



DANE COUNTY CHAPTER

November 2020: Focus on Volunteering

Wondering how you can get involved in the Dane County Chapter of the Ice Age Trail? Read on!

How You Can Get Involved

By Dave Lonsdorf

The Ice Age Trail Alliance has a dedicated professional staff of about a dozen members. But much of the work to maintain and build the trail is done by volunteers—some 80,000 hours per year!—organized into 19 chapters across the state. The Dane County chapter (DCIAT) has over 700 members, and one of the common questions chapter coordinators get is “How can I volunteer?” There are a number of ways you can help support the Alliance’s mission as a chapter volunteer. Last month, we highlighted Stewardship (land restoration) volunteering on the trail in Dane County. Here are some other ways you can get involved. (All current volunteer activities follow COVID safety protocols.)



Volunteers on a recent Stewardship work day—our first at the new Mammoth's Back property!—get instructions while social distancing. Photo: Dave Lonsdorf

Trail Maintenance

Dane County has eleven trail segments—Lodi Marsh, East Lodi Marsh, Springfield Hill, Indian Lake, Table Bluff, Cross Plains, Valley View, Madison, Verona, Montrose, and Brooklyn Wildlife. There are several roles involved in maintaining each.

Trail Mowers: Portions of each segment need periodic mowing four to five times during the growing season, especially in prairie and grass areas. The chapter has several mowers of various sizes for volunteers to use after training.

Trail Monitors: These individuals walk the trail segments on a regular basis and make note of problems—downed trees, trail tread issues, vandalism, broken sign posts, etc. Monitors report their observations to the Trail Maintenance Coordinator or Lead Trail Maintainer for the particular section of trail (trail monitors are not expected to fix the issue).

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Trail Maintainers: Trail Maintainers repair trail tread, construct and maintain trail drainage structures, keep the trail corridor open, etc. New trail maintainers aren't expected to already know how to do these tasks; each section of trail in Dane County has a Lead Trail Maintainer who is a trained and experienced crew leader and coordinates and lead efforts on bigger projects and also teaches trail maintainers skills needed for this work.

Trail Building Volunteers: When we have a big trail building or repair project, we put out a call for volunteers to help out through our "trailbuilders" email group.

Chapter member Ed Spoon (edspoon@charter.net) is the chapter's Trail Maintenance Coordinator in charge of these efforts. Contact him if you're interested in helping out!

Tool Maintenance

The chapter owns three large brush mowers, 6 brush cutters, leaf blowers, trailers, dozens of loppers and saws, and many other tools with interesting names like "McLeod" and "Pick-Mattock" and "Pulaski." We have a big shed (a former corn crib) that houses all the tools. During the summer, when the tools are in frequent use, we need help keeping them in good condition, especially the big mowers.

If you have a knack for this, or would be interested in learning how to do it, contact Dave Lonsdorf (dblonsdo@wisc.edu).

Landscape Restoration (Stewardship)

Our chapter's stewardship efforts accommodate all skill levels as we work to restore native landscapes around the trail—typically prairie, oak savanna and oak woodlands. We currently have projects underway in more than a dozen locations throughout the county.

Chapter stewardship volunteers are at work every weekend throughout the year. Contact Gary Werner(nattrails@aol.com) if you have questions about this work or to be added to the notification list for stewardship volunteer opportunities.



Photo: Bob Kaspar

Don't (only) want to get your hands dirty? There are plenty of other ways to volunteer!

Chapter Communication/ Outreach: With more than 700 members and thousands of “friends of the trail” in Dane County, communication and outreach requires volunteers, too. This email update, a print newsletter, a Facebook page, an Instagram account and other social media outlets, as well as managing e-mail lists and keeping the Alliance calendar updated with chapter activities, all need people to help out.

If you're interested, contact chapter secretary Megan Schliesman (schliesfrau@gmail.com). To help specifically with the print newsletter or calendar entries, contact newsletter editor Tom Gross (tagr@umich.edu).

Chapter Management: We have regular chapter “business” meetings, and chapter officers who help manage all the chapter activities. Bob Kaspar, our “Chapter Coordinator,” facilitates the meetings, and coordinates all of the chapter’s business-related activities. If you’re interested in attending chapter business meetings, contact chapter secretary Megan Schliesman (schliesfrau@gmail.com) to be put on the meeting notification mailing list. Contact Bob Kaspar (bobkaspar@sbcglobal.net) if you have questions about chapter management and are interested in future work in this area.

Fundraising: As we shared last month, we have a chapter “Land Fund” to raise money to help protect land in Dane County where new trail can be built. (Currently, we have about 39 miles of “off road” trail in Dane County with the remaining miles comprised of “road walks” that we would like to convert to Ice Age Trail.) The key to this is finding land parcels to protect by easements or purchase.

If you're interested in fundraising for the future of the Ice Age Trail in Dane County, contact Dave Lonsdorf (dblonsdo@wisc.edu).

Trail Angels: If you’re willing to provide a ride to hikers wanting a shuttle to or from their car, volunteer to be a trail angel. Interested trail angels can provide other support to hikers as well, especially thru-hikers, including lodging/meals/laundry. You can specify how much you’re willing to do and when available (e.g. weekdays only, weekends only). To volunteer to be on the trail angel list after COVID restrictions are lifted, contact Tess Mulrooney (tlmmdsn@aol.com)

Hike-a-Thon Organizing: Each June, on National Trails Day, we have a fundraiser hike, the “Hike-a-Thon” that usually has more than a hundred participants, some hiking more than 20 miles on the IAT. Although COVID meant the Hike-a-Thon was cancelled this year, we’re still planning for future events. If event planning appeals to you, contact Mark Graczykowski (mark.a.graczykowski@gmail.com).

Trail Hike Leaders: Love hiking the trail at dawn? Snowshoeing a section under a full moon? Birding on the trail? Consider sharing your passion with others by organizing and leading a Dane County chapter trail hike. It can be

as simple as naming the time and place and having hikers introduce themselves before you head out, or you can offer talking points as you go (e.g., geology or other features of the trail, name that bird, future trail plans).

You can use the [Ice Age Trail Alliance Rock and Dane Co Chapters meetup group](#), as well as the Alliance calendar, to promote the event. Hikes are a great way to meet others interested in the trail, and to provide support for those working to complete the [Dane Drifters](#) hiking “rewards” program. For tips, talking points, and more information on organizing and promoting hikes for our chapter post-COVID, contact Gary Wensing (kensinginn@tds.net)

Trail Signage: The “yellow blaze” is a symbol of the Ice Age Trail that every hiker learns to look for. We have approximately 39 miles of off-road trail in Dane County and more than a thousand blazes on trees and posts that need to be refreshed every couple of years. There are also a dozen trail head kiosks, and many informational signs and maps to maintain.



A yellow blaze in the Brooklyn Wildlife segment. Photo: Bob Kaspar

Our trail signage crews are busy most of the summer in various parts of the county making sure that hikers can find their way. We are not currently training new volunteers because of COVID restrictions, but hope to get back to doing so in the future. Contact Jeanette “Gus” Wahlquist (jkwahlquist@sbcglobal.net) to find out about more about this volunteer opportunity.

The Dane County chapter can always use more help—from YOU!