

# RIDGELINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE SUPERIOR HIKING TRAIL ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2023



## PLANNING FOR OUR FUTURE

**T**he Superior Hiking Trail is a recreational resource for all. With changing trends in tourism, land use, climate, and more, it's important that a Master Plan study potential impacts on the Trail. The Plan will identify strategies to adapt to changes so the Trail that we know and love today is still available to the next generation of Minnesotans.

(Continued on page 2)

PHOTO: A frozen tombolo visible from the SHT's northern Lake Walk. Photo by John Steitz Photography.



## Planning for our future ...CONTINUED FROM COVER

### UNDERSTANDING AND ADAPTING TO CHANGING TRENDS

It is incredibly rare to find a recreational trail of our size and scale that does not have a planning document like a master plan. Typically state and federal trails have a master plan that guides their priorities for maintenance and management but the SHT is managed by a non-profit and is multi-jurisdictional, which has made us lag behind other equally regionally significant recreational resources.

The outdoor recreation industry is growing, and the Superior Hiking Trail is a major player in the region. A Master Planning process will allow us to collect information about the number of Trail users and user demographics, which will allow us to provide a better Trail experience for all. We will be able to develop both the physical infrastructure (parking lots, trail kiosks, etc.) and the visitor support services to match the evolving needs of the user base. Through this process, we will also learn who is not using the Trail and identify strategies to equitably meet the needs of future Trail users.

We'll gather data through an asset inventory process and a community engagement mapping tool that will help the SHTA prioritize our future

maintenance and renewal projects to increase safety and sustainability. While the Superior Hiking Trail continues to be the premier foot trail in the region, other outdoor recreation opportunities are expanding, such as mountain biking and backcountry skiing.

*Based on a recent U.S. National Forest user/visitor survey, hiking and walking continue to be the most popular outdoor activity that people engage in.*



**SHTA staff tour the Sundling Creek Boardwalk Project from 2022. Part of our Master Plan will involve taking an inventory of the SHT's infrastructure like boardwalks, bridges, campsites, etc.**

Through the Master Plan, we will engage these other recreation groups and identify and address any potential conflicts, but more importantly look for opportunities for partnership within the larger outdoor recreation sector.

### OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY AND UNDERSTANDING OUR IMPACT

We know that recreational tourism is a booming industry in our region and we're eager to study the Trail's contributions. The Superior Hiking Trail's impact on the regional economy during its 37-year history is

hard to quantify, but fortunately that is one of the outcomes of the proposed Master Plan — we will produce an economic impact report that will illustrate the contributions the SHT is making to the region's economy. According to the latest data from the Bureau of Economic

Analysis, Minnesota outdoor recreation generates \$8.4 billion dollars in GDP. Minnesota's outdoor recreation also supports more than 89,000 jobs.

The SHT is nationally recognized and regularly featured in state and national media. Based on a recent U.S. National Forest user/visitor survey, hiking and walking continue to be the most popular outdoor activity

that people engage in. According to the Explore Minnesota's study "Tourism Economic Impact: MN's Leisure and Hospitality Industry 2019," the three main counties in which the SHT is located had a gross sale from tourism of more than \$703 million, \$46.6 million in state sales tax, and the area tourism economy creates over 13,248 private sector employee jobs. Over the last few decades dozens of complementary businesses have emerged that depend on the Trail's success, this includes shuttle services, lodging, and guide services to name a few.



**Projects like the Sundling Creek Boardwalk come with large price tags. Developing a Master Plan for the Trail will allow us to qualify for additional state and federal funding sources to replace aging infrastructure.**

## WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT

The planning process will take place now through March 2024. The first phase will focus on volunteer-driven data collection. During the summer months, volunteers will be deployed to help collect data. Volunteers will talk with people on the Trail and ask them to fill out a survey, along with quantifying the existing infrastructure (boardwalks, bridges, signs) and assessing their condition. If you are not volunteering yourself, you will likely run into staff and volunteers on the Trail conducting this work!


We'll also be using innovative online community engagement tools, like Social PinPoint, to collect suggestions and feedback from the SHT community.

Our members and users are geographically diverse so we want to create easy ways for everyone to participate, along with targeting outreach to local residents and businesses along the Trail corridor.

**Asset Inventory**—  
*June through August*

**User counts and surveys**—  
*June through September*

**Social PinPoint (Online data collection)**—  
*July through September*

By completing a Master Plan, the Superior Hiking Trail Association will be equipped with the information we need to make sound, informed decisions for the Trail for the next decade. 

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



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### VOLUME 38, ISSUE 1

PEOPLE.  
NATURE.  
FOOTPATH.



## 2023: TRAIL RENEWAL PROJECTS— ROCKIN' WITH NATURE

# 2023

**S**ince the launch of the Trail Renewal Program in 2017, staff and volunteers have learned and implemented more sustainable trail building techniques. We're working with nature, not against it. Our 2023 Trail Renewal projects model this approach: Build and maintain the Trail using methods that create resiliency and sustainability, and focus on protecting the land and water through which we traverse. Two projects that illustrate this approach are the Encampment River Crossing and Leskinen Reroute.



A new bridge was constructed over the Encampment River in the fall of 2012.



The bridge washed out during 2013's spring melt. It was time to move to a different crossing method — stone steps!

### \* Encampment River

On the Encampment River, we will reinstall permanent stepping stones. Many of this year's projects use materials that are already in the environment, like rock, which are more sustainable and less expensive. For a day or two during spring melt or high-rain events, stone crossings like the Encampment River may not be safe to traverse but will provide dry-foot crossings the rest of the year. SHTA worked with the Minnesota DNR to assure a stable stone crossing design in a location that works with the river's hydrology.

### \* Leskinen Creek

At the existing Leskinen Creek section of trail or "mud bath," one volunteer reported sinking thigh-deep. Although reroutes take longer to plan and implement due to land-use permissions, they are more sustainable by allowing us to locate the best terrain and implement a more resilient trail design. Reroutes often reduce the need for costly infrastructure like bridges and boardwalks. In the case of Leskinen, we will reroute 1.5-miles of trail to a higher and drier location, which will lessen the Trail's impact on the surrounding environment and require less maintenance in the future.



## HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR BIGGEST PROJECTS OF THE YEAR:

### \* Silver Creek Reroute

This critical project re-establishes the Trail corridor from Reeves Road to Lake County Road 301. This project is in partnership with the private owner and ends a two-year road-walk detour. The new alignment will take the Trail away from a slumping shoreline of the creek.

### \* Indian Camp Creek Stone Step Crossing

Damaged during 2022's spring flooding, the bridge over Indian Camp Creek was condemned by the U.S. Forest Service. The SHT has a lot of failing bridges, reports Trail Operations Director Tamer Ibrahim. At each one, we'll assess the need for a replacement bridge. Many low, rocky streams are crossable most of the year without a bridge. Indian Camp Creek is an example of a location in which a natural rock crossing is a better fit. *Volunteers needed Sept. 14-17.*



The Indian Camp Creek bridge was permanently closed by the U.S. Forest Service after damage from the 2022 spring melt floods made it unsafe. Photo courtesy of Cathy Quinn, USFS.

### \* White Sky Rock Renewal

This project will rehabilitate the tread and install erosion control on the spur trail that runs from Caribou Trail Trailhead to the

intersection with the main SHT at Lake Agnes. The "Lincoln Log Stairway" – an infamous, aged, notched log that runs up a rocky ascent – has met the end of its lifespan and will be replaced with a safer design.



The "Lincoln Log Stairway" needs a new solution.

### \* Springdale Creek Bridge Removal and Stone Step Crossing

We'll remove an unsafe bridge and replace it with solid stone steps. We will also repair the tread between the trailhead and the creek. *Volunteers needed July 12-16.*

### \* West of Cascade Reroute

Erosion along the steep banks of a creek crossing on this popular Cascade River loop has caused an extremely difficult crossing. Further damage occurred during the spring melt flooding last year so we will reroute .6-miles of the Trail to a more sustainable location and avoid the need for a full bridge replacement.

(Continued on page 6)



**A**long with contributions from SHTA donors and members, these projects were made possible by funding provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. Funding is also provided by the U.S. Forest Service and Recreation Resource Advisory Committee.



## Volunteer!

We have lots of volunteer opportunities including weekly maintenance in Duluth, renewal projects, office support, and much more. Go to: [superiorhiking.org/volunteer](https://superiorhiking.org/volunteer) for more information.



## Become an SHTA Member

Do you love the Superior Hiking Trail as much as we do? Interested in supporting these projects? 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/join](https://superiorhiking.org/join).





### \* Britton Peak Stone Steps, Part 2

Volunteer Crew Leaders and SHTA staff will lead the installation of an additional 32 stone steps on the spur trail up to Britton Peak to complete this project originally started in 2020. *Volunteers needed June 7-11*

### \* West of Cascade Reroute

Erosion along the steep banks of a creek crossing on this popular Cascade River loop has caused an extremely difficult crossing. Further damage occurred during the spring melt flooding last year so we will reroute .6-miles of the Trail to a more sustainable location and avoid the need for a full bridge replacement.

### \* Mystery Mountain Rehabilitation, Phase 2

One thousand feet of very wet Trail will be repaired with puncheon, stone work, elevated tread, and drainage devices.



Stone staircases like this one near Bean and Bear Lake will be increasingly used when rock is available on site.

### \* Poplar River Reroute

We will move the Trail away from a wet area with many failing structures along the Poplar River to a higher, drier, and more sustainable location. This 4,000' reroute will also include installing 340' of boardwalk and puncheon.

### \* Lismore Road Trailhead

We will replace a parking lot at the Lismore Road Trailhead after losing access to our previous lot. This project is a partnership between the City of Rice Lake and the SHTA, and will provide parking for about half a dozen vehicles.



## GUIDED HIKES REBOOTED

**Have you missed guided hikes on the Superior Hiking Trail? They're back in 2023!**

Hosted by a Master Naturalist, each hike will also have one additional guide. All hikes will be out-and-back; no shuttling of vehicles required. Space is limited. Guided Hikes will be advertised six weeks prior to each event.

To register, visit our Events calendar at:

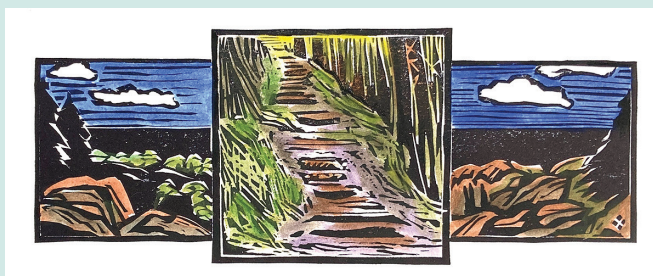
[superiorhiking.org/calendar](https://superiorhiking.org/calendar).



Join us for a guided, group hike on the SHT like this cheerful group on a 2015 National Trails Day hike. Photo courtesy of Kim Cameron

## Visit the Trail Store

Pick up guides, maps, SHT swag, gear, and more. Betsy Bowen of Grand Marais, Minnesota is our featured artist this year. Known for her woodcuts, illustrations, and more, Betsy's SHT-inspired artwork will be available all season.



Betsy Bowen woodcut of the SHT.

**2023 Season Hours** 🌿 Open May 18th-October 27th 🌿 Thursdays and Fridays 🌿 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.



# Stable & Thankful:

**An Overview of the SHTA's Finances:**  
Superior Hiking Trail Association stays steady amongst a year of inflation and changing trends in philanthropic giving.

**T**he SHTA would like to thank the thousands of individuals, business supporters, agency partners, and other funders who invested in the sustainability of the Trail. SHTA members and donors have continued to show up and give back to assure the Trail and the Association both remain strong, sustainable recreational resources into the future.



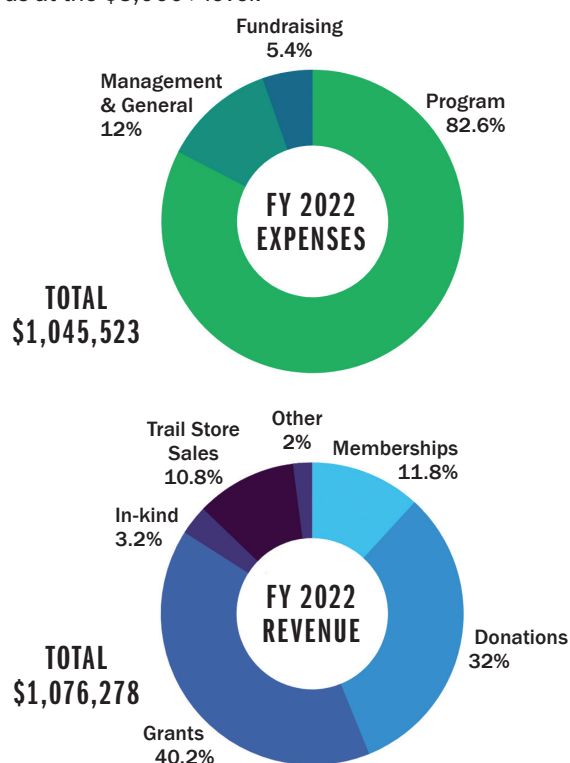
## HIGHLIGHTS:

**Grants:** Grant funding was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources, Minnesota Power, the Federal Recreational Trail Program, the Lake Superior Coastal Program, and Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation.

**New Members:** 548 SHT enthusiasts joined the SHTA as new members, contributing more than \$40,000.

**Give To The Max Day** drew the participation of trail supporters from all over Minnesota and helped us raise \$12,000 in a single day!

**A special thanks** to our Thru-Hiker Level Business Members REI and Odyssey Resorts, who supported us at the \$5,000+ level.



## VOLUNTEERING CREATES COMMUNITY



**Volunteering with the SHTA guarantees meeting amazing people who, like you, love the outdoors and the Trail.** Photo courtesy of Lisa Byrne

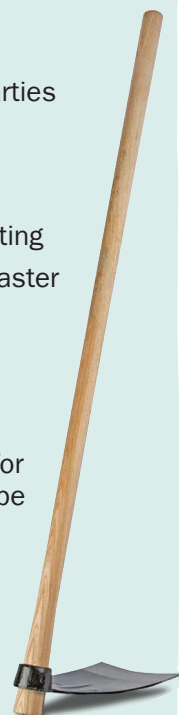
**W**atching our volunteer community gather in person again after two years of virtual meetings gives us real joy. In the past year, volunteers came together for trail maintenance work parties, first aid training, and volunteer appreciation parties. The result was not just amazing amounts of work done, training accomplished, and celebration. New connections and friendships were formed, ideas and stories shared, personal projects launched, and acquaintances and old friends joined together in work they love to do.

### COME BE PART OF OUR VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY! OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:

- ▶ Weekly maintenance work parties in Duluth
- ▶ Camp cook for Trail Renewal Projects
- ▶ SHT Facebook group moderating
- ▶ Intercept surveying for our Master Plan
- ▶ Large group trail work events (see article on pg. 4-6)
- ▶ And more!

Visit [superiorhiking.org/volunteer](https://superiorhiking.org/volunteer) for more information on how you can be a part of our community of caring and passionate volunteers. Email: [volunteer@superiorhiking.org](mailto:volunteer@superiorhiking.org) with any questions.

**Volunteers contribute significantly toward trail maintenance**







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We learned how to see the Northern Lights from the SHT in our spring webinar "Trail Astronomy on the SHT with AstroBob," viewable on our YouTube channel.

*John Seitz Photography.*

## Mud Season Is Coming

**A**s spring—or mud season—arrives, remember the SHT is especially vulnerable to damage during the spring melt and thaw transition. Trying to “go around” the mud only damages the forest corridor along the trail, ruining the wilderness experience for Trail users and creating erosion and water quality issues. The City of Duluth will close all natural surface trails, including 42 miles of SHT, until the melt is complete. We also ask the trail community to avoid using the SHT north of Duluth until it has a chance to dry out and firm up. We'll announce the Duluth closure and keep our community up to date on the spring melt's progress on our Trail Conditions page at: [superiorhiking.org/trail-conditions](http://superiorhiking.org/trail-conditions). 



Whatever the time of year, always walk straight through the mud to prevent damage and environmental impact, but the best practice is to turn around, or avoid the SHT during this transitional time.

## THRU-HIKER BUSINESS MEMBER: ODYSSEY RESORTS

Odyssey Resorts goes the full distance with their “Thru-Hiker” Business Membership, joining with a gift of \$5,000 to the Superior Hiking Trail Association.

Thank you, Odyssey Resorts, for valuing and supporting the Trail!



**ODYSSEY**  
**RESORTS**

Contact Odyssey Resorts at: • (218) 257-0068 • [odysseyresorts.com](http://odysseyresorts.com)