



**ICE AGE TRAIL
ALLIANCE**

Strategic Plan

2011 – 2015



Ice Age Trail Alliance Strategic Plan 2011 – 2015

HISTORY

Imagine trying to walk the entire length of the Ice Age Trail without a map or yellow blazes. You might be able to complete your journey, but you would spend a lot of time and energy being lost, relocating the trail, backtracking — you would not have guidelines to follow. You would not know how far you have traveled or how far you have yet to go. You would not be able to adequately manage your water, food, and other resources needed to finish the journey.

An organization such as the Ice Age Trail Alliance also needs a map and signposts to complete its journey, to provide guidelines and measurements so it can have a sense of where it is and where it needs to go next. For an organization this “map” is called a strategic plan. It begins with the mission and then outlines goals and strategies designed to achieve that mission.

Just as trail walkers need to regularly consult the map they carry, so too does the IATA need to regularly review its strategic plan. As the Trail map is updated periodically, so also will the strategic plan for the IATA need to be updated to meet the emerging and changing needs of both the geographical territory we walk in and the social and political environment around us. How this plan will be implemented, monitored, and updated will be addressed later in this document.

Since 2007 the IATA has been working toward developing an effective and timely strategic plan. In February 2007 a retreat was held in Wisconsin Dells that included the Triad partners, staff, board members, and members from almost every chapter of the Ice Age Trail Alliance. That retreat was a first step in agreeing on how the organization would move forward. That year the Board of Directors convened an ad hoc strategic planning committee to begin outlining a process to develop a new plan that would include as many members as possible. In the autumn of 2008 the IATA held the “Fall Into the Future” event that provided members and staff an opportunity to identify organizational directions for the next five years. At the end of 2009 the Board of Directors committed the organization to a formal planning process that has resulted in this document.



Several activities have occurred in the past year to arrive at this point. Between March and June all members had an opportunity to provide input into the plan via an online survey. Board members attended the regional meetings during March to review the survey and collect comments, ideas, and suggestions. At the April annual meeting the process was reviewed and members were again provided an opportunity to participate in the development of the plan. In July a day was devoted for staff, Board, partners, and members to interact in a facilitated event to develop draft goals and strategies. After that, smaller groups independently addressed each area of the plan to refine the goals and strategies that were then brought to the Board of Directors in September for review and final editing.

At the January 2011 Board of Directors meeting the strategies were weighted and prioritized. In February and March a small group of volunteers worked to finalize the plan format for final approval at the April Board of Directors' meeting. The strategic plan will then be presented to the membership as part of the Annual Meeting.

LAND MANAGEMENT

Our vision is that the Ice Age Trail Alliance secures and maintains accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance. The secured trail corridor and adjacent lands are maintained and managed to provide a superlative user experience, and in line with IATA legal requirements and LTA standards and practices. We have two goals relating to this vision.

The first goal is to seek and secure Land Trust Alliance accreditation by the end of 2013 and maintain it thereafter. This will involve staff time and effort to prepare documentation. In order to achieve accreditation, we plan to raise \$900,000 by December 31, 2015 in restricted endowments for stewardship and monitoring needs of IATA easements, which is consistent with LTA standards. We will need to educate donors about the importance of, and the difference between, management costs and acquisition costs. We will also raise \$150,000 by December 31, 2015 for a restricted fund to legally defend IATA easements, consistent with LTA standards.

To help fund land management activities, we also plan to seek funding via the National Park Service for management of Ice Age Trail lands, and for trail management in general. We intend to document our compliance and performance improvement against standards by reviewing the 2010 Guided Organizational Assessment every year.

Our second goal is to provide trail users with scenic, aesthetic and interpretive surroundings. We plan to develop land management guidelines and create a comprehensive land management plan that incorporates scenic, aesthetic and interpretive goals which emphasize Wisconsin's native ecosystems. We will work with public and willing private Trail hosts to achieve



the goals of land management. This will help ensure that scenic and aesthetic goals are consistent along the length of the Trail. To provide resources for management of these lands we will develop a land stewardship fund.

LAND PROTECTION

Our vision is that there will be a set of protected properties in place that offers, where appropriate, a connected path and story for a contiguous, off-road Ice Age Trail. A continuous corridor will be preserved and protected of sufficient width to assure long-term viability of the natural and cultural resources of the Trail, its continuity, and the aesthetic or scenic quality of the trail users' experience. All lands will be permanently protected and be owned or eased by various entities including: the National Park Service or other federal agencies, the Department of Natural Resources or other state agencies, counties, and local municipalities, the Ice Age Trail Alliance, or other conservation organizations. We have four goals relating to this vision.

The first goal is to raise funds sufficient to protect the lands needed to complete the Trail, and to handle the subsequent land management needs. We will need a large amount of land in order to protect the 500+ miles of Ice Age Trail needed to complete the Trail. We must diversify our land protection funding sources to include foundations, corporate grants, individual donors, board members, and government grants. We will need to garner more monies from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Wisconsin state Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, as much as \$15 million per year from each fund.

Our second goal is to protect 25 miles of trail corridor per year over the next 20 years, thus completing the protection of the remaining 500 miles of Ice Age Trail. To do this we intend to expand the IATA's role as a land trust in order to take advantage of our ability to offer diverse land protection options. We will create and fill sufficient staff positions dedicated to land protection. These positions will allow us to track opportunities for land acquisition and to negotiate and complete them in a timely manner.

Our third goal is to create and maintain positive relationships with "handshake" landowners. These are landowners who are hosting the trail by allowing us to locate it on their property without a formal agreement. We intend to increase the IATA's visibility to these IAT hosts by maintaining good communications with them and informing them of our role as a land trust by contacting them each at least annually.

Our fourth goal is to involve board members, staff, chapter volunteers, and other general members as active participants in land protection work. We will draft and implement a comprehensive land protection plan that



incorporates scenic, aesthetic, and interpretive goals and presents criteria for determining when the IATA gets involved with an acquisition. We will also create a handbook on land acquisition, which defines the roles of the various elements of the IATA in this area. This land acquisition handbook will be used to conduct trainings with chapter leaders and other interested volunteers.

TRAIL BUILDING

Our vision is that the entire length of the Ice Age Trail is constructed to the same high standard, and completed as expeditiously as possible. We have three goals relating to the vision.

The first is to ensure that trail building standards are identified, articulated, disseminated, understood, and followed by all involved in trail building. To this end we plan that trail construction training will continue to be disseminated via the Mobile Skills Crew, and the Ice Age Trail University. We also plan to create, print, and distribute a trail building field guide.

Our second goal is to complete the building of 100 miles of new Ice Age Trail by 2015. We will do this by fully implementing the Mobile Skills Crew 2010-13 plan which describes the goals of building the IAT with skilled and trained volunteers according to the consistently high standards we have achieved in the past.

Our third goal is to construct the Ice Age Trail to standard on all lands on the route of the Trail where construction can take place. To do this will require that we increase the chapters' capacities to construct trail to standard by training and certifying more trail crew leaders. The chapters, in cooperation with the Ice Age Trail National Scenic Trail standards and the Mobile Skills Crew program, will construct each approved new segment of the Ice Age Trail in a timely period after approval.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Our vision is that the entire Ice Age Trail will be readily hikeable year round, providing users with a consistently positive experience. We want every user of the Trail, regardless of where they get on, where they get off, or how long they are on it, to experience a walkable and unobstructed path. Positive experiences by Trail users result in greater support and awareness of the Ice Age Trail.

Our goal is to maintain the Ice Age Trail to standard on all lands on the route of the Trail where constructed trail is in place. In order to keep a trail of this length maintained to high standards we realize that we must rely on the efforts and commitment of local volunteers. We recognize that trail building most often takes place in a larger group experience where



volunteers are able to interact with others, while chapters' trail maintenance activities most often occur as the efforts of one or two volunteers working on their own. These critical maintenance volunteers need to be supported so that they not only have the information and tools to do the job, but are recognized and valued for their important role in making the Ice Age Trail a premier hiking and walking experience.

We intend to do this by working to consistently ensure that chapters have adequate tools, equipment, and training needed to accomplish routine maintenance. A trail maintenance field guide will be developed and made easily available so that new volunteers will be informed on maintenance standards. Training on the safe use and upkeep of equipment will be made available regularly across the state.

To insure that a reliable and strong system is in place for ongoing maintenance we intend to support chapters to develop and enhance their current maintenance efforts. Many chapters have developed successful trail monitor programs and we intend to share these ideas among all the chapters so that workable local models can be devised and implemented. Chapters will also be supported to identify a trail maintenance coordinator position. A number of chapters already have a person or team responsible for identifying and addressing ongoing and episodic trail maintenance needs.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEADERSHIP

Our vision is that the IATA has both the infrastructure and the resources to ensure its existence in perpetuity. Even after the Trail is completely constructed the ongoing maintenance and promotion of the Trail will continue. We have identified three goals to make this vision a reality.

Our first goal is to imbed leadership development for volunteer leaders at all organizational levels into the cultural fabric of the IATA. Volunteer driven organizations such as ours need to continually nurture emerging leaders and support veteran leaders. To do this we intend to review the roles and purposes of leaders throughout the IATA by updating position descriptions for the IATA Board of Directors, board committees, staff, chapter leadership, and volunteers so that everyone is secure in their expectations and responsibilities. A plan for leadership development activities and goals will be developed that encompasses all levels of the organization. Potential members of the board of directors will be recruited and orientated so that they have the skills and resources to implement the strategic plan and represent the various constituencies of the IATA.

Our second goal is to continually increase membership in the IATA. Membership is referenced in several areas of this plan since membership numbers matter in terms of influencing decision making and marshalling



general support for the IAT. We intend to develop and implement innovative initiatives aimed at attracting youth to the IAT so that they have a positive experience to carry with them into adulthood. We will be studying our current membership to establish how they came to hear about the IATA and use that information to inform outreach efforts. We will be assertively recruiting members from the large numbers of people who use the Trail.

Our third goal is to address our financial sustainability by raising the balance of our two existing operating endowments to \$1,000,000 in funds and commitments. A variety of strategies will be initiated to raise funds or commitments from businesses, members, and other supporters.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Our vision is that the IATA chapters, board of directors, members, volunteers, and staff all work together effectively with trust and without confusion. All those involved are clear about their roles and responsibilities in achieving the mission to create a thousand-mile footpath tracing Ice Age formations across Wisconsin. We have identified two goals that will help us successfully attain this vision.

Our first goal is to clarify, communicate, and foster understanding of the various roles and expectations of the IATA's chapters, board, members, volunteers, and staff. We will do this by posting all relevant documentation (the IATA Handbook, Board manual, training manuals, etc.) to a secure section of the organization's website so that this information is readily available to all who need it. A continually updated organizational handbook (the IATA Handbook) will be created that documents roles, responsibilities, policies, requirements, etc., and made available on the IATA's website.

Our second goal is to create and continually improve all systems of communication amongst the IATA. A statewide organization is always challenged by the difficulty of communicating across a wide geographical area. We will do this by ensuring that Board of Directors members attend chapter meetings, regional meetings, and other events outside of their home chapter in order to personalize the communication network, update chapters on board activities and current issues, and to hear the thoughts and opinions of members. Field Representatives will hold regular meetings, in person or electronically, with appropriate groups of chapters to share information and resources amongst each other. The Board of Directors will be responsible for creating and disseminating a report twice a year designed specifically for the IATA membership.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Our vision is that the Ice Age Trail will serve as a lifelong educational resource through a variety of community outreach programs. The Ice Age Trail will be widely recognized and used for recreation, education, and conservation of Wisconsin's glacial, historical, and natural heritage. Through its sustained and increased use, the Ice Age Trail will promote health and vigor for all ages and abilities through experiencing this national scenic treasure. We have two goals relating to this vision.

Our first goal is to maintain the Ice Age Trail as relevant to all potential users whether for recreational or educational use or for families to enjoy the outdoors. We intend to do this by developing and implementing a marketing plan for the IATA to ensure consistent branding and messaging about the IAT. We need to have a consistent and effective message on why the IAT exists and how it can be used. This plan will include strategies for outreach to groups that the IATA wants to see using and promoting the Trail, including youth groups, families, educators, tourism officials, outdoor industry resources, and others. Recognizing the importance of reaching potential Trail users early in life, we intend to increase the use of the IAT and associated materials in schools.

Our second goal is to increase awareness of the IATA across the Midwest and increase support for the IATA by increasing general membership. We intend to develop a Trail Town program for implementation across the state and provide outreach to specific national, statewide, and local groups by establishing a system of speakers who will effectively provide informative and entertaining presentations. We will work toward ensuring that the IAT is represented on official state maps, county maps, online mapping tools, and at highway Trail crossings.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy is about educating elected and appointed officials about the objectives and needs of the IAT and its corridor. Our vision is that the IATA will be recognized by and influential at all levels of government. All staff, board members, and interested volunteers will be active participants in a coordinated advocacy strategy. Chapter members and local volunteers will be educated and available to respond to governmental issues as they arise.

Our goal is to develop an advocacy network that links the IATA to county, town, village, city, state, and federal government. This will ensure that the needs of the IAT, including development and protection of the Trail, will be represented and heard in the decision making process. We will develop and disseminate a policy guide of IATA advocacy efforts that will be used to help select the issues to which the IATA will apply advocacy resources. Specific target issues and goals at local, state, and federal levels will be identified and



advocacy information developed to address them. The IATA will maintain regular contacts with key officials to keep the IATA and the IANST front and center. Ongoing training will be developed and conducted for staff, board members, and volunteers on advocacy roles, strategies, and skills.

IMPLEMENTATION

When you are trying to walk the entire IAT you do not just look at your map once and leave it in your pack. You check it regularly to see where you are, be aware of what is ahead, note if there are route changes, and adjust your pace, water, and food.

The IATA will also need to keep its strategic plan out on the table when decisions are being made. The Executive Director and staff will use the plan for establishing annual operational plans and the budgets that support them in order to allocate resources to achieve the organization's goals. The Board of Directors will use the plan at each of its quarterly meetings to assess the organization's progress.

Each year the plan will be reviewed and updated in light of the progress made so that adjustments can be made to respond to the changing political, financial, and natural environments. The plan will be fully reviewed in three years so that at the start of the fourth year (2014) adjusted and new goals will be set for an additional three to five years. In this way the strategic plan never really ends: it is consistently extended into the future to meet emerging issues, needs, and challenges.

The plan is being developed into two complementary formats, this narrative version and a more detailed version that includes all of the strategies that were identified and metrics to measure progress. Both versions will be available on the IATA website. Members who have further questions concerning the plan are invited to contact the Executive Director.

