

## Critical Connection Complete!

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Just outside of Cross Plains is a newly minted 81-acre preserve with an iconic shape. The distinct ridge-line on the property is reminiscent of the double-mounded back of a woolly mammoth, which inspired its name: “Mammoth’s Back Preserve.”

Mammoth’s Back Preserve was previously unattached to the Cross Plains Segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail to its west. However, this past May, the Alliance acquired two trail easements that will eventually connect the southern extent of the Cross Plains Segment to the existing Preserve.

At the forefront of the land acquisition efforts for the Ice Age Trail Alliance is Kevin Thusius, Director of Land Conservation. Thusius notes that finding and purchasing parcels of land to lengthen and protect the Trail can take years, so acquiring lands in quick succession in the same area is a rare and exciting occurrence for the Alliance.

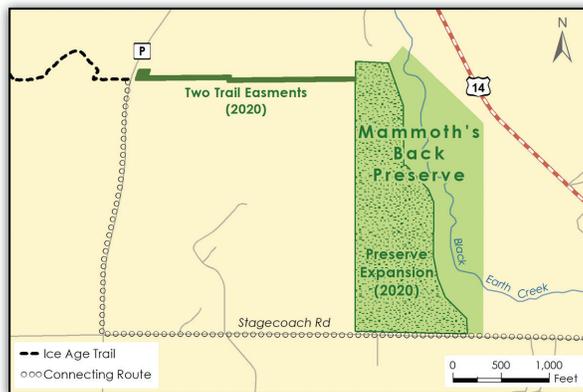
“Other land trusts and nonprofits tend to buy land in clumps,” describes Thusius. “The world of trails is different. We’ve got to protect a linear path. We think: how can we get from this road to that road and get all of them lined up around the same time? That’s the ideal situation, but it almost never happens like this.”

As rare as it is to acquire a contiguous road-to-road section at one time, that is exactly what happened with the two trail easements this May. Now, the Alliance looks forward to restoring lands on the Preserve, including restoring an ecologically significant remnant prairie on the hilltop that forms the “Mammoth’s Back” of the Preserve, and building trail along the easements to connect from the existing Cross Plains Segment at CTH P to Stagecoach Road on the way to the Cross Plains Reserve.

“We’ll start restoration this fall/winter, and as early as next year, we’ll be able to build the Trail,” says Thusius enthusiastically.



*View of the trail easement lands from County Highway P towards Mammoth’s Back Preserve. The two trail easements pass through primarily agricultural land and will be built into Trail as early as next year. Photo by Kevin Thusius.*



*If you would like to help close the gaps along the Ice Age Trail and ensure the success of future land protection efforts, please donate to the **Robert & Victoria Connors Land Resource Fund**. For more information, please visit: [iceagetrail.org/land-protection-iata/](https://iceagetrail.org/land-protection-iata/)*

Thusius notes the importance of private fundraising to acquire these three properties. “We were able to raise significant private funding to help offset costs associated with the acquisition of the properties as well as help with long-term stewardship of the land, including socking funds away in the Alliance’s Property Monitoring and Land Defense Funds.”

The Alliance’s conservation-minded friends in the Dane County Chapter of the Ice Age Trail Alliance and local business owner, Mary Devitt, of Crossroads Coffeehouse, helped raise private additional funds. The Alliance would not have been able to protect these lands if not for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and the Dane County Conservation Fund.

The Ice Age Trail community of volunteers, donors, landowners, and Trail users all have their own special connection to the lands that the Trail passes through. Thusius trusts that connecting the Trail to the Mammoth’s Back Preserve has the opportunity to foster stewardship of the newly acquired lands. “People will care for the land because they have access to it: they are going to see it, help restore it, build new trail, and then be able to hike on it. These activities are what help create connection and meaning. And I think that is one thing that the Trail really brings to the landscape,” notes Thusius optimistically.

Along with the efforts of the Alliance, the mission to create, protect, and support the Ice Age Trail depends on our community of volunteers, donors, and Trail users. The privately raised funds, made possible by individuals in Cross Plains area and beyond, helped cover the cost of easement acquisition, future trail development, and land restoration. The Alliance is also in the process of securing a grant from State’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund to cover the remaining costs associated with the trail easement purchase.

Thank you for your support!