Background

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is a work in progress. As planned, the trail is about half finished, with more than 600 miles complete out of the projected 1,200 of the final route. However, connecting routes, many of them along public roads, have been identified that make it possible even today to hike the entire 1,200-mile route. The partners who manage the trail are continually in the process of carrying out the Corridor Planning Process to identify a general route for the trail in specific counties, and to negotiate land purchases that will connect existing trail segments.

The trail, the "brain child" of Milwaukee lawyer Ray Zillmer back in 1958, winds through the state along the terminal moraine of the last Wisconsin glaciation. Hikers on the trail have the opportunity to observe one of the most significant collections of glacial features to be found anywhere in the world, including moraines, kettles, kames, drumlins, erratics, kettle lakes, potholes, eskers, marshes, meltwater channels, gorges, ice-walled lake plains, outwash plains, and glacial lake beds. As they hike, they encounter wetlands, bogs, lakes, prairies, oak savannas, forests, farmland, upland habitat, the shores of Lake Michigan, and even towns and cities. Like the famed Appalachian Trail, the Ice Age Trail is mainly intended for off-road hiking. The eastern terminus of the trail is in Potawatomi State Park

in Door County. The trail runs through 30 counties, with the western terminus in Interstate State Park, an Ice Age National Scientific Reserve Unit at St. Croix Falls in Polk County on the Minnesota border.

The trail is managed by a "Triad," a partnership of the National Park Service, the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA), and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The Triad works together to preserve the natural landscape on and near the trail, which is often threatened by residential, industrial, and energy development. The National Park Service is the primary administrator, providing planning and compliance, sign systems, tools, and funding to support partners and trail construction. DNR coordinates the involvement of state agencies, leads the land acquisition process, and participates in the planning, development, and management of trail segments. The Alliance promotes the trail, participates in planning and land acquisition, and trains and coordinates the efforts of volunteers who build and maintain the trail.

The "prehistory" of the trail goes back nearly 30,000 years ago, when two-thirds of what is now the state of Wisconsin was covered with enormous glaciers up to two miles thick. The glaciers scraped and sculpted the landscape as they advanced, and left behind deposits as they retreated, including some erratics that were carried from a thousand miles away. Their gushing meltwaters radically shaped the land. The unique glacial landscape has long been a source of pride and wonder to its inhabitants. Anthropologists believe that it may have inspired the ancient Mound Builders to create their own versions of the glacial features they observed on the landscape, such as drumlins, eskers, and kames, by reflecting those shapes in the rich array of effigy mounds they built hundreds of years ago.

In 1964, Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to work with the governor of Wisconsin to create an Ice Age National Scientific Reserve (Reserve), formally established in 1971, to protect, preserve, and interpret the tangible elements of the Wisconsin glaciation. Congress authorized the Ice Age NST in 1980 as a Long Distance Trail that would connect most of the Units of the Reserve. In 1987, the state legislature designated the trail as a Wisconsin State Scenic Trail.

In 2010, President Barack Obama's administration launched the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative, calling for a grassroots approach to conservation and ways to reconnect Americans, especially youth and urban populations, with their natural heritage.

Two projects were selected for each state. One segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail – from the Ice Age Complex at Cross Plains (Dane County) to the Aldo Leopold Shack (Sauk County) – was

Aldo Leopold Shack, Sauk County

selected for the AGO project due to its proximity to and easy access for a large urban population. The LRIP for this segment of the trail is intended to facilitate the goals of AGO by planning for outreach to new audiences, to encourage more recreational use of the trail, and to provide effective interpretation of the trail segment's stunning array of glacial features.

Ice Age wayside exhibit in Roznos Meadow, Devil's Lake State Park, Sauk County ***Photo courtesy of Ice Age Trail Alliance***

Information and Orientation

Information about the trail is available from a number of sources. The National Park Service website provides basic information, including an overview map and a link to Ice Age: *Geology of Ice Age National Scientific Reserve of Wisconsin* (NPS Scientific Monograph No. 2, 1974) by Robert F. Black. The Department of Natural Resources maintains an on-line interactive map viewer on its website that allows hikers to print out detailed maps of the trail. The Ice Age Trail Alliance website offers downloadable maps and descriptions of each segment, and the Alliance publishes the *Ice Age Trail Atlas* featuring 105 detailed, colored hiking maps, along with the *Ice Age Trail Companion Guide* that describes the trail segment by segment.

The *Atlas* and *Companion Guide* are invaluable for orientation to the trail, as trail segments are not yet continuous; it can be confusing to hikers and other visitors as to where the trail is located and how the connecting routes link the segments. *The Companion Guide* is particularly valuable for long distance hikers in finding support facilities such as campsites and in providing background and highlights on particular trail segments.

For visitors who would like more in-depth information, *Geology of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), by David M. Mickelson, Louis J. Maher, Jr., and Susan L. Simpson, provides a wonderfully accessible account of the trail's features, including "Science Briefs" that explain the science behind glaciers and how different glacial land forms are created, as well as a segment-by-segment description of landscape elements.

On the ground, the trail is indicated in a variety of ways. There are simple wooden routed signs, upright signs that feature a map of the whole trail, standard Park Service-style wayside exhibits and other interpretive signs, and kiosks. The trail for the most part is sustainably built with native soil, and with boardwalks, bridges and other structures placed in wet areas.

The Audience

Anecdotally, it is clear that many users of the trail reside near it and use it to walk their dogs, improve physical fitness, or catch a breath of fresh air at the end of a long day. However, more than fifty hikers have achieved the designation of "Thousand-Miler" by hiking the entire length of the trail, either as through-hikers, or segment by segment.

Interestingly, when stakeholders of the trail were queried during the planning process about what population segments utilize the trail, the answers seemed to vary by segment. For example, Dane County stakeholders cited growing numbers of college-age youth and young families on the trail, while Sauk County stakeholders felt this population under-utilizes the trail. In 2012, the Ice Age Trail Alliance commissioned an audience survey and economic impact study through Economic Development Partners and the Fiscal and Economic Research Center (FERC) at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Responses for the Joint Effort Marketing Report were collected from more than 1,010 trail users through online, mail, and field surveys at various access points along the Ice Age Trail. Key findings included:

- Based on the field survey results, an estimated 1,252,685 people use the trail annually.

- Nearly 93 percent of those surveyed were repeat users and used the Trail an average of 10.26 times per year. Internet responders (targeted through the organization's email list) unsurprisingly used the trail 30 or more times per year.

- 51.1% of users seek out new sections of the trail, while 37.4% enjoy returning to familiar trail segments.

- Average number of people in the party was 4.86.

- Average age of respondents: 38

- On-trail respondents were equally divided between women and men, but the online responses broke down at 60% male, 40% female.

- 32.6% of respondents had 4-year college degrees, and another 19.4% had master's degrees, for a total of 52% of users with college degrees. Among internet responders, 75.3% had a college degree or higher.

- The overwhelming majority of respondents learned about the trail from family and friends, followed by the internet.

- 47.7% of users did not take travel distance into consideration when planning their trips.

- 60% have a household income greater than $50,000, while 26.5% had incomes of under $40,000.

- 51% of those surveyed stayed overnight in the region, with the balance being day-trippers. 52% of those who stayed overnight stayed in tent campgrounds.

- Hiking and geocaching were the highest ranked trail activities.
- Users from 31-45 years old with incomes of $40,000-59,000 were identified as a highly motivated target audience.
- The number of users in the 18-30-year-old target group seems to be growing. More than 60% in this age group use technology to connect to the outdoors, including online research, social media, blog sites, and QR codes.
- Madison, metropolitan Milwaukee, and northern Illinois were identified as primary target markets for the region. Secondary markets include Minnesota and Iowa.

Ice Age Trail on Main Street, City of Lodi, Columbia County