process. The northern portions of Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 had distinct themes. All action alternatives illustrate a corridor that is approximately 2-5 miles wide with their southern portions mirroring each other through the John Muir Neighborhood located in the Township of Buffalo. All alternatives contain portions of the Elderon Moraine. As a result of the public involvement process, a hybrid alternative (Alternative 4) emerged as the Preferred Alternative.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Secretary of the Interior's responsibility to select a route pursuant of the National Trails System Act (NTSA) would not be carried out and no corridor would be established. WDNR and/or other local and state entities could continue to pursue the development of a trail, but there may be no direct NPS involvement. Local and private partners working to establish the trail could continue to be guided by the general route referenced in the

NTSA, which for the most part is a conceptual route and could deviate from it at their discretion. Trail users would continue to follow the route as it is designed by the partners, without the guidance of the Preferred Alternative.

Preferred Alternative

Under the Preferred Alternative, a corridor would be designated approximately 2-5 miles in width, extending north and west from the Marquette/Columbia County line to the Marquette/Waushara/Adams County line. This corridor contains the highest concentration of unique glacial features. In addition, it provides the potential to link several public properties including a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Wildlife Protection Areas, three WDNR State Wildlife Areas, four WDNR Scenic Natural Areas, municipal parks, and John Muir County Park, where 1.8 miles of existing Ice Age NST have been constructed, the only Ice Age NST in Marquette County. A portion of the original Muir farmstead in the County is a National Historic Landmark and State Natural Area. In addition to Muir's homestead, the Preferred Alternative includes other areas that had an influence on Muir. Moreover, this alternative provides opportunities for the trail to connect with the adjoining counties of Columbia, Adams, and Waushara to facilitate the trail bifurcation which provides access through the superlative glacial lake Wisconsin landscape.

Selected Alternative and Rationale

The NPS has selected the Preferred Alternative as described and analyzed in the EA for implementation. The Preferred Alternative was selected because it best fulfills the Purpose and Need, and the intent of Congress and the Wisconsin State Legislature. It is based on an evaluation of the geologic and natural features, public lands, support facilities, and cultural resources found in Marquette County. The Preferred Alternative incorporates the geologic features, public lands, and support facilities meeting the project's objectives.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The NPS places strong emphasis on avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating potentially adverse environmental impacts. Therefore, multiple mitigation measures and best management practices (BMPs) are included to protect natural and cultural resources. These mitigations and BMPs are described in Chapter 5 of the EA.

The authority for this project's mitigations comes from the following laws and policies:

- National Park Service Organic Act (16 United States Code [U.S.C.] 1)
- National Park Service Management Policies (NPS 2006)
- Endangered Species Act (1973)
- National Historic Preservation Act (1966)
- National Trails System Act (1968)

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA OVERVIEW

Potentially Affected Environment

This EA designates a trail corridor within Marquette County for the Ice Age NST. Potentially affected resources identified in the EA include the following: geology, soils, vegetation, surface and groundwater resources, wildlife, recreation resources, cultural resources, Native American cultural resources and concerns, and socioeconomics. These resources are described in detail in Chapter 5 of the EA.

Degree of Effects of the Action

The NPS considered the following actual or potential project effects in evaluating the degree of the effects (40 CFR 1501.3(b)(2)) for this proposed action.

a. Beneficial and adverse, and short- and long-term effects of the proposed action.

The Selected Alternative will result in mostly long-term beneficial impacts, and some negligible or minor short-term adverse impacts, as described below.

Development and construction of the trail is entirely dependent on willing landowners. The designation of a corridor would result in long-term beneficial effects to geological resources through protection from disruptive land uses. There is potential for short-term adverse impacts to soils during the construction phase, however, these impacts will be analyzed at the trail building phase and best management practices will be implemented. The Selected Alternative would result in long-term beneficial impacts to forest communities by extending the protected trailway and avoiding future fragmentation of the trailway ecosystem. Short-term adverse impacts to vegetation from introduction of invasive species may occur at the trail building phase; however, these effects would be mitigated through control efforts. The Selected Alternative would have long-term beneficial impacts to vegetation by providing a protected trailway that would be managed for control of invasive species. There would be no adverse effects to plant species of concern, due to avoidance measures and additional consultation with the USFWS and WDNR during design of the trail alignment. During construction, there could be negligible short-term adverse impacts to water resources from sedimentation and temporary stream bank destabilization. During construction, some negligible, short-term, adverse impacts to wildlife and threatened and endangered species could occur, including limited displacement of certain species, however, overall patterns of use would not change. All potential impacts would be mitigated by adhering to best management practices and consulting with USFWS. The development of the trail would result in long-term beneficial impacts to wildlife by reducing habitat fragmentation. There could be some negligible, short-term adverse impacts to fisheries during construction activities as a result of possible erosion, sedimentation, and temporary stream bank destabilization. The impacts, including some

displacement, would be temporary and localized, and fisheries are anticipated to recover quickly. If the trail is constructed, it would have highly beneficial, long-term regional impacts on recreation resources and opportunities. The trail could add to existing recreation opportunities in the county and provide an important linkage to existing trail segments.

The Selected Alternative would have localized, long-term beneficial impacts to cultural resources through interpretation of historic sites. The consultation and coordination process outlined in the 2021 Programmatic Agreement between the NPS and the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) would ensure the preservation or avoidance of important cultural resources in the corridor and result in no adverse impacts during the trail building phase. The designation of the corridor does not have adverse effects on Native American cultural resources and concerns. Tribal consultation was initiated early in the planning process, and comments were received from the Ho-Chunk and Forest County Pottawatomi. These comments were incorporated prior to public release of the EA. No other comments on the project have been received from tribes.

Development of a corridor through Marquette County would have a direct, long-term beneficial impact to socioeconomic resources, as documented in a 2020 University of Wisconsin study. If the trail is developed, the potential acquisitions would have no adverse effects to the tax base, due to state and federal Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) programs.

b. Degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

Implementing the Selected Alternative would have beneficial impacts to human health by potentially increasing recreational opportunities. No other effects to human health and safety are anticipated. In Chapter 5 of the EA, human health and safety was dismissed from further analysis as an impact topic.

c. Effects that would violate federal, state, tribal, or local law protecting the environment.

The Selected Alternative does not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection laws. The NPS has complied with all federal, state, and local laws with relevance to the Selected Alternative. The EA has been developed to meet requirements of the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act (WEPA) in addition to NEPA as per Ice Age NST's partnership and general agreement with the WDNR.

During preparation of the EA, the NPS consulted with federal and state agencies, tribes, interested and affected parties, and the public. Notifications included the Congressional delegation, state, and local elected officials. These activities are summarized in Chapter 5 of the EA and are further detailed below.

Public Involvement

Scoping was initiated on May 7, 2012, with the initial meeting of the Core Team. The Core Team was composed of the Marquette County Chapter of the Ice Age NST Volunteers, IATA, WDNR, Marquette County, USFWS, and NPS. Presentations were made to each of the local town and village boards within the project area to discuss the EA and respond to questions and concerns about the Ice Age NST the Summer of 2012 through May 2013. Similar presentations were made during this period to the City of Montello, Maquette County Parks and Rural Planning Committee, and Marquette County Board of Supervisors. May 2, 18, and 23, 2012, in Westfield, Montello, and the Township of Moundville, respectively.

In 2013, the Core Team began to develop alternative corridors for the Ice Age NST through Marquette County. The alternatives were referred to as the No Action, Alternative 1-Glacial Features, Alternative 2- Public Lands, and Alternative 3-Most Direct Route. These alternatives were based on the conceptual ideas gathered during the initial scoping process. In the fall of 2013 and early 2014 they once again met with local officials to announce the next series of open house meetings and present the concept alternatives and answer questions. In the spring of 2014, three open house meetings for the public to present the four alternatives to landowners, local officials, and other interested stakeholders. Following these meetings, the Preferred Alternative was selected.

To prepare for the final open house meetings to present the Preferred Alternative to the public, the Core Team members met with all the communities that would be affected by the Proposed Action, Buffalo, Packwaukee, Montello, Harris, Westfield, and Springfield in January 2020. The NPS office prepared and sent letters to landowners and public officials inviting them to open house meetings to be held on March 26, 28, and 30, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, any in person meetings needed to be canceled; however, the NPS continued to communicate with the Core Team. The Core Team worked to develop a process to solicit public comment.

On July 1, 2022, the public was contacted and invited to review and comment on this EA through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) system with another round of individual invitations and press releases to local media outlets. The press release was also posted on the park's website. The public was asked to review the EA and share their comments for 30-days between July 6, 2022, and August 7, 2022, related to the EA. During public review, twenty-one (21) correspondences were received through PEPC or by email. Letters were sent to local government officials and postcards were sent to all local landowners notifying them of the plan.

Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office

The Wisconsin SHPO was provided a pre-public draft EA on April 7, 2022. The park did not receive a response within 30 days of the original notice. SHPO was contacted again on July 21, 2022, and materials resubmitted electronically. On July 22, 2022, NPS

received confirmation that the materials were received by SHPO and recorded under case #22-1222. The park received a response on August 2, 2022, stating “We find no issues with the corridor plan. We also stand ready to commence any Section 106 of the NHPA consultations as per the corridor plan.”

Tribal Consultation

On March 25, 2022, a letter was sent to the fourteen affiliated tribal governments that included a pre-public draft EA. A follow-up email was sent to the tribe’s Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO) on April 7, 2022. Comments were received via email from the Ho-Chunk (May 13, 2022) and Forest County Pottawatomi (May 16, 2022) THPOs and incorporated into the document prior to public release.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The NPS initiated informal consultation with the USFWS February 2012. The NPS notified the USFWS that the NPS was developing a Corridor Plan and EA for Marquette County. The USFWS was also notified regarding the plan’s progress in July 2013 (scoping) and July 2014 (development of alternatives).

The USFWS was sent a pre-public review of the draft EA on April 4, 2022. Comments were received from Bruce Luebke, Wildlife Refuge Specialist, who also serves as District Manager, Leopold Wetland Management District, and as a member of the Core Team. His comments were incorporated into the draft prior to the EA being released to the public. No further comments were received from the USFWS.

Since the exact location of future trail in the corridor is unknown at this time, the NPS will consult with USFWS under Section 7 of the ESA on each project as the plan is implemented and individual trail segments are developed. The NPS determined the plan itself would have no effect on threatened and endangered species. The NPS obtained a species list for the project area using the USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) system (<https://ecos.fws.gov/ipac>). The list indicates there may be four species present in the project area: the northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), whooping crane (*Grus americana*) and Karner Blue Butterfly (*Lycaeides melissa samuelis*), Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). The draft plan was updated with the revised species information prior to the public comment period.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

The WDNR provided substantial feedback and support regarding the development of the EA beginning in May 2012. Throughout the process WDNR staff worked with the NPS to ensure the resulting EA would fulfill the requirements of both NEPA and WEPA. The WDNR received written correspondence regarding the plan’s progress in July 2013 (Scoping) and July 2014 (Development of Alternatives).

WDNR staff received a pre-public review of the draft EA on April 4, 2022. Compiled WDNR staff comments were received from Andrew Hanson, Partnership Liaison, on May 12 and May 26, 2022. Comments were addressed and additional information as

requested was included in the draft prior to public release. Additional comments were received after the start of the public review period. These comments were addressed, incorporated into the final version, and noted in the attached errata.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the information contained in the EA, it has been determined that the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. An Environmental Impact Statement is therefore not required for this project and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality criteria for significance (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1501.3 [b] (2020)), regarding the potentially affected environment and degrees of effects of the impacts described in the EA (which is hereby incorporated by reference) and as summarized above.

ERIC GABRIEL Digitally signed by ERIC GABRIEL
Date: 2022.09.02 14:06:35 -05'00'

Recommended:

Eric Gabriel
Superintendent
Ice Age National Scenic Trail

Date

Approved:

Herbert C. Frost, Ph.D.
Regional Director
National Park Service DOI Regions 3, 4, and 5

Date

ATTACHMENT A: RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND ERRATA

On July 6, 2022, Ice Age National Scenic Trail released the Corridor Plan (CP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Marquette County, Wisconsin for public comment. Striving to reach a broad audience, the park distributed announcements by e-mail and/or hard copy to local, state, and federal government officials. The park also announced the release of the EA via press release. The public was asked to review the plan and share their comments for 30-days between July 6, 2022, and August 7, 2022, related to environmental analysis of actions proposed for the study area.

This section includes both minor edits and technical revisions to the EA that resulted as a response to comments received from general commenters and consultants during the public review period. These revisions do not change the outcome of the impact analysis, nor do they affect the final decision documented in the Finding of No Significant Impact.

The Errata, when combined with the EA, comprises the only amendment deemed necessary for the purposes of completing the Final Corridor Plan and Environmental Assessment for Marquette County, WI.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND ISSUES

During public review of the EA, twenty-one (21) correspondences were received through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website. A total of forty-six (46) comments were recorded and coded. Most comments were editorial in nature or requests for additional information. There were no substantive comments or comments received.

ERRATA - MINOR EDITS TO THE CORRIDOR PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR MARQUETTE COUNTY, WI.

Clarification or Minor Technical Edits:

Table 1: Technical Revision or Change

Page/Section	Revision or Change
PLAN and EA	
All pages	Minor revisions to page numbers possible due to final formatting for content and accessibility.
Page 15	Replaced ‘described and analyzed’ with ‘shown’ in last sentence.
Page 17	Updated “on a farm near Fountain Lake (now known as Ennis Lake)”

	to 'at Fountain Lake Farm National Historic Site (private property). Fountain Lake is now known as Ennis Lake,...
Page 18	Removed reference to Muir brothers killing wolf
Page 45	Updated Chaffe Creek SWA to Chaffe Creek SFA
Page 48	1-Added the word "owned" to first sentence of first complete paragraph to read "The 643-acre Page Creek Marsh SNA, located just south of Lake Buffalo, is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy." 2-Removed the word "overlain" and rewrote the third sentence so it reads: "Both Page Creek and Observatory Hill are State Natural Areas." 3-Removed reference to "WDNR 2013"
Page 69	Replaced 'After the possible trail routes were developed based on the ten objectives, the desirability of each alternative could be evaluated based on' with 'Trail development will be guided by'
Appendix	
Appendix A Page 69	Removed tabular information from Appendix A to eliminate redundancy with information presented graphically in Appendix A maps.
Appendix D Page 81	Added NR 150.40(2)(a) to Section A. (2)