



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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WAYFINDING PROJECT

The wayfinding project to build a consistent, regional trail signage guide is complete! WMT has met with the City of Kentwood, Ottawa County, and representatives in Barry County to discuss implementing the signage into new trail segments. If you are interested in implementing the new signage on a trail in your community – let us know how we can help. The guide will be on our website soon and FREE to use.



MASTER PLAN

Over the past few decades, West Michigan has experienced significant growth in non-motorized trails and bikeways, including hundreds of miles of new regional trails. Work continues to complete connections between major urban centers and destination areas. As the demand for and usage of these pathways increases, more and more communities are seeing the health and economic benefits of trails.

A regional, non-motorized master plan has become necessary for cohesively growing and effectively funding the regional effort. The West Michigan Master Trails Plan will serve as a foundation for a collective vision, future investments, and funding opportunities for a regional

nonmotorized trail system.

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VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: TODD FETTIG

My wife, Erin, and I grew up on the east side of the state, and we met each other at Central Michigan University. We discovered West Michigan thanks to landing good jobs in journalism, first at the Muskegon Chronicle, where Erin and I both worked, then at The Grand Rapids Press, where I spent most of my career. West Michigan welcomed us, we found our home here, and we put down roots and our kids, Carter and Tatum, graduated from Grand Rapids Public Schools and are off to college.

We love West Michigan’s sense of community, its pace, its tendency to pull together and get things done, and its general affordability compared to other regions. You get a lot of bang for your buck.


This makes the place great: On the same day, with ease and in mere minutes, we can go from enjoying the vibrancy and culture of a city to immersing ourselves in nature. And we can do that by hitting the road or, better yet, hitting a trail.

I started biking a lot in the late 2000s, mostly commuting to work in The Press newsroom – five miles there, five miles back. Back then, when Twitter was fun, using the banner “24-minute Bikewitness Action News” and just for giggles, I used to tweet in a breathless fashion about everyday observations along my 24-minute-or-so commute.

It’s great to see the improvements to biking infrastructure around Grand Rapids since those days.

The annual Michigan Trails magazine is what first caught my attention of West Michigan Trails. It’s a great resource, and I keep a copy next to my chair in the living room. I learned a lot more about the organization when a friend of a friend invited me to attend a virtual West Michigan Trails event during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was heartening to see that, even in the times of social distancing, a dedicated group of trail advocates were gathering and making connections, to enhance the quality of life in West



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Michigan. I’ve been donating and volunteering ever since.

Trails bring people together, and they connect and strengthen communities. They allow us to safely bike, hike, ski, run, walk, and roll, and to engage with nature. Take a trail, instead of a road or street, to a familiar destination, and you’ll see your community from a different perspective. Alone on the trail, I exercise, unwind, and clarify my thoughts. On the trail with friends and family, I enjoy the exercise, the sights, and the meaningful conversations.

I’ve greatly benefited from the area’s trails, and so has my community. I bet you and yours have, too. I’m fortunate enough to have the time and capacity to contribute to West Michigan Trails’ efforts to connect trails and communities. If such connections matter to you, please consider giving!

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FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR, AARON BODBYL-MAST

About 15 months ago, I wrote a newsletter article outlining how my thinking evolved on e-bikes. I started as a mild e-bike skeptic and evolved into an actual user. I wanted to take a moment to revisit the issue having owned an e-bike for over a year. E-bike adoption, anecdotally, continues to skyrocket in the Muskegon area, among users of all various ages and demographics. This is coming with growing pains as many other trail users find the E-bike speeds to be a potential safety concern or that they undermine our non-motorized trail culture. However, as I wrote last year, "Bikes have the potential for people to facilitate a gentler existence in this world while also possibly allowing us to design better, more egalitarian communities" and, by democratizing access to bikes for people who otherwise might be discouraged or find biking challenging, e-bikes further enable this vision. Everything I have seen in their growing use has confirmed this possibility. For today, I want to relay my e-bike experiences, with two brief focus areas.

Short Trip Replacement: I just passed 1,000 miles on my e-bike. A significant portion of these miles were not for recreation, but for transportation from my home to downtown Muskegon (where I work on several volunteer efforts) to the store, or to Church. I have ridden my E-Bike in every month of the year even in poor weather. One of my hopes with purchasing an e-bike was to make it possible to reduce the use of our car. If I want my city to be more walkable and bikeable, I need to embody this value by keeping my car off the road, when I can, so that I am not adding to road traffic.



According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, over 50% of car trips are 3 miles or less. This translates into a tremendous opportunity for those who can adopt e-bikes and reduce traffic congestion by replacing these short trips with an e-bike. While I and others work to improve biking infrastructure in the metro area of Muskegon, I can attest that for many trips the e-bike is a safe, efficient, and enjoyable option. I haven't maximized my usage yet and the route to the local Meijer could be greatly improved, but I would strongly urge anyone who lives in the urban, suburban context to consider doing the same.

Travel: My wife and I traveled to the greater Washington DC area this spring. One of the downsides of traveling to a metro area like this is driving around to get to desired destinations like restaurants, etc. Traffic can be a nightmare, parking is difficult, and transit isn't always available where you're staying. We stayed on the Maryland side of the Potomac south of DC. It was a short distance to Alexandria, Virginia, but the traffic might have kept us at our hotel. However, DC has a bike share program with E-bikes as an option. This truly transformed our trip. With the bike infrastructure built over and along the I-495 Potomac bridge, we were able to spread out and easily visit Alexandria via our e-bikes. Getting around and exploring was so much simpler and more pleasant than it could have been. It also allowed us to take a memorable ride from Maryland to DC on Mount Vernon, an 8' pathway near the Potomac that experiences heavy use. Despite the less-than-ideal width, the high traffic, and the mix of many user types, it was amazing to see how well people managed it and co-existed. It would not have been possible for us to enjoy the trip the way we did, by car or by a regular e-bike. E-bikes are expanding our mobility horizons in unexpected, exciting, and sometimes challenging ways.



We are so grateful to be the charity partner for the Grand Rapids Gran Fondo. Thank you to everyone who contributed! 565 donors raised \$34,428!!



WE RAISED NEARLY \$1,000 FOR TRAILS AT THE WHITECAPS GAME! THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!



DONOR HIGHLIGHT: DAVID MORDIS

I grew up in Port Huron and practiced Ophthalmology in Lansing. I had always biked but got more serious about it when I joined the TCBA because all my friends were members. When I married, I moved to Grand Rapids, picking a house close to the White Pine Trail. Eventually I became a friend of the White Pine Trail and enjoyed participating in their fall weekend ride to Cadillac.

I have a couple cousins who are bike riders (one of whom was featured in Bicycling magazine for having ridden on all 7 continents) with whom I have done some memorable bike rides – a bike ride down the Mississippi from Lake Itasca to New Orleans, the Katy Trail, the C&O Towpath/GAP Trail, and most recently the Inaugural Great Lake to Lake Trail Ride where I got to ride with Mike Levine. Also, with my wife, I've ridden the West Shoreline ride that started in New Buffalo and ended at Mackinaw City.

I've made some good friends along the way, including Joel Bierling from Bier Distillery, who named a beer after me. There's something about riding together that builds strong bonds. It's hard to explain.

Besides getting outside to appreciate nature, it's nice to keep fit when you get older. Many memorable rides have been to restaurants and breweries. It's nice to have burned off the calories while biking instead of putting on weight.

Some of the rides I've enjoyed the most have been with my great nieces and great nephews; I've come to appreciate the trails as safe places to take them riding. There are stretches of the White Pine Trail that offer views that can't be beat. Recently I rode the GR Gran Fondo with a great nephew and enjoyed getting to see Brent Bookwalter and Bob Hughes again, as well as meet Christian Vande Velde.



 If you would like to join David, become a donor!

<https://bit.ly/WMTGiveBack>

One of the things that I have come to realize about Grand Rapids (unlike other places) is that many successful people stay here and reinvest in the community. The list is a lot longer than just Fred Meijer, but I'll point him out as an example since he has done so much for the trails. I feel very appreciative of all he did so I can enjoy the trails. It's my turn to step up so hopefully people in the future can continue to use and enjoy the trails.

MASTER PLAN (CONTINUED)

Recognizing this need, West Michigan Trails has sought planning services to create a regional, nonmotorized master trails plan. The plan will include existing trails, planned trails, trail improvements, trail connections, trail gaps, and an action plan.

The Master Plan is also intended to increase equitable access to our regional trail network by addressing the various factors that have led to the inequities we now face. By identifying target areas, involving the community, recognizing diverse modes of connectivity, and bridging socio-economic disparities, we aim to greatly enhance access to recreational, health, and transportation advantages provided by trails, benefiting individuals of all backgrounds and abilities.

Deliverables of this project will include an inventory of existing trails, planned trails, and gaps in a layered GIS map. Results will be shared throughout the region to help

guide planning and seek funding. A robust community engagement process will yield community priorities including regional trails, amenities, community connections, and more. Finally, a criteria tool will be built that establishes a methodology to help prioritize identified projects.



FALL INTO HEALTHY HABITS

Peak trail season is here! If you're like us here at Ivy, fall is a great time to get out and rejuvenate the mind and body by enjoying the crisp air and all the beautiful colors of nature's landscape. As the weather starts cooling down it is important to take some key steps before working out to reduce the chance of injury. Trail walking, bike riding, and even running are all great ways to get us out of the house and into autumn's beauty, as well as to get us moving. Three ways to help assure your workout is safe and comfortable are to make sure you are dressed properly, to include a proper warm-up, and to drink plenty of water!

Dress for the occasion! Layers will be your best friend. Layering clothes is a smart way to help your body stay nice and warm when going out in the cold. The body's natural response to the cold is shivering, which is its way to try and generate heat. Muscles also tend to tighten up to produce heat when we feel cold. The great thing about layers is that you can always take them off! Great clothing ideas for layering can be: tight fitting, compression long sleeved shirt; leggings/sweatpants; thick socks; gloves; a hat or earmuffs; and a breathable jacket or sweatshirt.

Warm-up in cool weather! Stretching increases flexibility and range of motion of the muscles. This is important to help decrease the chance of muscle strain injuries. A proper warm-up should start with getting your blood flow moving; a brisk walk or slow jog of about 5 to 10 minutes can prepare your muscles for stretching or more strenuous



activity. Dynamic stretching is a form of warm up that uses active movements to get the body moving before exercise. Some ideas of movement-based stretches can be: toe or heel walking; straight leg kicks; arm circles; high knee marching; and walking lunges.

Don't forget that water bottle! Hydrating the body is crucial when the weather is hot, but also when it is cold. In the fall there are less cues telling your body to consume water since sweating and feeling overheated are much less common in the cooler weather. It can be hard to tell if you are sweating because by the time you produce sweat droplets, the cool, dry air causes your sweat to evaporate faster than it does in the humidity. Total water loss during a workout in the cold is not that different than in the warm weather. Besides sweating, there are other ways the body is losing water, such as a runny nose, teary eyes, and from your breath. A helpful reminder to stay hydrated is to set timers or choose landmarks to stop and take a drink break.

So, "layer up" and get out to enjoy the beauty of a Michigan autumn day on the trail.

Julie Blodgett, PT, Certified MDT
Clinic Director at Sparta Ivy Rehab



WEST MICHIGAN
trails

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WE WANT YOUR PICTURES!

We want YOUR pictures from your favorite trails for our **Where are We Wednesday?** social media posts.

Send us a picture that clearly identifies a favorite or unique spot on a Michigan trail. If we use it in a **Where are We Wednesday?** post, we'll send you a FREE WMT sticker!

Please send your pictures to:
info@wmtrails.org with a note identifying the name of the trail.



Where are We Wednesday?