To create, support, and protect a THOUSAND-MILE footpath tracing Ice Age formations across Wisconsin — the Ice Age National Scenic Trail
2011: A Year of Growth, Respect, and Pride

Dear Friends of the Ice Age Trail Alliance,

Other parts of this report will deal with numbers, miles, acres and hours…….all wonderful news.

I prefer to look back from a different perspective. Here’s a statistic: In the last two years our membership has increased by over 11%. Why? Times are tough….Everybody’s cutting back….In a difficult economy, we provided a message of conservation, recreation, purpose, and resolve that resonated with our current members and many more. Here are some reasons why.

Our land protection strategy in 2011 yielded some extraordinary successes that will allow us to build more Ice Age Trail on permanently protected lands. With new land acquisition came new responsibilities to manage the land and its resources. We accepted those responsibilities enthusiastically by committing extra resources.

Trail building projects, both local and statewide, were enormous successes. Ten projects spread over the entire Trail attracted members and volunteers of all ages as we constructed many new miles of new trail and maintained over a thousand (it takes more than one pass!). By year’s end, over 635 miles of Ice Age Trail are complete and open to the public.

For the second time in three years, the Alliance received the National Park Service’s prestigious Hartzog Award for Volunteer Service….this time for the creative stitching together of two successful Alliance programs, our Mobile Skills Crew and Summer Saunters, to provide meaningful community service to our youth.

These successes, and so many more, deepen the respect we have for our volunteers. They step in locally every day somewhere in Wisconsin. It is impossible to describe all the ways they work. Over 65,000 volunteer service hours were logged in 2011 in support of our mission to “create, support, and protect a thousand-mile footpath tracing Ice Age Formations across Wisconsin.”

The result….Pride. We’re proud that our members, donors, foundations, and corporations support our work. We’re proud of new trail and land. We’re proud to educate. We’re proud of an ever increasing legacy. Simply, we’re proud of the Ice Age Trail Alliance.

We extend our sincere thanks to all those who make our work possible. Because of you and inspired by you, we are poised for another great year in 2012.

Sincerely,

Mike Wollmer
Executive Director
Who We Are

The Ice Age Trail Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to CREATE, SUPPORT, and PROTECT the ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL. We don’t get this work done by ourselves. The building of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail is accomplished with help from a kaleidoscope of private donors, landowners, businesses, nonprofit organizations, city, county, and state governments, and volunteers. Our 21 volunteer chapters and 3,420 members sustain (and often jump right into!) the work of building, maintaining, and sharing the Trail right on the ground.

About the Trail

The Ice Age Trail is a thousand-mile-long National Scenic Trail that lies entirely within Wisconsin. Winding its way through 30 of the state’s 72 counties, it passes crystal lakes, thriving prairies, towering white pines, national forests, and charming towns, highlighting geological formations created ten thousand years ago during the last ice age. It is within reach of over 15 million people. Along its length lie opportunities for conservation, cultural interpretation, quiet recreation, glacial history and earth sciences education, and inspiration.

Many Accomplishments in 2011

Behind the scenes on the Ice Age Trail, 2011 buzzed with activity. A new Strategic Plan for 2011-2015 means that IATA leaders have a “trail map” for the future. The launch of a new pair of Trail guidebooks made hikers happy: the Ice Age Trail Atlas and Companion Guide received substantial updates to include all the new trail built since the last editions were published in 2008.

IATA volunteers caused quite a stir in 2011. The Chippewa Moraine, Waukesha/Milwaukee County, Washington/Ozaukee County, Walworth/Jefferson County, and Lakeshore chapters all stepped up and led significant local trail building events in 2011. They ramped up our capacity to build and maintain great trail and built or rerouted many miles in the process. And during the most-ambitious-ever slate of trail building projects — 10 in one season — 775 volunteers lent a hand. That’s 26.5 hours per person, on average. What a committed bunch of volunteers.

With the help of Gathering Waters and the Land Trust Alliance, the IATA began the process of becoming an officially accredited land trust. Accreditation will allow us to be a more effective steward of Trail lands.

The year brought milestones. In 2011, Tom Gilbert retired from his post at the National Park Service as Superintendent of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. Tom has been a great friend of the Trail, and he continues to work actively with the IATA. Pam Schuler has stepped in as acting Superintendent. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and its staff continue to support the IATA with land acquisition, stewardship, and land management for the Trail.

Eight people became Thousand-Milers in 2011: Donene A. Rowe, Linda J. Lamont, Lowell B. Lamont, Sylvia L. Oberle, Ruth A. Sommers, Thomas D. Teeple, Rita M. Fox, and Christine M. Miller. Sixty-eight members became charter members of the Yellow Blaze Club, vital financial supporters of the IATA. And finally, we mourned the passing of many Trail lovers and leaders, including Sarah Sykes, John Zillmer, and Dick Cates. Their legacy will continue to be felt on the Trail for years to come.
Growing and Stewarding the Trail

In 2011, Ice Age Trail volunteers helped open 24.9 new miles of the Ice Age Trail for public use. Even with the loss or change to 11 miles of the Ice Age Trail, the Trail still gained 13.9 miles in 2011 (see table).

2011 Trail Building highlights include working shoulder to shoulder with 125 Army National Guard members while passing motorists cheered along STH 48, near Birchwood; completing work and officially opening the Trade River and Straight Lake Segments, near Luck; upgrading the historic Grandfather Falls segment along the Wisconsin River with Summer Saunters participants of all ages, near Merrill; constructing a native footbridge and stone crossing of the Plover River, near Wausau; local chapter projects being implemented that follow best practices and national standards, Trailwide.

Together, new and veteran Ice Age Trail volunteers helped craft 875 feet of boardwalk, shape over 50,000 feet of side hill tread, muscle into being 420 linear feet of rock retaining walls, and protect these conservation investments by conducting regular trail maintenance and stewardship outings locally in 2011.

The “Stewardship Zone” of the Trail includes much more than moving dirt and eradicating invasive plants. Moving forward, the Stewardship Zone of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail includes camaraderie, playfulness, and the gratification experienced as part of a team effort that works toward and achieves common goals. One foot at a time, the IATA and its supporters are building the sinuous shape known as the Ice Age National Scenic Trail amidst the magic and awe of the diverse glacial landscape of Wisconsin.

Protecting the Trailway

In 2011, the Ice Age Trail Alliance acquired 169 acres and in doing so protected 2.3 miles of Trail. Though the number of transactions and miles protected were lower than usual this year, Ice Age Trail partners still managed to have some success.

The Ice Age Trail Alliance and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) creatively protected five parcels without using funds to acquire the land. The DNR received an easement donation from Marathon County and the donation of a large piece of property from a land trust in northern Wisconsin. The Ice Age Trail Alliance made three very different and creative acquisitions to secure properties for the Trail. The IATA worked with a developer to secure an easement donation that protects approximately half a mile of trail in the City of Janesville. The most creative acquisition of the year was the exchange of a few acres of land along the Straight River in Polk County. This tiny trade allowed the Ice Age Trail to be laid out and designed in a flowing and sustainable manner just south of the river. And late in 2011, longtime Ice Age Trail supporters Bob and Ann Rusch continued to develop their Ice Age Trail legacy by donating a 17-acre parcel. This follows on the heels of their partial donation of a 160-acre conservation easement in 2009. The new property is adjacent to existing IATA-owned lands and is appropriately named the “Ann and Bob Rusch Preserve.” These acquisitions exemplify the Ice Age Trail Alliance’s ability to be creative and nimble with its land protection program.

There were a number of reasons for the lull in land protection for the Ice Age Trail last year, but chief among them was the uncertainty of funding through the State’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, which delayed the IATA’s application for grant funding for acquisitions and diminished the state’s ability to directly acquire lands for the Trail. The good news is that 2012 looks very promising as we try to make up for lost time. Ice Age Trail supporters can help IATA land protection efforts by reminding state legislators just how vital the Stewardship program is for the protection of the Ice Age Trail.

Enhancing the experience of Ice Age Trail users and being good stewards of the land are part of the vision for the Ice Age Trail. In 2011, the IATA continued to perform land management activities around the state. IATA staff and volunteers worked to keep invasive species at bay and, in a few cases, continued to restore lands to resemble habitats that existed prior to European settlement. The IATA
received grants and federal funding to perform restoration on properties in Rock, Washington, and Dane Counties. Working with our partners and volunteers, these management activities will help tell the stories of the land along the Trail.

Supporting Our Volunteers

When it comes to Ice Age Trail Alliance volunteers, sometimes it makes more sense to say that they are supporting us, rather than we them. In 2011, out of the hours our volunteers spent in the service of the Trail (see table below), a few notables stand out.

Jenny Addis, a disability advocate and inspirational speaker from Hancock, WI, garnered a National Park Service Accessibility Achievement Award for her contribution to the opportunities available for individuals with disabilities. Jenny secured support for an accessible trail spur on a State Ice Age Trail Area at Bohn Lake in Waushara County. “The outstanding thing about her involvement in the Bohn Lake Accessible Trail project is not that she accomplished everything from a motorized wheelchair,” said Dan Watson, National Park Service IANST Volunteer Coordinator, who nominated Jenny for the award. “The outstanding thing is that she was the right person, in the right place, at the right time, to make things happen.”

The Summer Saunters program was honored with the 2010 George and Helen Hartzog Volunteer Youth Group award for outstanding volunteer service. The program was founded in 2008 by Luke Kloberdanz and Chris McNeill, both teachers at Lodi Elementary School. Its purpose is to combat childhood obesity, reduce summer learning loss, and fight the detrimental effects of a lack of exposure to nature. They approached these goals by introducing school-age children to the Ice Age Trail and the great outdoors through hiking, service, and learning on the Ice Age Trail each summer. Participants helped build a segment of the Ice Age Trail in Straight Lake State Park in 2010.

“The contributions of Summer Saunters may not be fully realized for years to come,” Dan Watson, NPS IANST Volunteer Coordinator, said. “Its young participants have been shown ways they can contribute, now and later in life, to a national effort to maintain our green spaces.”

We salute Jenny, Luke, and Chris for their groundbreaking work, and we thank Dan for his work on the nominations for both awards. Our volunteers are truly a special bunch of people, and we are grateful for every single one of them.

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<td>Total hours reported</td>
<td>1189</td>
<td>1602</td>
<td>2281</td>
<td>2340</td>
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<td>Average hours per volunteer</td>
<td>48,187.5</td>
<td>42,288.9</td>
<td>58,225.5</td>
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There are so many things about the Ice Age Trail Alliance that I am not an expert on, but I am now an expert on being AWED. As chapter Trail Coordinator, I am awed by the local volunteers who put their time and their hearts into the trail. At Mobile Skills Crew events, I am awed by the quality of trail that is carved out of the earth — and by Thelma’s cooking. As a Thousand-Miler, I am awed by the way the Ice Age Trail highlights the best Wisconsin has to offer. AWESOME!

– Pat Witkowski, Oconomowoc, WI, Waukesha/Milwaukee County Chapter Trail Coordinator and Thru-Hiker Liaison

I am a section hiker, and I did it piece by piece....There are so many gems along the way. I had heard about places like Parfrey’s Glen and Gibraltar Rock and seen places like Devil’s Lake many years earlier. Experiencing all these places along the IAT is awesome. And some of the prettiest were right in my backyard in Langlade County....As I traveled the rest of the state to complete the segments, I was awed by all Wisconsin has to offer. I will return to many spots to enjoy them again, and in different seasons.

– Rita Fox, Antigo, Langlade County Chapter Member and Thousand-Miler

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