

Chapter 5

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES AND PREFERRED ACTION

The NPS and WDNR propose to establish a planned and mapped Corridor of Opportunity within which lands for the trail may be acquired, developed, managed, and protected for the Waushara County portion of the Ice Age NST.

Descriptions of alternative strategies for establishing the Ice Age NST are presented below. Alternative 1 is the “No Action” alternative. Alternative 2, the “Preferred” alternative, is a corridor that is based upon the 18 miles of existing scattered trail segments developed by the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation over the last thirty years. These existing trail segments presently provide a recreational corridor and minimal resource protection that could be used as a foundation to complete the trail and create greater user satisfaction through additional site enhancements. Also, two other corridors were “considered but eliminated.”

The design of the proposed Ice Age NST corridor is based on a number of factors. These factors are: general adherence to glacial features left by the Wisconsin advance, linkage to public lands for support facilities and interpretive opportunities, provision for a varied and scenic hiking experience, preservation of significant natural features, and reasonable directness of route. The goal of establishing the Ice Age NST would best be met by Federal, State and private partners having specifically delineated, authorized areas in which to work.

B. ALTERNATIVE 1 – “NO ACTION” ALTERNATIVE

Under the “No Action” alternative, no Corridor of Opportunity to more specifically identify the route of the Ice Age NST would be established. The Secretary of the Interior’s responsibility under the National Trails System Act to select a specific route for the trail would not be carried out. The various Federal, state, local and private partners working to establish the trail would continue to be guided only by the general route referenced in the National Trails System Act and Comprehensive Plan.

Any activities by partners to acquire lands for the trail would be done without a professional analysis of the best route for the trail or the environmental impacts of trail construction. The “No Action” alternative would constrain the involvement of governmental partners in the project since their involvement requires environmental analysis. It would also not provide the opportunity for local units of government and private citizens to be involved in determining the best route for the trail. Without the inclusion of local government and private citizens in the planning process, the Ice Age NST would not be used in local planning documents, a situation that could result in lost opportunities to build the trail. Trail development, management, and operation under this alternative would continue as in the past. The WDNR would continue to provide trail segments on lands that it manages. Trail built on private land by permission only would continue to be vulnerable to loss by increasing development pressures. This would result in much slower and haphazard establishment of the trail.

C. ALTERNATIVE 2 – “PREFERRED” (PROPOSED CORRIDOR)

This is the “Preferred” alternative. Under this proposal, a Corridor of Opportunity that is approximately 1 to 5 miles in width extending northeasterly from south to north through Waushara County has been identified and would receive State and Federal approval. Within this corridor, a trailway that is approximately 200—1000 feet or more in width would be acquired for Ice Age NST purposes. A wider trailway may be necessary to incorporate significant features of a particular area. The corridor is intentionally designed to be wide enough to allow flexibility in working with cooperating landowners to site the trail since all participation in the project is voluntary. The established corridor will define areas for purchase using private, state, or federal funds and will serve as advisory information for town and county land use planning. A map showing the proposed Corridor of Opportunity is located at the end of this section.

This alternative fulfills the purpose and need, and the intent of Congress and the Wisconsin State Legislature. This alternative is based on an evaluation of the geological and biological features within Waushara County, as well as the field work of representatives of the Core Team. This proposed corridor generally follows the Almond Moraine deposited approximately 16,000 years ago through the townships of Coloma, Richford, Hancock, Deerfield, Wautoma, and Oasis. Here it encompasses glacial features found on the edge of the glacier such as kettle ponds, outwash plains, stagnant ice topography, and a very distinctive tunnel channel. When the corridor reaches the Town of Rose in northeast Waushara County it winds onto the Elderon recessional moraines and connects up to the approved Waupaca/Portage Counties corridor near Heffron. The corridor has the potential to link four state fishery areas, a state wildlife area, two city parks, a county park, and the Waushara County School Forest. It also passes through or near the villages of Richford, Hancock and Wild Rose. Collectively, these areas provide support facilities such as trailheads, parking, water, lodging, and phones. Among the resource features found within the corridor are high quality oak woodlands, prairie and oak savanna remnants, pristine trout streams, and pothole marshes. Well-placed scenic overlooks could potentially provide dramatic views of the glacial landscape.

The following is a general description of the corridor starting at its south end in the Town of Coloma. The corridor boundaries tend to follow roads, section lines, and property lines. Possible trail route options are described and analyzed in Appendix A of this document.

Towns of Coloma and Richford

The corridor in the Towns of Coloma and Richford varies in width from 1—3 miles. Beginning at the Marquette County line, this portion of the corridor is largely in the Town of Richford, generally following the line between the two towns. Only the southeastern and northeastern sections (sections 36 and 1) of the Town of Coloma are in the corridor. The corridor is bisected by I-39 near the Marquette County line in the Town of Coloma and State Highway 21 near the midsection of this segment. County Roads JJ, B, and GG also pass through the corridor but none carries substantial traffic. All other roads are quiet town roads and remote driveways. This corridor segment also contains the unincorporated Village of Richford.

Three significant watercourses, Chaffee Creek, Wedde Creek, and the Mekan River, punctuate this corridor segment. These high quality Class A trout streams flow in a southeasterly direction through the hills and glacial drainageways of the Elderon Moraine. The WDNR owns extensive acreage along each of these streams, particularly Chaffee Creek and the Mekan River, and these public lands could be used for locating the trail.

The glacial landscape in this area is very hummocky and the boundary between the Elderon Moraine and nearby Almond Moraine to the west is indistinct. This is thought to be the result of material “piling up” behind the Almond Moraine, resulting in the deposition of significant and uneven depths of glacial till. A meltwater plain corresponds with the small portion of the corridor that lies to the east of the Elderon Moraine.

Agriculture is the dominant land use in this corridor segment. Dairying and field crops are the primary products but many farmers keep the bulk of their acreage, most notably their hillier areas, in native oak woodland. Stands of pine plantations are also common. Farming operations are generally confined to areas where the landscape is more accommodating, such as in the stream valleys and on the meltwater plain.

The southernmost portion of the corridor has two existing trail segments, both located entirely on WDNR lands. The Chaffee Creek State Fishery segment, about 1.5 miles in length, begins at the Waushara County line adjacent to the southbound I-39 rest area, where parking, restrooms, drinking water, and an information kiosk are available. The trail crosses Chaffee Creek on an existing bridge, follows the stream under the highway, and emerges from an open streamside ecosystem into an upland woods. Chaffee Creek contains different ecosystems from uplands to lowlands, including a calcareous fen and oak savanna. The trail passes a large kettle and many wildflowers.

The second trail segment, located less than a mile away, is located in the Wedde Creek State Fishery Area. Also about 1.5 miles in length, this segment extends from Czech Avenue, where a small trailhead parking area is available, northward through an upland woods and across Wedde Creek, where it shares a bridge with a snowmobile trail. The trail then crosses a field and passes through a pine plantation before emerging onto Cypress Road. A remnant prairie and an oak barrens are two unique plant communities found along the trail.

The trail would then continue northeast for approximately 2 miles to Richford. This area contains glacial features that are among the most classic examples of undulating moraine topography within the entire corridor. Several dry as well as marshy kettles with depths up to 50 feet, and some low marshy areas on the back side of the moraine could be encountered by the trail. The area is primarily native woodland interspersed with pine plantations. Several Amish farmsteads are also found in the area. Open grasslands, farm fields, a Christmas tree farm, and a game farm provide opportunities for a diverse trail experience. The trail would cross Cumberland Road before reaching Richford. This is a highly scenic, low-volume town road which has become increasingly attractive for scattered residential development, a fact that could limit options in locating the trail’s road crossing. Food, drink, and overnight accommodations at a local pleasant bed ‘n breakfast can be found in Richford.

North of the village, the corridor focuses on the Mekan River valley, which bisects the Elderon Moraine. Most of the shoreline of the river from Richford upstream 3 miles to Mekan Springs, a

State Natural Area, is under WDNR ownership, providing an excellent option for locating the trail. Much of the shoreline is wooded and a number of shoreline improvements have been undertaken to improve trout habitat. Although some low areas are encountered, it appears most can be skirted by strategically locating the trail. A small parking area is available on the west side of the river north of State Highway 21. This major highway, which carries about 4,000 vehicles a day, crosses the corridor north of Richford. At some point in time, it will be necessary to ensure that a safe crossing for hikers is provided. Currently, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation is evaluating the need to expand the highway to a four-lane facility. If this were to occur, a grade-separated structure would be required for the trail, which should be incorporated into any future design for the highway.

After following the river northwesterly across 9th Avenue and County Highway GG, the corridor is closely defined by Mekan Springs, the headwaters for the Mekan River and the highly scenic centerpiece of this portion of the corridor. The springs features a pond about 40 acres in size and 20 feet deep surrounded by steep wooded hillsides. The WDNR is in the process of re-establishing a prairie on a recently acquired upland tract where the Karner Blue butterfly is expected to thrive. Trail would need to be kept on or near the upland areas of this site because of the erosion potential of the steep hillsides and sensitivity of fragile ecosystems located closer to the edge of the springs. An excellent opportunity exists to create a magnificent overview of the springs at its western extremity.

Towns of Hancock and Deerfield

North of Mekan Springs, the corridor extends about three miles to the north along 7th Avenue before heading northeasterly into the Town of Deerfield. This corridor segment, defined by 6th Avenue on the west and County Road GG on the east, is about 2 miles in width and is designed to provide a linkage between Mekan Springs and the Greenwood State Wildlife Area, which lies largely in the Town of Hancock. Lightly traveled County Trunk Y and two town roads cross the corridor from west to east. The Almond Moraine angles from southwest to northeast across this corridor segment, which features a blend of cropland, open grassland, woodlots, and pine plantations.

Three possible route options have been identified for this corridor segment, each providing its own opportunities and limitations. All three encounter Karner Blue habitat. After leaving Mekan Springs, the westernmost option encounters an area of restored prairie and skirts fallow fields and undulating glacial topography to Greenwood Wildlife Area. Scattered farms and a rural residential development located south of Greenwood could limit options for locating the trail in the western half of the corridor. The second option has less topographic character once it leaves Mekan Springs, passing through an area of scattered farms and residential development characterized by a landscape of pine plantations and open agricultural fields. The third option has minimal development and is characterized by a mix of open and wooded landscapes. This alternative features a large kettle pond that can be seen from the north side of Mekan Springs.

The Greenwood State Wildlife Area contains a mixture of native woodlands, open lands, and croplands, providing a diverse habitat for many species of birds and other wildlife. Its southern half is heavily wooded and features four kettle ponds. An open area provides Karner Blue habitat. In the central and northern portions of the site, the WDNR has undertaken a large prairie

restoration, which is truly spectacular in the peak of flower. A small parking area is available in the heart of the site.

Town of Deerfield

The trail corridor in the Town of Deerfield angles generally from southwest to northeast in a band varying in width from 1—3 miles. This portion of the corridor closely follows the highly undulant Almond Moraine. County Roads C, GG, B, V and O, along with several towns roads, pass through the corridor. All have traffic volumes well under 1,000 vehicles per day.

Existing land use is a mixture of farmsteads and single-site residential development. Selective timber harvest is also an important activity. The landscape is a rich and diverse mixture of native woodlands, pine plantations, Christmas trees farms, cropped and vacant agricultural lands, and open grasslands. Large irrigated fields predominate over the landscape and beyond the corridor boundaries.

A pronounced tunnel channel crosses this corridor segment. The tunnel channel comprises well over a dozen lakes ranging in size from small potholes to 177 acres, including 10 within the width of the corridor. Although a couple of the larger lakes are surrounded by significant amounts of lakeshore development, many of the lakes are still relatively pristine.

As the corridor enters the Town of Deerfield from the Greenwood Wildlife Area, it passes through a landscape that is best characterized by agricultural activities on the flatter till plains and generally oak woodlands, pine plantations, and Christmas tree farms on the more undulating terminal moraine. Deerfield has been particularly susceptible to scattered residential development, especially along roadways, and this may be a concern as steps are taken to acquire land for trail development. Depending on its future location, there is an excellent opportunity to create a trail segment of significant length along and within the tunnel channel. A trail in this location would pass several kettle ponds. A trail located further east would wend its way along oak-covered undulating glacial topography and then follow tree lines and parcel lines through agricultural fields, pine plantations, and open grasslands to a new county park located adjacent to a 9-acre undeveloped kettle lake, which is one of the tunnel channel lakes. Waushara County's plans for developing the park include basic support facilities, possibly campsites, for trail users.

A short distance to the north is a small parking area and information kiosk, which serve a 3-mile segment of existing certified trail. Upon departing the trailhead, the trail skirts a 100-foot deep dry kettle before generally following the undulating crest of the moraine in the northern portion of the corridor segment. Woodlots, open grasslands, small fields, a restored prairie, pine plantations, and Christmas tree farms provide a diverse hiking experience. The existing trail presently terminates at County Trunk O, which is the boundary between the Town of Deerfield and the Town of Oasis.

Towns of Oasis and Wautoma

The southeast corner of the Town of Oasis (Section 36) and the northwest corner of the Town of Wautoma (Sections 4, 5, and 6) provide options for extending the existing trail segment in the Town of Deerfield into the Town of Rose. State Highway 73, which angles across the corridor in this area and carries about 3,000 vehicles per day, will be encountered by the trail regardless

of where it is located. Several single family residences exist near the intersection of State Highway 73 and County Road O.

Should the trail continue north from its present terminus on County Trunk O into the southeast corner of Oasis, it would pass through undulating topography, Christmas tree farms, and open grassland, before crossing State Highway 73, and then continue on through additional Christmas trees and oak woods near the Town of Rose line. The Christmas tree grower is in the process of parceling off his holdings in this area for rural homesites, which could be a less attractive option for future trail development. If the trail were to be extended across State Highway 73 in the Town of Wautoma portion of the corridor, even larger stands of Christmas trees would be encountered. These stands may also be temporary as some of them have already been sold off as small parcels. This area also features undulating glacial topography and a significant amount of native woodlands mixed with scattered fields and open grasslands. A small kettle lake (Lake Wautoma), lying adjacent to County Trunk O about 2 miles east of State Highway 73, is a visual highlight in this portion of the corridor.

Town of Rose

The corridor in the Town of Rose is typically about 3 miles in width to provide a variety of options in locating the trail. It enters in the southwestern portion of the town, meanders easterly, and exits in the north central part near the unincorporated community of Heffron, which lies on the Portage County line. In addition to County Trunk O, which lies on the town line, County Roads A, AA, and P also cross the corridor. County Trunk P carries about 1,200 cars daily while the other highways have traffic volumes under 1,000. Several lightly traveled town roads are found throughout the corridor.

The Village of Wild Rose, a community of about 800 residents, is located on the eastern edge of the corridor. The village provides a variety of basic facilities and services for trail users, including a hospital. The WDNR Wild Rose Fish Hatchery north of the village is an attraction for visitors to the community. It is currently being renovated and a new visitor center constructed. While the trail is not envisioned to enter the Village of Wild Rose, a spur trail to the village is desirable. WDNR land that surrounds the Pine River, a Class A trout stream from its headwaters in the northern portion of the corridor to the Wild Rose millpond, could facilitate its development. If a spur trail is developed, a stream crossing would be needed.

The southwestern portion of the corridor contains some of the most scenic undulating topography in the county. Included in this area are two tunnel channels featuring wooded hillsides and a series of dry kettles, some over 100 feet deep. Elevation changes exceeding 200 feet can be found in the area. The visual quality of the landscape has created a demand for rural residential development, particularly along County Trunk A. Nonetheless, there is sufficient topography and tree canopy to site a trail that would create a sense of remoteness unmatched elsewhere within the Waushara County segment of the IAT corridor. This portion of the corridor also includes Chain Lake and other small kettle ponds. Irregularly shaped plots of cropland and open grassland along with scattered pine plantations provide opportunities to create an ever-changing trail experience.

In the central and eastern portions of the corridor, the topography transitions from the Almond Moraine to the more gently rolling hills formed by the eastward-flowing meltwater. This portion

of the corridor is dominated by cropland interspersed by woodlots, pine plantations, and open grasslands. Trail users in this area would have an opportunity to enjoy scenic vistas and broader panoramas. One such memorable vista is located at the north end of Super 8 Drive, where there is a directed view across open farmland to a farmstead set into a distant hillside.

As the corridor proceeds north to Heffron, the moraine once again becomes a more prominent feature. This part of the corridor is bisected by the upper reaches of the Pine River and its adjacent wetlands. Woodlands, both irrigated and non-irrigated cropland, open grassland, pine plantations, and Christmas tree farms create potential trail interest. Three kettle ponds are landscape features of Camp Moshava, a summer camp for urban youth. Land surrounding two other small kettle lakes west of County Road AA has been subdivided and partially developed. These lakes are part of a tunnel channel extending northwesterly into Portage County. A number of dry kettles are found on two adjacent tracts, which are owned by the Wild Rose School District and the Town of Rose, and which abut the Portage County line in the northern portion of the corridor.

Maps of “Preferred” Ice Age NST Corridor, southern half

Map of “Preferred” Ice Age NST Corridor, northern half

D. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT DISMISSED

Under “Alternatives Considered But Dismissed” two other possible corridor locations were evaluated but dropped from consideration. As part of scoping, when the Corridor Planning Process was first initiated for the Ice Age NST in Waushara County, the Core Team evaluated two other areas as potential corridor locations. The first location was on the northern edge of the “Preferred” alternative and included the Village of Hancock in the Town of Hancock; the second location was through the Town of Springwater. The Village of Hancock contains an outstanding example of the Hancock Moraine, which is the terminal moraine. Here the moraine is very distinctive and would be great for interpretive purposes. However, to connect the Hancock Moraine with existing trail on the Almond Moraine, trail would need to pass through 7-8 miles of flat, irrigated agricultural fields. This option was dropped because it would be very difficult to wend a way through this cropland and the hiking experience would be visually poor and physically unexciting.

The second corridor location was in the Town of Springwater, which is located east of the Town of Rose. We looked at this option because it contains extensive public lands in the Pine River State Wildlife Area. Unfortunately, these public lands are very wet, creating a difficult situation for building an environmentally sustainable trail. Also, the location of the township is east of existing Ice Age NST in Waupaca and Portage Counties, making it an indirect route. This additional distance would increase the cost of creating the trail in terms of additional lands that would need to be purchased, and the cost of building and maintaining the trail.

E. ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508) and the DO-12 require the NPS to identify the alternative that best promotes the goals of Section 101 of the National Environmental Protection Act. The environmentally preferred alternative is defined by the CEQ as: “...the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources” (CEQ 1981).

This Trailway Plan and Environmental Assessment evaluates two alternatives: the “Preferred” alternative and a “No-Action” alternative. The “No Action” alternative would not adopt a specific corridor for the trail. A planning team was formed to investigate corridor and possible route options and conduct a public involvement process. A number of trail routes within the Preferred alternative’s corridor were also identified and evaluated.

The environmentally preferred alternative for a Corridor of Opportunity for the Ice Age NST in Waushara County is the “Preferred” alternative. The “Preferred” alternative will provide a focused and accountable implementation of the trail. It will permanently protect some of the geological, biological, and archeological resources within the corridor from development and will create a protected, undeveloped trailway of diverse habitats (both uplands and wetlands) that will promote an increase in biodiversity. The “Preferred” alternative will increase public recreational opportunities and connect existing recreational resources. Securing a trailway in public ownership will help maintain existing wildlife and in some cases, will benefit threatened

and endangered species by permanently protecting their environment. It will also provide opportunities for local landowners and visitors to have access to the glacial features along the trail as well as enhance public awareness of Wisconsin's glacial landscape through interpretation of the glacial features.

The "No Action" alternative amounts to abandoning any coordinated, collaborative effort to attain these goals. Through the "No Action" alternative, the trail may be built in a less than optimal location or have more water crossings than necessary. Without a coordinated effort, the "No Action" alternative may not join efforts with other groups to create mutually beneficial recreation opportunities or protect significant natural or cultural resources relating to the trail.

Map of Waushara County with “Preferred” Alternative and “Alternatives Considered but Dismissed”

