

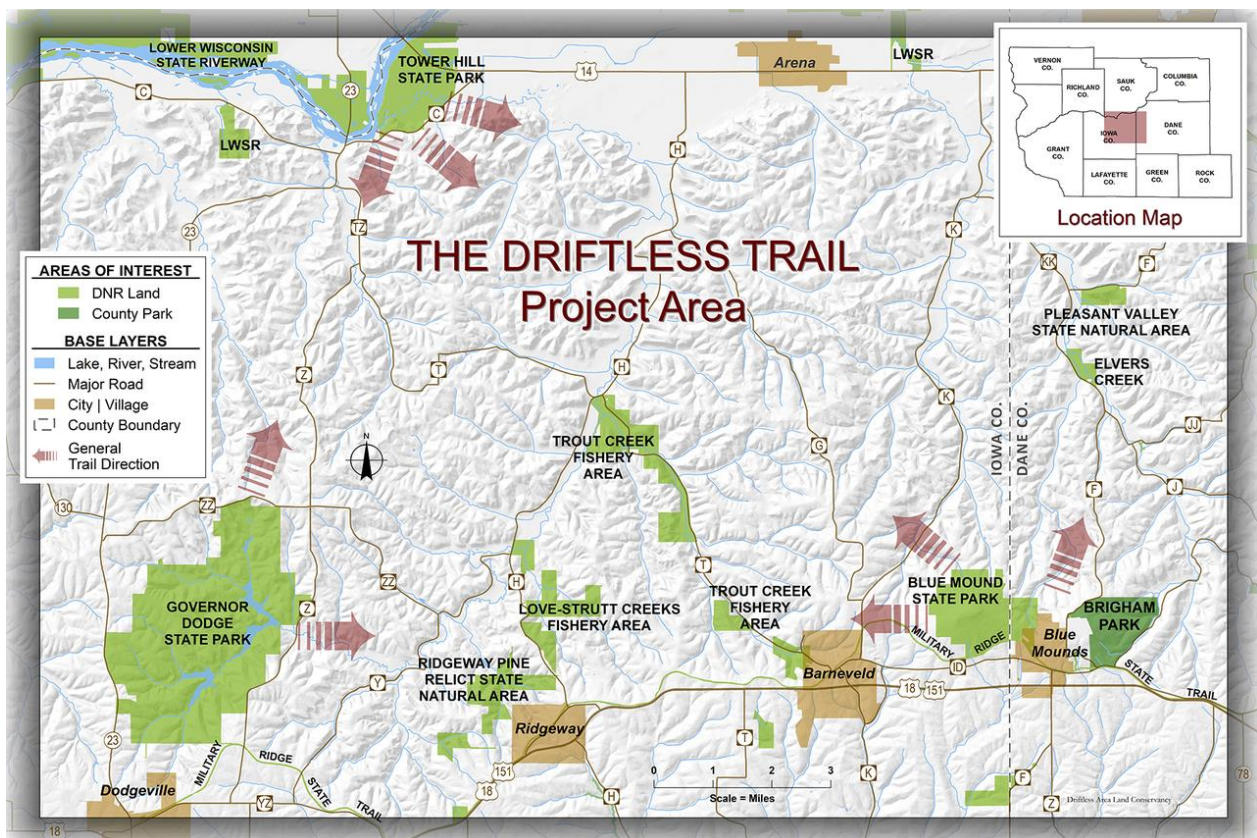


Driftless Trail: A Corridor of Resiliency for People and Nature

Our vision: a 50 mile-long trail through Driftless Area vistas & valleys

Imagine hiking a footpath that wanders through the woods, prairies, farms, bluffs and streams of Iowa County's Driftless landscape. It takes you through state conservation lands and through nooks and crannies owned by people who want to share the beauty of their land with you. Hike the trail for three miles or plan a multi-day loop that connects Tower Hill, Governor Dodge, and Blue Mound State Parks. During the winter, strap on snowshoes or skis to explore the vistas, valleys, and cultural sites that make this area so widely renowned. This is the vision we have for the Driftless Trail.

Beyond serving up this unique experience, the Driftless Trail will create a corridor for land conservation, wildlife, and climate change resiliency. It will entice people to exercise, spend quality time with others, and learn about the nature, history, and agriculture they are walking through. And it will be a new economic resource for nearby rural gateway communities.



Why a “Driftless Trail”? Why our organization? Why now?

This project embodies Driftless Area Land Conservancy’s holistic, community-based approach to conservation, a philosophy best described by the late UW-Madison landscape architect, Phil Lewis. He lived in the hills this trail will traverse and created the term “e-corridors” to describe projects that incorporate ecology, environment, esthetics, exercise, and education. Driftless Area Land Conservancy adds easements and economics to the mix. The Driftless Trail covers it all.

Driftless Area Land Conservancy’s mission is to protect the health, diversity and beauty of Southwest Wisconsin’s natural and agricultural landscape through permanent land protection and restoration, and *improve people’s lives by connecting them to the land and to each other*. The Driftless Trail helps implement every strategy we use to achieve our mission.

Wisconsin’s Driftless Area is 97% privately owned, so land conservation is up to landowners, not government. And setting foot in these hills requires either owning land or visiting public parks and trails. During the pandemic, visitation to the state parks in our project area has skyrocketed. From 2019 to 2021, the number of visitors to Governor Dodge, Blue Mound, and Tower Hill State Parks increased 72%, 70% and 56% respectively, showing the profound need for access to nature for our mental and physical health.

What progress have we made?

Following a thorough planning process aided by the National Park Service from 2015-2018, we were confident the Driftless Trail would be feasible and welcomed by landowners, local communities, and the public. Easement work and trail design began in 2019, construction by WisCorps crews began in 2020, and we opened the Weaver Road Segment north of Governor Dodge State Park in October 2021. In fall of 2022, we will open the 2.7-mile Knobs Road Segment north of Ridgeway, and 2023 will see the opening of segments on and near the Frank Lloyd Wright Taliesin estate, connecting to Tower Hill State Park. From there, trail hosts are lined up going south through the Lowery Creek valley. Many more easement and trail routing conversations are on-going.

How is this project funded and how are funds used?

The Driftless Trail is funded through private sector grants and donations. Costs include planning, construction (WisCorps crews), easements, materials, signage, and maintenance, which total around \$67,000 in 2022.

