



# 2021

## ANNUAL REPORT

*of the Ice Age Trail Alliance*



*Seed collecting at SwampLover's Preserve along the Table Bluff Segment. Photo by Amy Lord.*



# A Banner Year!

2021 was the type of year the Ice Age Trail Alliance has been building toward for 63 years. Investments – time, energy, and money – made by volunteers, members, partners, directors, and staff since 1958 created a strong foundation for our extraordinary growth. With the pandemic's arrival, Wisconsinites sought refuge outdoors. And, the Alliance was ready for the crowds flocking to the nearby, open, and accessible Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

The Ice Age Trail's rapid rise and sustained popularity is best evidenced in Emily Ford's meteoric stardom. Her 69-day quest, as she became the first woman and person of color to tackle a winter thru-hike, drew attention to the Trail from all over the state and country. People gathered on social media and on the Trail itself to support Emily's quest.

Then, throughout the year, new and long-time hikers ticked off miles on their own journeys toward Thousand-Miler acclaim. In total, **83 people** hailing from **7 states** – Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Wisconsin – brought their adventure to completion; a 62% increase over 2020.

October's Mammoth Hike Challenge prompted **6,500 people** to sign up to hike, walk, run, or backpack 41 miles of Trail. Finally, a November "Membership Looks Good on You" campaign in partnership with the Duluth Trading Company – which provided knit caps used as a membership incentive – generated **417 new memberships**, the most ever in a single month.

But, where support for the Trail was felt most keenly was in the fundraising efforts for land protection. Twice in 2021, supporters stepped up to meet matching campaigns and handily raised nearly \$250,000 for property purchases. This record support enabled the Alliance to protect nine properties, which will result in five miles of future Ice Age Trail.

Underpinning the Alliance's successful land protection is its award-winning MSC trailbuilding program. In spite of a cautious beginning, the 2021 Trailbuilding Season ended with three new miles of Trail built in Dane County and completion of a multi-year, seven-mile reroute in Marathon County.



*A hiking group celebrates reaching the 700-mile mark of their 1,200-mile journey. Photo by Xiping-Wang.*



# CONSERVE

## Land Protection and Habitat Management



### Land Protection

The Ice Age Trail Alliance, in 2021, made significant strides toward the completion of a continuous Ice Age Trail through Wisconsin. Its protection of nine properties across the state, made 2021 the most prolific year of land protection in three decades. Our partners made progress on the Trail's behalf, as well; purchasing an additional 3 parcels totaling nearly 300 acres and protecting 0.5 miles of Trail.

Since 1986, the Alliance and its partners have collectively protected 20,709 acres of land for the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.



*An esker's ridge preserved in the Mueller Lake Preserve. Photo by Kevin Thusius.*

### Notable Protection Achievements

#### A HANDSHAKE AGREEMENT BECOMES PERMANENTLY PROTECTED PROPERTY

The purchase of 10-acres and a 6-acre easement from the Krogwold family exemplifies a long-standing goal of the Alliance: **turn handshake agreements into permanently protected property.** The easement highlights the landowner's dedication to maintaining the Ice Age Trail's presence in Portage County, solidifying the route of the New Hope-Iola Ski Hill Segment. It allows for improvements along the segment, including vegetative restoration, reroutes and new Trail structures to improve the hiker experience.

#### A NORTHERN ANCHOR FOR THE BIFURCATION ACHIEVED

The purchase of a 48-acre easement one mile west of the Chaffe Creek State Fishery Area will dramatically improve the hiker experience with construction of 1.5 miles of new Ice Age Trail, a loop trail, and a parking area. This property also enables a northern anchor point for the bifurcation, **encouraging trail construction and interpretive opportunities along the bifurcation's western side.** Besides permanently protected Trail, this property's conversion from farmland to a thriving native prairie will support the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly.

#### THREE PROPERTIES PROTECT SIGNIFICANT GLACIAL FEATURES

The purchase of three properties – Moraine-Outwash Preserve, Mueller Lake Preserve, Ice Override Preserve – will collectively add 2.5 new Trail miles near Antigo, a 2021 Trail Community addition. Cumulatively, the 161.5 total acres highlight glacial features, which make the Ice Age Trail so unique. These acquisitions also reflect the Alliance's **commitment to improving the hiking experience in Langlade County** and boosting Antigo's relevance as a hiker's destination.



### BY THE NUMBERS

#### Land Protection and Habitat Management

- 12 properties totaling 637 acres and protecting 5.5 miles of future Trail (Alliance and partners).
- 20,709 acres permanently protected since 1986. 4 Alliance-owned preserves, bringing the total owned to 37.
- 5,500 trees planted.



# CONSERVE

## Land Protection and Habitat Management

### Habitat Management

Hand-in-hand with land protection is the thoughtful habitat management of 37 Alliance-owned preserves. The importance of this work was brought to the forefront with these signature events:

#### INVASIVE CEDAR REMOVAL BENEFITS PRAIRIE

A five-year collaboration between the Alliance and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is transforming the land comprising Steenbock Preserve, located along the Gibraltar Rock Segment in Southern Columbia County. Volunteer crews continued to remove an invasive cedar thicket from the Preserve's western slopes. This stewardship work will help heal and increase the biodiversity of nearly three acres of prairie.

#### PLANTING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FOREST

Volunteers gathered to plant **5,500 young trees** on the Brownrigg-Heier Preserve in Manitowoc County. This three-day project helped convert a portion of a pine plantation, established in the 1950s, to a more natural and sustainable forest. The newly planted trees – white oak, bur oak, black cherry, and sugar maple – are hardwood species with an adaptive capacity to a changing climate.

#### INCREASING BIODIVERSITY AND POLLINATOR HABITAT

A Weeding & Wine stewardship series premiered in 2021. It encouraged fun and fellowship while pulling weeds in SwampLovers' Preserve located along the Table Bluff Segment in Dane County. As a result, volunteers pulled thousands of plants – translating to the removal of millions of weed seeds – in an effort to protect prairie and savanna ecosystems from invading non-native species. Volunteers also collected native prairie seed – Purple Prairie Clover, Pale Purple Coneflower, and Rosinweed – to be used in future renewal efforts in area prairies.



*A volunteer team help plant the 5,500 saplings adding biodiversity to the Brownrigg-Heier Preserve. Photo by Amy Lord.*

# CONSERVE

## Philanthropy Highlights

### Donor Spotlight: Prairie Springs: The Paul Fleckenstein Trust

Prairie Springs: The Paul Fleckenstein Trust is integral to the Alliance's land protection efforts for future Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

Their involvement with the Alliance started in 2020, when the trustees, Carolynn and Jay Scott, were key in helping raise funds for two campaigns: 'Close the Waterville Gap' and 'Protect Rice Lake'.

In 2021, land protection opportunities flooded the Alliance, who then shared this unique challenge with Prairie Springs trustees. The Scott's love for the Trail came through once again. They generously contributed \$360,000 to purchase three properties and offered another \$200,000 for a 1:1 match campaign to protect a fourth. The campaign was a resounding success! 624 individual donors gave to the cause. But not only that, the funding raised during match campaign exceeded the purchase price for the property. With the excess funds, the Alliance established the Prairie Springs Land Protection Fund, a replenishing fund that will help future land protection efforts (See below for more information).

*The Alliance's Prairie Springs Land Protection Fund is named in honor of Paul Fleckenstein. A dedicated supporter of conservation efforts, Paul worked with a variety of organizations to protect Wisconsin's natural beauty. The Alliance's fund celebrates Paul's memory and commitment to these causes.*

#### **How the Prairie Springs Land Protection Fund works:**

**The Alliance protects a property.**

**The Alliance seeks and receives partial reimbursement of the purchase price from DNR and other sources.**

**The reimbursed funds go back into the Prairie Springs Land Protection Fund for future land protection.**



# CREATE & MAINTAIN

## Trailbuilding Successes



After months of uncertainty, volunteers and their familiar smiles returned to the Trail in a big way. Small work events at the beginning of 2021 built toward the return of large-scale MSC projects. As a result, August brought near normalcy – almost 100 volunteers worked on 2 segments – adding 3 new miles of Trail in Dane County. A few months later, the ribbon (and cake) was cut on the newly minted, seven-mile reroute of the Ringle Segment.

Volunteers, 522 in total, showed up in all types of weather – freezing rain to high humidity – prepared to build 31 brand-new, gleaming structures and 31,944 feet of sustainable tread. They donated 13,159 hours of service while cheerfully maintaining the MSC program's award-winning status.

### **Marathon County's Reimagined Ringle Segment is Complete**

*It took 5 years, 11 events, 1,161 volunteers and 26,650 hours, but in 2021, the reimagined Ringle segment was complete. Volunteers toiled over rocky ground, creating a 7-mile reroute. In the process, they forged a world-class segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail highlighting the glaciers' handiwork on the landscape. Grand re-opening celebrations included a champagne toast, speeches, cake, and of course, hiking.*

*Volunteers maneuver a rock into position along the Ringle Segment. Photo by Cameron Gillie.*



## **2021 Trailbuilding Season Sponsors**

### **Business and Partner Organizations:**

- Columbia County Department of Transportation
- Crossroads Coffeehouse
- Department of Natural Resources: Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program
- Duluth Trading Company
- Friends and Family of Spencer Hicks
- Marathon County Solid Waste Department
- National Park Service
- New Glarus Brewing Company's Only in Wisconsin Giving, Inc. Charitable Foundation
- Plastics Ingenuity
- Prairie Springs: The Paul Fleckenstein Trust
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- West Foundation

### **Alliance Chapters and Friends of the Trail:**

- Central Moraines Chapter
- Dane County Chapter
- Fox Cities Backpackers Meetup Group
- High Point Chapter (Taylor County)
- Lakeshore Chapter
- Lodi Valley Chapter
- New Vision Wilderness
- Preserve at Hunters Lake Homeowners Association
- UW-Oshkosh Volley Ball Team
- Washington/Ozaukee County Chapter
- Waukesha/Milwaukee County Chapter



# CREATE & MAINTAIN

## Trailbuilding Successes



*MSC volunteers build a boardwalk across a perennially wet area along the Valley View Segment.*

### BY THE NUMBERS:

#### **2021 Trailbuilding Successes**

- 9 MSC events.
- 522 volunteers.
- 13,159 service hours.
- 8 bridges totaling 164 feet.
- 23 boardwalk/puncheon totaling 1,813 feet.
- 1 timber wall totaling 21 feet.
- 13 rock walls totaling 165 feet.
- 4 rock steps.
- 31,944 feet of sustainable tread (or 6.05 miles).
- 681 miles of blazed Trail.

# PROMOTE

## A Beneficial Partnership: Ice Age Trail Communities

In 2021, the Alliance welcomed two cities, Antigo and Sturgeon Bay, into the Trail Community family. **This brings the number of municipalities designated as Trail Communities to 15!**

The Trail Community program highlights the Trail's positive, local economic impact. Together, the Ice Age Trail Alliance and Trail Communities promote the unique qualities that make the Trail, and the community it travels through, a meaningful destination.

Surrounded by fertile farmland, yet nestled in the heart of the Northwoods, **Antigo** is the county seat of Langlade County. Known for its friendliness, it is home to 20 parks and more than 250 acres of recreational space. Outside city limits, Langlade County has hundreds of miles of snowmobile, ATV, hiking, and biking trails. This includes 54 rugged miles of Ice Age Trail hosted on county forest land, 28 miles of connecting route, as well as numerous glacial lakes, rivers, and streams.

**Sturgeon Bay**, a popular vacation, shopping, and sport fishing destination, is the largest city on the Door County Peninsula. A scenic lake port at the head of Sturgeon Bay, an inlet of Lake Michigan's Green Bay, the city enjoys a rich maritime history and numerous lighthouses. The city's Potawatomi State Park is the home of Ice Age Trail's Eastern Terminus, offering a start or conclusion to one's thousand-mile journey.



### ***Ice Age Trail Campuses***

*The Alliance encourages universities near the Trail to become Ice Age Trail Campuses. This collaboration generates awareness about the Trail among those who will care for it into the future. In 2021, UW-Platteville (including Baraboo and Richland campuses) joined UW-Whitewater (including Rock County campus) as an Ice Age Trail Campus.*



# PROMOTE

The Mammoth Hike Challenge Encouraged Thousands to Explore The Trail!



In its second year, the Mammoth Hike Challenge once again drew people from in-state and out to the Trail!

Their goal: hike, run, walk or backpack 41 miles during October. And visit three Trail Communities!

More than **6,500** registered for the free challenge—an impressive 67% were first-time participants, too. Throughout the month participants shared their Challenge adventures on social media and showed how the Trail expands minds, positively affects mental and emotional well-being, and creates community.

In partnership with the **Wisconsin Department of Tourism**, the Challenge promotes tourism, bringing attention to our 15 Trail Communities. Guided Fall Color hikes, Meet Monty events, Hiker Meet-Ups, Hiker Happy Hours, Hike-a-Thons, and more encouraged hikers to visit and linger areas around town(s). As part of the Challenge completion form, participants reported spending more than \$300,000 when exploring Trail Communities—a 20% increase in spending from 2020.

The Mammoth Hike Challenge was generously sponsored by the **Duluth Trading Company**, helping to off-set the Challenge's administrative costs.

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TRADING  
co

*Friends meet up to hike the Lowe Lake Segment during the Mammoth Hike Challenge. Photographer unknown.*





# PROMOTE

## Think Outside and Saunters: Engaging Outreach and Education Initiatives

The Ice Age Trail Alliance works hard to ensure the next generations of trailbuilders and land conservationists will continue. During 2021, Saunters, our award-winning youth engagement platform, and Think Outside – a National Park Foundation initiative to get 10, 000 fourth-graders out onto the Ice Age Trail – enjoyed a renaissance. Alliance staff

quickly adapted to presenting virtual class presentations, yet also offered in-person field experiences when requested. Between these two options, **4,474 students** from **64 schools or community centers** learned about world-renowned glacial features along the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.



*Saunters kids of the Fredric School District after a summer hike.*



*Students from the Mount Horeb School District learn about fall foliage.*



*A snowy day doesn't diminish the enthusiasm of fourth graders from Verona's Glacier's Edge.*



*A fall hike brings out the smiles of kids from Green Bay's McAuliffe Elementary.*



# PROMOTE

Thousand-Milers Make History!

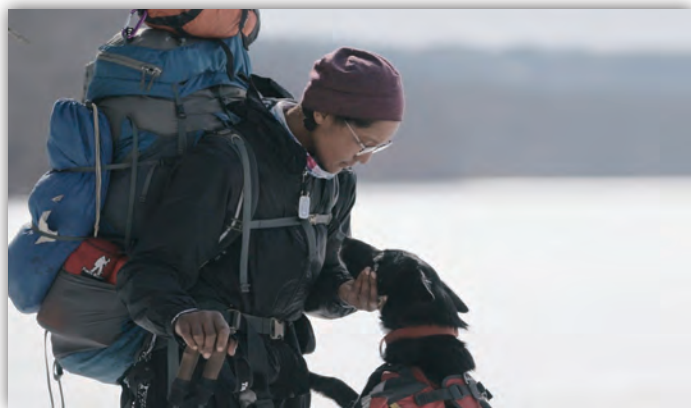


Each year, hikers submit the application certifying their status as Thousand-Milers – the devoted who have walked all the segments and suggested connecting roads, which currently compose the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

The final tally of those claiming Thousand-Miler status in 2021 shows the Trail's gain in popularity: **83 people** hailing from **7 states** completed all 1,200 miles! That's a 62% increase from 2020.

Emily Ford from Duluth, Minn., kicked off the year with a high-profile thru-hike. Her trek generated serious excitement among hikers and non-hikers, as she became the first woman and person of color to complete the Ice Age Trail in winter. She accomplished this feat with her canine companion, borrowed sled dog, Diggins.

Her 69-day trek (December 2020 – March 2021) served as inspiration to many, and she became an unintentional ambassador of the outdoor industry's quest for inclusivity. A documentary film, *Breaking Trail*, written and directed by Jesse Roesler, Principle and Creative Director at Credo Nonfiction, chronicled the duo's journey, spurring further interest. The film premiered at the 2021 BANFF Film Festival.



## BY THE NUMBERS: *Outreach Successes*

- 83 Thousand-Milers completed all 1,200 miles.
- 4,474 students from 64 schools or community centers introduced to the Trail.
- 6,500+ registered for the Mammoth Hike Challenge.
- \$300,000+ spent in Trail Communities during the Challenge in October.

*"... my favorite part was when Ellen (my new friend from the Thousand Miler Wannabes Facebook Group) and I walked from Indian Lake to Cross Plains. The Liebetrau property belonged to my husband's family and I have many fond memories of family gatherings in that farmhouse. More importantly, because the family sold the land to the Alliance, we can always go home. Jim's parents would be so happy to see the land was restored to prairie. His Dad never wanted it to become residential. Perhaps others who hike the trail will also decide to help with land acquisition so the Trail can continue to expand."*

~ Tina Liebetrau, section hiker,  
12/04/2020 – 10/15/2021

## 2021 Thousand-Miler Facts:

	Male	Female
Youngest hiker	8 years	26 years
Oldest hiker	70 years	71 years
Shortest duration on Trail	46 days	49 days
Longest duration on Trail	2,789 days	2,903 days



Photo by Laura Stewart.



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

During 2021, as an Alliance, we leapt forward; a unified force of staff, board, volunteers, and members, working together in a new and oddly exciting time.

We've joined the ranks of top-tier trail and conservation organizations through our collective efforts. With this growth came new opportunities, responsibilities, and, of course, challenges. However, our volunteers and chapter structure remain foundational and support a host of good news:

- Ice Age Trail use is off the charts.
- Land protection efforts set a record-breaking pace
- Membership exploded.
- Fundraising in support of our mission is stronger than ever.

As we strove forward, so did the organization-wide volunteer service hours, rising from the previous year's dip to **63,284**, reflecting the time and effort of **1,354** volunteers. According to the National Parks Service's 2021 summary of their Volunteers-In-Parks program, **the Ice Age National Scenic Trail ranked 16th, out of all National Parks and Trails, for its volunteer numbers and 9th for its volunteer hours.** Pretty impressive!

**David Lonsdorf**, this year's winner of the **Spirit Stick award**, embodied the long-term dedication and service to the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. As Kevin Thusius, Director of Land Conservation, stated in Lonsdorf's nomination, "Dave has really done it all. From getting filthy at trail construction projects to being board president to, most recently, fundraising for land protection. His honesty and humor provide a refreshing and enjoyable experience for those around him."

A similar level of dedication was demonstrated in the contributions of **Jerry Sazama**, winner of **Trail Steward of the Year award**, to the Trail's management and development. "If you're looking for Jerry, you can find him on the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, checking to ensure the local segments are in tip-top shape," wrote Diane Harp in her nomination of Sazama. "When a section needs attention, he schedules well-attended Trail Improvement events and gets the work done."

The Alliance continued to expand its capacity to get work done on behalf of the Ice Age Trail with new hires: Riley Dupee, Field Operations Specialist; Sarah Driscoll, Philanthropic Coordinator; Patrick Gleissner, Trail Operations Coordinator; and Melissa Pierick, Director of Marketing and Community Relations.

We brought 2021 to a close with a strong bank balance and **5,478 memberships!**

**These shared successes are a credit to all who participate in conserving, creating, maintaining, and promoting the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.**



**Mike Wollmer**  
Executive Director



*David Lonsdorf, Spirit Stick Winner 2021. Photo by Cameron Gillie.*



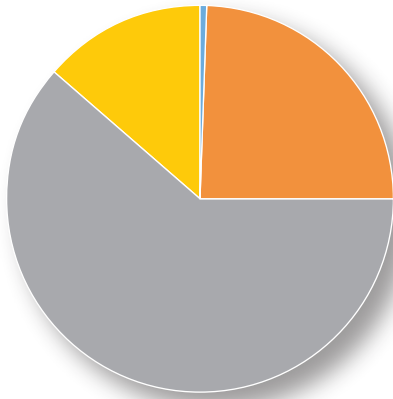
*Jerry Sazama, Trail Steward of the Year. Photo by Dave Caliebe.*

## By the Numbers

- 4 new staff members.
- 1,354 volunteers and 63,284 service hours.
- 5,478 memberships.



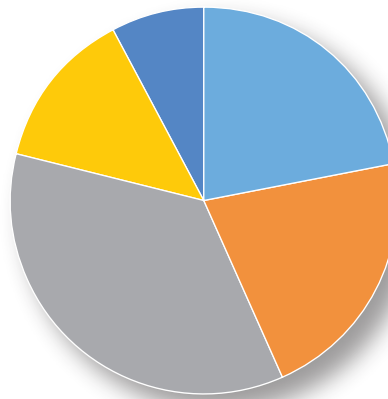
# IATA REVENUE & EXPENSES 2021



- Government (state & local) - \$1,000.00
- Government (federal) - \$637,021.14
- Individuals & foundations - \$1,628,717.21  
includes chapter and in-kind contributions
- Other (events & sales) - \$352,694.19  
includes investment income and gain on sale of land

**Total revenue - \$2,619,432.54**

Note: In addition, IATA received \$1,209,700 that was used to acquire land in 2020. Of this total, \$430,200 was from governmental units; the remainder was from private sources.



- Trails - \$477,669.33
- Lands - \$457,610.56
- Outreach - \$762,180.18
- Administration - \$289,646.90
- Fundraising - \$163,729.90

**Total expenses - \$2,150,836.87**

Note: These numbers include estimated in-kind services and include chapter expenses.



Photo by Christina Callies.



Photo by  
Laura Stewart.



Photo by Brian Rathgeber.





# *The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is...*

*Quintessential Wisconsin; a view along the Waterville Segment. Photo by Laura Groetsch.*

**... a thousand-mile footpath winding across Wisconsin, showcasing some of the nation's most beautiful natural areas along the way.**

It's a place where people of all ages and backgrounds come together to hike, work, and play. This linear park winds through woods, farm fields, small towns, and urban areas, making Wisconsin's natural beauty accessible and available to both rural and suburban populations.

And it's all thanks to an immense flow of glacial ice which sculpted a landscape of remarkable beauty across Wisconsin more than 12,000 years ago. As the glacier retreated, it left behind a variety of unique features: moraines, eskers, erratics, kettles, drumlins, kames and dells. These glacial remnants are now considered among the world's finest examples of how continental glaciation sculpted our planet.

Wisconsin's tourism and travel industry widely recognizes the Ice Age Trail, one of only eleven National Scenic Trails, as a crown jewel in the state. The Trail's economic impact is quantified at more than \$355 million (and growing) annually.

Its notable rise in popularity is reflected in the 2.3 million people from across the country who use the Trail each year. Convenient to a tri-state area, 18 million Americans living within a two-hour drive of the Trail are able to enjoy its benefits.

The Ice Age Trail Alliance, has conserved, created, maintained, and promoted the Ice Age Trail since 1958. This longevity is a testament to effective public, private, and corporate partnerships, active collaboration, and strong financial support. Although the Trail is not yet complete (more than 500 miles of connector routes remain between segments of it), the Alliance remains focused on creating a premier, continuous, permanently protected Ice Age Trail. This steadfast commitment is reflected in the 681 miles of blazed Trail, which are actively used.

***Working to Conserve, Create, Maintain, and Promote the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.***

Ice Age Trail Alliance  
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