

2025 ICE AGE NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC RESERVE ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources,
Bureau of Parks and Recreation Management
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OVERVIEW

The Ice Age National Scientific Reserve consists of these nine separate units exhibiting outstanding evidence of continental glaciation:

- Interstate Park*
- Chippewa Moraine*
- Mill Bluff State Park*
- Devil's Lake State Park*
- Cross Plains State Park
- Horicon Marsh*
- Two Creeks Buried Forest
- Campbellsport Drumlins
- Kettle Moraine State Forest - Northern Unit*

To date, six of the nine units (marked with *) are operational with limited state and federal resources. Interpretive centers at Interstate Park, Chippewa Moraine and Northern Kettle Moraine (and a small nature center at Devil's Lake) provide exhibits interpreting each property's unique glacial features. Cross Plains unit is partially developed.

At several of the reserve units, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff present programs to visitors, interpreting these glacial features and the surrounding landscape and presenting educational programs to school and youth groups, as well as adult audiences. Volunteers at some units occasionally present interpretive information to visitors as well.

DNR staff, partner organizations and dedicated volunteers work to protect the natural resources of these important areas. Management projects, like invasive species control and natural community restoration, take place in many areas on an ongoing basis.

Implemented in early 2024, new DNR reporting tools are improving the tracking and report-generating capabilities of interpretive programs at all reserve units that offer programming. These new tools assisted in the writing of this annual report.

Operational funding shortfalls continue to limit the amount of staffing provided at several of the reserve units. Aging visitor centers, including their interpretive exhibits, are in need of capital funding for repairs or replacement.

ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

Linking many of the reserve units, the 1,200-mile Ice Age Trail traces the edge of the glaciers' advance, about 10,000 years ago. The Ice Age Trail Alliance is a non-profit organization that works in partnership with the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) and the DNR to manage the Ice Age Trail. While it is heavily involved in on-the-ground management of the trail, it is much less involved with the National Scientific Reserve.

The Ice Age Trail has far eclipsed the reserve in the public eye and focus of both the NPS and the DNR.

CHIPPEWA MORAINES STATE RECREATION AREA

Size/Location:	This recreation area includes 4,400 acres of land just north of the Eau Claire/Chippewa Falls area.
Unique features:	Some of the unique glacial features include ice-walled-lake-plains, debris-filled ridges, hummocks, kettle lakes and restored prairies.
Facilities:	Facilities at this property include the David R. Obey Ice Age Interpretive Center, boat landings, picnic areas and outpost camp sites. There are 23 miles of trails, including 8 miles of Ice Age National Scenic Trail and three self-guided interpretive nature trails.
Attendance:	Chippewa Moraine State Recreation Area hosted 184,106 visitors during the federal fiscal year reporting period. There were 10,178 visitors to the Ice Age Trail Interpretive Center.
Economic Impact:	In a 2012 economic impact study done by the University of Wisconsin, the study estimates that visitors provided \$1,233,419 of local and non-local economic impacts. (About \$1,740,456 in 2025 dollars.)

Programs: The property had 9,878 participants at its interpretive programs including multiple programs on Ice Age geology, others on native snakes and more.

DEVIL'S LAKE STATE PARK

Size/Location:	Devil's Lake State Park includes 10,200 acres of land just south of Baraboo in the Baraboo Hills. The Ice Age National Scientific Reserve acreage for the Devil's Lake unit is 9,810.
Unique features:	Some of the unique glacial features include the billion-year-old quartzite bluffs that rise 500 feet above lake level. The spring fed lake is more than 1 mile long and 47 feet deep at its deepest point. The park is also home to many unique rock formations including "Devil's Doorway," "Balanced Rock" and "Elephant Cave."
Facilities:	Facilities at this property include four campgrounds, picnic areas, an enclosed shelter and boat launches. There are 29 miles of hiking trails, including 1.5 miles of accessible trails, and 2 miles of self-guided nature trails. There is a nature center at the park. A portion of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail is found within the property.
Attendance:	Devil's Lake State Park hosted 2.29 million visitors during the federal fiscal year reporting period. The visitor/nature center saw 14,796 visitors.
Economic Impact:	In a 2012 economic impact study done by the University of Wisconsin, the study estimates that visitors provided \$120,437,696 of local and non-local economic impacts. (About \$169,947,486 in 2025 dollars.)

Programs:

- The interpretive programing for 6,219 participants included:
 - Winter – led tracking programs for an entire elementary school (410 students)
 - Spring – co-led three *Think Outside Hikes* as part of the Ice Age Trail Alliance's 4th grade program (225 participants)
 - May and June – 14 school groups (410 students and adults)
 - August – 1 school group (98 students and adults)
 - Fall – 4 school groups (200 students and adults)
- Since the pandemic, the number of visitors to the nature center and programs is increasing, with larger numbers of people participating in programs.
- There is an increase in diversity of participants to programs and attendance at the nature center.

- The nature center continues to foster a relationship with the Ho-Chunk to help tell their history of the land around Te Wakąçąk (i.e. Devil's Lake).
- The nature center receives several requests for presentations from community groups, which helps foster a relationship with the surrounding communities.

Achievements:

- Partnered with Wisconsin Master Naturalist classes to lead program on Wisconsin geology and Interpretation.
- Led activities and a booth at the Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo (MOHEE) at both Havenwoods State Forest and the MacKenzie Center. The activities taught kids about fun opportunities at Wisconsin State Parks. At Havenwoods, 600 students participated and at the Mackenzie Center there were about 2,200 participants over the two-day event.
- Continued to work with community groups to provide presentations about the park. Community groups included the Sauk Prairie Community Center, Madison's Active Women's Group, the Madison Area Master Gardeners, the Baraboo Library, the Kilbourn Library, the Free Congregation of Sauk County, a UW-Madison conservation biology group and the Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education.
- Continued to partner with the Little Eagle Arts Foundation to showcase the Ho-Chunk culture at the park, their native land. Seven programs/events were hosted, totaling about 814 attendees.
- Continued to partner with the Friends of Devil's Lake to lead members only programs for their members, as well as assisting to finance public programs for the summer. Eight programs were held, totaling 1,147 participants.

INTERSTATE PARK

Size/Location:	Interstate Park includes 1,330 acres of land just south of St. Croix Falls on the St. Croix River.
Unique features:	Some of the unique glacial features include the sheer rock walls that rise 200 feet above the St. Croix River and the world-famous potholes that illustrate the drilling effects of the sand, gravel and rock once trapped in whirlpools of glacial meltwater.
Facilities:	Facilities at this property include two family campgrounds, two group campgrounds, picnic areas, a beach and a boat launch. There are more than 9 miles of hiking trails, including 1 mile of self-guided nature trails. The western terminus of the Ice Age

	National Scenic Trail is found within the property. There is an Ice Age Interpretive Center on property.
Attendance:	Interstate Park hosted 230,696 visitors during the federal fiscal year reporting period. For the federal fiscal year reporting period, there were 19,123 visitors to the Ice Age Interpretive Center, including visitors from 70 of Wisconsin's 72 counties, 49 of the 50 States, and over 30 countries.
Economic Impact:	In a 2012 economic impact study done by the University of Wisconsin, the study estimates that visitors provided \$18,481,798 of local and non-local economic impacts. (About \$26,079,336 in 2025 dollars.)

Programs:

- The park had 4,053 participants at its interpretive programs, including participants from 20 different school districts.
- The Friends of Interstate Park helped with numerous events, including the First Day Hike, Candlelight Night, Work*Play*Earth Day, and Interstate's 125th Anniversary Celebration where the Friends provided a scenic boat tour, bus transportation for the general public, programming on the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and nature journaling.
- The Friends also brought in programming on geocaching and the fur trade, purchased new supplies for the naturalist, and designed, produced, and installed three interpretive signs explaining the History of the Silverbrook Mansion and its connection to the Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul, which was a thriving Black Community until I-94 went through the heart of the community.
- On Sept. 20, Interstate celebrated its 125th Anniversary. Over 2,000 people visited the park that day, which included a variety of events and programs. The ceremony took place in front of the Ice Age Interpretive Center with speakers Gov. Tony Evers, DNR staff, Friends group representatives and volunteers. After the ceremony, the anniversary tree was planted. Items were also collected for a time capsule that will be buried at Interstate.

Achievements:

- The North Campground lift station was replaced with a modern system.
- Replacement of the old office well began and will be completed in late 2025.
- The Horizon Rock Shelter was rebuilt. The shelter was a CCC-era shelter that burned in the summer of 2021. The Friends of Interstate Park gave a generous donation of \$40,000 toward the project.

- Several larger projects are in the design phase, such as road resurfacing, roof replacement and drinking fountain replacement.

KETTLE MORaine STATE FOREST - NORTHERN UNIT

Size/Location:	The Kettle Moraine State Forest – Northern Unit includes 30,932 acres of land southeast of Fond du Lac. The Ice Age National Scientific Reserve acreage for the Northern Kettle Moraine unit is 20,000.
Unique features:	This property is the largest and most varied of the Ice Age Reserve Units. Some of the unique glacial features include kettles, moraines, kames, eskers and outwash plain.
Facilities:	Recreation facilities at this property include two family campgrounds, one group campground, one equestrian family and group campground, six remote backpack shelters, 10 picnic areas, three swimming beaches, two enclosed shelters, three open air shelters and seven boat launches. There are more than 170 miles of hiking trails, horseback riding trails, snowmobile trails and bicycle trails, plus 3.5 miles of self-guided nature trails. The Ice Age National Scenic Trail travels 31 miles through the length of the forest property and there are five backpack shelters for camping along the trail. There is an Ice Age Interpretive Center on property, and 31 miles of the 115-mile Kettle Moraine Scenic Drive. Opened to the public since 1980, the Henry S. Reuss Ice Age Visitor Center continues to provide hands-on education opportunities that include its aging interpretive exhibits.
Attendance:	The Kettle Moraine State Forest – Northern Unit hosted 591,950 visitors during the federal fiscal year reporting period. The Ice Age Visitor Center specifically welcomed an estimated 10,500 visitors.
Economic Impact:	In a 2012 economic impact study done by the University of Wisconsin, the study estimates that visitors provided \$29,420,220 of local and non- local economic impacts. (About \$41,514,348 in 2025 dollars.)

Programs:

- DNR employees presented 28 public programs with an attendance of approximately 771 and hosted 29 group requested programs with an attendance of 1,579 in calendar year 2025 at the time of this report.
- Non-personal services provided in 2025 included the participation in the following Wisconsin State Park System programs: Wisconsin Explorer Program, Wisconsin Explorer Packs, Take Smokey Camping Packs, and the Fishing Tackle Loaners Program.
- Three campgrounds welcomed 25 camp host volunteers who provide 2,977 hours of service in the campgrounds.
- A Boy Scout fundraised and completed the installation of three horse mounting blocks at bridle trail access lots improving visitor experience and earning an Eagle Scout Award.
- A Boy Scout fundraised and completed improvement projects at the Ice Age Trail backpack shelter #5 improving visitor experience and earning an Eagle Scout Award.
- A Girl Scout fundraised and completed the installation of 80 emergency wayfinding signs throughout the Greenbush trail system improving the emergency response to the trail system and earning a Gold Award.
- Three volunteer trail stewards committed 65 volunteer hours inspecting and reporting trail conditions.
- The Volunteer Center of Sheboygan County held a “Day of Caring by the United Way” at the Greenbush Recreation Area with 70 volunteers from Rehlko Engineering completing many maintenance projects at the warming shelter, outdoor group campground and along the single-track mountain bike trail.

Partnerships:

There are over 35 official partnerships which aid the state forest in providing various recreation opportunities. Some of these partnerships include:

- Friends of the Kettle Moraine, Inc.
 - Official Friends Group of the state forest
 - Hold concessionaire agreement to continue providing merchandise sales via a gift shop at the Ice Age Visitor Center and at the Mauthe Lake Recreation Area and the Long Lake Recreation Area contact stations.
 - Received a Knowles Nelson Stewardship Grant to install a new universally accessible outdoor drinking fountain and bottle filler at the Ice Age Visitor Center.
 - Host an ongoing Invasive Species Committee working to reduce the presence of undesirable vegetation on the property.
 - Presented 10 public events with attendance of 896.
- Northern Kettles Horse Trail Association

- Continuance of a twice-annually volunteer workday to clean and maintain the New Prospect Horseriders' Camp, pre and post camping season.
 - Donated \$800 towards the installation of "No ATV" signage for the bridle trail.
 - Donated supplies towards a trail reroute past a steep hill on the Crooked Lake Bridle Loop.
- Northern Kettle Moraine Nordic Ski Club
 - Focus on Greenbush Ski Trails
 - Continuance of a Recreational Land Use Agreement for trail maintenance and grooming efforts providing a premier classic and cross-country skiing opportunity.
 - Support of a youth ski team.
- Sheboygan County Cycling
 - Focus on Greenbush Mountain Bike Trails
 - Continuance of a Recreational Land Use Agreement for trail maintenance and grooming efforts of the mountain bike trails providing a premier single-track biking opportunity year-around.
- Ice Age Trail Alliance
 - Lakeshore Chapter and Washington-Ozaukee Chapter
 - Continued support in maintaining the 31 miles of the iconic Ice Age Trail through the state forest.
- New Fane Mountain Bike Association
 - Continuance of a Recreational Land Use Agreement for trail maintenance and grooming efforts of the mountain bike trails providing a premier single-track biking opportunity year-around.
- Wisconsin Mycological Society conducted a fungi species survey and foray near the Greenbush Recreation Area.
- University of Wisconsin-Madison's Geography Department collected geological samples around the Long Lake Recreation Area for laboratory analysis toward research correlating proglacial features in the state forest.

Achievements:

- Received a Cherish Wisconsin Outdoor Fund grant for \$15,596 to support the first phase of a multi-year project to improve habitat at and around the Ice Age Visitor Center. The first phase will remove invasive glossy buckthorn, poison ivy and other undesirable brush, and conduct a prescribed burn. This work will stimulate the growth of native plants and improve habitat for several Species of Greatest Conservation Need.
- Participated in the 125th Anniversary of the Wisconsin State Park System celebrations by hosting a Daisy Girl Scout Troop to plant the celebration tree at Mauthe Lake Recreation Area on Earth Day.
- Replaced the roof, windows and overhead garage bay doors, and repainted the 1940s-constructed historic forest headquarters office and shop facility.

- Reconstructed the Long Lake public boat access and parking at the Long Lake Recreation Area improving launch access and useability.
- Installation of mulch at the Ice Age Visitor Center arboretums.
- Reconstructed boat access piers at Lake Seven and Crooked Lake.
- Installed a new group fire ring and permanent benches at the Greenbush Recreation Area.
- Constructed an open-air shelter at Parnell Trail Area.
- Redecked a snowmobile access trail bridge.
- Installed 14 new kiosks across at the property for improved visitor information.
- Wisconsin DNR, Division of Forestry completed a Beech Leaf Disease Survey in state natural areas (SNA) embedded within the state forest: Johnson Hill Kame SNA, Kamarath Creek Forest and Fen SNA, Kettle Hole Wood SNA, and Nichols Creek Cedars and Springs SNA.

MILL BLUFF STATE PARK

Size/Location:	Mill Bluff State Park includes 1,603 acres of land southeast of Tomah. The Ice Age National Scientific Reserve acreage for the Mill Bluff unit is 875.
Unique features:	Some of the unique glacial features include tall buttes and glacial lakebed. The park offers a 200-step overlook that offers a spectacular view of the glacial lakebed below.
Facilities:	Facilities at this property include a campground, picnic areas and a beach. There are 2 miles of hiking trails, including a 0.6-mile self-guided nature trail.
Attendance:	Mill Bluff State Park hosted an estimated 35,000 visitors during the reporting period.
Economic Impact:	In a 2012 economic impact study done by the University of Wisconsin, the study estimates that visitors provided \$4,934,856 of local and non- local economic impacts. (About \$6,963,487 in 2025 dollars.)

Programs: Staff partnered with a local high school for a spring cleanup day, during which 20 students worked for four hours.

CROSS PLAINS STATE PARK

Size/Location:	This park is a compilation of federal, state and county lands near the village of Cross Plains, Wisconsin. Currently there are about 750 acres of public land available at this unit of the National Scientific Reserve for recreation.
Unique features:	Some of the unique glacial features include examples of the interface of glaciated and unglaciated terrain, including planted prairies. A glacial end moraine meets eroded driftless area.
Facilities:	Public facilities are limited. Trails on DNR, NPS and county land total over 10 miles open to the public. There are a few benches in the park. Dane County offers two parking lots. Recreational uses include hiking, wildlife viewing, picnicking, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, geocaching and hunting.
Attendance:	The Cross Plains unit of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve hosted an estimated 75,000 visitors during the federal fiscal year reporting period.

Programs: Staff led two field trips totaling 21 participants, including a six-mile hike of the Cross Plains unit for the Natural Resources Foundation that focused on geology and ecology.

Achievements:

Dane County Ice Age Trail Land Stewards held 11 scheduled weekend workdays and a number of impromptu workdays in the Cross Plains State Park unit of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve during calendar year 2025. During those events 140 volunteers contributed at least 780 hours of labor. Their work was focused on the area of the Park north of Old Sauk Pass and their accomplishments included:

- Annual scanning and eradication of herbaceous invasives, such as garlic mustard, burdock, curly dock, and Japanese hedge parsley in the woodlands and sweet clover and parsnip in the prairies and grasslands;
- Cutting and removing invasive shrubs, including honeysuckle and buckthorn from the margins of the planted prairie and from the woodlands and oak savannas west and north of the prairie;
- Cutting and removing maple saplings and invasive shrubs from the white oak shooting star glade on the Terminal Moraine at the west edge of the glacial drain way gorge.

HORICON MARSH STATE WILDLIFE AREA

Size/Location:	Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area includes 11,465 acres of DNR-managed land north of the City of Horicon. The Ice Age National Scientific Reserve acreage for the Horicon Marsh unit is 10,899.
Unique features:	The property highlights a large extinct glacial lakebed and includes drumlins.
Facilities:	Facilities at this property include trails and an education center.
Attendance:	Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area does not track total visitation across the entire property. There were 22,026 people who came through the Horicon Marsh Education and Visitor Center between January 1 – October 31, 2025. For the same period, 3,577 came through the Explorium.

Programs: There were 225 programs conducted for approximately 12,800 people between January 1 – October 31, 2025. These programs include school groups, virtual programs, off-site expos, on-site public programs and special events.

Achievements:

- Partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to hold a workshop for teachers.
- Worked with the Natural Resources Foundation (NRF) to host a field trip for their interns, plus six additional field trips for the NRF.
- Continued to work with our partners around Horicon Marsh including Marsh Haven Nature Center, Horicon Marsh Boat Tours, Horicon National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS) and the Horicon Marsh Bird Club.
- Continued to work with the property's main partner, the Friends of Horicon Marsh, to collaborate on daily on projects, events and programs.
- Began a partnership with Ducks Unlimited to acquire and restore grassland and wetland habitat on 80 acres bordering the State property.

CAMPBELLSPORT DRUMLINS

Size/Location:	The Campbellsport Drumlins unit includes ten acres of DNR-owned land west of the Village of Campbellsport. The Ice Age National Scientific Reserve acreage for the Campbellsport Drumlins unit is 3,695.
Unique features:	The property highlights a large swarm of drumlins.
Facilities:	None.

Dr. Robert Black's geology treatise on the National Scientific Reserve (published in 1974 by the National Park Service) stated, "the specific drumlins and drumlinoidal forms of the Campbellsport area doubtless were specified in the [1964 National Scientific Reserve] Act because of their proximity to the Northern Kettle Interlobate Moraine rather than because of their uniqueness or unusual degree of development."

Drumlins are widespread in Wisconsin and protected at other DNR properties including:

- Glacial Drumlin State Trail, between Cottage Grove and Waukesha
- Capital Springs State Recreation Area, Madison, Monona and Fitchburg
- Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area, one mile north of Horicon
- Waterloo-Mud Lake State Wildlife Area, one mile east of Waterloo
- Lima Marsh-Storrs Lake State Wildlife Area, one mile east of Milton
- French Creek State Wildlife Area, four miles northeast of Portage
- Killsnake State Wildlife Area, three miles east of Chilton
- Westport Drumlin Prairie State Natural Area, two miles east of Waunakee

TWO CREEKS BURIED FOREST

Size/Location:	Along the shore of Lake Michigan, the Two Creeks Buried Forest unit includes 24 acres of DNR-owned land a few miles northeast of the Village of Mishicot, of which 16 acres are also designated a state natural area. South of the DNR land, are several additional parcels owned by the Town of Two Creeks.
Unique features:	The property highlights a forest buried by glacial debris that brought world-fame in the 1960s-1970s for providing material for the radiocarbon dating of multiple glacial advances and retreats.
Facilities:	None.

Programs: Dr. David Mickelson led a field trip of the Two Creek Buried Forest for the Natural Resources Foundation.