



North Star

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2026



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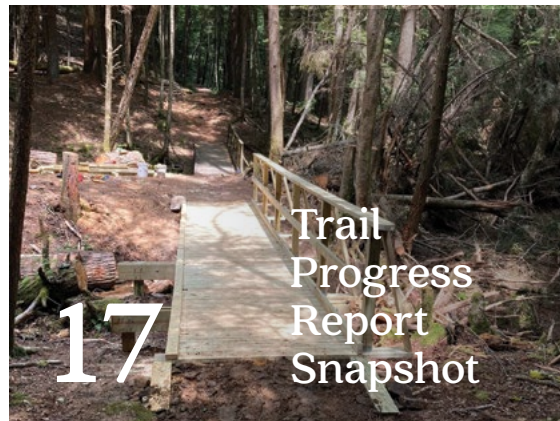
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Four NCT Navigators (hiking group) from the Chequamegon Chapter celebrate the completion of their individual Hike 100 Challenges with a "raised pole salute." As each passes underneath, the Navigators sing These Boots Are Made for Walkin' by Nancy Sinatra.

Photo by Sara Balbin

Trailhead

JAN ULFERTS STEWART,
PRESIDENT, NCTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS



This issue of the *North Star* is a celebration of you, the remarkable NCTA trail community! Turn the page to see highlights of the momentum you've helped build. We hope these stories renew your sense of purpose and invite you to keep shaping the future of the trail.

Looking forward to the new year, we say goodbye to Andrea Ketchmark as she embarks on another professional opportunity. Andrea has laid a strong foundation for our future, and I am sincerely grateful for her leadership, energy, and vision. To ensure continuity during this transition, the board has appointed Cheryl Kreindler as Interim Executive Director. Cheryl brings experience and institutional knowledge, and will work closely with the staff and board to maintain momentum while we conduct a comprehensive search for our next executive director.

At this time of transitions, we are excited to welcome Dan Geiger, Bob Rosati, and Joe Shelley to the board. Dan, a Minnesotan, is a retired electric engineer who has been supporting the NCTA for 30+ years. Bob has been creating new trails through the Adirondacks in New York and is a project manager. Joe is also from New York, is an avid hiker, and a Vice President at Hamilton College. We look forward to the fresh perspectives and expertise you bring to our team.

Transitions can be a time for reflection and building momentum. They can point us forward while also asking us to look back, so that we can build on the energy and commitment already present. That is where the NCTA is heading. The momentum we have today is both a beacon and a mirror, shining a guiding light on the future while reflecting the strength and purpose that set us in motion in the first place.

The momentum we've built together gives us confidence to keep pushing our mission forward. With a strong community and a shared love for the trail, we're continuing the work of building, maintaining, and protecting it, while also preparing for what's ahead.

Your board of directors and I treasure our committed staff, our dedicated volunteers, our valuable partners, and our generous supporters. Your commitment and belief in this organization and this trail make every step possible.

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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

CHERYL KREINDER,
INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Welcome to 2026, everyone! Never in my wildest imagination did I consider that I'd be writing in the *North Star* as an interim executive director. Yet, here I am! Lucky for me, I'm in a life position that allows me to serve our trail and community in this time of transition. I've dusted off those skills learned during

a 35-year career often spent leading transitions and am ready to get to work.

One of the biggest things I've learned during my career is that during times of change, stay steady. Stabilization does not mean sit back and watch, it means work with everyone to maintain momentum and continue the work at hand. I'm looking forward to this opportunity to work with our awesome staff in a deeper way than I have done as a board member. I bet I get to learn lots of new things.

Despite the change in leadership, nothing has changed about our mission. We, as a community of NCTA and National Park Service staff, Chapter leadership, volunteers, and members remain dedicated to develop, maintain, protect, and promote the NCNST as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States. In this interim role, I will do my best and work closely with all of you to deliver against our mission, as well as prepare us for a smooth transition to our new executive director.

I'd be remiss if I didn't say how excited I am for Andrea as she takes this next step in her career journey. She has provided strong leadership and dedication to our trail during her tenure. I will miss her.

2026 will be a year of moving forward, changing and staying steady at the same time. It promises to be an exciting year, and I'm sure we'll have a lot of fun as we go about our work. See you on the trail!

NIC LOISEAU, NCNST VOLUNTEER PROGRAM
MANAGER, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Photo by Steve Sharkey

This year, the National Park Service joins the nation in celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

We invite you to be part of this historic celebration! America Gives is a nationwide initiative designed to enhance the country's longstanding tradition of service and to foster a renewed commitment to community engagement for the future. Join America Gives by volunteering with the National Park Service and the North Country National Scenic Trail. Contribute 250 hours of service, and as a token of appreciation, enjoy the perks of a complimentary volunteer pass (unless you already hold an America the Beautiful pass). These passes open the door to adventure, providing free access to more than 2,000 federal recreation sites where entrance or day-use fees apply.

Volunteer Dan Geiger shares why this goal is achievable and rewarding:

"It's really easy to give 250 hours of service on a trail that you love and want to support, whether it's by volunteering at outreach events, building or maintaining the trail, leading hikes, or recruiting other volunteers. If you travel the United States, there are plenty of opportunities to use the volunteer pass to explore our amazing national parks and federal lands."

When asked what he would say to someone considering volunteering this year, volunteer Steve Sharkey offered this inspiring perspective:

"I encourage everyone to not just pass through, but to change how you experience our public lands and become invested in creating a path for future generations. Whether it's trail work, leadership, or lending a specific skill, your contribution matters. Especially in a milestone year like this, volunteering is a powerful way to connect our history with the future we're helping to build together."

Celebrate 250 years of freedom through service. Help America Gives make this the largest year of service in history!

For additional information, please reach out at nicole_loiseau@nps.gov.



The Black River property in Wisconsin.

Photo by Will Cooksey, Senior Project Manager, Trust for Public Land

Trail Protection Partnership: Trust for Public Land

BY ANDREA KETCHMARK, IMMEDIATE PAST NCTA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Despite its National Scenic Trail designation and impressive length of nearly 5,000 miles, the North Country Trail still faces significant challenges. More than 1,400 miles currently follow roads. In addition, hundreds of miles cross private property - sections that volunteers and staff worked hard to build - where future changes in ownership could revoke access, making “No Trespassing” signs an ever-present risk.

The NCTA is committed to protecting the landscapes that make the trail such a treasured resource. This is not work we can do alone. That’s why we partner with a wide network of organizations - federal and state agencies, local land trusts, and national nonprofits - to ensure the trail is permanently protected for generations to come. One of our most significant and growing partnerships is with the Trust for Public Land (TPL), whose expertise in land conservation and acquisition helps safeguard key properties along the North Country Trail corridor.

Together, the NCTA and TPL - as well as our stalwart National Park Service (NPS) partners - combine unique strengths to further the development and protection of our trail. In partnership and cooperation with the NPS, the NCTA identifies potential parcels of land needed for the trail route, then NCTA staff and volunteers often lead the initial outreach to landowners. We also take responsibility for trail layout, design, and construction once a property is secured. Meanwhile, the TPL is well-equipped to manage the transactions: conducting appraisals, negotiating with landowners, and ensuring a successful outcome. Then, together, we work to identify the right agency or nonprofit to take ownership of the land and collaborate on funding the purchase of it.

“The Trust for Public Land has the professional staff and resources to quickly secure critical land parcels for the North Country National Scenic Trail before they are lost to development,” said Paul Gagnon, NCTA Director of Trail Protection. “This makes our relationship with them one of our most valuable partnerships.”

In 2025, TPL worked with the NPS to protect more than 300 acres along the Black River in Northern Wisconsin. After successfully orchestrating the purchase from the private landowner to protect this property from being sold to other interests, TPL held this property until the NPS was able to purchase it from them for its permanent protection. It will host a new segment of North Country Trail and allow us to reroute roughly 30 miles off roads and onto land owned by Douglas County. This effort will someday create a continuous pathway from the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway to Pattison State Park - a potential watershed moment for the trail in Wisconsin.

“Paul has moved the NCTA’s trail protection strategy forward very quickly,” wrote JT Horn, Senior Director National Trails Initiative at the Trust for Public Land. “He’s built a network of land trusts interested in helping with trail protection, recruited a new Trail Protection Committee, and offered helpful guidance on specific conservation projects. At Trust for Public Land, we are pleased to be working on trail protection projects in Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, and Vermont. Over the next few years we expect to help protect or relocate more than 60 miles of the trail to a permanent home on conserved land.”

Moving into 2026, the NCTA is partnering with TPL on a project called Appalachia United Outdoors, to enhance outdoor recreation access across the Appalachian region including Southeast Ohio, Western Pennsylvania, and Southern New York. Through this project, we aim

*continued on
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TRAIL
PROTECTION



Above photos by Chris Loudenslager, NCNST Superintendent, NPS

to work with communities to gather excitement and further the development and protection of the North Country Trail. Partnerships are at the heart of everything we do, and trail protection is no exception. As the trail grows and improves, so will our relationships and expertise in land protection. With this trifecta of a partnership between the NCTA, NPS, and TPL, the possibilities for completing and protecting the North Country Trail are limitless.

Learn more about our collaboration with the Trust for Public Land at tpl.org/our-work/north-country-trail, and help ensure the NCTA can continue this trail protection work by making a gift today.

Navigate your future

Continue your important work of helping your loved ones and the causes you care about with a plan for the future.

Enjoy free tools to help you navigate your future:

- Resources we can offer to your attorney and advisors to help them save you money.
- A wealth of free information and advice in our emails. Contact us to sign up for our email list!
- A free estate planning guide.

Call or email us and learn how you can provide for your loved ones and support the causes that matter most to you.

northcountrytrail.org/support

Beaver River Property Contributions

The North Country Trail Association extends countless thanks to the following individuals who, because of their generosity and forward thinking, helped make this property purchase possible.

Ralph Boyd

Dennis Garrett

Jim Gilkey

Lorana Jinkerson

Jane and Tom Norton

Dan Nydick

Jaron and Vicki Nyhof

Lynne and Brad Slagle

Tina and Mike Toole

Gary Werner

NCTA Wampum Chapter

Lawrence County Commissioners

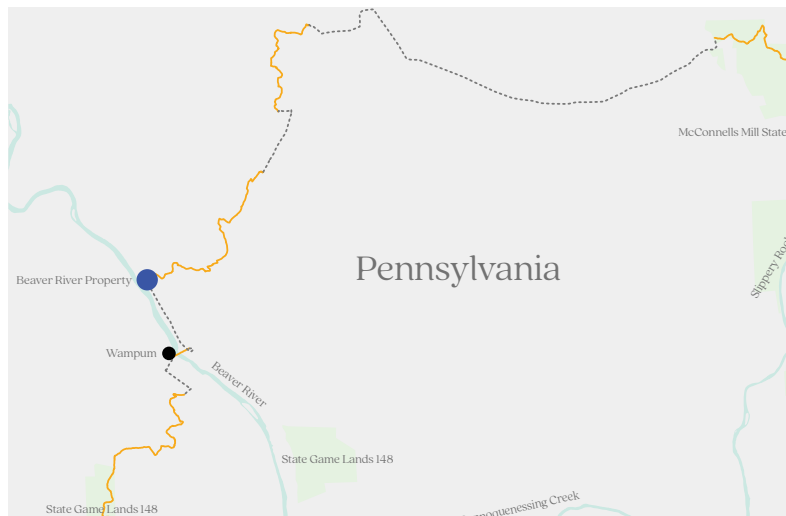
Daniel J. Vogler (Chairman),

Dan Kennedy, and Chris Sainato

Consider a contribution today at northcountrytrail.org/gift to ensure this trail protection work can continue.

Permanent Protection in Western Pennsylvania

BY NCTA STAFF



Land is a limited resource - no one is making more of it. And as parcels of land are sold and ownership changes, permission for the trail may be revoked. This means many segments of the North Country Trail could be in jeopardy of disappearing entirely, creating permanent gaps in the route.

In 2023, the NCTA Board of Directors made the decision that the Association would have the ability to buy land from willing sellers. This decision strengthens our dedication to conserve land for the trail and to enhance your experience.

We are now delighted to announce the NCTA's first-ever land purchase, furthering our goal of permanently protecting the North Country Trail and its surrounding landscape.

Kaleb Muir, a landowner near Wampum, Pennsylvania, agreed to sell eight acres to the NCTA to help secure permanent protection for the trail. The parcel is approximately 40 miles northwest of Pittsburgh and about 10 miles from the Ohio state line.

The trail has existed here for some time on this privately owned land. But what if Kaleb had sold this land to someone who didn't want the trail there anymore? Nearly four miles of the trail would need to be rerouted around this parcel. Four miles may not seem like much to move, but consider the time and effort necessary to acquire permissions or permits, flag the route, clear trees and brush, remove roots and stumps, dig and smooth the trail tread, and install signage. Often, a single NCTA staff member and volunteers coordinate this work. Depending on factors such as volunteer availability, permit review and processing times, and the availability of funding for materials and tools, building a trail segment can take anywhere from months to years.



"This parcel contains nearly 900 feet of undeveloped riverfront, which is rare in an area already subject to so much urban development," explained Paul Gagnon, NCTA Director of Trail Protection. "Our Wampum Chapter volunteers will continue to steward the trail here, providing its users with a wonderful experience. This segment is excellent for walks and hikes, and it allows birdwatchers and anglers to access the river and enjoy their hobbies, as well."

"Since I joined the NCTA staff in 2023, I've become much more aware of the importance of trail protection and planning," said Lauren Kennedy-Little, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator. "Our volunteer Chapters, such as Wampum here in Pennsylvania and Ohio, are tirelessly engaging with landowner outreach and community advocacy for the trail. So, it is not surprising to me that they spearheaded the first NCTA land purchase. I am really excited about the new growth that is happening within our trail community as we learn together and strive to make a forever home for our trail. I am grateful that I get to help accomplish this with the support of trail volunteers like Dennis Garrett, and my fellow NCTA staff members."

While we celebrate this win for the trail and the Association, we must remain focused on the broader, long-term goal. There are still nearly 1,500 miles of our trail's 5,000 that are currently not in a guaranteed position. For each unprotected mile lost to a land sale or revoked permission from the landowner, the trail will experience increased roadwalks and an expanded need for reroutes.

"The vision of the North Country Trail is of a completed corridor that is protected for future generations," said Andrea Ketchmark, former NCTA Executive Director. "To fulfill that vision, we need to work with many partners on a national, regional, and local level, and we need to be ready to own the land ourselves if we don't have an agency or land trust that's willing. It's exciting that NCTA is ready to take this step."

Thanks to the support of our trail community - including you - we've made history with the NCTA's first land purchase. Let's keep building our forever trail together, one crucial acre at a time.

Interested in helping the NCTA further these trail protection efforts? Make a gift to the Trail Protection Fund. To learn more, contact NCTA staff, or visit northcountrytrail.org/gift.



TRAIL
USE



Cherry Pie Hike

BY RODNEY GASCH, VOLUNTEER, WASHINGTON'S TRAIL 1753

The powerful boom of a musket shot echoed through the forest, and the resulting cloud of white smoke floated amongst the trees, but that didn't discourage the flow of hikers coming across the snowy path. Cherry pie and warm soup were waiting for these hikers, all in celebration of George Washington's birthday.

For close to 25 years the NCTA Butler County Chapter has been leading this commemoration.

"A hike in honor of our first president seemed like a good way to get members out in winter," recalled Dave Adams, past President of the Butler County Chapter. "We hike a round trip from a historic inn located on the North Country Trail then hear a presentation about George Washington. Initially, members volunteered to bake cherry pies. As the event grew, a local restaurant that supports the trail offered to donate the pies."

For the past decade, it has taken place at Jennings Environmental Education Center, a Pennsylvania state park on the North Country Trail that has facilities for the 200 plus people who reserve a spot on one of nine different hikes. Black powder, snow, and soup make for a popular event.



Photos by Darl and Marilyn Black, Blackwolfe Communications

"The event has grown in part from the partnerships we have fostered with other organizations," said Jan Genaway, Butler County Chapter President. "We attract those wanting a strenuous hike, families seeking nature walks, and people interested in history. As a result, we expose them to the North Country Trail. It's a win for all involved."

Other groups now help sponsor, including the Butler Outdoor Club and Washington's Trail 1753, a nonprofit that celebrates Washington's first diplomatic mission when he was just 21 years old.

His task was to deliver a letter from the Virginia Colony's governor to a French commander, demanding that French troops depart from what is now Western Pennsylvania - land then claimed by both France and England. That trip took Washington on a 900-mile journey from Williamsburg (Virginia Colony) to Fort LeBoeuf (near modern-day Erie, Pennsylvania). He traveled on paths used by indigenous peoples, which portions of the North Country Trail now follow in Butler County.

That mission led to Washington's first close brush with death. On his return to the Virginia Colony, a musket shot from a French-ally just missed him.

"The event offers a variety of outdoor experiences," related Dave. "There's a seven-mile hike on the North Country Trail, two 45-minute nature walks led by park educators, and six half-mile history hikes that tell the story of Washington's mission, complete with a reenactment of that shooting."

Inside the park's education building, participants find cherry pie, hot cider, history authors, French and Indian War reenactors with their period artifacts, and information tables for the different groups that support the event.

"We look for ways to improve the event," added Jan. "One year, members donated five crockpots of homemade soup and we sold it as a Chapter fundraiser. This was very popular, especially for those who had just hiked seven miles on snow-covered trails."

See the NCTA Events Calendar for unique opportunities like this one at northcountrytrail.org/events.

Thank You for 2025

Success is a collective effort and 2025 was a testament to the power of our community. We are incredibly grateful for the financial support provided by our members and partners. Because of your belief in this mission, the NCTA enters 2026 with the momentum to **deliver an even greater impact for the trail.** Your decision to join this effort makes all the difference and we are honored by your support.

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.

Tom Dahle, North Dakota

Chad Gaskill, Michigan

Daniel Nelson, Michigan

Janice Lindstrom, Michigan

Jan and her husband Bob were the founding members of the NCTA North Country Trail Hikers Chapter—now the Marquette Area Chapter.

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

HIKE 100 CHALLENGE

As of early 2026, more than 800 trail users have signed up for this year's Hike 100 Challenge. Will you?

2025 STATS

- 2,370 participants
- 161 pet participants
- 1,075 finishers (as of January 2026)



"My friend and I drove from Michigan to North Dakota. We then hiked at least 5 miles each in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, also making sure we hiked across the border in each state. We plan to hit up the trails out east in 2026."

- MARGARET PAWLOWSKI-BOVEE, MICHIGAN

northcountrytrail.org/hike-100-challenge

Staff State of the Trail

BY THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION STAFF

What was the most fulfilling project you worked on in 2025 and why was it so rewarding?

Kenny Wawsczyk, Regional Trail Coordinator for Michigan



Bush Creek Bridge, Michigan.

Photo by Kenny Wawsczyk

In the remote Western Upper Peninsula, in the Peter Wolfe Chapter's area, the bridge over Bush Creek washed out nearly every year. In 2015,

the Ottawa National Forest approved replacement plans and in 2021, it was closed. Last October, the new bridge was finally constructed. Usually, a project is fulfilling to me only if I can physically get out there and help. This one was unique though, in how much work was needed behind the scenes with obtaining approvals, changing the design, and constant reminders to keep this project moving forward. Maybe relieved is a better word? But we now have a sustainable bridge, built by a contractor, and that meets Forest Service standards.

Heather Ertle, Membership and CRM Systems Manager

I enjoyed working with a small team on a section of the Association's strategic plan focused on improving project management. We're in the process of implementing new software, and it's exciting to see early opportunities to streamline workflows, strengthen collaboration and communication, and increase transparency across organizational projects.

Becky VanDyke, Data Entry Specialist

I am always encouraged when processing donations and memberships, especially during our annual appeals. While many staff do their work out in the field, mine takes place in front of a computer screen. Even so, it is never boring. Each donation is a powerful reminder of how many people truly care about the North Country Trail. Being removed from the field can sometimes make it easy to forget that we are working

to maintain and protect nearly 5,000 miles of trail. Yet, these moments make it clear that this work would not be possible without the countless supporters who care deeply about the trail, from North Dakota all the way to Vermont.

Alison Sanchez, Administrative Assistant

Managing the volunteer awards program has been rewarding because I don't often see first-hand how much our volunteers do. This has given me more of a glimpse into that side of the work that goes into the trail.

Kate Lemon, Marketing and Communications Manager

Playing a leadership role in our strategic planning process challenged me in a very positive way. It pushed me to think longer term, and it allowed me a better understanding of how our Association already works and what changes are needed for us to level up. I very much appreciate the trust I was given to build some important processes, and I look forward to seeing it all in action.

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



Lake Sakakawea, North Dakota.

Photo by Matt Davis

Matt Davis, Regional Trail Coordinator for North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin

Seeing how the North Dakota volunteers rolled out the

red carpet for out-of-state attendees at Hike Fest last August was special. One of my favorite memories was watching folks walk along the new NCT segment near Riverdale while almost being blown over by the "gentle breeze" coming 8 miles across Lake Sakakawea. (I was the hike sweep.) Folks from far away definitely got a chance to experience the challenges afforded by North Dakota's weather.

Lauren Kennedy-Little, Regional Trail Coordinator for Ohio and Pennsylvania



Artist and NORTA volunteer Linda Doyle creates beautiful art both inspired and sourced from nature.

Photo by Lauren Kennedy-Little

As I pause to reflect on this past year, I feel thankful above all. I am fortunate to work in a space driven by passion - that is a huge piece of what makes the North Country Trail special. Instead of just one story, here's a brief highlight reel focused on the groups I work with the closest. Thank you to: the Allegheny National Forest Chapter for miles and miles of trail maintenance so I could hike my first A-100; the Clarion County Chapter for companionship during day-long walks in the woods; the Butler County

Chapter for creating memorable experiences to inspire the next generation of conservation stewards; the Wampum Chapter, for bushwhacking along the Little Beaver River and always having a pair of pruners to spare; the Buckeye Trail Association for establishing the first *Ohio Outdoor Recreation and Education Conference*; and the Northwest Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association for filling my annual fall visit with a sense of connection and a reminder of nature's bounty.

Paul Gagnon, Director of Trail Protection

I recently spoke with a land developer in Madison County, New York. He was approached by the Central New York Chapter volunteers many years ago about routing part of our trail through land he had long-term plans to develop. He told me that his initial reaction was "Well, what is in this for me?" but reluctantly agreed to allow the trail to be built under a use agreement. Since then, he has seen how valuable the trail has become to community members who will be buying homes on land he has developed in the area, and how it has drawn consumers to his commercial development investments. He has evolved into a strong supporter of the trail, and now plans to grant us a permanent trail easement. Each relationship we initiate with private landowners has the opportunity to evolve and become richer over time, just like this one. It requires our patience and dedication in nurturing the relationship, even when the outcome cannot be known, and demonstrating that our trail is an asset to the local community.

Nancy Brozek, Director of Development and Communications



Nancy in Marquette, Mich.

Photo by NCTA Marquette Area Chapter

It was a pleasure to see the many ways our trail celebrated Public Lands Day in September. I had the opportunity to travel to the Upper Peninsula - I joined the Marquette Area Chapter's *Hike Every Mile* event and celebrated their success alongside them. It was also exciting to have Carhartt promote the trail and the NCTA through their social media!

What's a project you're looking forward to working on or completing in 2026?

Will Brazill, Regional Trail Coordinator for New York and Vermont



Bob Rosati scouting trail in New York's Adirondacks.

Photo by Will Brazill

I'm really looking forward to a scouting project in the West Canada Lake Wilderness of New York's Adirondack Mountains. It's one of the most remote stretches on the North Country Trail. The plan is to identify a sustainable route across the Indian River. If all goes as planned, it could lead to a new bridge, likely requiring a helicopter drop for materials.

Karen Raab, Finance and Operations Manager

I am looking forward to visiting the Buckeye Trail Association's TrailFest 2026 in Ohio. It will be a new experience for me and I am excited for it.

Matt Rowbotham, GIS Program Manager

I'm looking forward to supporting the rollout of new field GPS and data collection equipment. This work will help create a clearer and more direct connection between what's documented in the field and how that information supports our maps, planning tools, and decision-making across the organization.

Valerie Bader, Director of Trail Operations

We have ordered an Eastern Terminus sign! I'm so excited to finally mark our progress and the expansion of the trail into Vermont.

Andrea's Next Chapter

This January, Andrea Ketchmark stepped away from her role as Executive Director of the North Country Trail Association, having accepted another professional opportunity with the Public Lands Alliance. She served the NCTA for more than 16 years, first as Director of Trail Development from 2009-2017. To say she has made a mark on the North Country National Scenic Trail is an understatement.

“Andrea has led the organization through periods

of significant change, guided strategic planning efforts, and launched the trail protection program, all while cultivating meaningful relationships at the local, state, and national levels,” wrote Jan Ulferts Stewart, NCTA Board of Directors President.

The remainder of this article is a compilation of stories, memories, gratitude, and well wishes for her, from a trail community she has been so influential in building and fostering.

“Having worked side-by-side with Andrea for the past decade, I am very proud of our shared successes and for how much the trail and our organizations have grown and evolved over that time. I wish her much happiness in her new role, have great confidence in her continued success, and value the prospect of continuing to work together to protect the lands and resources that define not only the splendor of the North Country National Scenic Trail, but of our entire nation.”

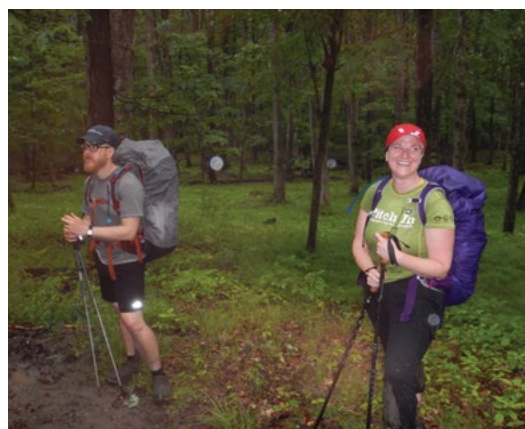
—Chris Loudenslager, NCNST Superintendent, National Park Service

“Recruiting Andrea was by far the best and most significant decision I got to make during my tenure at the NCTA. She is uniquely talented in her combination of skills: Visionary yet grounded; a strong leader while being a humble follower; idealistic yet realistic; sensitive while still resilient; and a dreamer as well as a doer - with an emphasis on the doer part. In a time when nonprofit leadership seems to be a revolving door, with an average tenure of no more than three years, the NCTA has been extremely blessed by Andrea's longevity with us - 16 years! That's her foundational commitment to who we are and what we do.”

—Bruce Matthews, former NCTA Executive Director

“When Andrea hired me in 2018, I was preparing for an interstate move to Michigan. While we waited out the closing process on our new home, my family lived two hours north of Lowell. I drove down once a week to work in the office, stayed at Andrea's house for a night, then worked again the next day before heading back up north. All these years later, I'm still deeply appreciative of that welcoming gesture she offered, and the bond we were able to form so quickly as a result. Her leadership and friendship have been invaluable. Andrea, may you never forget to *shake the glass!*”

—Kate Lemon, NCTA Marketing and Communications Manager



Andrea (right) at the 2015 A-100 in Penn.

Photo by Shelby Gangloff

“Andrea worked exceptionally hard to understand the needs of the NCTA's new Trail Protection program and to move it forward. Her hard work has set the stage for NCTA's future success in closing the remaining 1,400 miles of gaps in our national scenic trail.”

— PAUL GAGNON, NCTA DIRECTOR OF TRAIL PROTECTION



Andrea with long-distance hiker and author Jennifer Pharr Davis at the 2023 NCTA Celebration.

Photo by Kate Lemon



Andrea and Larry Pio, Chief Noonday Chapter.

Photo by Eric Longman



Andrea with Ice Age Trail Alliance Executive Director Luke Klobardanz at the 2023 Hike the Hill in Washington DC.

Photo by Felicia Hokenstad

"I'd like to recognize Andrea particularly for extending a great deal of sympathy to our Chapter at the untimely passing of our President, Cal Kangas, in July 2019."

—Karl Jensen, NCTA Ni-Miikanaake Chapter President

"Being active in many areas of our Chief Noonday Chapter, I had many opportunities to interact with Andrea through the years. I found her to be very quick to respond and open to new ideas, and following up on various issues that our Chapter was dealing with. I was especially pleased when Andrea showed up at last year's annual picnic near Kalamazoo, and took on a large role of helping to distribute the various NCTA awards that our Chapter members received."

—Eric Longman, NCTA Chief Noonday Chapter President

"Whoever said girls can't lead? It is so very sad to see her leave. Happy trails, Andrea."

—“Cranberry” Jerry Fennell, Wisconsin

"Andrea has been a valuable staff member to NCTA and will be missed. I wish her the best in her new adventures."

—Karen Raab, NCTA Finance and Operations Manager

“Under Andrea’s leadership the North Country Trail has truly flourished by all metrics. She has been able to vastly improve the trail as a whole, elevate volunteerism and philanthropy all while lifting up the brand and awareness of the NCT. I am personally and professionally grateful for her passion, commitment and vision.”

— JOSH BERLO, NCTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

“

I look up to Andrea as a professional, and I’ve enjoyed working with her in both a volunteer and staff capacity. She’s given so much to the NCTA. The Public Lands Alliance is lucky to have her!”

— FELICIA HOKENSTAD, NCTA NEXT GENERATION COALITION



Andrea (right) with Val Bader during a Hike the Hill event in Washington DC.

Photo provided by Val Bader

“

I valued Andrea's dedication to outdoor recreation access, sustainable partnerships, and the people that make the North Country Trail possible. I appreciated her efforts over the years that improved and advanced the trail, such as on the Dingell Act, unit status, and so much more. I wish her success, the best of luck, and 'happy trails' for her future!"

— STEPH LIGUORI, NEPA SPECIALIST, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

“Andrea has been the kind of leader every mission-driven organization hopes to find: Steady, thoughtful, and relentlessly focused on people. I have watched her guide the NCTA through real challenges, including government shutdowns and the long uncertainty of the pandemic, with calm clarity and a level head that helped the rest of us stay oriented to what mattered. At the same time, she never allowed the organization to simply endure. She helped the trail community recognize itself and its strength, and she kept us moving toward the future, not just managing the work but shaping it. Most recently, that has meant helping launch a strategic planning effort and a new vision for the North Country Trail and the NCTA that will guide us long after she leaves. The Association is stronger because of her leadership, and I am deeply grateful for the time we have had with her at the helm. I know she will bring that same steady leadership and heart to the Public Lands Alliance, and I am excited to see the impact she will have there.”

—Mike Chapple, Vice President, NCTA Board of Directors

“I'll never forget my final interview - it's a story to say the least! Andrea showed me exactly who she is that day: a leader who puts people first, handles challenges with a cool sense of calm, and maintains a great sense of humor through it all. It's been a pleasure working with you.”

—Nancy Brozek, NCTA Director of Development and Communications

“Andrea has been an exceptional Executive Director - truly the best leader I've had the privilege of working for. While not everyone on the trail had the opportunity to interact with her regularly, I'm grateful that I did. She always made a point to stop by our office to say 'good morning,' a small gesture that had a meaningful impact. It let us know she was present and created space for conversations, which made her approachable, genuine, and accessible. Those qualities may seem minor to some, but they make a significant difference in a professional environment. We have been fortunate to work with her and she will be greatly missed.”

—Becky VanDyke, NCTA Data Entry Specialist

“I'm truly grateful to have had the opportunity to work under Andrea's leadership. She leads with clarity, trust, and a deep respect for the people who care for this trail. The North Country National Scenic Trail is better because of her vision and dedication, and I wish her continued success in her next chapter.”

—Will Brazill, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator

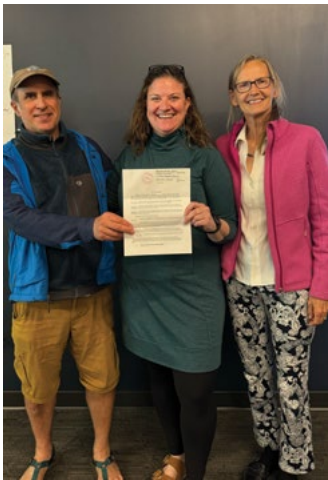


Top to bottom:

Andrea with trail runner and author Mirna Valerio (center) alongside NCTA and NPS staff and volunteers at the 2019 Celebration in Michigan.

Andrea with former board member Jaron Nyhof (center) and current board member Mike Chapple at the 2022 Celebration in Minnesota.

NCTA staff and volunteers at a Partnership for the National Trails System event in 2015.



Far left: Left to right: Paul Gagnon (NCTA Director of Trail Protection), Andrea, and Jan Ulferts Stewart (Board President) celebrating a finalized easement for the trail in North Dakota in 2024.

A post-conference hike at Lake Ashtabula after the 2015 North Dakota Trails Conference, which the Shyenenne River Valley Chapter co-hosted. Andrea is pictured second from the right.

Photo by Becky Heise

“Andrea always placed such value on building and maintaining relationships with our volunteers, as she knew they are the heart and soul of the NCT. Many of my fondest memories involve her meeting with our Chapter leaders, sometimes when a Chapter was going through tough times. Her presence always made the Chapter leaders feel better about the good work they were doing and the team that they had on their side that would help them out. I also remember texting back and forth with her in 2019 when Congress actually passed the Arrowhead Reroute (Minnesota) legislation as part of the omnibus public lands bill. It was a surreal moment to see the vote actually happen after we’d spent a **long** time on the advocacy part of it.”

—**Matt Davis, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator**

“Andrea has left her mark on the North Country Trail in so many ways. Here’s to new adventures ahead - I wish her nothing but success!”

—**Nic Loiseau, Volunteer Program Manager, National Park Service**

“Andrea strikes me as someone who sees the bigger picture and isn’t afraid to step in and step up. Since I’ve been with the NCTA, I’ve witnessed her champion the Association forward from funding to new development to increased staff capacity. I admire her leadership and communicative nature. She has clearly made a mark here and wishing her a heartfelt good luck as she embarks on her next chapter.”

—**Lauren Kennedy-Little, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator**

“I’ll always be appreciative of how Andrea guided me, especially during my first couple years as the RTC for Michigan. Being able to ask her questions, having her knowledge available at any time, and her willingness to discuss *anything* truly helped me learn quicker and become better at my job.”

—**Kenny Wawsczyk, NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator**

“Among your many contributions to the NCTA and the ANF Chapter was your unwavering support for the Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge. Twice you attended the event, encouraging the participants and showing your interest by hiking the difficult Tracy Ridge terrain. Thank you for all you have done! We wish you success and fulfillment in your new endeavors!”

—**Tina Toole, Secretary, NCTA Board of Directors**

“

Andrea, you will be missed immensely! It has been wonderful working with you. This next chapter in your life sounds perfect. We wish you all the best. Enjoy, and come hike the UP!”

— BARB ISOM AND CHARLIE TODD,
NCTA SUPERIOR SHORELINE CHAPTER

“

Andrea’s love and passion for the trail inspired us all. We wish her well!”

— BRUCE DZIADZIO, NCTA CHIEF
NOONDAY CHAPTER PRESIDENT



Left to right: Val Bader (NCTA Director of Trail Operations), Andrea, and Richard Lutz.

Photo by Dave Brewer

"For the several decades I have been privileged to work with her, it has always been a pleasure to work with Andrea. She is always so appreciative of the help she is receiving and of the motivations of volunteers. Although she always has been working to strengthen the NCTA and advance progress toward completing the NCNST, her readiness to collaborate with leaders from other national trails has been a hallmark of her service. She has repeatedly made common cause with leaders of the Ice Age Trail Alliance to further the federal support for the two national scenic trails passing through the Great Lakes region. Just as importantly, she has been a leader in the larger National Trails System community through her work within the Partnership for the National Trails System. Andrea has been a stalwart champion of the National Trails System. I wish her joy and success in her new endeavor."

—**Gary Werner, retired Executive Director, Partnership for the National Trails System**

"Andrea deserves much credit for bringing the Association to a new level of maturity, vitality, and sustainability. She directed the efforts that are expanding the base of support for the Association and its growth into becoming a protector of lands for the trail. All of this bodes well for the future of the trail. Her efforts have earned respect for the Association within the National Trails community and recognition for the trail as a premiere National Scenic Trail. We will be forever grateful to her."

—**Tom Gilbert, retired NCNST Superintendent, National Park Service**

"Andrea has been a superlative leader for the NCTA over a challenging time in the organization's history. Her wisdom, sense of humor, patience, and organizational skills have been very important for the board, staff, and volunteers. It has been a privilege to work with her over the past decade. I wish her all the best in her new role."

—**Tom Moberg, former member, NCTA Board of Directors**

Blazing a Trail for your future has never been easier.

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Just like maps guide you on your adventure, we can help you navigate your legacy plan

"Leaving a gift through the Legacy Society gives us confidence that the trail will be there for future generations to enjoy the way our family has thus far!"

— DAN AND JENN DRIESENKA

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LEGACY SOCIETY
NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

2026 A-100

The NCTA Allegheny National Forest Chapter is excited to announce the annual Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge (A-100) will return June 12-14, 2026.

The A-100 is not a race but a personal test of stamina, determination, and resilience. Participants select a personal mileage goal of 100, 75, 50, or 25, then aim to complete it within 50 hours on the North Country Trail through the National Forest.

This challenge is open to all experience levels. Whether taking on your first overnight hike or pushing toward the full 100, hikers are encouraged to travel at their own pace, rest when needed, and embrace the adventure. The hike is unsupported; there are no aid stations, so participants must carry their own food, water, and gear, and be prepared for limited cell service.

The route features rolling hills, quiet hardwood stands, and scenic hemlock-lined stream valleys. This year's trek will run north to south, starting at PA Route 346 (Willow Bay Trailhead) and ending at PA Route 66.

Registration is open from March 6-13 or until the event's capacity is reached, and the entry fee is \$100. Details and FAQ can be found at northcountrytrail.org/a-100. Contact the Chapter with questions at anf@northcountrytrail.org.

2025 Trail Progress Report Snapshot

The following is a compilation of trailwide accomplishments in 2025. This incredible impact is a result of the dedication of each and every NCTA Chapter, Affiliate, and partner. Please see the full *State of the Trail* article for details of local-level efforts.

Current NCNST miles (total)		Current off-road miles		
4,860		3,365		
1,267 volunteers contributed		for a value of		
80,405* hours		\$2,797,273		
2,886	47	25	505	53
miles of trail maintenance work completed	new miles of NCNST built	miles of roadwalk eliminated	miles of trail blazed	bridges built or repaired
4,066	81	313	29	
feet of puncheon and boardwalk built or replaced	kiosks and signs updated or installed	Chapter and Affiliate-led hikes with 5,016 total participants	youth corps and programs helped to build and maintain the NCNST	

*includes volunteer advocacy and travel hours

State *of the* Trail

CHAPTERS, AFFILIATES, PARTNERS



NORTH DAKOTA

Central Flyway Chapter

A new, long-awaited segment was finally opened at Riverdale and we celebrated with a ribbon-cutting and inaugural group hike during North Dakota Hike Fest. We strengthened a variety of partnerships to help promote the trail, our hikes, and volunteerism, including staff at Lake Sakakawea State Park, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Audubon National Wildlife Refuge. A Scout troop aided us for a

total of 27 hours to sand and weather-seal trail benches, and to build and install a kiosk. We led many themed group hikes such as a Migratory Bird Hike and a 12 Days of Christmas Hike, and represented the trail at many community events. About 22 miles of trail were mowed and brushed numerous times throughout the year, and we kept a vigilant eye on signage, as the prairie tends to take it over! We look forward to growing partnerships this year to further improve the trail experience here at the west end.



Glee Mayer during the 2025 North Dakota Hike Fest.

Above: Mark Zimmerman at a ribbon-cutting for new trail in Riverdale, North Dakota.

Photos by Central Flyway Chapter



NORTH DAKOTA

Sheyenne River Valley Chapter

We have been successful in obtaining three new 99-year easements to help permanently protect the trail and move more miles off-road. With help from county offices, we updated our landowner lists, too. We were delighted to host a portion of the North Dakota Hike Fest event, and to celebrate our members and partners who received prestigious volunteer awards, including Jerry Warner (Trail Builder of the Year), Michael Kangas (NCTA Friend of the Trail), and Daryl and Becky Heise (NCTA Lifetime Achievement). Our continuing partnership with Doosan Bobcat resulted in two community service projects and matched company donations. In 2026, we'll focus on constructing more trail near Lake Ashtabula and closing more gaps across our section.



Sheyenne River Valley Chapter volunteers build a cleared ramp in North Dakota.

Photo by Lisa Kelley

Left: Boardwalk building in North Dakota.

Photo by Becky Heise



NORTH DAKOTA

Dakota Prairie Chapter

The reroute we recently built on the Ekre Grassland Preserve now winds past two log cabins, providing hikers with a new, historical experience. These cabins are being restored by the landowner who wants the public to have access to them. We enjoyed co-hosting North Dakota Hike Fest, which was a great success and was even promoted on the North Dakota Today show. Our annual Hike a Half (half marathon) event saw 85 participants and we hosted more than a dozen other group hikes throughout the year. Priorities for this year include collaboration with the Sheyenne National Grassland as they undergo a large trail improvement project, and continuing to grow our Chapter. Last but not least, we can't resist a shoutout to our stalwart member Rennae Gruchalla who wrote and self-published *Meadowlark's Guide to the North Country Trail in North Dakota*. Let us know if you're interested in a copy!



Rennae Gruchalla (left) and Chris Brandt at the old fire tower site during the Hike a Half.

Above: A Dakota Prairie Chapter spring group hike.

Photos by Chris Brandt



MINNESOTA

Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter

Multiple Chapter members became certified sawyers last year, increasing our capacity for maintenance. We rerouted and blazed the trail through Delagoon Park to accommodate the overhaul of the campground, and a kiosk was reconfigured to reflect this change. We partnered with the Prairie Wetland Learning Center for our annual Snowshoe and Skishoe event, with our volunteers assisting people of all ages in trying these winter sports. Chapter hikes were held monthly; a highlight includes visiting a Dambo troll on the NCT in Frazee, as well as our annual leaf color hike in Maplewood State Park. Our first project this spring will be to install a handrail on stairs



A kiosk reconfiguration at Delagoon Park, Minn.

Photo by Michelle Lackey Olsen

near the Otter Tail River. We're also partnering with other NCTA Chapters in Minnesota to obtain a planning grant to move more trail miles off-road.



MINNESOTA

Laurentian Lakes Chapter

Incredible amounts of time and energy were used to deal with the aftermath of a major summer storm that resulted in massive blowdown areas. For perspective on the complexity, for days on end, chainsaw crews cleared only about 50 feet per hour. But we're proud to report that by the end of October, all segments were finally cleared. We formed a new partnership with a county sheriff office's "Sentenced to Serve" program, through which numerous people helped with trail maintenance.



A Laurentian Lakes Chapter volunteer clears blowdown in Minn.

Photo by Robert Becklund

The vast majority were skilled and anxious to participate; many expressed interest in continuing to serve after they've completed their sentences. In 2026, we look forward to growing our Chapter membership and strengthening partnerships with our neighboring NCTA Chapters.



Portage Brewing Company in Walker, Minn. named a brew honoring the North Country Trail.

Photo by Itasca Moraine Chapter



MINNESOTA

Itasca Moraine Chapter

We kept up with regular maintenance of our 70-mile trail segment in 2025. We hosted our annual meeting at Portage Brewing Company in Walker, which brewed a *Trail Town IPA*!

Volunteers tabled numerous community events all around north-central Minnesota to introduce more people to the trail. Early this winter, volunteers flagged a new spur trail from the NCT at Amikwik Shelter south to Deep Woods County Park. This new spur trail will provide additional public access to the trail and provide a developed campground for long-distance hikers. In 2026, we'll be exploring ways to build this new trail.



MINNESOTA

Star of the North Chapter

The biggest event for us in 2025 was building new trail in the Chippewa National Forest. Over four days, three-quarters of a mile got flagged, built, and blazed by more than 25 volunteers from all over Minnesota - many

of them new to trail building. Our Arrowhead Chapter neighbors provided a lot of assistance, too. This was the beginning of an 11-mile project that has been many years in the making. We plan to attend more community events this year and recruit more volunteers for both trail work trips and to adopt sections. We'll also keep chipping away at that new trail segment.

Dan Geiger and Amanda MacDonell finish trail tread work in Minn.

Photo by Matt Davis



The Arrowhead Chapter trail building crew.

Photo by Arrowhead Chapter



MINNESOTA

Arrowhead Chapter

We made major strides in trail development and maintenance in 2025. This includes roughing in 13 miles of new corridor, completing multiple parking areas at trailheads, installing

kiosks and signage, building new campsites, scouting new routes, and our regular maintenance. Multiple Chapter members became chainsaw certified; some attended trailbuilding and skills classes, and some participated in Avenza map training to improve our field documentation. We celebrated the designation of NCTA Trail Town status for Grand Rapids and Cohasset, and attended a variety of other community outreach events. We aim to keep this momentum in 2026 as we develop more trail and build more partnerships.



Building trail in Northern Minnesota.

Photo by Arrowhead Chapter



Exploring Minnesota's Northwoods.

Photo by Ely Northwoods Chapter



Ely Northwoods Chapter

Last year, we hosted 12 monthly Leadership Team meetings and six Chapter meetings, including two community cookouts. We conducted spring and summer highway cleanups near the trail, and took on our standard maintenance. We worked alongside the Kekekabic Trail Chapter to promote the trail and to recruit volunteers at Ely's Blueberry Arts Festival, Harvest Moon Festival, and the Regional Trailhead Building ribbon cutting. In September, we hosted our Chapter's second "birthday" at Ely's new trailhead building, which featured

food, a giveaway, and cake. We also carved a block of snow into a hiking boot at Ely's annual Winter Festival! This year, we'll continue identifying new trail route and keeping this wild trail as open as possible.



An NCTA hiking boot, carved from snow by the Ely Northwoods Chapter.

Photo by Ely Northwoods Chapter



Volunteer crew working on a new stone stairway.

Photo by Rick Bothwell



Kekekabic Trail Chapter

More than 50% of our Kekekabic Trail segment of the NCT was cleared and maintained by nine crews last spring and fall. In total, 74 volunteers provided 2,814 hours of service - including two

Outward Bound volunteer crews who cleared four miles of the trail. We're leading the development of a new 18-mile segment east of Ely. This process included flagging, communicating with private landowners, and collaborating with the U.S. Forest Service. We expect to begin construction this coming summer, pending federal approval. Other projects in 2025 included

repair to trail tread, steps, and stream crossings, stone step building, and significant trail clearing. We represented the trail at many events,

continued on next page



The Kek Kamp Crew.

Photo by Amanda MacDonell



Kekekabic Continued

from outreach efforts at college campuses to community gatherings to partner meetings. We also organized a hiking, camping, and [light] work weekend called Kek Kamp for eight participants from several sister Chapters and Affiliates in September. This will be an ongoing activity with different Chapters taking the lead each year. We look forward to strengthening partnerships, recruiting and training more volunteers, and furthering the new segment.



A BRTA sawyer clears (non-wilderness) trail in Minn.

Photo by Pam Tavernier



MINNESOTA

Border Route Trail Association (Affiliate)

We maintained approximately 10 miles of wilderness trail and 30 miles of non-wilderness trail in 2025. This work included blazing, updating kiosks, and lots of sawyer work. In 2025 alone, we led 11 maintenance trips. We were excited and honored to be featured on the Paddle and Portage podcast last spring, too! This year, aside from on-going maintenance and volunteer training, we'll welcome assistance from the Conservation Corps Minnesota and Iowa in June with a project in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.



MINNESOTA

Superior Hiking Trail Association (Affiliate)

The amount and complexity of maintenance work done each year on the Superior Hiking Trail is often staggering. On the Bean and Bear Lakes Loop, we installed a 126-foot boardwalk. We replaced 450 feet of boardwalk near Lax Lake Road (paired with a training session by trail building professional Willie Bittner), and built 300 feet of puncheon across three other locations. The new Boreal Campsite is now complete and the Bear Lake Campsite has been intensively updated. Last year was another record-breaker for the number of volunteers engaged (600) and the number of volunteer hours donated (10,000). Three youth organizations alone served a total of 675 hours maintaining trail with us. This year, we celebrate our 40th anniversary as an Association and will be launching many ways to celebrate, including a limited podcast series. We are optimistic that six parcels of land we've identified as critical to the trail will be moved from a temporary easement to permanent. In addition, we will bring on a new Southern Seasonal Contractor, as our long-time contractor Larry Sampson has officially decided to retire. This will be a big transition for our organization.



Above: Volunteers at the Boreal Campsite during the SHTA Backpack-In Work Weekend.

Photo by SHTA

Left: Beaver Bay boardwalk project on the Superior Hiking Trail, Minn.

Photo by Willie Bittner

STATE OF THE TRAIL

Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew



New turnpike built by the Rovers last fall in Wisc.

Photo by Rovers



New turnpike built by the Rovers last fall in Wisc.

Photo by Rovers

The Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew is a group of volunteers from a variety of NCTA Chapters. Under Brad Stewart's capable leadership and Bill Menke's continued mentoring, the Rovers had another productive year. A total of 3,732 volunteer hours were contributed by 98 volunteers, and the crew benefitted from three weeks of a WisCorps crew joining them. We built bridges, puncheon, and a new campsite. We finished a project with the Heritage Chapter, which has been a focus for the last two seasons, and we were prominently featured in a *Discover Wisconsin* travel and tourism video. We also extend special thanks to David and Geraldine Wregge for once again hosting the crew at their Quiet Pines campsite. This year, we're aiming to build new trail in Douglas County with the Brule-St. Croix Chapter.



Watch A Wisconsin Wonder: The North Country Trail on YouTube.



Dom Sosnowski uses a power wagon to move materials to a worksite in Wisc.

Photo by Brule-St. Croix Chapter



WISCONSIN

Brule-St. Croix Chapter

After a lot of work, we secured a large grant from the East Central Energy Cooperative to support building six miles of new trail in our section. We can't wait to get started!

Using upgraded materials, we leveled nearly 400 feet of puncheon (the Brule Bog Boardwalk). Much of the credit for that goes to Dom Sosnowski, who has put hundreds of hours into this project on his own and hosted a series of workdays last spring with 21 volunteers. Our group hikes were well attended and a Scout troop adopted a section of trail.



A Chapter hike in Pattison State Park, Wisc.

Photo by Brule-St. Croix Chapter



A new 24-foot bridge over Porcupine Creek, Wisc.

Photo by
Chequamegon Chapter



Volunteers on the new Tyler Forks Bridge, Wisc.

Photo by
Bethany Thomas



WISCONSIN

Chequamegon Chapter

Last summer, we were honored to be featured alongside a WisCorps crew in a Discover Wisconsin travel and tourism video: A Wisconsin Wonder (YouTube). Our hardworking trail crews replaced a 28-foot bridge, installed more than 100 feet of puncheon, and built stone steps over three muddy sections. We hosted 10 group hikes and continued our strong partnership with Copper Falls State Park. Administrative work is never the most thrilling to report, but it's such essential work for a smooth-running Chapter. We organized lists of trail adopters and shuttle drivers, leadership position descriptions, tool and supply inventories, and more. This will allow us to accomplish our 2026 goals more effectively and efficiently, including building two new campsites, a few sections of puncheon, and a long reroute near Canthook Lake, and supporting a large NCTA volunteer training event.



WISCONSIN

Heritage Chapter

2025 was a maintenance-heavy year for our Chapter. We built and repaired multiple bridges ourselves and assisted a contractor with the construction of a 75-foot bridge over the Tyler Forks River. Hikers can now travel

between Ashland and Iron Counties on the NCT much more smoothly. We installed signage, blazed trail, and built a campsite on the Potato River. For the first time in 10

Northland College student Nathan Davison installs an honorarium for the college on the trail.

Photo by Bethany Thomas



UP MICHIGAN

Ni-Miikanaake Chapter

Our top priority for 2026 is to map a route on the new land we've gained access to. There are also several maintenance projects we'll work on, including a kiosk at the Powers Vista East Trailhead and boardwalk along the Lost Lake Trail section in the Porcupine Mountains. We improved blazing across our Chapter's segment and installed a bench, and collaborated with NCTA staff on trail agreements to further protect our segment in the Western Upper Peninsula. We hosted group hikes through the spring, summer, and fall, and stayed present in our community at events and meetings. The Friends of the Porkies group has become a partner of ours and we look forward to maintaining trail together.



Volunteers clear brush and grass near the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park.

Photo by Karl Jensen



Volunteers clear trail in the Upper Peninsula after the 2025 Thanksgiving Blizzard.

Photo by Connie Julien



Marquette Area Chapter

Of our more than 100 miles of NCT, we maintained 100% of all off-road trail and spurs. This work included refreshing 20 miles of blazes, installing signs, and repairing 120 feet of boardwalk. Our new hike leader, Dennis Fattaleh, led 13 group hikes throughout the year and earned glowing reviews. Chapter board member Nancy Kreft was instrumental in planning, scouting, and organizing the Softies Hikes in the spring and fall. We held our annual *Hike Every Mile* event in which more than 60 people participated. (They sign up to hike a segment of trail so collectively, we hike our entire Chapter section on National Public Lands Day.) The Northern Michigan University Conservation Crew worked 38 hours to maintain the trail. We're also building strong partnerships with travel, tourism, and community groups to promote the trail and improve environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Our top priority this year is to permanently repair and/or replace unsafe boardwalks and stairs at the Laughing Whitefish River. We are also

collaborating with the Dead River Campers Association in hopes of securing an easement to relocate 7 miles of roadwalk.



Brad Slagle at the new Jeske Boardwalk sign, dedicated to the incredible NCTA volunteer, Lorana Jinkerson.



A Marquette Area Chapter trail crew in Mich.

Photos by Michael Sekely



Peter Wolfe Chapter

Our most challenging yet rewarding accomplishment in 2025 was to remove and replace a deteriorating boardwalk over beaver dam water. We are very thankful for the new 32-foot Bush Creek bridge finally built by a contractor! Volunteers also built bridges, boardwalks, and puncheon, repaired a shelter, and updated blazes on our 120+ miles. We welcomed student volunteers from Michigan Tech on multiple occasions and held 15 group hikes - many spent nearly two hours driving to/from the trailhead to join us. Ottawa National Forest staff and a youth crew placed logs over a very wet and muddy section, and we continue to work with NCTA staff and private landowners to secure more trail segments. This year's "spring cleaning" will be exceptionally challenging due to the amount of trees brought down late last year. Please reach out if you'd like to join in our efforts!



A volunteer-built bridge in the Little Spruce Lake Nature Preserve, Mich.

Photo by Stan Vitton



New sign at the trailhead of the new 4.5-mile reroute.

Photo by Barb Isom



Superior Shoreline Chapter

Our community really came together to construct a new 4.5-mile trail segment that eliminated 2 miles of roadwalk. Much of this work was done during 15 different work events. Many new volunteers traveled from afar to help, for which our stalwart team was grateful. Those 4.5 miles were then blazed and additional signage was installed. We also completed a much-needed switchback and next year, plan to construct another for an eroding hill off Route 407. This segment has been marked and cleared, and we'll offer

a work party this coming fall. We're also hoping for sawyer training opportunities and will work to recruit more volunteers interested in becoming sawyers.



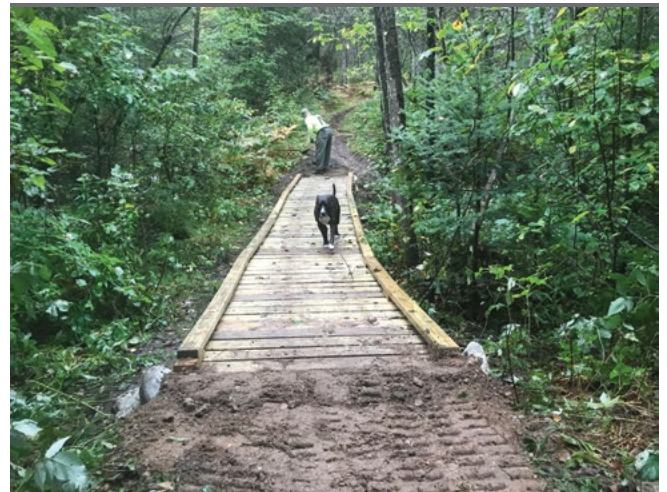
One of the many groups who helped with the reroute this year in Mich.

Photo by Barb Isom



Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter

In 2025, we led 13 proper hikes and 37 trail maintenance workdays - an impressive amount of work was done! We refreshed blazes across about 40 miles of trail, replaced 400 feet of puncheon, and updated wayfinding signs across 20 miles, from Whitefish Bay south past Soldier Lake. This year, we plan to replace a quarter-mile of puncheon near the Carp River. There are also several projects awaiting approval from various agencies that our volunteers are eagerly standing by for!



Above: Brad Stewart and his dog Ricky Bobby put the finishing touches on new puncheon at Trout Brook Pond.

Left: Stan Kujawa, Erik Baron, and John Texter frame a new kiosk.

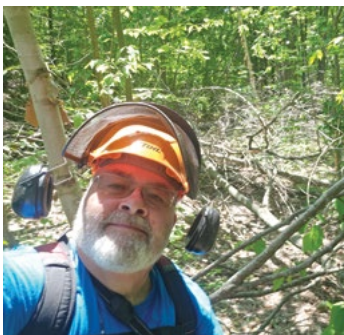
Photos by Tom Walker



MICHIGAN

Harbor Springs Chapter

A large portion of our Chapter's maintenance time in 2025 was spent cleaning up after a massive spring ice storm. It rendered much of our trail section unusable for a few months. Thanks to our dedicated volunteers from both our Chapter and neighboring ones, as well as a Michigan Department of Natural Resources crew, our entire section was reopened in the fall, with the exception of one small portion. For some perspective, it was estimated that four hours of work would clear a quarter-mile of trail. We cleared trees and debris, rerouted, reblazed, and repaired signage. Additionally, a long-awaited, 80-foot bridge was installed over the Carp Lake River by a contractor, significantly improving the trail user experience in our segment. This spring, we'll scout and devise a plan for that final storm-damaged segment, and add a small parking area near the new bridge.



Spring 2025 ice storm cleanup efforts in Northern Lower Michigan.

Photos by Tim Calloway



MICHIGAN

Jordan Valley 45° Chapter

Our Chapter led trail cleanup efforts after a spring ice storm devastated much of Northern Lower Michigan. In total, volunteers spent nearly 800 hours clearing the trail from downed trees, branches, and other debris. We were assisted by a SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew for about a week too, and we helped the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the City of Petoskey with some of their cleanup efforts. While this took a significant amount of our time and resources in 2025, we still managed to lead monthly hikes and attend community events. Now that we're able to look ahead, our sights are set on moving multiple trail segments off-road and potentially building a campsite. Lastly, we commend our volunteer Evelyn Howell, for her collaboration with the National Park Service in developing an official Junior Ranger Adventure Guide for the North Country Trail.



Spring ice storm damage in Northern Lower Michigan.

Photo by Kevin Whitley



VOLUNTEERS



MICHIGAN

Grand Traverse Chapter

Thanks to a strong partnership with the Kalkaska Downtown Development Authority, among others, a major reroute is now complete. This project included the installation of three bridges, 300 feet of boardwalk, 900 feet of gravel, barrier-free trail, and a new designated trailhead and parking lot. The trailhead includes an interpretive panel and a large refurbished garage for the Chapter to store equipment. With help from a SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew, our volunteers also conducted repairs on a series of 16 bridges and puncheons in a narrow valley near the Manistee River. We led 16 group hikes throughout the year and 11 participants hiked all 107 NCT miles our Chapter maintains. To improve the experience of all our trail users, we updated our Chapter brochure, as well as the lists of trail access points and water sources on our webpage -

which we also added via QR code to our trailhead kiosks. We look forward to improving recruitment and training for Trail Adopters and protecting more trail segments.



Kalkaska, Mich. trailhead ribbon cutting.

Photo by Patty Warner

Above: A restored bridge on a tributary of the Manistee River.

Photo by John Gerty



MICHIGAN

Spirit of the Woods Chapter

Last June, our volunteers traveled north to assist our neighboring Chapters with tree clearing after a highly destructive ice storm. It was slow going, but what excellent collaboration! We extend many thanks to them for the free lodging and meals for our crew. We were able to get three new sawyers certified, and we recruited and trained three new section adopters. Thanks to partnership with a private landowner, a new Trail User Agreement was signed to protect a quarter-mile of trail. We teamed up with a SEEDS EcoCorps youth conservation crew to tackle a puncheon project and to remove invasive autumn olive. Our Chapter welcomed an average of 24 participants at our monthly group hikes in 2025, and other events like a map training seminar, and a National Public Lands Day workday saw similar participation. In 2026, we'll continue

our interpretive panel installation project in the Manistee National Forest and our pursuit of moving more trail off-road.



Above: A work crew installing anti-slip treads at Sterling Marsh.

Photo by Dan Driesenga

Left: A work crew builds puncheon at Sawdust Hole.

Photo by Pete Bennett



Western Michigan Chapter Spring Gathering.

Photo by Chris Present-Halford



MICHIGAN

Western Michigan Chapter

Trail Adopters maintained all of our Chapter's NCT miles in 2025. County Trail Coordinators planned and managed more than 17 workdays. More than 60

sawyer tickets for branch, tree, and other debris removal were completed. Our volunteers also tackled 4,500 feet of critical erosion control and benching maintenance. Thanks to cooperation with a local landowner and the Fallasburg Historical Society, we rerouted a small segment to add a campsite, privy, and interpretive panel. This addition greatly benefits thru-hikers because Kent County has very limited camping options. A SEEDS EcoCorps youth crew and Lake County Youth Works provided great assistance on several reroutes in Newaygo County. Total Chapter hike participation exceeded 225 people, and included 10 dogs and one ferret. This year, we aim to fill key Chapter leadership positions, grow our partnership with the Kent Conservation District and Kent County Parks, and move more trail off-road.



Trail work in West Michigan.

Photo by Jay Benda



MICHIGAN

Chief Noonday Chapter

The head of our Hike Committee reported that a total of 445 people attended our hikes in 2025 and 25% of them were first-time hikers with us. Our annual Shoe Year's Day Hike drew the largest crowd: 143. In early

2025, we started offering Breakfast Meetups. The location and day of the week changes, but the concept remains to have breakfast together then hike or tackle a small work project. It has brought in a number of members who do not come to other Chapter events. Trail work wise, we repaired approximately 100 yards of puncheon and bridges, updated miles of blazes, rerouted nearly 4 miles of trail. We also built a partnership with the Calhoun County Trailway Alliance (who we will assist with in planning new trail), and represented the trail at a wide variety of community meetings and events. Goals for 2026 include engaging more youth in hiking on the NCT, developing a campsite in Calhoun County, and organizing a Chapter Bridge Walk on the Mackinac Bridge on Labor Day. Stay tuned!



A kiosk is moved in response to a trail reroute.

Photo by Eric Longman



A Luminary Lit Winter Solstice Hike in Southern Michigan.

Photo by Chris Sherman



MICHIGAN

Chief Baw Beese Chapter

The most exciting progress we made last year was receiving the permits to build a bridge in the Lost Nation State Game Area, across a branch of the St. Joseph River. We're eager to team up with the

Michigan Department of Natural Resources this year to complete the project. We also secured an agreement with city managers of Hillsdale and Jonesville to build a new trail segment between them. Our hike leaders led 14 hikes and we attended a variety of outreach events to promote both the trail and our Chapter. Volunteers repaired a 20-foot bridge and one campsite; improved 25 feet of puncheon, reblazed 5.5 miles of trail, and installed a variety of signs.



The Chief Baw Beese Chapter Saturday trail maintenance team.

Photo by Chris Sherman



OHIO

Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association (Affiliate)

Roughly 3 miles of NCT blazes (on both trees and carsonite posts) were refreshed for improved visibility. A local high school's ecology club offered to do a service project last spring that included trash pickup and brush trimming. We improved parking lots and trailheads, and coordinated major paving and resurfacing projects. A partnership with the Delta Community Garden Club has resulted in a native flower garden alongside the trail. This year we'll strive for smooth volunteer leadership transitions, stronger partnerships, continued community support, campsite improvements, and much more.



Tiffin River cleanup efforts after spring storm surge.

Photo by Jeff Smucker



Local NORTA volunteers celebrating trails with an organized spring hike.

Photo by Dave Blyth



OHIO

Buckeye Trail Association (Affiliate)

Check out our new website! We also hired a new Volunteer Trail Coordinator and Peebles, Ohio was officially made a trail town. In the New Straitsville section, volunteers started *Trail Tuesdays*: Recurring workdays for the local community to engage in trail work. They have greatly increased capacity, allowing the local chapter to get more done. Our Association partnered with Great Ohio Lodges and Tourism Ohio to help promote trail use, and with Boots On The Trail: an organization that provides veterans and active-duty service members with ecotherapy opportunities. A Student Conservation Association crew is helping us build new trail in the Wayne National Forest. More than 130 miles of blazes were refreshed and lots of signage was updated. Top priorities for 2026 include



Staff and volunteers celebrate Peebles, Ohio as a new BTA Trail Town.

Photo by Aidan Reagh



An improved kiosk at the Pretty Run Nature Preserve.

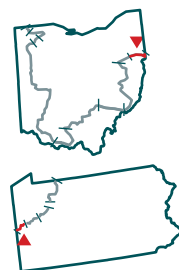
Photo by Byron Guy

completing that segment in Wayne National Forest to eliminate 15 miles of roadwalk; co-hosting TrailFest in September with the NCTA and others; and planning and implementing a backpacking loop project.



A Wampum Chapter trail building crew in Pennsylvania.

Photo by Dave Brewer



OHIO AND PENNSYLVANIA

Wampum Chapter

Our trail crews were kept busy in 2025 with eliminating roadwalk, replacing two bridges, installing signage, constructing a hiker shelter, clearing logging debris, and much more. To accomplish a few projects, we partnered with youth groups such as Trail Life Troop 1116, Tiger Paws Youth Ministry, and a volleyball team from Darlington, Pennsylvania. We led nearly 30 group hikes, including many of our signature themed hikes such as the Bigfoot Search. Last but not least, we're proud to have provided direct support for the NCTA's first-ever land acquisition, which permanently protects a segment of the trail in our region. This year we'll prioritize closing more trail gaps, helping with a management plan for that newly acquired property, and promoting the trail at as many events as possible!

As a member, your support goes a long way.



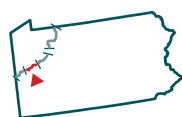
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The Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps working with the Butler County Chapter.

Photo by
Lindsey Hartle



PENNSYLVANIA

Butler County Chapter

We were fortunate last year to work frequently with the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps, who aided our volunteers with multiple projects. Multiple landowners are also collaborating with us on improving trail access and we look forward to continuing those relationships. Our segment through Moraine State Park continues to improve with well-maintained trail and a new storage shed for volunteer tools and equipment. Group hikes were numerous and well-attended, especially our Holy Sundae Hike (ice cream!) and New Member Hike. This year we'll host a CPR and First Aid training and send volunteers to sawyer training, expand partnerships with organizations such as the Butler Outdoor Club and Keystone Trails Association, and advance our landowner outreach to get more of the trail off-road and into the woods.



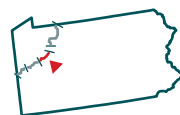
Butler County Chapter's Holy Sundae Hike.

Photo by Lindsey Hartle



Scurry Overlook, Clarion County, PA

Photo by Sandy Craig



PENNSYLVANIA

Clarion County Chapter

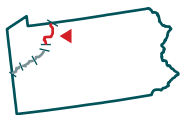
Our excellent volunteers maintained 45 miles of trail in 2025. We installed road crossing signs, built a half-mile reroute, and hosted monthly hikes for our community. A half-mile of new, more sustainable trail eliminated nearly a mile of regularly wet walking. We thank the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy, Clear Creek State Forest, and Lyme Timber for their collaboration on that. We also supported the Keystone Hiking and Outdoor Weekend - hosted by the Keystone Trails Association and Discover Clarion County - by leading two hikes. Priorities this year include building crossings over deep gulleys for our DR mower and scouting the realignment of a steep section in

Cook Forest State Park. We'll also identify a new shelter site along the Allegheny River - there's currently an 18-mile gap between shelters, which is significant anywhere but especially here given the winding, rocky landscape.



Liggett Bridge, Clarion County, PA

Photo by Sandy Craig



PENNSYLVANIA

Allegheny National Forest Chapter

Each year, we reblaze about a quarter of our trail section (25 miles). The freshest blazes are now between Chappel Bay and the New York state line. We installed four informational panels in Kellettville about the logging industry, built a new campsite near Williams Brook, and repaired and replaced many structures including bridges, kiosks, and puncheon. In June, we held our 13th annual Allegheny 100 Hiking Challenge (the A-100). This is an unsupported endurance hiking challenge with the purpose of promoting both the trail and the National Forest. Nearly 180 hikers participated; 16 completed the full 100 miles while most of the rest logged 75, 50, or 25. This year, we're seeking approval for the design of two large bridges; addressing drainage and tread issues; increasing technical training for our volunteers; and adding creative events to engage both new and existing members and trail users.



(Left to right) Lori Tillman, Angelia Clarke, and Shawn Weishaar on the ANF Chapter's First Day Hike.

Photo by Tina Toole

ANF Chapter volunteers install interpretive signs as the last step of a four-year reroute project that removed a mile of roadwalk.

Photo by Dave Fleck



An FLTC hike at Rattlesnake Hill Wildlife Management Area, NY.

Photo by Finger Lakes Trail Conference



NEW YORK

Finger Lakes Trail Conference (Affiliate)

Multiple properties were purchased in 2025 to eliminate roadwalk and permanently protect trail segments, including a parcel next to Watkins Glen State Park and one near DeRuyter Reservoir. Permanent easements were secured for other segments, too. We relocated one 24-foot bridge and upgraded four others, installed more than 200 feet of puncheon, and refreshed 50+ miles of blazes. Our annual Hike the County series remained popular: 80-100 hikers attended each of the seven scheduled hikes while 50 more participated independently. We're excited to be updating our five-year strategic plan and transitioning to new GIS mapping software. We also look forward to co-hosting another Volunteer Vacation with the American Hiking

Society, protecting more trail segments, and continuing to build and maintain the trail sustainably.



Assessing a bridge damaged by flooding.

Photo by Finger Lakes Trail Conference



VOLUNTEERS



Central New York Chapter Full Moon Hike.

Photo by Scott Sellers



NEW YORK

Central New York Chapter

Last fall, we conducted our first full-length group hike on the newly completed reroute through Clark Hill

State Forest and Pixley Falls State Park in the foothills of the Adirondacks. The state agencies, which have been a great help on this major trail construction project, are also building three small bridges, kiosks, and a parking area at the south end of this segment. Our chainsaw crews made five trips to this same area to clear numerous blowdowns from summer storms. This certified sawyer crew expanded by 12 last August. Volunteers also built a bridge, teamed up with an Eagle Scout to rebuild steps, revised Chapter outreach materials, led a variety of group hikes, and made progress with several landowners to further protect our trail segment. We're also pleased to welcome our new Regional Trail Coordinator, Will Brazill. He hit the ground running and has already been a great help!



Chainsaw training in Central New York.

Photo by Will Brazill



NEW YORK

Adirondack Mountain Club (Affiliate)

Much of the year was spent connecting Will Brazill, the newest NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator representing New York and Vermont, with the various folks involved in the NCT construction and maintenance in the Adirondacks. We developed an important partnership with the Adirondack 46ers: a nonprofit whose members have climbed the 46 major Adirondack peaks, and who are dedicated to similar work regarding trails and their surrounding landscapes. We also hiked all of the existing NCT in the Adirondacks to assess needs and pick up from where the late volunteer superstar Mary Coffin left off. Alongside regular trail maintenance tasks, we assisted multiple volunteers in their pursuit of updated GPS tracks through the Adirondack Park, which were then provided to the NCTA. When trail work season approaches again this spring, we'll continue progress made in 2025 - lots of new trail construction and route planning.



A sign-in register for the Jones Hill Trail in the Hoffman Notch Wilderness Area.

Left: The ADK 46ers Trail Crew hauled garbage away 3 miles down the mountain from an old, illegal camp.

Photos by
Adirondack
Mountain Club



Volunteer John Derick inspecting the underlying infrastructure of a suspension bridge.

Photo by MALT



VERMONT

Middlebury Area Land Trust (Affiliate)

2025 was one of our most productive years. Alongside the projects completed on the shared Trail Around Middlebury (TAM) / NCT, we completed many infrastructure

projects across the rest of our trail network, and we are looking forward to a similarly busy season this coming year. We welcomed a new Executive Director, hosted our annual TAM Trek (a 19-mile race), and collaborated with the NCTA on trail protection efforts. We also replaced two bridges and repaired two others, added 175 feet

of puncheon, and installed a new kiosk. Top priorities this year include moving more trail off-road, and working with the NCTA on a necessary reroute to avoid an incoming solar energy development.



MALT Trails and Volunteer Manager Liam Hickey on newly installed puncheon.

Photo by MALT

Volunteer Award Nominations

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 2026 awards are being accepted now through April 6, 2026. Review both the NCTA Award Descriptions and Policies at northcountrytrail.org/volunteer-awards. 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. We encourage you to get help from others 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.



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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.

Sometimes, this is what trail planning looks like. NCTA staff traveled to New York's Adirondack Mountains and Vermont's Champlain Valley last fall. The goal of the trip was to connect with partners on ongoing trail projects, introduce new staff, and plan for upcoming collaborations in trail construction, maintenance and protection.

Photo provided by Will Brazill