

RIDGELINE

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FALL 2025



20 Years of Servant Leadership

When Larry Sampson retired in 2005, he wasn't really looking for another career. He'd already had two: one as a surveyor with the Army and the US Forest Service and the second with the US Postal Service. When he attended an information session about helping to build the SHT through the City of Duluth, he was just looking for a volunteer opportunity. And he did volunteer for a little more than a year after that evening. But then, in 2007 he was offered a position as a contractor for the SHTA. He thought, "this will be a good gig for 3-5 years," but instead it turned out to be his third career.

Photo by John Steitz

Larry Sampson – Celebrating 20 Years

“Larry has a great passion for the Superior Hiking Trail, and shares that passion with others. This was evident in the quality of his work over so many years of service. It was an honor and a privilege to get to work with Larry for the last seven years, and even though he is retiring (maybe), his legacy will live on in the great trail he built and the people who he inspired.”

— **Tamer Ibrahim, SHTA Trail Operations Director**

“I am always impressed by the impossibly high standards Larry sets for himself and the Trail. Working with raw materials in the woods is hard, and if something is a few degrees off of level, it takes him a long time to accept it. This commitment isn't about perfectionism or pride (I've never heard Larry be boastful about the amazing contributions he's made), it is an unwavering commitment to making the trail safe and accessible for all. My Larry quote is “It'll be fine, right?” after 30-60 minutes of deliberation about a 30 foot boardwalk that has a half dozen boards 1-2 inches off center.”

— **Josh Stangle, Volunteer**

“Larry is great to work with. He always has a kind word for all the volunteers who join his crew. He's fond of saying, ‘You don't have to go to the gym after working with me’. He also is crazy about rocks. ‘Just one more rock; a big flat one would be nice right here.’”

— **John McDonald, Volunteer**

For 20 years, Larry has been instrumental in building and maintaining the southern third of the SHT, from the Wisconsin border to Two Harbors. He helped construct the SHT from Jay Cooke to Martin Road and then on to Rossini Road. And finally, in 2017, from Jay Cooke to the southern terminus.

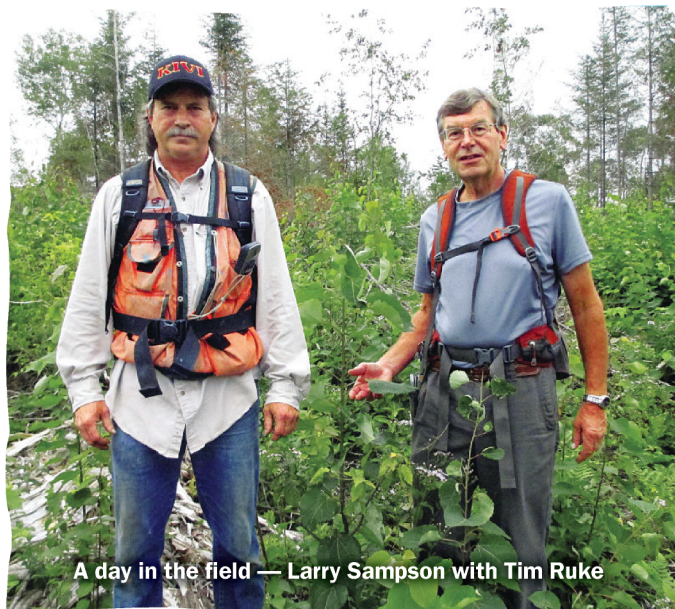
Anytime a section was completed, maintenance followed right away. Larry reflects, “Trail work is never done. Highways are never done, why should trails be done? It's the same sort of thing.” While general maintenance like drainage, lopping brush, and weed whipping happen annually, there are always bigger projects, too. In 2012 Larry led the work to re-establish the Trail after the devastating 500-year flood which Larry described as “literally put parts of the SHT at the bottom of Lake Superior.” In 2016, a huge storm blew down 500 trees between Hartley Park and Lismore Road, and Larry led teams of sawyers and swampers to remove the downed trees off the Trail. Let us not forget the approximately 250 reroutes that he's project managed, which range in length from 100 feet to almost half a mile.

Larry didn't do this work alone, of course. Much of his work as a contractor has been leading volunteers. Greeting them at the trailhead, teaching them the techniques needed for completing trail building and maintenance, cheering them on, and saying thanks. “I really enjoy working in the woods, always have since I was a kid. But it's the volunteers. It's wonderful working with volunteers. Volunteers want to be out there.” Nothing brings Larry more joy than hearing a new volunteer say, “Now I have ownership on this trail!” And according to Larry, a lot of them have become close, lifelong friends.



Larry at Larry's Lookout

For twenty years, Larry made taking care of the SHT his third career. But all careers, no matter how wonderful, come to an end. In the beginning of 2025 Larry contacted SHTA staff to let us know this would be his final year. “Don’t worry, though”, he says, “I will still be involved when I can, but no longer three or four days a week. It’s been good. There have been no regrets. It’s been enjoyable, and I’ve made long lasting friends and hiking partners. It’s been a wonderful third career.” We’re grateful for his 20-year dedication to the SHT, a trail that desperately needed Larry and still needs more people like him. Like Larry says, “A trail is never done.” 🍁



A day in the field — Larry Sampson with Tim Ruke

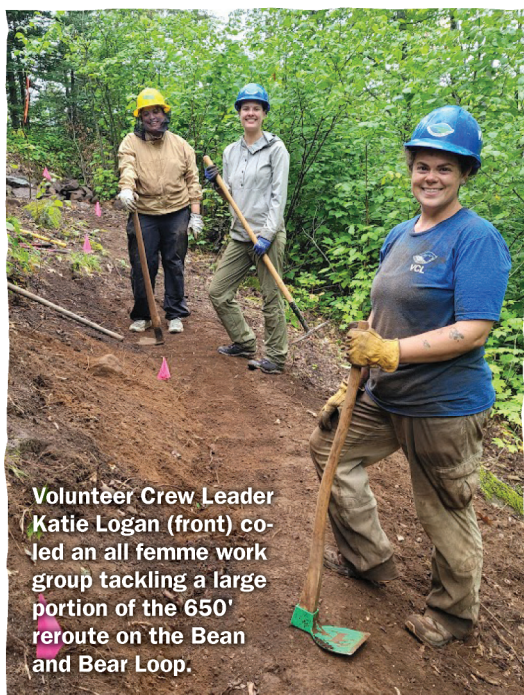
2025 Trail Renewal Projects Rewind

With the excitement and speed of the 2025 construction season it is easy to rush to the next project and overlook the important step of reflecting on our collective accomplishments. We have nearly completed the three Trail Renewal Projects on the Split Rock River, Bean and Bear Lakes, and Cascade River Loops! Two volunteer groups backpacked into project sites, and launched Saturday work parties on the Duluth SHT. Here’s a rewind of some of the projects we completed this year.

Volunteer-Powered Projects

Our Volunteer Crew Leaders honed their leadership skills while overseeing over half a dozen multi-day renewal projects on the Trail, including:

- A 650' reroute on Bean and Bear Lakes Loop.
- 126' boardwalk installation along Bean and Bear Loop, a collaborative project with Rocksteady Running.
- Replacing a 450' boardwalk near Lax Lake Road, including skill-building training with trail building professional Willie Bittner.
- Trail maintenance, step replacement, and short reroutes on the Cascade River Loop.
- Backpack-in project on Cascade River Loop to complete the installation of infrastructure at our new Boreal Campsite.



Volunteer Crew Leader Katie Logan (front) co-lead an all femme work group tackling a large portion of the 650' reroute on the Bean and Bear Loop.

Duluth Projects

Along with ongoing trail clearing, maintenance, and weed whipping, the Duluth SHT sections were improved through projects completed by SHTA contractor Larry Sampson and volunteers. Projects include:

- Constructed the long awaited 100 foot reroute to eliminate a roadwalk between Bagley Nature Center and Hartley Park.

Continued



On June 11, 2025 volunteers from Minnesota Power volunteers work on puncheon in Duluth on Day of Caring 2025.



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On the main trail portion of the Bean and Bear Lakes Loop contractors used locally sourced materials (rock) to design resilient and dramatic stone steps.

- Replaced more than 300 feet of puncheon near Spirit Mountain, Haines Road Trailhead, and Mission Creek.
- Rehabbed, benched, and hardened the tread, including 120' near Spirit Mountain, and locations near Mission Creek and Kingsbury Creek.
- Installed a step stone crossing across a tributary west of Kingsbury Creek.

Contractor Projects

Major Trail Renewal Projects continued this season at Split Rock River, Bean and Bear Lakes, and Cascade River Loops.

Split Rock River Loop

Nearing completion, this 3-mile loop may now be unrecognizable to those who once frequented it. The east side of the river was completed in spring 2025 and includes hundreds of feet of significant tread rehabilitation and includes a lot of stone work over small drainages and also in the forms of steps. 800' of puncheon was installed. Construction is still underway on the west side of the loop which is currently closed to the public. There are several hundred feet of new reroutes, retaining walls and stone steps, along with tread hardening along many well-known muddy spots. Work will soon begin on the final 900' of puncheon and elevated boardwalk.

Contractor: Trails Anonymous

Bean and Bear Lakes Loop

As the 2-year project draws to a close, the renewal is visible to all who visit. In 2024 the work focused on the main Trail and 2025 focused on the spur side of the loop, including a 1-mile reroute that dramatically improved erosion issues. Improvements also included features such as expanding of the bench (or width) of new and existing tread from 18" to 24" wide. Additionally, over 100 stone steps were installed on the main trail, in addition to checks, retaining walls, and tread hardening to increase its sustainability and resiliency.

Contractor: Trail Source LLC

Bear Lake Campsite Renewal

Campsites are often overlooked spaces along the trail corridor that need regular

maintenance. Due to erosion and user-created expansion, a total overhaul was needed of Bear Lake Campsite. We installed six new tent pads, and rehabilitated the 500' access spur trail. This new design is more sustainable and works with the landscape, instead of fighting against it. And, thanks to Tettegouche State Park who led a Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, who were able to decommission a rogue campsite within the park boundary as well.

Contractor: Great Lakes Trail Builders & Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa



Bear Lake's new tent pad pod design

Cascade River Loop

This year's work has focused on renewing the northern mile of the east side of the loop which is still under construction, this includes significant structure replacement of puncheon and steps and 1,000 feet of reroutes to move the Trail to more sustainable locations.

Contractor: Trail Logic 🍁



New boardwalk on Cascade River Loop built by contractor Trail Logic



Thank You Project Funders!

Funding for these projects has been provided by the **Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund** as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources, Federal Recreational Trails Program, North Country Trail Association, and SHTA members and donors.

Using the Trail During Hunting Season

Between September and November, please wear blaze orange or pink while using the Superior Hiking Trail as various hunting seasons occur along the corridor.

In November, parts of the Trail are closed during firearms deer season. Plan ahead if you intend to use the SHT between November 8-23. For the full list of SHT Trail closures, please visit our Trail Conditions page at our website, superiorhiking.org. Of note, some closures may go in place the week prior to the November 8th opener. Please respect all Trail closure signs for your safety, and be prepared to encounter hunters on or near the SHT.

State parks also host various hunts and may restrict access to state park lands during November and December. Check with any park you intend to visit. For more information go to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website: www.dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/index.html



Stay safe when using the Trail during fall hunting seasons by wearing blaze orange or pink.

SHTA Volunteers and Partners Honored at the NCTA Annual Awards Ceremony

Leadership comes in many forms, many of whom shy away from limelight or lack a formal title that matches their roles. At SHTA we are blessed to have competent leaders embedded throughout our organization and we took the opportunity to nominate these outstanding individuals and groups for awards through the North Country Trail Association. In 2025, one partner and five individuals were presented awards from NCTA for their exceptional service.



Friend of the Trail Award

The City of Duluth Parks & Recreation Division for being instrumental in the success of the SHT through the City of Duluth and for placing priority on maintaining the SHT and other world-class trail systems for their residents and visitors.

Sweep Awards

John Storkamp for his 30 years of involvement with the SHT as a volunteer and Volunteer Crew Leader, participating in and leading trail renewal projects. In addition, his company, Rocksteady Running, which hosts races on the Trail, is one of SHTA's generous business supporters.



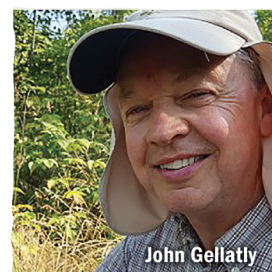
Larry Scanlon for contributing at well over 100 hours of volunteer time each year for many years. Larry has been instrumental in the stewardship of the SHT, helping to assess projects, scout reroutes, and is often available on short notice when needed.

John Gellatly has been the section adopter for the Spirit Mountain section in Duluth for over a decade. He maintains this section expertly—keeping the corridor clear, lopping back brush, and notifying SHTA of any hazards. John lives the motto, “people on, water off,” and has kept the spring runoff going across the Trail, rather than down it, by constructing and maintaining appropriate drainage.



Trail Maintainer Award

George “Madhat” Dahm is probably one of SHTA's longest serving volunteers who is still actively working on the trail. He was involved with building some of the sections between Duluth and Two Harbors, and other projects in the early days (mid to late '90s). He is still busy today, maintaining and clearing a section near Finland, MN and participating in annual trail clearing events.



Outreach Award

L W. Byrne for bringing together the groups he loves. For several years, L has been instrumental in organizing Northern Minnesota Track Club members to help with weed whipping on approximately 10 miles of the SHT through Duluth. More recently, L encouraged members of the Duluth Foot Trails Alliance (DuFTA) to join those Wednesdays, expanding from weed whipping to helping with Trail renewal projects—hauling material, deconstructing old structures, and helping construct new, more sustainable structures. 🍁

A Note from our Trail Store Manager

Thank you to all who stopped in the Trail Store and/or ordered through our online store this season. It has been a fun year—from an updated 10th Edition Guidebook to fun, fungus-inspired merchandise.

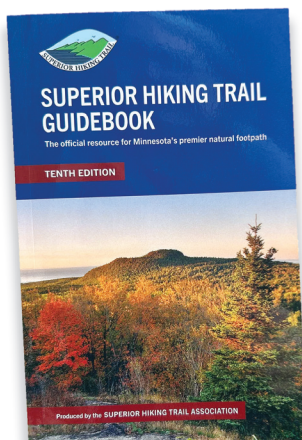
The Superior Hiking Trail Guidebook is the official guide for information and trip planning on the Superior Hiking Trail! With information on trail section details, mileage, notable features and vistas, campsites, water sources and directions to trailhead parking lots, this resource will help you prepare for your adventures

on the Trail, whether you are planning day hikes, several days of backpacking or a thru hike.

And our 2025 artist, Anni Friesen, has reminded us to “Breathe” by creating a colorful and calming image of mushrooms seen along the floor of the forests. Available on regular and long-sleeve Women’s Tees in 60/40 cotton-poly fabric, and semi-fitted.

You’ll find our Trail Store at 618 1st Avenue in Two Harbors, and it is open for the season through Friday, October 17th. Stop in and see us. Remember, our online store is open 365 days a year, allowing you to order

items anytime!



Protect and Renew the Trail



Do you feel passionately like the people profiled in these pages about protecting and renewing the Superior Hiking Trail into the future? Return the enclosed envelope or go to superiorhiking.org/donate today to make a gift to renew the Trail today and protect it for tomorrow:

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



618 1st Ave, PO Box 315
Two Harbors, MN 55616

218-834-2700

www.superiorhiking.org

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Tamer Ibrahim, Trail Operations Director

Justin Otsea, Trail Stewardship Director

Barbara Budd, Volunteer and Education Manager

Tracy Olson, Administrator

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Megan Wylder, Development and Communications Associate

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Two Harbors, MN 55616
218-834-2700
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Hikers, we want to celebrate you!

Did you complete the entire Superior Hiking Trail this year? Or participate in our Hike 50 Challenge? Congratulations! If you would like to have your accomplishment recognized by SHTA mascot Birchy the Beaver, sign up by December 31st to receive an official Certificate of Completion and signature patch. Hike 50 Challenge and End-2-End-er recognitions will be mailed out in January 2026.



**The Certificate of
Completion and
signature patch**

Thru-Hiker Business Member: Trailfitters



Trailfitters of Duluth inspired 300-miles of gratitude by becoming a “Thru-Hiker” Business Membership with the SHTA with a gift of \$5,000 along with numerous other ways they show up for the SHTA and the trail community. Thank you, Trailfitters, for being stewards of the Trail!