Dear Friends,

Michigan has been hailed as the nation’s leading trail state for several years now, but something has been missing. We promote our trail system for its vastness, its ability to connect communities, its historical and cultural legacies and its ability to highlight and conserve our natural resources. But we have been missing the boat—literally!

Finally, thanks to a partnership between the MDNR and Michigan Trails, Michigan is making real progress towards incorporating an inland water trails program into its trail management program. Led by a very successful coastal water trail program, the inland water trails effort will likely result in several official state designations later this fall.

This has been a slowly maturing effort with legislation enacted almost 25 years ago that included a statutory preference for a water trails program that "should be a part of our state trails program". Subsequent amendments to the Michigan Trailways Act continued to reference the importance of water trails and specifically gave authority to the DNR to designate Pure Michigan Water Trails. Last year, amendments to the DNR budget were drafted and presented by Michigan Trails to the Senate Appropriations Committee to create a position of a water trails coordinator and then to require the DNR to develop a plan to implement a water trails program. These efforts led directly to conversations that created a focus group led by the DNR to begin to put together criteria for designation.

Mike Morrison of the DNR has now been designated as the Department lead on developing the application process which will likely incorporate the Waterways Commission and a specific advisory group on the non-motorized workgroup of the Michigan Trailways Advisory Council. Morrison and his team at the DNR are working with other DNR divisions to assemble a state designation program.

The real genesis of this program and the ability to get a designation process up and running is due mainly to the efforts of local paddle groups working with local units of government, along with organizations like the Huron River Watershed Council; the Land and

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The popularity of linear trails may seem like a modern development. Congress created the National Trails System in 1968, Michigan's first rail-trail was established in 1970, and the criteria for a state water-trail designation is just now being established. However, trails are much more deeply rooted into Michigan's past. Centuries before there were railroads or modern highways, Native Americans relied on a vast network of land and water trails for transportation, communication and commerce.

For most native people, waterways were a preferred method for long-distance travel in Michigan. This is due in part to the region's extensive coastline and river system, and it was also generally more efficient to travel by canoe than on foot. There were several inland routes where Native Americans could travel across the state. For example, from Lake Huron, they could paddle up-stream on the Au Sable River to its source, and after a short portage, descend the Manistee River to Lake Michigan. A great number of villages were located near waterways for these reasons.

Native Americans created an extensive system of land trails that complimented the natural water network. Typically simple footpaths wide enough for one person, they formed more direct routes to villages and resources, and were reliable when conditions for water travel were not optimal. Thoughtfully placed through Michigan's dense forests and wetlands, Native American trails were the best routes to penetrate the interior. European explorers recognized this and created trading posts at primary land and water trail intersections. In fact, many of Michigan's modern roads follow these footpaths formed over centuries.

Native Americans would sometimes mark trails with "trail trees" (also known by other names). Purposefully bent as saplings, the trees retained these distinctive shapes as they grew and served as landmarks for many years. The tree pictured at left was removed during the construction of US-131 near Kalamazoo.

More than simple recreational corridors, trails are a connection to early aspects of human history in our state. So, the next time you enjoy a land or water trail, ponder the similar experience once shared by Michigan's first residents!
Michigan is renown for its amazing lakes and rivers and paddling offers a great way to experience these diverse waterways. The Chain of Lakes in Northwestern Michigan is no exception. Home to the turquoise waters of Torch Lake, Michigan’s second largest inland lake, the Chain provides a variety of flatwater paddling opportunities for beginner to advanced paddlers. The Chain of Lakes has plenty to explore - encompassing 14 lakes with over 60 square miles of open water and 200 miles of shoreline.

One issue for locals and visitors wanting to have an Up North paddling experience on the Chain of Lakes was the lack of knowledge of access sites and paddling routes. In 2014, a grant from the State of Michigan was received to do an inventory of the potential water trail access sites. With that base information collected, Paddle Antrim worked with over 15 access site owners in four different counties to gain approval and support to include over 80 access sites on the water trail. Having the routes and sites identified is only one piece. With assistance from the local Chambers, they worked with the local businesses as well as the local lake associations and other stakeholders on development of a water trail plan and signage standards, with planned sign installation over the next two years.

“We are excited to build a premier water trail and couldn’t do so without the support from the entire community,” said Deana Jerdee, Paddle Antrim Executive Director”. The Chain of Lakes Water Trail is due to the support from the access site owners, donors, chambers, businesses, stewardship groups, and local residents.”

Working with Michigan Trails, Paddle Antrim has been providing input to the state of Michigan which is developing a statewide water trail program. A statewide program will help support the development of quality water trails around the entire state as well as provide information to paddlers on the great opportunities available.

In addition to the water trail, Paddle Antrim offers events and classes to encourage paddlers to have fun and be safe. They are well known for the Paddle Antrim Festival, a non-competitive event held every September where people can do all or part of the Chain of Lakes Water Trail over two days. For more information on Paddle Antrim and the Chain of Lakes Water Trail go to www.paddleantrim.com.
In 2014, the Michigan Legislature passed legislation creating an official designation process for highlighting exceptional land and water trails and trail towns to help promote and publicize the “the best of the best” trail experiences in Michigan.

Subsequent to that authorization, the DNR has developed a program working in conjunction with Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Travel Michigan and the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance to implement key criteria that will be used in the designation process along with an application for communities to follow in requesting the Pure Michigan designation.

Michigan Trails Applauds Trail Award Winners

The Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance has begun an annual award program to recognize the exemplary leadership of trail advocates across the state that have helped Michigan become the number one trails state in the nation. In a ceremony at the Capitol Rotunda on September 27, Michigan Trails will honor a Legislator of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, Federal/State Agency Employee Trail Advocate of the Year, and Non-Profit/Local Agency Employee Trail Advocate of the Year.

The Alliance is pleased to announce Representative Holly Hughes and Senator Goeff Hansen will share the Michigan Trails Legislator of the Year award. The award celebrates a Michigan legislator who has either sponsored or cosponsored legislation advancing Michigan trails policy or has otherwise exhibited leadership in advancing trails policy. Rep. Hughes will be recognized for her work as Chair of the House Outdoor Recreation Committee, a vocal trail advocate for the Muskegon area, and as a main sponsor of the e-bike bills and bike safety package.

Senator Hansen, Chair of the Senate Outdoor Recreation Committee, will be honored for his sponsorship of the Pure Michigan Trails legislation as well as legislation updating the state’s railbanking program, providing for volunteer liability protection, and most-recently his work to affirm the role of trail councils and the value of trails as a public good in a community. The senator was also a key proponent of renaming the Hart Montague Trail in honor of William Field, who purchased the former railroad and donated it for trail use to the state of Michigan.

Michigan Trails has named the Volunteer of the Year Award after Mike Levine, philanthropist and tireless trail advocate. The award celebrates an uncompensated volunteer for their demonstrated exceptional commitment to either a local, regional or statewide trail. The Mike Levine Michigan Trails Volunteer of the Year will
In July I was thrilled to be a part of my first Michigander, the 27th for the annual bicycle tour. As usual, the tour attracted a diverse group of riders travelling from 25 different states and 2 other countries to participate.

This summer’s tour began in Cheboygan and travelled to Mackinaw City, Mackinac Island, Cheboygan, Onoway, Topinabee, Petoskey, Charlevoix, Harbor Springs and Cross Village. Riders enjoyed the coastlines along Lake Huron, Lake Michigan and Mullet Lake while travelling the Top of Michigan Trails.

While I am known as someone who loves to bike around town and ride trails with her family, I quickly saw my experiences paled in comparison to bicyclists who have been riding the Michigander for over two decades. I was deeply impressed with the athleticism of the riders and their commitment to being fit for life through bicycling.

I am truly inspired by the abilities of the riders whose average age was 57. I am happy to report that of our 550 riders their ages spanned from 6 months to 88 years of age! One couldn’t help but feel bicycling is a key to longevity and happiness, and the sights along the tour were equally as memorable.

Many riders took advantage of taking the ferry from Mackinaw City to Mackinac Island to bike the 8.3-mile shoreline path known as Lake Shore Boulevard. The eight-mile loop is Michigan’s only state highway that’s entirely free of automobiles. With views like Arch Rock and the Great Lakes along every inch of the highway riders were in awe of Michigan’s splendor.

Riders also enjoyed unique stops at Moran Iron Works’ Awakon Park, Oden Fish Hatchery, U of M Biological Research Station, Pond Hill Farm and Three Pines Studio. Swimming was a welcome respite as riders cooled off in Mullet Lake, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan and Douglas Lake while enjoying beautiful vistas at favorite SAG stops like Conkling Heritage Park, Topinabee Beach Park, Aloha State Park, West Park and Depot Beach Park. My favorite highlight of the tour was the ride up and down Michigan’s iconic M-119 Tunnel of Trees Scenic Heritage Route. The magical, scenic road was on the bucket list of many riders. I joined for a small portion with my family and couldn’t believe the athleticism required to do the ride nor the speeds at which I travelled downhill – riders with speedometers clocked 45 miles per hour!

It was an awesome tour full of sights and comradery I will never forget. I can’t wait for the 28th annual Michigander!
Michigan Trails Applauds Trail Award Winners

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be awarded to Dave Monstrey for his work on the Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails, or TART Trails. Monstrey is one of the founders of the Leelanau Trail, the first and only President of the Leelanau Trail Association, a TART Trails alumni board member, member of the Safety, Operation and Maintenance Committee, a donor and the Leelanau Trail Crew Ambassador. Monstrey has recorded over 1200 volunteer-hours with TART Trails.

Roger Storm, MDNR’s Trailway Acquisition Specialist, is the 2018 Mark Mandenberg State Agency Employee Trail Advocate of the Year awardee. Storm is a long-time trail advocate and the former Michigan Chapter of Rails to Trails Conservancy State Coordinator. He is currently administering the Department’s Trailway Acquisition Program.

“Michigan has come to be known as The Trails State because of the remarkable work that individuals like Roger Storm have done on trails across the state,” said Paul Yauk, State Trails Coordinator for MDNR’s Parks and Recreation Division. “When I speak to local community officials and leaders, one thing I always tell them is to find your trail champion – someone in your community who is going to take ownership of a trail project and see that it is a priority. Roger has been Michigan’s trail champion.”

The Michigan Trails Non-Profit/Local Agency Employee Trail Advocate of the Year is given to a current employee of a non-profit or local governmental agency who demonstrates an unusual and enduring commitment to advancing trails policy, trails development or trails advocacy. The 2018 recipient is Kenny Wawsczyk, Regional Trail Coordinator for the North Country Trail Association.

Wawsczyk joined the NCTA as the Regional Trail Coordinator for the state of Michigan in 2015 and has made a significant impact on the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT) throughout the state and within the Michigan trails community. As the NCTA Regional Trail Coordinator, Kenny coordinates the work of 12 NCTA Chapters and helps to design and implement projects across the 1,150 miles of NCT in Michigan. His contributions to the trail on a local and regional level have helped to raise the profile of the NCT and strengthen relationships with federal, state and local agency partners and land managers across the state.
Information Access Association; the Blueways of St. Clair; and the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission that have spurred development of locally-designated water trails. There are also key individuals like Emily Meyerson who have advocated for a state water trail program for years; in fact much of the foundational work that Morrison is looking at was done by Emily when she was a DNR employee. Michigan Trails wants to specifically highlight their efforts and thank them for leading the way.

We are all anxiously awaiting the first round of designations and look forward to continuing to partner in the efforts to add water more trails to Michigan's nation-leading trail system!

Sincerely,

Bob Wilson,
Executive Director

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Michigan Trails History

Michigan Trails is proud to work with the MDNR and Michigan History Center to promote historical interpretation along Michigan’s over 12,500 miles of state-designated trails and pathways. History telling helps people connect with trails and increases the likelihood they’ll share their trail experience with others. How much do you know about history of the trails in our state?

Here are a couple of quiz questions - we'll continue to test your knowledge in upcoming issues. Visit our Facebook page at https://facebook.com/michigantrails/ to discover the answer!

1) What was the first rail corridor to be converted to a trail in Michigan?
2) What U.S. highway was constructed along The Great Sauk Trail?
3) What National Scenic Trail passes through Michigan?
Join us for the Michigan Trails Annual Meeting at Hamburg Township Hall on October 14 at 12:00 p.m. Please use the enclosed ballot to vote for board members.

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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