



North Star

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2025

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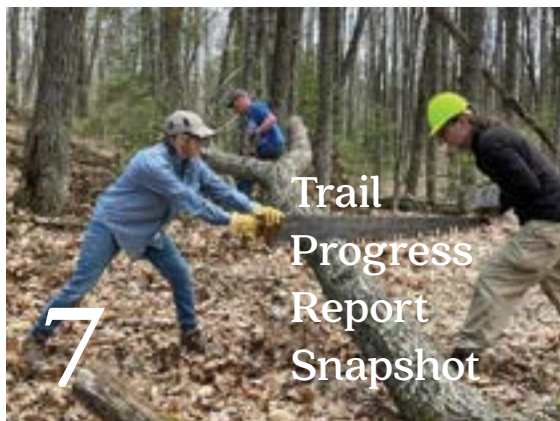
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Visit northcountrytrail.org/staff to message NCTA staff members directly. Email hq@northcountrytrail.org or call 866-445-3628 with general inquiries.

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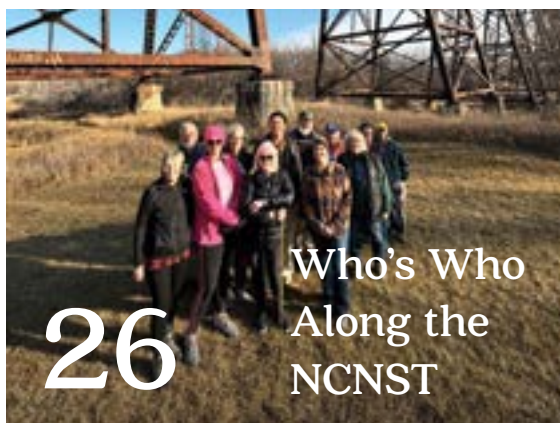
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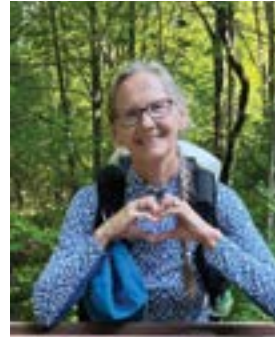
On the Cover

NCNST in Wisconsin, near Drummond and Grandview.

Photo by Sandra Devanie

Trailhead

JAN ULFERTS STEWART, PRESIDENT, NCTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Your board of directors is committed to making smart choices so we can meet our goal of increasing permanently protected trail miles. This ambitious goal is a collaborative cycle of volunteer engagement, advocacy, financial health, and fundraising. Each element strengthens the others: Engaged volunteers drive advocacy, advocacy

attracts funding, and funding sustains our collective efforts - ultimately ensuring the trail's protection.

The NCTA is incredibly fortunate to have a solid base of dedicated volunteers like you! Your passion raises awareness, builds momentum, and fosters public support for effective advocacy. Advocacy efforts expand your grassroots efforts to influence policies that support the trail. The stories and connections built by volunteers and advocates translate to success in fundraising. Finally, a strong financial position is necessary to sustain day-to-day operations, and to enable both volunteer efforts and advocacy to thrive.

The NCTA is well-positioned to support these components. Our 2025 budget is balanced, and we have a solid operating reserve and a growing endowment to provide a strong financial base. These intertwined efforts form the foundation of our plan to protect the trail for generations to come. With your dedication, we are confident in achieving our shared vision. Thank you for being an essential part of this campaign for the future!

Looking ahead, I'm pleased to introduce Tom Gilbert as the NCTA's very first honorary board member. Tom is a pillar of the trail's history. In the early 1970s, he arranged meetings in seven states to introduce the proposed trail route. Subsequently, he was instrumental in preparing a management plan for the trail, then put in charge of implementing it. Accordingly, he served as the National Park Service's first Superintendent of the North Country National Scenic Trail, until his retirement in 2011. But retirement did not signal the end of his influence. Tom still actively participates on a number of NCTA committees. "I'm happy to support the trail in any way I can be of assistance," is his ever-supportive refrain. The recent decision to designate North Country Trail as a unit of the National Park System was a capstone to his 40-year campaign. Tom's guidance continues to be invaluable to the board, staff, and volunteers. Thank you Tom, for your unwavering support.

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The content theme of the Winter issue is **State of the Trail**. You'll see an impressive compilation of what our trail community accomplished last year, and what it's set up to achieve this year.

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Trailhead

JAN ULFERTS STEWART (CONTINUED)

To our members retiring from the board - Jaron Nyhof, Dennis Garrett, and Jeff Van Winkle - we extend our heartfelt gratitude. Your inspiring leadership has been an important influence on your colleagues across the trail. Thank you.

We are also excited to welcome Claire Drolshagen Puck and Nathan Miller to the board. Claire has spent over 20 years in public service, holds a master's degree in public policy, and has expertise in conservation and climate initiatives. Nathan's master's degree in regional planning, background in outdoor recreation, and skills in planning, conservation, and outreach are huge assets. We look forward to the fresh perspectives and expertise you bring to our team!

As we enter a new year, I want to express my deepest appreciation for our incredible North Country Trail community of hikers, maintainers, volunteers, and supporters. Together, we will continue to protect and enhance the trail we all cherish. I wish you a joyful year filled with friendships and adventures.



Meet the entire NCTA Board of Directors at northcountrytrail.org/board-of-directors.

ANDREA KETCHMARK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Photo by
Andrea Ketchmark

As we welcome 2025, it's the perfect time to reflect on the remarkable journey of the North Country National Scenic Trail and the incredible people who bring it to life. Spanning over 4,800 miles, the North Country Trail is more than a path through diverse landscapes - it's a testament to the power of collective vision, dedication, and community spirit.

This issue of the North Star is filled with stories and highlights from 2024 that showcase the passion and perseverance of our trail community. From the tireless efforts of volunteers who built and maintained trail, to the success of outreach programs that connected new audiences to the trail, every accomplishment reminds us what we can achieve together.

Looking ahead, 2025 promises to be a transformative year. With the launch of a new strategic plan, we're taking bold steps to enhance our capacity to complete and safeguard the trail and its corridor for future generations. Key priorities include advancing route planning, improving project management capacity, telling more stories about the places we protect, and building the staff and volunteer workforce to make it happen. Together, these initiatives will ensure that the North Country Trail continues to inspire and connect people for decades.

We're also focusing on deepening connections within the trail community. Whether you're a trail builder or user, donor or community partner, your involvement is critical to the trail's future. The stories in this issue showcase the incredible impact of your contributions, and serve as a call to action for everyone who loves and values this trail.

Here's to a new year filled with progress, partnership, and shared purpose. Let's keep moving forward together to protect the North Country Trail forever.

CHRIS LOUDENSLAGER, NCNST SUPERINTENDENT, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Photo by Kate Lemon

As we usher in 2025 and look forward to another incredible year of accomplishments and milestones, great hikes, new friends, and a whole lot of fun, I'd also like to take note that this May will mark my 10-year anniversary with the National Park Service North Country Trail staff.

What we've become as an organization in the last decade, how we've grown - both literally and operationally - and what we have all collectively accomplished to elevate the status of the North Country National Scenic Trail is truly quite astounding.

The goals and priorities Jan and Andrea spoke of, and specifically in regard to increasing the number of miles of permanently protected trail, advancing route planning, and improving project management, are all achievable realities that were beyond our scope of possibilities not that long ago. These are exciting times, and I do personally predict that 2025 will mark the start of a new era for the North Country Trail. That is my resolution for the New Year.

Of course, we all recognize that none of this would be possible without the passionate and committed community of volunteers, members, supporters,

advocates, and hikers that we so completely rely on and wholeheartedly appreciate and respect. Your work and accomplishments that are highlighted in this issue of the North Star are a source of pride across the trail and throughout the communities that lay claim to their portion of the trail; and are worthy of national recognition across the entirety of the National Trails System. While your work “puts us on the map” and shows the world what we are and what we can be, it is your voice and your stories that make us heard and recognized by those who aren’t aware of what we are, what we do, and what we need.

Share your voice and stories broadly and with pride (and your volunteer hours as well). The longest National Scenic Trail in the United States exists because of you. Invaluable lands and resources are conserved and protected because of you. You are helping to achieve what Congress intended when it determined the North Country National Scenic Trail was something our nation needed. The North Country Trail is needed, now more than ever - and your story and voice need to be heard.

Mark Your Calendar

Hike Fest 2025



AUGUST 20-23, 2025
NORTH DAKOTA

Volunteers of the Dakota Prairie, Sheyenne River Valley, and Central Flyway Chapters welcome all to Hike Fest 2025. A variety of trail use opportunities will be offered across North Dakota’s 400+ miles of North Country National Scenic Trail.

northcountrytrail.org/events

2025 Celebration Cancellation

After careful consideration and discussion, the North Country Trail Association’s annual Celebration event has been cancelled for 2025. This choice was made in light of several logistical challenges, and rather than push forward under less-than-ideal circumstances, it was in everyone’s best interest to explore new ways to connect with our community. This also offers the opportunity to reimagine how to best engage and recognize our incredible volunteers and partners.

In lieu of Celebration, you are still invited to North Dakota this August for HikeFest: A multi-day event organized and directed by the Central Flyway, Sheyenne River Valley, and Dakota Prairie Chapters. Details will emerge on the NCTA Events Calendar in the early spring, and in North Dakota Chapter communications.

Blazing a Trail

for your future has never been easier. Do you have a plan for the future? Just like maps guide you on your adventure, we can help you navigate your legacy plan.

“The North Country Trail has been a part of our lives since the 1970s. We want the trail to be available and well-maintained for the enjoyment and inspiration of many generations to come. And we need the North Country Trail Association leading the way as the key partner of the National Park Service. Being part of the NCTA Legacy Society is one of the best ways we can help ensure these goals are achieved.”

— TOM AND JANIS GILBERT

northcountrytrail.org/ways-to-give



LEGACY SOCIETY
NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

As a member your support goes a long way.



Join or renew today
northcountrytrail.org

In Memoriam

We thank the following for their dedication to our Trail Community. Please consider taking a hike on the North Country Trail in their memory.

Alan Adsmond, Michigan

Lou Adsmond, Michigan

Jim Belote, Michigan

Carol Bertucci, Michigan

Kingery Clingenpeel,
Michigan

Mary Coffin, New York

Jeffrey Connelly, Minnesota

Joanne Dawson, Michigan

Jacob Detrie, Pennsylvania

Richard Eiler, Pennsylvania

Ken Fisher, Michigan

Ellen Hass, Michigan

Ron Klinger, Michigan

Terry Lowery, Michigan

Mike Milnes, Pennsylvania

Ralph Powell, Michigan

Eugene Schmidt, Jr.,
Michigan

Curt Slabaugh, Michigan

Nita Tewksbury, North
Dakota

Charles Thompson, Jr., Ohio

If the NCTA has inadvertently overlooked anyone, we apologize, and please let us know: hq@northcountrytrail.org.

HIKE 100 CHALLENGE



"This challenge was one of several goals for my 70th year. Because the others took a long time, and because of Northern Minnesota's legendary mosquitoes, I didn't start until October. We had a gorgeous fall, then rain and a huge snowstorm, and below-zero temperatures followed. The days got shorter and because I still work full-time, it was tough to get it done just on weekends. But I finished - and getting to walk several times with my grandkids was frosting on the cake."

- MYRNA HOWES, MINNESOTA

As of early January 2025, more than **1,300** trail users signed up for the Hike 100 Challenge. Will you?

northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge.

2024 Trail Progress Report Snapshot

These are trailwide efforts and achievements, reflecting the impressive impact this trail community made as a whole in 2024. Starting on the next page, you can dive into the details of what each NCTA Chapter and Affiliate accomplished at the local level.

Current NCNST miles (total)		1,217 volunteers contributed 64,253 hours in 2024, a value of*		
4,904		\$2,151,816		
Current off-road miles		Number of volunteers who earned chainsaw certification from the National Park Service		
3,310		61		
3,356	64	42	56	11,233
miles of NCNST maintained	miles of new NCNST built	miles of roadwalk eliminated	bridges built or repaired	feet of puncheon, turnpike, and boardwalk built or replaced
460	33	6	165	27
miles of trail blazed	trailhead kiosks updated or installed	permanent trail protection projects completed	Chapter and Affiliate-led hikes with 6,297 total participants	youth corps and programs partnered with to build and maintain trail

*includes volunteer advocacy and travel hours



TRAIL
WORK

Staff State of the Trail 2024

BY THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION STAFF

What is the most exciting work or project you look forward to in 2025 and beyond?

Lauren Kennedy-Little, Regional Trail Coordinator

The Wampum Chapter has been working hard for years to negotiate moving trail off-road in major gap areas, and they have recently made excellent progress in Ohio. Partnering during the planning phase has involved ODNR, a local tourism group, a Wild and Scenic River, and numerous private landowners. This reroute will eliminate 2.5 miles of roadwalk, and showcase a historic canal and lock system, weaving on and off a towpath. Everyone is eager to build new trail here, and it's a beautiful addition. This is particularly exciting for me, as I've been involved in this project's management since I was hired almost two years ago.

Matt Rowbotham, GIS Program Manager

I'm looking forward to improving how we collect and use field data with ArcGIS Field Maps. This tool will allow us to bring our existing maps and resources directly into the field, using familiar and accessible hardware like smartphones. Field Maps makes it possible to not only view trail data in real-time, but to

add new information and updates right from the trail itself. Users will be able to document trail information, and capture photos and notes - all while standing on the trail. This means decisions about trail management and planning can be based on the most current and reliable data available.

Kenny Wawsczyk, Regional Trail Coordinator

Any time you can remove 1.75 miles of trail off a highway (M-94), I have to lean into that project. Superior Shoreline Chapter volunteers spent many 2024 workdays opening the trail corridor and doing tread work for this four-mile reroute south of Munising in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. They also coordinated with a youth conservation corps (SEEDS EcoCorps) for a couple weeks of major benching work. I can't wait to see the map change and have hikers experience this new section of trail later in 2025.

Valerie Bader, Director of Trail Operations

A contractor is helping us develop a trailwide training strategy. This has been a frequently requested need for years, and will provide great continuity for the volunteer training experience. In 2025, we will further develop the curriculum and materials, and start to roll out our official *Blue Blaze Academy* programs and events. Special shout out to the Buckeye Trail Association, who first coined the name *Blue Blaze Academy* (and

A sunrise in St. Ignace (MI) during 2024 Celebration.

Photo by Heather Ertle



Scouting a new trail route along a canal and lock in Ohio.

Photo by Dale Webb

graciously agreed to share it), and is gearing up for their third annual Blue Blaze Academy training event this spring.

Karen Raab, Finance and Operations Manager

Every day I work with awesome volunteers, assisting with

paperwork to complete their projects. I'm excited about new and improved accounting processes coming down the pipeline from our developing strategic plans. In my nearly three years with the NCTA, I've seen amazing growth within our operations and across the entire trail.

What was the most rewarding project you worked on in 2024 and why was it the most rewarding?

Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director

Strategic planning may sound boring, but it's one of the most important things we do as an organization. It ensures we take time to think about where we need to be in the future, and sets a strong course to get us there. Just like trail building, it's a labor of love for our mission, and it's exciting to see the plan take shape.

Nancy Brozek, Director of Development and Communications

Last October, I attended the National Park Friends Alliance fall meeting in Fish Camp, California, home of Yosemite National Park. Surrounded by the awe-inspiring beauty, I reflected on the North Country National Scenic Trail, which holds its own sense of wonder. Our trail community works together to bring those same feelings to countless volunteers and hikers. We see your accomplishments each year, and I find it rewarding to have a small part in telling your stories.

Heather Ertle, Database and Membership Administrator

Celebration has been my favorite "project" each year. I love to interact in person with our members and volunteers. I feel more connected to our mission when I get to experience, through hikes and conversations, why people love the North Country Trail. Also rewarding are the sweet sunrises I get to bask in on the way to opening registration each morning.

Kate Lemon, Marketing and Communications Coordinator

The NCTA was invited to be featured on both an episode of *Under the Radar Michigan* on PBS, and in a Pure

Michigan Trails video. (Pure Michigan is the main travel and tourism brand for the state.) Both experiences were super fun to participate in, and it was very cool to see the trail (and our work) be spotlighted so publicly. I look forward to helping continue that ascent and introducing more people to the trail.



Tom Daldin with Kate Lemon in Lowell (MI) during the filming of an episode of *Under the Radar Michigan*.

Photo provided by Kate Lemon

Share one of your favorite stories from the trail this year.

Matthew Davis, Regional Trail Coordinator

While opening a new trail segment at the Lake Brekken-Holmes Recreation Area in North Dakota, we recognized volunteers ranging in age from 15 to 70, as well

as our fabulous agency partners at the Bureau of Reclamation. We received kind words from a staff member at U.S. Senator Kevin Cramer's office. Then we went for a hike of this new segment, enjoying sweeping views of the recreation area, McClusky Canal, and the City of Turtle Lake. The group included members from all three North Dakota NCTA Chapters, the local community, partner agencies and their families, the senator's staffer, and even a stalwart volunteer who drove from Minnesota. It was a true North Country Trail community gathering!



Opening new NCT at the Lake Brekken-Holmes Recreation Area (ND).

Photo by Matt Davis

Paul Gagnon, Director of Trail Protection

Michael Sekely of the Marquette Area Chapter and I visited the remote cabin of the Saari family in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. En route, we tramped through a swamp to view some old-growth white pine trees. I only had running shoes with me to wear, but the trees were pretty impressive and worth getting wet feet to see.

Alison Sanchez, Administrative Assistant

Seeing familiar faces that come to visit Headquarters, as well as new ones. I especially love when people bring their pets to visit!



State *of the* Trail

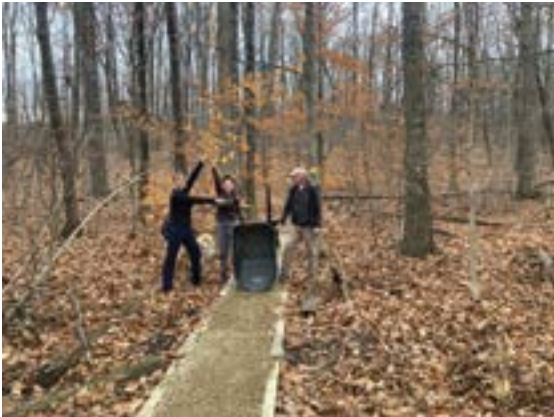
CHAPTERS, AFFILIATES, PARTNERS



VERMONT

Middlebury Area Land Trust (Affiliate)

Every North Country Trail hiker we came across in 2024 complimented the level of maintenance and signage on the trail in Vermont, which fills our trail team with pride in our work. Some of that work last year included installing more than 200 feet of puncheon and 800 feet of turnpike. The Middlebury College football and baseball teams volunteered with us on several occasions, too. We hosted multiple volunteer workdays and four “Saturday on the TAM” hikes on the shared Trail Around Middlebury (TAM) and North Country National Scenic Trail. This year, we will secure partnership agreements for essential trail infrastructure to cross Otter Creek.



AmeriCorps members Madelyn Clem (left) and Celi Byers (middle), and long-time volunteer John Derick (right), put the finishing touches on a turnpike on shared Trail Around Middlebury / North Country Trail (VT).

Photo by Middlebury Area Land Trust



NEW YORK

Adirondack Mountain Club (Affiliate)

Our most significant accomplishment in 2024 is the completion of the new Jones Hill trail segment, from the Big Pond Trail to the Dirgylot Hill parking area in the Hoffman Notch Wilderness Area. This project has taken eight years due legal and pandemic setbacks.

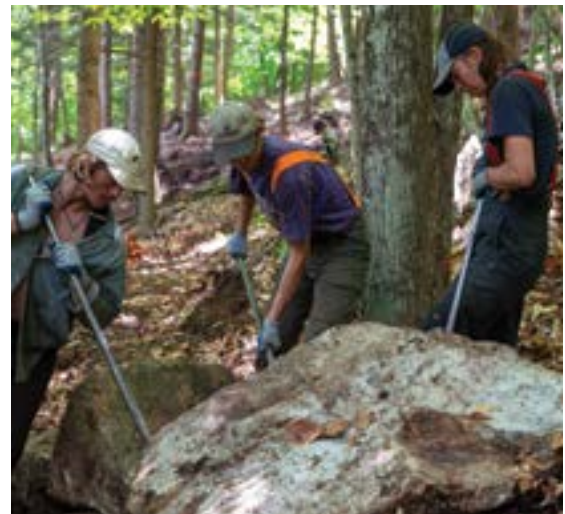
Our fearless leader, Mary Coffin, wanted to see this trail finished. She passed away unexpectedly in late 2024, but she knew the trail was approved for official marking. Her legacy will live on forever on Jones Hill. We thank the Adirondack Mountain Club's Professional Trail Crew for their help here, too:

They built a half-mile of new trail tread, installed 37 new drainages, 25 feet of rock retaining wall, and 11 rock steps. We also established a new relationship with the Adirondack 46ers trail crew, led six work hikes, eliminated roadwalk, installed a 25-foot bridge, updated signage, painted blazes, and flagged multiple miles of trail. We thank the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for their strong partnership, as well as the NCTA and the Finger Lakes Trail Conference's Onondaga Chapter. In 2025, we'll build a lot of trail. Join us if you can!



Bob Rosati installing NCNST signage near the summit of Jones Hill (NY).

Photo by Kim Putnam



The Adirondack Mountain Club Professional Trail Crew on Jones Hill (NY).

Photo by David Hyde



Central New York Chapter volunteers.

Photo by Michael Daly



Central New York Chapter

Last October, we completed the Pixley Falls State Park / Clark Hill State Forest reroute in the foothills of the

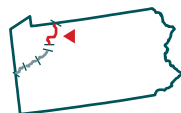
Adirondacks. This was the culmination of five years of planning and authorization seeking, followed by three seasons of trail construction. The new route replaces eight miles of state highway roadwalk with a delightful walk in the woods, over hills and across brooks in a largely undeveloped forest. We also made great progress rerouting the trail between the Erie Canal Trailway through Rome. This stretch of the trail is unavoidably urban and suburban, but the reroute takes advantage of quieter streets and parks. Other Chapter projects included renovating trailhead kiosks, offering guided hikes, tabling at local events, partnering with an Eagle Scout, installing an equipment storage shed, and creating a new Facebook page for better outreach. This year, we look forward to continuing our reroute work, improving landowner relations, and welcoming the new NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator for our region once they've onboarded.



Finger Lakes Trail Conference (Affiliate)

We maintained more than 400 miles of our shared trail in 2024, plus many loops and spurs. We constructed new trail and eliminated roadwalk. We installed a number of structures, including a 36-foot bridge and many feet of puncheon. Other bridges and lean-tos were repaired, as well as kiosks and signage, and we secured a number of permanent trail easements. In July, high-wind and tornado events

affected Central New York. A tremendous amount of trees fell, closing several miles of trail. Fortunately, we had nearly 60 certified sawyers at the ready. Thanks to them and many others, the trail was reopened, rerouted, and cleaned up well. We received help from Hammondsport students who pruned and removed blowdown in Birdseye Hollow State Park, and from college students who joined on some workdays. Our county hike series covered Steuben County in 2024 and continued to be popular. We offered a Hike 101 Series, too. Look for more trail use opportunities with us in 2025! Otherwise, we'll be maintaining the trail, filling leadership vacancies, teaming up with the American Hiking Society for another Volunteer Vacation, and protecting more miles of trail.



PENNSYLVANIA

Allegheny National Forest Chapter

In 2024, over 100 different volunteers helped us maintain trail and run our special events. Our 12th annual Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge last June welcomed 199 participants and a record 36 people completed the full 100 miles. (Nearly 150 others completed 25, 50, or 75 miles.) To engage more people, we incorporated some themes to our trail use opportunities, including a New Year's Day hike, tree identification, a scavenger hunt, and an intro to backpacking. We fostered partnerships with the U.S. Forest Service, Wilderness Volunteers, and the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. We refreshed nearly 25 miles of blazes, built and repaired puncheon and bridges, installed water bars and signage, and repaired and stained nine kiosks and two shelters. This year, we aim to get designs approved for two large bridges, improve outreach efforts, train more volunteers, and construct a few reroutes to improve the trail experience.



Left: This group improved puncheon in a marshy area.

Photo by Bill Lallman



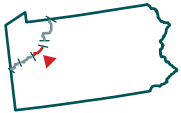
Right: Hikers enjoy a beautiful summer day in the Allegheny National Forest (PA).

Photo by Alisha Glasgow



One of the many bridges the Clarion Chapter maintains for Cook Forest State Park (PA).

Photo by Gary Rhodes



Clarion County Chapter

PENNSYLVANIA

Last year, we met with the NCTA Director of Trail Protection and the Trust for Public Land to examine private land parcels along our Chapter's trail segment - we are preparing to discuss trail protection opportunities with these landowners. We are also route planning with the Pennsylvania Game Commission to improve the trail and eliminate roadwalk. Last year, we replaced two bridges and repaired one, built a set of steps, and recruited and trained several new trail adopters. Our volunteers continue their weekly workdays to maintain our 100 miles of the North Country Trail. This year, we'll work alongside the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy to construct a half-mile reroute away from a notoriously wet area. Watch the NCTA Events Calendar for our monthly hikes and two annual river paddles!



Volunteers learn about trail adoption at the Cook Forest Environmental Center (PA).

Photo by Sandra Craig



PENNSYLVANIA

Butler County Chapter

Mid-June, we began installing steps on the trail in Moraine State Park, with a plan to complete five to six steps each morning. Despite weather delays and regular trail maintenance scheduled elsewhere, the crew built 35 steps - completing the project - by mid-July. In October, alongside the Butler Outdoor Club, our volunteers finished constructing a 24-foot bridge over a ravine in Moraine State Park. We refreshed 90% of our blue blazes in one day during our Blaze the Trail Day event. A local Scout troop helped us clear old bridge material from the side of the trail one day, and we engaged in several community outreach events. It's been encouraging to see our local partnerships strengthen and thus, our community grows.



OHIO AND PENNSYLVANIA

Wampum Chapter

We had another busy year of trail building and maintenance across Eastern Ohio and Western Pennsylvania. Volunteers upgraded signage and campsites, refreshed many miles of blazes, and rehabilitated 60 feet of bog bridge. Our Closing the Gaps Committee worked with NCTA staff to explore permanent trail protection options. We have 10 different gaps to consider with a committee member assigned to each; we're optimistic that some of our roadwalks will be eliminated this year. Our amazing Hiking Committee scheduled 44 hikes last year - many were themed, including the annual Bigfoot Search and several full moon hikes. Volunteers represented the Chapter at



The Wampum Chapter's bog bridge project in Pennsylvania State Game Lands.

Photo by Dave Brewer



On the Misingwa Land Trust property (PA), a high school senior planted trees as a sound barrier and the Wampum Chapter added another 15 saplings throughout this campsite.

Photo by Dennis Garrett

more than a dozen local events, and we partnered with groups such as the Student Conservation Association, Eagle Scouts, Knights of Columbus, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission for trail use events and trail projects. We look forward to improving our maintenance program, closing more trail gaps, and collaboratively increasing awareness of the trail.

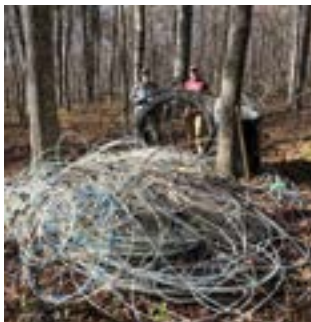


OHIO

Buckeye Trail Association (Affiliate)

Our Troy and Caesar Creek Section Supervisors relocated more than five miles of trail, allowing users to experience local parks, ecological

wonders, and historical features. This project also gave way to a wonderful variety of new partnerships. We are working alongside the NCTA and *Arc of Appalachia to open a new 1.25-mile section of trail near Pike State Forest in Ohio. The Student Conservation Association, American Conservation Coalition, and American Conservation Experience assisted in building more than six miles of new trail in the Wayne National Forest. Each organization supported 12 weeks of work, totaling 8,000 hours



Cleaning up leftover maple syrup tubing to open a new 1.25-mile section of trail in Pike County (OH).

Photo by Andrea Jaeger

of support! We partnered with the Hocking-Athens-Perry County Community Action (HAPCAP) program that involved eight kids and an advisor, building trail and removing invasive species.

Other successful notes include great participation in monthly hikes



HikerBabes in Ohio, on a trail maintenance hike.

Photo by Ann Furste

across the state, our annual Blue Blaze Academy volunteer training, and the successful maintenance of nearly 500 miles of shared North Country Trail / Buckeye Trail. A top priority for 2025 is continuing to grow our community through improved volunteer management and support, increased storytelling, and a new website.

**The Arc of Appalachia is a nonprofit interested in acquiring and preserving land parcels for nature preserves in southwestern Ohio and West Virginia.*



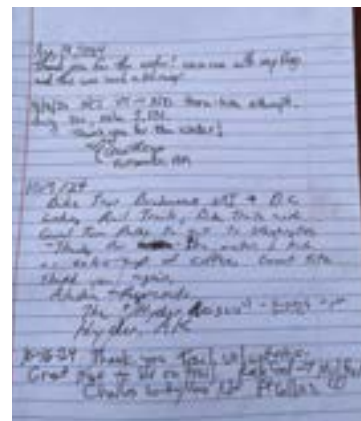
OHIO

Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association (Affiliate)

One of our devout, local volunteers, Larry Muller, maintains two

campsites along the Wabash Cannonball / North Country Trail. Both sites have registry books, which Larry frequently takes pictures of and shares with the NORTA community. Many of the comments are messages of gratitude and appreciation for the trail, which are heartwarming and encouraging to read. This inspiration helped throughout 2024 as we maintained 15 miles of trail, and constructed a new trailhead, parking lot, and informational kiosk. We also worked with an Eagle Scout to install a bike

repair station on the trail. In 2025, we'll continue to improve the campsites, support route planning, and seek partnership with the Oak Openings Metropark to host a volunteer trail maintenance hike.



Hiker registry from the Wye Campsite in Northwestern Ohio.

Photo by Larry Muller



VOLUNTEERS



The Chief Baw Beese Chapter's third annual Winter Solstice Luminary Night Hike (MI).

Photo by Nikki Sobell



MICHIGAN

Chief Baw Beese Chapter

After many years of planning and requesting, we received permission from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to construct a much-needed bridge in the Lost Nation State Game Area. Our volunteers represented our Chapter and the trail at multiple community events throughout the year and hosted 14 group hikes with nearly 150 participants in total. We built 20 feet of new boardwalk, improved bridges, installed signage, and completed 18 miles of fresh



A Chief Baw Beese Chapter hike in Lost Nation State Game Area (MI).

Photo by Nikki Sobell

blazing. We also established contact with nine new landowners (about potentially hosting the trail on their land instead of on roads) and started a Chapter newsletter. This year, we're eager to start building that bridge and improving the trail in the state game area, and to construct new trail north of Jonesville.



MICHIGAN

Chief Noonday Chapter

In 2024, our Chapter really expanded its reach. We were featured in Encore magazine (greater Kalamazoo community); we recruited 11 new members; hosted more than 150 hikers for our Shoe Years' Day Hike (37 first-timers); and grew partnership with organizations such as the Grand Rapids Audubon Club. We offered a variety of themed hikes throughout the year and attended outreach events as well. Our volunteers refreshed 44 miles of blazes on roadwalk between Marshall and Hillsdale; extended puncheon in Fort Custer Recreation Area; built 70 feet of stairs on the Augusta Prairie; and installed four benches built by one volunteer. We also added and updated signage, and built and refurbished brochure boxes. We look forward to moving more trail off-road via easements and improved landowner relations, and diversifying our outreach efforts to meet different kinds of trail users.



Top: Chief Noonday Chapter volunteer Bob Cooley built four benches that were installed along the trail in the Yankee Springs Recreation Area (MI).

Bottom: Boardwalk in the Augusta Prairie (MI).

Photos by Chief Noonday Chapter



MICHIGAN

Western Michigan Chapter

Last year, we established a small committee to focus on board member succession planning. After a number of productive meetings, we're excited to welcome six new board members! Our volunteers maintained more than 140 miles of trail; repaired one mile of puncheon; installed 72 additional feet of puncheon; repaired two bridges; and built one new bridge. Across the 10 group hikes we hosted, we welcomed 64 first-time hikers. In Newaygo County, we partnered with Coolbough Natural Area and West Michigan Land Conservancy to help with trail construction, maintenance, and habitat restoration. (This is not North Country Trail but nearby, and we are stewarding our partnership with these organizations.) In Kent County, we established a relationship with the Fallasburg Historical Society, which led to an agreement for both an existing 0.05-mile and a future 0.16-mile reroute on their property, which will be completed this year. This section will also feature a much-needed primitive campsite that includes water and an outhouse. This year, we're also hopeful for U.S. Forest Service approval of multiple reroutes.



MICHIGAN

Spirit of the Woods Chapter

We have had great turnouts for monthly hikes, which provide introduction and motivation for prospective volunteers. More than 300 people hiked with us throughout the year! Consequently, we're thrilled to welcome more volunteers to cover membership, publicity, trail angel coordination, and hike planning. Joan Young volunteered to be our Chapter's Trail Protection Coordinator, and with guidance from NCTA staff, is reaching out to landowners to help us move



Left to right: Sue Squire, Gary Hearing, Peg Gramas, and Miki Slawinski on the Spirit of the Woods Chapter's December 2024 hike.

Photo by Loren Bach



Jack Barnhill (left) and Dan Driesenga work on a turnpike project near Baldwin, MI.

Photo by Peter Bennett

more trail off-road. We constructed 184 feet of raised turnpike, repaired boardwalk at Sterling Marsh, and blazed 15 miles of trail. For the turnpike project, we partnered with a SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew and First Ward Community Service from Saginaw. Thanks

to collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, we are creating 10 kiosks in the Manistee National Forest - a project we aim to complete in 2025. Through an environmental study, the Forest Service also found potential for wood turtles in our area - so during mowing season, we'll have a designated Turtle Spotter walking ahead to move any from the mower path.



MICHIGAN

Grand Traverse Chapter

Over the course of the summer, we tackled a number of bridge and puncheon renewal projects. The largest was with a SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew, who helped renew three 12-foot-long plank bridges north of Mesick. We refreshed many miles of blazes, added signage, and installed two new trailhead kiosks. We collaborated with a private landowner on a trail use agreement, and represented the NCTA at many community events. We also hosted 14 group hikes with a total of 181 participants! Volunteers began construction on a new trail segment into Kalkaska, which will replace a two-mile roadwalk. That reroute and the repair of more bridges and puncheon are our top priorities for 2025. We also aim to offer enough hikes throughout the year to cover our Chapter's entire 107 miles of North Country Trail.



Grand Traverse Chapter hike at Sand Lakes Quiet Area (MI).

Photo by Seth Stein



VOLUNTEERS



Puncheon project near Russian Creek at North Central Michigan College.

Photo provided by Duane Lawton



MICHIGAN

Jordan Valley 45° Chapter

Community was a strong theme for us in 2024. We led monthly group hikes; installed new interpretive panels in Petoskey; worked with staff at North Central Michigan College to replace 72 feet of puncheon; printed thousands of Chapter brochures and maps; and are working with a landowner to eliminate a roadwalk near Elmira. In total, our volunteers maintained more than 70 miles of trail. They also installed water diversion structures and slope stabilization devices in the Jordan Valley. In 2025, we plan to eliminate the aforementioned roadwalk and continue hosting hikes for our community.



Jordan Valley 45° Chapter members at 2024 Celebration.



MICHIGAN

Harbor Springs Chapter

We strive to host monthly hikes and are not afraid of the cold and snow! To provide our participants with the best experience, we maintained 49 miles of trail in 2024. The bridges south of Goose Pond were replaced within Wilderness State Park, and we have been working with the Little Traverse Conservancy to install a hiker shelter on their property, which is scheduled to be constructed this spring. We improved one trailhead parking lot by adding gravel to a deep sinkhole, and worked with the Emmet County Road Commission to build another parking area. When the snow melts, a contractor will replace the current structure over the Carp Lake River with an 80-foot fiberglass bridge. We're also researching reroutes to move small portions of trail off private property to protect the trail from future timber harvests (as the new route follows the timber stand's boundary).



A Harbor Springs Chapter (MI) February hike.

Photo by Shari Searles



Left to right: Pat McNamera, Bob McNamera, and Stan Kujawa are part of the Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter crew that cut the lumber for 3,800 feet of puncheon.

Photo by Bill Courtois



Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter

Our Chapter and community were thrilled to host the NCTA's 2024 Celebration event last August in St. Ignace, Michigan. It was a wonderful

opportunity to show off our hard work building and maintaining the North Country Trail here in the Eastern Upper Peninsula. Otherwise, trail work was our main focus: We replaced 3,800 feet of puncheon with the help of the Conservative Anabaptist Service Program, removed and replaced a timber stairway, installed 10 yards of gravel on new turnpike, reblazed 105 miles of trail, and installed interpretive panels. We hosted 18 hikes and attended a number

of community outreach events. We have a few things in the works for 2025, including a kiosk installation, dealing with beavers, building a storage shed, and more puncheon replacement. Stay tuned to the NCTA Events Calendar - we'll have 18 hikes scheduled for you!



Left to right: Bill Courtois, John Texter, and Cody Ames haul gravel for a 160-foot turnpike south of Round Lake (MI).

Photo by Tom Walker



Superior Shoreline Chapter

Last year, all 60 miles of our Chapter's trail segment was thoroughly cleared of growth and downed trees, and regularly maintained throughout the hiking months. Lake Superior claimed parts of the trail, so we built approximately one mile of reroute for a more sustainable path. We held our annual Chapter meeting around a campfire with good food and good company. A SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew spent eight days building a four-mile reroute to eliminate two miles of roadwalk on M-94. This was a long-awaited project; we've met many new volunteers, some who traveled a considerable distance to help. We also met with the City of Munising, Alger County Conservation District, and a private company to discuss additional potential reroutes to eliminate more roadwalk outside of Munising. The enthusiasm and camaraderie at our work parties is encouraging. At the end of a long and tough day, it's heartening to have volunteers thanking us for a fun day. This year, we'll finish the reroute off M-94, and build a much-needed switchback west of the Mouth of the Two Hearted River trailhead.



Superior Shoreline Chapter volunteers (MI).

Photo by Superior Shoreline Chapter



The Marquette Area Chapter's Red Road Reroute Crew.

Photo by Michael Sekely



Marquette Area Chapter

Our volunteers maintained 100% of our off-road trail and spurs: more than 100 miles! We also built four miles of trail that will be open in 2025 to eliminate roadwalk; repaired an eight-foot creek crossing, and installed signage. A SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew contributed 120 hours to clear trail in the McCormick Wilderness, and the Northern Michigan University (NMU) Conservation Crew worked 65 hours to maintain trail. We extend many thanks to the Ralph family, who provided the NCTA a permanent easement to host the trail on their property. Trail Crew Leader Michael Sekely led two *Trailhead Tour* hikes, providing attendees the chance to familiarize themselves with the driving routes to remote trailheads. Each tour featured stops for short yet scenic hikes. We also held a *Hike Every Mile* event: More than 50 participants

collectively hiked our Chapter's entire trail segment. This year we'll foster partnerships with local organizations and the Ottawa National Forest, open the Red Road reroute to trail users, recruit trail adopters, and continue to offer monthly hikes.



Crosscut saw work in the McCormick Wilderness (MI).

Photo by Tom Rulseh



Peter Wolfe Chapter

Between August and October, a SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew spent 12 days building and maintaining trail with us. A group of 11 Michigan Technological University (MTU) students drove nearly

two hours to help us with spring trail maintenance. On MTU's Make a Difference Day in the fall, students with the Delta Sigma Phi fraternity volunteered with us, carrying materials to the trail site and helping build two boardwalks. We've been refreshed and encouraged by this next generation of trail stewards! Additionally, our volunteers installed five new bridges and 350 feet of puncheon, and maintained all of our 121 miles of North Country Trail. In June, alongside our neighboring Marquette Area Chapter, we celebrated the completion of a new trail segment off busy US-41. This year, we're eager to build more boardwalk and a 20-foot bridge; organize an additional brush cutting crew; and for a contractor to build the remote Bush Creek bridge on the Ottawa National Forest. But perhaps our biggest challenge is the one we set for ourselves: Complete our annual spring maintenance across our entire segment by Memorial Day - snowmelt permitting!



Ribbon cutting on a new trail segment at the junction of the Peter Wolfe and Marquette Area Chapters (MI).

Photo by Connie Julien



Ni-Miikanaake Chapter

Nearly all of our Chapter's North Country Trail miles have been rerouted since about 2021, and we're continually in awe of this successful roadwalk elimination. Working to build relationships with landowners is ongoing; our goal is to remove an additional 18 miles of roadwalk to remove an additional 18 miles of roadwalk in northern Gogebic County. Aside from trail building, we've maintained plenty. We were lucky enough to host a SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew twice last year: Once to maintain six miles of trail, and once to establish two miles of new trail tread. We continue to appreciate our strong partnerships with the Michigan

Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service, specifically in the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park and Ottawa National Forest. Our volunteers led one public hike each month during the summer, guiding trail users to scenic spots such as Conglomerate Falls and the Black River Harbor. We also attended a variety of community events. Top priorities in 2025 include growing our membership, continuing to eliminate roadwalk, and focusing on improved maintenance.



Participants of the Ni-Miikanaake Chapter's July hike at Trap Falls in Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park (MI).

Photo by Ni-Miikanaake Chapter



Heritage Chapter

Northwoods Manufacturing of Hurley High School (WI) made trail signs for us with a computerized router. We also teamed up with a WISCORPS youth crew for a week - we hope to bring them back this year to finish building a fabulous, new trail segment alongside the Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew. Thanks to FEMA funding, we assisted Copper Falls State Park in stream bank erosion control at Pipeline Bridge.

We "de-scummed" a 400-foot boardwalk, constructed three campsites, installed signage, and refreshed miles of blazes. Our volunteers led group hikes and represented the NCTA at multiple community events. Keep an eye out for a new Chapter brochure in 2025. We hope you'll join us for a hike!



College student Erin Schmidt and long-time volunteer Joe Kravetz install a sign at Foster Falls (WI).

Photo by Heritage Chapter



Only hand tools may be used in the Rainbow Lake Wilderness (WI).

Photo by Chequamegon Chapter



Chequamegon Chapter

The Copper Falls State Park (WI) supervisor requested our help to redesign a one-mile section of trail to accommodate both hikers and bicyclists,

safely rerouting bikers off a busy park road. We also assisted the park, building two bridges (20 feet and 16 feet respectively), and a 42-foot puncheon. The U.S. Forest Service recruited five young men from the American Conservation Experience who worked under our leadership for 40 hours, building and repairing puncheon, building stairs, improving 80 feet of trail tread, and maintaining a spur trail. The NCTA also helped the Friends of Copper Falls State Park acquire a private land parcel within park boundaries. If there is future need to reroute the trail, this parcel will be considered. We hosted many group hikes, including an interpretive hike from Wren Falls to a gold mine site, and another that included canoeing and a picnic. Aside from plenty of trail work, our 2025 priorities include updating our equipment and tool inventory, and adding safety measures to our hikes and workdays.



Volunteers constructed this 20-foot bridge in Copper Falls State Park (WI).

Photo by Chequamegon Chapter



VOLUNTEERS



Volunteer Dominic Sosnowski leveling and repairing the Brule Bog Boardwalk (WI).

Photo by Jim Lindberg



WISCONSIN

Brule-St. Croix Chapter

The Brule Bog Boardwalk is 3,200 feet of puncheon through a cedar swamp. We are leveling and repairing the structure, and will continue this effort into 2025. In honor of John Pearson, a dedicated volunteer who passed away in 2024, we installed a bench at our US-53 trailhead. On National Trails Day in June, we held a grand opening event for a new trail segment at the Wisconsin-Minnesota state line. There, we welcomed a variety of partners and supporters, including U.S. Senator Tina Smith (Minnesota), and led three hikes from this new trailhead. We hosted many other hikes and participated in community events throughout the year. We welcomed back a local Scout troop that adopts a four-mile section of trail and



U.S. Senator Tina Smith (MN) at the grand opening for new NCT at the Minnesota-Wisconsin state line.

Photo by Peter Nordgren

maintains it annually. In total, nearly 60 miles of trail were maintained by 27 adopters! Planning and scouting is underway for a new four-mile segment in the Nemadji Valley, with work by the Wisconsin Roving

Trail Crew to begin in late 2025 or early 2026.

STATE OF THE TRAIL

Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew



Photo by Matt Davis

The Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew, “the Rovers,” is a group of volunteers from a variety of NCTA Chapters. Alongside a WisCorps youth crew, we constructed 3.7 miles of new North Country Trail along a beautiful section of the Potato River in Gurney. We also built eight bridges, three campsites, and two vistas for better visibility of the waterfalls. Public foot traffic can now hike to two previously inaccessible waterfalls in the area. We completed this work in 19 work days, spread across six work weeks from May through November. Nearly 100 volunteers supported this work; most worked three days at a time. We also trained 15 new volunteers - six of whom were college students who worked with a WisCorps crew, and had never built trail tread previously. This year, we plan to build more trail and integrate more youth conservation crews. It is a true joy to work alongside them, knowing we are teaching the next generation how to build and maintain hiking trails for years to come.

Additional note from Regional Trail Coordinator Matt Davis: Thank you to Brad Stewart for his amazing crew leadership in 2024, and to Bill Menke for his mentorship and continued volunteer service!



Superior Hiking Trail Association staff hiking on new boardwalk on the Split Rock River Loop (MN).

Photo by Superior Hiking Trail Association



Superior Hiking Trail Association (Affiliate)

We completed our first-ever Master Plan last June to serve as a guide for our next 10 years of priorities. It will also help us pursue a Greater Minnesota Parks and Trail Commission Legacy designation to open up new funding streams for the long-term care, improvement, and protection of the Superior Hiking Trail / North Country Trail. We launched our collaborative programming with BIPOC Twin Ports Outdoors, and partnered with both state and federal land managers to allow Leave No Trace trailhead education: 14 events happened over the year. We also co-hosted a technical training weekend with the NCTA and Border Route Trail Association. We became an official member of the North Shore Scenic Drive Council: a volunteer group of organizations, agencies, and businesses that have a connection to the historic scenic byway. Our volunteers maintained 300 miles of trail. Their work



A stone staircase on the Superior Hiking Trail at Bean and Bear Lakes (MN).

Photo by Superior Hiking Trail Association

included bridge and step building, drainage repair, and installing thousands of feet of puncheon and boardwalk. Additionally, Harbor City International School and Honeyrock Camp respectively contributed 200 hours of trail maintenance. In 2025, we'll revise and create policies, procedures, and best practices, implement trainings, and retain volunteers.



MINNESOTA

Border Route Trail Association (Affiliate)

The Border Route Trail shares 65 miles with the North Country National Scenic Trail. Of that, we maintained approximately 30 miles of non-wilderness trail and 35 miles within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. We attended a number of events from routine meetings to partner presentations, community festivals, and skills trainings. We're beyond proud that three of our board members have now received Lifetime Achievement Awards from the NCTA - most recently, Gary Carlson in 2024. (Previous - and very deserving - recipients include Ed Solstad and John Elliott.) We were only able to host one group hike in 2024 but will aim for more in 2025 - stay tuned! We will also prioritize multiple maintenance trips, and working with the U.S. Forest Service on a possible reroute and/or maintenance of the flooded Long Portage section of the Border Route Trail. Our wish list for 2025 includes no blowdowns!



Before and after: A clearing trip on the Mayhew Spur Trail (MN) organized by Chris Fothergill.

Photos by Pam Tavernier (top) Darian Westerlund (bottom)



VOLUNTEERS



Kekekabic Trail Chapter volunteers on the new Kekekabic-Border Route Connector Trail (MN).

Photo by Kevin Myrmel



MINNESOTA

Kekekabic Trail Chapter

Our Chapter is leading the development of a new 18-mile trail segment east of Ely, Minnesota. We are flagging

routes, talking to private landowners, and collaborating with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Construction is expected this fall or in early 2026. Last year, seven crews cleared and maintained 14 of the 39 Kekekabic Trail miles: in total, 68 volunteers provided more than 1,400 hours of service. A Conservative Anabaptist Service Program (CASP) volunteer crew worked with us and the USFS on five miles of North Country Trail and additional miles of nearby trails. We rerouted around beaver dams, eliminated roadwalk (the 0.2 miles from the Gunflint Trail to the Border Route Trail are gone!), built connector trails, and installed signage. We have been heavily involved in outreach from Ely to Duluth to Minneapolis, and have been developing excellent partnerships with groups such as the Friends of the Boundary Waters. We look forward to using our new gear and canoe trailers this year, participating in more volunteer training workshops, increasing our membership and volunteer base, and keeping our wild stretch of trail open for you to enjoy!



MINNESOTA

Ely Northwoods Chapter

We've really hit the ground running since becoming an official NCTA Chapter in 2023. Last year, we hosted

11 Chapter hikes with 79 participants for a total of 357 cumulative miles hiked. We continued to hold regular meetings, and actively collaborated with the Border Route Trail Association and our neighboring Kekekabic Trail Chapter. Ely hosted its inaugural Trail Town Celebration in August, which included hikes, cake, giveaways, and the unveiling of our new volunteer tool trailer. Regarding the planning and route development of the Ely segment of the North Country Trail, we worked with NCTA staff to begin conversations with the U.S. Forest Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and county, city, and township officials. One of our Chapter leaders, Liz Anderson, has created a wonderful storymap detailing our progress - check it out at arcg.is/1i8XKz2 or via the QR code. We will charge forward this year, scouting for off-road trail opportunities, and increasing awareness at both the local and regional level.



An Ely Northwoods Chapter hike at Bass Lake (MN).

Photo by Sharon G.



The Arrowhead Chapter (MN) hauling gear to a new campsite.

Photo by Arrowhead Chapter



MINNESOTA

Arrowhead Chapter

With help from partners, our volunteers built six miles of new trail in 2024. We installed seven miles of urban signage in Grand Rapids (MN) and built our first campsite a little east of Highway

6. We hosted a handful of workdays, monthly Chapter meetings, and three group hikes. We participated in several regional and statewide outreach events, including an American Hiking Society Volunteer Vacation with volunteer camping in Schoolcraft State Park. We're working with Arbo Township in Itasca County on permanently protecting the trail, and with the Chippewa National Forest on routing the trail north of County Road 61 toward "the Chip." This year, we're most focused on our 18-mile reroute project, and we hope to host some sort of gathering for all Minnesota Chapters to attend for hiking and camaraderie.



MINNESOTA

Star of the North Chapter

Our small-but-mighty Chapter maintained approximately 30 miles of North Country Trail last year. We built two small bridges over culverts and attended a



A Star of the North Chapter spring work weekend (MN).

Photo by Dan Geiger

field day event for elementary school kids in Remer. In collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, we scouted new trail route in the Chippewa National Forest. Ultimately, a lot of last year consisted of our new leadership learning the ropes and prioritizing Chapter projects. We look forward to increasing our outreach efforts and keeping the trail in its best shape possible.



MINNESOTA

Itasca Moraine Chapter

It's been exciting to see our active membership increase and our community grow. Portage Brewery in

Walker agreed to sponsor a hiking club that we expect to start in 2025. Some of our volunteers joined a local committee that revised and updated the Hubbard County Timber Management Plan and is developing Deep Lake Park. The park is non-motorized, and will offer campsites, showers, and a trailhead (via a spur trail) to the North Country Trail. A local Scout troop helped us rebuild trail and the Itasca State Park kiosk. We look forward to building and fostering more partnerships like these. We also finished reconstructing a mile of trail across a major blowdown area east of Itasca State Park. It is now a continuous trail through a new-growth poplar forest. Otherwise, we continue to refresh blazes, update signage, and maintain nearly 100 miles of trail.



Itasca Moraine Chapter volunteers (MN).

Photo by Jeanette Redlin



VOLUNTEERS



Chuck Church's construction crew (Laurentian Lakes Chapter) after completing a new boardwalk.

Photo by Robert Becklund



MINNESOTA

Laurentian Lakes Chapter

Under the leadership of Chuck Church (an octogenarian!), one group of our volunteers maintained 45 miles of our Chapter's 66 miles of North Country Trail. This included snow removal at trailheads throughout the winter. Chuck also planned and coordinated the construction of an 80-foot walkway across a bog. He also worked with our county's Natural Resources Committee to secure funding that helped us acquire and maintain needed equipment. This resulted in our Chapter presenting an NCTA Friend of the Trail Award to the County Land Commissioner. Thanks to an NCTA Field Grant, our volunteers installed approximately 40 informational and directional signs. We also refreshed 45 miles of blazes - one of our 2024 goals. We hosted 100+ people throughout 11 events; nine were guided hikes, at most of which we provided trail awareness and maintenance training to attract trail adopters. Top priorities for 2025 include growing our Chapter membership, protecting and maintaining the trail, and increased volunteer outreach.



MINNESOTA

Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter

Our monthly group hikes drew about 10 to 20 participants each month. Last July, we teamed up with our neighbors to the west, the Dakota Prairie Chapter, for a successful hike in Fergus Falls at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center and Delagoon Park. Our volunteers maintained 7.5 miles of North Country Trail and refreshed blazes on 5.5 miles. We also installed signs on a 1-mile roadwalk and a spur trail in Ferber Park. The trail's route between Fergus Falls and North Dakota is a long roadwalk, and the town of Rothsay is about halfway. We prepared an information sheet for trail users in this area and provided it to the city office, along with brochures.



NORTH DAKOTA

Dakota Prairie Chapter

We hosted 21 group hikes in 2024. The most notable included our Hike a Half [marathon], a hike with 32 students from the North Dakota State University wellness center, and collaborative hikes with the other two NCTA Chapters in North Dakota. Our devout volunteer Rennae Gruchalla wrote and self-published a guide: *Meadowlark's Guide to the North Country Trail in North Dakota*, which is available to interested parties. We celebrated our dedication to stopping the sale of a land parcel in Richland County at the Ekre Grassland Preserve, protecting the trail here for years to come! Volunteers also repaired two campsite latrines, replaced two fence stiles to increase accessibility,



High Bridge in Valley City, ND: A historically important structure that the trail goes under.

Photo provided by Jack Norland

and worked with the U.S. Forest Service to build four new benches and 200 feet of boardwalk. This year, we will offer plenty of trail use opportunities, add new hike leaders and sweeps, support the Sheyenne National Grassland as they improve trail, and keep our segments in the best shape possible.



NORTH DAKOTA

Sheyenne River Valley Chapter

Our awesome volunteers maintained about 65 miles of North Country Trail in North Dakota last year. Projects included a couple small reroutes for improved access, lots of tree and brush trimming, a 25-foot boardwalk installation, and fence stile repair. In the Sheyenne State Forest, we installed water bars, re-benched trail, and gravel armored 1,300 feet of trail. Because of constant cattle damage in pastures that host the trail near Lake Ashtabula, we must replace directional signage every few years - which we did in 2024. We hosted a variety of events, including one ranger-led hike in Fort Ransom State Park followed by a paddle of the Sheyenne



The Sheyenne River Valley Chapter installs boardwalk (ND).

Photo by Bobby Koepplin

River in a canoe or kayak. Our Chapter also initiated a four-part series of segment hikes throughout the summer, allowing trail users to hike across our Chapter's section of North Country Trail. In 2025, we'll ensure our volunteers are trained, prioritize easements and reroute opportunities, maintain trail alongside the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Lake Ashtabula, and increase our volunteer base.



NORTH DAKOTA

Central Flyway Chapter

Our Chapter is developing a stronger relationship with the local office for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Garrison Dam). They have expressed support of our efforts to move the trail off road in two different locations. We also collaborated with Scouts: One troop from Bismarck constructed and placed a kiosk on the east side of the Audubon National Wildlife Refuge, and an Eagle Scout repaired four wooden benches that will be placed along the trail in the refuge this spring. We were pleased to complete mowing and maintenance on sections that have been somewhat neglected for the past couple years, and we enjoyed co-hosting a large event with the other two North Dakota Chapters. We led many group hikes, including our popular Salmon Run Hike at the Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery property where participants could observe salmon returning to spawn. In lieu of Celebration this year, we warmly welcome you to HikeFest 2025 this August. Keep an eye on NCTA and North Dakota Chapter communications as details emerge!



Eagle Scout Cameron Erth completed a kiosk installation on the trail in the Audubon National Wildlife Refuge (ND).

Photo by Central Flyway Chapter

Award Nominations Open

Who are you thankful for in your local trail community? Who do you watch go above and beyond for the trail? If you've witnessed impressive commitments of time, money, materials, or energy, nominate them for a North Country Trail Association award.

Nominations for 2025 awards are being accepted now through April 7, 2025. Review both the NCTA Award Descriptions and Policies at northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-awards. Then submit a nomination right from that webpage or email awards@northcountrytrail.org.

Anyone can make a nomination, but to really help your nominee stand out, take as much space as you need to tell their story. You can get help from others too, to craft a complete picture of your nominee's contributions to the North Country Trail.

If emailing, please include a one- to two-page statement detailing why your nominee should receive this particular award. Also include the nominee's name, address, phone, and email, their Chapter/Affiliate name, the award category, and your name and contact information. Questions can be directed to awards@northcountrytrail.org.



Who's Who Along the North Country National Scenic Trail

The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST) is built, maintained, and promoted by volunteer Chapters, and independent Affiliate and partner organizations. Thirty NCTA Chapters are established across the eight trail states, offering you membership, hikes, trail workdays, and other events. Each group is responsible for maintaining a segment of the trail, and promoting it at a local level. Connect directly to get involved!

Guided by a board of directors, NCTA staff provide direct support to Chapters so they can work safely and effectively. Staff also collaborate with Affiliate and partner organizations to ensure trail management and operations are aligned, and goals are accomplished together.

The National Park Service (NPS) administers the NCNST, providing management to the entire trail by working with other federal agencies, state and local governments, private organizations, and landowners, and by providing guidance to the NCTA as a partner. The NPS provides funding for trail projects, planning and decisions on trail routing, trail tools, supplies and signage for volunteers, trail certification guidelines, and volunteer support through the Volunteers-In-Parks (VIP) program.

North Country Trail Association Headquarters

northcountrytrail.org

hq@northcountrytrail.org | 866-445-3628

National Park Service, NCNST (NOCO) Office

nps.gov/noco | 616-319-7906

Superintendent Chris Loudenslager,
christopher_loudenslager@nps.gov

NORTH DAKOTA

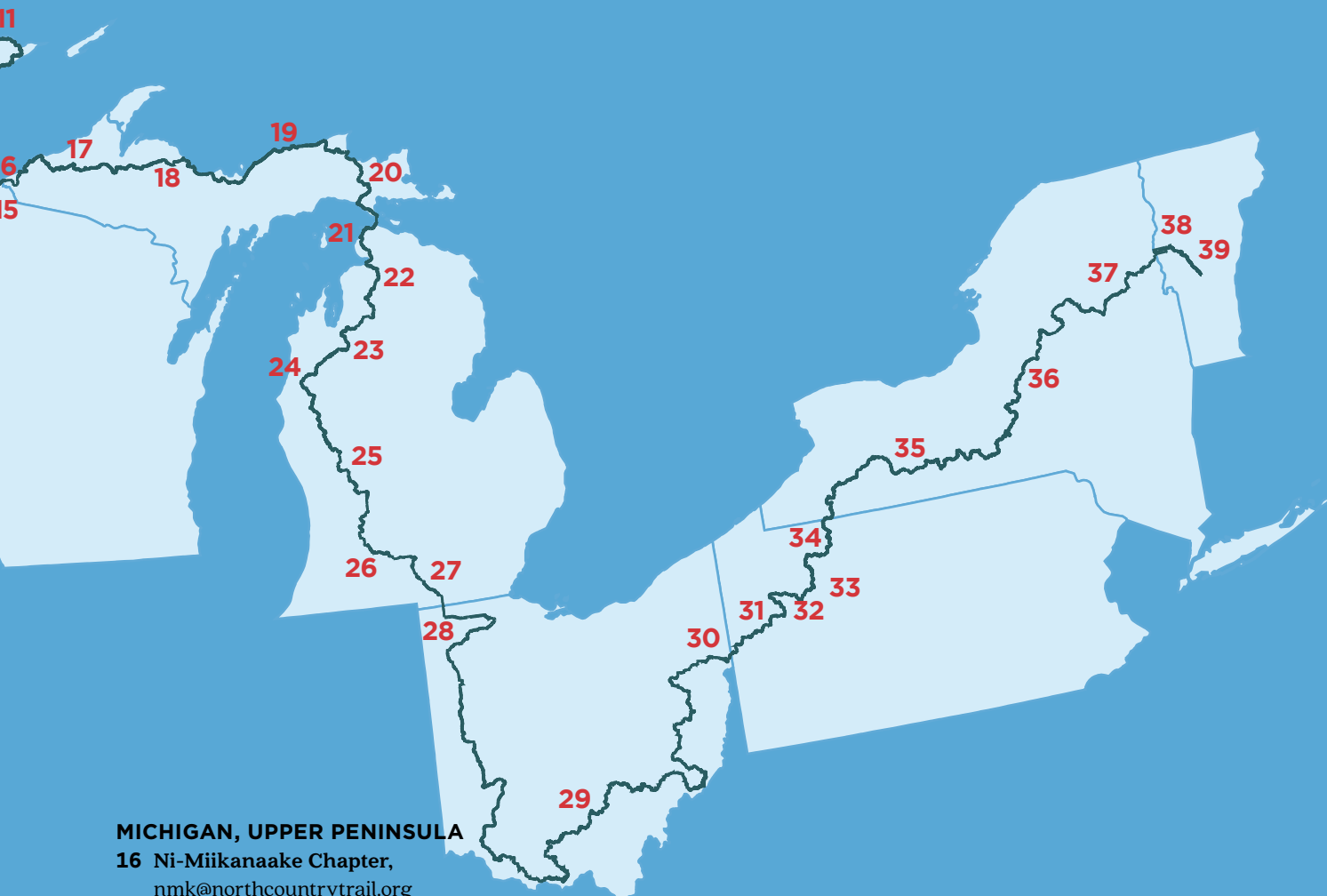
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Reach Out!

The NCTA headquarters office and Trail Shop are located at **229 E. Main St. in Lowell, Mich.** Find more information at northcountrytrail.org/contact.
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The North Country Trail Association develops, maintains, protects and promotes the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States through a trail-wide coalition of volunteers and partners.

Our vision for the North Country National Scenic Trail is that of the premier footpath of national significance, offering a superb experience for hikers and backpackers in a permanently protected corridor, traversing and interpreting the richly diverse environmental, cultural, and historic features of the northern United States.

"The North Country Trail continually surprises me. My favorite moments were watching the northern lights dance over a frozen Whitefish Bay (MI), and the next morning, watching two wolves lope through the snow in Tahquamenon Falls State Park."
- Ben Zukowski, trail user

Photo by Ben Zukowski