The Michigan Legislative is currently debating a package of bills that will alter the landscape of how the state funds conservation projects, with a specific focus on trails. This package includes a constitutional amendment that will require voter approval in early August. The staff at Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance is actively engaged in working directly with the legislature to shape this package. In order to effectively engage in this debate, it is important for trail advocates to appreciate the history and the intent behind the formation and development of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund.

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) has its origin in statute and was passed by the legislature in 1976 to provide for an ongoing source of revenue to conserve and develop public lands. The idea behind the legislation arose as a direct result of negotiations between the oil and gas industry and the conservation community to allow for access to sub-surface oil and gas reserves in the Pigeon River Country Forest while at the same time using the royalties from those non-renewable resources to conserve another valued public resource--our lands. Due to a variety of unintended uses by the legislature to fund projects unrelated to the original purpose of the fund, it was eventually adopted into the Michigan Constitution in 1984 to ensure that expenditures would be used for projects that had an enduring conservation value for the citizens of the state. One of the most critical spending restrictions contained within the constitution is that not less than 25 percent of the total amounts made available for expenditure are to be expended for acquisition of land and not more than 25 percent are to be expended for development of public recreation facilities.

Over the years, the MNRTF has been funded through deposits of bonuses, rentals, and royalties collected by the state under provisions of leases. The constitution authorizes that the annual expenditures only consist of MNRTF interest and earnings, and 33 1/3 % of MNRTF revenue received by the state during the previous fiscal year, until the corpus of the MNRTF reached $500 million, a cap that was reached in 2011. From that point moving forward, spending was restricted to interest and earnings and the revenue was diverted into the Michigan State Parks Endowment Fund.

It is important to note that once the cap of $800,000,000 was reached for the Michigan State Parks Endowment Fund, the revenue that would normally flow into the MNRTF is free for appropriation for whatever purpose by the legislature.

Recently, SJR 0 and SB 763 have been introduced by Senator Tom Casperson to help ensure that both funds are to be used for the preservation of the state’s natural resources and the citizens’ rights to access those resources in a sustainable fashion. In addition, the proposal clearly earmarks new funding for both non-motorized and motorized trail work in Michigan.

To that end, there are several key strengths of this package. The first being the move to redirect the revenue that under current law would be subject to appropriation by the
The Top of Michigan Trails Council (TOMTC) has been busy this winter, focusing on our new mission acronym; we are AMPing up our trails! Here is the Readers Digest version of what we are up to:

A stands for ADVOCATE. We are on a mission to get some new trails built that will enhance our 300-mile network. One is the Burt Lake Trail, which will connect the North Western State Trail (at Brutus) with the North Central Trail (Topinabee). Thanks to a campaign by the Burt Lake Trail Committee, local match funds have been coming in, and the support for this connecting trail is amazing! TOMTC has also been busy advocating for a trail through Fisherman’s Island State Park (Charlevoix), which would comprise the northernmost ten miles of a trail connecting the TART ( Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation) Trail system (at Acme) with the Little Traverse Wheelway. We know that closing this 46-mile gap will be a huge boon to biking in Northern Michigan, so we are not going to let up until it happens! Funding is also being sought for phase three of the Boyne City to Charlevoix Trail. The total project will take five phases and will connect Boyne City to the Little Traverse Wheelway just outside of Charlevoix.

M stands for MAINTAIN. Our paved trails have been on the ground long enough and need some tender loving care. Last fall we began a project involving cutting the tree roots on both sides of 30 miles of trail. This “groundbreaking” effort will pay off by curtailing the damage these roots have done. Of course, we will try to flatten the hazardous bumps that have erupted. Our Safety and Maintenance Director, Bill Prall, is also planning to continue his efforts to improve sight lines at road intersections and improve signage on the trails that will make them safer.

P stands for PROMOTE. We have great trails in our area. We would like to have more folks using them.

- TOMTC promoted trail use this winter by working with a local bike shop and our nature conservancy to offer demo days for fat bikes and snowshoes.
- Smart Commute Emmet is another TOMTC project that encompasses the entire summer, in which folks are encouraged to walk, bike or carpool to school or work (and of course, our trails come into play).
- We are preparing for our second year of class field trips on the trail for fourth graders. Fifteen classes (over 325 kids) will enjoy an educational eight-mile ride on the North Western State Trail in May. These outings are preceded by skills testing in the schools, and each child is accommodated for the trip using tandems and tag-alongs. Our goal? To raise up a new generation of kids that realize the joy and freedom of getting outside, on a bike, on a trail.
- Memorial Day Weekend brings us year three of the Top of Michigan Festival of Races that includes a marathon race from Charlevoix to Harbor Springs, a half marathon, a 10K and two 5K races—all run through the Little Traverse Wheelway. Another skillful use of a great trail!

For more information on our AMPed up trails in the Northern Lower, visit www.trailscouncil.org.
Headwaters Economics has created a valuable tool for trail professionals to utilize, and a platform that we can use to learn about the great trail work being done across the nation. Headwaters Economics, the independent non-profit research firm based out of Bozeman Montana, specializes in community development and land use issues in the Western United States. For the past couple of years, the group has been working on compiling research studies from across the nation that focus on the benefits of recreational trails and have developed an extensive library of more than 130 studies that can be used by trails professionals, community leaders and trail advocates to understand and communicate the benefits of trails. The library of studies is searchable based on type of community benefit, trail use, region, and year of study. Each study is summarized so users can quickly find the type of research they are looking for, and direct links to each study are provided in the library.

As professionals in the trails world we understand the benefits that trails provide to our communities, but, often, we may have trouble communicating and demonstrating those benefits to our elected officials, community leaders, and the public. By searching the library by benefit or use type we are easily able to find the type of study we are looking for and apply it to our own specific needs. Headwaters Economics organizes each study based on seven different types of trail benefits:

- **Public Health** – Often cited, but difficult to measure, the public health impacts of trails are becoming increasingly more important to justify to elected officials and decision-makers. Studies include users’ level of physical activity, monetized gains in public health, and the averted costs of healthcare associated with a higher level of trail-related physical activity.

- **Trail Use Estimates** – Because use estimates are the basis for most benefit-based studies, it is important to stay ahead of the curve on counting and estimating trail use so you can confidently quantify other benefits on your trails.

- **Business Impacts** – Economic studies are important that measure the added revenue to local businesses, jobs, and other income attributable to a trail or recreational use. These studies may include the direct, indirect, and induced impact of the expenditures of trail users on the local economy, as well as the impact of trail construction or maintenance activities.

- **Consumer Surplus** – An economist’s term used to quantify in dollars the value trail users hold for the trails they use. Consumer surplus is the difference between a trail user’s willingness to pay and their actual trail-related expenditures, allowing us to hint at the intangible value that trails create in our communities.

- **Property Value** – This benefit gets talked about a lot, with landowners on both sides of the issue and questions about gentrification arising along urban trails. Headwaters includes studies that use two main methods to measure the impact of trails on adjacent property values.

- **User Attitude** – An attribute worth capturing in your next survey of trail users, studies in this category consider attitudes, spending, and use levels. They may be a great place to start when writing your own surveys for your trail.

- **Access** – In the parks, recreation, and trails profession, we see a growing amount of discussions around issues of equity and access to quality recreation opportunities for all residents in our communities. The library includes six studies that address how trails have an impact on income, health, and equity inequalities and how those factors influence trail use.

I encourage you to explore the library and apply these studies to your own work as you see fit. There’s no sense in re-inventing the wheel. As with all research endeavors, we need to keep research quality in mind when citing these studies, and understand how each study differs in population, sample size and methods. If you conduct a trail study, please submit it to the Trail Benefits Library at Headwaters Economics.

For more information, visit www.headwaterseconomics.org/trail or www.americantrails.org/resources/benefits/webinar-benefits-of-trails.html.
In the fall of 2016, representatives from Muskegon County approached Michigan’s Edge Mountain Biking Association (MEMBA) with an opportunity—a proposed trail on approximately 500 acres straddling Mosquito Creek, a feeder stream south of the Muskegon River. The Mosquito Creek Trail System project goal is to:

- Bolster physical activity opportunities
- Increase opportunities to connect to nature
- Empower youth and adults to develop lifelong healthy habits
- Improve community economic vitality
- Increase sense of place and community pride

This project was a perfect fit for MEMBA as our mission is to promote and endorse responsible trail use and design, trail etiquette, and provides International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) guided training to our members and volunteers.

A group hike of the property led to Michigan’s Edge (MEMBA) contacting professional trail builders Chad Irey and Dr. Jeremy Wimpey of Dirt Artisans and Applied Trails Research from Covington, Kentucky to confirm the feasibility of a much-desired mountain bike trail system. The property is roughly 500 acres and straddles Mosquito Creek and contains a power line which is managed by Consumers Energy.

The team from Dirt Artisans conducted field design work during late March last year. They flagged trail corridors and collected photos and GPS data to detail stream crossings and structures needed for trail construction and to estimate the cost for approximately 11-12 miles of trails.

A preliminary concept plan was provided to Dirt Artisans by MEMBA and outlined a mix of trail types:

- Green beginner trail at 3.35 miles or 31% of the system
- Blue intermediate trail at 6.11 miles or 56% of the system
- Black advanced trail at 1.49 miles or 14% of the system

Estimated total cost of the machine-built “flow-style” trail with bridge structures was nearly $250,000. Let the fundraising begin!

MEMBA applied for and was selected to be part of IMBA’s inaugural Dig-In program that is funding 500 miles of new trails. IMBA believes mountain biking changes lives and wants to change as many lives as possible. MEMBA wants the Mosquito Creek Trail System and its more than 10 miles of backcountry trails to offer experiences for all interest and skill levels of trail users; whether visitors are seeking a serene walk through the woods, a heart pounding two-hour mountain bike adventure, or a 10k trail run/snowshoe. As other donations trickle in, plans are being made to begin trail building in the summer of 2018.

This collaborative recreation improvement project seeks to showcase the region’s beautiful outdoor assets and to extend Muskegon County’s mission to expand as an outdoor brand for physically active pursuits. The Mosquito Creek Trails will offer year round outdoor recreation to increase opportunities for physical activity, connection to nature, adventure, economic vitality, and ultimately, a higher quality of life. For more information, visit www.ridememba.com.
Presented by Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance and the Michigan Fitness Foundation, the 27th Annual Michigander Bicycle Tour will take place in North Central Michigan with camp headquarters moving from Cheboygan to Petoskey to Harbor Springs and back. We will ride from shore to shore from one Great Lake to the next starting on the sunrise side of Lake Huron and heading west into the sunset side from July 14-21, 2018. The Michigander is a classic cycling vacation that combines beautiful trails, Great Lakes beaches, lighthouses, forests, rivers and streams amidst quaint Victorian Era towns, and historic sites in and around national historic landmarks in the Upper Midwest.

The tour offers three options; a 2-day, 6-day or 8-day tour (which combines both the 2-day and 6-day tours). Routes are mostly paved or crushed limestone, and on occasion jaunts on dirt roads. The 2-day Michigander is designed to be a casual, easy ride up to 25-30 miles each day. The 6-day tour moves upwards of 50-60 miles a day and moves from town to town every two days.

The Top of Michigan Trails Council manages a fantastic network of trails that cover nearly 300 miles of Northern Michigan. Cyclists will experience the following trails:

- North Central State Trail
- North Eastern State Trail
- North Western State Trail
- Little Traverse Wheelway
- Burt Lake Trail
- Charlevoix Township Bike Path
- Petoskey City Trails
- And backroads on select days of the 6-day and 8-day tour

All registrants will be provided with a printed Ride Book that has all of the printed routes along with things to see and do along the way. Nightly camping in schoolyards is included with registration, there is no additional fee but you must provide your own camping gear. We recommend tents that are easy to set up and tear down and a lightweight mallet/tent stake puller that will fit in one of your duffel bags (each rider is permitted two duffel bags or other easily packed and smushable pieces of luggage for the luggage trucks, each piece must be 40lbs or under, use one for clothing, one for camping).

For those that prefer to have someone else set up their camp, Michigan Cycling Charters is our official tour provider, they offer rental tents, as well as set up and tear down service for a reasonable fee. In addition to their tenting services, they also offer towels, chairs and memory foam sleeping pads for a fee. Riders are encouraged to book early.

Breakfast and dinner are also included with registration, as well as gourmet coffee each morning and SAGs (support and gear rest stops) every 15 miles with ice water, fresh fruit, KIND bars, and at select stops, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The Michigander Bicycle Tour is also a part of The Pure Michigan FITness Series. This series endorses local, regional and state events consistent with the Governor’s Council mission to promote healthy choices, while offering a physical activity event open to all participants, regardless of skill level or age.

We hope your join us for fun, fitness and Pure Michigan wonders! For more information and to register visit www.michigander.bike.
Discover the Iosco Exploration Trail

----> Nancy Huck, Treasurer, Iosco Exploration Trail Inc.

Iosco County is the “new” best kept secret in Michigan’s tourist destinations. Starting at Tawas Bay with its beautiful beaches, clean water and total fun you can continue along the stunning AuSable River to enjoy kayaking, paddleboarding, canoeing, camping, and hiking. Its beauty is so welcoming.

The Trail system is nestled in the central part of the county where “Silver Valley” evokes fond memories. Now, Iosco County is adding 34 miles to the Iron Belle and construction is set to begin in spring 2018 in two locations, both the eastern and western sections. This trail will connect communities to the outdoors, Lake Huron, the AuSable River and give residents and visitors one of the best non-motorized pathway experiences they will encounter.

The shovels will be in the ground in early 2019 for the pathway over the river in AuSable Township and in Loon Lake Nature Park in Plainfield. This is a dream destination for bikers, hikers, bird watchers and nature lovers! Come visit, enjoy, and support the Iosco Exploration Trail as part of the Iron Belle Trail initiative. For more information, visit www.facebook.com/ioscoexplorationtrail/. Like, share, and learn about all things Iosco Exploration Trail!

--->

CVBs Can Help with Your Next Trail Event

----> Larisa Draves, CMP, Executive Director, Michigan Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus

Wouldn’t it be nice to get more support for your next trail event? One great resource is your local Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB).

A convention and visitors bureau (also sometimes referred to as a DMO - destination marketing organization) is an organization that promotes a town, city or region in order to increase the number of visitors to that area. The CVB promotes the development and marketing of a destination, with a focus on meetings and events in addition to marketing to tourists.

What are some reasons you should consider working with a CVB for your next trail event? Here are just a few:

- They are EXPERTS about the community they represent. They work hard to keep updated about happenings with your local infrastructure and are a wealth of knowledge. They know who to talk to for resources.
- They offer a lot of SERVICES. The services vary from bureau to bureau but typical services include: obtaining bids for hotel room blocks, helping with local permits, advising with event logistics such as transportation needs and working with local restaurants and businesses to let them know your group will be in town.
- They have helpful BROCHURES. Some event participants like hard copies of maps, visitor guides and a list of restaurants. Others prefer to receive this information via a downloadable format to their phone or computer. Most CVBs offer both printed and mobile-friendly options.
- They like to WELCOME people. This will vary from bureau to bureau but whether it’s a welcome table at your ride stop or maybe it’s providing welcome signs for local businesses, the CVB can help your riders feel welcome as they ride into town.

Again, the services do vary by size of the CVB, but many bureaus offer these services for free or at a very reasonable cost to incoming event groups. For more information email visitmichigan@gmail.com or visit www.visitmichigan.org.
Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund

--- Continued from page 1 ---

legislature once the corpus of the State Parks Endowment Fund has reached its cap of $800 million back into the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. Without this change, the legislature would be authorized to appropriate the revenue for whatever purpose it chose. In addition, the proposal will provide for more funding for development of public recreation projects by removing the current 25% cap on this category of spending and clarifying that renovation and redevelopment projects are clearly-authorized expenditures—both of which will likely mean more trail work in the state.

It is fair to note that the current proposal has raised some concerns with allowing for the fund to be used for projects related to invasive species treatment, and it is important to remember that as this package moves through the legislature, other changes can be made.

In addition, there are concerns about the potential long-term impact of the proposed funding formula on the MSPEF provided for within SJR O. This and other issues should be monitored carefully as this package moves forward. It is thus critical that all members and supporters of trails continue to monitor this important legislative package to ensure that it remains consistent with the vision that paved the way for the creation of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund.

For current updates on this package and other key trails policy developments be sure to subscribe to the Capitol Trails Connection. To subscribe, email zack@michigantrails.org with the subject line Capitol Trails Connection.

Sincerely,

Bob Wilson
Executive Director

Michigan Air Line Trail Adds Pedestrian Bridge

--- John Hensler, Trail Manager, Michigan Air Line Trail ---

The Michigan Air Line Trail is six miles of former railway that connects the West Bloomfield, M-5 Metro and Huron Valley Trails. The trail is part of the 260-mile Great Lake to Lake Trail being implemented by the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance that runs from South Haven to Port Huron.

The former railway was purchased by the Commerce, Walled Lake and Wixom Trailway Management Council. The public body administers the trail along with a trail manager to organize operations. A volunteer friends group from all three towns and surrounding areas supports the efforts of the Council and serves as educators and ambassadors.

The Trail is open for walking and hiking, but is not quite ready for cyclists yet, unless you ride a real fat tire bike. Please use caution as the trail is under development and fat bike riders may encounter loose stone or pieces of metal and ride at their own risk. The Council is working to shore up additional matching funds for trail surfacing and development. Meanwhile, construction on the Pedestrian Bridge over M-5 is well under way with foundation work proceeding on both the east and west ramps to the bridge.

A tentative completion date for the bridge is late August-early September. You can follow bridge updates on the Michigan Air Line Trail website: www.miairlinetrail.com/bridge.html, and on our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/MIAirLineTrail/.
“Earth Day is the first holy day... and is devoted to the harmony of nature... The celebration offends no historical calendar, yet it transcends them all.”
~Margaret Mead