



**WEST MICHIGAN
TRAILS & GREENWAYS
COALITION**



NEWSLETTER OF WEST MICHIGAN TRAILS & GREENWAYS COALITION

TRAIL LINK is the newsletter of the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition, published four times annually. Established in 2005, the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition is a grassroots group of individuals committed to developing a non-motorized trail system connecting our communities and rural areas and providing alternative transportation and recreation options to West Michigan residents and visitors.

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West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition

HINDSIGHT 2020 FORESIGHT 2021

It's been a challenging and interesting year for everyone and, yes, we are here to say it's been all of that for WMTGC. We began the year with ambitious plans for the trails and for our organization, and now we find those plans tattered with a lot of notes and changes.

Most of our projects are moving forward with adjusted plans and timelines. The request for proposals for a wayfinding or signage guide for the region is delayed but expecting to go out in the coming weeks. Progress is being made to complete the section of trail between Leonard and Ann streets in Grand Rapids, directly connecting the city to hundreds of miles of trails to the north; we're working toward construction in 2023. We're bringing the communities together along the Interurban or River to River Trail between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids to be organized in a way to drive this project forward. And, while the Mid America Trails And Greenways conference (MATAG) didn't take place in Grand Rapids this year, it WILL take place here in 2021.

One of the plan changes, our Trail Mixer fundraising breakfast, was postponed and then switched to a virtual breakfast in mid-September. In many ways it was a huge success: key take-aways were that trail use is way up because of the pandemic and there is a desire in West Michigan to keep moving forward on a unified trail system connecting us all. You can see more information in this short and inspiring video: <https://bit.ly/WMTGCVideo>.

In a couple of key areas, we fell short: primarily, we lost major operational dollars to keep this work moving forward. Can we count on you to support West Michigan Trails & Greenways in this important work? Please take a moment to think about what trails mean to you, to your community, and to West Michigan. We ask that you consider supporting us at a level that fits you. It is really helpful if you become a monthly donor, spreading your gift over the year and keeping needed dollars consistently coming in to fund our work. Monthly pledges make a huge difference.

You can make a monthly or a one-time donation to West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition [here](#). Or, if you prefer, use the enclosed donation envelope to send in a one-time donation.

In the meantime, please stay safe and healthy, explore new trails (ask your doctor if the West Michigan Trail Challenge is right for you), and let's all look for 2021 to be a great and calm year!



John

John Morrison,
Executive Director WMTGC

2020 HASN'T STOPPED TRAIL BUILDING/PLANNING

As chair of the WMTGC Board of Directors I want to elaborate on something I referenced at our Trail Mixer, and that is in this turbulent year there is still much activity in the trail building and trail planning world. Significant progress is being made to create a connected "world-class trail experience" in West Michigan. There are many miles to go, but the good news is that those miles are being built.

At the Trail Mixer I expressed that one thing a "world-class trail experience" means for me is that anyone, anywhere will be able to leave their home and easily find and access the trail system. There are infrastructure things we can do to accomplish this; however, we must also realize that no matter how many trails we build and how well we do with creating signage, there are still barriers – whether they're cultural, socio-economic, or some other reason – that are keeping people from enjoying everything trails have to offer.

As part of the West Michigan Trails Challenge, our family visited the Grand River Edges Trail and walked through Riverside Park in Grand Rapids on maybe the last mild Sunday of the year. As I said on Instagram, it was lovely. But, it wasn't just the pleasant setting along the river

that made the experience so memorable – it was being there with so many people – a wide diversity of people enjoying the park and its trail system.

I would like to see that happen all across West Michigan and I don't always. At West Michigan Trails, we are striving not only to build trails, but promote them to everyone. We are committed to supporting an inclusive trails movement – but, we are just learning how to do this. In the past, we have often been focused on the nuts and bolts (or just plain asphalt), but to expand our focus beyond this we need help of passionate volunteers and board members. We have been fortunate to have more people connect with us recently, but there is lot of room for more. Please join us or consider recommending a friend to help. As always, we need your financial support to make this vision a reality, but we also need people to participate.

Aaron



CHALLENGE ACCEPTED!

Do you love West Michigan Trails? If so, you are not alone. Over the last nine months some areas of West Michigan have seen as much as a 300% increase in trail and park use. With that increase, we have received a record number of questions about the location of alternative trails for people to explore. We decided to offer a challenge to get people out and exploring the trails beyond their back door. We have created the West Michigan Trails Challenge on Runsignup to challenge you to get out and explore all that West Michigan has to offer. You can walk, hike, bike, run, ski or snowshoe (might want to wait a little later in the year for those two), or skate! Whatever your favorite mode of transportation – just get out there and explore. We have identified 40 trails in West Michigan that are included in the challenge. You only need to explore 20 of the 40 to earn a medal! Sign up and get a t-shirt. This is a challenge to get out, get moving, and check out all the amazing trails that are out there, for FREE, for you to enjoy! You have until Dec 31st to complete the challenge! Sign up for the challenge here: <https://runsignup.com/Race/MI/GrandRapids/WestMichiganTrailChallenge>



BALLOT PROPOSAL 1



The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund was established in the Krammer Recreational Land Trust Fund Act of 1976. Its purpose was to acquire public land and advance public outdoor recreation using revenue derived from oil, gas, and mineral rights owned by the state. Through 2019 the Trust Fund has awarded \$1.2 billion in grants, \$935.9 million for acquisition and \$286.4 million for development. In November Proposal 1 will be on the ballot to expand the limits of the State Parks Endowment Fund. In 2011, oil, gas and mineral royalty revenue previously deposited in the Trust Fund began being deposited in the Endowment Fund due to reaching the \$500 million cap in principal balance of the Trust Fund. The ballot proposal will allow the revenues to continue to be accumulated beyond the \$800 million cap. If the ballot proposal is not passed, the additional funds will be distributed as determined by the state legislature and the governor.

Furthermore, there would be changes to the dollar amounts available for acquisition and development grants. According to the DNR: currently, of the total amounts made available annually for spending from the Trust Fund, not less than 25% shall be expended for the acquisition of land or rights in land for recreational uses or protection of the land. Not more than 25% shall be expended for the development of public recreation facilities, such as ball fields, fishing platforms, canoe/kayak/boat launches, trails, playgrounds and supporting amenities like restrooms and parking lots.

If the ballot measure is approved: Not less than 25% of the total amounts made available annually for spending from the Trust Fund shall be expended for the acquisition of public land and the development of public recreation facilities.

What this means the Trust Fund Board would have discretion in recommending the remaining 50% of the total amounts made available (less costs for administration of the Trust Fund) toward acquisition or development projects.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: HOLLY VISSER

How does someone summarize Holly Visser? It isn't easy. She is a Yogi, Wanderluster, Gazelle Girl Half Marathon Race Director, Empath and Passionate leader, who is compelled to manifest positive change in her community.

As busy as Holly is, she also finds time to volunteer for WMTGC by serving on our events committee. She tells us she volunteers because, "This organization has a genuine interest in contributing to vitality of our community by inviting us to take in all that the outdoor paths and trailways have to offer. They are very humble people with good hearts, and great to work with. I count myself blessed to come alongside their efforts."

Holly believes that trails add to our community by providing a place for everyone to appreciate fresh air. Holly believes Fresh Air = Fresh Perspective. She explains that her miles ran or hiked have served to provide clarity on challenges she is facing in life.

We appreciate all that Holly brings to our organization. If you have a passion for trails and would like to volunteer, please contact us at info@wmtrails.org.

T-SHIRTS!

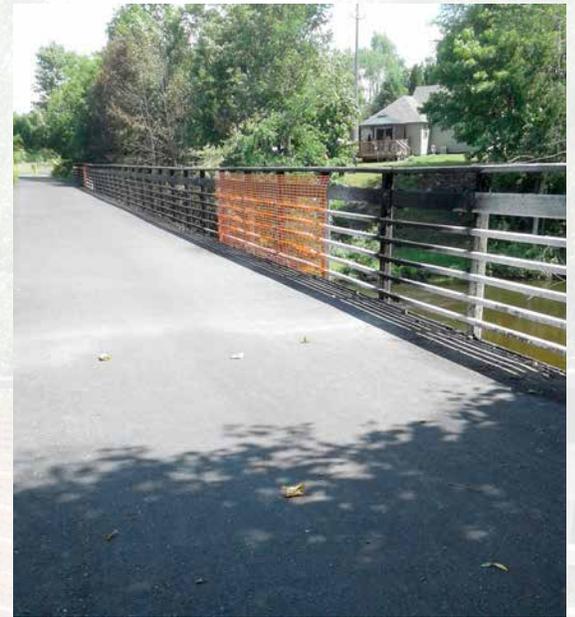
We are thankful to our partnership with The Mitten State. A portion of all t-shirt sales result in a donation to WMTGC.



Order your shirt today!

<https://themittenstate.com/products/wmtg-mi-trails-unisex>





SPOONVILLE TRAIL PHASE II

The Spoonville Trail Phase I (WMTGC helped fund Phase I with a grant) connected the Idema Explorers Trail on the south side of the Grand River, across the Grand River on the M231 bridge to 120th Avenue at Leonard Street. Phase II starts at this intersection and is about 1¾ miles long. It runs along Leonard St to the entrance of the Terra Verde Golf Course, then along the south and east edges of the Golf Course to 112th Avenue, over I-96 on 112th Avenue, connecting to the North Bank Trail in Nunica. It is under construction with anticipated completion this fall.

KAL-HAVEN TRAIL

There has been a lot happening on the Kal-Haven during the pandemic. Some enhancements to the trail include: the Heritage Trail program now has an app available for Android phones at the Google Play Store (already in the App Store for Apple), there is a new bicycle repair stand at the Bloomingdale Station, as well as two new memorial benches on the trail. One bench is in Gobles near the intersection of the Kal-Haven and the Driftbusters Snowmobile Club in honor of long-time supporter Ron Stolk. A second bench has been provided for trail users just west of the vault toilet at Kendall in honor of Al Cassada, an early pioneer and supporter of the Kal-Haven Trail. There are plans to rebuild the kiosk at the Gobles station this fall and the plans for rehabilitation of the Caboose at Bloomingdale are moving forward. Kal-Haven Trail t-shirts will be available by early winter so stay tuned! Lastly, mark your calendars for the annual Trailblazer fundraiser that is scheduled for Saturday, May 8, 2021.

CANNON TRAIL

The Springer Farms section of the Cannon Trail is now complete (small restoration punch list items remaining). This ¾-mile section of trail starts at 9 Mile Road, near Las Palmas Drive and Springer Royal Road, and extends in a mostly cross-country easement to Hickory Drive, then following Hickory Drive, connecting to Kies Street right at Luton Park. This is a section of Cannon Township’s master plan to connect Cannonsburg to the White Pine Trail and create a trail across the Township from Ada Township’s network to Rockford and the White Pine Trail.

FRED MEIJER HEARTLAND TRAIL

The bridge in Greenville is open for use by pedestrians and bicycles after an arson fire on June 12th! A big thank you goes out to the fire departments from Greenville, Belding, and Montcalm Township who responded quickly and were able to limit the damage to the creosote on the outside of the wooden structure. There are several panels of the railings that will be replaced due to warping caused by the intense heat. Thankfully, the FMHT carries insurance on the bridges and the insurance company is finalizing the agreement to cover the repairs. It could take a year to finish the project. The bridge is still closed to vehicles.

SHOUT OUT!

Shout out to Ada Township for passing an increase in their trails millage from .75 to 1.5 mills to help fund trails!





Public Participation

STATE TRAIL PLAN

Help the "Trails State" shape Michigan's trails management plan!

Veteran trail users in Michigan know the state is richer than most, with 13,000 miles of state-managed trails, thousands of miles of local, county, and federally managed trails, and more rail-trail miles than any state in the nation. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources, which oversees the state-designated trails, is asking for input from trail lovers of all experience levels on the management and future development of these valuable resources.

From Oct 1 - Oct 22 the DNR will host a series of virtual meetings where people can learn about the department's draft vision and goals for Michigan's trails system that was developed with assistance from the Michigan Trails Advisory Council which WMTGC plays a roll on. Participants will also be able to share their own ideas. The meetings are the next step in the DNR's effort to update the 2013 Statewide Trails Plan, an 18-month process that started last fall and will be completed by summer of 2021.

To learn more about the planning process, register for a virtual meeting or complete the online trails survey, please visit the [public participation](#) section of the MichiganTrailsPlan.org website.

RIVER TO RIVER (INTERURBAN TRAIL)

The communities along the proposed River to River Trail or Interurban Trail have begun discussions for an intergovernmental agreement to work together to get this project underway. They have been working on a Trail Commission Agreement and are hoping to get together, once again, in January of 2021. The group will work together to support the development of the trail and ensure fluid communication throughout the process.



MID AMERICA TRAILS AND GREENWAYS (MATAG) CONFERENCE: TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

IT'S TO BE, TIMES TWO!

The MATAG Conference that was scheduled for August this year is rescheduled for August 15-18, 2021 at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids. Watch matag.org for details about this informative and fun conference that moves around nine states in the Midwest every other year. There will be pre-conference field trip, two days of speakers, breakout sessions, and mobile workshops, and intensive post conference workshops going even more in depth.

In place of this year's MATAG was a morning of virtual panel sessions discussing trail-related topics like economic recovery, pandemic response, working with legislators, and trail policy, attended by trail professionals and enthusiasts all over the United States.





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DONOR HIGHLIGHT

*Friend of North Bank Trail & WMTGC
member and supporter - Pete Murdoch*

Pete Murdoch believes that trails represent a significant and vital asset to the communities they serve. Trails are a safe and progressive recreational source for residents, and non-residents, of all ages. Pete is an active member of the Friends of the North Bank Trail and a member and supporter of the WMTGC. Pete shares that his support of WMTGC is motivated by having experienced first-hand how well received the trails are and his desire to further their growth. "My favorite trail is the North Bank because it represents the very mission of the WMTGC - to enhance connectivity with other trails and communities and to ensure its proper maintenance and sustainability going forward."

Pete's plans, and those of the Friends of the North Bank Trail, are to direct future efforts to expand the NBT east into Polkton and Wright Townships and to connect with the Musketawa and Meijer trails. He is hopeful that these efforts will be successful with the strong support of the WMTGC and their operational objective of promoting and encouraging such connectivity. Pete and his wife are residents of Spring Lake Township and he owns Reliant Professional Cleaning Contractors, Inc. a west Michigan based building services contractor. West Michigan could not have the trail network that it does without supporters like Pete Murdoch! Thank you, Pete for all that you do. If you would like to join Pete as a Trail Guardian - you can join him by going to: <http://bit.ly/FallNews2020> or filling out the enclosed envelope and choose to be a monthly donor.

