Happy Forty-Fifth Birthday to Michigan’s 1st Rail-Trail: The Haywire Trail

Roger Storm, DNR Trailway Acquisition Specialist

Haywire - what an appropriate name for Michigan’s first rail-trail. According to Webster’s New World Dictionary, the origin of the word comes from ‘haywire outfit’, being a loggers’ term for a camp with poor equipment that had to be held together with haywire. The term became the nickname for the Manistique & Lake Superior Railroad (M&LS), which during emergencies was reportedly held together with pieces of discarded haywire by the railroad’s engineers.

Operating from 1909 to 1968, the M&LS ran a 38-mile long line that stretched north from Manistique to the Shingleton/Doty area. Built in the late 1890’s by a predecessor railroad to service the Central Upper Peninsula’s booming lumber and pulpwood industries, the line also served as the northern terminus to the Ann Arbor Railroads car ferry service out of Elberta. At 100 miles, it was one of the longest, if not the longest, regularly scheduled railroad car ferry service operated in the United States.

But all that came to an end when the railroad ceased operations in 1968. Then, two years later something new transformed the Haywire. Spurred by the growing popularity of snowmobiling, the Haywire was held together for a new life as a snowmobile trail. What a crazy idea. Converting an abandoned railroad corridor into a trail, and the Haywire became Michigan’s first. The conversion didn’t come easy though. It took a series of land transactions (purchase, gift, 3-way exchange), and the combined efforts of Schoolcraft and Alger Counties, the Hannah Mining Company, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to make the trail a reality.

More recently the Haywire Trail has quietly morphed again, as it transformed from being primarily just a seasonal snowmobile trail to becoming the Upper Peninsula’s first year-round multi-use trail. Now under year round management by the Schoolcraft County Motorized Trail Association (SCMTA), in partnership with the DNR, the trail is undergoing a systematic grade reconstruction.

While the grade reconstruction work, which is two-thirds complete, will continue for a couple more years, the SCMTA is setting sights on 2020 and a 50-year Haywire Trail birthday celebration. To help spruce up the trail, the group has plans for further upgrades that include historical signs, milepost markers, and the replacement of twelve bridges. To help seed the fundraising necessary to fulfill the 2020 vision, a limited edition Haywire Trail 50th Anniversary Celebration spike is under development.

For further information on the Haywire Trail and the limited edition 50th Anniversary Celebration Spike, contact Gerald Reese, President of SCMTA, at greese@centurylink.net.

Roger Storm, DNR Trailway Acquisition Specialist – Roger rode the Haywire Trail, sand and all, by mountain bike in 1993, and featured the trail in 40 Great Rail-Trails in Michigan, Illinois and Indiana.
The Iron Belle: Already a Jewel in Michigan’s Trail Crown

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Executive Director

When the Iron Belle Trail was first proposed by Governor Snyder in November, 2012, the idea was met with mixed reviews. Many were delighted at the prospect of a continuous north-south trail across the state before they knew its exact route. Of course, on the other hand, there will always be naysayers who will scoff at the very mention of a trail. (For one or another reason, they refuse to acknowledge the significant economic, health, community-building, transportation, and conservation benefits that overshadow their opposition!) But beyond those that are the hardened opponents, there were those that argued about this gigantic trail overshadowing other trail connection efforts. The idea even took MTGA aback as we were in the midst of working out details of closing the gaps on another cross-state trail, known as The Great Lake to Lake Trail, Route 1 from South Haven to Port Huron.

Having been involved with this trail now for over 2 1/2 years, I have come to realize that this trail ushered in from the reasons why:

- It has brought the tough hurdles that delay trail projects to the forefront to force some new negotiation and decisionmaking. Such issues as utility right of way, rail with trail, active rail crossings, highway bridge accommodation, etc. have risen right to the top for consideration at a time when many people at influential levels want to make this trail happen.

- It has reawakened the nonmotorized planning efforts in communities who may have been active at one point or another in planning connections, but found the going tough and stalled, or perhaps halted when a particularly supportive elected official departed. Plans are coming off the shelf when more eyes are upon them, and the potential for grants is warming up.

- The trail is catching the attention of corporations and other private fundraising sources that have never given dollars for trails. The potential for visibility along such a significant trail is huge and is not going unnoticed. Let’s hope this is a trend that sticks far into the future, even after the Iron Belle Trail is finished!

- Nonmotorized trail partners are united in this effort like never before and realizing that there is more that can be done together than apart. The North Country National Scenic Trail partners have been quietly going about their business for over 30 years, segment by segment. It was mostly just the avid long-distance hikers that were aware. However the new statewide marketing effort for the Iron Belle Trail has illuminated the effort of establishing this trail, attracting new users, advocates, and volunteers to the scene. How many bicyclists would like to try some hiking for a change and vice versa? We are betting there will be many new trail users and synergy from this cross-marketing effort. There is also trail know-how on routing, signage, maintenance and other topics that can be regularly shared between all the groups. Just being aware of each other’s existence on this significant trail artery invites discussion and potential collaboration.

- The trail has brought state departments together with a united focus. The state departments have invigorated the regional planning agencies’ attention on their nonmotorized transportation planning initiatives as well. The inter-agency collaboration was beginning to happen, but this project has injected additional power to their efforts.

- Communities in the gaps who previously had no trails are now in the process of planning their segment of the Iron Belle Trail. The benefits of nonmotorized trails will be extended to even more of Michigan’s populace, which is a very good thing!

- Having a primary trail artery across the entire state ripples the imagination of communities on both sides of the corridor to endeavor how they may connect into it, again enabling more nonmotorized facilities for both Michigan residents and visitors to our state.

So, while the Iron Belle Trail has raised skeptic’s eyebrows, it has also kindled inspiration and collaboration across many trail groups and layers of government, and will, in our estimation, do more to advance Michigan’s reputation as the #1 Trail State than any other trail project has. And as we continue down that path to make it happen, happy trails to us!
Michigan Trails Legislative Day United All Trail Interests

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Executive Director

On April 28, 2015, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance hosted a Michigan Trails Legislative Day at the State Capitol. As home to one of the largest interconnected trail systems in the country, the “All Trails Day” gave trail advocates the opportunity to unite and network with the entire Michigan trails community, learn the latest in trail policy issues and developments and share good news and needs of Michigan trails with legislators and staff. The event brought 118 trail advocates representing snowmobilers, ORV riders, hikers, bicyclists, equestrians, railtrail and water trail enthusiasts who visited with 80+ state legislators. This event marked the first time that the entire trails community came together to accomplish common goals and work through trail issues.

One of the priority requests made to legislators was to protect the Natural Resources Trust Fund for the purposes it was intended – conservation and recreation. Several bills have been introduced this year that would divert these funds to other purposes. Legislators were also asked to assist in developing all the trail systems to their maximum potential and to only allow co-use after a thorough community engagement and input process. Nancy Krupiarz, executive director of Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance indicated the third request was for expanded trails promotion, “We are working together to create an easy way for more trail users to enjoy Michigan’s 12,000 miles of trails to enhance the economic benefit that trails bring to communities all across Michigan. We know we have the mileage that makes us #1, but it is critical that trails promotion takes center stage. Funding to develop the overall trails data portal and a prominent spot on the Travel Michigan website are needed if we want the world to know about them.” Last but not least, attendees asked the Legislature to consider what they might be able to do to help implement the 73 goals identified in the State Trails Implementation Plan (http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10365_16839---,00.html) which was approved last fall.

Event participants also delivered fact sheets on the economic and health benefits that trails bring to communities across the state. Trails are an economic engine across the United States, bringing in $730 billion to the US economy from over 160 million Americans who participate in outdoor recreation. In fact, leisure literacy is increasing and it has been shown that real estate close to greenways sell for 10% more. In 2014, the Michigan Department of Transportation found that the annual economic impact of bicycling was $668 million. A study of the Pere Marquette Trail in 2000 also found that 8 out of 10 trail users visited a business along the trail, increasing the sales revenue by 25 to 30% of the trail’s first six months of existence.

In a 2000 Michigan State University survey, 62% of trail users used the Pere Marquette Trail for exercise and 73% of users said they had improvements in their health due to the trail. According to the Task Force on Community Preventive Services, improving access to physical activity can result in a 25% increase in the number of people who exercise at least 3 times a week.

Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance would like to thank everyone in attendance and the sponsors who supported the event. Thank you to the North Country Trail Association, Michigan Fitness Foundation, West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition, Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway, The Greenway Collaborative, Inc., PEA, Inc., Mannik Smith Group and the Rowe Professional Services Company. Thank you also to the Legislative Day planning committee who helped to make this day a success: Mary Bohling, Brindley Byrd, Andrea Ketchmark, Jean Ligon, Jack Minore, Lewis Shuler, Toni Thompson and Anita Twardesky. The entire Michigan trails community appreciates your help, support and guidance.
Detroit to Top 200 Miles of Trails and Bike Routes

Todd Scott, Detroit Greenways Coalition

Our work to build more trails and bike routes in the City of Detroit continues to accelerate faster than anyone might have imagined. By the end of this year, we should have over 200 miles of off-road trails, bike lanes and marked routes.

The most prominent addition is the $20 million Link Detroit project. It includes an extension of the popular Dequindre Cut trail from Gratiot to Mack. Bike lanes continue at Mack all the way to the city of Hamtramck. There’s also an extension connecting the Cut to Eastern Market and the Midtown Loop.

Another major addition are the bike lanes between New Center and the Detroit River which are mostly on Cass Avenue. While Cass is already a super popular bike route, we expect its use to grow with the new bike lanes, three public bike repair stations, and two bike counter kiosks – the first in Michigan.

Speaking of firsts, a section of East Jefferson will get protected bike lanes late this year. These will be the first in Southeast Michigan. Though it is only a short section of road, we are working with our partners and the city to extend this design another three miles by next year. When completed, this will become one of the longest protected bike lane routes in the U.S.

Detroit will also get more bike lanes through the city’s Complete Streets efforts thanks to $2 million in local road safety grants.

There are also a couple major updates on the Iron Belle Trail from Belle Isle to Wisconsin. The Conner Creek Greenway on Detroit’s eastside will get bike lanes on Van Dyke starting from E. Outer Drive, crossing Eight Mile and heading north to Stephens in the City of Warren. Further south, the DNR has secured funding to purchase a mile long abandoned rail corridor from the RiverWalk to the Gleaners Community Food Bank.

On the subject of rail lines, Detroit has the grant funding to acquire 8.3 miles of abandoned Conrail property. This rail corridor is the last remaining piece of the 26-mile Inner Circle Greenway. We’re working with the City of Detroit and other partners on a $20+ million federal TIGER grant that would fund the construction of the Inner Circle. We should know by the end of this year whether our grant is successful.

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Meet MTGA’s New Intern

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Executive Director

Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance welcomes Franziska Pugh as our new student intern. Franziska is a senior at Michigan State University and is majoring in Communication and specializing in Public Relations while dually pursuing her master's degree in Communication with a focus on social influence and persuasion. She is originally from Germany and enjoys traveling, horseback riding and taking her three dogs on walks in the summer. She will be assisting MTGA with the promotion and execution of events, managing social media and assisting with various other tasks around the office. She is honored to have the opportunity to support MTGA with their efforts to promote a healthier Michigan through a connected statewide trail system.

Trail Towns Tour “Triple T”

Franziska Pugh, MTGA Intern

Jump on your bike and pedal along with MTGA on Sunday, October 4 as we explore Southeast Michigan. The Trail Towns Tour will explore the beautiful 30-mile interconnected trail network of South Lyon, Island Lake Recreation Area, Kensington Metro Park, Milford Trail and Huron Valley Trail. The route is a combination of paved trails, dirt roads and optional undeveloped trails. This family-friendly ride serves as a fundraiser for Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance to continue creating an interconnected system of Michigan trails. Check-in at South Lyon Cycle between 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. There will be an after-ride party at the historic South Lyon Hotel with food and beverages available.

Early Registration:
Adults: $30
Ages 11-17: $15
Ages 10 & Under: FREE

After Sept. 27:
Adults: $35
Ages 11-17: $20
Ages 10 & Under: FREE

Register today: http://michigantrails.org/trail-towns-tour
Registration closes October 1, 2015.
North Country Trail Volunteer Honored with a Governor’s Fitness Award!

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Executive Director

Ron Sootsman has been a key volunteer for a critical trail segment across Calhoun County, and on April 23rd earned a Governor’s Fitness Award to recognize his efforts! The Governor’s Fitness Awards, hosted by the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness and Health and the Michigan Fitness Foundation, recognize inspiring stories of individuals or teams overcoming adversity in the name of physical fitness.

The Calhoun County Trail, to eventually stretch east-west across Calhoun County, is an important segment of 3 other concurrent trail identities:

- The 4,540 mile North Country National Scenic Trail, a hiking trail from New York to North Dakota
- The 250+ mile Great Lake to Lake Trail from South Haven to Port Huron, and
- The 1,259 mile hiking route of the Iron Belle Trail

Ron not only had a hand in developing the first six miles of this trail from Battle Creek to Historic Bridge Park, but has walked at least 2000 miles of trail routes in Calhoun County to determine the best route for the rest of the trail. With GPS in hand, Ron has systematically marked those routes, one by one, and transferred them online to Google Earth. When he’s not analyzing new routes, Ron can be found walking those trails in all sorts of weather with his spouse and leading work days on the North Country Trail. Ron is also a hardworking member of the trails committee, working alongside MTGA, meeting with communities on the pros and cons of each route. Through his passion for trails work, Ron is having an impact at the community, state and national level, giving Calhoun County, The Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, and the National Park Service a head start in defining major trail routes in South Central Michigan.

Ron Sootsman’s inspiring work gets people moving, and puts Calhoun County trails on the map!

(Continued from page 4)

Just across the river, the City of Windsor is also working on a 26-mile bike trail. For that reason and others, we continue to advocate for bicycle and pedestrian access on the new bridge between Detroit and Windsor.

On the policy front, we supported Detroit City Council when they updated nearly all their traffic ordinances to follow state guidelines. We’re still working on a few more improvements this year.

Lastly, Downtown Detroit will see some major bike upgrades. A nonmotorized plan is being completed with implementation forthcoming. This is timely as Detroit’s public bike share is set to launch in 2016 with 35 stations and 350 bikes.

We’re very thrilled to have a role in helping make this happen. Detroit is already a super bike-friendly place and it just keeps getting better.
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Lastly, Downtown Detroit will see some major bike upgrades. A nonmotorized plan is being completed with implementation scheduled for 2016. On the policy front, we supported Detroit City Council when they updated nearly all their traffic ordinances to follow state policy. Detroit's efforts are making Michigan more bike-friendly.

(Continued from page 4)

Ron Sootsman, to the right of “Roary” the Lion, and his family. Ron Sootsman has been a key volunteer for a critical trail project in Calhoun County. As the Alliance’s Coordinator of Trail Building, Ron is dedicated to making Michigan a better place to live, work, and play. He is an expert on Michigan trails and has a passion for the outdoors. Ron is a leader in the community and a role model for others.

Step Up to Be a Statewide Voice for Michigan’s Nonmotorized Trails!

Franziska Pugh, MTGA Intern

It is that time of year again when we ask for candidates for our board elections. If you have strong enthusiasm for nonmotorized trails and have knowledge about nonprofit organizational management, fundraising, trails expertise, partnership, strategic planning or other related topics, consider sharing your valuable expertise by running for a board member position!

Board members are expected to engage in at least 6 evening meetings a year and a couple special daytime events as well as participate on a committee of your choice with a few in-between meetings. Our board currently has a diverse representation of financial, legal and public relations professionals, trail building experts, former state policy makers as well as representation from regional and local nonmotorized trail groups. You can submit your nomination by emailing us a head and shoulders picture of you along with a completed board application downloaded from our website, www.michigantrails.org by July 15, 2015.