Cross-State Trails Define Michigan’s System

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Director

Individual trails are fun to enjoy when you’re already visiting an area. They add an extra dimension to your stay, perhaps for add-on activities, whether for workouts, or a casual stroll. The presence of a trail adds one more reason you may want to visit a particular place. Long-distance trails, on the other hand, excite the imagination. They may be the reason for your trip. They become a goal to conquer. The amenities and features of the towns along the way pop up through exploration of the trail, adding to the overall enjoyment and sense of accomplishment at completing such a journey.

Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance is pleased to be playing a role in making two long-distance trails happen in Michigan, the Showcase Trail: A Pure Michigan Experience and the Great Lake to Lake Trail Route 1.

The Showcase Trail is the approximately 1,000 mile cross-state conceptual route called for in the Governor’s message on Energy and the Environment about 18 months ago. The trail’s endpoints are Belle Isle State Park in Detroit and Ironwood on the Michigan-Wisconsin border. It will serve at least two distinct trail types: hiking and bicycling and is meant to cater to the needs of the long-distance trail user. The goal of providing a high-quality experience for each trail user type may mean that the trail splits into two different routes where it is possible to capture idyllic settings for either hiking or biking, and then reunites on multi-use trails that are built to handle both uses, a sort of “braided” concept. MTGA is one of several partners helping to formalize the route, along with Top of Michigan Trails Council and the Noquemanon Trails Network. MTGA’s segment is from Detroit to Bay City. MTGA’s Detroit Greenways Coordinator will formalize some of the routes that have emerged in the evolution of the Detroit Greenways network as well as define new ones in Wayne and Oakland counties. St. Clair, Macomb, Lapeer, Genesee, Tuscola, and Saginaw county routes will be explored by MTGA as well, not only for the trail’s primary route but secondary connections to areas of higher population. Current efforts include collecting all existing trail routes, funded trail proposals, conceptual trail plans, and land use maps which may offer up new ways to connect.

The final determination will rest on several criteria, including: the willingness of communities to commit to the ownership, development and operation of trails along this

(Continued on page 4)
Michigan Trails for ALL

Alissa Sturm, MTGA/MFF Intern

Tourism is exploding in Michigan, as the efforts of the Pure Michigan campaign and the state have pushed for tourism to be a greater source of economic growth and stimulation. However, the need to make trails, parks, recreation and tourist attractions accessible to people of all abilities is coming to the forefront. Cindy Burkhour, a certified recreation specialist from Michigan who consults around the country on inclusive recreation, believes there is opportunity for Michigan tourism and recreation to fill this market niche.

“IF we don’t make trails accessible, we are missing 20% of potential users if the environment is not suitable for people of all abilities. Not only have we missed the visit from people with disabilities, we have missed out on the opportunity from their family and friends as well,” said Burkhour. “Making trails universally inclusive is a vital component for the growth of tourism and the economy in Michigan.”

In America, 17-20% of the population represents persons with disabilities and roughly 1.9 million Michigan residents. The lack of mobility and accessibility of recreational activities such as trails, greenways, lakeshores and state parks could potentially translate into Michigan missing the opportunity to cater to 36-50% of the tourism market. Baby boomers command the most substantial buying power in the country and are projected to spend an increasing amount of time and money on recreation and hobbies post-retirement. With 10,000 baby boomers turning 65 every day for the next 19 years, there is a vast opportunity to establish Michigan as the leader of recreation accessibility and tourism opportunities.

How can trail communities help make trails accessible? Cindy stresses the importance of engaging community members and trail designers to make trails 100% inclusive. It’s essential for community members to pay special attention to the trail width, surface stability, clear rotating space, and develop viewable kiosks and information centers.

Educating trail designers is extremely important as well. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires all trails to be accessible to people with disabilities, but often trail designers do the bare minimum to save time and money. One of the most effective ways for communities to assess trail accessibility is to take a walk or hike with people of all abilities to ensure trails are inclusive. Evaluating the barriers of inclusion and making a plan are essential to go above and beyond ADA regulations to make trails barrier-free.

Developers of multi-use trails know that when using public grants for trail development, they must follow AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) standards. Examples of these regulations include: level surfaces of at least 10 feet wide with 2 feet of level shoulders on each side, cross slopes of no more than 2-3%, and running grades of no more than 5%. For the Curell family of Grand Rapids, trails such as the Hart-Montague Trail allow their entire family to enjoy bike riding. “For us, inclusive trails in Michigan have been enjoyable beyond belief. Our daughter loves participating in bike rides, and rail trails are so safe and free of dangers, such as heavy traffic. It means so much to us that trails are becoming more accessible in Michigan,” said Dan Curell.

John Waterman, Executive Director of Program to Educate All Cyclists knows that special programs and therapies take up a lot of free time, but don’t usually include siblings. “The ability for the family to ride on the bike path together gives everyone the chance to share the joys of riding.”

Rolling Hills, a Washtenaw County Park, goes the extra mile by offering trail loops varying in length for people to choose distances according to their ability. Accessible bathrooms at trailheads and a two mile paved pathway are vital components to making this park 100% inclusive. Many of Michigan’s water trails now offer assistive kayak launches to allow a safer, more comfortable way to enter the water for people of all abilities. Even equestrian trails can be made more accessible, such as the equestrian mounting platforms installed on the Southern Links Trail.

Embracing the concept of universal design for the trails and attractions of Michigan is the next step for the tourism industry in Michigan. Next time you’re on an outdoor vacation, look about you for the special features that allow complete and comfortable enjoyment of the trail, no matter your ability.
**MTGA on eBay!!!**

Great news for fellow Michigan Trails and Greenway Alliance (MTGA) supporters that are also fans of eBay. MTGA is now registered as a certified non-profit on eBay through their Giving Works program. Giving Works guarantees that 100% of every donation you make will reach MTGA! This is great news for those of you that buy and sell on eBay and would also like to give to MTGA. The program is really easy for you to use and very easy for MTGA to manage.

**How does it work?**

*As a buyer* on eBay you are able to select to buy items from sellers that are donating some or all of their proceeds to MTGA.

*As a seller* on eBay you are able to donate a percentage to MTGA by linking your account eBay Giving Works and selecting what percent of your sale to donate to MTGA. Watch this video on “www.youtube.com and search for “ebaygivingworks” or visit the MTGA Giving Works on eBay at “www.givingworks.ebay.com” and search for Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance under “search for charities.”

In the very near future MTGA will have our eBay store up and operational with many great items for you to purchase and continue to support MTGA. We will keep you informed on the progress of this project as we work through the set-up process.

If you have any questions about our new eBay programs please email us at info@michigantrails.org or give us a call at 517-485-6022.
route, the alignment of land parcels that offer up the safest and most direct trail alignment, the linkages of natural features that add to the “showcase” quality of this trail, and other criteria.

The Great Lake to Lake Trail, Route 1 is an approximately 250-mile cross-state trail from South Haven to Port Huron. The trail will pass through at least 78 local jurisdictions when it is all connected. It utilizes 15 existing multi-use trails meant for hiking and bicycling, and some equestrian use. The work involves closing seven different gaps, totaling approximately 100 miles. Currently, MTGA is in fundraising mode to make progress on this trail. Grant applications are in for a trail coordinator to help close the biggest gap in Calhoun County. The trail coordinator will explore a variety of alternative routes from Battle Creek to Marshall, Albion, Homer and Concord, gather input from stakeholders, tackle the perceived obstacles for each option, and narrow down to the best route through the county. Meanwhile, MTGA is developing a website which will promote the trail, its progress, recreational trip options, and events happening along the route. The Amtrak train line, which intersects the route at Battle Creek, recently started allowing “roll-on” service for bicycles, which will surely pique the interest of trail users to try the completed portions of the Great Lake to Lake Trail as will be described on the website.

The layout of other trails in the state lends itself to several other Great Lake to Lake Trail routes, all of which could intersect with the Showcase Trail. Other trail groups are working on making the connections for Routes 2 and 3, while Routes 4 and 5 have yet to be explored. The completion of this long distance trail grid will certainly put another feather in the cap of the nation’s #1 Trail State!

MTGA’s New Intern
Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance welcomes Alyssa Sturm who joins us as our new student intern. Alyssa is a junior at Michigan State University and is majoring in Advertising and specializing in Public Relations. She is a native of Michigan and grew up exploring the natural beauty and active lifestyle that Michigan has to offer. To maintain a healthy lifestyle and combat her addiction to chocolate, Alyssa enjoys running and hiking in the warm summer months. She will be assisting MTGA with various tasks, including social media management, promotion and operation of the Michigan bicycle tour and other duties throughout 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!

Great Lake to Lake Trail Campaign
Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance is raising dollars for the Great Lake to Lake Trail Route 1, a 250+ mile route from South Haven to Port Huron. Since last summer, we have raised almost $30,000. We are climbing towards our goal of $80,000 for this project phase. We’ll be using some funding towards some extra assistance in Calhoun County to finalize trail alignment from Historic Bridge Park in Emmet Township to the Village of Concord, the western end of the Falling Water Trail. We will develop a website with the purpose of showcasing the completed portions of the Great Lake to Lake Trail, so people can enjoy the trails and to get updates on the trail’s progress towards completion. Lastly, the funding will be used to design and manufacture Great Lake to Lake Trail signage for the communities who are ready for this designation along their trails. And as always, we will provide technical assistance and advocacy towards making the Great Lake to Lake Trail happen! Please continue to help us reach our goal by donating today!

Donation Amount (USD) $________

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Lansing MI 48909

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Yes, I would like a hat for my $100 donation for the Great Lake to Lake Trail
Are You Ready to Ride? Join Us For The 23rd Annual Michigander

Alyssa Sturm, MTGA/MFF Intern
Rated as one of the top bicycle tours in the country, the 2014 Michigander will loop riders through Reed City, Mesick, Frankfort, Leland, Traverse City and Cadillac. The ride, a summer tradition for hundreds, takes place on July 12-18 and will highlight Michigan’s “True North”.

Riders will cycle through the Pere Marquette State Rail Trail, the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail, the Betsie Valley Trail, the Leelanau Trail, and the TART Trail. Pedal along the towns and attractions of Northern Michigan, including Leland, USA Today’s second “Best Place to Watch a Sunset”, and Sleeping Bear Dunes, winner of Good Morning America’s “The Most Beautiful Place in America.” A stop on the Little Traverse Bay of Lake Michigan will allow riders to visit one of the leading cherry producers and some of the best wineries in America.

With trails for beginners and experienced riders, the whole family will enjoy riding along the sandy beaches and shoreline of Lake Michigan, Leland’s Fish Town and Cadillac’s state and national forests. Cyclists can cool off from the hot summer sun with a dip in the cool waters of the many lakes they will be passing by.

Grab your mountain, hybrid or road bike to escape to a 2, 6 or 7-day summer cycle that is 100% “Pure” Michigan. Are you ready to ride?

Have you participated in a past Michigander? We would love to hear from you! Tell us your story and you may be featured on our blog! Please email the MTGA intern at alyssa@michigantrails.org.

The Pure Michigan Trailways Package - Implementing the New State Trails Plan

Alyssa Sturm, MTGA/MFF Intern
Members of the Senate Outdoor Recreation and Tourism recently approved a 5-bill package designed to update the Michigan Trailways Act and to promote quality trail development and operation. This legislation unites and incorporates all trail types, including snowmobiling, ORV use, equestrian, hiking, bicycling, mountain biking, winter uses, such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, water activities, such as Kayaking and canoeing under one act. A Pure Michigan Trail designation will encourage best practices for development and maintenance according to standards to be established by the Department of Natural Resources. Also, communities will have the opportunity to become a “Pure Michigan Trail Town” if they undertake a planning process and implement trail enhancements, such as physical connections, wayfinding, entrepreneurial services, or other improvements that welcome trail users to town.

Another feature of the new legislation is that a new pilot program will establish a statewide database of trail maps for Pure Michigan Trails allowing trail users to download trail map applications on their smartphones. Having this user-friendly information so easily accessible will further promote trail use in Michigan. Finally, the bill will require adopt a trail programs to coordinate with other clean-up efforts on public land in close proximity to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the many volunteers who so generously give of their time and energy.

“It is hoped that these changes to the Michigan Trailways Act will elevate all of our state’s trail systems to the next level of trail development, upkeep, and promotion,” said Nancy Krupiarz, Executive Director, MTGA. This legislation propels the new Michigan Comprehensive Trails Plan forward into implementation.”
Up Next For MTGA . . .

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Director

Spring is “Trail Booth” time for Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance! We will be featuring the latest trail and greenway information as well as details about our Michigander “True North Tour” at these upcoming events:

Chrysler Earth Day: Chrysler hosts a gigantic Earth Day celebration on April 22nd for all of its employees and contractors. MTGA will set up shop from 10:00 to 2:00 p.m. at the Chrysler Headquarters in Auburn Hills.

Michigander Expo: The Michigander Bike Expo is quickly approaching! Join us to learn about all things Michigander, including what a typical day on the Michigander trails looks like, what to pack, bicycle maintenance, and tenting tricks and tips. Bring the whole family to test out the trails of Maybury State Park in Northville and to connect with new and familiar faces. The event is on May 18, 2014 and will run from 10 to 2 p.m.

Will also be attending our Michigander Warm-Up ride, the Gold Spike Trail Tour II, a ride on the Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail and the Musketawa Trail celebrating on Saturday, May 31st. For more details on this event visit www.musketawatrail.org.