



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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GRAND WAYFINDING

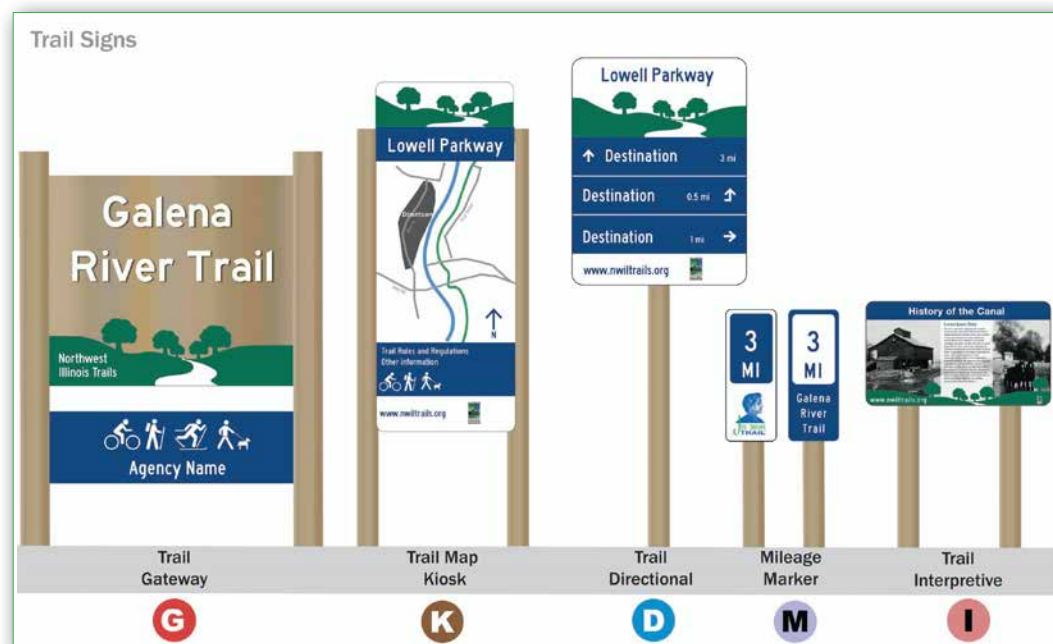
 Tell Us What You Think.
Participate in Our Survey!



Have you ever been frustrated trying to navigate your way from one trail to another? Or even just trying to figure out how to follow a trail? West Michigan has experienced significant growth in the past few decades in non-motorized trails and bikeways, including hundreds of miles of new regional facilities. Work continues to complete connections between major urban centers and/or destination areas, particularly between the city of Grand Rapids and the lakeshore communities of Grand Haven, Holland, and Muskegon.

As the demand for and usage of these trails has increased, providing adequate wayfinding is necessary to guide users through the regional trail system. We recognize the need to improve signage not only for the region's growing network of bikeways and trails, but also to communicate connections clearly and seamlessly to and from surrounding communities' networks. A unified signage system will improve the safety, usage, and quality of experience for residents and visitors who use our growing active transportation network. WMT is working with Toole Design Group and other key public partners to create a preferred sign family concept and a wayfinding signage plan/implementation guide, which is required before we move on to phase two of the project. Phase two will be the implementation of signs on the trails.

As part of the project we are looking for community input. Please click here to participate in our online visual preference survey. <https://bit.ly/WMTWayfinding>



FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN MORRISON

In my early 20s I spent some time in the Netherlands and was struck by not only the incredible bicycle infrastructure they had but by how much they used it. In the country, villages, and cities, bicycles were abundant. Not that many years earlier, I rode my bicycle everywhere. I loved riding and exploring but gave it up when I was old enough to explore by car.

I was nostalgic for my old bicycle-riding days, imagining those trails in the United States and safely cycling where I wanted to go. I figured we could never have a network like the Netherlands because we're too spread out over here. I was wrong; in West Michigan we're now closing in on having a very well-connected bicycle infrastructure made up of trails, side paths, and bike lanes.

Technically we already have it, but there's work to be done to unify it. That's West Michigan Trails' vision and focus. One of the intentions of West Michigan Trails' wayfinding project is to create a trail signage system that brings all that infrastructure together, so users know where they are, what's around them, and where they're going. Think of it like the signage system on the roadways across the United States: consistent and understandable signage as you navigate your way to a destination anywhere in the country. Our trails deserve similar tools.

WMT's work in connecting trails and communities serves the same vision. There are many reasons and benefits for the River Edges project in Grand Rapids, and one of them is



connecting the city to literally hundreds of miles of non-motorized trails. Paving an additional seven miles of the White Pine Trail this year brings us closer to completing what is sure to be a destination trail; 2023 is the push to complete the trail. And working with communities in Allegan County to build a trail between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids gives more people access to a trail close to home and connects the extensive networks in those two cities.

There are more than 850 miles of non-motorized trails in our West Michigan region. Add to that the hundreds of miles of bike lanes and shared-use facilities, as well as other trails being planned and built, and the connectivity becomes staggering.

How much of those 850 miles of trail are you familiar with? Challenge yourself to explore parts you don't know. Sign up for our Trail Challenge, get the latest copy of *Michigan Trails Magazine*, and see for yourself what we have in West Michigan.



DONOR HIGHLIGHT: BETSY INGRAHAM

Meet Betsey Ingraham, a native West Michigander who spent much of her childhood exploring the parks and trails around Comstock Park. Her love for the outdoors hasn't faded in her adulthood; the trails being an essential part of her outdoor activities. She says that exploring Michigan on the numerous trails she enjoys on both peninsulas helps her reconnect, destress, and live a healthy lifestyle. Betsey loves trails that attract a diverse group of individuals and offer many ways to experience the trail. When she participated in the Fred Running Relays in 2016, she was amazed by all you can experience just on the White Pine Trail. There are parks along the way for respite and fun activities depending on what your interests are!

She and her husband Jeff support West Michigan Trails because they are active trail users. "If we want to see expansions, improvements, maintenance, and growth along the trails, it is up to us, as trail users, to support with our time, talent, and/or treasure." They know the unique opportunity that trails bring to their community when they are accessible to individuals of all backgrounds and abilities; and that trails are a vital part of the infrastructure in West Michigan. Betsey has appreciated her time over the past few years to be reminded of the fact that our trails and parks are safe spaces to gather and offer something for everyone. Join the Ingrahams in supporting the trails that you use every day!



**Join the Ingrahams
by supporting trails!**

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

WELCOME: JESS HOWARD!

Join us in welcoming West Michigan Trails' newest board member, Jess Howard. Jess is a Senior Civil Engineering Technician at Progressive AE where she works mostly on trail projects. Jess has over 10 years of experience with trail design, securing grants, and outreach. In Jess' words "I am passionate about being active and exploring. Trails are a beautiful way to experience different areas".



A LETTER FROM THE WMT STAFF

thank you

The staff at West Michigan Trails wants to extend our most sincere thanks to all our loyal supporters. So many of you have stayed connected with us through the difficult times of the pandemic. However, the road is not finished. Because of you, we have been able to build connections with individuals in a range of communities. Your support has helped us persevere through the challenges we have faced, and we are thrilled to see the momentum of the trail movement in West Michigan. Many exciting things are going on in the area and we are confident that you will soon be able to enjoy West Michigan in a whole different way than before. We look forward to celebrating as we become a world-class trail system. In the meantime, we deeply appreciate your continued support. Stay connected with us through our social media, mailing list, and newsletters!



MARK YOUR CALENDAR



TRAIL CHALLENGE – NOW THRU DEC 31

Take on the challenge! Get out and explore trails you haven't previously experienced. This virtual event has attracted hundreds of people to check out more of the 40+ trails we have in West Michigan. Participants earn badges along their journey and, when they log at least 20 trails, they earn a custom medal. Sign up before September 1st to get your trail t-shirt!

Register here: <https://bit.ly/WMTGTrailChallenge>

WHITECAPS TICKETS FOR TRAILS – AUG 17

Come out to the ball game on Wednesday the 17th and look for the West Michigan Trails volunteers selling 50/50 raffle tickets for trails! Help us reach our goal of a world-class trail system in West Michigan and join us for a night of celebrating trails.

To volunteer, email olivia@wmtrails.org!

SHARON DAVIS MEMORIAL RIDE/WALK – SEPT 11

Join the Friends of the Musketawa Trail for a memorial walk/ride for former Friends of the Musketawa Trail board secretary, Sharon Davis. This is a FREE event. Donations are completely optional and will be accepted in Sharon's name for the Friends of the Musketawa Trail (as she desired). **Meet at the Conklin trailhead** for a self-guided walk/ride. Sharon was a passionate advocate for the trails and biking. Come join in Sharon's passion for the trails!

LAKESHORE HARVEST RIDE – SEPT 17

Early bird registration for this Blue Star Trail fundraiser ends August 21st, sign up now! <https://www.lhride.com>

NORTH BANK TRAIL KICK-OFF FUNDRAISER – SEPTEMBER 22, 2022 6-9PM

Prepare your tastebuds for this wine and beer tasting fundraiser event for the North Bank Trail. Funds raised will go toward the portion of the trail stretching from Nunica to Coopersville. Enjoy conversation and refreshments in support of completing this important section. Tickets will be available soon! **For more information**, contact kterpstra@cityofcoopersville.com.

GRAND RAPIDS GRAN FONDO – JUNE 24, 2023

We hope you will join us in kicking off this rebranded event in 2023. The iconic Gran Fondo is coming to Grand Rapids, spearheaded by Tris4Health, a West Michigan endurance sports organization, and West Michigan Trails is thrilled to be the charity partner! Race the clock in this popular, family-friendly, cycling event and find out what awaits you at the finish line! (See page 5.)

<https://www.facebook.com/grgranfondo>

FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR, AARON BODBYL-MAST

The first few times I encountered e-bikes as we walked our dog, it didn't leave a positive impression. "Isn't that just too fast?", I thought.

The advent of e-bikes in Michigan was not without contention; I recall when the legislature was considering adopting a law allowing e-bikes, some park professionals were bitterly opposed. Looking back, I can understand where that sentiment came from. However, I must confess, that my first impression was off and that now I am glad that the legislation passed.

I am a trail enthusiast who has grown to love seeing e-bikes used recreationally. Additionally, experiencing the alarming shifts in our ecological balance has led me to a whole new level of appreciation. Bikes have the potential for people to facilitate a gentler existence in this world while also enabling us to design better, more egalitarian communities. What I didn't realize when I was annoyed by those first few e-bikes was that they would be key to this vision.

What first opened my eyes was a [podcast episode](#) (thewaroncars.org) with New York Times Columnist Jamelle Bouie. Bouie described how using his e-bike had changed his perspective. He explained that the greater range of e-bikes led him to explore new places, from the bike level, shifting how he viewed things. He argued that this greater range was key to making e-bikes a serious alternative mode of transportation.

E-bikes have many advantages. They allow riders to safely approach the speed of cars more easily on some streets. This makes commuting to work less strenuous allowing you to wear business casual clothing for commutes. Furthermore, they make trips via bikes faster and more comparable to car trips. As a result, many vehicle trips in urban areas could be replaced with e-bike trips. Additionally, e-bikes and cargo e-bikes afford those of differing abilities and socioeconomic status increased mobility and range-of-travel options.

Studies have indicated that this shift to e-bikes could meaningfully reduce CO2 emissions - though far short of what is needed. Shifting to e-bikes could play an important role in the strategies to reduce the



need for cars in urban spaces, and thereby further reduce emissions. These strategies include denser development, infill development, and much-improved transit. Communities that implement these strategies do much better in reducing emissions than less dense areas while also providing quality of life benefits. So much urban space is dedicated to vehicles for transport, parking, etc. that if we can reduce the need for it, then we can begin to adapt the space. Urban space that is now used for cars can be used for many other things: parks, trails, transit, gathering spaces, restaurants, housing, and more. (For further reading, check out this New York Times column ["Free E-bikes for Everyone"](#)). It may seem like a long shot to make such a shift, but e-bikes could ease the transition.

However, while electric vehicles are part of any emission reduction strategy, there is growing concern that we cannot sustainably replace all combustion cars globally with electric vehicles because of the high mineral demand required to make the batteries. Although this proposes a challenge, e-bikes (with transit) can greatly help reduce the need for motor vehicles.

Therefore, as a trail supporter and user who is now an e-biker user, I hope all trail supporters can think anew about e-bikes as part of the trail world and an important part of what we are trying to build together.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS



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GREATER GRID**

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NIA Wisinski
Out of the Saddle
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Rockford Brewing
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WELCOME TO FRIENDS OF BARRY COUNTY PARKS & TRAILS GROUP

Join us in welcoming the region's newest Friends Group. The Friends of Barry County Parks & Trails group is dedicated to supporting the future growth and sustainability of the Barry County Parks & Trails Commission. The group is currently gathering friends to help gain support for the upcoming millage extension for Charlton Park, and support future parks and trail endeavors! Follow their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fobpct> to learn more about millage information and details as they become available. If you are interested in joining the FoBCPT planning committee, please reach out on the Facebook page.

MATCHING GRANT AWARDED

The Friends of the Musketawa Trail group was awarded a matching grant with the Michigan DNR earlier this year and plans to install bike repair stations at the Marne and Conklin trailheads. The Friends group already purchased the stations and the DNR is providing the concrete pads.

NEW COMMITTEE REPRESENTING NORTH BANK TRAIL

A new committee has formed to represent the Coopersville/Polkton/Wright portion of the North Bank Trail and is working, in conjunction with the City of Coopersville, to complete this trail. The City of Coopersville has begun clearing the land on the train easement purchased a few years ago by the DNR. A kick-off fundraiser for the North Bank Trail will be held on September 22nd (See "Mark Your Calendar").

FEDERAL ARPA FUNDS FOR CITY OF NORTON SHORES

The City of Norton Shores will use Federal ARPA funds to connect P.J. Hoffmaster State Park and Lake Harbor Park with the 8-foot-wide Lake Harbor Trail. This stretch of Lake Harbor Road is popular among walkers, runners, and cyclists who use the paved shoulders on the major street. Hopes are that most of the trail can be built on existing city rights-of-way along Lake Harbor Road. The trail is expected to extend to Henry Street near the main entrance to Hoffmaster.

NEW PASSION. NEW MISSION. SAME EPIC RIDE.

West Michigan Trails is excited to announce a new partnership with the creator and founder of the MSU Gran Fondo, Robert Hughes, and Tris4Health. In 2013, the MSU Gran Fondo started with the idea of bringing a West Michigan signature cycling event to the area that would showcase our beautiful state, welcome cycling enthusiasts of all experience levels, and raise money for a great cause. Bob Hughes recently announced that the MSU Gran Fondo has been rebranded with a new name and mission but will remain the same epic ride next year.

The Grand Rapids Gran Fondo 2023 features all the same iconic elements of this beloved cycling event: the well-known finish line festival on the streets of downtown Grand Rapids, professional timing, on-course amenities and police support, celebrity rider, and more. With the new name comes a new cause. Now more than ever, people are looking for more trails to ride and explore. West Michigan Trails will receive 100% of the charitable funds raised at the event for the purpose of connecting trails and advancing the regional trails movement. West Michigan Trails is honored to be the charity partner for the Grand Rapids Gran Fondo and we look forward to continuing working towards a world-class trail experience in West Michigan!



GRAND RAPIDS GRAN FONDO
JUNE 24, 2023

GRAND RAPIDS GRAN FONDO
New passion. New mission. Same epic ride.

VISIT GRGRANFONDO.COM FOR FULL DETAILS.

 100% of the funds raised will go to West Michigan Trails for connecting trails and advancing our regional trails movement.

TRIS4HEALTH MICHIGAN'S PREMIER ENDURANCE EVENTS



WEST MICHIGAN
trails

PO Box 10 • Byron Center, MI 49315

Sign up for our e-Newsletter!

<https://www.wmtrails.org/newsletter>



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: KATHY WRIGHT

Kathy Wright is a Great Lakes enthusiast and a novice to trails. "I've always had a bike and did casual riding, but after retiring at the end of 2020, my retirement gift to myself was a hybrid bike". Once Kathy discovered her love for riding the trails, she established her go-to trails to be the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail and the Fred Meijer M-6 Trail. After getting a bike rack addition to her car, she found it easier to check out other popular favorites like the White Pine. She anticipates that she will have many other favorites as she pursues her very long list of trails to explore in this beautiful state.

Kathy has always known the value of connecting with people and giving back to her community, and she thinks volunteering at West Michigan Trails is "a great way for [her] to support a group that supports the trails". After volunteering last summer, Kathy noticed how passionate and dedicated the people who work on trails are. She knew she wanted to continue supporting WMT specifically to learn from the many people in the community who have been using the trails for years. "Trails provide an opportunity for me to discover new areas in Michigan that I've never been to or that I want to revisit in different ways. The number of trails to choose from is impressive, and many have great stops along the way so I can also discover small towns and businesses." Join Kathy and other WMT volunteers at upcoming WMT events!



**Join Kathy and support
WMT by volunteering!**

Contact Olivia@wmtrails.org
to learn more about our volunteer
opportunities or donate at
<https://bit.ly/2022SummerNewsletter>