



## **St. Croix Valley Foundation Proposal Narrative**

### ***I. Organization Overview***

The mission of the Ice Age Trail Alliance is to create, support and protect a thousand-mile footpath tracing Ice Age formations across Wisconsin – the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. In collaboration with our many partners, the Alliance envisions a premier, continuous, permanently protected Ice Age National Scenic Trail. Coursing through Wisconsin, the Trail is a place where all people can enjoy and embrace the unique natural landscapes and cultural histories of Wisconsin, while finding physical and mental renewal in a peaceful setting and an enduring spiritual connection to the land.

In the 1950s, the late Ray Zillmer, a Milwaukee native, envisioned a trail spanning across Wisconsin's glacial landscape, traveling the furthest extent of the Laurentide ice sheet. In 1958, the Ice Age Trail Alliance (f/k/a Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation) was formed by a grassroots movement of Wisconsin citizens interested in promoting the creation of a National Park that would recognize the glacial footprint in our state. These citizens' efforts were finally recognized when, in 1971, the Alliance, State of Wisconsin and National Park Service collaborated to create the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve. Finally, in 1980 – over 20 years after Mr. Zillmer's work began – President Carter signed the law that federally designated the Ice Age Trail as a National Scenic Trail. This act recognized the national significance of our landscape, and the importance of sharing it with the country. The Ice Age National Scenic Trail is now, one of only eleven trails in the United States.

### ***II. Project Description***

The Saunters program is designed to help students in grades 3 – 12 in the Amery, Luck, and Frederic school districts develop lifelong healthy habits that reduce childhood and ultimately, adult obesity, improve the mental health, and build a system for continuing to utilize the Ice Age Trail as a medium for personal well-being throughout their lives. In addition, students will participate in daily reading, math and science-based work focused on navigating a segment of the Ice Age Trail. These practices help students maintain academic skills in a way that is immediately applied, thus enhancing the relevancy of the practice. The ability to understand and navigate an Ice Age Trail segment is also a skill that will contribute to lifelong exercise. Saunters directly addresses the obesity and summer learning loss epidemics by helping students learn through hands on situations while staying active on the Ice Age Trail.

In order to achieve measurable results, several activities will be designed and implemented. The first step in program design and implementation will occur March 22, 23. This is the time of year when The Ice Age Trail Alliance hosts its annual Educators Summit. During this event educators from across the Upper Midwest gather to plan hikes and collaborate with contemporaries. The Luck and Frederic program as well as Amery program will have representatives in attendance in 2018.

All youth activities designed during the Educators Summit will occur as part of the summer school platform for the Luck and Frederic School Districts. Amery programming will include the remainder of the 2018 school year and fall of 2018 – 2019 school year. The primary focus is to get kids and families on the Ice Age Trail for, at a minimum, 5 days. Students will travel, by bus, to Ice Age Trail segments in close proximity to their schools as well as segments up to one hour away. Traveling and identifying new segments will help students learn how to

find a segment of the Trail whether they are near to home or visiting another part of the state. Further, the series of hikes will last an entire day, with up to 8 miles of hiking per day. These activities will have an immediate impact on reducing obesity and developing healthy habits, while laying the groundwork for long-range healthy lifestyles.

Additionally, one of the Saunters hikes will infuse service learning. This requires youth to work hand in hand with multigenerational Alliance volunteers as they maintain a segment of the Ice Age Trail. This work, while yet to be finalized, will focus on removal of invasive species, clearing an existing Trail corridor and helping improve navigation for future hikers.

While participating in any of the above youth will use the Alliance's youth field book, A Companion Guide for Sauntering. This text was written in conjunction with dietitians, physiologists, geologists, naturalists and educators with goals of understanding the health benefits of hiking, becoming knowledgeable about the history of the Wisconsin landscape and building lifestyles focused on healthy activities. All content of the Companion Guide has been connected to Wisconsin Model Academic and Common Core Standards as adopted by the State of Wisconsin.

There is no shortage of goals Saunters hopes to achieve. A list of both immediate and long-range goals has been identified below. However, the true goals for the Saunters program rest in each of the participants. As a program designed to benefit the youth that take the hike, there are no measures as important as the confidence that is cultivated in each participant, the development of the intrinsic desire to become better, or the understanding that it is completely up to them to do something more with their lives by becoming healthy or maintaining a healthy lifestyles in a world full of opportunities to be unhealthy.

#### Immediate Results Include:

- Directly combat childhood obesity through multiple day, extended hikes
- Increasing physical activity resulting in improved mental and physical health
- Improving core academics with particular focus on reading, math, physical education and the sciences
- Providing students with the skill set to plan and carry out a hike on a segment of the Ice Age Trail or other outdoor recreational opportunity
- Create awareness of energy sustaining foods students and families should consume before, during and after exercise
- Educate students and families about personal health in an attempt to immediately reduce obesity

#### Long-Range Results Include:

- Increase the number of students that participate in Saunters
- Increase the number of students and families that return to the Ice Age Trail, as a low-cost form of exercise and learning
- Positively benefit the lifelong dietary health of participants and families

While Saunters is a program of the Ice Age Trail Alliance it lives and breathes in the school districts that participate. The Ice Age Trail Alliance staff, in collaboration with local volunteers and educators design and implement each Saunters component. Specific names and qualifications are listed below.

- Amy Lord, Outreach and Education Manager, Ice Age Trail Alliance. Amy works to gather funding for each of the 17 programs across the state through grant writing. She also helps educators plan and implement hikes.
- Kevin Thusius, Director of Land Conservation, Ice Age Trail Alliance. As the primary curator of Alliance owned lands, Kevin helps schools and youth participate in service learning events. Kevin participates in program design and in the field as needed.

- Carrie Peterson, Frederic School District. As the lead teacher for Saunters, Carrie ensures compatibility of the program with other district plans, coordinates with the Luck School District and recruits students.
- Jacklyn Anderson, School District of Luck. Jacklyn works with Carrie to ensure compatibility between the two districts, recruits students and participates in hikes as needed.
- Samantha Montana, Amery School District. Samantha works to integrate Saunters with Amery Inquiring Minds year around curriculum.
- Dean Dversdall, Chair – Ice Age Trail Alliance Indianhead Chapter. Dean coordinates with local volunteers to support the work of Saunters. This includes recruiting hike guides, facilitating a chapter sponsored cook out at the end of the Saunters week and ensures the Trail segments are in great shape.

### **III. Need, Impact, Evaluation**

There are three primary needs being addressed by Saunters, combating childhood obesity, reducing summer learning loss and mitigating nature deficit disorder. According the National Conference of State Legislatures childhood obesity, ages 10 - 17, grew in the state of Wisconsin from 13.5% in 2003 to 31% in 2007. The University Of Wisconsin Department Of Pediatrics further estimated obesity has doubled in the United States as well as Wisconsin. This disturbing trend is prevalent in research surrounding obesity and childhood obesity in particular. Even though obesity numbers were on the decline nationwide in 2013, the state of Wisconsin still reports increasing obesity.

In addition to addressing childhood obesity, Saunters also addresses summer learning loss. The National Summer Learning Association states "Most students lose about two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months." Low-income students also lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains. Through infusing real word application of learned skills, Saunters programming helps maintain valuable gains made during the regular school year.

Finally, through landscape immersion over the course of multiple days, Saunters provides a much needed connection to the natural world. In Richard Louv's book, Last Child in the Woods, he coins the term nature deficit disorder. Saunters leaders have taken steps since 2008 to mitigate this deficiency for tomorrow's leaders.

Participant numbers vary from year to year. However, they have been on a steady incline in the Luck and Frederic Districts for the past three years. In 2017, the program registered 63 students, which is the same as 2016 and is capacity. In the 2017 – 2018 school year, Amery added Saunters curriculum to its work, bringing the total St. Croix Valley youth participant numbers to 143. This more than doubles the number of youth served by the program.

The societal benefits of a healthy community reach far beyond the timeline for Saunters implementation. More immediately, youth will gain confidence, a skill set for actively using the Ice Age Trail and open spaces as mediums for personal growth, and directly address obesity and learning loss while being in touch with the outdoors. In the long-term, there are positive impacts on economic systems, academic settings and overall well-being of the community.

A portion of the funding for this project is derived from local and statewide funding. As such, the Alliance coordinates extensive surveying and analysis of program activities, including those found in Amery, Frederic, and Luck. These assessments include an online survey for program leaders; youth surveys related to health, wellness and knowledge of accessing the Ice Age Trail; and direct surveys to families of students. Combined, these assessments are used to design programs and improve content from year to year.