Hike it
Build it
Love it

Your Adventure Starts Nearby.
Our community’s Core Values

- **Accountability** We take ownership and responsibility for our actions, policies and decisions. We engage in wise stewardship of public and private resources.
- **Collaboration** We value the spirit of cooperation between staff, volunteers, all partners and landowners and are committed to building and maintaining this culture of collaboration. Service is the backbone of our organization.
- **Excellence** We strive for exceptional quality and safety, both in the work we do in building and maintaining the Trail and in the experiences of the users of this world-class trail.
- **Inclusion** We are committed to ensuring that everyone is respected, included and valued for their contributions to our mission and culture. We actively welcome people of different backgrounds, perspectives, thoughts and beliefs.

**MISSION**

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.

**VISION**

Our vision for the North Country 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.

We are a united community of individuals and partners who embrace the spirit, peace, and beauty found along the Trail.

Cover Photo: Pregent-Halford Family
When we look back at 2020, we’ll remember what mattered. The Trail provided space, peace of mind and grounding to millions of people when it was needed most.

More people completed the Hike 100 Challenge, we reported more volunteer hours than ever before, we pulled our community together in new and innovative ways, and we were able to keep thousands of miles of the Trail maintained and blazed, while it was facing record use. You made that happen!

In turn, we heard your stories about what it’s meant to you to have the Trail in this time of need. The North Country Trail is more than just a Trail and 2020 showed us just what that means and why it’s so important that we do this work.

In 2020, we lived up to our promise to add two new Regional Trail Coordinators, providing professional staff across the entire Trail for the first time in history. We built 51 miles of new Trail in 2020 and put $200,000 directly onto the ground through trail construction and maintenance projects. We focused on general trail maintenance, blazing and mapping to show the way for all that were seeking solace on its path, for there has never been a time that a walk in the woods was needed as much.

In all aspects of our work, NCTA adapted to the challenges that faced us all in 2020 and we’re better for it. The North Country Trail Association is resilient and you made it all possible. Thank you!

Sincerely,

JARON NYHOF
Board President

ANDREA KETCHMARK
Executive Director
After extensive research, preparation and planning, the Board of Directors adopted a three-year strategic plan focused on seven long-term priority objectives.

**TRAIL OBJECTIVES**

**MAINTAIN THE TRAIL**
Every mile will have an active Chapter or Affiliate responsible for maintaining the Trail to NPS standards and reflecting the quality of a National Scenic Trail.

**COMPLETE THE TRAIL**
There are 3,150 miles of off-road Trail currently completed. Over time we will move 1,600 miles of the route that are currently on roads to the optimal location that serves to fulfill the North Country Trail’s nature and purpose.

**PROTECT THE TRAIL, VIEWSHED AND HIKER EXPERIENCE**
Become an organization that has capacity and structure to prioritize and permanently secure access for the route and protect the trail experience.

**PROMOTE THE NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL**
Increase national, state and local awareness of the North Country National Scenic Trail hiking experience, the natural and historical resources it offers, and volunteer opportunities to engage with NCTA and our work.
ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

SUPPORT OUR VITAL CHAPTER AND AFFILIATE COMMUNITY
Each Chapter and Affiliate organization will be actively achieving their commitment to our mission, with successful mechanisms to develop new members and new leadership over time.

DEVELOP NCTA’S ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY
Increase NCTA’s capacity to meet the opportunities and challenges of fulfilling our mission and support our partners and community of trail stakeholders.

INCREASE AVAILABLE FUNDING
Become a self-sustaining organization, enabling us to implement what has been identified within our strategic plan.
Accomplishments

In collaboration with the National Park Service (NPS), the Association hosted three socially distant chainsaw trainings for 43 volunteers during August and September.

Kenny Wawsczyk Regional Trail Coordinator for Michigan

Photos: Kenny Wawsczyk
The Outdoor Foundation and Outdoor Industry Association reported 8.1 million more Americans hiked in 2020 than 2019, as the national participation rate grew 16.3 percent.

The North Country National Scenic Trail was no exception. Reports of increased Trail use were prevalent across the Trail. With traditional work groups restricted, Chapters planned and prepared for increased volunteer needs to be completed in a shorter time period.

- Regional Trail Coordinators helped to facilitate virtual Chapter meetings, hosted regional webinars and led statewide priority setting meetings; all to stay connected and continue planning for the Trail.
- Built 51 miles of new Trail and eliminated 20 miles of off-road walk.
- Volunteers reported 91,086 hours for a total donated value of $2,477,539.

**NCT Maps**

“Our maps continued to provide a barrier-free entry point for users looking to research and explore the NCT” —Matt Rowbotham, GIS Program Manager. “This was especially important in 2020 with the increase in new users.”

- 128,000 unique views of Trail Maps and Downloads web page
- 18% increase of overall website traffic (Trail Maps and Downloads page)
- Integrated Trail Alert conditions into the digital map
- Multiple map updates throughout the year, saving financial resources for NCTA and our trail users

In partnership with the National Park Service, the Association awarded 15 Field Grants, for a total of $42,095, to Chapters, Affiliates and Partners in 2020. The NCTA funds our portion of this program through private donations and membership dues to make an impact where we appreciate it most: Along the Trail itself.
Executive Director Andrea Ketchmark continues to serve on the PNTS Trail Leaders Council and in 2020, also joined the Board of Directors.

“It’s exciting to be part of such a vibrant community, striving to elevate the status of the entire National Trails System. Through our collective advocacy in the halls of Congress and by building strong relationships with our federal agency partners at the national level, we will see policy that upholds the values and vision of the National Trails System Act. The success of the Partnership’s is success for the North Country Trail.” —Andrea Ketchmark.

Seven NCTA delegates, including two from the Next Generation Coalition, attended Hike the Hill, virtually, in February. NCTA continues to champion the National Scenic Trails Parity Act to secure unit status for Ice Age, New England and North Country National Scenic Trails.

In August 2020, the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act was signed into law. This includes funding for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This is an important step to maintain and protect lands and resources in our National Forest and National Park land in all eight NCNST states.

Marketing Milestones

Two major marketing milestones were accomplished in 2020: a new website and a new Association brochure. “Both pieces offer a better user experience and more accurate and appealing representation of the work our volunteers, Chapters and Association do throughout the year.” —Kate Lemon, Marketing Coordinator.

northcountrytrail.org

Michigan Blue Magazine

Assoc. Brochure

Social Media Presence

21,000+ Facebook followers

8,000+ Instagram
Stay Safe, Stay Local with Hike 100

At a time when the need for respite was on the forefront of everyone’s mind, how would the ever popular Hike 100 Challenge continue when group activities and travel were restricted? Enter #HikeFromHome which allowed non-NCT miles to count toward the Hike 100 Challenge.

Promoting Togetherness on the Trail

“I love being able to get to know my son as an individual in a setting where he feels at ease enough to easily articulate his thoughts and feelings. Until last year, we hadn't experienced that with Sam. For individuals who have autism, the world is often overwhelming—noisy, crowded, odiferous. Being in nature, when Sam hikes, he is able to listen and feel ‘nothing and be (himself).” — Jen Steinberg.

Inaugural MY NCT Membership Drive Launched

The My NCT program incorporates the promotion of the Trail through an artist's visual interpretation of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST).

Inaugural My NCT Art, a woodcut of the Trail created by Michigan artist Erica Lang, owner of Woosah Outfitters

“I am honored to capture what this [Trail] means to so many people. I hope it makes them want to get out, go to their favorite state and make new memories.” — Erica Lang

4,000+ Registrations from Across the Country

2,714 Individual Finishers

573 Pets Completed the Challenge

“I love being able to get to know my son as an individual in a setting where he feels at ease enough to easily articulate his thoughts and feelings. Until last year, we hadn't experienced that with Sam. For individuals who have autism, the world is often overwhelming—noisy, crowded, odiferous. Being in nature, when Sam hikes, he is able to listen and feel ‘nothing and be (himself).” — Jen Steinberg.
Special thanks to the 29 Chapters and 8 Affiliates who live and breathe the vision of the North Country Trail.
CELEBRATING OUR CHAPTERS AND AFFILIATES

NORTH DAKOTA
• Central Flyway Chapter
• Sheyenne River Valley Chapter
• Dakota Prairie Chapter

MINNESOTA
• Minnesota Waters and Prairie Chapter
• Laurentian Lakes Chapter
• Itasca Moraine Chapter
• Star of the North Chapter
• Arrowhead Chapter
• Kekekabic Trail Chapter
• Border Route Trail Association
• Superior Hiking Trail Association

MICHIGAN, LOWER PENINSULA
• Harbor Springs Chapter
• Jordan Valley 45° Chapter
• Grand Traverse Hiking Club Chapter
• Spirit of the Woods Chapter
• Western Michigan Chapter
• Chief Noonday Chapter
• Chief Baw Beese Chapter

OHIO
• Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association
• Buckeye Trail Association
• Wampum Chapter

WISCONSIN
• Brule-St. Croix Chapter
• Chequamegon Chapter
• Heritage Chapter

MICHIGAN, UPPER PENINSULA
• Ni-Miikanaake Chapter
• Peter Wolfe Chapter
• North Country Trail Hikers Chapter
• Superior Shoreline Chapter
• Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore Chapter

PENNSYLVANIA
• Wampum Chapter
• Butler County Chapter
• Clarion County Chapter
• Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy
• Allegheny National Forest Chapter

NEW YORK
• Finger Lakes Trail Conference
• Central New York Chapter
• Adirondack Mountain Club

VERMONT
• Middlebury Area Land Trust
NCTA encouraged volunteers to #VolunteerResponsibly and employ best practices while volunteering during the pandemic. A 16-member Task Force, composed of Chapter and Affiliate leaders, volunteers, National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service partners, NCTA Board representatives and Association staff, was created to discuss volunteer issues related to the coronavirus and create a set of guidelines and best practices. While the initial focus of the Task Force will eventually end, the success of the collaborative is undisputed and will continue with a comprehensive focus on risk management.

**Special Programming**

**VERBAL JUDO**

With an expected increase of traffic on the Trail, and the widely differing viewpoints around Covid-19 safety, the Association took a proactive approach. Curtis Smith, Vice President of Training with the Verbal Judo Institute, led 40 people through an online workshop on de-escalation and persuasion tactics when confronted with people who are being verbally abusive, resistant, and difficult to the point of creating an impasse.

**#RECREATERESPONSIBLY**

NCTA supported and promoted the national #RecreateResponsible initiative to protect yourself, others and the outdoors.
MONTHLY CHAPTER AND AFFILIATE LEADERSHIP CHECK-INS

Chapter and Affiliate Leadership check-ins via Zoom: What began as bi-weekly updates, to help survive unknown consequences brought on by a pandemic, have transformed into idea exchanges between Chapter leaders, Affiliates, National Park Service and NCTA staff. The meeting provided social interaction and discussion on hot topics like coronavirus Trail implications, National Park Service compliance protocol, Chapter and Affiliate support, and Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI).

JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (JEDI)

In June, the North Country Trail Association joined with others in signing the Outdoor CEO Diversity Pledge and began amplifying efforts to create a welcoming space on the Trail for all.

• Director of Trail Operations, Valerie Bader, represents the Association on the Partnership for the National Trails Systems (PNTS) JEDI working group. The group has advanced the Partnership’s JEDI initiatives through crafting a statement of inclusion for publication, drafting an internal best practices outline, and supporting training through a series of virtual workshops.

• Outdoor Afro leader Kim Refosco began working with NCTA JEDI Committee in planning two series of online training sessions, a pilot for Pennsylvania Chapter leaders and volunteers, and a board and staff training series.

• NCTA Board approved the use of donor-directed funds for a mini-grant program (starting in 2021) focused on JEDI work. The intention is to fund work affinity groups are already doing on the NCT, rather than duplicate efforts.

A YEAR OF TECHNOLOGY

All Association staff created home offices while meetings and training across the country were held online.

Inaugural Campfire Chats with members of the Founders Circle and NCTA staff were held on Zoom. These small group discussions were a place to share thoughts and ideas about the future needs of the Trail and Association.

Celebration 2020 was also held virtually. For the month of August, the Association celebrated volunteers, partners, supporters, and the Trail Community as a whole.

• Facebook Live Opening Ceremony with more than 2,000 views.

• 131 volunteers were recognized by NCTA and NPS

• Next Generation Coalition Summit

• Founders Circle Reception featuring Anne Nelson as guest speaker

• NCTA’s mapping technology in trail management and hiking workshops.

2020: A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

North Country Stories: Creating Spaces a candid conversation on the Trail experience from a person of color’s perspective, featuring Alice Jasper, Good for Michigan Program Director.
Because of you, the North Country Trail Association is able to continue to serve the Trail and all it offers. Your gift protects and provides access to the beauty and spirit of the Trail, not just for today but for future generations.

## DONOR HIGHLIGHTS

### True North Society

**$25,000 AND UP**
- Colcom Foundation
- Iron Belle Trail
- Lux Foundation
- Michigan Fitness Foundation
- REI Foundation

### Trail Champion

**$10,000-$24,999**
- Larry Bell
- Gloria and Kevin Brushwyler
- Lorana Jinkerson
- Jim and Eleanor Mitton
- Tom and Mary Moberg
- National Park Foundation
- Nicholas Funds
- Partnership for the National Trails System
- Jim Stewart and Jan Ulferts Stewart*
- Jim Warbritton
- John and Cyndi Woollam

### Trail Guardian

**$2,500-$4,999**
- Pat Allen and Mark Miller
- Robert E. Bauer
- Mary and William Coffin
- Carter and Florence Hedeen
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- Derrick* and Cheryl Passe
- Jeff* and Nancy VanWinkle
- Raymond Vlasak
- William Vogt and Claire Eberwein

### Trail Leader

**$5,000-$9,999**
- Peter Bennett and Julia Davey
- Betty A. Lewis Environmental Charitable Trust
- Mike* and Renee Chapple
- Jerry* and Nancy Fennell

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* Board Member
Thank you to our partners and friends who made 2020 such a remarkable year.

OFFICIAL TRAIL PARTNERS

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
As the officially administering agency for the North Country National Scenic Trail, the National Park Service has a long history of supporting NCTA through a Cooperative Agreement that funds a portion of our operations along with select special projects.

USDA FOREST SERVICE
As a major land management partner, the Forest Service supports critical volunteer training like NCTA’s Crew Leader program and community programs like Trail Towns.

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Thanks to the Iron Belle Trail program, the Michigan DNR supports NCTA’s work by funding capacity building and needed trail projects throughout the state.
DONOR HIGHLIGHTS

TRAIL BLAZER

$1,000-$2,499
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Jack Cohen
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$500-$999
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Quinn Wright*
Gaylord and Marlene Yost

We are grateful for all of our supporters who helped make 2020 the successful year it was. These accomplishments are the result of your generous support.

Thank You.

* Board Member
† Staff Member
† Deceased
YOU WERE A PART OF A TRAIL COMMUNITY 3,703 MEMBERS STRONG — AND GROWING.
$250-$499

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We have made every effort to make sure these lists are as accurate as possible. If we have omitted or incorrectly reported your generous support please accept our apology and contact Nancy Brozek, Director of Development and Communications nbrozek@northcountrytrail.org or (616) 897-5987 ext. 5.
**Legacy Society Members**

Anonymous (1)  
Pat Allen  
Loren Bach and Dave Martus  
Steve and Karen Bade  
Mike* and Renee Chapple  
William W. Currie†  
Cecil† and Joanne Dobbins  
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Irene Szabo  
Jere Thompson†  
Roger and Rebecca Tuuk  
Elizabeth Wheatley†  
Joan Young  

* Board Member  
† Deceased

**Recommend NCTA through your Donor Advised Fund**

**Name NCTA as a beneficiary on a retirement or life insurance policy**

**Donate stock or give through your IRA**

**Name NCTA in your will or estate**

For more information contact  
Nancy Brozek, Director of Development and Communications:  
nbrozek@northcountrytrail.org  
(616) 897-5987 ext. 5.
The North Country Trail Association is filled with appreciation and recognition for those honored and remembered this past year.

MADE IN HONOR OF

Adalee Erickson
Adirondack Mountain Club—Onondaga Chapter
Alyssa Meller
Anna Pogozelec
Anne G. Nelson
Barbara Ann Smith
Barry and Kent County
Brule St Croix Chapter
C. D. Ogg
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Phyllis High
Ralph E. Ramey
Ric Stanford
Virginia Wunsch

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR CONTRIBUTORS
You ensured the financial sustainability of the North Country Trail Association remained steady in the midst of an unprecedented and unpredictable year. Although Covid-19 disrupted some planned work, revenues continued to support major program areas of trail building and maintenance, awareness and advocacy, and the support of our volunteer community.

Strong performance in fundraising and a much appreciated bequest, paired with decreased expenses due to delays in projects, events and travel due to Covid-19, resulted in a net income for 2020 of $300,000. Our donors and foundation partners continued to grow their support of our work with a 45% increase in their giving. Support from the National Park Service through our Cooperative Agreement also increased. Thanks to an 4% increase we were able to add additional trail management staff. Grants, which we rely on mainly to fund trail projects, fell by 74% due to temporary pauses in planned projects in the field due to Covid-19. We’re happy to report that these projects are now back in motion and will be completed in 2021. Our investments also grew in 2020, now totalling $347,000. This includes modest growth in Endowment accounts and growth in contributions toward our Operating Reserve which exceeded a goal of securing one month of operations, ensuring we can weather any challenges ahead in the world’s economy.

Due to solid financial management and the dedicated support of our many donors, the NCTA was able to meet its goals in 2020 and is prepared to fund its mission in 2021 and beyond.

The North Country Trail Association holds the “Accredited Charity” rating from the Better Business Bureau. The rating means that the NCTA maintains or exceeds the Wise Giving Standards for Charity Accountability established by the BBB. The standards measure financial and programmatic data, as well as fundraising and administrative practices looking for certain standards in disclosure, transparency, program and fundraising cost ratios and solid financial management.
Together we hike it, build it, love it.

Special thanks to those who shared their stories, provided financial support and gave of their time in 2020.
DEVELOP NCTA’s ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

WELCOMING NEW STAFF
A part-time Events Coordinator and a part-time Data Entry Specialist joined the team. Two full-time Regional Trail Coordinators (RTCs) were hired to further the development of the NCNST in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Vermont. The RTC position is the voice of the Association among NCTA Chapters, Affiliates, and Partners; including land managers and the National Park Service. Having liaisons representing each state is a turning point for the Association.

STAFF
Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director
Valerie Bader, Director of Trail Operations
Nancy Brozek, Director of Development & Communications
Stephanie Campbell, Regional Trail Coordinator
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