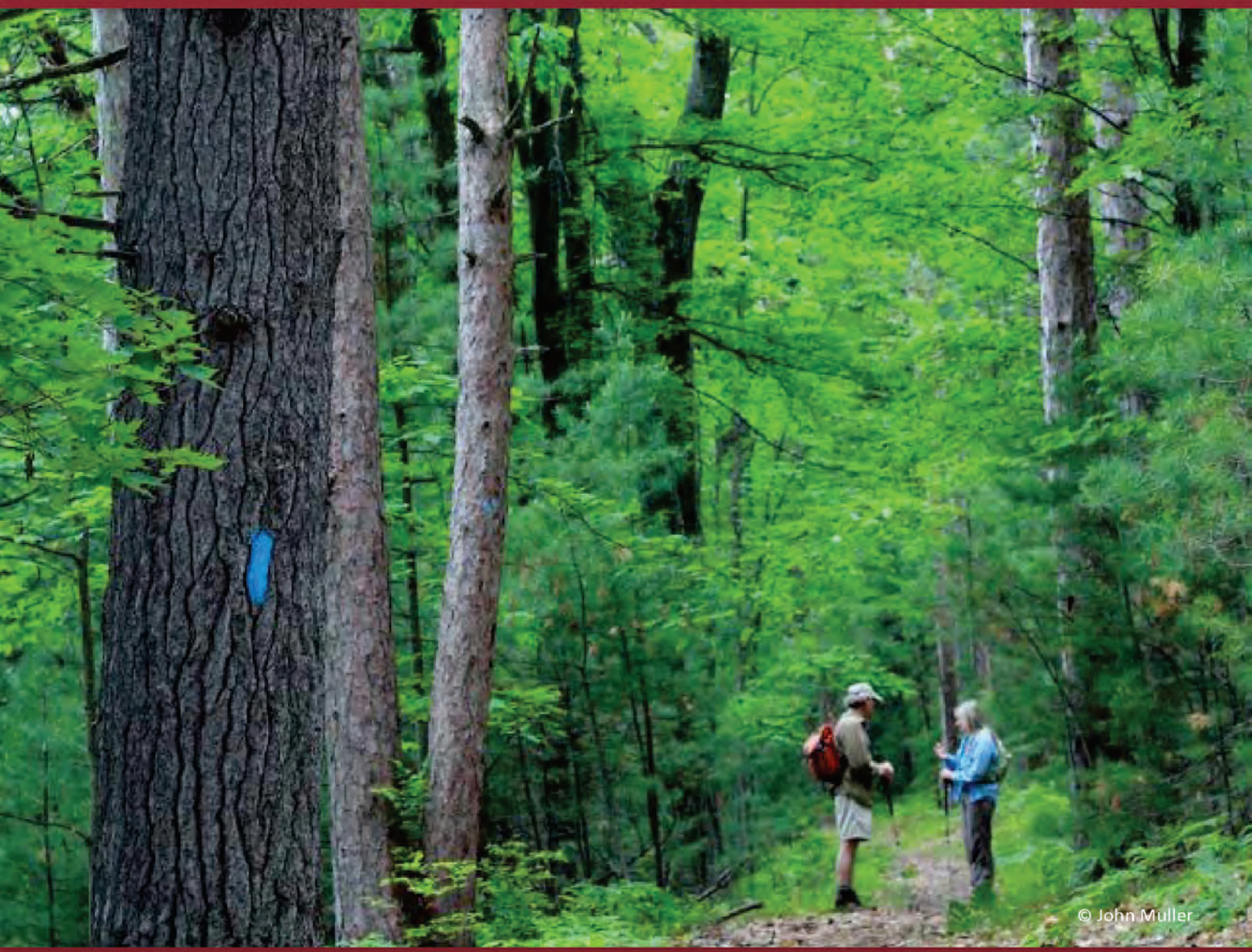
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Foundation Document Overview

North Country National Scenic Trail

ND, MN, WI, MI, OH, PA, NY



Contact Information

For more information about the *North Country National Scenic Trail Foundation Document*, visit: nps.gov/noco or write to:
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Trail Nature and Purposes

The nature and purposes of the North Country National Scenic Trail is to provide a non-motorized trail offering world-class walking and hiking experiences within a protected trailway and landscape through the northern heartlands of America.

The Trail reflects a tapestry of people both past and present, woven together with the places and stories that define them. The grandeur of rugged mountains, vast prairies, deep woods and placid lakes, the tranquility of rural farms, the variety of working landscapes, the boundless horizons of the Great Lakes, the splendor of true wilderness, and the nostalgia of historic canal towpaths and communities intertwine to create a natural and cultural tapestry of great breadth and depth.

Linked by common commitment, the trail engages and supports a multitude of public and private partners and volunteers working to create a continuous pathway telling this story.

Trail Significance

Significance statements express why North Country National Scenic Trail resources and values are important enough to merit designation as a component of the national trail system. These statements are linked to the nature and purposes of North Country Trail, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Statements of significance describe the distinctive nature of the trail and why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. They focus on the most important resources and values that will assist in trail planning and management.

- **Length and Connectivity.** The North Country Trail links hundreds of federal, regional, state, local, and private lands and trails together to create the longest national scenic trail in the United States. The North Country Trail enhances interconnectivity and facilitates a multitude of different trail experiences.

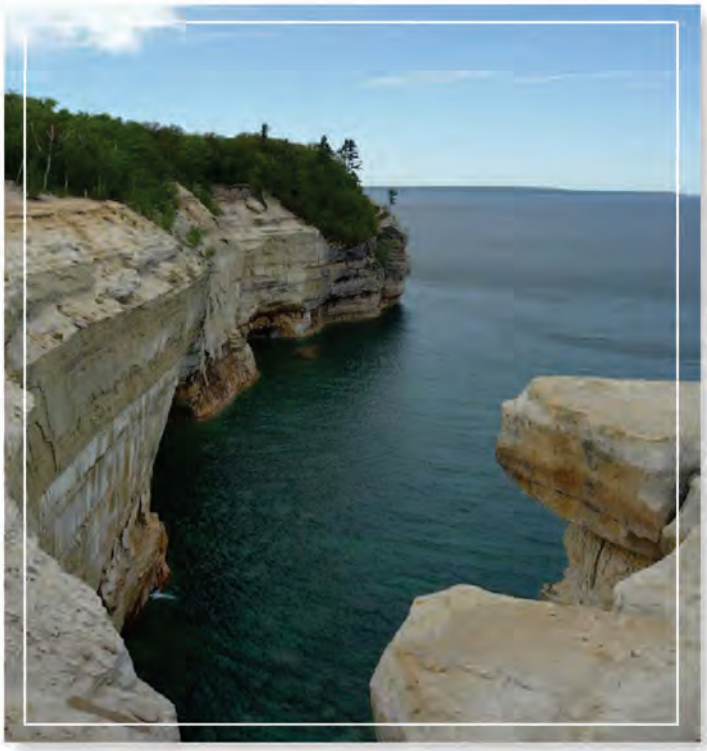
- **Diversity of Natural Resources**. From the Adirondack Mountains and Finger Lakes regions of New York through the rolling Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania, the rich agricultural lands of Ohio, the Great Lakes of Michigan, the remote North Woods of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and northern Wisconsin, and the vast prairies of Minnesota and North Dakota, the North Country Trail captures the bountiful diversity of the Great North Woods along its length.

- **Cultural Tapestry of the North.** The distinct regional cultural traditions found along the length of this linear landscape reflect a tapestry of people—both past and present—woven together with the places and stories that define them.

Primary Interpretive Themes

- **Adventure Awaits.** The North Country Trail is open to travel by foot for its entire length, engaging visitors in four-season recreational opportunities in a wide spectrum of areas, from wild, undeveloped areas to rail-trails, towpaths, towns, and cities. Each time on the trail is an undeniably different experience.

- **Partnerships and Volunteers.** The North Country Trail unites hundreds of public and private land owners and nonprofit organizations across its seven-state length in collective partnership to engage with the values and resources of our nation's North Country. As an outgrowth of this partnership origin, the trail and its partners continue to develop its shared stewardship model through creative partnership arrangements and a passionate cadre of volunteers led by the North Country Trail Association and its 30 chapters of volunteers and approximately eleven trail affiliates.



Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose,significance, resources, and values.

- **Our Northern Heritage.** For thousands of years, American Indian peoples lived and thrived throughout this north country. Their cultures wove the foundation of a rich tapestry of the American story. The migration of European adventurers and settlers added even more threads to this cultural tapestry. Today, our evolving heritage offers opportunities to appreciate our diverse collective heritage, past and present.

- **The Adventure of the Trail.** The North Country Trail explores a slice of America at a slower pace, and provides a retreat from the hectic routines of everyday life.

- **In the North Country.** The diversity of scenic landscapes and the beauty of the flora and fauna beckon the potential user to come and sample a cross section of America's northern tier.

- **Out of Many, One.** The North Country Trail is an example of many partners and communities acting together for the accomplishment of a common goal.

Description

North Country National Scenic Trail (North Country Trail) is a unit of the network of scenic, historic, and recreation trails created by the National Trails System Act of 1968, and it is also a component of the national park system. The North Country Trail is administered by the National Park Service.

The North Country Trail provides an opportunity to explore a slice of America at a slower pace, and enjoy a place of retreat from the hectic routine of everyday life. It exists as much for the enjoyment of the casual user as it does for others who are challenged to travel its entire length, by providing outstanding opportunities for recreation, education, inspiration, solitude, and enjoyment.

The North Country Trail currently extends from the vicinity of Crown Point State Historic Site, New York, on Lake Champlain near the central Vermont border, westward approximately 4,000 miles, to Lake Sakakawea State Park on the Missouri River in North Dakota, where it joins the route of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. Planning is completed to expand the trail to include the Arrowhead region of northern Minnesota, and a link in Vermont to connect with the Appalachian Trail. Pending successful enactment of legislation incorporating these two areas, the trail will be approximately 4,600 miles long.

The North Country Trail is a truly special recreational resource. It is the longest national scenic trail in the United States. It is not confined to and does not follow a clearly discernible geological feature as do many other national scenic trails. Instead, it meanders through seven northern states taking users through a fascinating diversity of scenic, historic, cultural, and natural landscapes and recreational features.

With the 2009 amendment to the National Trails Systems Act to permit NPS acquisition of land from willing sellers, the National Park Service now has the opportunity to acquire tracts of land needed for establishing and permanently protecting segments of the trail. This protection may preserve a scenic view or an important resource that is fundamental to the nature and purposes of the trail, whether it may be flora, fauna, geologic, historic, archeologic, or cultural in nature. At the time of this publication, no NPS acquisitions have been completed.

The diversity of the landscapes and features along the North Country Trail is perhaps its most appealing quality. It beckons the potential user to come and sample a cross section of America's northern tier and captivates the trail user with a kaleidoscope of scenes of a developing America and the wild, undeveloped resources from which it grew. They will experience the grandeur of the Adirondack Mountains, the tranquility of the rural farm countryside, the splendor of placid lakes and sparkling streams among forested hills, the boundlessness of the northern prairies, the merging of water and sky at the horizon of the Great Lakes, and the nostalgia of historic canals and abandoned logging and mining communities.

In fulfilling its purpose to take users to the diversity of scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resources along its route, the North Country Trail incorporates many existing trails traversing these resources and nearby communities. While the North Country Trail is managed primarily for hiking and backpacking (and other forms of foot travel, e.g., snowshoeing, skiing), some of these trails permit other nonmotorized uses, as determined by the managing authorities of those trail segments. Of primary importance is protecting the trail experience—providing outstanding opportunities for recreation, education, inspiration, solitude, and enjoyment—and ensuring user safety and resource protection.

At present, the trail crosses 168 federal, state, and local land management units, 114 counties, and passes through or near 14 cities with populations of 20,000 or greater. New trail segments and new partnerships are continually being established with the help of the trail's primary partner, the North Country Trail Association (NCTA). The Association consists of approximately 30 chapters of volunteers and 11 trail-maintaining affiliate partner organizations that perform on-the-ground trail construction, maintenance, and partnership development, among other activities that support the trail.

The official North Country Trail emblem was issued in the *Federal Register* on March 28, 2000. As with the emblems of other national trails, its form is an inflated triangle with the trail name surrounding a distinctive North Star logo in the center.