

Development of the North Country National Scenic Trail in Northwest Wisconsin

Citizen volunteers in Northwest Wisconsin continue to work toward completion of Wisconsin's segment of the longest hiking trail in the US. The project, however, is at a critical point which will require continued engagement of the Wisconsin DNR to succeed.

In the past decade, federal funds allocated to the DNR have permitted acquisition of trail easements and purchase of property from willing sellers on the trail route. These funds have been used strategically to secure trail route in the Copper Falls, Solon Springs, and Nemadji Valley areas; new trail built in these areas is already attracting recreational use by both visitors and residents.

Designated federal funds have now been fully used, and additional funds of this type are not anticipated. Future easements and purchases will now be dependent on coordinated efforts to secure funds through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund and the state's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. The primary concern is the ability to quickly respond when property becomes available; as a current example, property in Douglas County is currently being offered by a private landowner for purchase, but if the DNR cannot act promptly, the land may be sold for other uses.

The North Country Trail has been recognized as a national-quality treasure by both Wisconsin Trails Magazine and Wisconsin Public Television. Walking in the outdoors is the most widely used form of outdoor recreation in America. Continued active engagement between the Wisconsin DNR, National Park Service, and citizen volunteers in the North Country Trail Association in planning and development of the trail is needed to ensure this recreational resource and visitor attraction is completed in Wisconsin.

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