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**Ice Age National Scenic Trail Granted Unit Status by National Park Service**

Trail will now be officially recognized and have equal access to funding opportunities

Cross Plains, Wis. (Dec. 7, 2023) – The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is now an official unit of the National Park Service.

Unit status gives the Ice Age National Scenic Trail:

- Official recognition within the National Park Service
- Access to additional funding opportunities
- Equal legal standing with other National Park Service destinations

The administrative change in status was announced during a video press conference today by National Park Service Director, Chuck Sams and U.S. Senator, Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.).

“This is truly momentous for the Ice Age Trail and its thousands of supporters and volunteers,” says Luke Kloberdanz. “Unit status gives the Trail, and its volunteers, the recognition it duly deserves,” he says. “Make no mistake: the Ice Age Trail is world-class and the number of hours Alliance volunteers devote to it consistently rank among the top in all the National Park Service.”

During fiscal year 2023, Ice Age Trail Alliance volunteers dedicated 100,666 hours to Trail-related activities including Trailbuilding, maintenance, and outreach.

“Plus, the Trail gets more popular every year. Go out to a segment on a weekend; you’ll see for yourself—people are hiking the Trail like never before.”

An economic impact study completed in late 2019 found that 2.3 million people visited the Ice Age Trail annually; that number has increased since. A new economic impact study is currently underway.

43 Years to Unit Status

Designated as a National Scenic Trail in 1980 by President Jimmy Carter, the Ice Age Trail is 1 of 11 National Scenic Trails in the country; six of which are administered by the National Park Service. Of those six, three trails (Appalachian Trail, Natchez Trace Trail, and Potomac Heritage Trail) were identified as units at the time of their designation. This specification was missing from the wording of the law when the Ice Age Trail, North Country Trail, and New England Trail were designated.

There is no clear reason or policy for the discrepancy in language. However, non-designation had real-world implications for the Trails, including funding opportunity restrictions. It also meant the Trails were not recognized as part of the National Park Service.

“It was quite confusing. On one hand, NPS (the National Park Service) is our administrative partner helping to create the Ice Age Trail. Alliance volunteers go through NPS-required training and report their

volunteer hours to NPS,” says Kloberdanz. “But on the other hand, the Ice Age Trail was not allowed to enjoy the same benefits as other units of the Park Service.”

“At last, the Ice Age Trail, North Country Trail, and New England Trail are on equal footing with other National Scenic Trails and National Parks,” he says.

Achieving unit status was a decades-long initiative for the three Trails. The leadership, volunteers, and supporters of the North Country Trail Association, Ice Age Trail Alliance, Appalachian Mountain Club, and Connecticut Forest and Park Association championed the cause.

“The Alliance appreciates the support of its elected officials at the state and federal level. We especially thank Senator Tammy Baldwin for being a stalwart supporter of the Trail since her days in local government and for spearheading the status change at the federal level,” Kloberdanz says. “Thanks also to Director Sams for his efforts and prioritizing the change. We look forward to a continued close relationship with our local NPS partners.”

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About the Ice Age National Scenic Trail:

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is a 1,200-mile footpath contained entirely within Wisconsin. It traverses the state from St. Croix Falls in the west, to Sturgeon Bay in the east, going as far south as Janesville. One of 11 National Scenic Trails, the Ice Age Trail highlights the landscapes that were carved out by ancient glaciers, which happen to be some of the most beautiful areas in the state. Approximately 60% of Wisconsin residents live within 20 miles of the Ice Age Trail.

About the Ice Age Trail Alliance:

The Ice Age Trail Alliance is the nonprofit, member- and volunteer-based organization which conserves, creates, maintains, and promotes the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. It consists of 19 volunteer chapters, spread across the length of the Trail. For more information visit **IceAgeTrail.org**.