Trails and Greenways and Land Use Planning

Bob Wilson, Executive Director
Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance
Land Use

- Best done at the local, regional level.
- Can be city, county, township or village.
- State-based land use can work with incentives.
- National programs are more-coarse, but can be effective--CZM.
Effective Land Use Planning

- Increases quality of life
- Reflects the will and the needs of local citizens
- Adaptable, flexible to changing conditions
- Starts with planning and public input
- Coordinated with multiple levels and with adjacent local jurisdictions.
Benefits of Trails as a land use tool

• Trails as conservation corridors
• Trails to promote and enhance recreation opportunities
• Trails to promote history and culture
• Trails to drive community action and participation
• Trails to drive local economies
• Trails as transportation routes.
Trails are #1 Recreational Need

DNR Statewide Survey finds that local planners value trails over any other recreational need today!
Local Government Official Survey - highlights
Respondent Outdoor Rec Needs
Trails Planning Process

- Generally starts with a vision from local recreation planner or a trail-passionate citizen.
- Public support evidenced at local level through hearings, formal or informal.
- Volunteer group forms and resources sought—MTGA is a great start here!
- At some point, local government supports.
- Identifying funding sources for both development and maintenance—local, private, state and federal sources are all options.
- Design, build and maintain.
Public Planning and Participation is critical

- Public is critical to hear their ideas and inform them of the process.
- Need to listen and learn and also educate.
- Public engagement is an essential, ongoing ingredient.
Building the Trail

- Takes trained and experienced crews but can also involve volunteers.
- A deliberative process that involves engineers, state and local officials.
- Permits for wetlands, dunes, erosion control and other impacts are often required.
- Surfacing is a decision—natural, asphalt, crushed limestone.
- Ongoing work once trail is built.
Managing the Trail

- What are the uses?
- Motorized and non-motorized
- Ebikes, hiking, bicycles, running, skiing, walking….
- Water Trails
- Need to plan your trail with maintenance and oversight.
Local Trails as a part of a multi-jurisdictional trail

- Michigan law allows for multi-jurisdictional trails
- Managing involves different levels of government
- Can be a touchy issue—don’t want to step on toes, but the benefits are real. Need to respect existing trails.
- Regional management of resources is a good concept.
Trails can complement other land use tools

- Conservation corridors to help protect sensitive natural resources—buffer zones.
- Protect sand dunes, wetlands and other water resources.
- Part of a master plan for a region or community.
- A key component of a plan to maintain or build a community and what the citizens want to see in their area—helps to maintain the quality of life and essential “feel” of an area!
Michigan as the Trails State!

• More miles of land trails than any other!
• Trails plan accommodates both motorized and non-motorized users.
• Significant state funding sources with NRTF and MDOT grants.
• Destination trail planning is happening now! GLTL and IBT!
Michigan as the Trails State (cont’d)

- Opportunities to “tell our story, our history!”
- Devoted historian—Heritage Trail Coordinator Dan Spegel
- Pure Michigan designations for trails and trail towns.
- The home state for the NCT!
- “Mountain biking capital of the Midwest”
Michigan as the Trails State (cont’d)

• 4200 miles of coastal water trails.
• Inland water trail program coming.
• Driven by local government and paddle clubs.
Future of Trails in Michigan

• A non-threatening land use tool that improves life in the community.
• Can accommodate business and consumer use and still protect natural resources.
• Politically-popular
• Promotes access and sustainable uses.
Thank you!

Bob Wilson

Executive Director, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance