A Shining Example of Trail Progress in Genesee County

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Executive Director

The Flint River Trail has existed as a major spine through the City of Flint since the 1920s when landscape designer Warren Manning was retained to design the Flint park system. He saw the river as a scenic asset, and so land along the River was designated as park land. In the late ’70s, the trail surface was blacktopped, but it fell into disrepair by the early ’80s when the recession forced drastic budget cuts. Fortunately, in the early ’90s, Flint resident Stephanie Diana was determined to take the trail under her wing. She started the Friends of the Flint River Trail (FFRT), they cleaned up the disheveled path and started community bike rides along the trail. Through the help of stalwart volunteers, the clean up continues, as do the rides. The FFRT and Mott Community College also pushed the City of Flint for extensions to the trail.

Both encouraged the City to apply for a grant to extend the trail to Carpenter Rd., which would complete the connection between Genesee County Parks’ trail to Bluebell Beach on the west bank of the river and to Stepping Stone Falls on the east bank. Later with the help of Mott Community College, the friends assured that grants were written and awarded for extensions to Kearsley and Dayton Parks. The Applewood Trail was then added by Mott Community College, so that all three major colleges, MCC, U of M Flint, and Kettering were connected by the trail. The FFRT has been “the little engine that could” by bringing like-minded groups together to create a network of interconnected trails.

The Flint River Trail’s momentum and the popularity of trails overall ensured it wasn’t long before other communities wished to connect to it. Thus, the Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission began regional trails planning for the entire county in 2007, conducting county-wide public input sessions, stakeholder workshops, and prioritization workshops. The top ten trails were identified from all of the input received and prioritized for funding in the first rendition of the plan, and the plan received its first update in 2015.

With the help of two regional trail summits and plenty of technical assistance, Genesee County communities were equipped to jump into the regional trails plan and get their trails underway. Around the same time, a collaborative of nonprofit, private, and governmental organizations formed SAGE; Safe and Active Genesee for
Trails Get a Helping Hand from Crowd-Funding Programs

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Executive Director

Trail groups have to be increasingly creative and resourceful when fundraising for their trails. Over the course of a few years of a trail project, the cost estimated at the beginning of project development may increase by the time the trail is ready to be built due to unexpected obstacles. Where do you look to fill the gap? In the last few months, several trail projects have turned to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation’s Patronicity crowd-funding program and CrowdRise to fundraise.

Patronicity is the first and only state government private-public crowd-granting program, in which funds raised by the public can be matched with corporate dollars if a goal is met by a certain deadline. As part of Michigan Economic Development Corporation’s Public Spaces, Community Places Initiative, the program works in partnership with MSHDA and the Michigan Municipal League. Beginning Fall of 2015, Patronicity has enjoyed a 97 percent success rate in Michigan, granting out a range of a few thousand dollars to as much as $100,000 in match. The projects eligible are varied, depending on what projects the communities think will activate the most buy-in. The program is primarily funded through revenue from tribal gaming compacts in the state. There is an approval process to go through, but once the campaign is approved, the choices are simple; it can be set up so that if a goal is not reached, the community misses the match but gets to keep what they raise or vice versa, where it is an all or nothing campaign, and credit cards from donors are not charged unless the goal is met. The assessed fees on the donations are small; 5 percent for use of the platform and 3 percent to the credit card processing company.

The Top of Michigan Trails Council was recently delighted to find that their “Petoskey Ultimate Trailhead” project for the North Western State Trail received $38,000 which was earned from their campaign overmatch of $105,955, more than $67,000 over their goal! The Point West Art and Trail project received $13,000 towards their goal of connecting Dunnebacke and West Side Parks with a trail that will ultimately connect with the Lansing River Trail. The Village of Bloomdale along the Kal-Haven Trail has received $5,000 towards a nice new pavilion next to the railroad depot museum. And, last but not least, on April 1st, the Friends of the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail launched their $10,000 Patronicity campaign for building out a .9 mile segment of their riverfront trail extension towards the neighboring town of Caledonia. With an overall goal of $100,000, we are hopeful the campaign will generate tremendous publicity and engagement. For more details and to donate to this campaign, please visit: www.Patronicity.com/Thornapple.

CrowdRise is another online fund-raising tool that made a splash in the news recently when the band Pearl Jam raised over $300,000 for the Flint Water Crisis. The program can be used for just about any cause and it is easy to share through Facebook, Twitter, text and email. Just 3 percent of the donations go back to CrowdRise for administration, and there are no goals or deadline requirements to meet. Using this platform, MTGA has created the Blue Star Trail Soiree, a wine and hors d’oeuvres reception with live music to be held at Fenn Vineyards during Michigander Bicycle Tour’s last evening on Friday, July 22nd. Proceeds collected through CrowdRise will go towards a match needed for public grants to construct a segment of the trail between South Haven and Holland. “We are sharing a two-pronged opportunity for funding with our Michigander riders, MTGA members, of the Friends of the Blue Star Trail and anyone else who is excited about this major trail connection. We believe the CrowdRise platform together with the live event is a winning combination,” said Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Executive Director. To help the cause, join us by purchasing a ticket to the event, by simply donating to the cause or by setting up a team fundraiser at www.crowdrise.com/bluestartrailsoiree.
Meet Michigan’s Non-Motorized Advisory Workgroup

The Nonmotorized Advisory Workgroup (NAW) is a subcommittee created by Public Act 46 as a component of the Michigan Trails Advisory Council (MTAC). The purpose of the NAW is to advise the Council on policies and issues relating to all nonmotorized trails, including trails meant for hiking, running, mountain biking, kayaking or canoeing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, or multi-use. There are parallel committees under MTAC that represent snowmobile, ORV, and equestrian.

The workgroups meet quarterly and typical agendas involve problem solving on complex issues, partner updates, and special projects. The public is always invited to join, and the agenda and minutes of meetings are posted on the DNR website at www.michigan.gov/dnr under Michigan Trails Advisory Council.

The current NAW is:

- Nancy Krupiarz (Chair), Lansing, multi-use trails
- Mary Bohling, Southgate, water trails
- Brindley Byrd, Lansing, mountain bike trails
- Jim DuFresne, Clarkston, hiking trails
- Carol Fusher, Marquette, cross-country ski trails
- Andrea Ketchmark, Lowell, hiking trails
- John Morrison, Comstock Park, multi-use trails
- Kristin Wiltfang, Pontiac, all nonmotorized trails

All serve for 3 year terms and the group is guided with the help of DNR staff.
Today, portions of the Flint River Trail have been among the first in the state to receive Iron Belle Trail official signage. We Trail small grant funding and Grand Blanc was awarded just over $7,000 to continue planning their segments of the trail.

gearing up for a trails millage that could fund connectors to it. Transportation Master Plan that identified their preferred nonmotorized connections to destination spots. Atlas Township, County parks staff and Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission were ready on the spot with maps and plans to envision a complete north-south connection through the county when the vision for the Iron Belle Trail emerged. The County parks staff and Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission were ready on the spot with maps and plans for connections to the north across Genesee County parks land over to the Southern Links Trail and southward from the Grand Traverse Greenway down to Grand Blanc and Atlas Township. The City of Grand Blanc had completed a Bicycle Transportation Master Plan that identified their preferred nonmotorized connections to destination spots. Atlas Township, their neighbor to the east had just completed their Atlas Bike Path from the downtown to the elementary school and was gearing up for a trails millage that could fund connectors to it.

They had done their planning, equipped their communities, and made major trail advancements according to their plan long before the Iron Belle Trail was a glimmer in anyone’s eye. Recently, the County has received over $30,000 in Iron Belle Trail small grant funding and Grand Blanc was awarded just over $7,000 to continue planning their segments of the trail. Today, portions of the Flint River Trail have been among the first in the state to receive Iron Belle Trail official signage. We congratulate everyone involved for their hard work and admire the dedication of so many like-minded partners who have carefully made this vision come to life. We look forward to a complete cross-county bicycle trail in the years ahead.

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**Explore Grand Region Trails with Google Maps**

Norm Cox, President, The Greenway Collaborative

![GRAND REGION TRAILS](image)

Ready to try out some new trails on the west side of the state? Go to www.walkbike.info and click on Grand Rapids, to find digital maps for 18 regional trails totaling over 425 miles, all within an hour drive of Grand Rapids.

Each trail has its own page and map with the distances between towns, along with links to helpful resources. In addition to planning your route, you can also pull the maps up on your smart phone while you are out on the trail to locate where you are and learn more about the features along the trail.

If one of these 18 trails happens to be your trail, please feel free to embed the map on your own website. There is also a form to provide input if you find any errors or something that is missing. We would also love to have you submit a photo of the trail to add to the trail page.

If you live in or are planning on visiting Grand Rapids, we encourage you to use the website to find information on active living, walking routes, bike maps, events and projects. WalkBike.Info is your hyper-local, one-stop online resource for people who walk and bike. Expect to see more trail maps and more towns soon.

*Editor’s Note: The 25th Annual Michigander Bicycle Tour will be in the Grand Region this July. See the article on page 4 for more information.*
American Hiking Society’s National Trails Day

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Executive Director

Spring has sprung, the time when you visualize the trail events and activities you will be participating in as the weather continues to warm. American Hiking Society’s National Trails Day (NTD) on Saturday, June 4, 2016 is a nationally recognized trail awareness program that occurs annually, with the purpose of inspiring the public to discover, learn about, and celebrate trails while participating in outdoor activities, clinics, and trail stewardship projects. The day helps to introduce Americans to the breadth of trail activities, such as hiking, biking, paddling, horseback riding, bird watching, trail running and more. Started in 1993, this event has grown; by 2012, statistics show over 157,000 Americans participated in over 2,000 trail events across the country. Sometimes the event is used to meet fund-raising goals and to recruit new volunteers. It is this “friend-raising” that keeps the trails progressing forward with dollars and robust stewardship. NTD is not only a celebration of America’s magnificent trails, but it is also to promote respect for the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who give tirelessly to build, maintain, and improve our trails.

In Michigan, we see evidence of the extreme dedication of volunteers towards their chosen trails.

- The Friends of the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail funds the maintenance on their trail through private donations and trail memberships. The trail winds its way north through farmland and wooded State Game areas, taking the traveler through the picturesque towns of Greenville, Sidney, Stanton, McBride, and Edmore. At Edmore, the trail turns east and leads through Cedar Lake and Vestaburg, entering Gratiot County where the trail goes through Riverdale, Elwell and ends in downtown Alma. Along its length, it crosses several creeks and one river. Of particular interest, south of Stanton, is the 120-year-old historic bridge that spans Fish Creek. Mowing the 42 mile long trail is no easy task and neither is the labor required to keep the corridor free of trash, fallen trees and limbs. The Friends also repaint bollards and bridges, trim back brush, seal pavement cracks and potholes, and install and repair trail amenities, such as benches, flower boxes, and benches.

- TART Trails is a 60 mile regional network, consisting of eight trails and an in-town bike route. The TART administration is run by 5 staff and 13 board members, volunteers who donate thousands of hours annually to make the system tick. Administrative volunteers help put on events or distribute posters about the events around town. There is always something to do on the TART Trail system out in the field as well. TART Trails hosts work bees in the spring, summer, and fall, to pick up trash, removing dead trees, spreading wood chips, and trimming brush on the trails.

- The Northern Michigan Mountain Bike Association is the local chapter of the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) for Northwest Lower Michigan. Based in Traverse City and Kalkaska, volunteers maintain over 200 miles in all four seasons, year round. Trails are built and maintained to allow everyone to enjoy woodland trails; winter fat tire biking, spring trail running, summer hiking to fall single-track riding. To provide this, NM MBA’s volunteers spend hundreds of hours clearing and maintaining over 200 miles of single-track in the region. NM MBA is the maintenance team for some of the most amazing winter multi-sport trails on the planet. Traverse City’s VASA winter trail system is home to some of the finest groomed cross-country skiing and fat-biking in Northern Michigan. It takes a team of dedicated groomers to wake up at 4:00 in the morning nearly every day during the winter to keep all of these trails usable. NM MBA also helped engineer over 15 kilometers of pristine, expertly-groomed winter single tracks to ensure people can experience the outdoors on bicycles during the winter.
• Water trails are kept humming through the vigilance of volunteers. The Clinton River Watershed Council’s Adopt-A-Stream program empowers community members to protect local streams and rivers through water quality monitoring. Volunteers are assigned sites and teams, given equipment, data sheets and protocols, and sent out to gather information on stream side habitat and macro invertebrate populations.

• The North Country National Scenic Trail is a 4,600 mile hiking trail that stretches from New York to North Dakota, and Michigan is fortunate to contain 1,150 miles within its borders. The North Country National Trail Association (NCTA) is the friends group that organizes all that’s necessary to keep the trail maintained and improved along its route. The NCTA reports that in 2015 alone, 16,216 volunteer hours were invested on Michigan’s trail sections. Damage from a major windstorm in Northern Michigan necessitated the work of volunteers to restore 15 miles of trail that were obliterated. Since 325 miles of the trail still follow on the road, volunteers in those areas work to find the safest alternative while volunteers on the 813 miles of off-road trail carry out such tasks as repairing bridges and boardwalks, and keeping the trail markers for the route in good order.

National Trails Day events can take many forms. Family fun events promote enjoyment and awareness of the trail, and volunteer stewardship activities aim to further maintenance efforts or accomplish special projects while recruiting new volunteers. The American Hiking Society encourages everyone to plan an event on their favorite trail. Anyone can do it with the help of their easy online Event Host Quick Start Guide available on the NTD section at www.americanhiking.org.

Here are a few of the activities planned for National Trails Day in Michigan:
• Clinton River: Paddlepalooza – Paddle the river from Auburn Hills to Rochester Hills in a canoe or kayak race or at a more leisurely pace. Visit www.crwc.org for more details.
• Paint Creek Trail: Garlic Mustard Pull – Check the trail website at www.paintcreektrail.org.
• Clinton River Trail: Enjoy the trail and stop at the Friends’ National Trails Day booth for the latest updates and maps

Stay tuned to www.michigantrails.org for more listings and make your National Trails Day participation a tradition!

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Bikes, Brews & Beaches: Michigander 25

Mary McGuire-Slevin, Assistant Director, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance

The 25th Annual Michigander Bicycle Tour registration is open. This classic cycling vacation gives riders the opportunity to experience the beauty and majesty of Lake Michigan on West Michigan’s Gold Coast. With pristine white-sand beaches, towering sand dunes and glorious sunsets, and some pretty spectacular beach towns, the ride will be spectacular. This tour is also part of The Pure Michigan Fitness Series, which endorses local regional and state events consistent with the Governor’s Council mission to promote healthy choices, while offering a physical activity event to all participants, regardless of skill level or age.

The Michigander is a fun and casual bicycle tour that offers three options: the 2-Day Tour, 6-Day Tour, or both combined for an 8-Day Tour. Each tour features a mix of paved trails and road routes. The ride is fully supported with fresh breakfast and dinner buffets daily, camping in a mix of schools and woodsy campgrounds, yoga, stretching, campfire music, 25th Ride BBQ in Comstock Park, and add-on options such as a full moon kayaking trip on the Muskegon River, tickets to the West Michigan Whitecaps and the Blue Star Trail Soiree at Fenn Valley Vineyards.


Rates for The Michigander Bicycle Tour:

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