

Chapter 1

BACKGROUND ON THE ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

A mere 15,000 years ago, during the Ice Age, most of North America lay under the grip of colossal ice sheets thousands of feet thick. The effects of the advancing and retreating glaciers can be seen in the headlands of Cape Cod, the Finger Lakes of New York, and the hills of Michigan, but nowhere is the glacier's mark upon the land more impressive and distinctive than in Wisconsin. Indeed, the state has lent its name to the most recent series of glacial advances and retreats—the Wisconsinan Glaciation lasting from about 100,000 to 10,000 years ago.

Wisconsin's legacy from the glaciers and meltwater streams of the Ice Age is a landscape of great diversity and beauty. The state contains world-renowned examples of many landforms that are evidence of continental glaciation. These include moraines, eskers, kames, kettles, drumlins, wetlands, and lakes. These many features invite us to explore and enjoy the landscape of Wisconsin.

The purpose of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (NST) is to preserve some of the finest features of Wisconsin's glacial landscape, as well as other scenic, natural, and cultural resources, while providing opportunities for low impact recreational and educational activities (See Appendix C—Purpose and Significance of Ice Age NST). In addition, the trail connects six of the nine units of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve and many other Federal, state, county, and local parks. The National Park Service (NPS) administers the trail in close cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation (IAPTF), counties, local governments, and other private organizations that are working to help build and maintain the Ice Age NST.

The Ice Age NST is one of only eight National Scenic Trails—long distance, non-motorized trails that follow major geographic features or pass through scenic areas. It is similar in concept to the Appalachian NST but is also uniquely different because of the landscape through which it passes. The Appalachian NST traverses a mountain range through 14 states whereas the Ice Age NST showcases the glacial landscape of just one state. When completed, the trail will extend over 1,200 miles from Interstate State Park on the St. Croix River in Polk County to Potawatomi State Park in Door County, tracing features left by the last continental glacier that swept over Wisconsin. Statewide, approximately 600 miles of the trail are currently on the ground.

The three primary statewide partners in the Ice Age NST—the NPS, WDNR, and IAPTF—are establishing the trail guided by the following Vision Statement:

The Ice Age NST is a continuous footpath through diverse landscapes that:

- Provides superlative outdoor recreation experiences;
- Preserves and commemorates world renowned geological features formed during the Wisconsinan Glaciation;
- Provides a natural corridor that protects habitat and enables the movement of wildlife;
- Serves as a lifelong educational resource;

- Provides quiet places for people to form and nurture a spiritual connection with the landscape;
- Promotes the health and vigor of users of all ages and abilities, and
- Links the history and diverse human cultures of the land that we call Wisconsin.

The NPS is responsible for overall administration of the Ice Age NST. In 1983, the NPS completed a Comprehensive Management Plan for the trail. The plan provides overall guidance for development and management of the trail, which is intended to be a partnership venture, accomplished through many cooperating Federal, State, and local agencies and private trail organizations. The primary cooperators are the WDNR and the IAPTF. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between these parties outlines their respective roles and responsibilities for the acquisition, development, operation, maintenance, and protection of the trail. A copy of this MOU can be found in Appendix D.

The WDNR is the state agency responsible for implementing state and federal laws that protect and enhance Wisconsin natural resources—its air, land, water, wildlife, fish and plants. More than 190 miles of trail are located on WDNR properties. The WDNR assists in planning and implementing the Ice Age NST, provides grants to the IAPTF and others for acquisition and maintenance of the trail, and acquires and accepts gifts of land for the trail.

The IAPTF was founded in 1958 by Wisconsin citizens who envisioned a thousand-mile trail that followed the terminal moraine and other Ice Age formations across the state. Today, the IAPTF is a member-based non-profit organization that continues to work tirelessly to develop the Ice Age Trail into one of the premier hiking trails in the United States. They also maintain the trail and its associated lands, promote and raise money to support the trail effort, and assist in planning and acquiring lands for the trail.

(Insert Map of State of Wisconsin and Ice Age NST)