



**WEST MICHIGAN
TRAILS & GREENWAYS
COALITION**

WEST MICHIGAN TRAIL LINK

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is the newsletter of the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition, published 3-4 times annually. Established in 2005, the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition is 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

TRAIL MIXER

Wow! Once again, our supporters came through.

Although we had to make our annual Trail Mixer fundraiser virtual, it did not stop our supporters from signing up and showing their support! We were thrilled to have over 100 people join us on Zoom and share their favorite trails, where they would like to see new trail connections made, and what they would like included in a unified signage system. We have nearly met our donation goals. If you would like to help us reach our goal, you can still donate at: <https://bit.ly/WMTTrails2021> We are hoping for 10 more monthly donors!!

A huge thank you to our sponsors for exceeding our expectations! Please be sure to think of them if you should need any of their services!



Many Thanks!



Lead Sponsor



STRAVA: SWEDISH FOR STRIVE

Strava is a social network for athletes that lets you track your activity with a GPS. You can join challenges, share your routes and photos, and follow friends. If you are a Strava user, join our club at <https://www.strava.com/clubs/WMTGC>. Being a part of a group can be inspiring. It is fun to learn where others like to run, hike, bike or walk. Use this in conjunction with our West Michigan Trails Challenge!



WHAT'S IT LIKE TO RUN THE FRED?

By John Morrison

I am excited for the months ahead of us with so many great things coming up with West Michigan Trails, many of them without all the restrictions we've all had to navigate for so long. Many of them are in this newsletter.

One that is near and dear to me are The Fred Running Relays. This event is special to me because I've participated in it numerous times, including the 2011 inaugural race. Those first years, the thought of being on a team running 200 miles was mind boggling. How can we do that? It didn't seem real. I am an adequate runner; in other races I could slog through the miles.

But The Fred was special; this was different. Run six miles, let the other team members run their segments, and then do it again. The legs vary from a little over two miles to nine miles; most are around five to six. On a team of 12, each team member runs just three legs. The math works.

It starts on Friday morning. Slower teams start earlier (that was me), faster teams later. Teams leave Belmont running toward Rockford, Cedar Springs, on to Sand Lake. It continues through the country and small communities, swapping out runners along the way. In your van you joke and have serious conversations and sit in silence. Sometimes you sleep. Anticipating your next run.

Eventually your team makes it to Cadillac, circles beautiful Lake Cadillac, and begins the return journey through the night. That's right, you run through the night – and it's awesome! My favorite runs were always the nights. Almost every team brings a bicycle and there's always a cyclist in your vicinity to help you if you're in trouble or need water, or just for the comfort of knowing someone is there. So, I always had a cyclist behind me helping light the trail. At night it's cool and it was always my fastest pace.

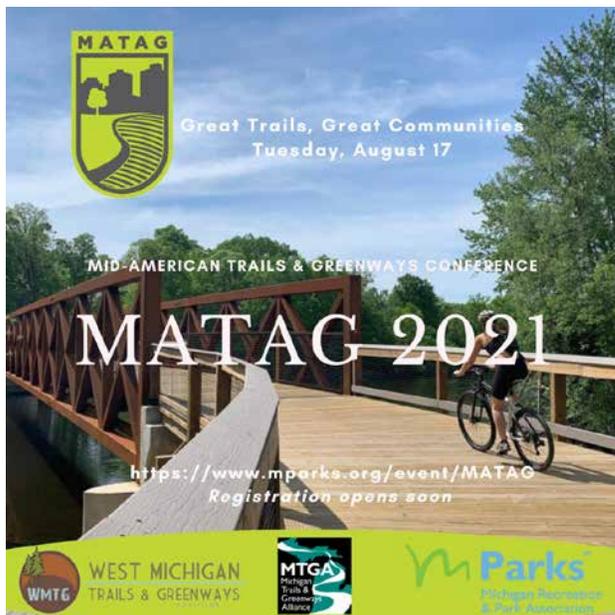


Teams begin arriving back in Belmont in late morning or early afternoon. And they keep coming in through the afternoon with the last teams coming in at four or five o'clock. I was always on one of those last teams so, yes, it took us more than 30 hours. It was tough, it was grueling, and it was exhilarating. At times you wonder why you're doing this. But as soon as your team finishes and you're there celebrating with your medals and cheers... Every. Single. Time. We were excited and talking about doing it again the next year. Every. Single. Time.

It's an accomplishment. It's not easy but it's doable, even for an adequate runner like myself. It's fun to say I ran The Fred, that I ran in a 200-mile relay (or five).

I was excited in 2019 when West Michigan Trails had the opportunity to acquire The Fred. For our mission it's a means to get people to explore the entire White Pine Trail, to promote the wonderful trail system we have in West Michigan. It's a chance to grow this really cool race and to challenge, even adequate runners like myself, to do something they can't imagine they can do.

Check it out (<http://bit.ly/2021FredRelays>) and, if not this year, challenge yourself in 2022. You'll be glad you did!



The Mid America Trails and Greenways (MATAG) Conference is an opportunity to connect with trail advocates from a nine-state regional area including: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. If you're not from one of these states, don't let that stop you from attending. A biannual conference, MATAG brings together hundreds of high-level, decision-making trail advocates from local, state, and federal government agencies, citizens, non-profit organizations, and industry leaders who have an interest in the development and management of trails, greenways, and blueways. Learn the latest trends and techniques in trail development, maintenance, and promotion. Look for nine breakout sessions, a great keynote, and updates from numerous states covering rail trails, water trails, mountain bike trails, hiking trails, ORV, and more! CEUs are available!

Virtual on Tuesday, August 17 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Registration and information: <https://www.mparks.org/event/MATAG>

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: THOM BELL

Thom Bell has been an avid cyclist for 20 years who knows the importance of West Michigan Trails and wants everyone to know the same. He says that trails are yet to grow old and are here in our backyard for us to discover! Many people don't know about them, but Thom believes that should change.



While Thom stays busy riding on the White Pine Trail on a regular basis, he also finds time to volunteer for WMTGC by working on videography projects. A videographer by trade, he tells us that he volunteers because, "I look at the trail network as a metaphor that you can touch and participate in. The trails take you to all the places that make up our community, West Michigan. You can circumnavigate West Michigan and not be on a road, not only is it exciting for safety, but you're going through all the smaller communities that make up our big community."

Thom believes that trails add to our community by giving us connection to the environment around us. "There is a type of connection that occurs only in that way, you can't get it anywhere else. You become aware of our place." He explains that if you went on a trail once every week, they would never twice be the same.

We appreciate all that Thom brings to our organization.

If you have a passion for trails and would like to volunteer, please contact us at info@wmtrails.org or consider a donation to WMTGC here: <https://bit.ly/GiveBack2Trails>.

Join us

TRAIL CHALLENGE

Do you love West Michigan's Trails? (Of course you do!) Have you had the opportunity to explore them all? We want trail lovers to get out and see all that West Michigan has to offer. Walk, hike, bike, run, skate, ski, or snowshoe (might need to wait a few months for those last two). Whatever your favorite mode of non-motorized transportation – just get out there and explore! This is a challenge to get out, get moving, and check out the trails of West Michigan. Register for the "swag" option and be among the first 70 to explore 20 trails and you will earn a custom West Michigan Trails Challenge medal!

<https://bit.ly/WMTGTrailChallenge>



FRED RELAYS AUG 6 & 7 2021
REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!



WEST MICHIGAN TRAIL CHALLENGE
JUNE 2021

THE FRED 2021

They're back! After a very disappointing cancellation in 2020, The Fred Running Relays are back for 2021! The relays are a 200-, 100-, and 50-mile team relays that runs along the White Pine Trail in West Michigan. Michigan is proud to be the #1 trail state, in the nation, with over 12,500 miles of trails (not including water trails!). The White Pine is a signature trail connecting Grand Rapids to Cadillac. The 200-mile Fred Relay runs the 100 miles up AND back while the 100-mile Ed starts in Cadillac and ends in Grand Rapids. The 50-mile Lena begins in Big Rapids and runs to Grand Rapids. Teams vary in size from three to twelve. Grab some friends and get signed up today! Anything is possible with friends!

<http://bit.ly/2021FredRelays>

MUSKEGON: MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

By Aaron Bodbyl-Mast

When you visit downtown Muskegon, there is a palpable sense of things coming together and moving in the right direction.

There have been continuing changes over the past several decades and not all of them have been improvements. However, with newly completed construction, emerging businesses, and an ongoing effort to beautify the city with art, the future looks promising for Muskegon.

For bikers and pedestrians, Muskegon is at the locus, of sorts, regionally. It is a gateway to “up north” and the first stop for Wisconsinites coming over on the Lake Express. It also has a signature farmers market that is a lively magnet to the downtown.

Being a lakeshore hub makes a completed trail network in the area vital. The recently repaired bike trail along the Muskegon Lake shoreline completes the connection to Hart to the north. The connection to Grand Rapids has two final gaps that need completing. The first gap between Musketawa Trail and the Laketon Trail is now scheduled for construction. Closing the second gap between the Laketon Trail and Muskegon Lake Lakeshore Trail is in the planning stages!

The plan for this second gap is very interesting, urban, and new. I connected with Leo Evans, Department of Public Works Director, and LeighAnn Mikesell, Director of Development Services, to discuss the plan, some future concepts, and the approach to bike/ped issues in the City.

With deindustrialization and the demolition of the downtown enclosed mall, there emerged a rare opportunity to rethink and reshape the City's infrastructure. This unique opportunity opened the door for planners to take a step back and be creative. With prompting by citizen groups like the Muskegon County Cycling Coalition, and with the vision being guided by staff with minimal resources, the city grabbed the opportunity.

Some of these opportunities include projects like road diets (the restriping of a stretch of road to remove at least one lane and turning that pavement over for other purposes) in downtown Muskegon have led to more bike friendly streets and comfortable pedestrian crossings. New road projects include bike lanes and sharrows (arrows indicating shared lanes between non-motorized and motorized vehicles), and this summer custom bike loops to lock bicycles have been installed up and down Pere Marquette beach. Furthermore,

expanded sidewalks are being planned to accommodate bikes on the beach as well.

Evans and Mikesell noted that, with a tight city budget, these projects are not easy to push ahead and they have other exciting projects on the docket. These projects include a plan to convert urban rail to trails in some of the dense neighborhoods. This has been driven by city staff without the benefit of a coordinated plan like the Vital Streets plan in Grand Rapids. However, with the help of the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission it may be possible to develop an urban focused bike/ped in Muskegon County's core.

Perhaps most exciting is the proposal to completely configure two wide boulevards downtown that currently divide two sides of downtown (Terrace Street) and cut downtown off from the Lakeshore and other neighborhoods (Shoreline Drive). The idea is to remove one side of each boulevard and convert it to green space. The hope is to add trails as well. The Shoreline Drive proposal is still conceptual. However, if these can be pulled off, it is possible that it would further transform downtown in a way like other well-known urban projects like the High Line in New York.

The Terrace Street reconfiguration is critical as it could be the final piece in the regional connection from Muskegon and Grand Rapids (and therefore GR and Hart), but Evans said funding is limited and a bike path may not be able to be added to the project. The West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition is connecting with these agencies and groups to learn how it can help. More to come!



NEW ADDRESS

Like many organizations, Covid gave WMTGC an opportunity to reassess how we do our work. Part of that assessment has been eliminating our office space and working from home. The only thing that has changed is our mailing address.



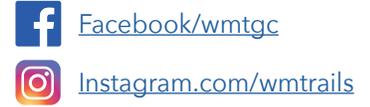
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Or reach us by emailing:

John@wmtrails.org
Jennifer@wmtrails.org
Olivia@wmtrails.org

Or follow us on social media:



WHITE PINE TRAIL

A 1.5 mile section of the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail will be under construction and, therefore, temporarily closed while the DNR replaces a failing culvert. The construction is about one mile south of Ashton between Sylvan Road and 9-mile road. The detour is marked clearly with signs and adds about 1.3 miles to the route. The construction is scheduled to begin July 1st and completed the end of October.

According to MLIVE, the detour is as follows: If traveling north, turn right (or east) on 9 Mile Road, turn left (or north) onto 210th Avenue and follow 1.5 miles to Sylvan Road; turn left (or west) and travel 0.2 miles until the White Pine Trail crosses Sylvan Road.



If traveling south, turn left (or west) onto Sylvan Road, turn right (or south) on 210th Avenue and follow for 1.5 miles; turn right (or east) on 9 Mile Road and travel 0.2 miles until the White Pine Trail crosses 9 Mile Road.

Get the latest on DNR closures of trails, boating access sites or other facilities at Michigan.gov/DNRClosures

PERE MARQUETTE

The construction of the Clare gap on the Pere Marquette State Trail has been delayed. There was some flood destruction that needs to be addressed as well as additional survey work that needs to take place prior to the bid letting in the spring of 2022. Look for construction in the summer of 2022.



BERRY JUNCTION

Friends of the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail Is adding a Dero Bike Fixit Station and Air Pump adjacent to the trail in front of the First Lutheran Church, 1206 Whitehall Rd, Muskegon, MI 49445 along with Bike Etiquette and E Bike Regulations signs in multiple locations along our trail this summer.





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DONOR HIGHLIGHT

Trails remind Marilyn Knol of being a kid.

As a kid, Marilyn would ride on the road, but now that doesn't feel safe to her. Trails bring a sense of safety that many of us lacked as kids with drivers around. Trails are a safe and progressive recreational source for residents, and non-residents, of all ages.

From running marathons and road races to family biking, Marilyn cares a lot about trails, their maintenance, cleanliness and their safety. After retiring, she thought hard about her values and what she knew was important to her.

Marilyn decided that she wanted to support WMTGC because "connecting trails is great, and the maintenance that happens helps me ride more smoothly." She goes on to tell us about her friend who had to stop riding trails with her because they were too rough. This really motivated her to give to an organization that supports the well-being of trails.

Ultimately, Marilyn thinks that trails are important because they provide a safe and healthy way for individuals to get together outdoors, especially in unprecedented times.

If you feel strongly about the cause and would like to support trails, please consider a donation to WMTGC here: <https://bit.ly/GiveBack2Trails>

Become a donor and help others enjoy the trails!