



VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1 • SPRING 2022

# WEST MICHIGAN TRAIL LINK

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is the newsletter of West Michigan Trails, published 3-4 times annually. Established in 2005, West Michigan Trails 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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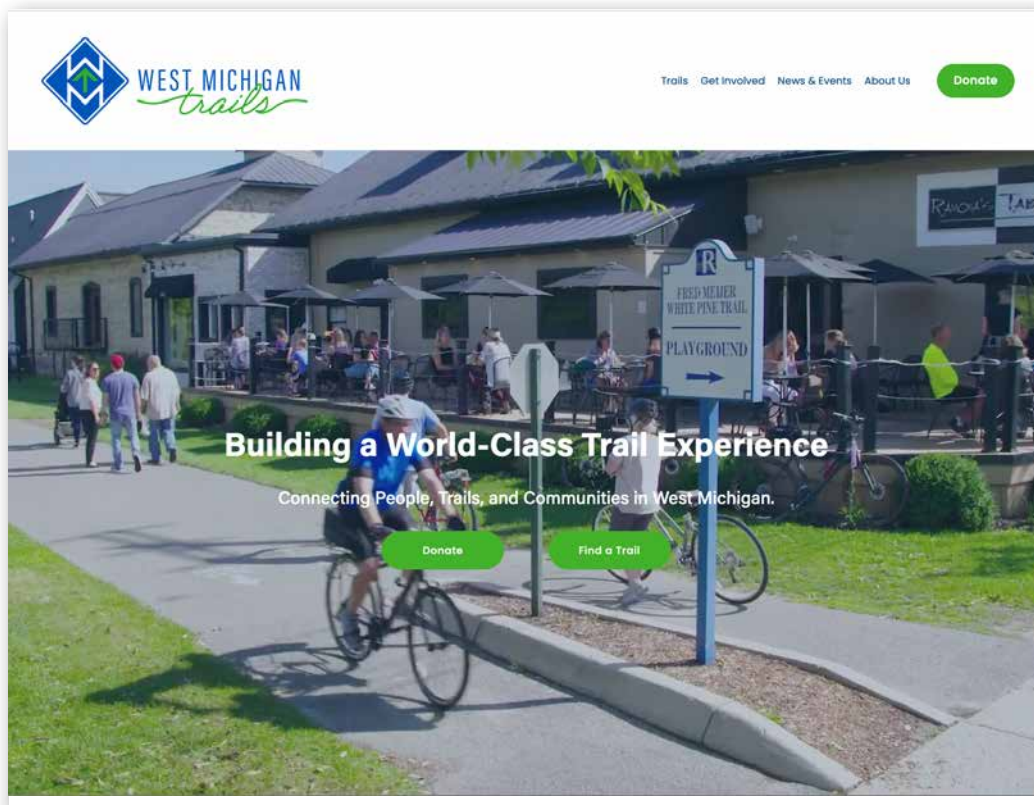
[WestMichiganTrails.org](http://WestMichiganTrails.org)

## NEW WEBSITE & LOGO

 **West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition is now West Michigan Trails**

Thanks to a grant from the Grand Rapids Community Foundations Technical Assistance Grant, West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition (now West Michigan Trails) got a much-needed update! Over the last nine months, working with LakeFX Media LLC, we completed a rebranding project. After surveys and interviews with donors, volunteers, and trail users, a new name, logo, and website were born!

Thank you to everyone that participated. We truly feel our new look better represents who we are. Check out our new website at [wmtrails.org](http://wmtrails.org).



## FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN MORRISON

West Michigan Trails is all about connection. In the beginning, we were about connecting people to talk about trails. Over time we adopted a more direct trail building role and now we are about connecting people to trails, trails to each other, and trails to communities.

Today WMT is partnering with the City of Grand Rapids to make a critical connection within our regional network. This new trail connection will be on the east side of the Grand River between Leonard and Ann Streets, downtown Grand Rapids. This project will fill a gap between the City's River Edges Trail and Riverside Park - making the connection between the City and hundreds of miles of trails in West Michigan.

We are also working with the communities between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids to build a trail from the northern edge of Kalamazoo County, through Allegan County, and into Kent County. This trail, known as the Interurban trail, will connect those communities to a large network of trails to the north and south. In addition, we are working to get more (or even all) of the White Pine Trail paved. Yes, the White Pine is technically usable already, but paving it will make it accessible to more user groups and be very attractive to cycle tourists.



Beyond construction, West Michigan Trails has released a request for proposals for a regional signage plan to connect our trails in new and meaningful ways - like road signage that works across the country. However, in this case, to go from trail to trail. We are aiming for work to begin in June.

We are excited about our new website ([wmtrails.org](http://wmtrails.org)) and the tools it affords us to better connect with you! With the help of trail users, donors, and volunteers we designed our new logo.

And, coming full circle, our Friends' Summit in March is designed to connect our region's trail Friends Groups and other people passionate about trails to each other and to West Michigan Trails. We hope you will connect with us there on March 19.



## DONOR HIGHLIGHT: DAN DRISENGA

*Hiking, backcountry camping, all forms of biking, skiing, kayaking, and paddle boarding are not out of the ordinary activities for Dan. He is an expert outdoorsman and has even rekindled his passion for woodworking when he can't be outside. Dan thought that becoming a monthly donor was the least he could do to support the amazing trail system he currently enjoys and help build and extend it into the future. He is also very interested in volunteering at West Michigan Trails and you can likely meet him at a future event!*

*Dan says that he is passionate about trails because "they provide safe and abundant access to the woods and water of Michigan for fresh air, exercise, and a connection to nature", things that are important to him. Among thousands of amazing memories on the trails, the highlights that stick out to him include fat biking on the snow-groomed trails at Riley Trails and biking the Hart-Montague Trail last Fall. And he will always cherish the memory of riding the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail last Fall! Dan looks forward to many more experiences on the trails in his retirement.*

*Living in Holland, Dan spends a lot of time year-round at Riley Trails because he can ride his bike(s) there from home. Although favorites are near impossible to pick, Hart-Montague and Sleeping Bear Heritage Trails are his most recent favorite spots to recreate. Dan sees the improvements on the trails first-hand and values the work that the trail groups put in to keep and update them. He is excited for all the work that West Michigan Trails has to come and loves to support an organization that supports him back!*



**Want to join Dan as a monthly donor?**

<https://bit.ly/WMTSpring2022>



## COMING EVENTS: **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**



### **WEST MI FRIENDS SUMMIT – SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 2022**

Join us from 8:15 am to 11:30 am at Plainwell City Hall. This is a wonderful opportunity to network and collaborate with other regional friends' groups to share ideas and explore best practices. This spring event brings together trail managers, municipal & state leaders, trail builders, and trail enthusiasts to share, learn, and network. This FREE, 3-hour event includes a state of the trails presentation, guest speakers, and breakout sessions.

<https://bit.ly/2022FriendsSummit>



### **TRAIL MIXER – THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 2022**

Our annual fundraising breakfast will be in-person this year! This fun event is an opportunity to celebrate our accomplishments and share our vision. There is no cost to attend, however, we hope attendees will be compelled to make a donation.

For more information or to be a table host, please contact [jennifer@wmtrails.org](mailto:jennifer@wmtrails.org) or check it out on our website at [wmtrails.org](http://wmtrails.org).



### **RIVER BANK RUN – SATURDAY, MAY 14, 2022**

West Michigan Trails is honored to be chosen as a Charity Partner for the 45th Anniversary of the Amway River Bank Run. If you are interested in running either the 5K, 10K or 25K and helping to raise money for trails- let us know! We are giving away 3 race entries for the race of your choosing. Simply tell us why you love trails by visiting [wmtrails.org](http://wmtrails.org). We will randomly choose 3 trail lovers to receive a FREE entry! Must submit by March 25th. <https://bit.ly/Run4theTrails>



### **FRED RELAYS – FRIDAY, AUGUST 12 TO SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 2022**

It's the 10th Running of the Fred Relays! Looking for a fun challenge with your friends? Why not sign up for either the 50-, 100-, or 200-mile relay race on the White Pine Trail? This trail event will help you create amazing memories. A vast majority of our teams come back year after year! Anything is possible with friends. <http://bit.ly/FredRelays2022>



### **CELEBRATE TRAILS DAY! – SATURDAY, APRIL 23**

We hope you will join us, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and people all across the country in celebrating America's amazing trails this spring. Whether you're new to the trails or a longtime fan, Celebrate Trails Day is the perfect way to enjoy and show your love for West Michigan's trails. Plus, if you let Rails-to-Trails Conservancy know you'll be celebrating this year, you could win great prizes!

Learn more and enter to win on the official Celebrate Trails Day. [railstotrails.org/celebratetrails](http://railstotrails.org/celebratetrails)

## FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR, AARON BODBYL-MAST

Having recently moved from a suburban area to the City of Muskegon, I've noticed the growth of outdoor walkers and bikers who are not necessarily out for recreation but to get somewhere.

While many streets in the urban area are more friendly to pedestrians, you realize that while people can navigate these areas, the ped/bike system is incomplete and insufficient. In the winter these concerns are greater when the sidewalks and trails are not cleared. People are then forced to walk or ride on busy streets.

Community design can often seem to occur spontaneously or accidentally. However, there is a long history of choices, laws, and economic factors that have led to our current car-centric society. Looking back, we now know that some of these historic design choices that were potentially well-meant or for short-term economic gain have had profound negative impacts on neighborhoods. And, in some cases, it may be that these design choices weren't so well-meant.

We now find ourselves with communities that severely limit the ability of people to walk or bike, whether for enjoyment or essential needs. It can feel like the facilities that West Michigan Trails advocate for are uncomfortably squeezed into areas that weren't constructed to make room for them. While I love having had been involved in several successful projects where we found the space, the funds, and the will to build the trails, I feel that to fulfill our vision of a "world-class trail system" we must push for more intentional initial design, or re-design, of our communities. One of the reasons I love advocating for trails is that they are part of the solution for so many issues – whether they are related to health, recreation, economic development,



resilient communities, equity, or climate. I try to work with the mindset that our communities will be better for everyone if we can get around easily by foot or bike. We must make sure that a wide spectrum of ped/bike trails (on-street and off-street) are available and are a priority from the start of the community planning process. It is not an easy task – but it feels like there is momentum in that direction.

It takes work at all levels of the community – locally and regionally. At West Michigan Trails we are pushing to shift mindsets. We have accomplished so much and yet we are just getting started. That is why we appreciate all of our partners and supporters – they help us keep the momentum going.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS







## FRIENDS OF THE MUSKETAWA TRAIL

The group reports that they have a new Musketawa Trail map/ brochure coming. The group will post the PDF file on their website ([www.musketawatrail.com](http://www.musketawatrail.com)) and print versions will come out this Spring. You can find the print versions in some local bike shops and at the trailhead kiosk on the Musketawa Trail in Muskegon, Ravenna, Conklin, and Marne.



## NORTH BANK TRAIL

Phase 2 of the North Bank Trail was completed in Nunica, MI.



## ROCKFORD TRAIL

With the majority of the work wrapped up before the snow arrives, the Rockford Trail is officially finished for the winter season! Brenner Excavating will return to the trail next spring to complete the remaining restorative punch list items for the surrounding areas.



## BLUE STAR TRAIL

There is a lot of optimism over the MDOT tri-community grant application for the northern section of the Blue Star Trail. There seems to be recognition that the trail fills a gap in the statewide system. Because MDOT suggested an increase in requested funding to cover replacement trees and rising costs the local match also must be increased. The city of Saugatuck agreed to contribute \$50,000 and the Friends remain committed to providing \$205,000 toward the local match. If all goes well construction could begin in late 2023 or early 2024.

Thanks to donors, Friends of Blue Star Trails exceeded their goal for their \$10,000 match for the year-end campaign and, as a result, raised over \$33,000 in December. This puts them in a strong position to have the funds for the \$205,000 grant match.

Be sure to check out their new version of their website designed by Board member Kim Redlin - FOTBST.org.

### And remember to save the dates:

- Toast to the Blue Star Trail fundraiser on August 1st
- Lakeshore Harvest Ride on September 17th





WEST MICHIGAN  
*trails*

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## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: **TIM NINK**

Tim is an avid bicyclist who gets out at least twice a week (during the non-winter months) to ride 20+ miles after work or on the weekends. He finds these rides to be an opportunity to gather his thoughts and decompress. After his first time using the Musketawa Trail, Tim decided to reach out to the Friends of Musketawa Trail group and quickly became a volunteer. He then became a board member for the group, moved on to Vice President, and now serves as the President, succeeding the group's first and only other President, Ed Holovka. Tim also helped found the Friends of the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail group along with its current president, Tom Lindrup. Serving as Vice President on the board of the group for a couple of years, Tim knows the trails and is passionate about them.

According to Tim, trails provide an outlet for people to enjoy nature and get physical exercise. In his opinion, "they provide a safer alternative to roads for walking, biking, in-line skating, etc. During the pandemic (COVID), trail usage has really expanded. I am passionate because I am also a user of the trails." Tim also recognizes that various trails need advocates, and that role typically falls on Friends groups and volunteers. He continues to volunteer because he feels it is his way to give back to both the community and to his fellow trail users. There are various West Michigan Trails events that Tim has volunteered at, like the Fred Relays; he has also volunteered at the Michigander Bike Tour.

With all his experiences, it is difficult for Tim to choose a favorite trail. He has special ties with the Musketawa Trail, but also thoroughly enjoys the Pere Marquette Trail and the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail. There is no better sense of satisfaction than seeing a trail project completed according to him, but carving out time to volunteer can be difficult at times. The positives of spending time with other volunteers and accomplishing something are personally rewarding. Growing up in West Michigan, Tim says that these trails have unique and beautiful surroundings. He urges everyone to get involved. Consider becoming a volunteer or becoming part of a trail Friends group!



**Want to join Tim  
and WMT by  
supporting trails?**

Contact [Jennifer@wmtrails.org](mailto:Jennifer@wmtrails.org)  
to learn more about our  
volunteer opportunities