

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 southern Langlade 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 and 3 (Map 5-1) were presented during the alternative phase of the planning process. Alternative 2 focuses on the glacial features of the Almond and Hancock Moraines and the topographical contrast between the moraines and the Antigo Flats. Alternative 3 sought to maximize the use of public lands and facilities found behind the terminal moraine. Alternative 4, the Preferred alternative (Map 5-2 & 5-3), connects the 54 miles of existing trail segments in Langlade County, developed by the Ice Age Trail Alliance over the last thirty-five years, to the Marathon County line in the town of Rolling. This alternative features key elements of both Alternatives 2 and 3, highlighting both the significant geologic features left by the last glacial advance as well as the many public lands and their associated facilities found on the back side of the moraines. While geology will be discussed some in this section, for more information, see Affected Environment, B. Corridor's Physical Resources, Geology.

The design of the proposed Ice Age NST corridor is based on a number of factors. These factors are: general adherence to features left by the Wisconsin Glaciation, 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 (Map 5-1)

Alternative 2 (presented to the public as “Corridor A”) is identical to Alternative 3 through the towns of Rolling and Norwood. This alternative was developed to take advantage of the terminal Hancock and Almond Moraines and the glacial features found on them. Besides the moraines, other features located here include ice-walled lake plains, eskers, and a series of five tunnel channels. The immense outwash plain called the Antigo Flats lies adjacent to this alternative’s northern edge. Alternative 2 would provide multiple opportunities to highlight the contrast between the wooded highlands of the Almond Moraine and the predominantly agricultural, Antigo Flats.

Starting from the Marathon County line in the town of Rolling, the west side of Alternative 2 includes the terminus of the Hancock Moraine, and the ice-walled lake plains and eskers associated with it. Bear Lake, the headwaters of the Plover River, and the community of Elmhurst are also found here. The City of Antigo is located approximately 2.0 miles north of the proposed alternative. Moving east this area also encompasses three of the project area’s five tunnel channels, two of which intersect at the Langlade County Gun Club (town of Rolling, Section 11). In addition to the County Gun Club property, public lands available for the trail are limited to Trout Springs and Demlow Springs State Fishery Areas (SFA).

Approximately 10 miles east of the Marathon and Langlade County line, Alternatives 2 and 3 diverge. Their separation occurs along County Trunk F in the town of Antigo and at the Polar/Norwood town line. Here Alternative 2 follows the Almond Moraine north and east slightly beyond where two different lobes of the glacier—Green Bay and Langlade (see Chapter 5, Geology)—respectively deposited the Almond and Parrish Moraines. Also found in this area are two additional tunnel channels in the towns of Antigo (Section 35) and Polar (Section 18); the western portion of Rabe Springs SFA, Mueller Lake town Park, and the community of Polar. A 6.4 mile segment of the Ice Age Trail is located between the communities of Polar to the town of Evergreen. Two miles of this segment is off-road through private forestland.

C. ALTERNATIVE 3 (Map 5-1)

Alternative 3 (presented to the public as “Corridor B”) is identical to Alternative 2 through the towns of Rolling and Norwood, as described in the Section B above, with the communities of Elmhurst, Polar, and Antigo, located within or near this corridor alternative. This alternative was designed to take advantage of the existing public lands located behind the moraines. Most of these lands are state fishery areas established around springs and the headwaters of high quality trout streams. Many of them have existing parking lots and trails.

Alternative 3 diverges east away from Alternative 2, and the front edge of the terminal Almond Moraine, at County Highway F in the town of Antigo and at the Polar/Norwood town line. Compared to Alternative 2, the number of public lands within this alternative increases to include: Rabe Springs SFA, Gartzke Flowage-Langlade County, remnant WDNR SFA properties along Deer Creek, and scenic Goto Lake, one of the deepest kettle ponds in the County. However, this alternative provides fewer opportunities to highlight the contrast between the wooded highlands of the Almond Moraine with the outwash plain called the Antigo Flats. Like Alternative 2, Alternative 3 includes Mueller Lake Town Park, the community of Polar, and an existing off-road segment of the Ice Age Trail.

D. ALTERNATIVE 4 – “PREFERRED” (Maps 5-2 and 5-3)

Under this alternative, a Corridor of Opportunity that is approximately 3 to 5 miles in width, extending east and north from the Marathon County line to existing trail in the town of Evergreen in southern Langlade County, has been identified and would receive State and Federal approval. Within this corridor, a railway that is approximately 200-1000 feet or more in width would be acquired for Ice Age NST purposes. A wider railway 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.

The Preferred alternative includes aspects of both Alternatives 2 and 3. It was developed using information obtained through the open house meetings and other comments received from the public. It provides a number of opportunities to highlight most of the glacial features that are common to Alternatives 2 & 3. In addition, the preferred alternative would allow the possibility of interpreting the interface between the Almond Moraine and the Antigo Flats. It includes all but one of the tunnel channels which are featured in Alternative 2, and all of the public properties, with the exception of Gartzke Flowage-Langlade County, found in Alternative 3.

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 found in southern Langlade County, as well as the field work of representatives of the Core Team. This proposed corridor generally follows the Hancock and Almond Moraines deposited approximately 23,000 – 30,000 years ago. Here it encompasses glacial features found on the edge of the glacier such as kettle ponds, distinctive tunnel channels and a number of spring-fed ponds. The vast outwash plain called the Antigo Flats lies adjacent its northern edge. The proposed corridor has the potential to link several state properties including four state fishery areas, the Steffen Memorial Forest, Langlade County Gun and Bow Range, Mueller Lake Park and a number of smaller local parks. It also contains the communities of Polar and Elmhurst, with the City of Antigo located approximately 2 miles to the north. Collectively, these areas provide support facilities such as trailheads, parking, food, water, lodging and phones. Among the resources found within the corridor are a white cedar-swamp, hardwood forests, spring ponds, outstanding trout streams and deep kettle lakes. Well-placed scenic overlooks could potentially provide dramatic views of the Antigo Flats and the Parrish and Summit Moraines.

The following is a general description of the corridor starting at its southern end in the town of Rolling. 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 Rolling and Norwood (Map 5-2)

Beginning at the Marathon County line the proposed corridor extends northeast starting at the southwest corner of the town of Rolling in Sections 19, 30 & 31. It varies in width from 3 to 6 miles. Its northern edge follows the interface between the terminal Hancock Moraine and the Antigo Flats, which is outlined by a number of town roads including County Trunk G. U.S. Highway 45 is a major transportation corridor that runs north and south through the town of Rolling, and extends to the City of Antigo and northern Langlade County. Bear Lake Road, which transitions into State Route 47 at U.S. Highway 45, is the only road that spans both towns from east to west. A couple of county highways are located here including County Trunk AA which winds in a northwest to southeast direction near the junction of four towns--Antigo, Polar, Rolling, and Norwood. All of these roads need to be considered when identifying potential routes for the trail. Depending on the route, the Ice Age NST may encounter a number of other low volume roads. This corridor segment is located within 2-5 miles of the City of Antigo. There are no existing segments of the Ice Age NST in these two towns.

The western edge of the town of Rolling contains the terminus of the Hancock Moraine that marks the furthest extent of the glacier some 30,000 years ago. The moraine is just a sliver here that covers portions of Sections 9, 16, 17, 19, 20 and 30 within the town. The moraine is predominately covered with woodlands and pine plantations, rural home sites, and agricultural field openings. The enormous Antigo Flats outwash plain, which is approximately 97 square miles in size and contains the City of Antigo, lies adjacent to the proposed corridor's northwestern edge. Agriculture in the form of dairying and field crops are its primary use. On top of the moraine are outstanding views of the Antigo Flats with the Parrish and Summit Moraines visible approximately 10 miles away in the distance. Roughly paralleling the front edge of the Hancock Moraine before winding north into the City of Antigo, is a short segment of Spring Brook, a tributary of the Eau Claire River. If the trail were placed through this area of the town of Rolling, it could provide hikers with expansive views across the Antigo Flats and potentially a hike over or a close up view of an ice walled lake plain or esker. As proposed by the *Downtown and Springbrook Vision Plan*, a connecting trail to the City of Antigo could be placed along Spring Brook.

Located to the east, southeast of the Hancock Moraine is the Almond Moraine, which was deposited at a later date. Between the two moraines and still west of U.S. Highway 45 is a low, wetland area that contains the headwaters of the Plover River, Bear Lake, and the once booming community of Elmhurst. Elmhurst, located in Section 21, is a potential opportunity to interpret some of the early settlement patterns, and history of the area. Positioned along the former Chicago and Northwestern Railroad grade that used to extend to the City of Antigo and beyond, hikers would be able to see the few structures that survived a near catastrophic fire that wiped out most of the town in 1911.

Moving east from Elmhurst and crossing U.S. Highway 45, the remaining portion of the proposed corridor for southern Langlade County encompasses the Almond Moraine, its predominate feature. The Almond Moraine is approximately one mile wide at this location, and extends in a northeast southwest direction. It is rich with geologic features—kettle ponds, tunnel channels, ice walled lake plains, and eskers. Its backside (southeast side) is dotted with springs which feed into ponds, small lakes, streams, and wetlands that cover the moraine.

South of Antigo, along the proposed corridor’s northern boundary, there is an opportunity to route the trail near the Langlade County Gun Range. The County Gun Range consists of 120 wooded acres and is located at the intersection of two tunnel channels that bisect the Almond Moraine. Both tunnel channels are very large, with the eastern channel expanding southeast to Moose Lake approximately 18 miles away. The County Gun Range has parking lots and outhouses that could potentially be used by hikers. An active quarry present at the outlet of the tunnel channels could provide an opportunity to interpret how the glacier deposited till as well as discuss the economic benefits of these resources.

The southern portion of this corridor, east of County Trunk W, passes through a landscape marked by springs and the headwaters of numerous streams. Several WDNR State Fishery Areas (SFAs) have been established to permanently protect these sensitive resources. Here the landscape is composed of gently rolling hills with a mosaic of private woodlots, managed forest, and small to medium sized agricultural fields. If the trail were located here, it could pass through the Trout Springs SFA, which is 110 acres in size. This property occupies a portion of the tunnel channel that originates at the County Gun Range. To the east of this SFA, across Trout Road, is another 120 acres of public lands consisting of the Steffen Memorial Forest and Perch Lake SFA. All of these properties have small parking lots and limited existing trails.

Leaving Perch Lake and continuing northeast along the south side of the Almond Moraine into the town of Norwood, the corridor passes through a patchwork of agricultural fields. If a trail were developed here it could connect another WDNR property, the Upper and Lower Demlows Springs SFA on Hill Road. Contained within this site are the headwater springs of Mayking Creek, a tributary of the Red River. This property also features an undisturbed white cedar swamp, notable for the size of the trees and lack of and deer browse.

Extending northeast and crossing County Trunk AA, Crestwood Road, and Division Lane, the corridor moves into the towns of Antigo, Polar and Evergreen.

Towns of Antigo, Polar, and Evergreen (Sections 6 and 7 only) (Map 5-2)

The corridor in the towns of Antigo and Polar varies in width from 3 to 5 miles. Within the town of Evergreen, which adjoins the east side of Polar, the proposed corridor includes approximately 500 acres in Sections 6 and 7. County Trunk F and State Route 64 pass through this portion of the proposed corridor in an east and west direction, and roughly split it into thirds. County Highway S extends north/south through the western portion of the town of Polar. In order to provide a safe option for hikers, care must be taken when considering potential route options

around the community of Polar. South and east of Polar, roads are quiet town roads and remote driveways. The City of Antigo is located within 6-8 miles of this corridor segment.

Beginning at Demlow Springs in the town of Norwood, and moving northeast across Division Lane, the proposed Ice Age NST corridor encompasses land used primarily for agricultural purposes such as dairying and field crops. If the trail were located here, behind the Almond Moraine, the hiker would experience an open, largely agrarian landscape. This gently rolling topography is dotted with springs and small kettle ponds. The baseball park and Perennial Gardens are located in the town of Polar just west of County Trunk S. Here hikers would find limited support facilities such as parking, and seasonal bathrooms and concessions. Continuing northeast across County Highway S, a potential trail route could wind into the Rabe Springs SFA. This 120 acre site contains the headwaters of Rabe Creek, a tributary to the Wolf River. Rabe Creek, along with Drew Creek, and Deer Creek punctuate this portion of the moraine. These high quality trout streams flow in a southeastern direction away from the mid-continental drainage divide marked by the Almond Moraine.

After crossing Polar Road at Rabe Springs SFA, the proposed Ice Age NST corridor continues northeast toward scenic Goto Lake SFA. Goto Lake is one of the deepest kettle lakes (82 feet) in the county. The topography of this WDNR owned property is moderately rugged providing a contrast to the gently rolling landscape found on top of the moraine. Goto Lake SFA is located just southeast of the community of Polar. Parking is available for hikers here.

The northern portion of this section of the proposed Ice Age NST corridor encompasses the north face of the Almond Moraine. Here the landscape is quite different from its' back side. On top of the moraine are woodlands that contain commercial hardwood forests, rural home-sites, and small subdivisions. Stands of pine plantations are also common.

Beginning at the southern edge of the town of Antigo, near Maple View Road and County Trunk AA, and winding northeast, this portion of the corridor contains the greatest topographic relief—150 feet—found within the entire corridor between the Antigo Flats and the crest of the moraine. The proposed corridor's highest elevation (1,650 feet) is found here between County Trunk F and State Highway 64. This general area would be a great place to site an overlook that interprets the contrasting landforms of the various moraines and outwash plain that were created by the Wisconsin Valley, Langlade, and Green Bay lobes during the late Wisconsin Glaciation. Because of its high elevation, the area on the top of the moraine is also where the St. Lawrence sub-continental divide is located. Here, the terrain forms a border between two distinct drainage basins—the Lake Michigan and Mississippi River. Approximately 2.5 miles to the east, across Hill Road and County Trunk S is the community of Polar, a possible supply point for hikers. Located within Polar is scenic Mueller Lake, which is surrounded by houses except for its southeast corner. Restrooms, picnic areas and parking are available there.

Crossing State Route 64 and leaving behind Polar and Goto Lake SFA, the proposed corridor extends northeast for 4 miles encompassing private forest land before reaching its terminus at the Langlade County Forest in the town of Evergreen. An existing Ice Age Trail segment has been built between the community of Polar and the Langlade County Forest. It begins on the northwest side of Mueller Lake and winds north and east crossing State Route 64 following

Groth Road for 2 miles before reaching Price-Polar Road. The trail then follows Price-Polar Road north for one half mile before winding east off road onto private lands. It then meanders northeast for approximately 4 miles before reaching the Langle County Forest. This trail segment represents the current terminus of the 54+ miles of Ice Age Trail that winds through the northern half of Langle County.

Map 5-1: So. Lantlade Co. Ice Age NST Corridor Alternatives

Map 5-2: Langlade Co. Alternative 4, “Preferred,” Corridor, Southern Half

Map 5-3: So. Langlade Co., Alternative 4, “Preferred,” Corridor, Northern Half

E. 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 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 preferable alternative for a Corridor of Opportunity for the Ice Age NST in southern Langlade 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.

