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Popularity of Ice Age Trail Confirmed: 4.65 Million Users Annually

Volunteerism reaches record-high: 103, 439 hours in 2024

Cross Plains, Wis. (December 19, 2024) – 2024 will go down as an impactful year in the history of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and the Ice Age Trail Alliance. From Trail construction milestones to record-breaking volunteer efforts, and record-setting use, the Alliance continues to lead the way preserving and enhancing the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

“2024 has been a stellar year for the Ice Age Trail Alliance,” says Luke Kloberdanz, Executive Director and CEO of the Ice Age Trail Alliance. “We are deeply grateful to our volunteers, supporters, and partners for their commitment to the Trail. Together, we’ve made incredible strides in protecting, creating, and celebrating this natural wonder.”

Expanding and Enhancing the Trail

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail now boasts 702.6 miles of blazed, hike-ready trail, an increase from 698 miles in 2023. This growth includes two new segments:

- **Montello:** a 2.0-mile path through the town, which replaces the connecting route that followed the busy, less scenic Highway 23 through the community.
- **Algoma:** 2.6-mile path through downtown and along Lake Michigan.

Beyond adding new segments, the Alliance focused on improving existing segments to enhance the hiker experience:

- **Greenbush Segment (Sheboygan County):** A reroute off a bike path to a winding footpath closer to glacial geology.
- **Blue Hills Segments (Rusk County):** Began a transformative multi-year, 19-mile reroute, shifting the Trail from logging roads and snowmobile paths to a primitive Trail through forested landscapes, offering views of the surrounding topography.
- **Plover River Segment (Marathon County):** Volunteers installed more than 300 stepping stones to eliminate muddy conditions, creating a magical hiking path.
- **Hemlock Creek Segment (Barron, Rusk, Washburn Counties):** Replaced aging boardwalks with five new structures, improving access and safety.

The final Trailbuilding project of the year focused on the Alliance-owned Muir Preserve in Marquette County, where volunteers constructed 800 feet of boardwalk. While currently a standalone loop, this segment holds the promise of connecting to the official Trail in the future.

Protecting the Trail for Future Generations

In 2024, the Alliance and its partners completed 14 land transactions, protecting critical properties that will enable future Trail development. These acquisitions lay the groundwork for nearly four miles of future Trail.

Record-Setting Volunteerism

Volunteers continue to be the backbone of the Alliance's success. In Fiscal Year 2024, volunteers logged 103,439 service hours on Trail-related activities—a new record, surpassing last year's high of 100,666 hours. These contributions, tracked by the National Park Service's Volunteer-in-Parks program, position the Ice Age Trail among the nation's top National Parks for volunteer engagement.

Growing Trail Use and Economic Impact

The Ice Age Trail's popularity was confirmed. A study, released in 2024, from the Fiscal and Economic Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, revealed 4.65 million people use the Trail annually. This growing use generates \$431 million in annual economic output, driving significant sales and services in communities across Wisconsin.

"The economic impact study confirmed what we anecdotally knew to be true," says Kloberdanz. "More people than ever before are getting out on the Trail."

"They're attending group hikes. They're becoming Thousand Milers (people who complete the entire Trail). They're participating in the Mammoth Hike Challenge. And, they're giving back by volunteering on the Trail," he says. "The 'Covid bump' in usership has not dwindled," he says. "The Trail is now a part of people's lives."

"As we look to 2025, we're excited to build on this year's momentum. The Alliance will continue working to connect people to the glacial history and beauty of Wisconsin as well as its many unique communities," Kloberdanz says.

About the Ice Age Trail Alliance:

The Ice Age Trail Alliance is a nonprofit member- and volunteer-based organization that conserves, creates, maintains, and promotes the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. This thousand-mile footpath, entirely within Wisconsin, highlights the unique landscape and glacial heritage of the state while offering unparalleled opportunities for hiking, recreation, and connection to nature. To learn more, visit www.iceagetrail.org.

About the Ice Age National Scenic Trail:

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is a 1,200-mile footpath contained entirely within Wisconsin. It traverses the state from St. Croix Falls in the west, to Sturgeon Bay in the east, going as far south as Janesville. One of 11 National Scenic Trails, the Ice Age Trail highlights the landscapes carved out by ancient glaciers, which happen to be some of the most beautiful areas in the state. Approximately 60% of Wisconsin residents live within 20 miles of the Ice Age Trail.