National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Ice Age National Scenic Trail
Wisconsin

Blue Hills Trail Re-Route

Rusk County, Wisconsin

Environmental Assessment

Executive Summary

The National Park Service (NPS), Ice Age National Scenic Trail (IATR), is proposing to construct 18.6 miles of new trail in Rusk County, Wisconsin to re-route 22 miles of existing trail. The new trail will provide better access to the unique geologic and glacial features in the Rusk County Forest. The proposed action also meets the goals of the 1983 Ice Age National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan (Comp Plan).

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide a decision-making framework as follows: 1) Assess a reasonable range of alternatives to meet the purpose and need of the proposed action; 2) Evaluate potential impacts to the natural and cultural resources; and 3) Identify required mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of any potential adverse environmental impacts.

The EA evaluates two alternatives, Alternative A: No Action, and Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative). Alternative B includes brushing, tread construction, two wetland crossings (boardwalks), 14 stream crossings, stone stairs, one bridge, and signage post installation. The trail re-route would occur entirely within the Rusk County Forest, managed by Rusk County, and would connect to the existing Ice Age National Scenic Trail (Ice Age NST).

This EA identifies the categories of resources, or impact topics, found within the project area that are most likely to be affected by the actions described in each alternative. These topics have undergone a detailed analysis by NPS staff to determine the most likely effects on the resources, and the mitigations required to avoid resource damage. The impact topics are identified in Section 1.4 of this document and in Table 1. The Preferred Alternative, Alternative B, would result in no significant impacts to resources.

Public Comment

This EA will be available for public review for 30 days. The NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) site provides access to current plans and related documents that are available for public review. To comment on this EA, you may post comments online at https://parkplanning.nps.gov or mail comments by May 12, 2024, to:

Ice Age National Scenic Trail
Attn: Superintendent Eric Gabriel
8075 Old Sauk Pass Rd
Cross Plains, WI 53528

Prior to including personal identifying information such as address, phone number, or email address with submitted comments, be aware that the entire comment, including personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While submitters can ask the NPS in the comment to withhold personal identifying information from public review, the NPS cannot guarantee they will be able to do so.

ON THE COVER
Blue Hills Felsenmeer State Natural Area. Ice Age Trail Alliance photo.

List of Acronyms

APE	Area of Potential Effect
CEQ	Council of Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DCA	Dispersed Camping Area
EA	Environmental Assessment
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
IATA	Ice Age Trail Alliance
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHI	National Heritage Inventory
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NPS	National Park Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NST	National Scenic Trail
NTSA	National Trails System Act
PA	Programmatic Agreement
ROS	Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
SCORP	Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
USC	U.S. Code
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
WDNR	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

On October 3, 1980, an amendment to the National Trails System Act (NTSA) (16 U.S.C. 1241 et seq.), authorized the establishment of the Ice Age Trail as a National Scenic Trail (Ice Age NST) in Wisconsin. The trail extends 1,200 miles, from Interstate State Park on the St. Croix River in Polk County to Potawatomi State Park in Door County. Statewide, approximately 700 miles of the trail are complete and open for use, including 22 miles of Ice Age NST in Rusk County. The trail exists in 30 counties in Wisconsin and passes through the ancestral lands of 15 Native American Tribes. The Ice Age NST is intended to be primarily a hiking trail. Other compatible uses include winter activities such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, and some portions of segments allow snowmobiles per the NTSA.

The 1983 IATR Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) provides general guidance on where to locate the trail, and states that the trail shall follow the terminal moraine or glacial features left by the last glacial advance. Maps showing the proposed 1983 route can be found in Appendix C.

Prior to the establishment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, Ray Zilmer's vision inspired this trail and the creation of the Ice Age Trail and Park Foundation. Today, the Ice Age Trail and Park Foundation is known as the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA), a non-profit organization and accredited land trust.

The Ice Age NST is one of eleven NSTs. The purpose of the Ice Age NST is to preserve some of the finest features of Wisconsin's glacial landscape, as well as other scenic, natural, and cultural resources, while providing opportunities for low impact recreational and educational activities such as walking and hiking. The Purpose and Significance of Ice Age NST can be reviewed at: https://www.nps.gov/iatr/learn/management/upload/508-purpose-and-sig.pdf

In 1987, the Wisconsin State Legislature formalized, through (s 23.17), legislation designating the trail as a State Scenic Trail, assigning the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) responsibility for coordinating the involvement of state agencies in the trail project and cooperating with the National Park Service (NPS).

The Ice Age NST is managed and administered cooperatively and pursuant of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the NPS, WDNR, and IATA. The MOU can be found at: https://www.nps.gov/iatr/getinvolved/upload/IATR_MOU_TRIAD_Fully_Executed_508.pdf.

Together, the WDNR, IATA, and NPS administer, build, and manage the Ice Age NST. Known as the Triad, this group collaborates and continues to pursue the establishment of trail off roads and land acquisition to support the trail. The trail is built and maintained almost entirely by volunteers. The trail is built on both public and private land. The development of trail on private land is entirely dependent on willing landowners as well as the selling of their land to the Triad partners.

Figure 1. Overview map of Wisconsin illustrating Ice Age NST with an emphasis on Rusk County

1.2 Purpose and Need for Action

The primary purpose of this project is to re-route a section of the Ice Age NST to comply with Section 5 of the National Trails System Act of 1968 (NTSA), as amended (16 USC § 1241 *et seq.)* which defined National Scenic Trails, as "*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.*" The proposed action directly supports IATR's 1983 Comp Plan, which provides general guidance on where to locate the trail and states that the trail should interpret and follow the terminal moraine or glacial features left by the last glacial advance.

The project is needed to provide better interpretation and access to geologic features in Rusk County Forest, create a more sustainable trail with improved water structures, permanently protect trail through the Rusk County Forest, move the current trail route from the road, and provide improved access to camping opportunities.

1.3 Relationships to Existing Plans and Programs

The **National Trails System Act (NTSA) of 1968**, as amended (16 USC § 1241 *et seq.)* authorized a national system of trails to provide for increasing outdoor recreation needs and to promote the preservation and enjoyment of and public access to outdoor areas and historic resources of the United States. On October 3, 1980, an amendment to the **NTSA** (16 USC. 1241 et seq.), authorized the establishment of the Ice Age Trail as a NST.

The park's **Foundation Document** describes the purpose, significance, fundamental resources and values, interpretive themes of the Ice Age NST. The purpose of the Ice Age NST is to ensure protection, preservation, and interpretation of the nationally significant resources and values associated with continental glaciation in Wisconsin, and to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities in support of and compatible with the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, and cultural resources along the trail.

The **1983 Comp Plan** provides general guidance on where to locate the trail, and states that the trail shall follow the terminal moraine or glacial features left by the last glacial advance. The trail follows the path of the last advance of the glacier that covered the majority of Wisconsin approximately 15,000 years ago, during the last Ice Age. The Wisconsin Glaciation lasted from about 100,000 to 10,000 years ago.

The Ice Age NST **Handbook for Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance** was developed in 2001. This document provides detailed guidance and a broad range of technical information regarding the methods and standards used to construct the trail.

Wisconsin DNR's **2019-2023 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan** (SCORP) is intended to evaluate outdoor recreation supply, demand, trends, and issues. It serves as a blueprint providing broad guidance to governments at all levels, communities, businesses, and organizations on recreation needs and opportunities. States are required to complete SCORPs

to be eligible for participation in the **Land and Water Conservation Fund** (LWCF) State Assistance Program.[1]

The proposed action would take place within the Rusk County Forest. The Ice Age NST is specifically incorporated into the **Rusk County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan,** revised in November 2020. [2] In 1987, the trail was incorporated into the Rusk County Code of Ordinances, revised August in2022.[3] There is also an existing **Land Use Agreement between Rusk County and the IATA** (Appendix B). This agreement was signed in 2016 for the purpose of cooperating in the development and management of the trail and clarifies the responsibilities of each party. The IATA is currently working with the county to adjust forest stand boundaries to minimize conflicts between logging and recreation.[4]

1.4 Impact Topics

Issues related to cultural resources and resources of interest to tribal nations, surface water resources, wildlife, soils and vegetation, and visitor experience are analyzed in detail in this EA. Resources were retained for detailed analysis either because (a) they are central to the proposal or of critical importance, (b) analyzing them will inform the decision making process, or (c) because there may be environmental impacts associated with the action.

Issues related to air quality, acoustic resources, socioeconomics, environmental justice, and human health and safety have been dismissed from detailed analysis because they are not central to the proposal, do not assist with making a reasoned choice between alternatives, or are not a point of contention.

[1] [1] WDNR-SCORP, https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/fl/PropertyPlanning/Scorp. Accessed 8/30/23.
[2] Rusk County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Chapters 700 and 900- Rev. November 10, 2020.
[3] Rusk County, Wisconsin. Code of Ordinances, Chapter 34 – Parks Forests and Recreation, Article III. Section 34-195. August 2022.
[4] Rusk County Land and Forestry Committee Meeting Minutes. April 19, 2023.

Table 1 Impact Topics Retained and Dismissed

Impact Topic (Resource)	Retain	Dismiss	Rationale for Dismissal
Cultural Resources and Resources of Interest to Tribal Nations	**X**		
Geology (and Paleontology)		**X**	Neither alternative would have impacts on geology or paleontology. The new trail route proposed under Alternative B would improve access for hikers to view geologic resources but would not impact them. Geology was therefore dismissed from further analysis.
Air Quality		**X**	The Clean Air Act of 1963 (42 USC 7401 et seq.) was established to promote public health and welfare by protecting and enhancing the nation's air quality. Air quality would not be affected by either alternative considered in any measurable way. Therefore, air quality was dismissed from further analysis.
Acoustic Resources		**X**	The quality, type and level of acoustic resources present in the current environment would not be affected in any measurable way by either alternative. Therefore, acoustic resources were dismissed from further analysis.
Surface Water Resources	**X**		
Wildlife	**X**		
Soils and Vegetation	**X**		
Socioeconomics		**X**	NPS Director's Order #12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making requires consideration of potential direct and indirect impacts to the local

			economy, including impacts to neighboring businesses in the general project vicinity (NPS 2001). Neither alternative would appreciably impact local businesses or other agencies and socioeconomics was therefore dismissed from further analysis.
Environmental Justice		**X**	Presidential Executive Order 14096 (Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All) builds on Presidential Executive Order 12898 (General Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-income Populations) and directs federal agencies to identify, analyze, and address impacts on environmental justice communities, including minority and/or low-income populations and those with disabilities. Implementing either alternative would not have disproportionately high adverse effects on environmental justice communities within the study area.
Human Health & Safety		**X**	Neither alternative would have adverse impacts on human health and safety. Both alternatives provide beneficial recreational opportunities to trail users, which encourages exercise and promotes physical health. Therefore, human health and safety was dismissed from further analysis.
Visitor Experience	**X**		

CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATIVES

This EA analyzes Alternative A: No Action and Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative). This chapter describes the alternatives in detail, and impacts associated with the actions proposed under each alternative are outlined in Chapter 3: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences.

2.1 Alternative A: No-Action Alternative

Under Alternative A, the 22-mile trail would not be re-routed and no new trail would be constructed. The current route traverses rolling stretches of hardwood forest, winding paths, and logging roads. The northern trailhead for the Ice Age NST in Rusk County Forest is located near Murphy Flowage Recreational Area in the northwestern portion of Rusk County. The southern edge of the Rusk County trail segment begins off County Highway O west of Weyerhaeuser.[5] The current route requires hikers to use multi-purpose paths/roads and walk along roads. Alternative A also requires hikers to ford their own paths through waterways and they frequently pursue unsustainable social trails to view geologic features.

[5] Rusk County Tourism website. Ice Age Trail. https://ruskcountywi.com/ice-age-trail/ Accessed April 28, 2023.

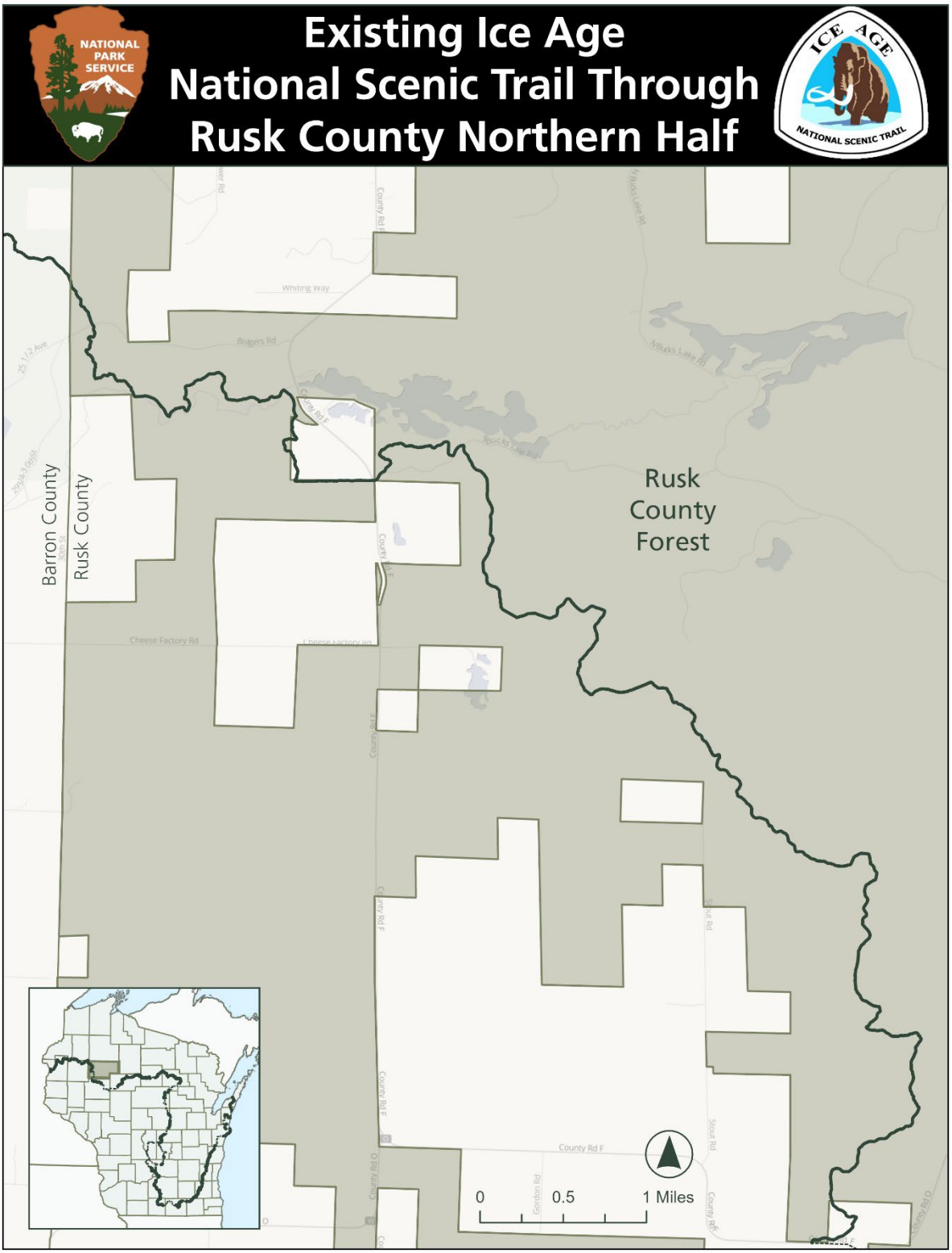

Figure 2. Existing Ice Age NST in Rusk County (north)

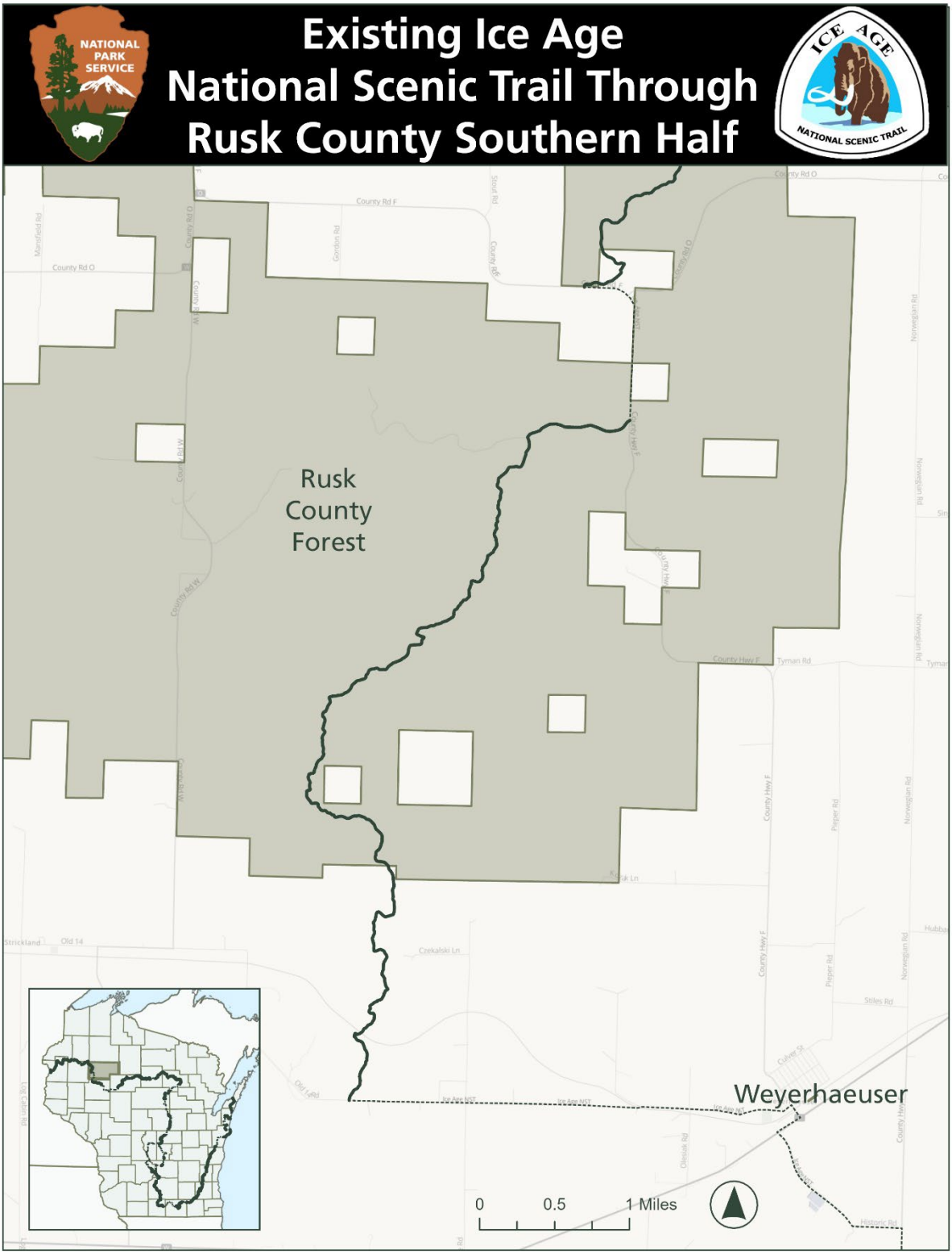

Figure 3. A Map of the southern portion of existing route

2.2 Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative B would construct 18.6 miles of the Ice Age NST in the Rusk County Forest to re-route 22 miles and provide access to some of the unique glacial features found in western Rusk County. The trail would be built by NPS Volunteers and a Wisconsin Conservation Corps crew using predominantly hand tools, incorporating the standards put forth in the "Handbook for Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance."[6] The trail re-route would be designed to avoid or minimize impacts to natural and cultural resources to the extent possible. The trail tread would be 18-30 inches wide. The corridor clearing prism, the area tree limbs would be cleared from to facilitate passage, would be eight feet high by six feet wide. Construction of the 18.6 miles of new trail would result in approximately 14 acres of ground disturbance.

The proposed action includes brushing, tread construction, two wetland crossings (425-foot and 180- foot boardwalks), 14 stream crossings, stone stairs, one 13-foot bridge, and signage post installation. The 14 stream crossings would be created from native stones found within 50 feet of the crossing or unimproved fords and would not disrupt hydrology. Due to seasonal flooding and wetland conditions, the boardwalks would be installed at Crossings 1 and 6 using pans (Figures 5, 7-9). The bridge would be constructed on sills at Crossing 7, requiring no pans or piles (Figure 6).

The 425-foot and 180-foot boardwalk would be built with a 24-inch clearance from the Ordinary High Water Mark, allowing sunlight to reach emergent vegetation below the surface of boardwalk. The pans that would be installed (See Appendix D for diagram) will create permanent disturbance totaling 151 square feet for Crossing 1 and 84 square feet for Crossing 6. However, installation of the structure qualifies as an excepted action under DO 77-1 under Section 4.2.1.1. The temporary disturbances would be mitigated by the measures outlined below. See Figure 5.

This 13-foot bridge will have a permanent disturbance of less than 84 square feet. Temporary disturbances related to the construction are expected and the mitigation measures can be found below (Appendix D for diagram and Figure 6).

Staging for construction and a basecamp will be required, and these locations will be in areas already disturbed (existing logging roads). Existing vehicle crossroads would be used during construction for access to the project area to minimize surface disturbance caused by travel. Work crews would clean equipment, boots, and clothing before starting and after leaving each workday to minimize the potential for invasive species spread.

Construction of the trail would use a multi-year phased approach. The first phase of construction would begin in Fall 2024 spanning from the northern extent of the project area to Cheese Factory Road. The current trail through the Blue Hills would be closed by removing blazes and existing wooden structures.

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[6] NPS-IATR. Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance. United States Department of Interior-National Park Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Ice Age Trail Alliance. Madison, WI. 2001.

The proposed new trail segments would be open to recreational hiking, running, snowshoeing/skiing, and backcountry camping. The trail is expected to be utilized by local hikers and long distance through hikers.

Common monitoring and maintenance activities would include maintaining the trailway with hand tools, removing new trip hazards from the trailway (such as a fallen tree), and maintaining Ice Age NST signage. These tasks would be completed by the Blue Hills Chapter of the IATA.

The construction of parking lots and Dispersed Camping Areas (DCAs) is not included in this EA and will be later analyzed.

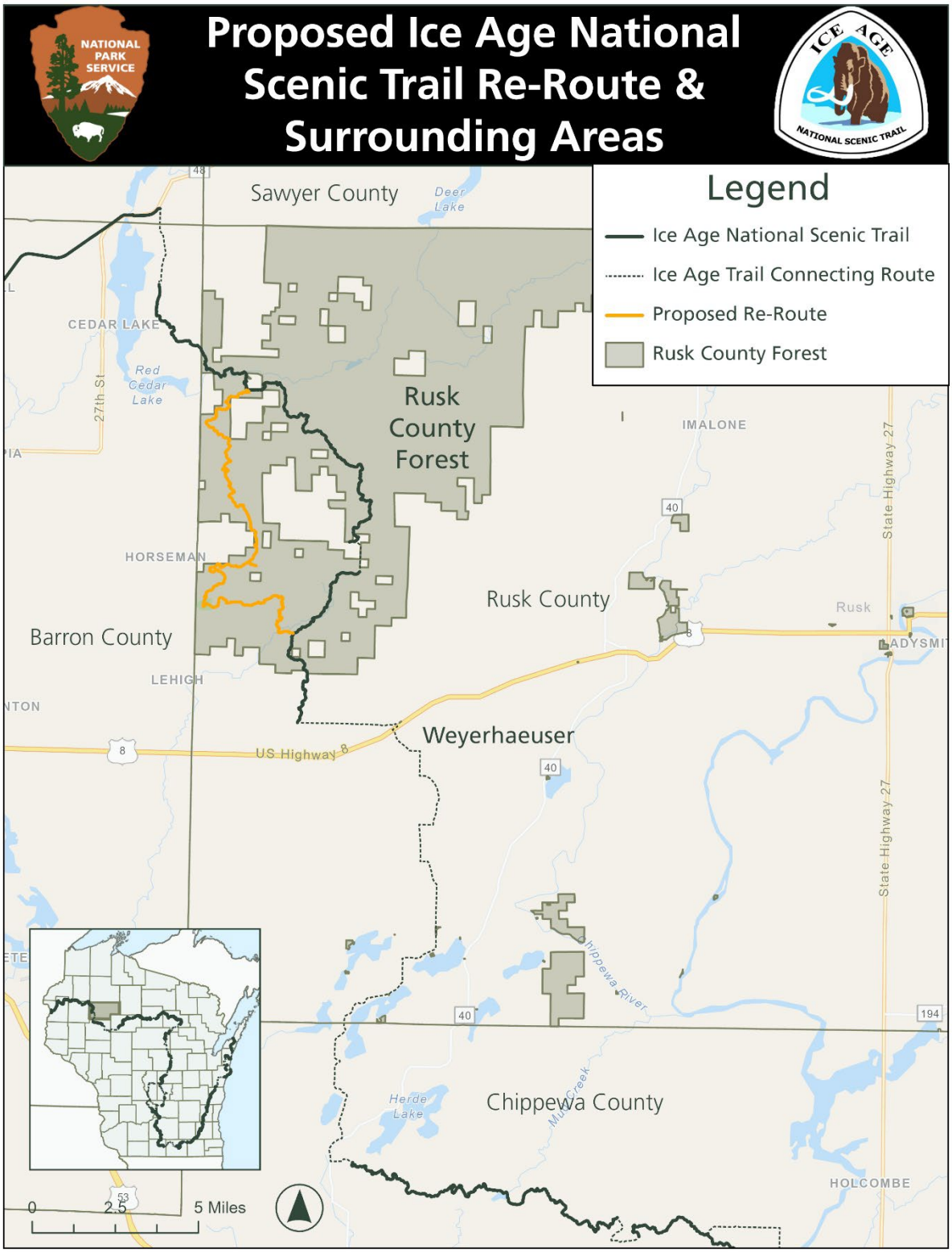

Figure 4. Proposed trail re-route

CHAPTER 3: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter summarizes the natural and cultural resources which could be affected by the alternatives and analyzes the impacts (or "environmental consequences") of each alternative. The affected environment description is followed by the environmental consequences analysis for each impact topic. The impact topics analyzed in this chapter correspond to the impact topics retained for analysis in Chapter 1. A summary of the analysis for each alternative is found in Table 2.

Affected Environment: The affected environment describes existing conditions for those elements of the natural and cultural environment (including visitor experience) which could be affected by the actions proposed in the alternatives. These descriptions serve as a baseline for understanding the resources that could be impacted by implementation of the proposed action.

Impacts: According to the 2022 Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) revised regulations, "effects or impacts" are changes to the human environment that include reasonably foreseeable (1) direct effects, (2) indirect effects and (3) cumulative effects [40 CFR §1508.1(g)].

Agencies consider the potentially affected environment and degree of effects to determine the significance of the proposed action's impacts. The degree of effects is assessed in the context of the park's purpose and significance and any resource-specific context that may be applicable. When assessing the degree of effects, agencies consider:

- Both short- and long-term effects.
- Both beneficial and adverse effects.
- Effects on public health and safety.
- Effects that would violate Federal, State, Tribal, or local law protecting the environment. [40 CFR § 1501.3(b)] None of the alternatives analyzed in this EA would violate any federal, state, tribal, or local laws that protect the environment. For all topics analyzed, short-term impacts are related to construction.

This EA also includes the analysis of cumulative impacts which are defined by CEQ regulations as "effects on the environment that result from the incremental effects of the action when added to the effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions." (§1508.1(g)(3)

Table 2. Summary of Environmental Consequences

Impact Topic	Alternative A: No Action Alternative	Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative)
Cultural Resources and Resources of Interest to Tribal Nations	No effects	A Phase I survey of the proposed action was completed September-November 2023. No archeological features or materials were identified. The park has an inadvertent discovery (ID) procedure in place should such resources be encountered during construction. There are no structures eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in the Area of Potential Effect (APE).
Surface Water Resources	No effects	There are 14 stream crossings, 2 boardwalks, and 1 bridge being constructed. Cumulatively, this accounts for 319 square feet of permanent disturbance. There will be temporary disturbances to surrounding vegetation during construction of the structures. The structures qualify for an exception from DO 77-1 under Section 4.2.1.1. All concerns, both temporary and long term, would be mitigated through BMPs and following the guidance to minimize disturbance to wetlands and waterways as outlined in DO 77-1.
Wildlife	No effects	Mitigation measures would be implemented during trail construction. There would be no long-term effect on wildlife.
Vegetation	Under this alternative, the continued development of new social trails would cause adverse impacts to vegetation. The level of impact would vary depending on the location of social trailing.	The disturbance to vegetation from construction activities would be overall minor, and localized.

Visitor Use and Experience	This alternative does not provide for high quality interpretation of geologic features or access to these resources.	The trail re-route would provide access to significant geologic features and re-route the trail off roads.

3.1 Trends and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

Land Management Trends. The proposed action is located within the Rusk County Forest. The area will continue to be used primarily for recreation and forestry purposes. Adjustments to the County Forest Management Plan are possible and made through a public process.

Climate Related Trends. The various impacts most relevant to the Ice Age NST derive primarily from changing temperature and storm intensity. Major concerns are impacts to ground and forest vegetation, increased flooding, and damage to infrastructure such as bridges and boardwalks.

Visitor Use Related Trends. As more of the trail is completed and opened to the public, the number of local and long-distance users increases. It is anticipated that these increases will continue and expand due to the rise in interest in outdoor recreational activities as experienced during the COVID pandemic.

Development Trends. In the next 3-5 years, designated camping areas will be established along the route as well as parking areas.

3.2 Cultural Resources and Resources of Interest to Tribal Nations

Cultural resources are:

- ***historic properties*** listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as defined by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA);
- ***archaeological resources*** as defined by Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA);
- ***sacred sites*** as defined by Executive Order (EO) 13007 to which access is afforded under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act;
- ***cultural items*** as defined by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA); and
- ***collections and associated records*** as defined by regulations for Curation of Federally Owned and Administered Archeological Collections (36 CFR 79).

3.2.1 Affected Environment

People have inhabited the project area since the end of the last Ice Age, for 10,000 years or more beginning with Native American ancestors using a tool tradition known as Paleoindian, lived as hunter gatherers until around 6500 BCE. During the Archaic (6500-700 BCE), Native

Americans of the region began to use domesticated plants. During the Woodland tradition, (BCE 700 to ca. CE 1300) people began to make pottery, and build earthen burial mounds. About 1000 CE people and ideas from the present-day St. Louis area moved to Wisconsin, following cultural traditions such as hereditary hierarchy, formal villages, and more complex mound building known as Mississippian culture, which lasted roughly from CE 1000 to 1200. Mississippian cultural ways ceased in Wisconsin around CE 1200, morphing into a culture known to archeologists as the Oneota.

By the time the first French explorers arrived in the area, in the 1620s, northern Wisconsin was predominately occupied by the Ojibwe, Chippewa, or Anishinaabe. Their homeland was immense, stretching in a great curve from the northern reaches of the plains to the southeastern shores of Lake Superior. Rivers served as the first highways, with campsites and villages located along their shores.

From at least the mid-1600s into the 1800s, warfare and pressures from colonial settlement caused significant shifts in tribal populations in present day Wisconsin. When Wisconsin became a territory in 1836, there were eight primary Native American groups in Wisconsin. They were the Chippewa/Ojibwe, the Potawatomi, the Ho-Chunk/Winnebago, the Oneida, the Sac and Fox, the Sioux and Stockbridge-Munsee of New York State, and the Menominee.

Much of the project area is underlain by Barron Quartzite, a red to maroon to light-gray, medium-grained, moderately sorted quartzite with argillite or catlinite (pipestone) interbedded locally.[7] This is a resource of interest to Tribal Nations, and there are small quarries in the area where this red, carveable stone was mined for centuries by native people to make sacred smoking pipes and other items.

The Wisconsin Historical Society's Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory of Rusk County includes 5 eligible historic properties in the townships that contain the project area. These are Shuda Place, the Oakland School, and the Weiszewski House in the Town of Strickland; the Wilson Center School, and a barn located on County Highway F in the town of Wilson.[8] None of these locations are adjacent to the proposed action nor any listed in the NRHP.

In 2008, a National Programmatic Agreement (PA) was signed by the NPS, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) for compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA and 36 CFR 800. The PA sets forth a streamlined process when agreed upon criteria are met and procedures followed in accordance with the intent of NPS policies, Directors Order's, and Sections 106, 110, 111, and 112 of the NHPA.

The NPS and Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) have a PA, updated in 2021, that outlines how the NPS will carry out Section 106 regarding the Ice Age NST and North Country NST in Wisconsin. The PA outlines the stipulations for meeting these requirements and is available on the park's website.[9] Should there be an inadvertent discovery of

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[7] USGS- https://mrdata.usgs.gov/geology/state/ Accessed April 25, 2023.

[8] Wisconsin Historical Society Website. https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS12566. Accessed May 4, 2023.

[9] NPS-SHPO-PA: https://www.nps.gov/iatr/learn/management/upload/SHPO-PA-Appendix-1-2-3_508-3.pd

archaeological resources during construction, work would stop, and those discoveries would be addressed through compliance with the trail's inadvertent discovery procedure and in consultation with the Wisconsin SHPO and interested Tribal Nations. Per the NTSA and MOU partners help build and maintain the trail, which includes monitoring for inadvertent discoveries.

A Phase I Archeological Survey of the project area was conducted on September 1, October 30 and 31, and November 1-3, 2023, by Commonwealth Heritage Group. Pre-field research revealed no archeological or cemetery/burial sites within the project's Area of Potential Effects (APE) and five (5) archeological sites recorded within one mile. Additionally, during the initial review of the proposed action, the WDNR noted that the NRHP listed Wajiwan ji Mshkode Archeological District (pipestone exposures and extraction sites) is located 1-2 miles west of the APE. Nearby site investigations in 1999 and 2018 found pipestone interbedded with quartzite on ridges north and south of Grundy Canyon and along the creek, but no evidence of quarry pits or cutting/grinding/knapping. A visual inspection to identify potential pipestone exposures and pit features was conducted as part of the field investigation, which found outcroppings, but no evidence of human modification.

Most of the terrain in the project area is undulating with slopes greater than 20 degrees. A total of 62 shovel tests were excavated. Many areas could not be shovel tested due to the concentrations of exposed rock on the surface or wetland characteristics. No cultural materials or archaeological features were identified on the surface of the APE or within any of the excavated shovel tests. There was no evidence of quarry pits or cultural materials potentially associated with Wajiwan ji Mashkode Archaeological District.

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences

3.2.2.1 Alternative A: No Action

No effects on cultural or historical resources would occur under this alternative.

<u>Cumulative Impacts-</u> When combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and trends, Alternative A would not impact cultural or historical resources beyond what is currently existing, as no additional ground disturbance or construction would occur.

3.2.2.2 Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative B would result in no adverse effect to historic (archeological) properties and in consultation with NPS cultural resource management staff, no additional archeological investigations are recommended at this time. Possible effects on cultural or historical resources under this alternative would be avoided or mitigated through careful review and consultation with Tribal Nations, implementation of the PA with the Wisconsin SHPO, and utilization of the park's Inadvertent Discovery Procedure.

The proposed action would have no impacts to any treaty rights. Participants interested in gathering firewood, tree bark, maple sap, lodge poles, boughs, march hay or other miscellaneous

forest products (except fruits, seeds or berries not enumerated in county ordinances) from Rusk County land shall obtain a county gathering permit from the county forestry office.[10]

Cumulative Impacts-
When combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and trends, no additional impacts to cultural and or historic resources are anticipated because the resources either do not exist in those locations or are being mitigated through avoidance. The construction of the trail provides for improved access while guiding visitors away from sensitive cultural and historic resources.

3.2 Surface Water Resources

3.2.1 Affected Environment

The project area lies within the Lower Chippewa Basin and the Red Cedar Lake[11], Brill and Red Cedar Rivers, and Lake Chetek[12] watersheds.

Red Cedar Lake Watershed is primarily forest with 167.65 miles of streams, 6,893.24 acres of lakes, and 7,428.58 acres of wetlands.[13] Of the 38 waterbodies in the Red Cedar Lake Watershed, 9 are monitored, 7 of those meet good quality standards for aquatic life as described by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).[14]

The Brill and Red Cedar Rivers watershed contains 265 miles of streams. The northern half of the watershed is mostly wooded while the southern half is mostly agriculture. The central portion contains the project area and is primarily glacial till deposited by glaciation between 25,000 and 790,000 years ago.

The Lake Chetek watershed contains 270 miles of streams, the nonpoint source issues affecting streams is ranked as medium by the EPA. Moose Ear Creek and Rock Creek are within the Lake Chetek watershed and are classified as Class I and II for trout. Both waterways are classified as excellent or good for fish and aquatic condition.

There are no impaired waters under the Clean Water Act within the project area. A portion of Rock Creek and Spring Creek have been identified as an Outstanding and Exceptional water resource by the WDNR and EPA. The portions identified are not in the project area.

The project area includes 16 waterways and subsequently, 16 water crossings, the waterways are summarized in the Table 3.

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[10] Rusk County, Wisconsin. Code of Ordinances, Chapter 34 – Parks Forests and Recreation, Article III. Section 34-168. August 2022.
[11] Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Waters in Watershed- Red Cedar Lake (LC11). Waters in Watershed Watershed - Red Cedar Lake (LC11) (wi.gov). Accessed February 29, 2024.
[12] Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Waters in the Watershed- Lake Chetek (LC08). Waters in Watershed Watershed - Lake Chetek (LC08) (wi.gov)
[13] Rusk County, Land and Water Resource Management Plan. 2016. Accessed February 29, 2024.
[14] EPA, My Waterway- Red Cedar Lakes. How's My Waterway - Community (epa.gov). Accessed February 29, 2024.

Table 3. Description of waterways

Crossing Number	Water type	Affected Environment
1	Palustrine Wetland/Bog	This Palustrine Bog holds a high volume of water, particularly after precipitation events, see Figure 5. The wetland is dominated by trees and persistent emergent vegetation. (Classified as PEM1F and PEM1C on National Wetland Inventory)
2	Unnamed Stream	This unnamed stream is not navigable but holds enough water where stone crossings would be valuable.
3	Unnamed Stream	The stream is not navigable but to minimize disturbance stones will be used to cross.
4	Spring Creek	Spring Creek, is classified as a cool-cold headwater, Coldwater community under Wisconsin's Natural Community Determinations. Beaver activity is widespread and common. It is a Class I trout stream, with cool to cold summer temperatures.[15] This waterbody condition is considered good by the EPA for aquatic life and has no impairments along its 4.46 miles.
5	Spring Creek	Same as above.
6	Wetland	This wetland is dominated by trees, lichen, and moss. The soil types do meet the criteria to be classified as wetland. It is categorized as connecting wetland as a link between two bodies of water.
7	Seasonal Drainage	This drainage only fills during times of high precipitation. The water drains from nearby slopes to the north and west. It is categorized as connecting a link between two bodies of water and conduit for moving water. See figure 6.
8	Rock Creek	Both Moose Ear Creek and Rock Creek are in the Lake Chetek watershed and are being degraded by flooding, barnyard runoff, streambank pasturing, streambank erosion and beaver activity.[16]
9	Rock Creek	Same as above.
10	Rock Creek	Same as above.
11	Rock Creek	Same as above.
12	Rock Creek	Same as above.
13	Rock Creek	Same as above
14	Unnamed Creek	This unnamed stream is not navigable but holds enough water where stone crossings would be valuable.
15	Unnamed Creek	This unnamed stream is not navigable but holds enough water where stone crossings would be valuable.
16	Moose Ear Creek	The waterbody condition is considered good for aquatic life by the EPA and is not impaired anywhere along its 11-mile length.

Maps of locations of structures and crossings can be seen in Figures 9-11.

[15] WDNR- https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Watersheds Spring Creek (2474100), Brunet River watershed (UC19)
[16] WDNR- https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Watersheds Rock Creek (2095000), Lake Chetek watershed (LC08)

Figure 5. Picture of wetland Crossing 1

Figure 6. Picture of Water Crossing 7

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences

3.2.2.1 Alternative A: No Action Alternative

As no construction would occur, threats to water resources would remain unchanged. With Alternative A, the trail crosses an unknown number of creeks, unnamed streams, and wetlands. Visitors' ford opportunistically and will utilize stones or nearby debris to create a crossing. These crossings at times can obstruct hydrology and disturb adjacent vegetation. There are some crossings that are constructed, and they are unsafe or do not meet the standards outlined in the Handbook for Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance.

Cumulative Impacts- When combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and trends no measurable impacts to water resources would occur.

3.2.2.2 Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative B would result in minor impacts to water resources, mostly temporary. The proposed action would not result in a change in topography but would add some wetland fill (pans and bridge resting on sills). There would be a permanent change in wetland characteristics, and less than 0.1 acres of wetlands would be affected. The surface of the boardwalk is not considered a permanent disturbance due to the 24 inches of clearance from the Ordinary High-Water mark, allowing sunlight to reach emergent vegetation and wildlife to pass under boardwalk. The stream crossings require stone crossings, and the stones would be considered fill; however, the stones will not disrupt hydrology. These stones would be found within 50 feet of the crossing. All these actions are excepted actions under DO 77.1 -4.2.2.1, thus no additional compliance is needed under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a Wetland Statement of Findings is not required.

Before trail construction begins on any portion of the Ice Age NST, the NPS and WDNR require that all the necessary permits be obtained. As the permitting agency, the WDNR reviewed all construction applications (bridge and boardwalks) and determined there would be no effect to the waterway or wetland (Appendix D). The development of the 3 water structures are subject to the provisions put in place by DO-77-1: Wetland Protection.

During construction, temporary disturbances would be kept to a minimum. Vehicles will not be driven in wetland areas. When constructing the wetland structures, volunteers and builders will stay close to the footprint of the structure to mitigate damage to submergent and emergent vegetation. Except for the bridge, both boardwalks will have at least 24" under boardwalk surface for sunlight to reach vegetation and for wildlife to navigate free of obstruction.

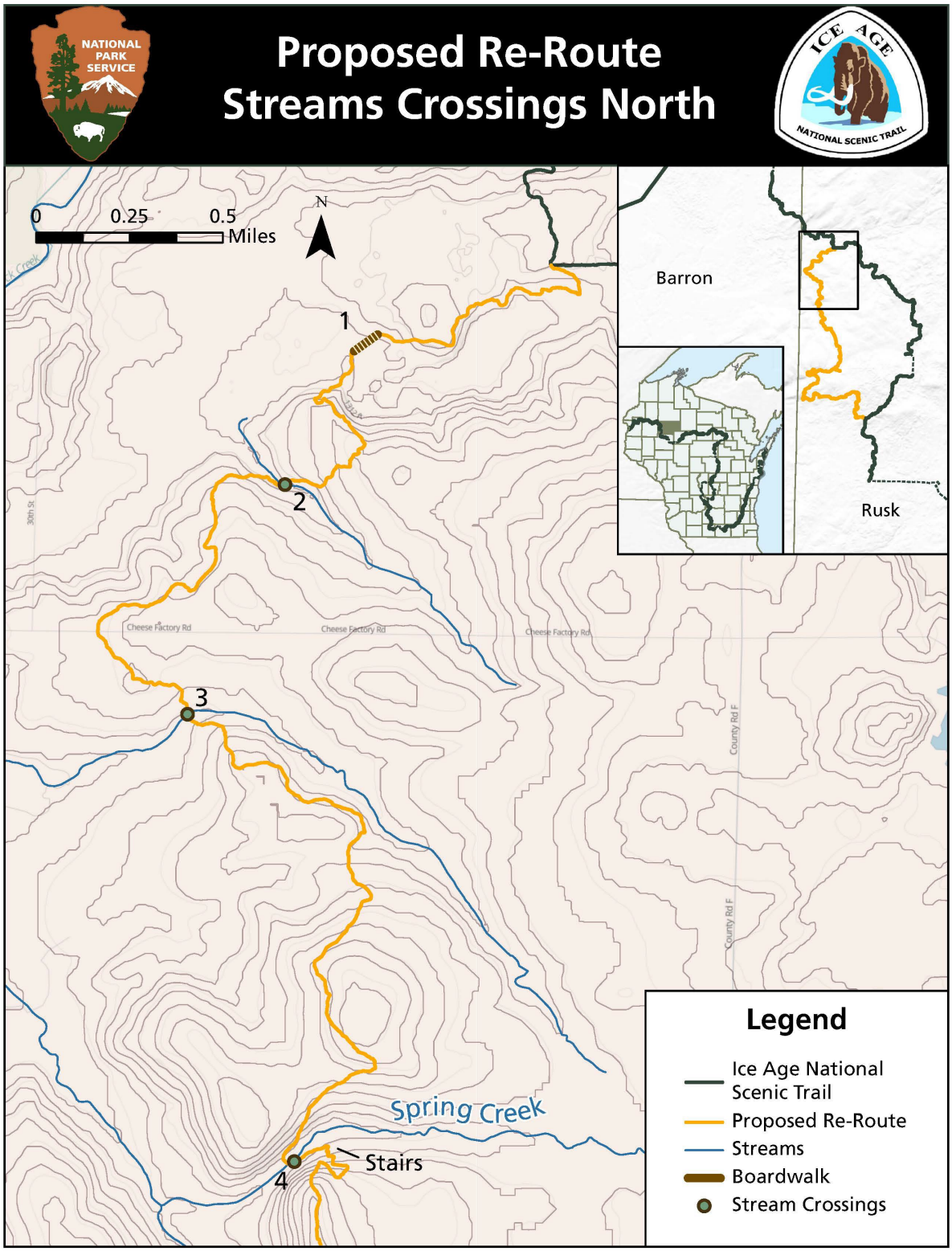

Figure 7. Map of stream crossing and structures in northern portion of proposed action

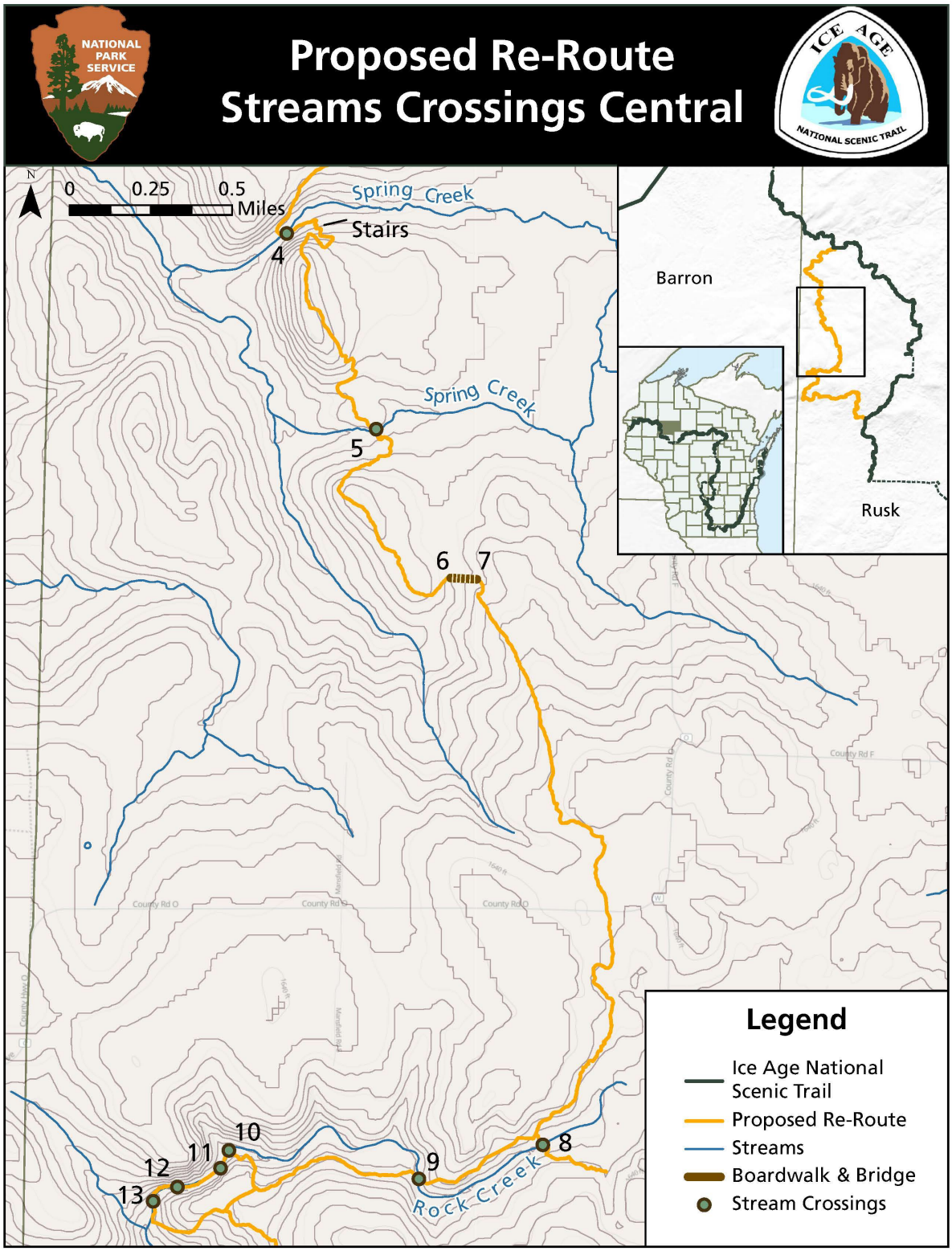

Figure 8. Map of structures and stream crossings in central portion of proposed action

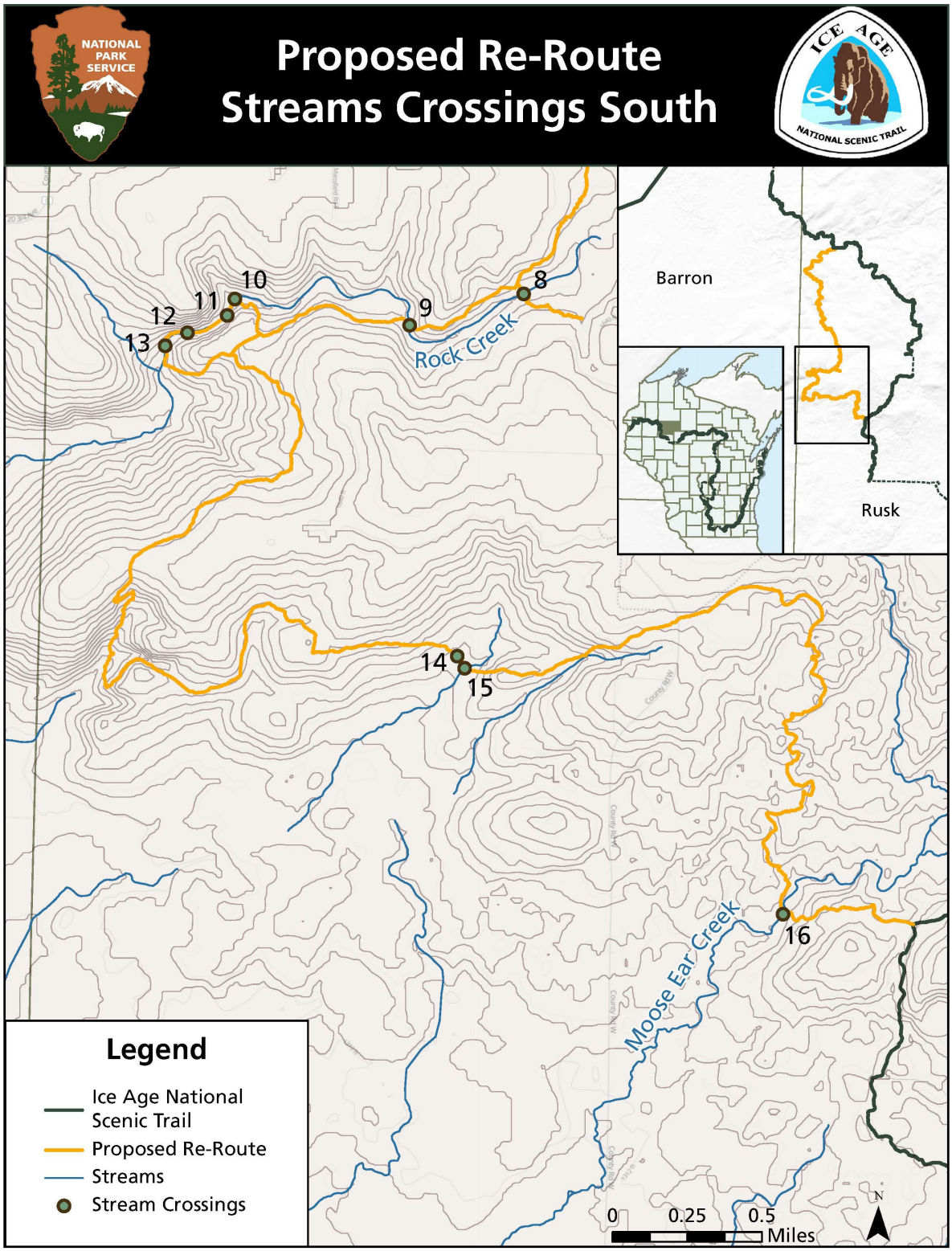

Figure 9. Map of structures and stream crossings in southern portion of proposed action

Cumulative Impacts- The cumulative total of all permanent disturbances to wetland resources under Alternative B do not exceed .1 acres; therefore, a Wetland Statement of Findings is not required. There will be no adverse impacts on wetlands and all the structures meet the exception criteria outlined in Section 4.2 of DO-77-1.

When combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions, NPS has determined that there are no significant cumulative impacts.

3.3 Wildlife

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires that actions authorized, funded, or carried out by federal agencies not jeopardize federally threatened or endangered species or adversely modify designated critical habitat. To fulfill this mandate, the NPS must consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to determine if projects will have any impacts on listed species or critical habitat.

Under Wisconsin State Statute 29.604 and Administrative Rule Chapter NR 27, the state of Wisconsin also assumes responsibility for the protection of federal and state endangered species under Section 7 of the ESA. In addition, the Management Policies 2006 and Director's Order-77 Natural Resources Management Guidelines require the NPS to examine the effects on federal candidate species, as well as state-listed threatened, endangered, candidate, rare, declining, and sensitive species.

Non-special status wildlife: Common wildlife in the action area are those that prefer forested and wetland habitats, such as: white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopava*), bear (*Ursus americanus)* and waterfowl including goose and duck.

Special status wildlife: Special status species include those that are designated as:

- Endangered: Designation used by the USFWS and Wisconsin DNR for species that are in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range
- Threatened: Designation used by the USFWS and Wisconsin DNR for species which are likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range
- Special Concern: Designation used by the Wisconsin DNR for species that are not endangered or threatened but are uncommon in Wisconsin or have unique or specific habitat requirements in Wisconsin that require special monitoring.
- Protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act: Bald eagles *(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)* are no longer designated by the USFWS as endangered or threatened species but are afforded Federal protection under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940. USFWS did not indicate that any bald eagles were present in project area.

- Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC): Designation used by the USFWS for nongame birds that are likely to become candidates for threatened or endangered designation, the majority of which are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

3.3.1 Affected Environment

The NPS obtained a list of Threatened and Endangered Species using the USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system on December 26, 2023. Species that may be present in the project area include the endangered gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) and northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis),* the proposed endangered tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*), the experimental population of whooping crane (*Grus americana*), and candidate species the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) (Appendix A).

Migratory birds in the project area include black billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus erythropthalmus),* bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus),* canada warbler *(Cardellina canadensis),* cerulean warbler *(Dendroica cerulea),* chimney swift *(Chaetura pelagica),* eastern whip-poor-will *(antrostomus viciferus),* golden-winged warbler *(Vermivora chrysoptera),* olive-sided flycatcher *(Contopus cooperi),* wood thrush *(Hylochichla mustelina).* These birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the guidance on when to avoid disturbance activities is found in the Probability of Presence Summary in Appendix A; primarily, disturbance to these birds should be limited during their breeding seasons.

The IATA completed an Endangered Species Review with the WDNR on January 24, 2024 (Appendix A). The information in the report is obtained from the WDNR's National Heritage Index (NHI) and it indicate the following endangered resources may be in the project area: bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucophalus), glaciere taulus (*Glaciere talus), dry cliff, moist cliff, stream (slow, soft, and cold), pugnose shiner (*Notropis anogenus),* least darter (*Etheostoma microperca),* Canadian gooseberry *(Ribes oxyacanthoides ssp. Oxyacanthoides), and* squashberry *(Viburnum edule).*

WDNR determined suitable habitat may be present within the waterbodies in the project area for a fish, the threatened pugnose shiner. The pugnose shiner prefers weedy shoals of glacial lakes and a low-gradient streams with a substrate of mud, sand, cobble, silt, and clay. Therefore, the following will be put in place to mitigate concerns to the state threatened pugnose shiner:

- Assume the pugnose shiner is present and avoid impacts to the species by conducting work outside of the spawning season, which is mid-May to July
- Do not assume the pugnose shiner is present and submit photos and information regarding the substrate of the streams that will be crossed by the trail. If it is determined that suitable spawning habitat is not present, there will not be any restrictions related to this species for this project. If the information and photos indicate there is suitable habitat, then in-stream work must be conducted outside spawning period

WDNR determined that habitat for the Canadian gooseberry, a threatened plant, may be impacted by this project. Suitable habitat within the project area includes talus forests and bluff edges. Therefore, the following will be put in place to mitigate concerns to the state threatened Canadian gooseberry:

- To avoid take of this species, a survey is recommended by a qualified specialist; however, if a survey is not conducted all impacts to the species need to be avoided. If a take cannot be avoided, an incidental take permit is required.
- Optimal timing for identification is late May through June. All results of surveys must be reported to Endangered Species Review Program.

WDNR determined that there is suitable habitat for the squashberry, an endangered plant, within the project area. Suitable habitat includes moist, quartzite, talus slopes.

- To avoid take of this species, it is recommended a plant survey occur. If a survey is not possible, it is required that all impacts to species be avoided. If species is recorded on site and impacts can't be avoided an incidental take permit/authorization is required. All results of surveys should be reported to the Endangered Resources Review Program.

3.3.2 Environmental Consequences

3.3.2.1 Alternative A: No Action Alternative

As no construction would occur, threats to wildlife would remain unchanged. There are no known disturbances related to wildlife and trail use in this area.

Cumulative Impacts- When combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and trends no measurable impacts to wildlife would occur.

3.3.2.2 Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative)

Consultation and coordination requires identifying mitigation measures to be applied during construction activities. These include the avoidance of certain areas during specific times of the year to ensure compliance with the ESA and Wisconsin's state endangered species law codified in WDNR Chs. NR 1-99; Fish, Game and Enforcement, Forestry and Recreation; Chapter NR 27.

During construction under Alternative B, there would be potential temporary disturbances to some wildlife. Mobile wildlife species such as mammals and birds would be expected to avoid construction activities, but less-mobile species such as insects could potentially suffer mortality. The level of disturbance from construction activities would vary depending on species, but would be overall minor, temporary, and localized.

Cumulative Impacts- Under Alternative B, the trail was designed to result in a negligible difference in habitat features for avian, terrestrial, and aquatic-dependent species in the long term. Short term impacts on biological resources would be temporary and negligible. Alternative B, when combined with future actions in the region, would not result in cumulatively considerable impacts.

3.4 Soils and Vegetation

According to the NPS's Management Policies 2006, the NPS strives to maintain all components and processes of naturally evolving ecosystems, including the natural abundance, diversity, and ecological integrity of plants. In addition, pursuant to the ESA, the NPS and its partners are required to avoid impacting threatened and endangered species while constructing the Ice Age NST and to follow mitigation measures when applicable.

Invasive and noxious plant species can be introduced intentionally (e.g., ornamental landscape, erosion control, range improvement) or accidentally released into an environment lacking in that species' usual predators or other similar controlling factors. Invasive species can affect natural environments, such as those found in National Parks and Forests, State Parks and Natural Areas, aquatic and riverine systems, as well as agricultural areas. According to Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species, an invasive species is "a species that is: 1. non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration and 2) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health."

Control activities for invasive plants follow the recommendations outlined in the Wisconsin Manual of Control Recommendations for Ecologically Invasive Plants (edited by Randy Hoffman and Kelly Kearns). This publication provides information about the identification, monitoring, and control of exotic and invasive species in a manner sensitive to both individual species and natural communities. It was produced by WDNR, Bureau of Endangered Resources in May 1997.

A 2015 review of research pertaining to the impacts of trail infrastructure on vegetation and soil found a majority assessed changes in composition and to some degree, structure, with the most common impacts documented including reduced vegetation cover, changes in plant species composition, trail widening, soil loss and soil compaction. [17] Key research gaps identified assessing informal trails, landscape and temporal scale impacts, and impacts on threatened ecosystems/species.

3.4.1 Affected Environment

The soils of the project area have been derived largely from the weathering of the glacial drift deposits and show a great variation within relatively short distances. [18] Vegetation and habitat types are often determined by the soils they are associated with. In the project area soils include Iron River and Pence loams; Goodman, Maonaco and Stambaugh silt loam; peat soils, some areas are stony; (Iron River, Padus and Pence loams, Vilas sand and peat soils; and Milaca, Cloquet, Iron River, and Cable loams and peat soils). [19]

These soils support mostly sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), red maple (*Acer rubrum),* northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*), American basswood (*Tilia Americana),* white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), and eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). Bigtooth aspen (*Populus grandidentata*), red pine (*Pinus resinosa*), and eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) may also be present. [20] The aspen-birch forest type group is also abundant, followed the by spruce-fir type.

The project area includes the Blue Hills Felsenmeer State Natural Area, a small 300-meter long, 100-meter-wide valley with 25 meters of relief underlain by angular quartzite boulders. This small valley contains little to no vegetation which contrasts markedly with the surrounding

[17] Ballantyne M, Pickering CM. The impacts of trail infrastructure on vegetation and soils: Current literature and future directions. J Environ Manage. 2015 Dec 1;164:53-64. doi: 10.1016/j.jenvman.2015.08.032. Epub 2015 Sep 3. PMID: 26342267.

[18] Rusk County 2021-2025 Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Chapter 300. November 10, 2020.

[19] Rusk County Land and Water Resource Management Plan. January 2016.

[20] USGS PADUS Series information. https://soilseries.sc.egov.usda.gov/. Accessed June 23, 2023.

mixed conifer and hardwood forests.[21] Cold air emanating from deep within the slopes maintains a tundra-like environment with diverse lichen flora (*Lasallia* spp.).[22] The WDNR has identified the natural community as *Glaciere Talus*.[23] in this SNA where scattered soil pockets may occur and support white and red pines (*Pinus strobus and P. resinosa*) often in association with mossy beds of common polypody (*Polypodium virginianum*) or marginal shield fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*). *resinosa*) often in association with mossy beds of common polypody (*Polypodium virginianum*) or marginal shield fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*). The base of the slopes are typically shrub dominated and may include a number of s northern species, such as squash-berry (*Viburnum edule*) and Canada gooseberry (*Ribes oxyacanthoides*). Other frequently occurring shrub or small tree species are Labrador-tea (*Rhododendron groenlandicum*), mountain maple (*Acer spicatum*), mountain ash (*Sorbus* spp.), and red-berried elder (*Sambucus pubens*). The vine, purple clematis (*Clematis occidentalis*) and tree, balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) may also be present along with rare bryophytes, lichens, and terrestrial snails.[24]

3.4.2 Environmental Consequences

3.4.2.1 Alternative A: No Action

Under the Alternative A, the existing trail segment will remain unchanged, and the existing bridges and boardwalks would not be re-constructed. Educational and interpretive opportunities associated with Alternative A would not be added. There would be no vegetation disturbance or removal caused by construction activities nor would additional invasive species be introduced. Alternative A would result in the continued unmonitored development of social trails to access geologic and glacial features. In addition, the existing route would continue to degrade and would not exemplify the best glacial features in the area.

Cumulative Impacts- When combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and trends the Alternative A could have minor long-term adverse impact if visitors continue to create social trails to reach geologic and glacial features. This would increase the number of locations where vegetation is disturbed, and non-native species could be introduced.

3.4.2.2 Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative)

Under Alternative B, there would be potential disturbance and mortality to some vegetation during construction. Construction would include the removal of brush and small saplings. The disturbance to vegetation from construction activities would be overall minor, and localized. After construction, off-trail disturbed vegetation would be expected to return to their pre-construction condition.

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[21] Hinke, Jeremy. Poster: "Detailed surficial geologic mapping and terrain analysis of the Blue Hills Felsenmeer Valley, Rusk County, Wisconsin" UW-Eau Claire. 2007-05-01. http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/23211. Accessed 5-19-2003.

[22] WDNR- https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/naturalareas/index.asp?SNA=74 . Accessed May 19, 2023.

[23] Epstein, E.E. Natural communities, aquatic features, and selected habitats of Wisconsin. Chapter 7 in *The Ecological landscapes of Wisconsin: An assessment of ecological resources and a guide to planning sustainable management*. WDNR, PUB-SS-1131H 2017, Madison

[24] WDNR- https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/EndangeredResources/Communities.asp?mode=detail&Code=CTGEO083WI. Accessed May 23, 2023.

Cumulative Impacts- Overall, long term cumulative impacts to vegetation from implementation of Alternative B would be minor when compared to the disturbance from existing land use and activities in the area.

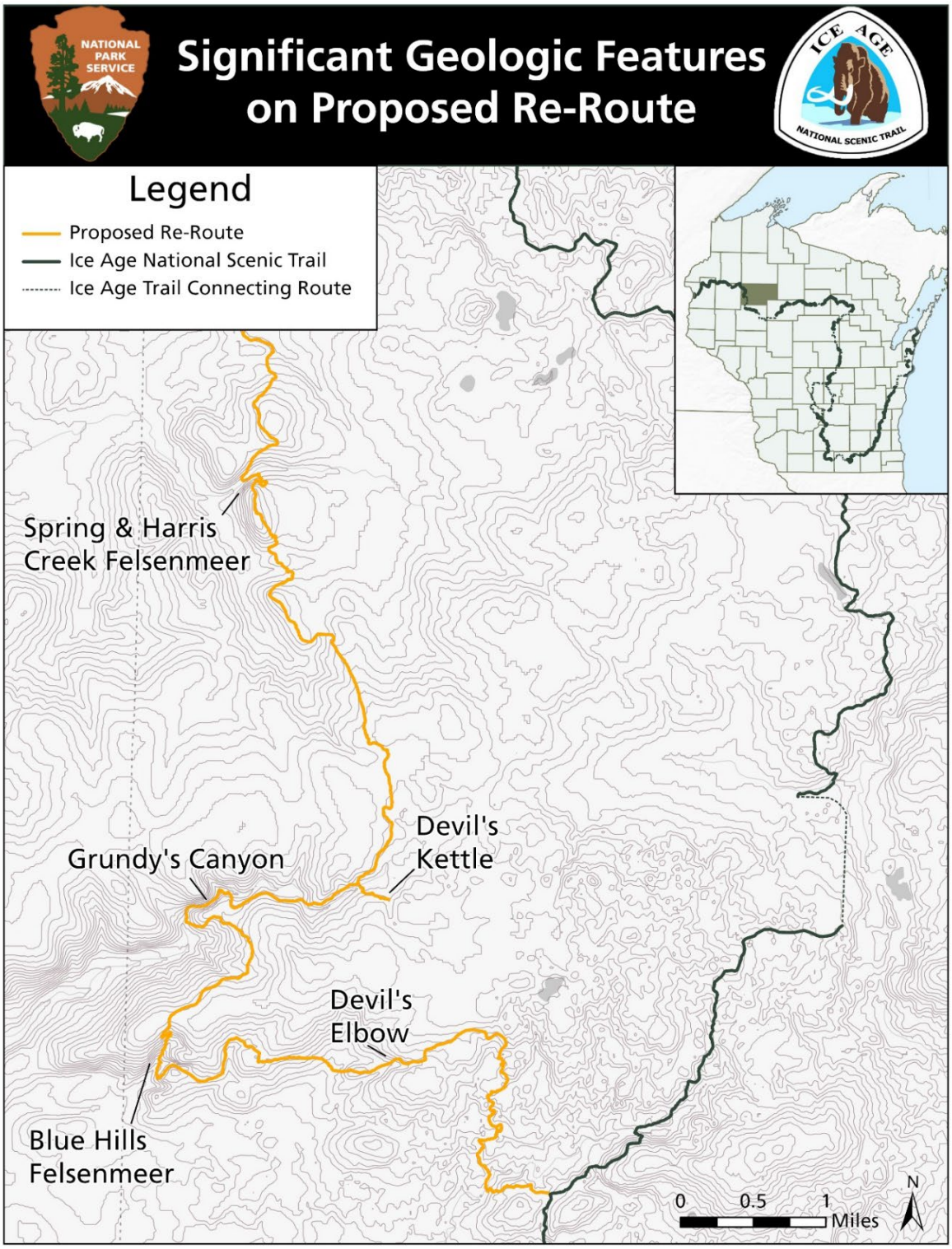
3.5 Visitor Use and Experience

3.5.1 Affected Environment

The purpose of the Ice Age NST is to preserve some of the finest features of Wisconsin's glacial landscape, as well as other scenic, natural, and cultural resources, while providing opportunities for low impact recreational and educational activities such as walking and hiking in a manner that is both safe for visitors and leaves the resource undamaged. [25] The benefits of hiking include improving physical and mental health. Spending quality time outside reduces stress and anxiety and can lead to a lower risk of depression.[26] Many hikers use existing trails in the area as a

[25] NPS-IATR. Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use- Ice Age NST. United States Department of Interior-National Park Service. 1983.

[26] NPS Trail and Hiking-https://www.nps.gov/subjects/trails/benefits-of-hiking.htm. Accessed June 26, 2023.



starting point for hiking to these features. Dispersed Camping is allowed anywhere in the Rusk County Forest with a permit.

Figure 10. Map of Geologic Features in Rusk County Forest

Ice covered all of Rusk County approximately 25,000 years ago. Following a retreat of the ice margin, the Chippewa Lobe re-advanced 18,000 years ago to deposit the Chippewa Moraine over and around the Blue Hills area, and meltwater eroded deep channels in the Blue Hills quartzite.[27] The tundra climate in the area at the time led to excessive frost activity and the development of several unique features including the felsenmeers (meaning "sea of rocks"). Quartzite, being a brittle rock, is very susceptible to frost wedging, which over time formed slopes of angular rock rubble. Some slopes are very stable; others have six-foot-high ridges of "talus moraine" formed at the base. While these features are called felsenmeers, they are also talus slopes. Blue Hills Felsenmeer is owned by Rusk County and was designated a State Natural Area in 1969.[28] It is an outstanding location for geological interpretation of glacial action. The natural area consists of several small valleys, strewn with lichen-covered rocks and is southwest side of the Blue Hills.

In addition to hiking trails, the Rusk County Forest has a 22-mile system of cross-country skiing trails. Other uses for visitors to the Rusk County Forest include snowmobile trails and ATV trails. There are 80 miles of snowmobile trails in the forest and 32 to miles of ATV trails.

3.5.2 Environmental Consequences

3.5.2.1 Alternative A: No Action

Impacts to visitor use and experience when combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and trends, would have continued long term adverse impacts due to the deterioration of trail infrastructure. Implementation of the Alternative A may impact visitor's enjoyment of the differing landscapes and geologic/glacial features. This would have a long term adverse impacts to visitor experiences of the trail's natural resources. This alternative could lead visitors to continue using social trails to access desired locations. Currently, anyone wanting to visit these places needs orienteering skills or can navigate the way on social trails and old logging roads. [29]

Cumulative Impacts- Under Alternative A, when combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and trends, would have continued long-term adverse impacts due to the continued use of social trails and deterioration of the existing segment.

3.5.2.2 Alternative B: Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative)

Implementing this alternative would provide Ice Age NST hikers with access to 18.6 new miles of continuous trail with improved hiking experiences, scenery, and safety. Re-routing the trail would expand the opportunity and enjoyment of hiking and camping for both local hikers and long distance hikers. Members of the local community who previously would not have used the road walk could be expected to use the new trail. Selection of this alternative would meet the goals and purpose of the Ice Age NST, and the NTSA. The effects of the Alternative B on visitor use and experience would be long term and highly beneficial.

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[28] WDNR- https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/naturalareas/index.asp?SNA=74. Accessed April 24, 2003.
[28] WDNR- https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/naturalareas/index.asp?SNA=74. Accessed April 24, 2003.
[29] Urban, Ryan. Barron News-Shield. "Plans progress on 17-mile re-route project.". October 22, 2021.

Cumulative Impacts- The cumulative impacts to visitor use and experience under Alternative B when combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions and trends would be beneficial.

CHAPTER 4: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The NPS conducted consultation and coordination with Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as Tribal Nations, to identify issues and concerns related to natural and cultural resources. This chapter provides a summary of the agencies and Tribes that were contacted in the preparation of the EA and/or were invited to review and comment the Draft EA.

The NPS reached a determination of 'may affect' for the endangered gray wolf (*Canus lupus*) for the proposed action using the Minnesota-Wisconsin DKey within the IPaC system (project code 2023-0070766) and a 'no effect' determination for the other threatened and endangered species that may be in the project area. NPS determined that the temporary increased vehicle traffic during construction may temporarily disturb wolves, but the project is not likely to adversely affect other species. The NPS follow up with the USFWS via email on January 16, 2024, to identify any additional mitigation measures that could be implemented by the NPS to minimize potential adverse impacts.

On February 8, 2024, the USFWS responded to a request from the NPS to provide mitigation measures to prevent disturbance to wolf population that may be in the project area. To mitigate any concerns to wolves, the NPS proposes two mitigation measures. (1) Provide 100-meter buffer around known den and rendezvous sites; however, at this time there are no known den or rendezvous sites in the project area. (2) Brief all project participants on safety measures for avoiding vehicle collisions with wildlife and ensure they are aware of mitigation measures in place and to stop construction if they observe any of the other potential species. If those species are found during construction, avoidance will be the best mitigation measure to avoid disturbance.

The NPS/IATA consulted WDNR on endangered and threatened species and correspondence with these agencies can be found in Appendix A. These consultations resulted in a determination of not likely to adversely affect determination, mitigation measures were developed and can be found in Wildlife 3.6.

The IATA and NPS also consulted with the WDNR and the NPS on Directors Order-77-1 to discuss permitting and wetland disturbance, and it was determined there would be no adverse impacts to wetlands. Correspondence can be found in Appendix D.

A letter was sent to the SHPO on March 21, 2024, with an internal draft of this EA requesting concurrence with IATR's determination that Alternative B (the Preferred Alternative) would have No Adverse Effect on historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. A response was received on April 7, 2024, concurring with the agency's No Adverse Effect determination. A copy of the archeological survey was shared with the SHPO on January 26, 2024, and this correspondence can be found in Appendix E. The NPS Cultural Resource Management Team was also consulted on this project, they provided comments and assessed that no historic properties would be affected after reviewing the Phase I Archaeological Survey and Draft EA.

A request for consultation was sent to 15 Tribal Nations on March 3, 2023, with a follow-up email sent directly to Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) on March 30, 2023. A response was received from the Forest County Pottawatomi on March 20, 2023, requesting to remain a consulting party for the project.

NPS contacted the tribes again via a letter in February 2024 following the completion of a Phase I Archeological Survey and provided a summary of the Phase I Archeology Report. Tribes were notified that the plan would be made available for public review and comment in spring 2024 and that a draft could be made available prior to public comment at their request. Tribes were sent a pre-public draft of the plan on March 15, 2024.

Tribal Nations Consulted:

Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma
Bad River Band of Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa
Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Forest County Potawatomi Community of Wisconsin
Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa
Ho-Chunk Nation
Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in KS & NE
Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin
St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin
Sokaogon Chippewa Community
Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Stockbridge Munsee Community of Wisconsin
Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
Osage Nation

The land on which the proposed trail route would be located is owned and managed by Rusk County which has been involved directly in the planning of the proposed alternative. The trail is included in the Rusk County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2020) and the county has a land use agreement (signed in 2016) with IATA regarding the cooperation and development of the trail. This agreement can be found in Appendix B.

CHAPTER 5: REFERENCES

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Appendices

Appendix A -List of Threatened and Endangered Species, NHI, and USFWS consultation

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Minnesota-Wisconsin Ecological Services Field Office
3815 American Blvd East
Bloomington, MN 55425-1659
Phone: (952) 858-0793 Fax: (952) 646-2873

In Reply Refer To: December 26, 2023
Project code: 2023-0070766
Project Name: Rusk County Forest-Dreamer Re-route

Subject: Consistency letter for 'Rusk County Forest-Dreamer Re-route' for specified threatened and endangered species that may occur in your proposed project location consistent with the Minnesota-Wisconsin Endangered Species Determination Key (Minnesota-Wisconsin DKey).

Dear Mary Tano:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received on **December 26, 2023** your effect determination(s) for the 'Rusk County Forest-Dreamer Re-route' (Action) using the Minnesota-Wisconsin DKey within the Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system. You have submitted this key to satisfy requirements under Section 7(a)(2). The Service developed this system in accordance of with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C 1531 et seq.).

Based on your answers and the assistance of the Service's Minnesota-Wisconsin DKey, you made the following effect determination(s) for the proposed Action:

Species	**Listing Status**	**Determination**
Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*)	Endangered	May affect
Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*)	Candidate	No effect
Tricolored Bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*)	Proposed Endangered	No effect
Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*)	Experimental Population, Non-Essential	No effect

<u>Determination Information</u>

Consultation with the Service is not complete. Further consultation with the Minnesota-Wisconsin Ecological Services Field Office is required for those species with a determination of "May Affect," listed above. Please email our office at TwinCities@fws.gov and attach a copy of this letter, so we can discuss methods to avoid or minimize potential adverse effects to those species.

Additional Information

Sufficient project details: Please provide sufficient project details on your project homepage in IPaC (Define Project, Project Description) to support your conclusions. Failure to disclose important aspects of your project that would influence the outcome of your effects determinations may negate your determinations and invalidate this letter. If you have site-specific information that leads you to believe a different determination is more appropriate for your project than what the Dkey concludes, you can and should proceed based on the best available information.

Future project changes: The Service recommends that you contact the Minnesota-Wisconsin Ecological Services Field Office or re-evaluate the project in IPaC if: 1) the scope or location of the proposed Action is changed; 2) new information reveals that the action may affect listed species or designated critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not previously considered; 3) the Action is modified in a manner that causes effects to listed species or designated critical habitat; or 4) a new species is listed or critical habitat designated. If any of the above conditions occurs, additional consultation with the Service should take place before project changes are final or resources committed.

Species-specific information

Gray Wolf: Gray wolf may be present in the Action area. Projects have potential to adversely affect gray wolves when they overlap with a known gray wolf denning or rendezvous area and/or have any potential to harm wolves directly (e.g., mammal trapping, poison bait) or indirectly (e.g., increasing vehicle use that may result in vehicle strikes, exposure to potential human persecution). **Please coordinate with the Minnesota-Wisconsin Ecological Services Field Office to further evaluate effects of the Action on gray wolf.**

Bald and Golden Eagles: Bald eagles, golden eagles, and their nests are protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (54 Stat. 250, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 668a-d) (Eagle Act). The Eagle Act prohibits, except when authorized by an Eagle Act permit, the "taking" of bald and golden eagles and defines "take" as "pursue, shoot, shoot at, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, molest or disturb." The Eagle Act's implementing regulations define disturb as "… to agitate or bother a bald or golden eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, based on the best scientific information available, (1) injury to an eagle, (2) a decrease in its productivity, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior, or (3) nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior."

If you observe a bald eagle nest in the vicinity of your proposed project, you should follow the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (May 2007). For more information on eagles and conducting activities in the vicinity of an eagle nest, please visit our regional eagle website or contact Margaret at Margaret_Rheude@fws.gov. **If the Action may affect bald or golden eagles, additional coordination with the Service under the Eagle Act may be required.**

The following species and/or critical habitats may also occur in your project area and **are not** covered by this conclusion:

- Northern Long-eared Bat *Myotis septentrionalis* Endangered

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Minnesota-Wisconsin Ecological Services Field Office
3815 American Blvd East
Bloomington, MN 55425-1659
Phone: (952) 858-0793 Fax: (952) 646-2873

In Reply Refer To: January 24, 2024
Project code: 2023-0070766
Project Name: Rusk County Forest-Dreamer Re-route

Federal Nexus: yes
Federal Action Agency (if applicable): National Park Service

Subject: Record of project representative's no effect determination for 'Rusk County Forest-Dreamer Re-route'

Dear Mary Tano:

This letter records your determination using the Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system provided to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) on January 24, 2024, for 'Rusk County Forest-Dreamer Re-route' (here forward, Project). This project has been assigned Project Code 2023-0070766 and all future correspondence should clearly reference this number. **Please carefully review this letter.**

Ensuring Accurate Determinations When Using IPaC

The Service developed the IPaC system and associated species' determination keys in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA; 87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) and based on a standing analysis. All information submitted by the Project proponent into IPaC must accurately represent the full scope and details of the Project.

Failure to accurately represent or implement the Project as detailed in IPaC or the Northern Long-eared Bat Rangewide Determination Key (Dkey), invalidates this letter. ***Answers to certain questions in the DKey commit the project proponent to implementation of conservation measures that must be followed for the ESA determination to remain valid.***

Determination for the Northern Long-Eared Bat

Based upon your IPaC submission and a standing analysis, your project has reached the determination of "No Effect" on the northern long-eared bat. To make a no effect determination, the full scope of the proposed project implementation (action) should not have any effects (either positive or negative), to a federally listed species or designated critical habitat. Effects of the action are all consequences to listed species or critical habitat that are caused by the proposed

action, including the consequences of other activities that are caused by the proposed action. A consequence is caused by the proposed action if it would not occur but for the proposed action and it is reasonably certain to occur. Effects of the action may occur later in time and may include consequences occurring outside the immediate area involved in the action. (See § 402.17).

Under Section 7 of the ESA, if a federal action agency makes a no effect determination, no consultation with the Service is required (ESA §7). If a proposed Federal action may affect a listed species or designated critical habitat, formal consultation is required except when the Service concurs, in writing, that a proposed action "is not likely to adversely affect" listed species or designated critical habitat [50 CFR §402.02, 50 CFR§402.13].

Other Species and Critical Habitat that May be Present in the Action Area

The IPaC-assisted determination for the northern long-eared bat does not apply to the following ESA-protected species and/or critical habitat that also may occur in your Action area:

- Gray Wolf *Canis lupus* Endangered
- Monarch Butterfly *Danaus plexippus* Candidate
- Tricolored Bat *Perimyotis subflavus* Proposed Endangered
- Whooping Crane *Grus americana* Experimental Population, Non-Essential

You may coordinate with our Office to determine whether the Action may affect the animal species listed above and, if so, how they may be affected.

Next Steps

Based upon your IPaC submission, your project has reached the determination of “No Effect” on the northern long-eared bat. If there are no updates on listed species, no further consultation/ coordination for this project is required with respect to the northern long-eared bat. However, the Service recommends that project proponents re-evaluate the Project in IPaC if: 1) the scope, timing, duration, or location of the Project changes (includes any project changes or amendments); 2) new information reveals the Project may impact (positively or negatively) federally listed species or designated critical habitat; or 3) a new species is listed, or critical habitat designated. If any of the above conditions occurs, additional coordination with the Service should take place to ensure compliance with the Act.

If you have any questions regarding this letter or need further assistance, please contact the Minnesota-Wisconsin Ecological Services Field Office and reference Project Code 2023-0070766 associated with this Project.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Certain birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act[1] and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act[2].

Any person or organization who plans or conducts activities that may result in impacts to migratory birds, eagles, and their habitats should follow appropriate regulations and consider implementing appropriate conservation measures, as described below.

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1. The Migratory Birds Treaty Act of 1918.
2. The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940.
3. 50 C.F.R. Sec. 10.12 and 16 U.S.C. Sec. 668(a)

The birds listed below are birds of particular concern either because they occur on the USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) list or warrant special attention in your project location. To learn more about the levels of concern for birds on your list and how this list is generated, see the FAQ below. This is not a list of every bird you may find in this location, nor a guarantee that every bird on this list will be found in your project area. To see exact locations of where birders and the general public have sighted birds in and around your project area, visit the E-bird data mapping tool (Tip: enter your location, desired date range and a species on your list). For projects that occur off the Atlantic Coast, additional maps and models detailing the relative occurrence and abundance of bird species on your list are available. Links to additional information about Atlantic Coast birds, and other important information about your migratory bird list, including how to properly interpret and use your migratory bird report, can be found below.

For guidance on when to schedule activities or implement avoidance and minimization measures to reduce impacts to migratory birds on your list, click on the PROBABILITY OF PRESENCE SUMMARY at the top of your list to see when these birds are most likely to be present and breeding in your project area.

NAME	BREEDING SEASON
Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* This is not a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) in this area, but warrants attention because of the Eagle Act or for potential susceptibilities in offshore areas from certain types of development or activities.	Breeds Dec 1 to Aug 31
Black-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus erythropthalmus* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska. https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9399	Breeds May 15 to Oct 10

NAME	BREEDING SEASON
Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.	Breeds May 20 to Jul 31
Canada Warbler *Cardellina canadensis* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.	Breeds May 20 to Aug 10
Cerulean Warbler *Dendroica cerulea* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska. https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/2974	Breeds Apr 20 to Jul 20
Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.	Breeds Mar 15 to Aug 25
Eastern Whip-poor-will *Antrostomus vociferus* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.	Breeds May 1 to Aug 20
Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska. https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8745	Breeds May 1 to Jul 20
Olive-sided Flycatcher *Contopus cooperi* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska. https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3914	Breeds May 20 to Aug 31
Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina* This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.	Breeds May 10 to Aug 31

PROBABILITY OF PRESENCE SUMMARY

The graphs below provide our best understanding of when birds of concern are most likely to be present in your project area. This information can be used to tailor and schedule your project activities to avoid or minimize impacts to birds. Please make sure you read and understand the FAQ "Proper Interpretation and Use of Your Migratory Bird Report" before using or attempting to interpret this report.

Probability of Presence (■)

Each green bar represents the bird's relative probability of presence in the 10km grid cell(s) your project overlaps during a particular week of the year. (A year is represented as 12 4-week months.) A taller bar indicates a higher probability of species presence. The survey effort (see

below) can be used to establish a level of confidence in the presence score. One can have higher confidence in the presence score if the corresponding survey effort is also high.

How is the probability of presence score calculated? The calculation is done in three steps:

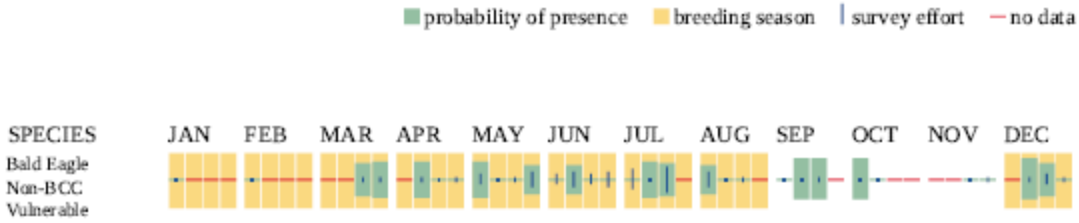
1. The probability of presence for each week is calculated as the number of survey events in the week where the species was detected divided by the total number of survey events for that week. For example, if in week 12 there were 20 survey events and the Spotted Towhee was found in 5 of them, the probability of presence of the Spotted Towhee in week 12 is 0.25.
2. To properly present the pattern of presence across the year, the relative probability of presence is calculated. This is the probability of presence divided by the maximum probability of presence across all weeks. For example, imagine the probability of presence in week 20 for the Spotted Towhee is 0.05, and that the probability of presence at week 12 (0.25) is the maximum of any week of the year. The relative probability of presence on week 12 is 0.25/0.25 = 1; at week 20 it is 0.05/0.25 = 0.2.
3. The relative probability of presence calculated in the previous step undergoes a statistical conversion so that all possible values fall between 0 and 10, inclusive. This is the probability of presence score.

Breeding Season (■)
Yellow bars denote a very liberal estimate of the time-frame inside which the bird breeds across its entire range. If there are no yellow bars shown for a bird, it does not breed in your project area.

Survey Effort (|)
Vertical black lines superimposed on probability of presence bars indicate the number of surveys performed for that species in the 10km grid cell(s) your project area overlaps. The number of surveys is expressed as a range, for example, 33 to 64 surveys.

No Data (–)
A week is marked as having no data if there were no survey events for that week.

Survey Timeframe
Surveys from only the last 10 years are used in order to ensure delivery of currently relevant information. The exception to this is areas off the Atlantic coast, where bird returns are based on all years of available data, since data in these areas is currently much more sparse.



Black-billed Cuckoo BCC Rangewide (CON)
Bobolink BCC Rangewide (CON)
Canada Warbler BCC Rangewide (CON)
Cerulean Warbler BCC Rangewide (CON)
Chimney Swift BCC Rangewide (CON)
Eastern Whip-poor-will BCC Rangewide (CON)
Golden-winged Warbler BCC Rangewide (CON)
Olive-sided Flycatcher BCC Rangewide (CON)
Wood Thrush BCC Rangewide (CON)

State of Wisconsin / DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Tony Evers, Governor
Adam N. Payne, Secretary
Telephone 608-266-2621
Toll Free 1-888-936-7463
TTY Access via relay - 711

101 S. Webster St.
Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

January 24, 2024

Patrick Gleissner
Ice Age Trail Alliance
2110 Main Street
Cross Plains, WI 53528

SUBJECT: Endangered Resources Review (ERR Log # 24-050)
Proposed Blue Hills Dreamer Route, Rusk County, WI (T35N R09W S08, T35N R09W S20, T35N R09W S29, T35N R09W S32, T35N R09W S31, T35N R09W S33, T36N R09W S32, T35N R09W S17, T35N R09W S30, T35N R09W S06, T35N R09W S18, T35N R09W S05, T34N R09W S03, T36N R09W S31, T35N R09W S07, T34N R09W S04)

Dear Patrick Gleissner,

The Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation has reviewed the proposed project described in the Endangered Resources (ER) Review Request received January 17, 2024. The complete ER Review for this proposed project is attached and follow-up actions are summarized below:

Required Actions: 3 species
Recommended Actions: 5 species
No Follow-Up Actions: 1 species
Additional Recommendations Specified: Yes

This ER Review may contain Natural Heritage Inventory data (http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/NHI), including specific locations of endangered resources, which are considered sensitive and are not subject toWisconsin's Open Records Law. Information contained in this ER Review may be shared with individuals who need this information in order to carry out specific roles in the planning, permitting, and implementation of the proposed project. **Specific locations of endangered resources may not be released or reproduced in any publicly disseminated documents.**

The attached ER Review is for informational purposes and only addresses endangered resources issues. **This ER Review does not constitute DNR authorization of the proposed project and does not exempt the project from securing necessary permits and approvals from the DNR and/or other permitting authorities.** Please contact the ER Review Program whenever the project plans change, new details become available, or more than a year has passed to confirm if results of this ER Review are still valid.

Please contact me at 608-419-2755 or via email at melissa.tumbleson@wi.gov if you have any questions about this ER Review.

Sincerely,

Melissa Tumbleson
Endangered Resources Review Program

cc: Craig Anderson, DNR Ecologist
Drew Hanson, DNR Public Relations Liaison
Mary Tano, NPS

Section A. Location and brief description of the proposed project

Based on information provided by the ER Review Request form and attached materials, the proposed project consists of the following:

Location	Rusk County - T35N R09W S08, T35N R09W S20, T35N R09W S29, T35N R09W S32, T35N R09W S31, T35N R09W S33, T36N R09W S32, T35N R09W S17, T35N R09W S30, T35N R09W S06, T35N R09W S18, T35N R09W S05, T34N R09W S03, T36N R09W S31, T35N R09W S07, T34N R09W S04
Project Description	Create ~18.6 mile trail reroute to enhance the hiker experience by incorporating unique geologic features and remove the hiker from shared use ATV trails and muddy logging roads. In addition this trail will provide access to impressive geologic areas that are becoming more well know with no official access leading to widending social trails and environmental degradation. The scope of work includes brushing, tread construction, wetland crossings, stream crossings, stone stairs, signage post installation. Trail to be 18-24" wide primitive class hiking trail of native surface/dirt. The corridor clearing prism will be 8'H x 6'W. The total area of disturbance to be ~11.25 acre.
Project Timing	October 1, 2024 through October 31, 2028
Current Habitat	Topography is hilly with 0 to 30 percent slopes. The landscape consists of 95% within the North Central Forest Ecological Landscape. Soils consist of sandy loams, sands and silts. Organic soils, peats and mucks, are common in poorly drained lowlands. The mesic northern hardwood forest is dominant, made up of sugar maple, basswood, red oak, and red maple, with some stands containing scattered hemlock, yellow birch, and/or white pine pockets. The aspen-birch forest type group is also abundant, followed by spruce-fir. The remaining 5% includes grass openings, shrub openings, rocky talus/bedrock. Existing land use is public recreation and forestry. Among the geologic features visited will be Blue Hills Flesenmeer, Spring Creek/Harris Felsenmeer, Devil's Kettle and Devil's Elbow.
Impacts to Wetlands or Waterbodies	The trail will cross Moose Ear Creek, Rock Creek three times, Spring Creek twice, four unnamed streams, and a wetland/bog. Due to periodic flooding the stream crossings will be stepping stones or unimproved fords. The bog crossing will be a ~300' boardwalk. an additional 12' boardwalk will be used to cross a small drainage gully.
Property Type	Public
Federal Nexus	Yes

It is best to request ER Reviews early in the project planning process. However, some important project details may not be known at that time. Details related to project location, design, and timing of disturbance are important for determining both the endangered resources that may be impacted by the project and any necessary follow-up actions. Please contact the ER Review Program whenever the project plans change, new details become available, or more than a year has passed to confirm if results of this ER Review are still valid.

Section B. Endangered resources recorded from within the project area and surrounding area

	Group	State Status	Federal Status
Bald Eagle *(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)*	Bird~		
Glaciere Talus *(Glaciere talus)*	Community	NA	
Dry Cliff *(Dry cliff)*	Community	NA	
Moist Cliff *(Moist cliff)*	Community	NA	
Stream--Slow, Soft, Cold *(Stream--slow, soft, cold)*	Community~	NA	
Pugnose Shiner *(Notropis anogenus)*	Fish~	THR	
Least Darter *(Etheostoma microperca)*	Fish~	SC/N	
Canadian Gooseberry *(Ribes oxyacanthoides ssp. oxyacanthoides)*	Plant	THR	
Squashberry *(Viburnum edule)*	Plant	END	

For additional information on the rare species, high-quality natural communities, and other endangered resources listed above, please visit

our Biodiversity (http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/EndangeredResources/biodiversity.html) page. For further definitions of state and federal statuses (END=Endangered, THR=Threatened, SC=Special Concern), please refer to the Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) Working List (http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/nhi/wlist.html).

Section C. Follow-up actions

Actions that need to be taken to comply with state and/or federal endangered species laws:

• Pugnose Shiner (*Notropis anogenus*) - Fish~

State Status: THR

Impact Type	Impact possible
Required Measures	Time of year restriction
Description of Required Measures	Suitable habitat for the Pugnose Shiner may be present within the waterbodies crossed by the project. Therefore, when working within these waterbodies, one of the following options shall be implemented to avoid take of the species: 1) Assume that the Pugnose Shiner is present and avoid impacts to the species by conducting work outside of the spawning season, which is mid-May through July. 2) Do not assume the Pugnose Shiner is present and submit photos and information regarding the substrate of the streams that will be crossed by the trail. If it's determined that suitable spawning habitat for the Pugnose Shiner is not present on site, there will not be any restrictions related to this species for the project. If the information and photos indicate there is suitable spawning habitat present, then in-stream work must be conducted outside of the spawning period (see option 1). Pugnose Shiner (Notropis anogenus), listed as Threatened in Wisconsin, prefers weedy shoals of glacial lakes and low-gradient streams over bottoms of mud, sand, cobble, silt, and clay. Spawning occurs from mid-May through July.

• Canadian Gooseberry (*Ribes oxyacanthoides ssp. oxyacanthoides*) - Plant

State Status: THR

Impact Type	Impact possible
Required Measures	Surveys,Other
Description of Required Measures	Suitable habitat for the Canadian Gooseberry on public land may be impacted by this project. Suitable habitat within the project area includes talus forests and bluff edges. To avoid take of this species, conduct plant surveys at the site to determine species presence/absence (a list of pre-qualified surveyors can be provided, if needed). If Canadian Gooseberry is not found on site, there will be no project restrictions related to this species. However, if surveys are conducted and this species is recorded on site, all impacts to the species must be avoided; if take cannot be avoided an incidental take permit/authorization shall be applied for. Survey results should be submitted to the Endangered Resources Review Program. Canadian Gooseberry (Ribes oxyacanthoides ssp. oxyacanthoides), a Wisconsin Threatened plant, is found in cool, open habitats such as talus forests, bluff edges, and moist flats between dunes. Blooming occurs early-May through early-June, fruiting late-June through late-July. The optimal identification period for this species is late-May through June.

• Squashberry (*Viburnum edule*) - Plant

State Status: END

Impact Type	Impact possible
Required Measures	Surveys,Other
Description of Required Measures	Suitable habitat for the Squashberry on public land may be impacted by this project. Suitable habitat within the project area includes moist, quartzite, talus slopes. To avoid take of this species, conduct plant surveys at the site to determine species presence/absence (a list of pre-qualified surveyors can be provided, if needed). If Squashberry is not found on site, there will be no project restrictions related to this species. However, if surveys are conducted and this species is recorded on site, all impacts to the species must be avoided; if take cannot be avoided an incidental take permit/authorization shall be applied for. Survey results should be submitted to the Endangered Resources Review Program. Squashberry (Viburnum edule), a Wisconsin Endangered plant, is found on moist, quartzite, talus slopes in the Blue Hills, where cold air from within the slope maintains boreal conditions at the surface. Blooming occurs early-May through late-July, fruiting throughout September. The optimal identification period for this species is throughout September.

Appendix B-Land Use Agreement between Rusk County and the Ice Age Trail Alliance

ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

LAND USE AGREEMENT

Article I - Parties to the Agreement

This agreement is made and entered into by and between Rusk County, hereinafter referred to as the "County" and the Ice Age Trail Alliance, Inc., hereinafter referred to as the "Alliance".

Article II - Purpose and Objectives

This agreement is for the purpose of cooperating in the development and management of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, hereinafter referred to as the "Trail", in Rusk County and clarifying the responsibilities of each party for the Trail. It is also for the expressed purpose of granting permission to the Alliance to use certain Rusk County forest lands for the purpose of constructing and maintaining the Trail.

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is a partnership project under National and State legislative authorization. The County may participate in hosting, developing, and/or maintaining segments of the Trail. As Ice Age Trail managing authorities, county forests retain management control over their lands but may authorize others to carry out trail development and maintenance activities through land use agreements. The Ice Age Trail is a state and nationally significant hiking trail and should be recognized as part of the multiple management objectives of the county forest.

The long term goal is to establish a continuous off-road trail that meets Federal and State legislative intent - that it be a "premier" hiking trail, nationally significant in its scenic and recreational qualities. The Trail is intended to interpret the effects of continental glaciation by following the route of moraines and other glacial features. The Trail is closed to motorized use by the general public. Motorized use for resource management activity is not limited. Motorized use of forest roads for Trail construction and maintenance may be permitted on a limited basis.

4) Wetland Structures — Recreational trail structures such as bridges, boardwalks, culverts, etc. must conform to local, State, and Federal standards. The expense and practicality of establishing safe stream or river crossings, in light of the potential level of use, should be considered. Depending on water depth and stream bed conditions fords are permitted. Alternative routes for use during hazardous water conditions may be established for segments with fords. The Alliance will be responsible for obtaining all necessary wetland structure permits.

5) Safe road crossing sites - Appropriate Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) officials should be consulted to ensure safe sight distance, signing, and compliance with state and local regulations.

6) Proximity to camping/recreational areas, roads (for user access and reasonable access for Trail maintainers), parking areas (trail heads), water, etc.

7) Planned silvicultural systems for timber stands along the Trail route and within primary viewsheds - When planning new silvicultural treatments or amending existing plans, the County will consider Trail location, aesthetics, and visitor use. Consideration should also be given to the following:
   a) Frequency of planned treatments for individual stands (e.g., periodic thinning of hardwoods or pine plantations regeneration of oak through shelterwood harvests, etc.)
   b) Infrequent travel by heavy machinery/equipment
   c) Areas with long-lived vegetative species or uneven age of management

8) Co-location with logging roads or use of logging roads (especially on high ground) - It is best in most cases

County may allocate resources to assist in these endeavors by decision of the County Forest Administrator.

6. Trail Marking - Trail marking and signing shall conform to the standards as written in *Ice Age National Scenic Trail, a Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance*, supplemented by the Alliance "Trail Notebook Series", and with appropriate County regulations. Specifically, all metal, wooden, and other signs should be placed on wood or Carsonite sign posts unless other arrangements have been made and agreed upon with the County Forest Administrator. Trail reassurance markers (blazes) should be painted. Only signs identifying the Trail route, permitted and prohibited uses of the Trail, Trail direction, Trail destination and distances, and natural and notable cultural features should be employed for use on, along, or leading to the Trail. Signs promoting commercial or other private activities are not permitted with the exception of signs promoting the Alliance and Alliance special events. The yellow 2" x 6" painted blaze is the standard reassurance marker of the Trail. The county shall not use yellow markings to denote timber management or harvest activities within 50' of the Trail.

a. Maintenance of Trail Marking During Logging Operations
When a timber sale is conducted, there is a need to ensure that the Trail route continues to be clearly marked during and after the harvest. Trail markings in areas designated for regeneration cutting (clear cutting) should be placed on posts, not on trees.

b. Interpretation
Interpretation along the Trail can include the full range of glacial, natural, and cultural features as well as resource management activities. Local efforts to develop and place interpretive signs shall be encouraged to add educational elements to the Trail experience.

d. Enforcement - The County may adopt ordinances relating to the Trail, such as controlling prohibited uses. Visitor safety and law enforcement under general or specific county ordinances shall be handled by the county sheriff department or other authorized County employees. Members and volunteers of the Alliance will report suspected violations or visitor safety issues to the county forest administrator, or in the case of a time-sensitive or serious issue, to the county sheriff.

8. Timber Management

a. Aesthetic management principles as described in the DNR *Silviculture and Forest Aesthetics Handbook* will whenever practical be utilized to provide protection of the Trail's scenic values. The Trail should be located, developed, and managed as an integral part of the environments through which it passes. The Trail should introduce users to a range of experiences, natural and cultural environments, and land management practices. When initially determining the location of the Trail it is important to place it in areas that will present the least management conflicts. The Trail route should generally be designated as a Class B aesthetic zone; however, segments of the Trail will be considered for Class A and Class D aesthetic zone designation if they receive or may receive a high level of public use or are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty or areas designated as special resources.

b. Skid road location and design, tract size and design, time of harvest, species management objectives, etc. are integrated within the *Silviculture and Forest Aesthetics Handbook* referenced in Item a., above.

C. Timber sale contract restrictions and requirements. Contracts shall include considerations to keep the Trail open and clear during, and to restore as needed after,

e. Periodic use of Trail for logging activities.
The objectives of the Trail are better served if the Trail is located in areas that are not, and are not likely to be, used as main haul roads for logging. However, the scenic, glacial, or special features or other considerations may sometimes argue for locating the Trail where timber sales and/or logging roads are or would be located.

9. Fees - No fees may be required for use of the Trail segments covered by this agreement.

10. Bi-Annual Trail Status and Planning Report - A bi-annual Trail status report, preferably written, shall be made by the Alliance, with input and assistance from the Trail Management Team, to the County Forestry Committee. The report should cover maintenance and development during the past year, planned developments and activities in the coming year, and any issues or problems.

Article VII - Term of Agreement

This agreement shall continue in effect for 10 years from the date of the last signatory party unless terminated or modified in accordance with Article VIII. Periodic (every 5 years) review of this document should be completed to determine effectiveness of this Agreement.

Article VIII - Termination/Modification

This agreement may be terminated upon 60 days advance written notice given by one party to the others, or it may be terminated earlier by mutual written consent of all parties. Termination of this agreement does not affect any other agreements which the signatory parties may have concerning the Trail. Any modification of the provisions of this agreement, including amendments, deletions, and waivers, shall be valid only when expressed in writing and signed by all parties. No party may assign its responsibilities under this agreement to another agency, organization, individual, corporation, or other body.

Article IX - Supremacy of Written Agreements: Related Agreements

All parties agree that this agreement supersedes any and all oral agreements and negotiations between the signatory parties concerning

the county forest in accordance with powers granted under the ordinance.

On October 3, 1980, Congress amended the National Trails System Act [16 U.S.C. 1241 et seq.] to authorize and establish the Trail as a component of the National Trails System [94 Stat. 1360; 16 U.S.C. 1244(a) (10)]. The State of Wisconsin designated the Trail as a State Scenic Trail in 1987 under Section 23.17. The Trail meanders through Wisconsin for approximately 1,200 miles from Potawatomi State Park in Door County to Interstate State Park in Polk County, generally following the terminal moraine and other glacial landscape features.

Article IV - Lands Covered by the Agreement

This agreement pertains to Rusk County forest lands and segments of the Trail on those lands shown on Exhibit B.

Article V - Management Team

Under the terms of this agreement the Management Team shall consist of:

1) Rusk County Forest Administrator and Public Liaison
2) Alliance Staff Representative
3) Alliance Blue Hills Chapter Representative (volunteer position)
4) Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Liaison Forester for Rusk County
5) DNR Northern Region Trail Coordinator

(See addendum for contact information for current trail management team members).

The Management Team shall be responsible for making decisions on issues and policies relating to Trail development, design, construction, maintenance, etc. The County Forestry Committee shall have final approval of non-routine management team decisions, such as: Trail relocations of greater than ¼ mile in length, changes to policies or practices that affect the Trail,

In accordance with the County's affirmative action policy and applicable Federal and State laws, no person shall be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, the program which is the subject of this agreement on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, age, disability, or national origin.

The Alliance shall furnish proof to the County of worker's compensation coverage in the form of a Certificate of Insurance indicating such for paid employees, and proof of General Liability insurance.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have executed this Land Use Agreement as of the last date written below.

/s/ 1-11-2016

Chairman, Land, Forest & Parks Comm. Date

/s/ 12/23/2015

Executive Director, Ice Age Trail Alliance, Inc. Date

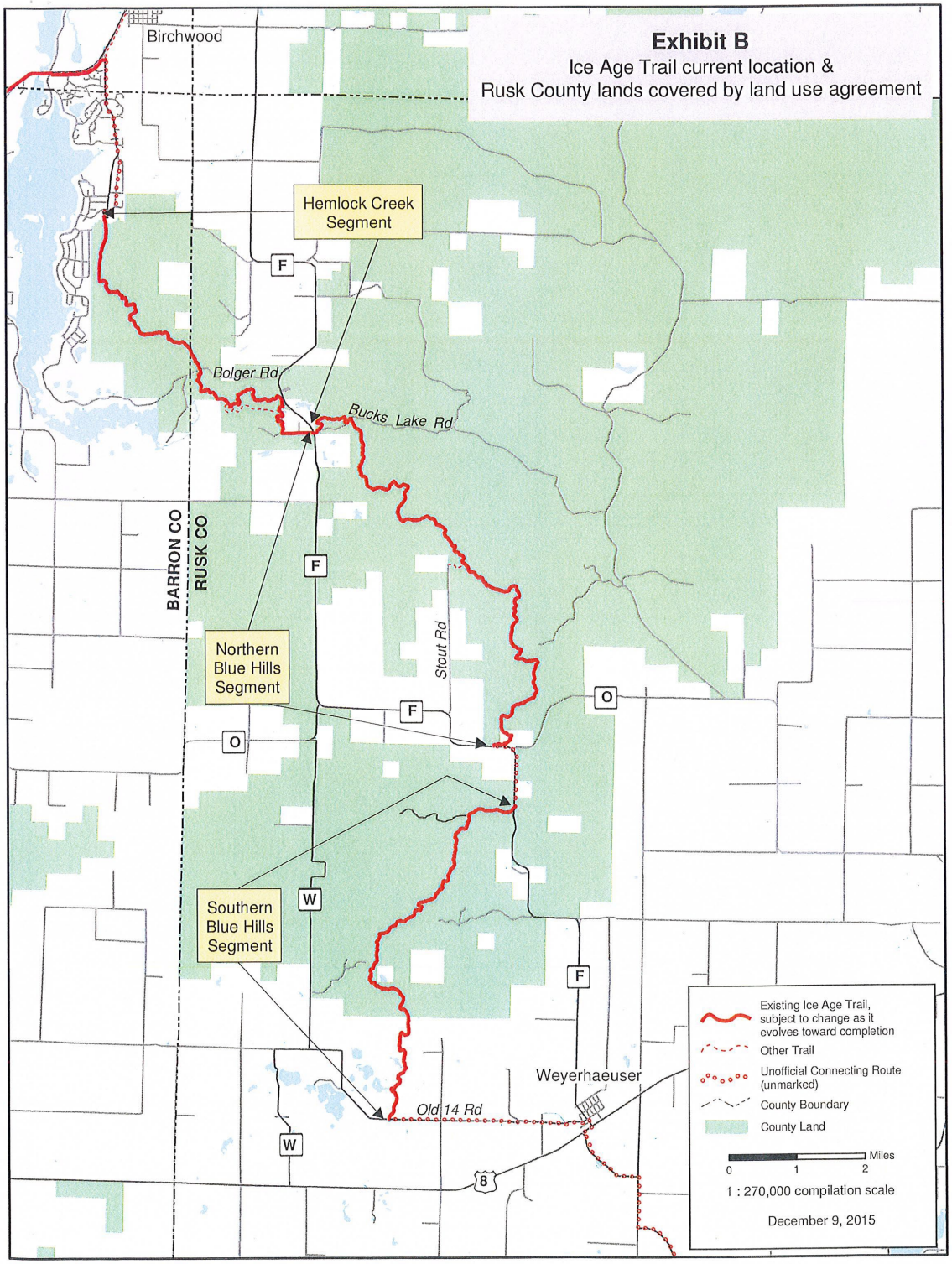
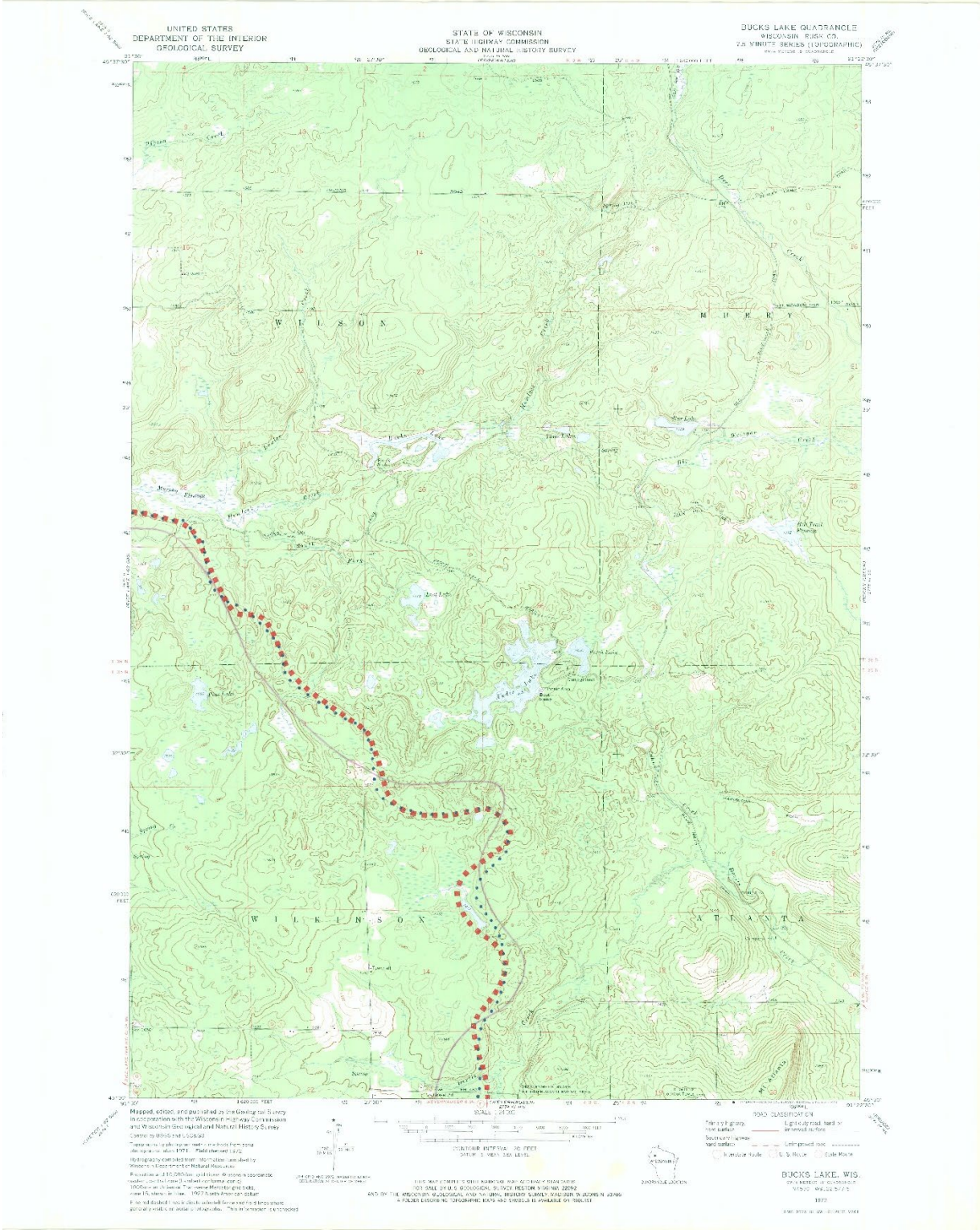
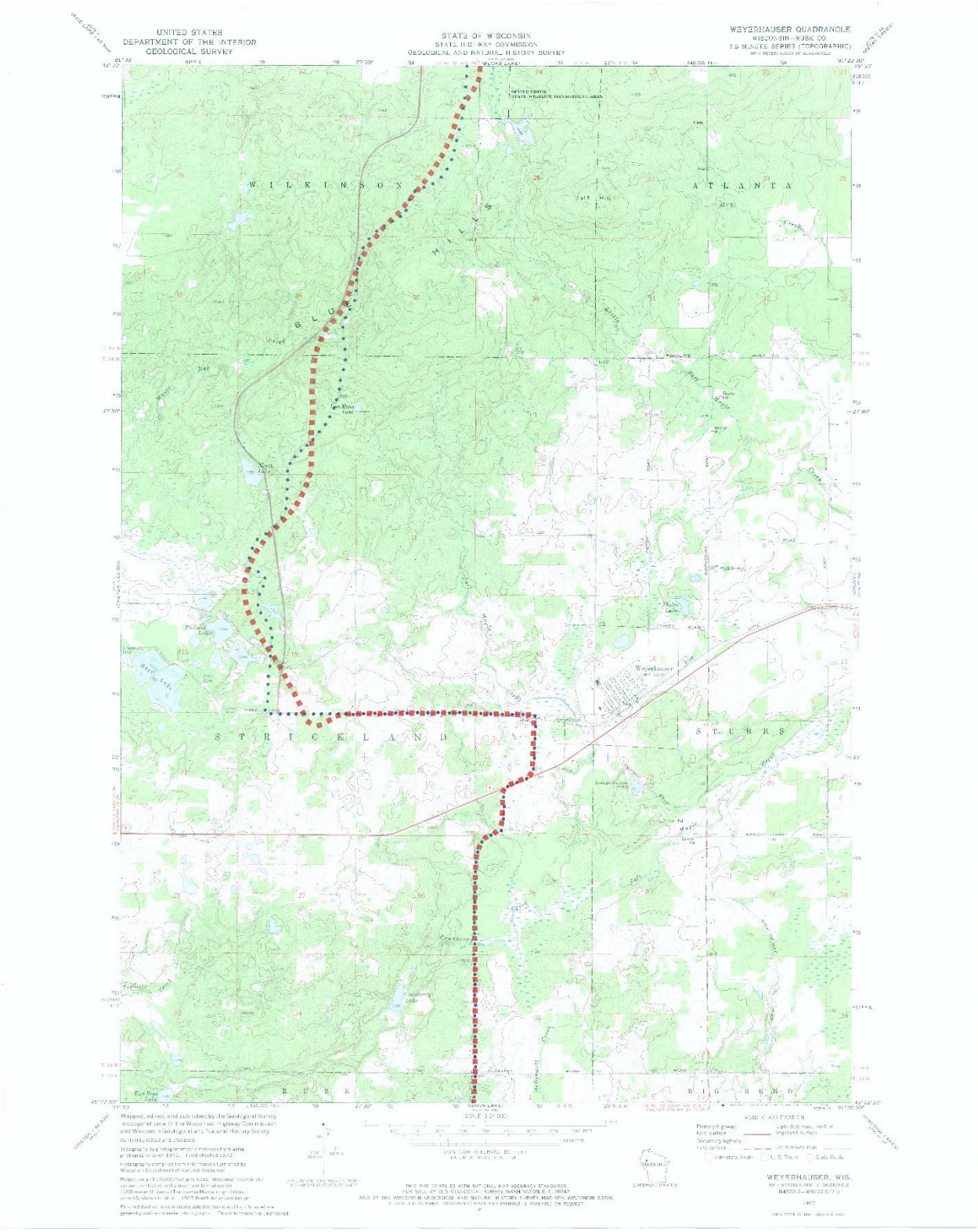


Exhibit B
Ice Age Trail current location &
Rusk County lands covered by land use agreement
Birchwood
Hemlock Creek Segment
Bolger Rd
Bucks Lake Rd
BARRON CO
RUSK CO
Northern Blue Hills Segment
Stout Rd
Southern Blue Hills Segment
Old 14 Rd
Weyerhaeuser
F
O
W
8
Existing Ice Age Trail, subject to change as it evolves toward completion
Other Trail
Unofficial Connecting Route (unmarked)
County Boundary
County Land
Miles
0
1
2
1 : 270,000 compilation scale
December 9, 2015

Appendix C- Proposed Route of the Ice Age NST in Rusk County from 1983 Comprehensive Plan




UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
STATE OF WISCONSIN
STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION
GEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY
WEYERHAUSER QUADRANGLE
WISCONSIN—RUSK CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)
WILKINSON
ATLANTA
BLUFF HILLS
STRICKLAND
STUBBS
BUSK
BIG BEND
Weyerhauser
SCALE 1:27 000
WEYERHAUSER, WIS.

Appendix D- Wetland structure design drawings and Permit Correspondence

From: Harrington, Dan - DNR
To: Patrick Gleissner
Subject: RE: Request for Wetland Permit Review - Ice Age Trail - Blue Hills Segment
Date: Thursday, January 18, 2024 10:30:54 AM
Attachments: Blue Hills Wetland Packet.pdf

Thanks for the email. Elevated boardwalks on pilings or pans do not require WDNR approvals provided they span the entire wetland.

Regards,
Dan

We are committed to service excellence.
Visit our survey at http://dnr.wi.gov/customersurvey to evaluate how I did.

Dan Harrington
Phone: (715) 733-0019
Dan.Harrington@Wisconsin.gov

From: Patrick Gleissner <patrick@iceagetrail.org>
Sent: Wednesday, January 17, 2024 4:04 PM
To: Harrington, Dan - DNR <Dan.Harrington@wisconsin.gov>
Subject: Request for Wetland Permit Review - Ice Age Trail - Blue Hills Segment

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the organization.
Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Please review the attached Wetland Permit Package for a proposed Ice Age Trail project on the Blue Hills Segment in Rusk County.

The project will include building a 425' boardwalk on a proposed reroute of the Ice Age Trail over a wetland and a 13' single span bridge across a gully in Rusk County forest.

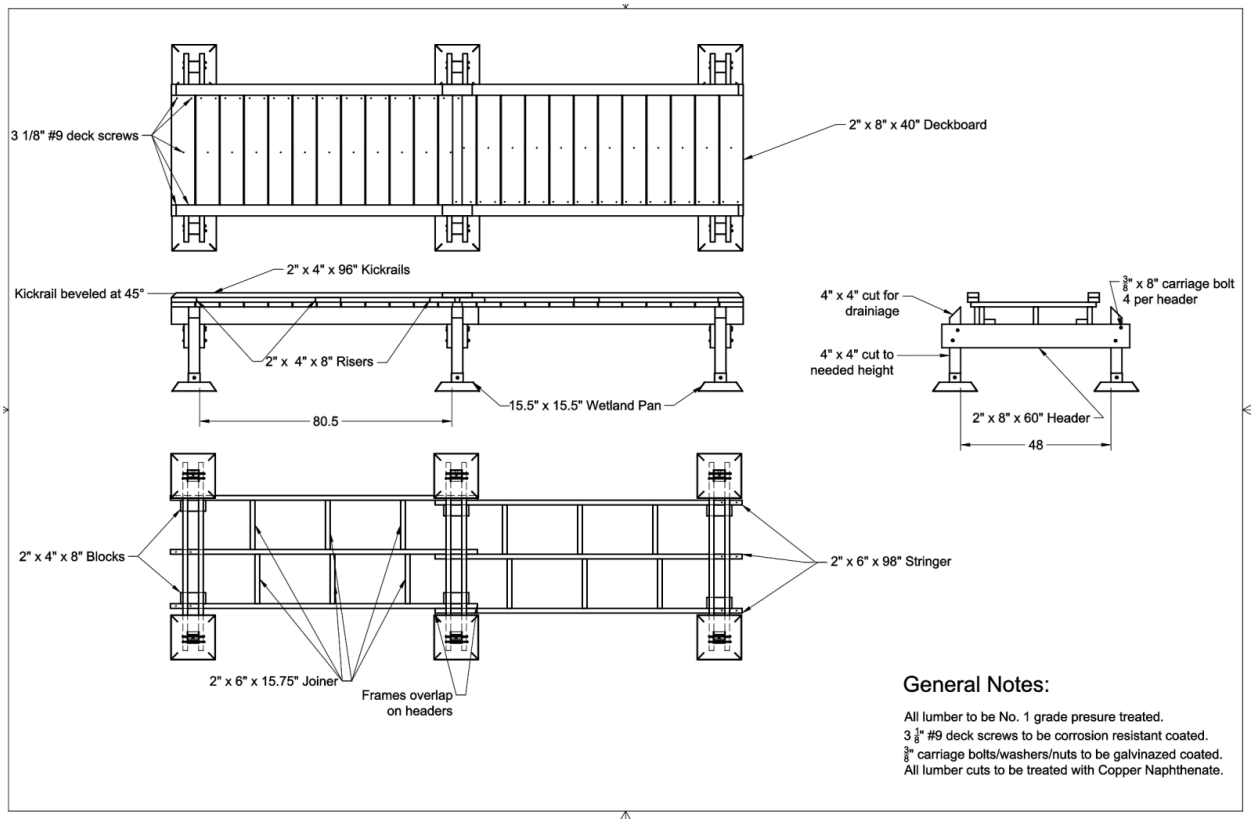
Let me know if you require more information or clarification.

ICE AGE TRAIL ALLIANCE

Patrick Gleissner
Trail Operations Coordinator

2110 Main Street, P.O. Box 128
Cross Plains, WI 53528

c: 414-416-2317



General Notes:

All lumber to be No. 1 grade presure treated.
3 1/8" #9 deck screws to be corrosion resistant coated.
3/8" carriage bolts/washers/nuts to be galvinazed coated.
All lumber cuts to be treated with Copper Naphthenate.

Appendix E- SHPO and Tribal Correspondence

[EXTERNAL] SHPO Review: 24-0666/RU - DRAFT- Blue Hills Re-Route Environmental Assessment for the Ice Age National Scenic Trail- Rusk County Forest

tyler.howe@wisconsinhistory.org <tyler.howe@wisconsinhistory.org>
Wed 4/3/2024 9:59 AM
To:Tano, Mary M. <Mary_Tano@nps.gov>

This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.

Good morning, Mary:

We have completed our review of WHS #24-0666, DRAFT- Blue Hills Re-Route Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Ice Age National Scenic Trail- Rusk County Forest project and concur with your determination that Alternative B - Trail Re-Route (Preferred Alternative) will have No Effect to historic or cultural resources within the Area of Potential Effect (APE).

We stand ready to conclude our NEPA federal consultation requirements should you need additional comments regarding this federal undertaking as you conclude a final NEPA determination.

Please use this email as your official SHPO comments on this draft EA. If you require a hard copy signed form, please contact me and I will provide you a signed copy as soon as possible.

Take care,

Tyler

Tyler B. Howe, PhD
Compliance Section Manager
State Historic Preservation Office

Wisconsin Historical Society
816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706

tyler.howe@wisconsinhistory.org

Wisconsin Historical Society
Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories Since 1846

Appendix F- Summary of Comments