A NEW BATCH OF TRAILS IS ON THE WAY!

Brooklyn Pluger, MTGA Intern

Summertime is upon us and when you live in Michigan, you know what that means: it’s construction season! Michigan’s trails are no exception! Trails in Michigan are constantly being extended and new trails are being built. Whether you’re a biker, runner, or simply enjoy walking Michigan’s trails, check out all of the updates below!

Upper Peninsula

West Portage Avenue Multi-Purpose Trail (Chippewa) - The city of Sault Ste. Marie is receiving a 10 foot wide asphalt nonmotorized pathway along the east side of West Portage Avenue from West Easterday Avenue to Peck Street and then to the Cloverland Power Canal/West Portage Bridge. In conjunction with this project, a 6 foot wide concrete sidewalk will be constructed, leading to downtown Sault Ste. Marie. When complete, this project will provide nonmotorized access from the west side of Sault Ste. Marie and Lake Superior State University to downtown.

Iron Ore Heritage Trail (Marquette) – 12 miles of new paved trail development from Negaunee to Marquette.

Northern Michigan

Petoskey to Alanson Trail (Emmet) – The first phase of the North West State Trail will commence with the construction of seven miles from Petoskey to Alanson (M-119 to Powers Road). After more than twenty years of planning, this rail trail winding between Round Lake and Crooked Lake will become a 10-foot wide, paved asphalt trail connecting Little Traverse Wheelway to Alanson.

Burt Lake Trail (Cheboygan) – The development of the first 5.1 miles of this trail will connect Maple Bay Campground to the University of Michigan Biological Research Station at Hogsback Road in Burt Lake Township. The Grand Opening for the trail will be held Saturday, August 10. Stay tuned to http://trailscouncil.org/ to find out more information as it becomes available.

Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail (Leelanau) – The trail will be paved another 4 miles from the Sleeping Bear Dunes Climb to Empire.

Leelanau Trail (Leelanau) – A short trail segment from the Depot to Dumas Road will be paved to complete development of the Leelanau Trail.

West

Jerusalem Bayou Bridge (Ottawa) – Off-road pedestrian approaches on each end of the Jerusalem Bayou Bridge will be constructed along W. Spring Lake Road over the

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Jerusalem Bayou in Spring Lake Township.

Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail (Ionia) – The first 8.4 miles of the Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail-Trail (FMGRVRT) will be developed from Adams Court on the west side of Ionia through the Ionia State Recreation Area to Parsonage Road in Saranae. The remaining 2.3 miles to Prairie Creek on the east side of Ionia, including a new nonmotorized bridge over Dexter Street (M-66) will be completed in Phase 2 in the future. This trail is a portion of the Fred Meijer Midwest Regional Trail Network for 125 miles, spanning six counties.

Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail (Kent) – An extension of this Musketawa-White Pine connection was completed the week of June 11. The extension consists of a three-quarter mile paved trail spanning from Peach Ridge Avenue to Meijer Headquarters. There is one more phase to be completed in the future, the segment which will head towards North Park in Grand Rapids.

Mid Michigan

Lansing River Trail (Ingham) – A 4/10 of a mile extension of the Lansing River Trail from Frances Park to the Waverly and Moores River Drive intersection is expected to begin construction this fall.

East Michigan

Flint River Trail Extension (Genesee) – The Genesee County Road Commission will construct a 10’ pathway on Seymour Road from Allen Drive to Montrose Township Barber Memorial Park. In addition, a 6’ sidewalk on the north and south side of State Street (M-57) from Seymour Road to east of Nanita Drive will help to complete the linkage from downtown Montrose with the school complex and the park.

Irish Road Pathway (Genesee) - A 10’ nonmotorized path on Irish Road from Court Street to Grand Trunk Western Railroad will be constructed in Genesee County. The path will connect several neighborhoods with commercial developments and recreational facilities. The project is slated to be combined with an MDOT bridge project.

Thomas Township Non-Motorized Trail (Saginaw) – The township will have a new 2.2 mile 10’ nonmotorized path from the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail to Shields Drive in Saginaw County. It will create a direct connection for the residents of Thomas Township to schools, libraries, and shopping centers while serving as a link between the north and south areas of the township with a safe crossing at M-46.

Kochville Township Path (Saginaw) – An extension to the Kochville Township path will be built along portions of Consumer’s Energy ROW from Elmer Lange Park to McCarty Road in Saginaw County.

Southeast Michigan

Washtenaw Border-to-Border Trail (Washtenaw) - A new 3 mile segment of this 35 mile trail from Livingston County to Wayne County along the Huron River will start on the west side of Mill Creek and head north and then east into Hudson Mills Metropark.

Lakelands Trail (Livingston) – The existing trailway will add another 6.2 miles from where it has already been improved in Hamburg Twp. to the border of Unadilla Twp., along with trailhead parking at D-19, Kelly Rd. and at Cedar Lake Rd. near the Pinekney State Recreation Area. A turf trail will also be developed next to the paved trail to best accommodate horseback riders and to link with the equestrian turf trail in Hamburg Twp.

Huroc Park to Oakwoods Metro Park Path (Wayne) - A non-motorized path from Huroc Park in Flat Rock to the Oakwoods Metropark will be the final link in the Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative’s 24-mile East-West Connector, connecting Willow/Oakwood Metropark all of the way to Lake Erie Metropark.

I-275 Metro Trail (Wayne) – Another 6-mile segment of the I-275 Metro Trail will be rehabbed with a newly paved surface from I-94 to the entrance to Willow/Oakwoods Metro Parks.

Port Huron Bridge to Bay Trail (St. Clair) – Another segment of the Bridge to Bay Trail in Port Huron will be constructed with 4 miles along an abandoned below-grade railroad corridor from 10th Street to a point just east of the Military Street bridge.

Southwest Michigan

Calhoun County Trail (Calhoun) – The first 5 miles of the Calhoun County Trail from Emmet St. to Historic Bridge Park is expected to begin construction this fall.

Kalamazoo River Valley Trail (Kalamazoo) – A connecting spur between Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo Community College, downtown Kalamazoo and the main Kalamazoo River Valley Trail will begin construction this fall.
Christopher Hillier, the first person to hike the unofficial “Governor’s Trail” from Belle Isle to Wisconsin is now 54 days and more than 75% of the way into his journey. MTGA had a chance to interview him from his rest stop at Marquette, where he had a lot to say about his experiences along the way; the surprising, the beautiful, the annoying, the good and the bad.

First, the surprises: The 45 year old had no idea that Michigan offers up the kind of heart-stopping dramatic scenery that rivals California, Colorado or New Hampshire, but he found that the 43 miles of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore along the North Country Trail is just beautiful. Another surprise was the sheer quantity and veracity of the bug population found in the Upper Peninsula. Perhaps it has been the wettest conditions this year, but there was not one inch of the woods in which Chris did not get his mosquito netting and heavy duty bug spray. “Even though they couldn’t bite, there have been days that the constant buzzing was about to drive me crazy,” says Chris. “If I had to do it over again, I would definitely do this hike in the fall, when the bugs are less active and the fall colors would be magnificent.”

Another great surprise has been the number of “Trail Angels”, as he calls them: the people who out of the goodness of their heart do random acts of kindness to help you along your way. He notes, “Sometimes they just offer help with directions or a piece of fresh fruit. Sometimes they bring you into their home, feed you, let you do laundry, and sleep in a warm, dry bed. They do these things just to be kind. Kindness for the sake of kindness.”

Chris believes that long-distance hiking brings out the best of nature and the best of mankind. His favorite nature experience along the route was his transition from the woods to the shoreline of Lake Superior. After hiking in the woods, with the bugs, for about a week straight, he crossed into a burned out forest near the Two Hearted River, which had been engulfed in flames only last summer. “It was a dramatic yet strangely beautiful sight to note that the forest was already making a comeback,” he said. From there he emerged onto the shore of Lake Superior, feeling the fresh cool breeze, the water, and the sun on his face. It was such a great feeling to set up his tent and remain on the shoreline, basking in the lake’s glow for the remainder of the day. Another has been the abundance of wildlife encountered on a daily basis. Bald eagles, fox, porcupine, deer, raccoons, and luckily, so far no bear, have all been an enjoyable (and sometimes surprising) part of the experience.

Of the trail itself, Chris noted that “the rail-trails have been the sweet spots of the hike.” The surfaces are easy to navigate and he has found them to be well-signed and maintained. He also emphasized that after days of solitude on the single-use hiking trail, he found it a welcome change of pace to break out onto the North Central Trail and be in the company of other walkers and bicyclists. He went on to say that he does not foresee the multi-use portions of this trail causing any conflict for thru-hikers, although there may be some who prefer single-use only. “We all just need to learn to get along,” Chris says, “because this cross-state trail will be very important for getting people all across the state to get out and be physically active.” He also feels it will be a big tourism draw, especially as the towns along the route embrace their “trail town” identity by catering to trail users’ needs.

Even though the trail will need a “ton of work to bring it to fruition,” Chris indicated the help he has received from the North Country Trail Association in the Upper Peninsula shows there are eager, organized and very capable volunteers that will lend a hand every step of the way, and that’s another plus for this trail initiative. “I’ve been greeted by every NCTA chapter as I hike through, and it feels great to meet like-minded people with whom to share my stories.”

While Chris’ hike will end in Ironwood at the Wisconsin border by mid-July, the work of putting the Governor’s Trail together has just begun. The adventures recounted by Chris in our interview and on his blog page, have given us a sneak peek at the work ahead and a vision for what this trail will become.
Little did we know when we finished The Great Lake to Lake Trail poster plan in 2010 how much it would do to spur momentum on the cross-state trail from South Haven to Port Huron. Of course, we also held numerous meetings with stakeholders all along the route and came up with a consensus on a trail name, logo, signage design and a preliminary route in the 7 gaps. However, it has been that poster, wrapping all of the above together, which has opened eyes and inspired the most enthusiasm for the completion of the trail.

A recent appeal sent out to our members and donors detail the progress since the release of the plan: twenty-one miles of trail completed, twelve more almost ready for construction, another trail in acquisition, initial trail clearing done in some previously obstructed areas, and much more in the works. (To donate or view trail progress details see www.michigantrails.org). The grand vision has made funders, key stakeholders, and the general public aware and focused on the goal.

Meanwhile, the light at the end of the tunnel is peeking through for what was perceived as one of the most challenging areas to traverse, the US-23 area in Green Oak Township. A recent meeting at Green Oak brought to light plans determined by engineers and elected officials from Hamburg and Green Oak Townships that incorporate trail connections from the existing Lakelands Trail through private and public property easements and in the road right of way of upcoming road projects. These plans will get the trail across US 23 and up to Island Lake Recreation Area. At the same time, discussions are happening with Washtenaw County on how to connect the Border to Border Trail to the GLTL Trail and how Northfield Township, the City of South Lyon (Huron Valley Trail), and the City of Brighton can also link in to the main spine. What started out to be a real conundrum could actually turn out to be a major trail hub for Great Lake to Lake Trail in all directions!

The next step MTGA will take on the Great Lake to Lake Trail project are to estimate the cost of trail development along the entire route, an essential component to lining up public and private funding for trail completion. Steps following that will be to further implement and launch the trail website, develop signage, and provide further technical assistance in closing the gaps. Donations are needed from the public to match a DALMAC grant waiting in the wings for us to do this work.

Meanwhile, one community group is anxiously awaiting trail completion by taking “virtual” trips along it! I had the pleasure of recently attending a celebration at Bronson Hospital of Battle Creek where the cardiac rehabilitation unit wrapped up a 12 week challenge program. Eighty of their patients and staff “traveled” the Great Lake to Lake Trail, logging 2 miles for every 10 minutes of exercise. A painted replica of the trail, stretching across their gym’s mirrored wall tracked their progress with bicycle markers each time they walked, stair-stepped, stationery-biked, etc. Twenty one patients and five staff were proudly wearing their Great Lake to Lake Trail hats at the celebration in honor of their accomplishment. It just goes to show what a grand vision can do in the hearts and minds of the right people. Congratulations to all for your hard work and determination to keep the Great Lake to Lake Trail alive and moving forward.
Several new records were set on Wednesday, May 29th for the Lucinda Means Bicycle Advocacy Day that made it our best effort to date. First of all, a new organization, Programs to Educate All Cyclists, was added to the host committee, which already included the League of Michigan Bicyclists, Michigan Mountain Biking Association, and Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance. PEAC worked hard to bring new participants to the event and helped with logistics. When all was said and done, the most number of participants, 103, met with 95 legislators out of 148 and dropped off literature to the rest.

A new added feature this year, the Virtual Lobby Day, added 161 more contacts to legislators’ offices!

The issues covered in our discussions with legislators this year were: 1) to support and/or co-sponsor the Vulnerable Roadway User legislation (House Bills 4792 and 4799) to enhance penalties for drivers that kill or injure a pedestrian or cyclist while committing a moving violation; 2) to support a modification in the Michigan Motor Vehicle Code by adding a gesture of right arm extended straight to the right as a signal for a bicyclist’s right turn; 3) to support legislation in the making to enact a safe passing distance standard between motorists and bicyclists on Michigan roadways; 4) to support House Bill 4265 to allow cyclists to safely and legally proceed through malfunctioning traffic lights; 5) to support Senate Bill 111 (and now an identical House Bill 4812) to create a Michigan Trails and Greenways license plate; and 5) to oppose any and all legislation (currently House Bills 4106 and 4578, Senate Bills 214 and 229, and Senate Joint Resolution Q) that would raid the Natural Resources Trust Fund for new project categories unrelated to its original intended purpose.

The “ask” for Virtual Lobby Day was for legislators to co-sponsor the Vulnerable Roadway User bill, and as a result of our collective legislative visits and the virtual contact, there are now 15 cosponsors of the bill! The introduction of House Bill 4812, the companion to Senate Bill 111, creating a new Michigan Trails and Greenways license plate, can also be traced back to our advocacy efforts on that day as well. Special thank you to Representative Anthony Forlini, a big trail supporter!

The day was not all work and no play, however. In addition to the unique opportunity to ride escorted down Michigan Avenue to the foot of the State Capitol grounds, there was a post-event ride through Lansing neighborhoods to view recent bicycle infrastructure improvements and also discuss some of the trouble spots impeding bicycle mobility.

There are not enough words to thank all those that gave of their time and energy in helping to make Michigan a more bicycle-friendly state by weighing in on these important issues. Your efforts have surely not gone unheeded! Planning has already begun for next year. Hope to see you there!

MTGA’s New Intern
Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance welcomes Brooklyn Pluger who joins us as our new student intern. Brooklyn is a junior at Michigan State University and is earning a dual major in Media and Information and English. She will be assisting on an assortment of MTGA tasks including social media management, promotion and operation of the Michigander bicycle tour, managing the silent auction, along with a variety of other duties. Brooklyn is from Grand Rapids and understands the benefits of living an active and healthy lifestyle: she swam and played water polo in high school and now enjoys running to stay fit. She is honored to have a supporting role in helping communities be healthier and happier because of Michigan trails.
An Invitation To Serve

Nancy Krupiarz, MTGA Director

This is the time of year when we ask for interested candidates for the Board to step forward. If you are an impassioned trail advocate, enthused about our mission of developing an interconnected system across our state, and feel you have special knowledge about nonprofits, fundraising, partnerships, strategy development or all of the above, we invite you to consider serving on our Board of Directors.

We currently have an 18 member board, who hail from most geographic areas of the state. There is representation from local and regional trail groups, former state officials, trail building professionals, financial and communications professionals, avid trail enthusiasts, among other professionals.

To submit your nomination, download a candidate application from the MTGA website, fill it out, and submit it with a headshot to our office electronically or by mail by Friday, August 9, 2013. We will review your application as it relates to our needs and determine the candidates for the ballot. Our bylaws allow for a maximum of 21 board members. One-third of the group is up for re-election at the end of their term on any given year. Board members serve for 3 year terms, attend at least 6 board meetings per year and usually are involved in at least one committee that meets in between meetings.

We Are Getting a New Face!

We are very excited that MTGA will launch a new website by late this summer! The new site will provide regional trail updates, more trail event listings, beautiful trail photos, and overall a much more comprehensive look at our organization’s work and Michigan’s trails.

Until then, please continue to use our current website at www.michigantrails.org for trail news and any membership renewals, online donations, and merchandise purchases. And don’t forget to check our Facebook updates and twitter too!!