

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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MASTER PLAN

West Michigan Trails has grown into a regional entity with a mission to strategically engage other organizations and agencies to coordinate, execute, fund, and sustain the development of the West Michigan trail network. We are committed to developing a non-motorized, connected trail system; a system that links urban and rural communities, protects habitats and natural areas, and provides active and alternative transportation options. To accomplish this, we need a comprehensive plan that identifies existing trails in the region (and their condition), the gaps within the region, and funding mechanisms for maintenance and development.

We kicked off the Master Plan process late last fall. In March, we will meet with stakeholders throughout the region, including trail, municipal, and regional planners, to review the inventory of our existing trails, what is planned, and the region's needs. Later this spring we will be seeking public input through a survey, meetings, and events to comment on the draft priorities. After a final set of priorities is identified and agreed upon, an investment strategy will be developed. Keep an eye on our website: <https://www.wmtrails.org/regional-master-plan> for updates.



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West Michigan Trails is excited to announce that we will be working with Greenway Collaborative to complete a Regional Master Trails Plan. The Master Plan will identify what trails exist, and what infrastructure is needed, set priorities for our work for the coming years, and identify funding needs and opportunities. This work will include considerable input from trail stakeholders AND from people like you. Look for your invitation to participate in the near future. Check back soon for updates.



WORKING TOWARD A WORLD-CLASS TRAIL SYSTEM

By John Morrison

West Michigan has nearly 1,000 miles of non-motorized trails connecting rural, suburban, and urban communities and hundreds of miles of on-road infrastructure. Many more miles are planned. The use of this extensive trail and active transportation system increases all the time and has important benefits related to health, transportation, conservation, economic revitalization, and community identity.

One of the ways West Michigan Trails (WMT) is working toward a world-class trail system is looking at how the whole network works together. One of the ways to make the system work together is through consistent signage. Last year WMT produced our **Wayfinding Sign Concepts and Implementation Guide** for trails and bikeways in our region. The guide is available to use for free to regional trail managers so that we can have a connected, visually consistent, and attractive wayfinding and regulatory signage framework from trail to trail and from trails to other bicycle infrastructure such as bike lanes. You can find the guide and request sign design templates under the Resources tab on our website: www.wmwmtrails.org.

This year WMT is working with The Greenway Collaborative Inc. collecting data and trail information on all the trails in our region, getting a good understanding of what exists, what is being planned, and the current state of our trail network. This will give us an in-depth regional map, information on the condition of individual trails and the network, and details on where WMT can help with the network. From that we will develop a master plan that will direct our work in the coming years. You can read more about the project in this newsletter.

We're also working through an operations assessment with Parallel Solutions LLC looking for ways to improve as an organization and to assess the "tools" we'll need to accomplish the priorities coming out of the master plan. One of the areas we're already developing is with the committees that help drive our work and direction. If you've ever wanted to get involved with the work of WMT, an excellent place to start is volunteering on a committee. Learn more about the various committees and how to get involved at www.wmtrails.org/volunteer.



The staff, board, and volunteers are excited about what we've accomplished and what we're currently working toward but are also saddened by the recent passing of one of our founding and long-term board members, Tom Anderson. Tom was a trail advocate in West Michigan for more than three decades, working with West Michigan Trails as well as his hometown of Muskegon. He was involved in so many things and always offered sound advice as well as some levity with his quick humor and wit. He will be missed, and he would love it if you spent some quality time on some trails this year.



You will be missed, Tom!

ANNUAL FUNDRAISER – MAY 9

Our annual fundraiser, the Trail Mixer Happy Hour is scheduled for May 9th. This event attracts trail users, builders, and sponsors to talk about the great things happening in our region. If you would be interested in attending to help raise money for trails, please contact jennifer@wmtrails.org.



**SAVE
the
DATE**

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT & NEW BOARD MEMBER: **BARB BROWN**

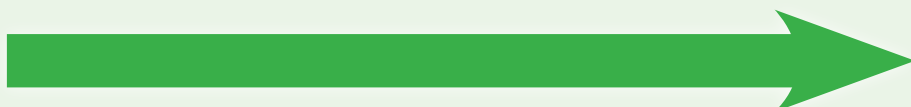
Barb Brown is a dedicated volunteer who has been a passionate advocate for trails in West Michigan. First volunteering on our Governance Committee (and now Chairing that committee) Barb now joins our Executive Board. A retired eye doctor, university employee, and fundraiser, Barb comes to us with extensive experience in non-profit work.

Following her retirement from the UMSK - College of Optometry, she moved from Missouri to Michigan. She got involved with West Michigan Trails because she believes that having excellent multi-use trails for use for all ages and abilities keeps our hearts young.

Barb rides the Grand Haven-Holland Connector trail the most, but her favorite trail is the White Pine. "Although I have only biked 82-miles on the White Pine, I have fallen in love with it. I am looking forward to biking it all."



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TO OUR SPONSORS!



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AARON BODBYL-MAST

FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

The vision that drives West Michigan Trails is a “world-class trail experience connecting West Michigan”.

West Michigan Trails is now working with the Greenway Collaborative on an 18-county regional master plan which will help us define what that means for West Michigan and how we get there.

In the meantime, I wanted to highlight a few projects that have recently been completed or are underway which demonstrate elements of a world-class experience in Michigan’s urban areas. These types of projects are critical to developing a trail system that functions from your door to your destination.



- **Protected bike lanes** on Turner Ave in the City of Grand Rapids: **COMPLETED!**

The two-way protected bike lanes project along Turner Ave in the City of Grand Rapids between Leonard St and 4th St has been completed. The lanes include a raised median between the bike and vehicle lanes, making it safer and more inviting to users who don’t regularly bike on streets. These protected bike lanes are considered the “gold standard” for urban bikeways.

- **Buffered bike lanes** in the City of Kalamazoo: **COMPLETED!**

Two-way “buffered” lanes have been completed in downtown Kalamazoo. These lanes include a painted gap between bike travel lanes and vehicle travel lanes.

- **Protected bike lanes** in the City of Ann Arbor: **Developing**

A network of protected and buffered bike lanes is growing in Ann Arbor with plans to expand the system. According to Mlive, the Williams Street bikeway shows over 5,000 weekly trips – so far. These numbers are expected to increase as the network becomes more interconnected.

- **Proposed reconfiguration** of Division-Ionia corridor in the City of Grand Rapids

Downtown Grand Rapids Inc is leading a project that would “remove a half-mile stretch of Division Avenue between I-196 and Mason Street and replace it with separated bike and pedestrian pathways.”

- **Proposed protected bike lanes** in the City of Muskegon Heights

A reconstruction of Broadway Ave is being planned in downtown Muskegon Heights to create a two-way protected bike lane. Funding is still being sought for this project.

- **Proposed reconfiguration** of M-46 (Apple Avenue) in the City of Muskegon

The Michigan Department of Transportation is preparing to reconstruct Apple Avenue (M-46) from downtown Muskegon to US 31. The City of Muskegon is proposing that MDOT consider adding bike lanes from downtown to Roberts Street.

For more information and links to articles on these projects, you can go to wmtrails.org/newsletter.



IDEMA EXPLORERS TRAIL

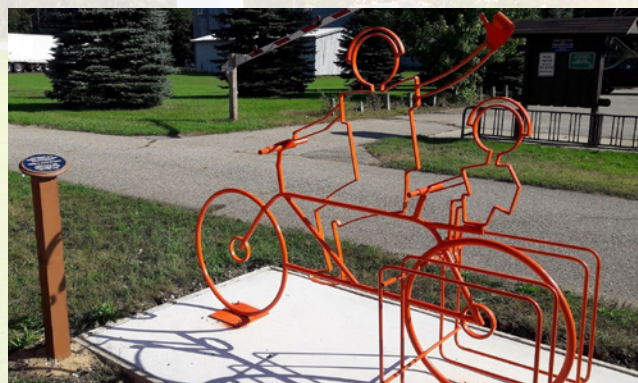
The Stearns Bayou Connector Segment of the Idema Explorers Trail will be under construction this year in Robinson Township. The 2.4-mile section will complete the western third of the Idema Explorers Trail and is the final piece needed to complete the 24-mile long "Grand Crossings Loop".



MUSKETAWA TRAIL

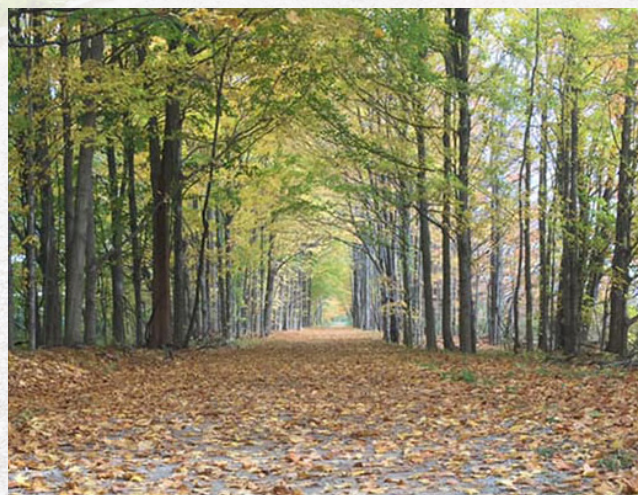
A common question we are asked here at West Michigan Trails is, "When is the Musketawa getting fixed?" The Musketawa is managed by the MDNR and it is currently scheduled for reconstruction. Unfortunately, there isn't enough funding to do all the clearing, bridge, culvert, and repaving work that's required. The cost for the necessary work is estimated at about \$21 million with \$13.5 million available.

The current focus is going to be on doing all the clearing and infrastructure replacement/repair work that is required to have a good base to rebuild the trail, using the entire \$13.5 million. This leaves about \$7-8 million needed to repave the trail. Although construction will begin in 2024 sometime, it won't be a newly paved trail when phase one construction is complete. If you are wondering what you can do to help? Contact your legislators to encourage more funding for non-motorized transportation.



KAL-HAVEN TRAIL

The Kal-Haven Trail construction that was resurfacing and repairing bridges should be complete this spring and the trail re-opened by Memorial Day!





WEST MICHIGAN
trails

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**WMT appreciates Jim and
all our monthly donors for
playing such a sustainable
role in our fundraising!**

If you would like to join Jim
as a monthly donor, scan the
QR code (at right) or go to
<https://bit.ly/WMTW24News>



DONOR HIGHLIGHT: **JIM MAHANEY**

Living most of his life in Holland, Jim Mahaney now spends his time outdoors riding, hiking, backpacking, skiing and paddling. In between all the outdoor activities he loves to read.

Jim believes that trails are important for several reasons. First, they give people who would not be out riding on the road a place to enjoy their ride. Second, if placed properly, they give us a safe route to bypass busy streets. Third, they give people a reason to visit places they might not otherwise go. "I use the Michigan Trails Magazine to pick out places to visit in Michigan for day trips; new trails to ride. I also visit other places outside of Michigan just to ride their trails that I have seen either while passing through or in a story." Jim shared.

"My favorite trail in this area is the White Pine Trail. I like the small towns it passes through. Outside of Michigan there are so many to ride. I hope to get out and ride the George S Mickelson Trail in South Dakota this year and maybe the rest of the Mesabi Trail in Minnesota."

Jim further shared, "I donate to West Michigan Trails so more trails can be built. I want them to go into areas that are underserved. I want trails to be accessible so someone can decide to ride or walk the one mile to the store rather than driving their car. I feel that the more trails that can be built and the more we can connect to the existing trails, the more people we can get out using them. If they are convenient, people will use them."