




**ICE AGE TRAIL
ALLIANCE**

2023
ANNUAL REPORT

**CONSERVE
CREATE
MAINTAIN
PROMOTE**



Our Mission

The Mission of the Alliance is to conserve, create, maintain, and promote the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.



Our Vision

In collaboration with our many partners, we envision a premier, continuous, permanently protected Ice Age National Scenic Trail. Coursing through Wisconsin, the Ice Age Trail is a place where all people may enjoy and embrace unique glacial landscapes and cultural histories, while finding physical and mental renewal in a peaceful setting and an enduring spiritual connection to the land.



Reaching NEW HEIGHTS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S
REPORT

Enthusiasm and Engagement Continued to Soar

The Ice Age Trail Alliance enjoyed another year of record-setting growth in 2023. This translated to a record climb in membership and an all-time high of service hours donated by volunteers in support of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. Events like the Annual Conference garnered record attendees, while the fourth-year of the Mammoth Hike Challenge attracted more registrants than ever before. And, finally, enthusiastic backing of conservation efforts enabled the Alliance to close on beautiful and strategic properties thanks to generous donor and foundation support.

A 30-Year Goal Achieved

A peak achievement included the exciting announcement in December by National Park Service Director Chuck Sams: The Ice Age, North Country, and New England National Scenic Trails are now official units of the National Park Service. A decades long quest for the Alliance, it involved many advocates and supporters, including dedicated volunteers, Alliance staff, Trail supporters from across the United States, and elected officials advocating for the Trails.

Although part of the National Park Service since 1980, the designation change means the Ice Age Trail is now equal in status to other national parks and scenic trails (Appalachian, Potomac Heritage, and Natchez Trace Scenic Trails) administered by the National Park Service. As a result, the Trail will have additional opportunities for federal funding and support through the Park Service, as well as national-level recognition and greater public awareness.

Looking Ahead

It's an exciting time to be part of the Ice Age Trail Alliance, as it's in an ever-stronger position to conserve, create, maintain, and promote the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. To that end, the organization enhanced its offerings and capabilities by adding staff members, directly impacting its ability to support volunteers through increased communication and training.

But more importantly, the impressive accomplishments listed in the following pages of this report were achieved because of the steadfast support of Alliance members and volunteers.

Please join us in support of a premier, continuous, permanently protected Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

Thank you,



Luke Kloberdanz, Executive Director and CEO
Ice Age Trail Alliance



“It’s an **exciting** time to be part of the Ice Age Trail Alliance, as it’s in an ever-stronger position to conserve, create, maintain, and promote the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.”

Conserve LAND

LAND PROTECTION HIGHLIGHTS

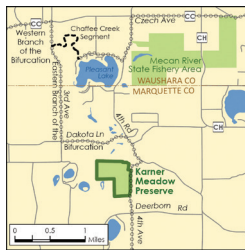
In 2023, 8 land transactions resulted in 200 acres protected for 3 future miles of Ice Age National Scenic Trail. We worked with landowners in Polk, Chippewa, Marquette, and Dane counties who readily sold property to the Ice Age Trail Alliance for future Trail.

Two New Alliance-Owned Preserves

The collection of Alliance-owned properties continued to grow; the year finished with 37 preserves, including:

• Karner Meadow Preserve

Summer brought the Alliance an incredible opportunity: protecting a gorgeous 106-acre property in Marquette County for future Trail. Site visits revealed hummocky terrain, majestic oaks, and a large pond, providing an ideal backdrop for a scenic path. This property, located in the Central Sands region, boasts acres of native lupine and is home to a significant population of federally endangered Karner blue butterflies. We're grateful to generous donors who supported the fundraising campaign and to Prairie Springs: The Paul Fleckenstein Trust for matching half of every donation (up to \$175,000)!



• Otter Lake Preserve

The 76.08-acre property in Chippewa County contains a creek and high-relief hummocky glacial topography, including several small ice-walled lake plains along the Perkinstown Moraine. Beyond its natural beauty, the Preserve anchors the Ice Age Trail route through the county's southeast corner. The purchase permanently protects more than a half-mile of future Ice Age Trail, providing respite along a nearly 40-mile road walk between the Cornell and Lake Eleven segments. There is also potential for a parking area and camping site.



Partner Protects Glacial Features

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, a long-standing land-protection partner of the Alliance, purchased two properties on behalf of the Ice Age Trail and preserved important glacial landscape features:

• Moulin Kames

The acquisition of a nearly 13-acre property in Washington County preserves additional kames within the Polk Kames area, the state's second-largest cluster. Moulin kames formed when boulders and sediment at the glacier's surface spilled into moulins, or vertical shafts, creating mounds, or kames, that remained after the ice melted.

• Drumlin

The purchase of an approximately 30-acre property in Waukesha County contained a small but coveted glacial drumlin, which indicates the Green Bay Lobe of the Laurentide ice sheet flowed toward the southeast in this location. Drumlins are streamlined hills sculpted by continental glaciers. Some are shaped like teardrops or cigars and can be up to 1 mile long and 100 feet tall. This acquisition also allowed for a 1/2 mile of Trail to be relocated from a busy road onto a blazed path.

KARNER MEADOW PRESERVE:

Trail enthusiasts eagerly supported this land protection: meeting the fundraising goal in just

two months.



8 LAND
TRANSACTIONS

200 ACRES
PROTECTED

3 FUTURE
MILES

LAND MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The Alliance's successful land-protection efforts transition into management of Alliance-owned preserves. In 2023, the following efforts and initiatives bolstered the Land Team's ability to care for land hosting the Trail:

Property Monitoring:

Developed new in-person and on-line training materials for a robust crew of volunteer Property Monitors. The resources introduced standard land trust practices related to monitoring easements and fee-property holdings. Property Monitors also utilized Landscape Land Conservation software to track site visits and create real-time status reports for the more than 4,000 acres monitored—resulting in greater program efficiencies. Staff strengthened relationships with easement landowners by joining them for walks along their Trail sections, underscoring the importance of their contribution.

Land Trust Accreditation:

Began the lengthy accreditation renewal process. Accreditation certifies the Alliance's ability to conduct proper land transactions and demonstrates the Alliance's fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, and lasting stewardship for the land it conserves.

Handshake Landowner Survey:

Conducted the first of its kind handshake landowner survey to gain better insight into the motivations of those who host the Trail. A remarkable 40% response rate revealed landowners were quite happy to host the Trail. Their feedback will inform future plans for these critical Trail areas.

Habitat Improvement Program:

Winter Habitat Improvement Program events took place on three Alliance-owned preserves. Frigid temperatures, icy terrain, and blustery wind didn't deter hundreds of volunteers from removing woody invasives and burning brush piles. These efforts helped restore oak woodlands and remnant bluff prairies to flourish on three properties along the Trail.

In spring, the Alliance conducted prescribed fires in several of its southern Wisconsin preserves, benefiting plant and wildlife communities and improving the hiker experience along the Trail.

In late summer and early fall, Alliance staff and volunteers teamed up with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for prairie seed collecting stewardship events, supporting native wildflowers and increasing habitat for declining pollinator species.

Collaboration Creates a Native Seed Nursery

Grant funding (awarded from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program) to the Alliance and its local U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service partners addressed the need for, and high cost of, propagating native plants on both public and private land.

In 2023, the Alliance purchased, assembled and tested seed processing equipment at its "Seed Shed".

Seed collecting events gathered 78 species of native prairie seed from Alliance-owned preserves. The resulting 201 pounds of cleaned seed will be used to restore and enhance 45 acres of wetland, prairie, and savanna habitat, increasing critical habitat for declining pollinator species.



The linear nature of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail provides an **amazing** opportunity to connect landscapes and restoration efforts for critters like the federally endangered Karner blue butterflies, monarchs, and rusty-patched bumble bees.



Create & Maintain

TRAIL

TRAILBUILDING HIGHLIGHTS

In 2023, nearly **15 miles** of brand-new Ice Age National Scenic Trail took shape, making it a banner Trailbuilding year. The season's true superstars, however, were the **1,031** volunteers who donated an impressive **24,725** service hours!

Large-Scale Projects Reconnect and Extend Trail

Three of the season's Trailbuilding events focused on completing a road-to-road reroute along the Rib Lake Segment after a handshake agreement dissolved many years ago. The 15-year endeavor culminated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony at October's project, celebrating 6 miles of blazed Trail and 0.7 connecting route. Reroute efforts along the Iola Ski Hill and Sturgeon Bay segments created dedicated hiking paths for the Trail in popular recreational areas. And hikers of the Cross Plains Segment delighted in three additional miles, extending the Trail across public land owned by the National Park Service.

Chapter-Led Initiatives Blaze the Way

In tandem with the Alliance's Trail Team, chapter volunteers blazed the Trail through Evansville, Cornell (an Ice Age Trail Community), and Gibbs Lake County Park in Rock County. Chapters also constructed Trail through the Alliance-owned Ice Override Preserve in Langlade County and extended the Waterville and Scuppernong segments in Waukesha County and the Chaffee Creek Segment in Waushara County. They also tackled reroutes, new bridges, and other Trail improvements.

Challenging Areas Received Targeted Maintenance

The "Roving Crew" pilot program cleaned up winter storm damage and knocked back fast-growing summertime vegetation, improving the hiker experience in all seasons. Long-awaited maintenance projects received an assist from a WisCorps trailbuilding crew. Funded by a grant from the National Park Foundation's Communities & Workforce Initiative, the crew built numerous structures, constructed miles of tread, and shored up retaining walls.

Increased Training Opportunities for Dedicated Volunteers

Eleven Crew Leader Skills Training participants swelled the volunteer Crew Leader ranks for the 2023 Trailbuilding season. Hands-on Ice Age Trail University (IAT-U) classes provided 56 volunteers with in-depth learning related to Trailbuilding and land stewardship. The Alliance and partner organizations also offered 4 chainsaw and 13 First Aid/CPR/AED trainings.

Blazing more Trail miles and improving the hiking experience motivates Ice Age Trail Crew *volunteers.*



15

NEW TRAIL MILES

1,031

VOLUNTEERS

24,725

SERVICE HOURS



Thanks to the efforts of Trailbuilding volunteers, the Ice Age Trail is

58%
complete!

The **extraordinary** number of volunteer-related hours can be attributed to “a great group of new volunteers who are finding value in giving back to the Ice Age Trail after hiking it,” says Dave Caliebe, Trail Program Manager for the Ice Age Trail Alliance. “They are excited about learning from our long-time Trailbuilding folks, and several individuals have taken the next step, becoming volunteer Crew Leaders.”



Promote THE TRAIL

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

People of all ages and abilities from across the state — and nation — continue to discover the Ice Age Trail.

Awareness Raising Campaigns

The Ice Age Trail continues to be a newsworthy- subject, which people love hearing about. More than 125 Trail-related stories appeared in magazines, newspapers, TV, and on the radio throughout the state and country.

Another First for the Alliance

Ice Age Trail Alliance license plates became available to Wisconsin residents this year, letting Trail enthusiasts show their support while driving their vehicles! Nearly 1,800 people chose to display Trail pride during the program's first 8 months.

Record Participation

The Alliance hosted the fourth Mammoth Hike Challenge in October. A record 7,757 people registered to hike 43 miles on the Trail and visit 3 Trail Communities. 60% of registrants were new to the Challenge! Although a free Challenge, participants generously donated to support the event. Plus, Trail Communities felt the Challenge's economic impact as participants supported Trail Magic—specials or discounts—offered by 60+ businesses along the Trail. And special thanks to AKHG, the principal apparel sponsor of the Mammoth Hike Challenge.

125+ Trail-related stories
appeared in magazines, newspapers, TV, and on the radio!

Kids Get Outside

Alliance educational outreach efforts (Think Outside and Saunters) achieved a milestone: 10,000 fourth-graders registered! These kids got on the Trail while learning about Wisconsin's glacial past, thanks to National Park Foundation support.

Women Explore the Trail—Events Designed by Women, for Women

Trailtessa Retreats encourage women (and girls) to explore the Ice Age Trail, expanding comfort zones through stewardship, snowshoeing, camping, seed collecting, and backpacking events. In 2023, 150 participants built outdoor skills and community, and nearly 2,000 women have participated since the program's 2016 inception.

Volunteers Celebrated

To honor all the ways volunteers and members contribute to the Trail, the Alliance held a Volunteer Celebration. More than 300 attendees gathered for a Trail-style dinner and ribbon-cutting hike along the reconnected Rib Lake Segment (a 15-year project in the making).



4TH
ANNUAL
MAMMOTH CHALLENGE

7,757
REGISTERED

60%
NEW TO THE CHALLENGE



150 women

built outdoor skills and community during the 2023 Trailtessa Retreats.



*First-
ever*

Ice Age Trail Alliance license plates.



10,000 students

discovered the Trail through the 2023 Think Outside and Saunters educational outreach programs.

Accomplishments

BY-THE-NUMBERS

- 100,666 volunteer service hours devoted to Trail-related activities
- 22,174 acres of total land protected for the Trail since 1986
- 10,000 students got on the Trail through Saunters and Think Outside
- 7,757 Mammoth Hike Challenge registrants
- 5,700 memberships
- 4,000 acres monitored by 22 Property Monitors
- 2,092 feet of boardwalk built
- 1,990 volunteers supported the Trail through trailbuilding and outreach
- 1,732 Ice Age Trail Alliance license plates sold (in 8 months)
- 698 miles of blazed Trail
- 538 miles of connecting route
- 539 acres burned in prairie restoration efforts
- 258 feet of retaining wall constructed
- 200 acres of land protected for the Trail
- 201 pounds of native seed collected from 78 plant species
- 150 Trailtessa participants
- 124 feet of bridges built
- 104 hikers completed the Trail, totaling 515 certified Thousand-Miler treks
- 76 stone steps built
- 36 timber steps constructed
- 19 Trail Communities
- 15 miles of sustainable Trail created
- 8 properties protected for the Trail



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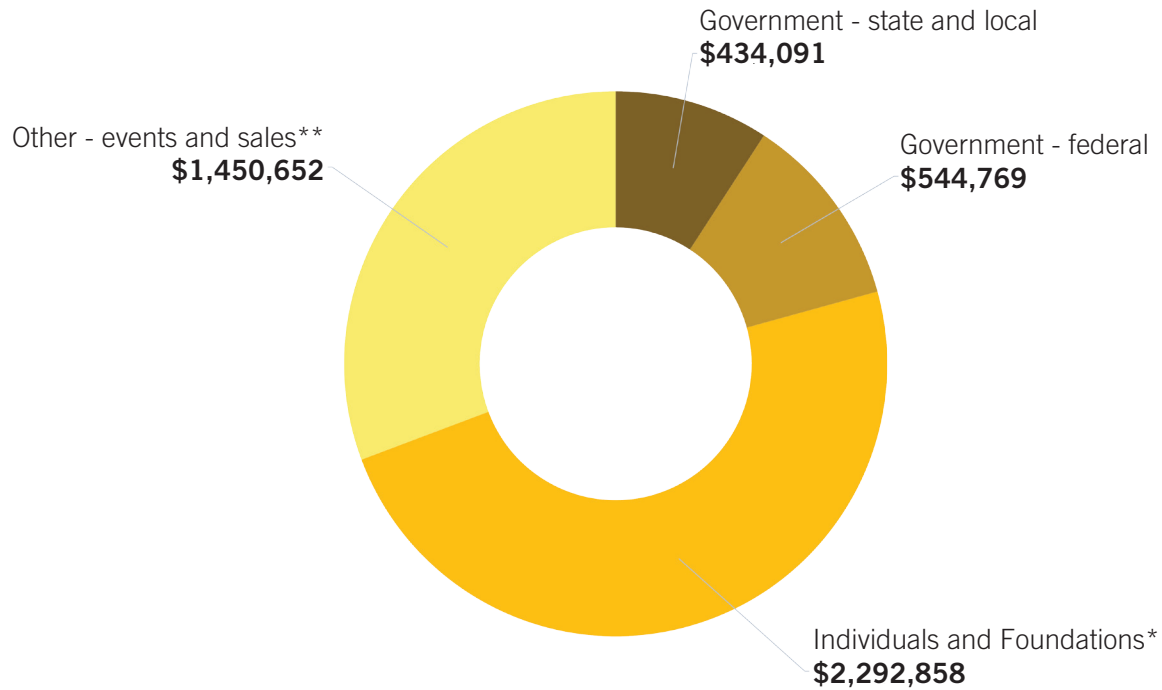
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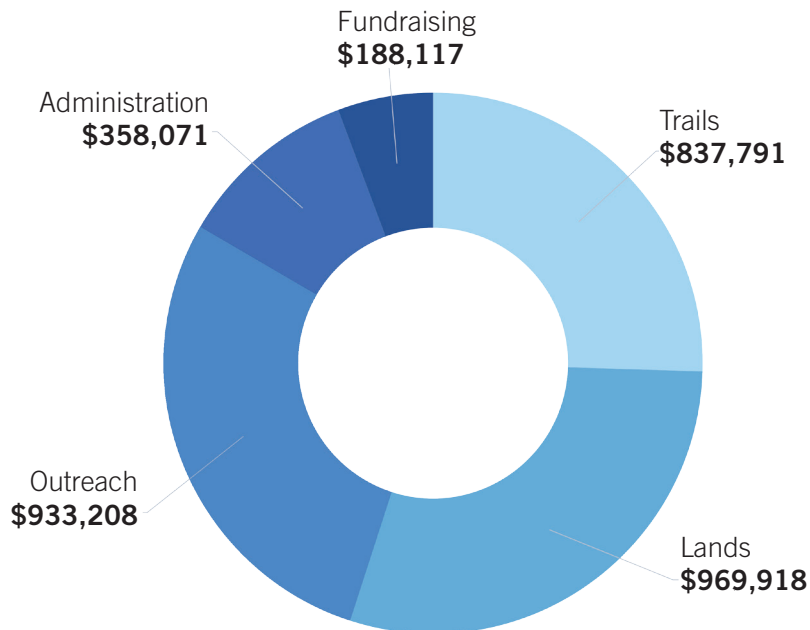
2023 REVENUE



TOTAL REVENUE: \$4,722,370

*includes chapter and in-kind contributions **includes investment income (non-endowment)

2023 EXPENSES



TOTAL EXPENSES: \$3,287,105

Note: these numbers include estimated in-kind services and chapter expenses.

Thank you

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