

Ice Age Trail Alliance, Inc.

Policy: Trail Use

Approved: Board of Directors

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As Amended Through: April 18, 2024

Related Policies and Documents: National Trails System Act, Ice Age National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use, Ice Age National and State Scenic Trail Vision Statement and Attributes, Ice Age National Scenic Trail: A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance, Ice Age National Scenic Trail Certification Criteria, Ice Age Trail Alliance Power Equipment Policy

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1.0 Background

The Ice Age Trail Alliance (the “Alliance”), is a nonprofit corporation with the mission of conserving, creating, maintaining, and promoting the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

The Trail, which is primarily a footpath, was designated a National Scenic Trail in 1980 under the National Trails System Act. The Act provides specific guidelines for Trail use, including:

- A. No recreational motorized use
- B. Snowmobile use may be permitted on segments where deemed appropriate by the Secretary of the Interior.
- C. Motorized use may be allowed in the following manners:
 - 1. By responsible authorities responding to emergency situations (forest fires, serious injury to a trail user, etc.)
 - 2. By employees or representatives of the managing authority to perform trail maintenance or other official resource management functions
 - 3. To enable adjacent landowners or land users to have reasonable access to their lands or timber rights

4. From time to time for any legitimate purpose by private landowners who permit the trail to cross their lands
5. By users of established off-road motorized vehicle trails which cross the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (only for the purpose of crossing the Trail)

The above policy statement acknowledges the right of the Alliance, where it is the managing authority, to issue policies which place stricter limits on the use of motorized vehicles by its employees or representatives (volunteers).

In 1987, the Trail was designated a State Scenic Trail by the Wisconsin State Legislature and Governor. In 2005, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (“WDNR”) adopted NR 1.29 which states, “The Ice Age trail and North Country trail shall be managed primarily as footpaths for pedestrian use.”

In 2002 the National Park Service (“NPS”), WDNR and Alliance (the TRIAD) signed the *Ice Age National and State Scenic Trail Vision Statement and Attributes*, which refers to the Trail as “a continuous footpath.” Section II.F. of the document states, “The long-term goal is an off-road trail for public use on foot...for non-consumptive recreation and a variety of challenge levels, including fully accessible segments. To provide essential connections for long-distance users, the Ice Age Trail might temporarily or permanently utilize portions of other trails that permit uses other than hiking.”

Prepared by the TRIAD, the publication *Ice Age National Scenic Trail: A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance* states the Trail (section 1-11), “is to be developed and managed as a premier hiking trail.”

As an accredited land trust, the Alliance holds property in fee and easement. Nearly all of these easements include the following provisions granting affirmative rights to the Alliance: “The right to permit general public access by foot, snowshoe or ski, but not otherwise, over and across a trail footpath...” and “The right to prohibit public access to all but foot, snowshoe or ski users through the installation of gates or other obstructions.”

While vehicular use for management, maintenance, and stewardship purposes is at times necessary, this Trail Use policy outlines the desired use for a 1,200-mile, nationally significant, footpath, which is minimally disrupted by motorized vehicular use.

2.0 Purpose

This policy states the Alliance position on Trail use, and is guidance for volunteers, managing authorities, and partners along the Trail.

The scope of this policy guides the uses of the Trail tread (the actual walking surface of the Trail), guides uses within the Trail corridor (the maintained area immediately surrounding the tread) and guides uses within 25 feet of either direction from the centerline of the Trail tread (the Federal Section 106 archeological and historic review

and Section 7 Natural Heritage Inventory compliance area required by federal and state law).

3.0 Authority for this Policy

As only one of the managing authorities for the 1,200-mile Trail, the authority of the Alliance to enforce this policy is limited to certain situations:

- A. The Alliance has the authority to set Trail use policy on lands it owns and lands where it holds a recorded easement, or there is a recorded deed restriction, and where the language of these documents permits. Such easements and deed restrictions generally limit public use to “foot, snowshoe or ski, but not otherwise.”
- B. Where the Alliance is the managing authority but does not hold a real estate interest in the property, such as handshake and license agreements, the Alliance may designate authorized uses of the Trail consistent with this policy.
- C. Certain lands acquired with State or Federal funding may be deed restricted in ways that affect how the lands may be used.
- D. This policy clarifies the official policy of the organization for volunteers and partners.

4.0 Primary Ice Age Trail Use

The Ice Age Trail shall be managed primarily as a footpath for pedestrian use, including hiking, walking, backpacking, bird watching, photography, nature appreciation and educational activities related to the Trail.

- E. Uses prohibited on the Trail include:
 - Motorized or wheeled vehicles used by the general public, except that wheelchairs and strollers may be used where terrain is appropriate.
 - Horses, except where the Trail is co-located with an existing equestrian trail.
 - Pet animals, except for dogs on leashes not exceeding eight feet.

5.0 Secondary Ice Age Trail Uses

Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are allowable activities on the Trail. Except in circumstances where the Trail passes through an area designated by the managing authority for groomed cross-country skiing, considerations for cross-country skiing shall not affect the manner in which the Trail is designed or constructed. Hikers and

snowshoers may be required by a managing authority to travel adjacent to a segment designated or groomed for cross-country skiing.

Snowmobile use may be permitted on the Ice Age Trail where deemed appropriate by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior and the managing authority responsible for the segment as allowed by federal law 16 U.S.C. 1241.

6.0 Trail Maintenance Uses

This policy strives to inspire a desired future condition for the Trail that increasingly diminishes motorized vehicle use on the Trail for management, maintenance, or land stewardship purposes.

- A. The use of walk-behind and self-propelled mowers, chainsaws, power pruners or similar non-vehicular power-operated equipment on the Trail is permitted. Power equipment operators must comply with Alliance and any related managing authority policies that govern the use of power equipment for Trail related purposes.
- B. Mechanized grooming equipment on segments designated by the managing authority for groomed cross-country skiing is permitted.
- C. The use of tractors, ATVs, ORVs and other motorized forms of transportation within the Trail corridor to perform routine Trail management, maintenance, or land stewardship activities is only permitted under certain circumstances.
- D. Use of four-wheeled riding lawn mowers or lawn tractors, while not encouraged, may be deemed appropriate for use in some landscapes. Trail design and tread characteristics shall be evaluated by the local Alliance chapter and Alliance staff to arrive at an ‘appropriate use’ determination. The local Trail chapter and trail maintainer must recognize that use of such a mower represents a compromise of this policy. Overall width of riding mowers should not exceed 32 inches and tire design should minimize impact.

7.0 Exclusions

This policy does not apply to rail-trails, connecting roads, or any other multiple-use trails that have been incorporated into the route of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, either permanently or temporarily, by the mutual consent of the TRIAD and the managing authority responsible for the segment. Examples of such trails are the Ahnapee State Trail, Tuscobia State Trail, and Gandy Dancer State Trail.

- A. This policy does not affect private landowner rights on lands the Trail crosses that are not subject to a recorded Trail easement or deed restriction that is consistent with this policy.

- B. This policy does not affect other public trails that may cross portions of Trail lands.