

# RIDGELINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE SUPERIOR HIKING TRAIL ASSOCIATION

FALL 2021



## DROUGHT, WIND, AND FIRE — “A MEMORABLE 2021 TRAIL SEASON

**E**ach trail season aims for its own distinct theme, but 2021 brought a trifecta—drought, wind and fire. It will be a trail season for the memory book, with unprecedented conditions that led area land managers to eventually close all backcountry campsites throughout state and federal lands. This is the first time in the history of the SHT that a camping ban was declared on the entirety of the Trail.

(Continued on page 2)

## Drought, Wind, and Fire—A Memorable 2021 Trail Season (continued from cover)

It was also the year we all got a good jolt reminder of “Know Before You Go.” Whether you were headed out for a day hike or a week-long backpacking trip, it was not the year to skimp on planning ahead and paying close attention to dynamically changing conditions whether it be water access, air quality conditions, or closures.

### WATER WOES

Most people associate the SHT with its endless water crossings, but 2021 delivered an extreme drought not seen in this part of the state since 1988. While sourcing water for drinking became challenging on some sections, hikers did a great job submitting updates via the Trail Incident Report form so that we could keep the website up-to-

date and keep hikers hydrated.

SHT users are pretty fortunate to have such rapid access to reliable water sources, some folks might even call us spoiled when comparing us to other long-distance hiking trails. The drought was a good reminder to practice gratitude for our water resources and also to stay vigilant with trip planning and preparation.

### WILDFIRE

The Association would like to extend a huge “Thank You” to our land management partners at the US Forest Service and the Minnesota DNR. They did an amazing job on providing SHTA and the public with timely status updates on area wildfires and associated restrictions and closures. Their work did not go unnoticed, and we are incredibly

grateful for them keeping us all safe through some highly unpredictable weeks.

For SHT users and our Association it was a lesson in adaptability. We felt everyone’s sadness as hard decisions were made to cancel or postpone long-awaited backpacking trips due to air quality conditions or campsite closures. It was also a moment of truth, when we saw the trail community dig deep and keep perspective by prioritizing their safety and respecting frontline public lands workers by complying with the bans and closures.

### WINDS OF CHANGE

A July windstorm ripped across the Trail from north of Duluth to Gooseberry Falls State Park, downing over a hundred trees. While we have been through our fair share of storms, clean up is never quick. Special thanks to volunteers Kit Grayson and Andrew Kortuem who put in many hours to clear hard-hit sections.

PHOTO BY U.S. FOREST SERVICE/SUPERIOR NATIONAL FOREST



▲ The Greenwood Fire had a historic impact on the summer trail season leading to camping closures and poor air quality conditions along the Trail.



▲ The conditions like this at Woods Creek were common along the shore as the extreme drought created untypical challenges for hikers as once reliable water sources were nonexistent or undesirable.



▲ This is just a small sample of what our volunteer sawyers experienced as they tackled the aftermath of the July windstorm.

We're also grateful for southern seasonal contractor Larry Sampson who took the lead in the clean-up.

The other winds that shifted this year were the financial ones. It wasn't until late June, during the final days of a special legislative session, that the bill passed containing the recommended release of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) for both the 2021 and the delayed 2020 SHTA proposals. Over \$600k of ENRTF funds will be spent down over the next two years on plumbing projects and other high priority projects such as finishing the Gooseberry Gap project and Poplar River reroute. The SHTA is committed to completing these projects to further the larger goals of the critically important ENRTF program through the State of Minnesota.

## CAUGHT UP ON CATCHING UP

A bright spot of 2021 was completing many of the pandemic-related delayed 2020 projects and catching up on deferred

maintenance carry-over. Spring clearing took place in small work groups, much awaited projects like the Gooseberry Gap entered construction, and exhilarating volunteer-powered projects like Split Rock Renewal project and Kimball Creek bridge were completed. It all came together in the end, and with the help of our volunteers and funders, we were able to make some amazing headway and make up for lost time!

## STILL WILD AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

We're exiting the 2021 trail season with the sense that the North Shore is still very much a wild space filled with unpredictability, and while technology and other modern conveniences try to make your trail experience more comfortable and controlled the reality is that the SHT and adjacent land and water still remain wild and untethered. This is the very reason trail users return year after year, to embrace the essence of the unknown found on the ridgeline. 🏔️

— By LISA LUOKKALA



### New Guidebook Released

The 9th edition **Superior Hiking Trail Guidebook** was released this trail season. Purchase yours today at our online trail store to plan your next adventure. [shop.superiorhiking.org](http://shop.superiorhiking.org)

The Superior Hiking Trail Association is dedicated to building, managing, renewing and promoting the Superior Hiking Trail.



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### VOLUME 36, ISSUE 2

PEOPLE.  
NATURE.  
FOOTPATH.

# A BUSY SUMMER SEASON OF TRAIL RENEWAL PROJECTS

## Kimball Creek Bridge Update



▲ A new fiberglass bridge at Kimball Creek; the first of its kind installed within the Superior National Forest.

The USFS assisted us with the purchase of a 50 foot span fiberglass bridge to replace an aged bridge with failing abutments. Our staff and volunteers completed the installation in August. VCLs (volunteer crew leaders) really stepped up to support, along with long-time supporters and old friends of the Association. In addition, the Student Conservation Association (SCA) was able to lend a crew that helped with final touches and clean up. 790 volunteer hours made this project a reality!

## Trail Enhancement Along the Split Rock River Loop

A bridge over a creek on the Split Rock River loop was in for a much needed upgrade. The old bridge was removed and placed in a wet section of the Trail approaching the crossing. The new 25 foot bridge took the collective effort of 30 people

and 2,000 hours of work to complete the installation. In addition to the new bridge placed, a rock step approach was built along with 180 feet of trail relocated uphill from the bridge to reduce future erosion. We would like to thank Split Rock Lighthouse State Park and the MN DNR for their support in this project.



▲ Volunteers unearthed and hauled many heavy rocks and placed them meticulously into a new stone step approach.



▲ After over 2,000 hours of work, this Split Rock River drainage has a new bridge and stone step approach increasing hiker safety.

## Poplar River Puncheon

A soggy section of trail got some much deserved attention this summer with the installation of a total of 150 feet of

puncheon, 100 feet of elevated boardwalk, and a 18 foot bridge to keep trail users high and dry. This was one of the pandemic-deferred projects carried over from 2020 that SHTA is happy to check off our to-do list. Thanks again to all the volunteers who helped with the earlier stages of the project of transporting the materials in this hard-to-reach location.

## Sargent Creek Stone Steps

The bridge over Sargent Creek has often been referred to as something out of a Dr. Seuss book, the warped infrastructure was originally compromised during the 2012 flood, we kept it functional until this year when it started showing greater signs of failure. Our staff worked with the MN DNR's team of hydrologists and habitat experts to identify a new stone crossing. The design will keep hikers high and dry while allowing the water to flow properly and limiting the impact on the aquatic habitat. We look forward to using this design approach at other water crossings along the Trail in the upcoming years. Removal of the bridge will take place this winter.

## Gooseberry Gap Phase I Complete—Funding secured for Phase II

Phase I, half of the Gooseberry Gap project is complete! 2 miles of new trail and boardwalk

was installed by contractor, Dirt Candy, LLC. The remainder of the project, Phase II, will commence in summer of 2022. We just received word that the project has received additional support from IRRRB—Phase II is now fully funded. We anticipate being able to open the section to trail users by Fall 2022.

## Help From Some Great Friends

This year the SHTA was fortunate to gain volunteer support from both the Student Conservation Association and the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa. Working with crews of young adults from these programs helps tremendously with challenging labor demands of our construction projects. More importantly, these collaborative projects provide opportunities to expose young adults to work within natural resources, land stewardship, and outdoor recreation to build the next generation of public lands and trail stewards. The Split Rock River renewal project and Kimball Creek bridge project would not have been possible without their



▲ SCA members became stewards of the Trail as they made things dryer for hikers by installing a series of puncheon at Poplar River.

support. We look forward to continuing to work with these entities on future projects and we hope to see the individual members on the Trail again enjoying the fruits of their labor.

## Trail Eyes Trainings Recap

Thanks to funds from NOAA Coastal Training Support administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, SHTA brought in trail expert Tim Malzhan of Trail Eyes LLC for several training opportunities this summer. This was the first

time the SHTA delivered training via a mixed platform: part of the training was offered online, with a limited in-person component. Recordings of the two online topics—“Developing Your Trail Eyes” and “People On, Water Off”—are available on the Superior Hiking Trail Association YouTube channel. 



▲ Tim Malzhan, expert trail builder and educator, spent many hours on the SHT this summer trail building and educating our volunteers on best practices.



## Become a Member

Do you love the Superior Hiking Trail as much as we do? Show your dedication and support by becoming a member today. We rely upon the support of members to ensure we can protect, renew, and enhance the SHT for generations to come. To learn more, visit [superiorhiking.org](https://superiorhiking.org)



▲ It took an entire Field Crew of Conservation Corps members to haul in and install the new bridge beams.

# FALL HUNTING SEASON ARRIVES IN THE NORTHWOODS



**T**hroughout the summer trail season, the trail experiences a wide range of users including day hikers, families, trail runners, naturalists, and more. The SHT is unique in that it provides easy access for many different users to experience the wonders of the North Shore.

As the leaves change and the temperatures cool, we transition into the fall season along the Trail. People will continue to use the SHT as they had all summer, but it'll see a new user group use the trail corridor. Grouse hunting and deer hunting are both long time family traditions of many Minnesotans. The public lands along the North Shore provide ample opportunities for

multi-generational outings into the woods in pursuit of deer and grouse.

## WORDS OF WISDOM FROM OUR LOCAL EXPERT

We took some time to chat with Nancy Hansen, Two Harbors Area Wildlife Manager with the MN Department of Natural Resources to get more insight in the fall hunting season.

“The best way that hikers and hunters alike can be safe during hunting seasons is to wear some article of blaze orange or blaze pink clothing on their upper body while on trails. The most visible combination is a hat and a vest or a long sleeve if you are wearing a backpack.”

“Keep dogs leashed and it wouldn't hurt to have a blaze orange dog vest or bandana on them too.”

“Public land is for everyone to enjoy, whether they want to birdwatch, do nature photography, hike, camp, hunt, fish, trap, or gather natural foods.”

## HUNTING SEASONS AND CLOSURES

Grouse hunting season is currently underway and firearms deer season will open on Saturday, November 6th and will run through November 21st. During that time, expect the following:

▮ Private landowners may close pieces of the Superior Hiking Trail which cross their property.

▮ Certain sections with a high density of private lands may be entirely closed.

▮ Hunters may be using the Superior Hiking Trail to access public lands.

While most public lands remain open during firearms deer season, if you encounter a section of the SHT signed as closed, please stay off. You can help us maintain access to the Trail and honor our agreements with public and private landowners by staying off closed sections. For more information on trail closures, please visit: [www.superiorhiking.org](http://www.superiorhiking.org). 



## Trail Store Enjoys Its First Season in New Location

While our Trail Store is closed for the season, we enjoyed reopening in our new downtown Two Harbors location this summer. We're still open online and offer shipping or curbside pickup. It was great to reconnect with trail users as they got on or off the Trail this season. In addition to our guidebooks and maps, we offer many products that'll help you show your love of the SHT. We work with local artists as well as many local or small businesses as possible. All proceeds from the Trail Store go directly back into the Trail. To make a purchase today, visit: [shop.superiorhiking.org](http://shop.superiorhiking.org)

# IT TAKES A COMMUNITY OF PARTNERS

**W**e rely upon a variety of trail stewards to support our work in protecting, enhancing, and renewing the Trail for generations to come. This year we had some exceptional business partners support the trail in many diverse ways.

As a member-owned co-op, REI invests deeply in the outdoor community, supporting efforts that steward and maintain local trails and public lands and connect underrepresented groups to the outdoors. We'd like to thank REI Co-op for making a major financial contribution to support our 2021 trail renewal program. In addition, they sponsored our annual Summit Challenge and donated several day packs to give away to a few lucky hikers who completed the challenge.

Rocksteady Running, long-time friends and supporters of the SHT, manage the Superior Trail Races that help connect thousands of runners from around the country to our trail. We'd like to thank them for their continued financial support and for the countless volunteer trail maintenance hours they provide each year.

Next in line for our endless kudos is Slalom in Minneapolis. Over the past year they've tirelessly donated their time, creativity, and energy to help SHTA reimagine and redesign our website to help trail users better access the information they need. Slalom is a strategy and technology-based consulting firm and we are thankful for their commitment to the Trail. Thanks to our friends at Slalom we are only a few months out from a whole new website look and feel! 

## THANK YOU, JOHN!



▲ **Photographer John Steitz has donated a portfolio of photos to the SHTA.**

**W**e'd like to thank photographer John Steitz for donating a portfolio of photos to the SHTA including the one on the front cover. John is a backpacker, public lands advocate, and landscape photographer from Minnesota. He likes to explore new wildernesses with his camera in tow, hoping his work can inspire people to cherish and protect the dwindling wild lands of America. John is a long time supporter of the SHT and we truly appreciate his support.

If you're a photographer and would like to support our work by making a donation, please reach out to Development and Communications Director, Matt Kraska, at [mkraska@superiorhiking.org](mailto:mkraska@superiorhiking.org).

*Thank you, John, for your stewardship of the Trail!*

## FUNDERS WHO MADE 2021 A SUCCESS

**T**RAIL MAINTENANCE, VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMING, AND LARGE-SCALE RENEWAL PROJECTS are not possible without the support from our funding partners who find value in our mission to connect people to nature, provide high quality recreation experience to all who wish to explore the North Shore, and protect the adjacent land and waters which the Trail traverses.

- **Iron Range Rehabilitation Resource Board (IRRRB)**
- **Federal Recreation Trail Program administered by the MN DNR**
- **Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund (ENRTF) administered by LCCMR**
- **Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation**
- **Minnesota Power**
- **NOAA Coastal STAR administered by the MN DNR**
- **NOAA Coastal Training Support administered by the MN DNR**

Thank you for supporting the projects and programming of the Superior Hiking Trail Association! 



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PHOTO: JOHN STELTZ

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## HONORING A LONGTIME FRIEND OF THE TRAIL



**T**HE SUPERIOR HIKING TRAIL ASSOCIATION WAS DEEPLY SADDENED to share the news this summer of the passing of one of our long time friends and founders, Tom Peterson. Tom was involved with the SHT since it was simply a dream. He was a dedicated visionary who worked tirelessly coordinating the development of the trail in the 80's and 90's. Through his efforts he laid the groundwork, quite literally, for the Superior Hiking Trail we all know and love today.

Tom has certainly left a strong legacy along the North Shore which we'll all work to uphold. He has been a lifelong friend of the Trail and North Shore community. Tom will be fondly remembered and sorely missed by many. Everytime we hike on the Trail, we're grateful for his work. Please think about Tom and honor him in your own way the next time you're out on the Trail this fall. 