



**WEST MICHIGAN**  
**TRAILS & GREENWAYS**  
COALITION

# WEST MICHIGAN TRAIL LINK

## **WEST MICHIGAN TRAIL LINK**

is the newsletter of the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition, published 3-4 times annually. Established in 2005, the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition 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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West Michigan Trails &  
Greenways Coalition

## **WEST MICHIGAN TRAILS SELECTED AS CHARITY PARTNER!**

We are excited and proud to announce that West Michigan Trails was selected as a Charity Partner for the 2022 Amway Riverbank Run on May 14, 2022. We are looking for runners, walkers, volunteers, and fundraisers!! We are offering some fantastic incentives to run/walk the race distance of your choice and raise money for West Michigan Trails.

**Join our team** and receive a welcome packet of fundraising tips and tricks, a social media downloadable packet to share your goals with friends, and training support.

### **PLUS:**

- Raise \$100 and receive an "I LOVE MI Trails" t-shirt
- Raise \$250 and also receive a custom racing jersey
- Raise \$500 and also receive an "I LOVE MI Trails" sweatshirt
- Raise \$1,000 and also receive a runners-essential gift basket

Sign up [here](https://www.wmtrails.org) to be kept informed about registration and volunteer opportunities! Or contact [jennifer@wmtrails.org](mailto:jennifer@wmtrails.org) or 616-262-5889. A huge thank you to our sponsors for exceeding our expectations! Please be sure to think of them if you should need any of their services!



## **SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES!**

We have a GREAT opportunity at WMTGC for you! Connect with trail users, trail builders and parks and recreation departments from across West Michigan by sponsoring the 2022 West Michigan Trail's events. Our annual events draw more than 1,000 diverse, attendees whose passion is trails. You will not only be reaching the users of the trails but the decision makers from local, regional, and state agencies. We strive to connect people, trails, and communities to build a world class trail system in West Michigan. We hope you will join us! For more information contact [Jennifer@wmtrails.org](mailto:Jennifer@wmtrails.org).



# WELCOME TO THE BOARD!



**West Michigan Trails is thrilled to welcome Lorena Aguayo-Marquez to our board.** Lorena's passions are education, social justice and the outdoors. She is an active community member in West Michigan, serving on the board of the Latina Network of West Michigan, Finance Council for St. Francis Xavier and Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine and active member of Latino Outdoors GR. She was a critical thought partner in the creation of La Lucha Fund and has volunteered as an application reviewer for the fund. Lorena holds a master's degree in education from Grand Valley State University and works at Grand Rapids Community College, where she has held a variety of positions supporting students in her 14-year tenure. She currently works as the Program Manager for Strengthening Community Colleges in Healthcare Grant, responsible for building capacity in the healthcare industry workforce. She enjoys spending time with her family/friends, reading and being outdoors. You might see her walking in her neighborhood, biking, hiking or taking in the sun rays at one of the many beaches of Lake Michigan.

Lorena is excited to be part of West Michigan Trails. She believes trails are important because they connect you to mature nature, friends, family and the community. Lorena is looking forward to working with the board and the community to connect people to the trails and create a welcoming space in nature where everyone feels they are safe and belong.

# A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*John Morrison*

I am genuinely excited about all the great things happening with West Michigan Trails right now! You can read about many of them in this newsletter.

We are, of course, thrilled to be selected as a Charity Partner for the 2022 Amway Riverbank Run. What an incredible opportunity to bring our mission together with thousands of people who are likely training for this popular event on the very trails that we have worked so hard to create. AND, there's a great opportunity for you to be involved in this partnership while helping create a world-class trail system! You know you want to.

Very excited, too, to have Olivia Marquez join our team as Development Assistant. Olivia is an incredibly talented person which we see in between her busy schedule as a senior at GVSU. Also joining us, Lorena Aguayo-Marquez is the most recent addition to our Board of Directors. Lorena is an avid outdoors person with a keen perception and voice from the trail users perspective as well as being an activist for inclusivity. Please join me in welcoming both Olivia and Lorena.

Not mentioned in the newsletter, but something we're every bit as excited for, is West Michigan Trails being the recipient of Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance's award of 2021 Trail Organization of the Year. I'm kind of blown away by that, especially in light of all the great trail work being done by numerous other trail organizations in Michigan. The award is for our work in hosting the MATAG conference in Michigan and our overall collaborative spirit to make Michigan trails even better. We are honored and humbled to receive the award, and thank MTGA for recognizing West Michigan Trails in this way.



## SAVE THE DATES

### FRIENDS SUMMIT – March 19, 2022

Our Spring event brings together trail managers, volunteers, and trail enthusiasts to share, learn and network. This Saturday event will feature a state of the trails presentation, trail updates, guest speakers, and break-out sessions. Plan to join us from 8 - 11:30am at Plainwell City Hall.



### THE FRED RELAYS 2022!

Registration is open. Early Bird registration ends January 2 at midnight! There are no other races like the Fred Relays! Choose between the 50, 100, and 200 Mile Relay Teams. Gather your friends and start your training. <http://bit.ly/FredRelays2022>



### TRAIL MIXER – June 7, 2022

It's our annual table-hosted breakfast fundraiser. If you are interested in volunteering or would like to host a table, please contact [Jennifer@wmtrails.org](mailto:Jennifer@wmtrails.org).





# NOW THROUGH DECEMBER 31, WEST MICHIGAN TRAILS & GREENWAYS COALITION CHALLENGES YOU TO GET OUT, GET MOVING, AND CHECK OUT THE TRAILS OF WEST MICHIGAN!

Participants are encouraged to explore as many of the 40+ trails in West Michigan as they can. Register for the challenge and explore at least 20 of the trails by Dec 31st and you will also earn a custom medal. You can register by visiting:

<https://runsignup.com/Race/MI/GrandRapids/WestMichiganTrailChallenge>

If you love West Michigan trails, here is your chance to get out and explore the ones you maybe haven't had a chance to experience. Participants can walk, hike, bike, run, ski or snowshoe (might want to wait until we have snow for those), or skate. Whatever your favorite mode of transportation - just get out there and explore. You don't have to travel the entirety of each trail, just explore what you can!



## WELCOME TO THE STAFF: OLIVIA MARQUEZ

We want to welcome Olivia Marquez as our new Development Assistant at West Michigan Trails (WMT). Olivia joined us as an intern from Grand Valley State University over the summer and proved herself invaluable. We were able to hire her on, part-time, for her senior year. Olivia learned about WMT from a professor at Grand Valley. Shortly after looking into the organization and our mission, she discovered we were looking for an intern.

Olivia was selected from a competitive field of applicants. She worked through the summer on our events and social media. She now assists on a multitude of projects in marketing, fundraising and events.

Growing up in West Michigan, Olivia has always loved the trails. "I love that trails give you an escape from reality, even in the city. Trails are the best representation of our beautiful greenery and nature in West Michigan. They are open and available for all communities and all types of people: trails don't discriminate."

Olivia will graduate from Grand Valley in Spring of '22 with a degree in Public & Non-Profit Administration. She hopes to find a career with an organization with a strong mission that she believes in. She wants to make a difference by helping underserved communities.



welcome  
TO THE  
TEAM

# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: KAREN GENTRY

Karen Gentry is an avid outdoors person who emphasizes the importance of fitness, recreation, and mental health. As a Central Michigan University graduate from St. Joseph, Michigan she has been involved in Rail Trails since the early 1990s when they were first being developed. Karen served on WMTGC's Board of Directors as the board secretary for more than eight years and she has been involved with the organization in many ways. As an experienced journalist and publisher, Karen has also led the way in creating the Michigan Trails Magazine. With the 12th edition coming out in 2022, it is a highly popular annual publication and the only source of detailed and accurate maps of all the trails in Michigan.

Karen says that "being involved in trails is natural for me. I enjoy the people and the fellow outdoor lovers". Like many, she finds that cycling or hiking on trails is a natural stress reliever and a way to stay fit. Karen enjoys the trails alongside her friends and family, and she loves that trails appeal to a spectrum of people: young kids, parents, and grandparents as well as a variety of users: competitive road cyclists, in-line skaters, runners, walkers, and hikers. Trails bring people together and help relieve the stresses of life. Karen explains that she loves that "Our West Michigan trails are beautiful... very scenic and interesting with woods, rivers and lakes, bridges, farmland, and tunnels of trees."



At 92 miles long, the White Pine Trail is her favorite trail that is closest to home. Karen feels that it is the backbone of the trail system in West Michigan. "I am also very impressed with the Pere Marquette Trail for being well maintained and having excellent signage", says Gentry while she describes the scenic beauty and remoteness of her favorite stretches of trail.

***Thank you Karen, for all you do for West Michigan Trails!***

## PROJECTS IN THE WORKS

### LEONARD TO ANN STREET TRAIL CONNECTION

The City of Grand Rapids is completing a trail segment between Leonard and Ann Streets, connecting the river trail system to Riverside Park. Completing this section will connect downtown Grand Rapids and communities of color to more than a hundred miles of regional destination trails. Building on its prior investment in the Grand River shoreline, the City of Grand Rapids is championing the development of riverfront trails, including this critical connector.

This project is a key "Opportunity Site" for the City of Grand Rapids' River for All Plan, the visioning document for reactivating and revitalizing the riverfront and the City's namesake rapids. The River for All Plan includes 7.5 miles of trails which circle the banks of the Grand River. The Leonard to Ann Street Connection is a critical component of the Plan as it is a primary entry point into the riverside trail system from the north. Once completed, hundreds of thousands of residents will have a safe pathway to engage in the river environment. This portion of the trail is also the most difficult to complete because of the complexities of the surrounding infrastructure. The project will include three costly trail underpasses at Ann Street, Leonard Street, and the

railroad to provide safe passage through these dangerous intersections. Doing so will provide a more family friendly and safe trail for all to enjoy. Additionally, the trails will be lined with overhead lighting, providing safety and security for pedestrians. Finally, the concrete trail will be 12 feet in width to handle the heavy traffic anticipated in this portion of the trail.

### WHITE PINE TRAIL

WMTGC is part of a collaborative of partners to pave a 7-mile stretch of the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park from the Kent County line at Sand Lake to Howard City. This project will advance the regional goal of a paved trail extending from Grand Rapids to Cadillac and build momentum toward completing the remaining unimproved trail portions. When completed, the White Pine Trail will be a nearly 100-mile paved trail (though it would exceed 100 miles when combined with connected trails), a tipping point for attracting bicycle tourists and events to the region. Paving the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park is a high priority of the cities and townships along the trail that anticipate increased tourism to the region and a higher quality of life for residents because of the trail enhancement.



## ROCKFORD TRAIL

The Rockford Trail in Plainfield Township is a new trail that begins at Rogue River Drive and follows Kuttshill Drive, Brewer Avenue and Kroes Street, ending at Jericho Road and Rockford High School.

The project is on time for completion by November 15. Most of the base course of asphalt is down, with the rest this week. Concrete ADA ramps this week and we believe paving the top course will be next week, followed by restoration and punch list completion in the spring.

Phase II will head north from Kroes Street on Jericho Avenue, and end at the White Pine Trail and is expected to begin in the next few years.



## CANNON TRAIL

The Cannon Trail in Cannon Township (the 9 Mile Road and Myers Lake Avenue section) was just bid last week. Construction will be in the spring.



## MUSKETAWA TRAIL

The Musketawa Trail Friends' Group has been able to start a project that has been outstanding since COVID-19 started. The project includes removal of an older wood deck and handicap-access table in Ravenna at the trailhead parking lot. The area is just outside the parking lot and provides handicap persons access to a table. The project includes new, steel bollards to separate from the parking lot and an area to install a bike repair station.

The concrete pad has been poured, the steel bollards installed, the table installed, and the bike repair station will be installed. Soon. Once this work is completed, the Michigan DNR will come back and paint parking spaces including two handicap spaces in front of the project. The Friends Group will also be installing handicap parking signs and rubber handicap parking bumpers.

"This project has been 2+ years in the making and we are happy that it is finally completed. Our hopes are that people like the bike repair station as we'd like to add them to all the other trail head parking areas, including Muskegon, Conklin, and Marne." Explained Tim Nink, Musketawa Friends President.

All the work was paid for by donations to the Friends group, a 501(c)(3) non-profit.





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### **Want to join Fred in supporting West Michigan Trails?**

Become a monthly donor like Fred by filling out the enclosed envelope or donating at <https://bit.ly/WestMichiganTrails>

## **DONOR HIGHLIGHT**

*Fred Wezeman has loved trails since he was a kid.*

Fred has spent most of his life around trails and rode mountain bikes, as much as he could, as a kid growing up in the Chicago suburbs. Upon coming to West Michigan, Fred discovered the vast trail system and was excited to explore it on his bike. He loves trails because they "allow you to focus on nature and enjoy a break from daily responsibilities".

Any trail can be a challenging or relaxing experience for Fred, all based on how much effort he wants to put into it. Each trail offers a unique experience and is never the same from one season to the next. That is what makes trails so special. Trails allow a safe way for individuals and families to get out and be active or explore.

Fred loves how you can be introduced to different parts of the community, that you may not have known existed if you hadn't gotten out on the trail. This is why he became drawn to West Michigan Trails and all the work that has been done. After attending a fundraising event and hearing about connecting communities, Fred knew from that moment on that he had to be a supporter.

Fred simply wants to be active and outdoors on the trails in order to refresh his mind after a long week. His main motivation to get out on the trails is to see all the beauty that exists in our community.