



WEST MICHIGAN  
**TRAILS**

**2025**  
**Annual Report**



## **Executive Director**

John Morrison

## **Program Manager**

Jennifer Antel

## **Development & Outreach Manager**

Emerson Rosenberg

## **Executive Committee**

John Arendshorst, *Board Chair*

Mara Gerlicke, *Vice Chair*

Barbara Brown, *Treasurer*

Erin Gordon, *Secretary*

## **Board of Directors**

Chris Zull

Scott Post

Michael McGraw

Dale Manske

Kevin Cusack

Aaron Bodbyl-Mast

Lorena Aguayo-Marquez



WEST MICHIGAN  
**TRAILS**

## **Our mission.**

Connecting people, trails,  
and communities

## **Our vision.**

A fully connected West  
Michigan where trails  
enhance quality of life for  
people of all ages and  
abilities, link communities,  
and strengthen local  
economies.



# 2025 Year in Review

2025 was a milestone year for West Michigan Trails, marked by record-breaking community support, expanded regional collaboration, and meaningful progress toward a more connected trail network!

This year reflected **unprecedented** community investment in our mission!

Individual Donors

204

Largest number in organizational history

First-time Donors

79

Largest number in organizational history

Retained donors

90

Recaptured donors

35

Highest ever

Total gifts received

603

Most ever in a single year

Monthly donors

38

Highest ever

# 2025 Year in Review



Awareness of West Michigan Trails continues to grow as supporters deepen their long-term commitment to advancing our five regional trail priorities as laid out in the **West Michigan Regional Master Trails Plan**. The increasing confidence and generosity of our donors reflects strong momentum behind our mission and impact across the region.



**\$222,467**



Year-End Appeal

**\$83,840**



Annual Fundraising Event

**\$16,167**



## Let's Connect!

### Website Updates! Check it out!

In 2025, West Michigan Trails unveiled a refreshed brand identity and launched a new website, creating a more engaging and user-friendly experience for supporters, partners, and trail users across the region. The updated branding reflected the organization's growing regional impact and forward-looking vision, while the new website improved access to trail information, project updates, events, and opportunities to get involved! Together, these enhancements strengthened West Michigan Trails' ability to connect communities and elevate awareness of the region's expanding trail network.




### Ways to Connect

#### Social Media

Learn about our work, new updates, and events on our social channels! We'll also share your trails photos, so tag us when you share them!

 /WMTGC     @WMTrails

 west-michigan-trails

#### WMTrails.org

See our plans, find new trails, and become a monthly donor on our new website!



#### Become a Donor!

Donors not only support our work, but also get access to member events and the Trail-Tracking Water Bottle!



# CONNECT TO COMMUNITY



In 2025, West Michigan Trails launched the **Trail-Tracking Water Bottle** and introduced a new community engagement initiative through our **Trail Meetup** series.

Designed to inspire exploration across the region's growing trail network, the sticker bottle encouraged participants to **commemorate their trail adventures** while discovering new destinations throughout West Michigan.

Together, these initiatives helped grow community awareness, inspire new trail users and supporters, and build long-term momentum for regional trail advocacy and philanthropy.



Become a monthly donor and get your own, **NEW trail-tracking water bottle!**



# Social Media Presence



From project updates and event highlights to advocacy efforts and community engagement initiatives, our digital channels continue to serve as an important tool for **inspiring connection, improving awareness, and increasing support for trails across the region**. In **2025**, our social media strategy focused on building community, increasing brand awareness, and growing our connections with the trail community.



Total Followers: **1,185**

Total Followers: **3,928**

Total Followers: **79**

Content Interactions: **71**

Content Interactions: **119**

\*Rebooted LinkedIn starting 2026

While exact metrics fluctuate since the restart of our social media channels, we have seen **steady upward momentum** in our digital footprint, reflecting strong audience connection and sustained interest in our initiatives. We've also seen the **growth** in audience reach, engagement, and interactions, help us to connect with new faces while strengthening relationships with our longtime trail supporters.

# Program Highlights!



## Wayfinding & Regional Connectivity

We continued to emphasize the importance of improving the user experience across the regional trail network, particularly through consistent wayfinding strategies and data-informed planning approaches that support future implementation efforts.

## Grants & Project Development

West Michigan Trails achieved success in a competitive funding environment! At the Rails to Trails Conservancy's Trail Nation Summit, WMT was awarded a **\$10,000 trail grant**, winning the inaugural Pitch Fest competition! Funding supports a **route feasibility study for the Interurban Trail/Rive to River Trail** advancing early-stage planning for a key regional connector.

## Regional Trail Leadership

West Michigan Trails hosted five Trail Summits in 2025, bringing together community leaders, municipal partners, and stakeholders to advance shared priorities. These Summits continue to strengthen regional alignment and reinforce the value of coordinated trail development across jurisdictions.

### Key topics included:



Regional trail development projects



Importance of quantitative data in planning, investment, and advocacy



Wayfinding and user experience improvements



## Organizational Growth & Strategic Assessment



*Building long-term organizational capacity for regional trail impact.*

In 2025, West Michigan Trails participated in the DeVos Institute Operations Assessment, an in-depth organizational review that focused on:

- Fundraising systems and sustainability
- Operational capacity and efficiency
- Mission alignment and strategic clarity
- Vision refinement for long-term impact

This assessment provides a foundation for strengthening organizational systems and scaling impact in the years ahead.



CONNECTING  
TRAILS

**910+**  
MILES

CONNECTING  
TO NATURE

**13**  
STATE PARKS

CONNECTING  
COMMUNITIES

**18**  
COUNTIES

CONNECTING  
VISIONS

**1**  
UNIFIED PLAN

# ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH & STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

“What sets West Michigan Trails apart is their ability to move ideas into action. They are not only visionary in thinking about a connected regional trail network, but also a catalyst for turning collaboration into real projects that improve communities.” - Laura Cleypool, Executive Director, City of GR Parks

West Michigan Trails has created a table where communities of all sizes feel heard and supported. Their leadership as a convener has helped build trust, partnerships, and momentum for innovative projects that benefit the entire region.” Mike Smith, MDOT TAP Manager

“West Michigan Trails has elevated the conversation around regional trail connectivity by fostering collaboration and helping communities align around a common vision. Their strategic leadership continues to move trail development forward throughout West Michigan”

Marcy Hamilton, Deputy Executive Director of Southwest Michigan Planning Commission and Board Advisor of Friends of the Berrien County Trails

The organization understands that trails are more than recreation — they are economic drivers, transportation assets, and quality-of-life investments. West Michigan Trails consistently helps communities see the bigger picture and work together toward long-term regional impact.”  
— Kristi Zimmerman, Economic Development Director for Mason County at The Right Place, Inc.

“West Michigan Trails has become the connective tissue for regional trail development. They bring together local governments, nonprofits, funders, and community leaders around a shared vision that no single organization could accomplish alone.”

— Catherine Getty, B Healthy Barry County, Executive Director and Barry County Commissioner