



Foundation Document Overview

Ice Age National Scenic Trail

Wisconsin



Contact Information

For more information about the *Ice Age National Scenic Trail Foundation Document*, contact: iatr_superintendent@nps.gov or (608) 441-5610 or write to:
Superintendent, Ice Age National Scenic Trail, 700 Rayovac Drive, Suite 100, Madison, WI 53711

Purpose



The purpose of the ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL is to ensure protection, preservation, and interpretation of the nationally significant resources and values associated with continental glaciation in Wisconsin, and to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities in support of and compatible with the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, and cultural resources along the trail.



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Significance

Significance statements express why Ice Age National Scenic Trail resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **Glacial Features.** The Ice Age National Scenic Trail and the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve Units in Wisconsin highlight the most impressive examples of continental glaciation in North America. The trail landscape exhibits the marks of the glaciers' farthest advance and is a showplace of features such as moraines, kames, drumlins, erratics, kettle lakes, potholes, eskers, marshes, meltwater channels, gorges, ice-walled lake plains, outwash plains, and glacial lake beds.
- **The Trail Experience.** The Ice Age National Scenic Trail generally traverses the edge of Wisconsin's most recent glaciation, and its planned 1,200 miles of footpath will provide outstanding opportunities for recreation, education, inspiration, scenic views, solitude, and enjoyment. As intended by the National Trails System Act, the Ice Age National Scenic Trail also connects communities along its route across the state to allow access for youth and urban populations to the great outdoors.
- **Glacial Science.** The Cross Plains Complex and other areas along the trail offer an unparalleled opportunity to compare and contrast the parts of Wisconsin that were glaciated and those that were never glaciated (the driftless area). The two landscapes provide outstanding opportunities to observe, monitor, and understand the impacts of large-scale, long-term environmental changes dating back to the Pleistocene epoch. The state of Wisconsin and the features protected by the trail were home to some of the earliest research on glaciation, research that continues today.
- **Partnerships.** The Ice Age National Scenic Trail exists through the dedicated efforts of partners and volunteers. The National Park Service cooperates with federal, state, and local units of government as well as organizations, landowners, and businesses to develop, manage, and maintain the trail.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Glacial Features**
- **The Trail**
- **Partnerships**
- **Visitor Experiences**

Ice Age National Scenic Trail contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

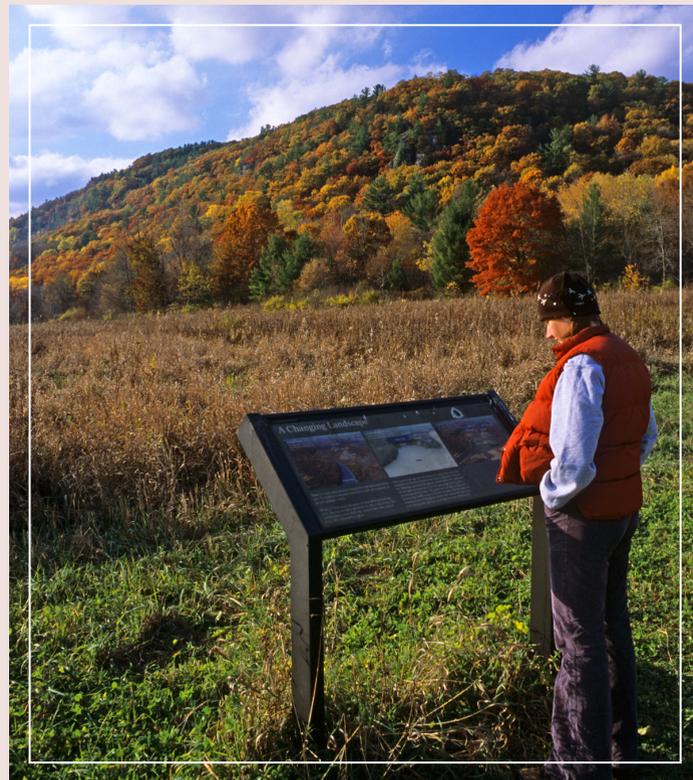
- **Scientific Study**
- **Enduring Collaborative Spirit**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **The Landscape**
- **People and Land Use**
- **Communities along the Trail**
- **Environmental Conditions**
- **Stewardship**
- **A Legacy of Volunteerism**
- **The Science of Glaciation**



Description

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is a premier recreational footpath that generally follows the edge of the last glacial advance through 30 counties in Wisconsin. A federal, state, and private partnership between the National Park Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and Ice Age Trail Alliance administers and manages the trail. The National Park Service is responsible for overall administration, planning, compliance, interpretation, signage, and some land acquisition. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is the primary landowner for the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. They acquire and manage the trail on their lands, support planning and development, and provide grants to the Ice Age Trail Alliance and others for acquisition and maintenance. The Ice Age Trail Alliance staff oversees the work of 21 chapters along the route of the trail who design, construct, and maintain it. They conduct public outreach to raise awareness and use of the trail, pursue funding initiatives, acquire lands, provide trail trip planning, carry out vegetation restoration activities, and educate and train youth to become future land stewards.

When completed the trail will meander for approximately 1,200 miles through Wisconsin, from Potawatomi State Park in Door County to Interstate State Park in Polk County. Today, approximately 660 miles of trail have been constructed and are open for use. The ice age is a landscape-scale story, but only portions of the trailway are protected. Most views of the landscape are dependent on neighboring land uses; some are protected through easements and ongoing agricultural uses, whereas others are threatened by development.

The story of long-term natural climate change cycles is visible along the trail; moraines, erratics, potholes, outwash plains, kettles, tunnel channels, drumlins, swamps, lakes, and other features are remnants of the Wisconsin glaciation that occurred 25,000–50,000 years ago. The glacial features along the trail are unparalleled in their diversity and concentration. Some of the earliest research on continental glaciation took place in Wisconsin, and research continues today.

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail links together six of the nine units of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve: Interstate Park, Chippewa Moraine, Devil's Lake State Park, Cross Plains, Kettle Moraine State Forest–Northern Unit, and Two Creeks Buried Forest. These reserve units are primarily owned and managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. They contain outstanding examples of the glacial landforms along the trail and are major nodes of interpretation of the glacial story and landscape. Each reserve unit protects a unique cluster of features that exemplify different glacial processes. The Cross Plains unit, which is partly owned by the National Park Service, is addressed in this document's sections on key issues and associated planning and data needs.

