

## Chapter 5

### DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

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 Marathon 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 on the 16.5 miles of existing trail segments developed by the Ice Age Trail Alliance over the last thirty years. These existing trail segments presently provide a recreational corridor and resource protection that could be used as a foundation to complete the trail and create greater user satisfaction through additional site enhancements. Also, one other corridor was “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.

#### **A. 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 identified 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.

## **B ALTERNATIVE 2 – PREFERRED (PROPOSED CORRIDOR)**

Under this proposal, a Corridor of Opportunity that is approximately 3-5 miles in width extending from north to south through Marathon 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 Marathon County, as well as the fieldwork of representatives of the Core Team. Beginning north, the proposed corridor moves southwest and then south from Langlade County following the Hancock moraine through the towns of Harrison, Easton, Plover, and Ringle. This moraine, with its steep sloping front and hummocky topography, was deposited approximately 25,000 - 16,000 years ago and represents the furthest extent of the glacier's advance. Erratics, which are large boulders left by the glacier, are common along its surface. As the corridor extends south, the Hancock Moraine angles to the west and is replaced within the proposed corridor by the Almond Moraine through the towns of Reid and Elderon. This moraine was deposited 13-14,000 years ago when the glacier retreated from the Hancock moraine. It also exhibits a steeply sloping forward edge, with several tunnel channels, kettle ponds, and ice-walled lake plains along its width. Just north of Mission Lake County Park, the corridor turns southeast to include portions of the Elderon moraine in the towns of Bevent and Franzen in Marathon County, and the town of Alban in Portage County where it connects to the previously approved Portage County Ice Age NST Corridor. The Elderon moraines were formed subsequent to the Almond moraine and consist of a series of narrow, discontinuous ridges. The corridor has the potential to link three state fisheries areas, a state natural area, two county parks, several town parks, and the Mountain Bay State Trail. It also passes through or near the communities of Hatley, Pike Lake, Galloway, and Three Lakes. Collectively, these areas provide support facilities such as trailheads, parking, water, lodging, and phones. Among the resource features found within the corridor are extensive woodlands, conifer swamps, pristine trout streams, and ground flora characteristics of both northern and southern Wisconsin. Well-placed overlooks could potentially provide scenic views of the glacial landscape.

The following is a general description of the corridor starting at its northern end in the town of Harrison. 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.

## **Town of Harrison**

The proposed corridor in the town of Harrison varies in width from 2-3 miles. Beginning at the Langlade/Marathon County line, it is located in the southeast corner of the town encompassing Sections 24-26 and 34-36. The northern edge of the corridor generally follows the Eau Claire River in a southwesterly direction. State Highway 52 runs along the south side of the town and proposed corridor. One of the highest elevations in the corridor is found here near the former site of the Aniwa fire tower. There are no existing segments of the Ice Age NST in the town of Harrison.

The major glacial features found within the town include the Hancock Terminal Moraine and the Almond Moraine. These moraines are ridges formed by unsorted gravel, sand, and boulders carried by the glacier and deposited at the outer edge, or front, of the glacier.

The Eau Claire River and the Plover River both flow diagonally through the corridor, roughly paralleling each other, from the northeast to the southwest, as do the moraines, with the Plover River flowing between them. The Eau Claire River flows along the west edge of the Hancock Moraine. Both rivers offer outstanding recreational opportunities. The area is scenic and wooded with little existing development. The forested areas consist primarily of northern hardwoods and aspen, with smaller amounts of oak and lowland hardwoods. There are small areas of conifer swamp found near the headwaters of streams, and associated with lakes in kettle depressions on the moraines.

Public lands that the Ice Age NST may utilize within the proposed corridor are limited to the northernmost 200 acres of the Plover River State Fishery Area (SFA), a predominantly wet property consisting of a nearly pure cedar stand. A small gravel parking lot is located within the SFA north of State Highway 52. The Ice Age NST may need to cross Nolan and Bear Lake roads, both relatively low volume local roads in addition to State Highway 52.

## **Towns of Easton and Plover**

South of State Highway 52, the proposed corridor continues to move in a southwesterly to westerly direction into the towns of Easton and Plover before reaching Dells of Eau Claire County Park where it turns south. The corridor here is 2 miles in width and houses are few. Depending on where the trail is located, it will need to cross County Trunk Y and Sportsman Road to reach the park.

While the major geologic features of this alternative are portions of both the Hancock and Almond Moraines, the proposed Ice Age NST corridor extends west of them and North Pole Road to incorporate pre-glacial geologic features found within the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park. Here Precambrian rhyolite schist, a very hard rock, was formed millions of years ago through metamorphosis and was later tilted to a nearly vertical position. Strong, swirling water currents combined with the grinding action of sand and gravel flowing over the rhyolite schist produced numerous potholes. Today, the Eau Claire River flows and cascades with a series of waterfalls over this hard rock through a picturesque gorge.

Within the county park, the gorge contains a northern mesic forest of hemlock, sugar maple, yellow birch, and mountain maple, the historic vegetation of the area. Canada yew is abundant in dense patches and the spring flora is rich. Bedrock outcroppings are common. In 1973, because of the park's significant natural and geologic features, forty acres of it was designated a State Natural Area (SNA). Outside of the park, land use consists mostly of forested areas interspersed with an occasional small family farm. A cluster of small quarry pits and quarries are located in Sections 17-19 in the town of Plover.

There is an existing 2.3-mile segment of the Ice Age NST in the county park. This trail segment, upgraded in 2005, follows the Eau Claire River south to an existing trailhead located on County Trunk Z. There are two other existing segments located within the proposed corridor. There is 1.06 miles of established trail located south of County Trunk Z beginning at the intersection of Fire Road and Partridge Lane, where it heads south. A cluster of small kettles is located here immediately east of Fire Lane. They were formed by large, buried blocks of ice, which melted and collapsed leaving surface depressions. These kettles may be dry or contain wetlands or small lakes. Another 2.0-mile long segment is located between Sportsmans Drive and SH 52 on Plover River State Fishery lands.

Public lands within the proposed corridor include the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park (208-acre), Plover River SFA (763-acre), and a parcel owned by the Marathon County Forestry Department in the town of Easton (80-acres). In addition to public lands, the IATA owns 14-acres south of the county park. Here, existing Ice Age Trail winds along the Eau Claire River. Access to the existing trail in these towns can be found at the Plover River SFA as well as the county park. The county park also provides additional parking, water, restrooms and camping.

The Ice Age NST may require several road crossings through this corridor segment. Their number and location is dependent upon where the trail will be developed. Local roads which may need to be crossed include Polar Road, Sportsman Road, and County Roads Y, Z, and N.

### **Towns of Ringle and Norrie**

Crossing County Trunk N, the proposed Corridor of Opportunity continues south through the towns of Ringle and Norrie following the terminal moraine. The current land cover is a mix of wooded uplands, wetlands, and agriculture. The proposed corridor is 3 miles wide with its western edge defined by Forrestville and Elm Roads, and its eastern edge by County Trunk Y. The corridor expands slightly near Hatley to include on its west side the Marathon County Landfill and Mountain Bay State Recreation Trail, and on its east side, the Almond Recessional Moraine. A large tunnel channel that is currently occupied by State Highway 29 adjoins Hatley's south side. Major traffic arteries are State Highway 29, which bisects the corridor in an east-west fashion, and County Trunk Y, which winds north south through its center. These roads play a major role in affecting the location of potential route alternatives.

Significant portions of the Ice Age NST have already been completed through these towns. Within the proposed corridor, beginning at County Trunk N and moving south are 6.29 miles of existing trail. This segment is constructed on an outstanding example of the Hancock Moraine.

This portion of the moraine is covered by woodlands, which have historically been used as forest crops. The WDNR, Kretz Lumber, Marathon County, and a private landowner own lands along this segment. Local volunteers for more than 30 years have maintained this trail. During this time, Eagle Scouts have constructed a number of benches and boardwalks along its length. Aside from the moraine, other geologic features found within this area are kettles and several kames including the distinctive Klaver Kame, which was named after an early settler from the area. This existing Ice Age NST segment crosses Mole Brook and Poplar Roads, as well as County Trunk Y.

At the south end of this segment, the Ice Age NST meanders through the Marathon County Landfill site and then winds onto the Mountain Bay State Recreation Trail. The Mountain Bay State Recreation Trail is a multi-use rail-trail just north of and parallel to State Highway 29. A short, approximately 1.6-mile section of the Mountain Bay Trail, between the Marathon County Landfill and the Village of Hatley, has been certified as part of the Ice Age NST. This section of the rail-trail passes through the large, well-defined tunnel channel and provides for an excellent transition between the Hancock and Almond Moraines.

The Village of Hatley is located at the junction of State Highway 29 and County Trunk Y. The Plover River flows along its west side. Recent transportation improvements here include a new County Trunk Y overpass, which provides a safe crossing over State Highway 29 for both vehicles and pedestrians. Through the Village of Hatley, the trail follows sidewalks. Hiker's support services are available here such as food, phones, water, and restrooms. A trailhead with a kiosk and parking is found adjacent to the Mountain Bay State Recreation Trail at the new Hatley Community Center.

The proposed corridor continues south of Hatley following a portion of the Almond Moraine. Found on this recessional moraine are numerous kettle ponds and ice-walled lake plains. A particularly good example of an ice-walled lake plain can be found in Section 31 of the town of Norrie, just west of Bass Lake. Land use within this area is predominately agriculture with scattered commercial and residential development. Future development is highly probable because of its proximity to Wausau and the State Highway 29 development corridor. Depending on where the trail is located, the route may cross Hilltop Road, Townline Road, and/or County Road Y.

Existing public lands within the corridor where future Ice Age Trail is proposed to be built include the County Landfill (526-acre) and Plover River SFA (193 acres).

### **Towns of Reid and Elderon**

The proposed Ice Age NST Corridor of Opportunity continues south into the towns of Reid and Elderon, and extends from Town Line Road to State Highway 153. Currently, no Ice Age NST exists within these towns. Here land cover is a mixture of agricultural crops and timber, with timbered areas being limited to those places too wet or steep for agricultural use. Several small, scattered residential developments are clustered along County Trunk Y, which runs north-south through the proposed corridor. Depending upon the route of the Ice Age NST, several relatively

low-volume local roads may need to be crossed including; Tops, Bridge, Esker, and Plover River, Pike Lake and Mission Lake Roads.

Within this portion of the proposed corridor, the central feature is the Almond Moraine. The Plover River flows between the Hancock and Almond Moraines, entering the corridor in the north and exiting it in the southwest. Depending on where the trail is placed, hikers will find excellent examples of ice walled lake plains here. They are found in Sections 5, 6, and 31, in the town of Elderon; and a very large cluster dominates Sections 13, 14, 23 and 24, and 36, in the town of Reid. As the glacier receded and drained away, it left numerous wetlands behind in these two towns. Care will need to be taken when placing the trail to avoid the large wet areas. In the southeast corner of the corridor, the Elderon Moraine, which received its name from the town, makes its first appearance (Section 32, town of Elderon).

A number of kettle lakes are found along the top of the Almond Moraine such as Bass Lake, Lost Lake, Rice Lake, Pike Lake, and Mission Lake. The level of development around each lake varies. Pike Lake is the largest at approximately 205 acres. It is the most developed with limited services available at its northern end. Mission Lake is the centerpiece of a 113.5-acre County Park where restrooms and water are available. This is a popular park for swimming, boating, and picnicking.

### **Towns of Bevent and Franzen**

In the towns of Bevent and Franzen, the proposed corridor shifts to the southeast terminating at the Marathon/Portage County line. It varies in width from 3-5 miles to allow for a variety of options when locating the trail. State Highways 153 and 49, and County Trunks I and C cross the corridor and need to be considered when identifying potential routes. Depending on the route, the Ice Age NST may encounter a number of other low-volume local roads through these towns. Land cover is primarily agricultural crops, with scattered timbered areas. The sandy soil is ideal for growing potatoes. There are also a number of small dairy operations in the area. There are currently no existing Ice Age NST segments within these towns.

As the proposed corridor crosses State Highway 153 and shifts southeast, it leaves a landscape dominated by the Almond Moraine and moves onto the Elderon Moraine, a recessional moraine deposited 13-14,000 years ago. The Elderon Moraine, unlike the Hancock and Almond Moraines, was formed by stagnant ice. Because of this, the Elderon Moraine is not a well-defined single ridge, but a series of many shorter ridges with numerous gaps and breaks. Trail users would find the topography scenic and undulating. Several picturesque creeks, whose headwaters begin on or at the base of the Almond Moraine, flow through the many interrupted sections of the Elderon Moraine to join the Little Wolf River. Like the Towns of Reid and Elderon, wetlands or wet areas will need to be avoided when placing the trail.

Moving southeast in the town of Franzen is the Village of Galloway on State Highway 49. The Village was named after an early lumber operation, Morre's and Galloway's lumber camp. The first settlers in the area were loggers and lumbermen from Scandinavia, followed by Polish farmers. Here the proposed corridor is quite wide to allow the possible routing of the Ice Age

NST either to the east where it would need to cross the Little Wolf River, or west of Galloway, toward Tree Lake in Portage County. Limited services are available in Galloway for hikers.

Two kettle lakes are found within this portion of the proposed corridor. Stenson Lake, is located immediately west of Galloway in Sections 22 and 27. This lake has residential development on its northern and western shores. An abandoned RR grade, which originates in Galloway, runs along the eastern shore of Stenson Lake and continues southwest. This former Chicago and Northwestern RR grade is still evident for approximately 1.2 miles through both croplands and wetlands. It may provide an option for a spur trail into Galloway. Another kettle pond, Moss Lake lies in Section 34 of the town of Franzen and is currently undeveloped.

### **Town of Alban (Portage County)**

In order to provide additional, safe options for routing the trail into Marathon County from Portage County, an expansion to the west of Portage County's approved Ice Age NST corridor is being proposed. The current Ice Age NST Corridor in Portage County was approved in 1996. Its western boundary is State Highway 49. State Highway 49 has high-speed traffic, and limited road shoulders. To achieve a safe, off-road trail, the planning team determined after field reconnaissance that other alternatives were needed. The proposed expansion is .5 to 2 miles west of State Highway 49. It is defined by Saumer Road, County Trunk A and Bobsiding Road and includes the community of Three Lakes, consisting of Penny Lake, Mud Lake, and Tree Lake and Peterson County Park on Tree Lake. This 4-acre county park includes a beach, picnic area, a well, restrooms, and parking. Another benefit of this expansion would be easier access to less developed, scenic countryside with morainal ridges to the northwest. Land cover is primarily agricultural crops, with scattered timbered areas. The major road to be crossed within the proposed corridor expansion in Portage County is State Highway 49.





### **C. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT DISMISSED**

One other possible corridor location was considered at the beginning of the CPP but dismissed. With the approval of the Portage County Ice Age NST Corridor in 1996, the southern entrance into Marathon County is predetermined. The southern endpoint is within the town of Alban on the northeast corner of Portage County, adjoining the southeast corner of Marathon County. The northern endpoint is located at the county's northeastern corner at the Langlade County line. Another fixed point that all potential corridors must intersect and cross over is State Highway 29, which bisects the county from east to west. Crossing this major highway can only be accomplished at two locations in this area. The first is a recently completed overpass at the Village of Hatley, or a second option is an underpass located in the town of Ringle.

The dismissed alternative is located west of the Preferred Alternative and south of State Highway 29. It focuses on the terminal Hancock Moraine. This option is essentially the route as described in the 1983 *Comprehensive Plan*. Here portions of the terminal moraine are quite distinctive and would be great for interpretive purposes, but also contains extensive wet areas. In addition to these wetlands, land between the Hancock Moraine and Elderon Moraine, where the predetermined southern endpoint is located, a distance of 9-10 miles is very wet. Furthermore, as the Hancock Moraine lies in between the two State Highway 29 crossings, depending on which crossing was used, the trail moving south would need to double back numerous times before reaching the pre-determined endpoint in Portage County. This option was dropped because of the difficulty building a sustainable trail through these low-lying areas for a significant distance, with the probability of a less than great hiking experience. It would also increase the overall costs for development and maintenance of the trail.

### **D. ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE 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 preferable 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 No Action and the Preferred 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 of Opportunity were also identified and evaluated.

The environmentally preferable alternative for a Corridor of Opportunity for the Ice Age NST in Marathon 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 5-4 of [Marathon](#) County with Preferred Alternative and Alternatives Considered but Dismissed