

Chapter 6

CORRIDOR'S AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF MARATHON COUNTY

The Ice Age NST's proposed corridor is located within Marathon County in the north central part of the state. At 1,584 square miles, it is the largest of Wisconsin's 72 counties. It is located approximately 150 miles north of Madison, the state capital, 190 miles northeast of Milwaukee, and nearly 280 miles north of Chicago. Interstate Highway (IH) 39, which runs north south through the center of the county, provides strategic statewide access. US Highway (USH) 29, which crosses the state in an east-west direction, intersects IH 39, and the proposed Ice Age Trail corridor.

Most of the county's industry is centered in urban areas. Lumber was the original industry. Today, paper manufacturing, insurance, home manufacturing and tourism are some of the major economic drivers. Agriculture also provides 12.5 percent of the job market. Marathon County's farming industry produces dairy products, Christmas trees, grain crops, meat animals, and ginseng, in which it leads the nation in production.

Marathon County offers abundant opportunities for recreational activities such as biking, fishing, hunting, camping, bird watching, hiking, golfing, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling. The county is one of the largest providers of public lands in the state with 17 county parks that total 3,370 acres, and nine county forests units that occupy 28,662 acres of land, and numerous trails including the Mountain Bay State Trail. The State of Wisconsin also owns a considerable amount of land that consists of a state park, two large wildlife areas (approximately 21,000 acres), and numerous fishery areas.

The proposed Ice Age NST corridor is located in a north south direction in the far eastern part of the county, where the glaciers came to a halt. The proposed corridor is about 15 miles east of the City of Wausau, the largest population center in the county. Within or adjacent to the proposed corridor are smaller communities such as Ringle, Hatley, Pike Lake, and Galloway. The primary land use found here south of USH 29 is agriculture, while woodlands and managed forests predominate north of the highway. This area also serves as the headwaters for several trout streams.

There are existing segments of the Ice Age Trail within the proposed corridor. All of them are located north of State Highway 29. Here the trail meanders in discontinuous segments from the Plover River State Fishery Area south to the Village of Hatley. Three segments have been certified. They are located in Plover River State Fishery Area, Dells of the Eau Claire County Park, and along the Mountain Bay State Trail through the County landfill site. A long uncertified segment of trail follows the terminal moraine from the County Landfill north through WDNR and Wausau Paper lands in the towns of Ringle and Easton.

B. CORRIDOR'S PHYSICAL RESOURCES

Geology

Beginning about 2 million years ago, the climate began to periodically cool and warm. During the colder periods, averaging 100,000 years each, ice sheets as much as three miles high at their centers formed in the Hudson Bay region of Arctic Canada and spread outward across northern North America, including Wisconsin. During warmer periods, averaging 10,000 years in duration, most of the ice sheets melted away. This cyclical process occurred as many as two dozen times during the 2 million years of the Pleistocene Epoch. These ice sheets blanketed portions of Wisconsin many times, but evidence of these events is mostly buried beneath the deposits left by the most recent glaciation.

Approximately 25,000 years ago, the last phase of the Wisconsin Glaciation began. During its colder periods, ice advanced into lowlands now occupied by Lakes Superior and Michigan, Green Bay, and the Fox River. As it flowed across the State of Wisconsin, it was impeded by the uplands of the Bayfield, Keweenaw, and Door Peninsulas, and was split into six major lobes including the Green Bay. The Green Bay Lobe most affected the far eastern portion of Marathon County. During its many advances and retreats it created a landscape in Marathon County that is largely defined by a series of three moraines—Hancock, Almond, Elderon--and an assortment of glacial features such as waterlain sediments, ice-walled lake plains, kettle depressions, and drainage and tunnel channels.

Moraines are ridges formed by unsorted gravel, sand, and boulders carried by the glacier and deposited at various times along its outer edge. The Hancock, Almond, and Elderon Moraines are located in the far-east side of Marathon County in a 1-14 mile wide band. They align in a gentle northeast to southwest direction. The Hancock or terminal moraine marks the furthest extent of the last glacial advance and it occurred approximately 25,000-30,000 years ago. After the Hancock phase, the ice margin melted back and then re-advanced and formed the Almond Moraine.

The Almond Moraine is similar to the Hancock Moraine. In most areas, the fronts of both moraines are steep, and their tops are hummocky and scattered with boulders (erratics). It has been suggested that the hummocky topography found in these moraines was caused by the outer edge of the ice sheet being frozen to its bed. This would explain the stacking and accumulation of thick glacial deposits, and would have allowed the formation of kettles, kames, ice-walled lake plains and the cutting of tunnel channels.

About 13,000 to 14,000 years ago, the Elderon Moraines were formed as a result of the glacier melting back from the Almond Moraine, pausing and then advancing a number of times. The Elderon Moraines are different from the other two moraines. They consist of narrow, discontinuous ice-marginal ridges without the hummocky topography, tunnel channels, and ice-walled-lake plains. When the Elderon Moraines were formed, the climate had warmed and the glacier was no longer frozen, but was sliding on its bed.

There are a number of distinctive geologic features found on the moraines. Numerous tunnel channels punctuate both the Hancock and Almond Moraines. They were created by meltwaters flowing under the glacial ice. A particularly good example of a tunnel channel is found near the Village of Hancock. State Highway 29 and the railroad grade for the former Chicago and Northwestern, now the Mountain Bay State Trail, both took advantage of this gap in the moraines when they were constructed.

Kettles are common along both the Hancock and Almond Moraines. These are surface depressions that were formed by large, buried blocks of melting ice. As the ice melted, the sand and gravel above them collapsed, leaving the depressions. These kettles may be dry or contain wetlands or small lakes. In addition to kettles, kames are also found on these moraines. A kame is a conical hill composed primarily of water-rounded sand and cobbles left by streams that flowed downward through shafts in the glacial ice. The Klaver Kame, located along an existing segment of the Ice Age NST in the town of Ringle is the best known example of this feature within the corridor.

Ice-walled lake plains can be found throughout the proposed corridor but particularly south of Hatley. Ice walled lake plains are flat-topped hills that were once lakes contained within the glacier. As the glacier melted, streams deposited loads of sediment into these lakes. When the surrounding glacier melted, the lake bottoms became the hilltops. Good examples of ice-walled lake plains can be found in Section 31 in the town of Norrie, just west of Bass Lake; 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.

Rivers located within the proposed corridor can also attribute their modern day courses to the melting of the Green Bay Lobe. The Eau Claire River, which runs diagonally northeast to southwest through the northern part of the study area, occurred during the Hancock phase. Tunnel channels cut through the Hancock Moraine and funneled meltwater towards the Eau Claire and Little Eau Claire Rivers. In addition, as mention in *Chapter 5-- Town of Easton and Plover*, what is today the Eau Claire River was once a torrent of glacial meltwater that created the rocky gorge in the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park.

The Marathon County Ice Age NST Core Team selected this location for the proposed corridor because here the topographic characteristics are classic examples of features formed in front of, at the edge of, and underneath the furthest advance of the glacial ice sheet. The sheer abundance and variety geologic features will provide educational and interpretive opportunities for hikers, students, and other trail users.

Soils

The bedrock soils in the Ice Age NST's proposed corridor originated from igneous, volcanic, and metamorphic rock materials created during the Precambrian Epoch. Except for major drainage-ways such as the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park, this Precambrian bedrock is typically overlain with 10-260 feet of glacial materials deposited by the Green Bay Lobe some 25,000-30,000 years ago during the Pleistocene Epoch. Soils found in this area are derived from the weathering of glacial drift, outwash and bedrock, and are predominately sands, loamy sands, and

sandy loams. Glacial erratics are scattered throughout the project area. Sandier soils are found in the southern part of the county. This is because glacial ice flowing over this area would have crossed more Cambrian sandstone than in the northern part of the county. These soils are ideal for certain types of agricultural crops, particularly potatoes.

According to the United State Department of Agriculture's Soil Survey of Marathon County, 5 of the 10 major soil associations in the county are found in the eastern 10 towns affected by the project area. A soil association is a landscape that has a distinctive pattern of soils, relief, and drainage. It is typically named for the major soils even though it may contain other minor soil types. The Kennan-Hatley Association is by far the predominant soil association found in the proposed corridor. Kennan-Hatley soils were formed in the youngest glacial till. The following are brief descriptions of the five soil associations with an assessment of their capacity for trail development.

The Kennan-Hatley Association makes up 60-70 percent of the proposed Ice Age NST corridor and consists primarily of the Almond Moraine, and to a lesser extent the Hancock Moraine. This association is coarse in nature and is described as "deep, nearly level to steep, well drained and somewhat poorly drained, bouldery, cobbly, silty, and loamy soils on slopes ranging from 2 to 30 percent. Kennan soils are commonly found on "tops and sides of knolls, hills, and ridges on terminal and recessional moraines" Stones and boulders often appear on its surface. Hatley and other soil types are nearly level to undulating and are found adjacent and in drainageways, former glacial lake plains, and stream terraces. They range from poorly to excessively drained. The predominant management concerns are water erosion, slope, stones, and boulders. Once the boulders have been removed, soils in this association are suited to cultivated crops and trees. Most of these soils have moderate limitations for trails and paths because of slope and/or stones.

Chetek-Rosholt-Oesterle is the next most common association. It is found on outwash plains and stream terraces primarily in the town of Franzen, but can be found throughout the proposed corridor. These soils are described as "deep, nearly level to steep, poorly to excessively drained, loamy, silty." They are found on convex or concave areas or flats with slopes that range from 0-30 percent. Erosion, drought, and soil blowing are the major constraints of this association. These soils are commonly cultivated for crops such as corn, and have only "slight" restrictions for trails and paths.

Fenwood-Rietbrock-Rozellville Association is found within the proposed corridor in the towns of Easton and Ringle. It is found on ground moraines and uplands that are underlain by igneous and metamorphic bedrock. They are described as "deep, nearly level to steep, well drained and somewhat poorly drained, stony, and silty soils on ground moraines and bedrock controlled uplands. Cobbles, stones, and bedrock are common on the surface. Slopes range from 1-30 percent with erosion being the primary management concern. Most of this association is used for growing crops or trees. These soils have "moderate to severe" limitations for trail and paths because of slope, wetness, or boulders.

Mahtomedi-Graycalm-Meehan Association is found around Pike Lake and Mission Lake because they are glacial lake basins. These soils are nearly level to gently sloping, and excessively to poorly drained. Their slopes range from 0-6 percent. Organic soils are found in

this association such as Cathro. Drought and the hazards of soil blowing are the primary management concerns. Limitations for trail and path development are “moderate to severe” because of wetness or sand.

A small portion of the Marathon-Myllrea-Moberg Association is found in the northern portion of the proposed corridor in the town of Plover. It is found on the knolls and ridges of ground moraines and have slopes that range from 1-16 percent. It is described as “deep, nearly level to moderately steep, poorly to excessively drained, stony, gravelly, and silty.” Limitations include rocks, slope, and wetness. The most common type of land use for this association is woodlands. These soils have ‘moderate to severe’ limitations for trail and path development because of slope, boulders, and wetness.

Water Resources

The proposed Ice Age NST Corridor is located within two watershed basins – the Wolf River and Upper Wisconsin Central Basin. The Wolf River Basin covers over 2,600 square miles and is one of the main contributors to the Fox River. The Central Wisconsin Basin has an area over 4,300 square miles and contains all of the drainage area downstream of the confluence with the Prairie River and upstream of the Lower Wisconsin Basin.

The Plover, Eau Claire, and Little Wolf Rivers all flow through the proposed Ice Age NST corridor. Originating from glacial meltwaters, all of the rivers are high quality trout fisheries. The Plover River is located between the Hancock and Almond moraines and is part of the Upper Wisconsin River Basin. It is the largest trout stream in Marathon County, and one of the largest in the State of Wisconsin. It flows generally southwest through the northern third of the corridor eventually reaching the Wisconsin River. The Little Wolf River flows southeast through the southern third of the corridor towards the Wolf River and Lake Michigan. Other Marathon County trout streams in the proposed corridor include Holt Creek, Aniwa Creek, Mole Brook, and Spring Brook.

Surface waters within the project area have relatively high overall quality and provide a good sport fishery. Lake levels and stream base flow are directly related to local groundwater supplies. Most of the groundwater is found near the surface because of shallow soils over bedrock. This region contains many springs and seeps. Depending on the rate of discharge on local topography, groundwater finds its way to the surface by flowing into streams or it may accumulate in a pond or marsh. Groundwater seepage is largely responsible for the abundance of trout streams in the project area.

Threats to the surface water and groundwater quality include soil erosion due to land development and agricultural practices, contamination from pesticide over-use in permeable soils, depletion from over-irrigation, and various other point and non-point sources. Loss of wetlands due to development activities also threatens the water system. A number of basin and watershed management plans and best management practices are in place, however, to help safeguard these valuable resources.

Air Quality

The ambient air quality within the proposed corridor is generally good and could be characterized as “fresh country air.” For the most part, ozone is not an air quality concern in this area. Airborne dust mobilized by plowing or wind erosion of bare soil in agricultural fields at times may be a problem.

Visual Resources

When a corridor for the Ice Age NST is first defined, the geologic features as well as the aesthetic values such as the foreground scenery, distant views and natural environments, are taken into consideration. The corridor must contain elements that create a visually diverse hiking experience since the Ice Age Trail is foremost a National Scenic Trail. Most of these elements are contained within the corridor, but some are located outside of it and can be seen from high vantage points within the corridor. During the planning process, geologic features, high points, and places of scenic beauty such as kettle ponds and high quality plant communities are identified and mapped. Conceptual trail routes are then designed to connect these various features. These collective viewscapes are the heart of the Ice Age NST. They tell the story, first-hand, of how the glacier shaped the landscape of Wisconsin and created its diverse biological ecosystems and water resources. In addition, they act as landmarks for hikers who consciously or subconsciously use these features as a map or way-finding system to identify where they are along the route of the trail.

Landforms, scenic views, and natural areas or plant communities have been designed into the proposed corridor plan, because of their aesthetic and educational value. The undulating topography of the Hancock, Almond and Elderon moraines, tunnel channels, ice walled lake plains, and numerous kettle ponds are the significant features within the proposed corridor.

The juxtaposition of human land uses (crops, farm buildings) upon the corridor’s topographic features offers variety as well as a pedestrian scale. Pastures located on the moraines are scattered with boulders (erratics) deposited as the glacier retreated. Rock-lined fences surrounding croplands are evidence of decades of manual labor from those farmers willing to till the land. Pastoral views are created by tree-lined cropland set atop rolling hills. Specialty crops contributing to the rural character include ginseng, and potatoes.

Beautiful, natural environments such as the Little Wolf River, Mission Lake, Dells of the Eau Claire and Plover River SFA are also located within the proposed corridor. These sites provide lush green settings and delightful scenery for the meandering walker. Lowlands provide kettle lakes and wetlands that are animated with wildlife. Walking along the Ice Age NST through the rolling countryside, open spaces, and woodlands of Marathon County will provide a continually changing and delightful experience for the hiker.

C. CORRIDOR'S BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Ecosystem

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Marathon County lies entirely within the Forest Transition Ecological Landscape along the northern border of Wisconsin's Tension Zone. Plant distributions are largely dependent upon the degree of snow persistence in the winter and the degree to which the soil freezes.

The pre-settlement vegetation of eastern Marathon County consisted primarily of upland maple, hemlock, yellow birch; and in the lowlands, black spruce, tamarack, and cedar. These plant communities were the result of natural succession influenced by fire and other factors.

Today, woodlands cover 53 percent of the proposed corridor. Significant stands of upland hardwood forests such as yellow birch, sugar maple, red and white oak, white pine, hickory, basswood, and hemlock are located here. Beneath the hardwoods, spring wildflowers and ephemerals such as jack-in-the-pulpit, spring beauty, squirrel corn, trout lily, and blood root form carpets in the spring. Trees associated with second growth forests established due to logging are white, red, and jack pines in the northeast portion of the corridor; and aspen and birch in the southeast. In addition to forestlands, 1.5 percent of the proposed corridor lies in wetlands, marshes, and conifer swamps, along with their associated vegetation and wildlife.

One critical habitat, which has been designated a State Natural Area (SNA), is located in the southeast corner of the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park. This area contains a prehistoric riverbed and rare plant communities. Ferns and mosses grow in crannies in the lichen-spotted rocks. Many plants with natural ranges into Canada are found in the gorge as well as several species of ground pines. These plants, as well as the scouring rushes found along the riverbank, are representatives of old and primitive plant communities.

A final category of vegetation, which includes residential plantings and agricultural fields, both abandoned and currently cultivated, represent about 40 percent of the proposed corridor. Residential plantings include native and ornamental species. Agricultural crops grown in this area are alfalfa, corn, soybeans, cranberries, ginseng, potatoes, and crop covers such as grain and vegetables. Old fields of various ages are present and exhibit a range of successional plant species.

Invasive Species

According to Executive Order 13112, the "Invasive Species Act," an invasive species is "a species that is: 1. non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration and 2) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health."

The Ice Age NST will traverse a variety of ecosystems like northern hardwoods, coniferous wetlands, and pine plantations. Problematic species for wooded areas are buckthorn,

honeysuckle and most recently, garlic mustard. Common invasive species of concern for open areas in this part of the state are spotted knapweed, wild parsnip, leafy spurge, and sweet clover. Purple loosestrife is a concern in wet areas.

The State of Wisconsin enacted an invasive species rule, Chapter NR 40, which took effect September 1, 2009, that aims to keep new invaders from getting to Wisconsin in the first place. It also allows the DNR to move more rapidly to contain new invasives to prevent them from being established when they are detected. NR 40 lists several prohibited species that have yet to gain a strong foothold in the state and can still be effectively managed. WDNR also produced several guides and manuals that identify potential invaders, which could degrade the local ecosystem and negatively affect local economies. More information can be found at the WDNR website at <<http://dnr.wi.gov/invasives>>.

Wildlife

Wildlife is abundant in the proposed corridor. More than 100 species of birds are known to breed in the area. Wetlands are home to waterfowl including sandpipers, herons, cranes and several species of ducks. These areas also provide resting and feeding areas for migratory waterfowl. Woodlands and fields provide habitat for other species like various owls, sparrows, finches, flycatchers, woodpeckers, hawks, wrens, and warblers. Game birds known to nest in the area include: wild turkey, woodcock, goose, pheasant, and grouse.

Principal furbearers found here are beaver, otter, muskrat, fox, coyote, black bear, fisher, and mink. Reports of wolves making their way into the area have also surfaced. Other small mammals include raccoon, woodchuck, squirrel, and skunk. A wide variety of game species abound throughout the forested regions of the county. Small game species include squirrel (gray and fox) and rabbit (snowshoe and cottontail). White tail deer is the most popular species hunted.

Fisheries

The waters of the study area contain a variety of cold and warm-water fish species. Warm-water species such as northern pike, bass, panfish, and carp inhabit 75 percent of the lakes and 77 percent of streams. Forage fish are found in the many small, shallow lakes, which are not suitable for game fish due to winterkill. These forage fish are often the subject of live trapping for sale as bait. Walleye is a very popular warm water game fish, but it is found in very few Marathon County lakes.

Cold-water species such as brook trout, brown trout, and rainbow trout are generally found in the deep spring-fed lakes and faster flowing streams that have a temperature of less than 75° F. Nearly all the headwater streams that emanate from the moraines are found in the far eastern portion of the county, the general location of the proposed corridor, and are considered Class 1 trout streams. They include portions of the Little Wolf River, Holt Creek, the Plover River, Aniwa Creek, Mole Brook and Spring Brook. The WDNR has defined Class 1 trout streams as those which exhibit natural reproduction and do not need supplemental stocking to sustain a viable trout fishery. The upper reaches of the Eau Claire River is considered a Class 2 trout

stream, having some natural reproduction, but requiring stocking to maintain a desirable sport fishery.

Threatened and Endangered Species

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the only federally listed endangered species which might occur in Marathon County is the Whooping Crane. The Wisconsin population of this species is considered to be experimental except where it occurs within the National Wildlife Refuge System or the National Park System, where it is treated as a threatened species. The experimental population designation denotes more flexible management for proposed endangered species or threatened species. It prefers bogs, lake margins, wetlands, and marshes with water levels typically 8 to 18 inches deep. Habitat for this species is found in several locations in and near the proposed Ice Age NST corridor. However, they tend to be poor locations to place the trail. The Bald Eagle and Gray Wolf are known to exist in the county, but they are no longer federally listed in Wisconsin.

The WDNR Wisconsin Natural Heritage Inventory Program tracks the location and status of rare species, natural communities, and natural features within the state. Four state threatened and special concern species were found within the proposed corridor. They are the Red-Shouldered Hawk (threatened), Deam's Rockcress (special concern) and two fish species--Pirate Perch and Redside Dace (special concern). State species of Special Concern are those that have suffered a decline that could threaten the species if allowed to continue unchecked, occur in such small numbers, have a restricted distribution, or specialized habitat requirements. These circumstances could easily lead them to become Threatened in Wisconsin. State Threatened species are those which may become Endangered.

D. CORRIDOR'S CULTURAL RESOURCES

Historical Sites and Structures

European-Americans left their mark on the landscape of Marathon County with the influx of immigrants in the mid 1800s. These immigrants were composed primarily of Germans and Polish, as well as Norwegians, Danish, and Dutch. They came to the area to farm or lumber. Within the proposed corridor, some of their churches, school, mills, homesteads, as well as picturesque fencerow boulders from early land clearing, are culturally significant.

The Wisconsin Historical Society's Architecture and History Inventory has records on historic buildings, structures, sites, objects, and historic districts throughout Wisconsin. Their records reveal architecturally unique farm buildings in the town of Easton, a basement barn and the Eau Claire Dells Bridge in the town of Plover, an architecturally unique house in the town of Norrie, and a Native American Church in the town of Franzen. The State Historical Society lists 25 National Register sites for Marathon County, although none are located within the proposed corridor. However, a number of other interesting historic buildings are also found here.

In the town of Easton, an old school and the town hall are located on County Trunk Q. The Zahrt Sawmill, which was built in the 1920s, is still in operation. The William Barden House was built in 1877. It is the oldest frame house built in the area. In the community of Sunset, the Sunset Tavern once served as a post office and a dance hall. Just north of the Tavern is the former Sunset Cooperative Cheese Factory, which was built in 1894.

In the town of Ringle, at the intersection of Highway N and River Road, there are remains of a small cheese factory. On the west side of County Trunk Q, the original Ringle Town Hall and the remains of a brown tile silo from the early 1900s can be seen.

In the Village of Hatley, a few of the buildings from Hatley Lumber Mill date back to the 1900's, and are still used to process logs harvested from local farmers' woodlots. On Clark Street, there are storefronts from the early 1900s, which formerly faced the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad. St. Florian Catholic Church, located at the intersection of State Highway 29 and Highway Y, is now the most prominent landmark in the community. The first church building on the site was built by Polish immigrants in 1898, and was replaced by the current brick structure in 1913.

In the towns of Bevent and Franzen, the importance of religion by Polish immigrants is evidenced by the many roadside shrines that still can be seen in this area. Those shrines include small brick structures, bathtub grottos, and crosses. The community of Bevent was once a thriving farming area with two general stores, a creamery, blacksmith shop, and a portable sawmill. All that remains of that era are a few storefronts and the St. Ladislaus Catholic Church, a rural farm parish that dates back to 1883.

Archeological Resources

Archeological investigations have shown that Native Americans inhabited eastern Marathon County since the Pleistocene Epoch, approximately 14,000 years ago. Today we recognize three distinct cultures that spanned the period from glaciation to the present – Paleoindian Cultural Tradition, 10,000 – 6,000 B.C.; Archaic Cultural Tradition, 6,000-500 B.C.; and Woodland Cultural Tradition, 500 B.C. to European Contact.

Among the tribes who were probably in the general area of central Wisconsin, were the Menominee, Fox (Outagamie), Chippewa (Ojibwa), Potawatomi, Mascoutin, and Sac (Saux), all members of the Algonquin language group; and the Ho-Chunk, a branch of the Sioux (Dakotas). Other Dakota tribes roamed the area from time to time, traveling between the Wisconsin River and their homelands near the Mississippi. Later there were also numbers of Hurons driven west by their enemies.

One location of significance in the proposed corridor is the Legion Ball Park in Hatley, which was the meeting ground of the Ho-Chunk Indians. They traveled from as far away as Nebraska to camp here and receive their government annuities. Listed in the Wisconsin Historic and Archeological database, another place of note is a Native American Church in the town of Franzen.

While Marathon County contains a wealth of cultural resources, there are no sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places within the study area.

E. CORRIDOR'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES

The proposed Ice Age NST corridor is located in a picturesque, rural region, which contains an abundance of wetlands, farmland, and woodlands. Public lands such as Eau Claire Dells and Mission Lake County Parks and a variety of wildlife areas are favorite open spaces for area residents given their close proximity to the Wausau Area. Like many other rural areas, the lack of employment opportunities and good paying jobs historically has resulted in the outmigration of a sizable number of young adults. In recent years, however, an improved transportation network has shortened travel times to nearby larger employment centers, helping stem outmigration by allowing more permanent residents to remain in the area and commute to work. Similarly, new residents have been attracted to the county from these urban centers, who willingly trade a longer work commute for the ability to have the area's scenic attributes and year-round recreational opportunities at their doorstep.

Between the 1990 and 2000 Census, the population increased 8.3 percent within the proposed corridor. The growth rate for the towns and villages within this area is projected to be around 12 percent, which is higher than the projected population growth of 10 percent for the county as a whole. An increasing percentage of new residential developments are occurring in towns outside of these villages and small cities. In 2000, the census reported 3,576 total housing units in the corridor planning area – up 16 percent from 1990. The elderly, likewise, are looking for a desirable place to retire. The median age in Marathon County is 36.3, indicating a slightly older population than the State of Wisconsin, which has a median age of 36.0 years. In the upcoming years, the elderly population in the County is expected to continue to increase.

Communities and Businesses

One of Marathon County's 18 incorporated communities lies within the proposed corridor. The Village of Hatley is located near the center of the proposed corridor along State Highway 29. With a population of 476, it acts as a service center for State Highway 29, but there is little other commercial development. As a result, many area residents rely on larger urban centers such as Wausau, Steven's Point, and Antigo for shopping as well as employment. Recently, Hatley constructed a new community center and library facility, which serves residents, including seniors, in the communities of Bevent, Elderon, Hatley, Norrie, Reid, and Ringle.

There are also a number of unincorporated communities in or near the proposed corridor including Hogarty (town of Harrison), Ringle (town of Ringle), Norrie (town of Norrie), Bevent (town of Bevent), Pike Lake (town of Reid), and Galloway (town of Franzen). These rural residential clusters contain churches and community facilities in addition to houses and, in some cases, small businesses. There are no reliable population figures or future projections for these areas.

The ten unincorporated towns surrounding the proposed corridor are for the most part sparsely populated. They are collectively projected to grow by over 1,700, a 20 percent increase, between 2005 and 2025. Much of this growth may be the result of an increase in development along nearby State Highway 29. While growth in the rural towns is roughly 11 percent, the Village of Hatley is projected to grow by almost 50 percent. As residential development continues to expand east of Wausau, communities with some proximity to Highway 29 will become more attractive to commuters leading some to move to the more rural communities.

A continuing trend will be a decline in the number of farm residences (and farm households). This decline will be offset by new rural residential development, which will house residents working in jobs elsewhere. This pattern of growth reflects a national trend where an increasing percentage of new residential development is occurring in outlying rural areas. Families looking for a better quality of life and empty nesters looking for a desirable place to retire are largely responsible for this trend. These influences will likely continue to contribute to the increase of land values and development within the corridor. They will also create a greater need to protect significant natural resource features as well as provide additional areas for individuals to recreate.

With an increased focus on attracting visitors and visitor-dollars into the local economy, the communities located near the proposed Ice Age NST corridor may benefit economically from trail users by providing such support opportunities as grocery stores, restaurants, campgrounds, and bed and breakfasts.

Land Use and Land Ownership

Primary land uses within the planning area are agriculture, forestry and residential. Although forestland is the highest land use, agriculture has a larger economic impact and employs more people.

Farmland covers 57 percent of the entire county, while 34 percent covers the proposed corridor. Since the 1982 Agriculture Census, the County has lost 20 percent of its farms and 15 percent of its farmland. Historically, dairy farming has been the most important type of farming, though many operations were lost in the last decade. In the planning corridor, dairy farms range from 0.5-1 dairy farm per square mile. Increasingly, farmland is being converted into other uses such as residential home sites.

Re-zonings to Residential generally accompany platted subdivisions, but this type of development is rare with the exception of river and lakeshore areas. Recent activity within the proposed corridor includes a residential subdivision in Easton, and near the Plover River in Bevent. Estate-style properties are being developed in the town of Hewitt, located near the corridor, at the rate of about five a year. Subdivisions and residential development is taking place in proximity to the STH 29 corridor, especially in the town of Ringle and the Village of Hatley.

Forestlands have also been slowly increasing countywide, where currently they utilize about 38 percent of the land. Within the proposed corridor, forests occupy 53 percent of the land. Over

34 percent of the proposed corridor is under agricultural production, while grasslands and other open spaces occupy an additional 6.1 percent.

Ceded Lands

Wisconsin’s native tribes retain their right to hunt, fish and gather within their former territories as a matter of federal treaty. The maintenance of these rights is comparable to a conservation easement and the off-reservation lands are known as ceded lands. Eastern Marathon County is part of the ceded territory of the Lake Superior Chippewa Tribes.

**Table 1
EXISTING LAND USE
Proposed Ice Age Trail Corridor**

Table 1 – Estimated Land Use in the Proposed Marathon County Ice Age Trail Corridor	
Land Use Type	% of Total
Grasslands, Pasture, Scrub, Marsh, Unused Open Space	6.1
Commercial	0.1
Crop Land	25.7
Forest Land	52.8
Other Agriculture	8.7
Public/Quasi-Public	0.02
Quarry	0.1
Recreational	0.04
Residential	2.5
Transportation	2.3
Water	1.4

Source: Marathon County Planning Department

Recreation Resources

The proposed Ice Age NST corridor contains an abundance of public lands that provide the public with an array of recreational opportunities. The following inventory provides a description of the major recreation areas within the corridor.

The proposed Ice Age NST corridor contains a large portion of the Plover River State Fishery Area, located in northeastern Marathon County. It is 1,405.8 acres, and provides excellent opportunities for the public to fish, hunt, and observe wildlife. Over the last couple of years, Ice Age Trail Alliance staff and chapter volunteers worked with WDNR land managers to locate a route for the Ice Age Trail through this property. A 2-mile segment was built here in 2010. The proposed corridor also contains a small portion of the Little Wolf State Fishery Area located in the northeast corner of Portage County.

The Mountain-Bay State Trail is an 83-mile trail from the Village of Weston in Marathon County and ending in the Village of Howard in Brown County. The trail right-of-way, the former Chicago Northwestern Railroad right-of-way, is owned by the WDNR except for the western 3.5 miles, which is owned by the Village of Weston. Marathon County manages approximately 17 miles of the Mountain-Bay Trail within the county boundaries. The trail consists of crushed stone trail tread placed over existing railroad ballast. The Ice Age NST currently uses a short portion of the trail, approximately 3.0 miles between the Village of Hatley and the County Landfill Site.

There are two County parks within the planning area. The Dells of the Eau Claire is one of the most popular parks in the region as well as the county. It is a 190-acre park bisected by the Eau Claire River in northeast Marathon County. The park is famous for the rock outcroppings and rapids along the river just west of the County Highway Y bridge. The park offers a variety of active and passive recreation facilities. There is an extensive trail system throughout the park, including a Marathon County segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

Mission Lake County Park is located on the west bank of Mission Lake in southeast Marathon County. This 122-acre park, which includes a recent 75-acre addition, has a wide variety of park facilities that include: open-sided shelters, restrooms, picnic tables, grills, children's play equipment, and drinking fountains. Mission Lake Park also offers a sand beach for swimming and a boat launch for access to the lake.

Within Marathon County, there are fifty-five kilometers of cross-county skiing, including the Ringle Trail, a 3.4-mile loop located within the proposed corridor. It is great for beginners and for those who want to enjoy classical skiing across gently rolling terrain.

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail fits well within this range of recreational alternatives. Social events are routinely held on the existing segments. A Winter Trails Day Snowshoe Outing is held when snow accumulation is sufficient. Geology hikes also take place several times a year.

Collectively, there is a relatively good supply of support facilities to accommodate hikers within and near the proposed corridor. Support facilities provide for hiker convenience, comfort, or sanitation. They include parking, trailheads, restrooms, camping, or other overnight accommodations, potable or filterable water sources, and opportunities to obtain supplies such as food.

Parking and restroom facilities within the proposed "Corridor of Opportunity" are available at the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park and Mission Lake County Park. Parking is also available at the southern end of the Dells of the Eau Claire Ice Age NST segment on County Highway Z, and at both the northern and southern terminus of the Ringle Cross County Ski Trail.

The Village of Hatley has recently completed the construction of a new Community Center adjacent to the Mountain Bay State Trail. This new community asset includes restroom facilities and an Ice Age NST trailhead, parking, and informational kiosk. Also in Hatley, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) has redesigned the State Highway 29/County Trunk Y

interchange to include a pedestrian-friendly overpass. This overpass will facilitate the safe passage of hikers over the ever-increasing traffic on Highway 29.

Campsites are available at the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park. Campgrounds are provided on both sides of the highway north of the river. Campgrounds are open May through October. A large CCC vintage shelter is situated to the west of the highway north of the river.

Supplies may be purchased in several communities within the proposed corridor including Galloway, Pike Lake, and Hatley.

Public Health

The Ice Age NST will contribute to public health and well-being. “Walking for Pleasure” is the most popular recreation activity in Wisconsin. It is enjoyed by an estimated 85 percent of the population. Completion of the Ice Age NST in Marathon will provide an opportunity for people to obtain regular exercise.

Tax Base

In 2009, the collective tax base of the nine towns through which the proposed Ice Age NST corridor passes was \$604,956,400. This included about \$165,297,500 in land value and an additional \$439,658,900 in improvements. Based on the proportion of each town’s land area actually lying within the corridor boundary, it is estimated that the total tax base of corridor lands is approximately \$165,854,883, including \$34,425,524 in land and \$131,429,359 in improvements. With the land within the corridor estimated at about 94.4 square miles, the gross average assessed value of land was slightly over \$561 per acre. For the county as a whole (excluding incorporated communities), the gross average assessed value was about \$ 1,175 per acre.

