

celebrating 40 years RIDGELINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE SUPERIOR HIKING TRAIL ASSOCIATION *SPRING 2026*



This year we are celebrating the Superior Hiking Trail's 40th Anniversary. The journey began in 1986 when early trail blazers met to form the Superior Hiking Trail Association with a vision for a footpath traversing the North Shore's rocky ridgeline. The history of the Trail is rooted in the dedication of volunteers, members, business owners, North Shore communities, land managers, private landowners, state and federal agencies, and more. These partnerships paved the way for the current 300-mile gem that stretches from the Minnesota–Wisconsin border south of Duluth to the 270 degree Overlook near the Canadian border. Our story continues as we celebrate four decades of this incredible Trail.

Photo by Annie Nelson

Let's Celebrate!

Together we are celebrating our 40th Anniversary by sharing stories, spending time on Trail, and gathering our community of volunteers, members, adventurers, and supporters that the SHT has connected over the past four decades. Whether you head out on the Trail for the Ultimate Birthday Celebration on June 6th or purchase special 40th merchandise, there are many ways to join the festivities.



Blazing Trail Podcast

An eight-episode podcast series produced in partnership with WTIP. It explores stories from the past four decades, the work of trail builders and volunteers, and the voices of hikers and adventurers whose lives have been transformed by the Trail. Listen to *Blazing Trail* on WTIP's website or subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

A series of short stories featured in the *Trail Mix*, our monthly e-newsletter, that trace the Trail's journey from a bold idea to the current 300-mile footpath. These reminiscences and retrospectives detail how the Trail is truly more than a path, it is a living link between people, place, and purpose.

From the Overlook



Steve Thorne Deputy Commissioner of MN DNR, Marlene Johnson MN Lieutenant Governor, James Oberstar MN 8th District US Congressman, and Blaine Fenstad & Beth Blank Resort owners, at the 1987 opening ceremony log-cutting at Britton Peak by Tofte.

Hike 40 Challenge

Hike, walk, run, backpack, or snowshoe 40 miles on the SHT in 2026. This year's *Hike 40 Challenge* features historically significant sections of the Trail including the 1987 log-cutting at Britton Peak, Halfway Hike ending at Gooseberry in the 90s, and more! Those who complete the challenge will receive a special Hike 40 Challenge certificate and patch featuring Birchy the Beaver.

End-2-Ender

“Although the trail is challenging, if you go at your own pace and enjoy the trail, it always offers surprises and brings rest to your soul” – Ellen, 2025 End-2-Ender. The SHT End-2-Ender program recognizes anyone who has finished every section of the SHT whether as a thru-hike or one day hike at a time. Join the growing End-2-Ender community by completing the entire Trail in 2026.



celebrating 40 years

The Superior Hiking Trail's 40th Anniversary 1986-2026



**Celebrate this milestone
and join the festivities:**

- Blazing Trail Podcast
- From The Overlook Short Story Series
- Hike 40 Challenge
- End-2-Ender Program
- Guided Hikes
- 40th Anniversary Merchandise
- Ultimate Birthday Celebration on June 6th



Scan the QR code
to learn more and
register for events

Superior Hiking Trail's Ultimate Birthday Celebration

One Day. One Trail. One Community.



National Trails Day® is Saturday, June 6 and we'll be filling the Trail with joy from end to end.

Choose a section of Trail to hike, run, or saunter, and afterward join one of our regional parties for our 40th birthday!

***Register for your preferred section to hike,
sign up online.***

Photo courtesy of John Steitz

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



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Front cover: "Split Rock River" by Annie Nelson

Back cover: "St. Louis River Sturgeon" by Sam Zimmerman

VOLUME 41, ISSUE 1

PEOPLE.
NATURE.
FOOT PATH.

Legacy Giving

Honor the Past, Secure the Future

The Trail exists because people believed in something bigger than themselves. As we celebrate this milestone, you have a unique opportunity to honor that legacy and help shape the next 40 years. A legacy gift is a powerful way to ensure the Trail endures for generations to come. Ways to leave your mark:

- *Include SHTA in your estate plans: A bequest in your will or trust is a simple way to create a lasting impact.*
- *Give through retirement assets: Make Qualified Charitable Distributions from your IRA or 401(k) or name the SHTA as a beneficiary.*
- *Start your legacy with a Donor Advised Fund: Make a tax-deductible gift now, grow it tax-free, and make grants to the SHTA over time.*
- *Make a special 40th Anniversary gift: Celebrate this moment with a special gift by giving online or mail a check using the enclosed envelope.*

We encourage you to consult with your attorney or tax advisor to find the approach that works best for you. Whether planned for the future or given today in honor of our anniversary, your support becomes part of our collective story.

Volunteer

Be Part of a Legacy that Builds the Trail

The SHT has been volunteer powered since 1986. Every footstep along the Trail is a testament to the people who showed up year after year to build something lasting. When you volunteer, you're not just helping today—you're carrying forward a tradition that has defined the Trail for nearly four decades. Opportunities include:

- *Spring clearing weekends*
- *Ambassador Leave No Trace outreach*
- *Backpack trail project teams*
- *Weed whipping and maintenance in Duluth*

Be part of the legacy that keeps the Trail alive. Learn more and sign up to volunteer at superiorhiking.org/volunteer or email volunteer@superiorhiking.org with questions.



Volunteers painting signs in the early days of the Trail.



All-Femme volunteer work crew renewing Bean and Bear Lakes Loop in 2025.

2026 Trail Renewal Projects

2026 is shaping up to be another busy season of trail projects. As the Trail celebrates its 40th year, there is a great deal happening from completing the projects from the “Big Bad Five” to replacing bridges. This year includes both contractor-led initiatives and volunteer opportunities. Projects for 2026 include:

- *Completing the renewal of Split Rock River Loop*
- *Renewing a portion of the Cascade River Loop*
- *Planning and preparing for installation of the Split Rock River Bridge*
- *Replacing puncheon near County Road 6*
- *Building a new bridge over the Devil’s Track River Tributary north of Grand Marais*
- *Replacing 500’ puncheon in the Magney-Snively Natural Area*
- *Rehabilitating and repairing trailheads*
- *Relocating the Arrowhead Trailhead near Hovland to a new and expanded location*
- *Ongoing maintenance along the entire Trail*

Bridges are the big theme for 2026 and 2027. This includes the Split Rock River Bridge as part of the project plan, but it is an incredibly complex undertaking. Over the past 30 years, the Split Rock River Loop has experienced four bridge removals due to natural disasters or aging infrastructure. The most recent bridge was removed in 2016 after being deemed unsafe.

In 2020, the Superior Hiking Trail Association suspended plans for a replacement bridge due to the project’s expense and organizational capacity to implement. Instead, focus shifted to renewing the Split Rock River Loop to address issues of serious erosion, extremely muddy conditions due to inadequate drainage, and dangerously failing infrastructure. That renewal began in 2024, thanks to funding from the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund. Contractor Trails Anonymous is set to complete the project in 2026. With that work nearing completion, sights are once again set on the

possibility of constructing a new bridge across the Split Rock River. However, the journey will not be easy or simple.

Bridges are among the most involved and costly trail projects. They require extensive structural engineering, environmental review and permitting, material transport during appropriate seasonal conditions, and close coordination between multiple project partners. Even with careful preparation, weather or logistical challenges can impact timelines. The successful completion of a new bridge spanning the Split Rock River will require thoughtful planning, funding, partnership, and patience. One thing is for certain, projects of this magnitude are only possible because of the dedication and support of funders, volunteers, project partners, and the entire SHTA community.



Old Split Rock River Bridge.



Volunteers from Minnesota Power building puncheon in Duluth during the 2025 United Way Day of Caring.

Funding for 2026 Trail projects and SHTA volunteer program is provided by the **Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund** (as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources), Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation, and our generous members and donors.



Grandpa's Trail

A Legacy of Multiple Generations on the SHT

At 5:00 on a frigid -20 degree February morning, Becky Brovitch climbed into her dad's vehicle for her first experience on the Superior Hiking Trail. Her dad, Kris Nurmi, had been leading guided hikes for years, but Becky was convinced no one would join in this bitter cold. However, as father and daughter stood at the trailhead, people began to show, all bundled up to hike.

That morning introduced Becky to the Superior Hiking Trail and its community. Hikers chatted and asked questions while following her dad through the woods. Becky was hooked. She discovered her enjoyment of spending time on the Trail, especially in winter. The sparkle of fresh snow and quiet stillness, not to mention the lack of mosquitos, created a perfectly peaceful hike. Her involvement with the SHTA expanded, encouraged by her dad. In addition to leading guided hikes, Kris adopted a section and volunteered on maintenance projects. What started as Kris's passion became an entire family's commitment. Nita, Becky's mom, often met guided groups at the end of their hike with a snack or worked alongside Becky and Kris on Trail maintenance projects. Once, Becky's grandma even joined a project at the age of 75. That freezing February morning, Becky began to follow in her father's footsteps developing her connection to the Trail.

In August 2019, Kris passed away on the Trail doing what he loved. The family's grief rooted them more deeply to the Trail to honor his memory. Becky and her husband Jason took over Kris's adopted section for five years. Becky bought her own loppers and saw, cleared blowdowns, reset rocks, and rebuilt tread.

Now Becky and Jason are introducing their daughter, Autumn, to the Trail. Sharing it is exciting because Kris always dreamed of hiking with his grandkids. Autumn has started claiming the Trail proudly whenever she sees the iconic logo or blue blaze, saying, "That's Grandpa's Trail!"

At the age of ten, she joined her first maintenance day learning how to clear branches and care for something bigger than herself.

The Superior Hiking Trail is a special place for the Nurmi Brovitch family. It is legacy and stewardship, knowledge and ownership, and love passed down, one generation at a time.



Photo courtesy of Becky Nurmi-Brovitch

Becky Brovitch and her father Kris Nurmi during Becky's first experience on the Superior Hiking Trail.



Photo courtesy of Becky Nurmi-Brovitch

Becky and Autumn Nurmi-Brovitch clearing Trail

A Place of Healing

There is never a more important time to be outdoors and connect with nature than during times of great uncertainty. At the Superior Hiking Trail Association, we know the healing power of time spent outside and recognize that the Trail impacts the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of all who use it. As we move into the warmer months and welcome back a larger number of trail users, please remember the guiding values of our Trail community – be kind and welcoming to everyone. The Trail is for everyone, yet right now not everyone in our Trail community feels safe being outdoors or in public spaces. We are deeply concerned that those who could benefit most from the healing power of nature are being deprived of it. The Superior Hiking Trail Association is committed to fostering a diverse community of trail users and supporters and building a culture of inclusivity. We recognize the value of meaningful outdoor experiences for all along this 300-mile footpath.

2025 Financial Health Report

The SHTA is financially stable thanks to the generosity of our supporters. In fiscal year 2025 more than half of the Association’s revenue came from members and donors – with an astounding 54% increase from 2024 – again showing the dedication of the Trail community. Thank you to last year’s donors, members, agency partners, and supporters who were committed to ensuring the Association remained strong and the Trail protected.

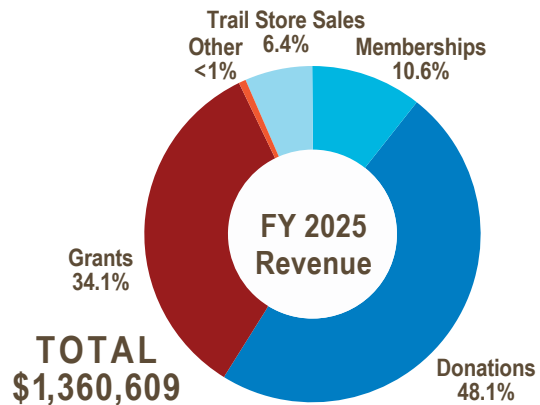
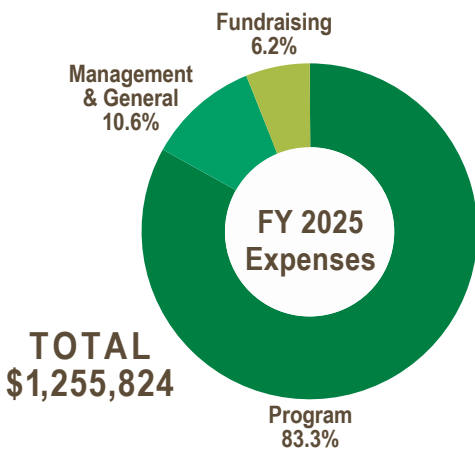
Grantors: Thank you to the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources), North Country Trail Association Field Grant Program, Federal Recreational Trails Program, Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation, and Minnesota Power Foundation (who provided grant funding for Trail renewal projects, ongoing maintenance, and the SHTA volunteer program).

Members: A warm welcome to the 329 new members who contributed over \$24,000 to the Trail.

Business Members: Thank you to *Rock Steady Running* and *Whole Foods Co-op Duluth* for giving at the Thru-hiker level in 2025 to support the needs of the Trail.



Your gifts ensure the Trail remains in good shape for all to enjoy now and for the next 40 years!



Trail Tips

Check the Trail conditions webpage for the most up-to-date information on closures and re-routes at: superiorhiking.org/trail-conditions.

A reminder to *Leave No Trace on Trail*: if there is mud, walk right through it, not around it.





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Visit the Trail Store in Downtown Two Harbors

2026 Season Hours: May 21st - October 16th,
Thursdays and Fridays, 10 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Superior Hiking Trail with shirts and sweatshirts in multiple shapes, sizes, and colors. 40th Anniversary apparel, guidebooks, maps, swag, gear, and more are available at our Trail Store. This summer we will have apparel and merchandise featuring the artwork of Sam Zimmerman, our 2026 Artist of the Year. All products are available in the online Trail Store with year round shipping or curbside pick up, visit:

shop.superiorhiking.org.



St. Louis River Sturgeon by Sam Zimmerman, a sneak peak at our 2026 Artist of the Year's artwork.



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