Looking Back at ‘17 and Forward to ‘18!

----> Bob Wilson, Executive Director

Dear Friends,

The legislature returned in early December from its traditional two-week Thanksgiving Break which marked the beginning of a busy 3-4 weeks of legislative activity. There were key issues that affect trail policy pending before both the Michigan Senate and Michigan House and there is significant work being done right now in the Executive Branch as the Governor and his various department directors are formulating the budget proposal that will be unveiled in February. Budget-making provides trail advocates with a unique opportunity to support trails policy through both the placement of key appropriations for trails work and the inclusion of boilerplate language that can set the table for new programs.

Sponsored by Chair Goeff Hansen, Senate Bill 596 moved unanimously through the Michigan Senate and was reported out of the House Tourism Committee without a single no vote. This bill is now on the floor of the Michigan House and provides important new direction to help in managing multijurisdictional trails, clarify that trail amenities are considered a “public good” and allow the Michigan History Center to help local trail managers tell local history through trails. We also had excellent support from the Michigan Senate on SCR 27, sponsored by Senator Rebekah Warren that sets in place the move to develop a statewide water trails program in the DNR. This resolution passed out of the Senate unanimously.

Work continues to take place on an exciting multicomponent bond proposal that would help to fund maintenance of our trails for years to come. This bond proposal would provide millions of dollars to repair and replace aging trail surfaces, boardwalks, and bridges— a critical area of need for many trails. This proposal is being developed in conjunction with other user groups and is anticipated to be part of the budget negotiation process when the legislature returns next year.

We are also working on developing a multi-jurisdiction trailways advisory council for the Great Lake to Lake Trail Route #1. It has long been our vision to combine local and regional trails into something that can stir the souls and imaginations of trail users, motivating them to travel from one Great Lake to another along a seamless corridor of multiuse trail. The purpose of such a council is to coalesce all local trail managers into one coordinated group to establish a like-minded management approach for this trail, so that we can all share in a vision of a trail that will have consistent signage, provide long term maintenance and a coordinated set of trail rules for usage.

Of course, work continues for our plans for the 2018 edition of the Michigander with the route scheduled to take place up in northern Michigan where we will be riding on the trails managed by the Top of Michigan Trails Council. We have also confirmed plans to stage the second annual legislative Kayak outing with the 2018 version to take place on the Huron River on August 23rd in conjunction with the Huron River Watershed Council. This event is meant to attract state and local policymakers to continue to educate policy makers about the recreational, cultural, historical, natural resource and economic value of our trail system, both land and water.

It is certainly easy to see why we are so excited about the work we have done and the mission that lies ahead of us. We hope you will join us in this mission and continue to be active advocates for Michigan Trails!

Sincerely,

Bob Wilson
Executive Director

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Striving for a Consistent Vision

--- Andrea Ketchmark, Executive Director, North Country Scenic Trail

Thru hiking a long-distance trail takes an incredible amount of patience, physical endurance, mental stamina and perseverance, but you come out at the end being transformed because of your experience.

The story of building, maintaining and protecting a long-distance trail follows the same path. Many people assume the length of the trail is what makes it difficult, but that’s really the smallest of its challenges. The real challenge comes from striving for a consistent vision across hundreds of agency partners, private landowners, partner organizations and volunteers on the ground doing the work.

Designated by US Congress in 1980, the North Country National Scenic Trail is planned to be a 5,000-mile hiking and backpacking trail that showcases the scenic, natural, cultural and historical resources of the Northern United States. We work with a network of hundreds of land management partners and a network of thousands of volunteers to build and maintain it. In Michigan, the North Country National Scenic Trail traverses 3 National Forests, 1 National Park, 9 State Parks or Recreation Areas, 2 State Forests, 5 State Game Areas, county and local land and many miles on commercial and individual private lands. Each with their own rules for management, individual concerns and relationships that need to be nurtured. Multiply that by seven states and that’s the North Country Trail.

But with the complexity, comes great diversity that makes the trail what it is. It’s also taught our organization to be innovative and adaptive in order to put each mile on the ground. Over the past 38 years, we’ve seen what works and what doesn’t.

Here are a few best practices:

- Have a strong vision and be able to communicate it. Without that, no one will join you in the journey.
- Provide guidance to volunteers in the form of good training programs, supportive staff and be willing to let them take ownership locally.
- Focus energy on building positive and reciprocal relationships with your partners. It’s got to be a shared goal with real people that respect each other’s needs, goals and perspectives.
- Give them the credit they deserve every chance you get.
- Remember to celebrate your successes.

We won’t complete the North Country National Scenic Trail in my lifetime, but, we can celebrate the more than 3,000 miles we have currently on the ground and every mile that comes in each passing year. We can share the incredible stories of our accomplishments and how we’ve been able to be successful.

Most importantly, we have to remember why we are in this. It’s the experiences we are providing for people to transform their lives by connecting with something bigger than themselves. That’s why we do it, day in and day out, year after year.

Happy New Year from the North Country National Scenic Trail.

More: www.northcountrytrail.org | Image credit: Nathan Miller, Ottawa National Forest near O Kun De Kun Falls

Detroit’s Urban Corridor: Joe Louis Greenway

--- Todd Scott, Executive Director, Detroit Greenways Coalition

Ten years ago came an idea for a trail that could encircle Detroit. It would extend the proposed Dequindre Cut northward in a large 26-mile counter-clockwise loop, use 8 miles of abandoned Conrail right-of-way, and connect with the Detroit RiverWalk. It was a bold vision for Detroit – that also connected the cities of Hamtramck, Highland Park and Dearborn.

We called it the Inner Circle Greenway.

One consistent characteristic of this trail is that it’s always changing. Through the years the route has been refined. Connections have been added to destinations such as the University of Detroit-Mercy and Mangrove College, as well as the city of Ferndale.

And in October, its name changed.

With the imminent demolition of the Joe Louis Arena, a Free Press columnist asked how we are going to honor his legacy. Mayor Mike Duggan proposed the greenway. Joe Louis’ family was super supportive, which should not have been a surprise. Louis’ son is a cyclist and board member for the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

Now, the question we hear all the time is “when will the trail be completed?” Portions of it are already along the RiverWalk and Dequindre Cut. Work is underway to nearly double the length of the Cut. The city of Detroit and Conrail have agreed to terms for the purchase of 8 miles of railroad. The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation provided a grant for $2 million to create a Framework Plan along the trail and develop construction documents. Detroit has applied once again for a federal TIGER grant worth $18.3 million. The city has pledged an additional $15.3 million in matching funds.

The city of Hamtramck has submitted for TAP grants to build their portion of the greenway. Our Coalition is working with the city of Highland Park to find funding for their segment. We should also mention that the Joe Louis Greenway will have a connection to the Gordie Howe International Bridge, which will allow cyclists and pedestrians access to Canada once it opens in 2023.

It’s exciting, yet still a bit surreal to see our trail rise from a grass roots vision to a top city priority named after one of its legends. Once it’s done, it’s exciting that, like Mr. Louis, the greenway will be able to deliver a world-renowned knockout punch.

More: www.detroitgreenways.org | Image credit: Kyle Shultz, Joe Louis Fist

#72 News from Michigan Trails

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More: #72 News from Michigan Trails
Water Trails as Teaching Venues
--- Elizabeth Riggs, Deputy Director, Huron River Watershed Council

The Huron River Water Trail (HRWT) attracts over 100,000 recreational users annually. The 104-mile inland paddling trail meanders through remnant forests, agricultural areas, and a network of wetlands, lakes and urban environments before flowing into western Lake Erie. Water trails, like the HRWT, serve as venues for teaching natural resource lessons to users while they are also having fun.

Part of what makes water trails so enjoyable is their natural beauty that comes from healthy natural systems – forested riverbanks and shorelines, functioning floodplains, and fish-friendly pools, riffles and runs. Trail managers and partners have countless teachable moments on the water to promote good etiquette and offer programming that encourages stewardship and conservation.

Water trail users share a responsibility to be ambassadors of the paddling community. A river code of conduct is promoted on the HRWT and includes these common sense guidelines that also teach natural resource lessons:

- Look after the natural environment and avoid damaging riverbanks and vegetation.
- Protect native species and habitats by using dry or disinfected equipment to curb the spread of invasive species.
- Employ the Clean, Drain, Dry practice, which is key in preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species such as Eurasian water-milfoil and zebra mussels.
- For more guidelines, visit Clean Boats, Clean Waters.

Stewardship programming events are offered along the HRWT year-round, and are organized by HRWT partners, schools, local outfitters, boat liverys and environmental and outdoor recreation organizations. Such events include:

- Flying fishing lessons and guided tours.
- River expeditions tied to stewardship education.
- River quality monitoring programs.
- Streambank stabilization in eroded locations to improve water quality and streamside habitat using native plants.
- Woody debris management using the Clean and Open Method to manage logjams, while preserving the benefits they provide to river ecology.

Finally, fluctuations in river flows may result from natural conditions or dam management. Since dams are ubiquitous in Michigan, trail managers have ample opportunity to work with dam operators and owners to identify potential dams for removal to eliminate the obstruction and portage. In cases where dam removal is not likely, then improved management becomes the focus.


From Holly to Chesaning: Rolling on the River
--- David Lossing, Chair, Shiawassee River Water Trail Coalition

The Shiawassee River Water Trail Coalition is a member organization representing 17 local units of government and non-profit organizations from Holly in Oakland County to Chesaning in Saginaw County.

The goal of the Coalition is to support a National Park Service application to designate 88 miles of the Shiawassee River as a National Water Trail. The National Water Trails System serves to bring existing and newly identified water trails together into one cohesive national network of exemplary water trails through the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program and the National Trails System. There are currently two designated National Water Trails in Michigan, the Huron River Water Trail and the Island Loop Route National Water Trail and if granted, the Shiawassee River would become the second longest designated National Water Trail in the state.

In addition to seeking designation as a national water trail, our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) objectives with our partners over the next decade are:

- Coordinate and cooperate amongst Coalition organizations to further the mission and vision for the Shiawassee River Water Trail.
- Offer mutual support and guidance on specific on-going projects.
- Investigate opportunities for increasing funding of conservation, restoration, and low impact recreation projects and improvements on the river.
- Increase community awareness of the recreational and environmental value of a healthy Shiawassee River.
- Encourage development of new canoe and kayak launches where gaps exist along the river and at facilities that are slated for improvements or renovations.
- Provide public information on the Shiawassee River Water Trail through partner websites, promotional and educational materials.
- Promote the Shiawassee River Water Trail as a valuable resource for low impact recreation, education, stewardship, and tourism.
- Encourage safe boating skills and outdoor ethics.
- While the focus of the Coalition is to promote low impact recreation, the intent of this MOU is not to impede motorized use, or advocate for excluding motorized use on any section of the water trail.

To learn more, get involved, or engage with the Coalition and their partner organizations, visit the following websites: Shiawassee River Water Trail Coalition: www.shiawasseewatertrail.org

Friends of the Shiawassee River: www.facebook.com/FOSRiver

Keepers of the Shiawassee: www.facebook.com/groups/111552015554058

Headwaters Trails, Inc: www.facebook.com/Headwaters-Trails-Inc-354066250140

Watch the video Come Paddle with Us: www.vimeo.com/74960931

Image Credit: Shiawassee River, Wikimedia
Exploring Pristine Scenery on Two Wheels

--- Mary McGuire Slevin, Assistant Director

Explore Northern Michigan on the 27th Annual Michigander Bicycle Tour from July 14-21. Featured towns include Boyne City, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Harbor Springs, Mackinac Island, Mackinaw City, Petoskey, and all points in between from Lake Huron to Lake Michigan.

This region is known for its scenery; sandy beaches, crystal clear lakes, winding rivers and expansive shorelines dotted with islands, shipwrecks and lighthouses. This is the region where writers across the years, from Ernest Hemingway to Jim Harrison, have found inspiration. Soaring 552 ft. above the Straits of Mackinac, cyclists will be in awe when they see the Mackinac Bridge, one of the world’s leading suspension bridges and now the fifth longest suspension bridge in the world. This engineering masterpiece connects Michigan’s two peninsulas and is the dividing line between Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. Cyclists will also have the option to ride on car-free Mackinac Island, considered “One of the Top Ten Islands in the World” by Conde Nast Traveler and National Geographic. Like most towns in the region, the downtown is quaint and filled with modern amenities. Yet, the Island harkens back to a simpler time with transportation by foot, bicycle and horse drawn carriages. Mackinac Island State Park covers 80% of the Island and has over 70 miles of trails, limestone formations from the Nipissing post-glacial period as well as a fort from the Revolutionary War. The oldest building in Michigan, Fort Mackinac holds 13 historical structures within its fortress walls featuring exhibits explaining everything from military training and battles to medical treatments and family life within the Fort. The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum has local works, including Native American art, maps and 19th-century photos. On the mainland, cyclists can tour Mill Creek and Colonial Michilimackinac, and many more wonderful attractions available in each town on this classic cycling vacation. Rich experiences, natural beauty, profound history and unforgettable delights awaits all who ride the Michigander Bicycle Tour this summer.

The Top of Michigan Trails Council manages a fantastic network of trails that cover 300-miles of Northern Michigan. Cyclists will experience the following trails: North Central State Trail, North Eastern State Trail, North Western State Trail, Little Traverse Wheelway, Burt Lake Trail, Charlevoix Township Bike Path and Petoskey City Trails, which when combined make up a part of the Great Lake to Lake Trails Route #3 and the Iron Belle Trail. Because of the expanse of this trail network, there are also many opportunities for cyclists who like a longer ride to easily take on more miles than the planned routes each day.

The tour offers three options: 2-Day Tour, 6-Day Tour or 8-day Tour (which combines both the 2-Day and 6-Day tours). Routes are a combination of trails and backroads with paved and crushed limestone surfaces on the mainland routes and paved and natural surfaces on Mackinac Island.

Registration is open from January 31 through June 30. The Michigander Bicycle Tour is a fundraiser for Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance.

More: www.michigander.bike | Image Credit: Steve Vorderman for Michigander Bicycle Tour (L) and Mackinac Design (R)
Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance is the statewide voice for non-motorized trail users, helping people build, connect and promote trails for a healthier and more prosperous Michigan.

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