

Chapter 2

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

When Congress amended the National Trails System Act in 1980 to authorize establishment of the Ice Age Trail as a NST, it designated only a general route for the trail.

“Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the National Trails System Act (82 Stat. 919; 16 U.S.C. 1241), as amended, is further amended as follows:

(a) Section 5 (a) is amended by adding the following new paragraph at the end thereof:

(10) The Ice Age National Scenic Trail, a trail of approximately one thousand miles, extending from Door County, Wisconsin, to Interstate Park in Saint Croix County [should have read “Polk County”], Wisconsin, generally following the route described in “On the Trail of the Ice Age –A Hiker’s and Biker’s Guide to Wisconsin’s Ice Age National Scientific Reserve and Trail”, by Henry S. Reuss, Member of Congress, dated 1980.”

This general route identified for the trail across the state was then incorporated into the 1983 *Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (Comprehensive Plan)*. The maps in the plan frequently identify roads as “Connecting Road Segment to NST” where there was no actual “trail” in existence and no specific idea where an off-road trail could be established in the future. This alignment was displayed on the maps even though it was known that these road routes could not serve as the route of the Ice Age NST over the long-term. The *Comprehensive Plan* states that the Ice Age NST “should be a continuous overland (off-road) trail. The roads identified on the maps were “place holders” for a future alignment that would need to be determined through a detailed analysis. This planning work was identified as a priority action on page 50 of the *Comprehensive Plan*:

“1. Detailed planning for the location and construction of new trail segments needed to make the Ice Age NST a continuous off-road trail as identified in this plan should begin as soon as possible as a cooperative effort between the Ice Age Trail Council, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the National Park Service.”

The purpose of the Corridor Planning Process is to identify and evaluate potential corridors where an overland route for the Ice Age NST could be established in Marathon County. A desirable location for the trail would meet the following objectives.

- Traverse a variety of glacial features that are located in a visually pleasing corridor.
- Provide for a diverse user experience by incorporating a variety of plant communities, terrain, open and enclosed spaces (ex. Forests, meadows).
- Provide vistas to broader landscapes for scenic and interpretive purposes.
- Link and protect significant geologic, biologic, and archeologic sites
- Link other significant natural resource areas.
- Connect or provide linkages to communities for user support purposes.

- If possible, use publicly owned land for trail development and support facilities.

These alternatives must also occur within defined endpoints. In Marathon County these endpoints are located northeast in the town of Harrison at the Marathon-Langlade County line, and on the county's southeastern border in the towns of Franzen and Alban, at the Marathon-Portage County line where a Corridor of Opportunity for Portage County was approved in the late 1990s.

The Green Bay Lobe's terminal Hancock Moraine traverses eastern Marathon County. The original idea for the trail was to follow the moraine through Marathon County using state and county public lands as anchor points. As indicated by the *Comprehensive Plan*, the trail was to wind from Langlade County moving southwest to Dells of the Eau Claire County Park, south to Ringle where it would cross State Highway 29, and then follow the terminal moraine through the Kronwetter and Leather Camp County Forest Units, and Dewey Marsh State Wildlife Area, just north of Stevens Point in Portage County. During the 1970s, a few volunteers built segments of the Ice Age NST through the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park, town of Ringle and Kronwetter Unit. While the trail through the Dells of the Eau Claire County and the town of Ringle was a success, the segment through the Kronwetter Unit proved to be too wet and difficult to maintain, and was subsequently abandoned in the late 1980s. Dewey Marsh, where the trail was proposed but not built, also encompasses extensive wetlands. Because of the expansive wetlands along this portion of the terminal moraine, it was decided that another route would need to be identified.

To complete the trail countywide, a plan is needed that will provide guidance on where future segments should be established. Today, Marathon County has a dedicated, self-sustaining, and enthusiastic group of volunteers. Such a plan will help volunteers and other partners focus their efforts.

Locally, there is also support for the Ice Age NST. The Marathon County Parks Department has been enthusiastic about the development of the Ice Age NST for sometime. Its incorporation into the *Marathon County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* dates back to 1977, and has been included in updates prepared through 2013. While the Marathon County Parks Department may actively assist with the development of the trail and intends to actively promote the trail in its literature, its present stance is that current funding levels prevent it from being involved with day-to-day trail maintenance responsibilities.

(Insert Map 2-1with **Marathon** County highlighted)

