



Trailblazing in Michigan

Winter 2006

MICHIGAN TRAILS & GREENWAYS ALLIANCE IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT SHALL FOSTER AND FACILITATE THE CREATION OF AN INTERCONNECTED STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF TRAILS AND GREENWAYS FOR RECREATION, HEALTH, TRANSPORTATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL/CULTURAL PRESERVATION PURPOSES.

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It's Official!

We've Received our 501(c)(3) Status

While Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance officially opened its doors on October 1, 2005, it wasn't until December 3, 2005 that we received our formal 501(c)(3) non-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service, fully 8 months from our application date. What a long and exhaustive process, but well worth it! We are inspired and humbled by the overwhelming show of support from trail organizations across the state, local governmental agencies, stakeholders we work with on a daily basis, our Michigander riders and the general public that continue to passionately believe in the cause of a statewide interconnected system of trails and greenways for Michigan. We are also pleased with the cordial send-off and spirit of cooperation we have experienced in our separation from the nationally based Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. They will continue to remain a font of knowledge and a strong partner for MTGA.

Our financial status continues to strengthen. It started on a strong note with a \$41,000 check from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, which we had earned from savings and increased fundraising in 2005 as the Michigan field office. Michigander riders chipped in



John Lindenmayer

MTGA Executive Director Nancy Krupiarz and Assistant Director Barry Culham stand in front of their new office in Lansing, MI.

tremendously by responding to our offer of early sign-ups for next year's tour. We have received several payments for work that was started under Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and finished as Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance and we already have 294 members in our stead. While it's a far cry from the 4,500 Michigan members we had with RTC, we are well on our way towards building our ranks.

Our identity was launched with the development of our new name and logo, and the launch of our website: www.michigantrails.org.

While we launched the start-up of our organization, we were also very busy with trail work. This fall, we reached the following new milestones:

- Secured resolutions of

Revive I-275 . . . (Bikeway, that is)

A partnership between the Michigan Department of Transportation, the League of Michigan Bicyclists, and MTGA is leading the way on making some much needed changes on the I-275 Bikeway. Anyone who has ridden this trail in the last decade knows that it has fallen into major disrepair. Many also know of the great new trails being developed throughout the area which could be connected to this 40+ mile long artery through Wayne, Oakland and Monroe counties, altogether vastly improving the state of nonmotorized transportation in Southeast Michigan. And in these days of high gas prices, more people are realizing nonmotorized transportation is an idea whose time has come.

The project kicked off last summer with an all-communities meeting. Planners, community development officials, transportation engineers, and parks and recreation personnel and advocates from the I-275 communities

of Northville Township, Novi, Romulus, Canton Township, Farmington Hills, Monroe, Westland, Van Buren Township, Livonia, Wayne, Plymouth Township and Huron Township came to hear the scope of the project and how to become involved. Greg Johnson, Region Engineer, Michigan Department of Transportation Metro Region

"...MDOT will take a lead role in restoring the corridor but that communities will be asked to assist in occasional maintenance, monitoring, and encouraging use through connections to their communities."

~Greg Johnson, Region Engineer,
MDOT Metro Region

explained that MDOT will take a lead role in restoring the corridor but that communities will be asked to assist in occasional maintenance, monitoring, and encouraging use through connections to their communities. The communities could form an interlocal government trail committee with MDOT to facilitate cooperation on management and operations.

As the project has proceeded, Nancy Krupiarz of Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, Rick Oberle of the

League of Michigan Bicyclists, and Bob Ford, Landscape Architects and Planners, Inc. have met with all the communities adjacent to I-275 in Wayne and Oakland Counties. (Monroe County is in another MDOT region so will be considered in another project phase). Information on trail crossings, where to enhance connections, highly congested ones to fix, possible new access points, and other pertinent details were collected. A GIS map of the corridor together with a report with all of the data collected will soon be available. It will lay the groundwork for the next phase of the project, which is to explore with community officials how they and MDOT may work together for the future restoration and improvement and the sustainability of the I-275 Bikeway.

A Friends of the I-275 Bikeway was also formed as part of the project. They have an electronic discussion group for keeping updated on the latest developments and they also participate in clean-ups, removing trash, dead limbs, overhanging branches, and other debris from the pathway. If you are interested in participating in this group, log on to: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/I275bikepath/> ■

2005 Ends with Trail Victories!

The Fall of 2005 saw an outpouring of grants awarded to trail projects. Kudos to all the state and local players that made these awards happen! Here are the latest grants and awardees:

Natural Resources Trust Fund

- \$4.8 million dollars for trail acquisition and development, including the following awardees:

Acquisition: DNR purchase of 200 miles of rail corridor critical links in the Upper and Lower peninsulas; Pere Marquette Trail extension into City of Clare

Development: Falling Waters Trail (Jackson County); Cannon Township Nonmotorized Trail; Boardman Lake Trail West (Traverse City); Lansing River Trail south extension; Tricentennial State Park and Harbor walkway; Silk City Nature Trail (Belding); Fremont Town and Country Trail (Newaygo County); Apple Blossom Trail River Walkway (Iron River)

Enhancements Grants

Program - \$625,117 for trail development, leveraging \$674,089 in matching funds.

Development: Tunnel construction under US-10 and extension of the Pere Marquette Trail to Industrial Drive (Isabella

County); Construction of the Grand Curve Trail, 1.8 miles, which completes a regional loop with the Pere Marquette Trail
Recreational Trails Program and Recreation Improvement Fund - \$938,000 for development and maintenance, including the following state trail projects: Pere Marquette State Trail – Evert Trestle; Juncture of Gaylord to Cheboygan Trail and Alpena to Mackinac Trail (trailhead design); Mackinac to Hawks Rail Trail (road crossings); Mackinac to Hawks Rail Trail (resurfacing); Bergland to Sidnaw Rail Trail (bridge renovation); Marquette to Munising (Chocolay Twp. Segment resurfacing); South Beach Bike Path – Marquette (surface 1 mile of trail); Gaylord to Mackinaw City (trail surfacing); Frank Anderson Trail – Bay City (trailhead parking and pave 1 mile of trail); Surveys, engineering, design, and construction of improvements on DNR-owned trailways; Maintenance of various DNR-owned trailways through grants to local partners
 Congratulations to all the recipients and trail fans who use these trails! ■

- Completed a series of meetings with all the communities along the I-275 Bikeway to determine what improvements and enhancements need to be made in the restoration of this major artery trail. (more on page 2)

- Developed plans for a statewide trails planning partnership project to take place this year. This project, which will convene both state and local trail stakeholders to plan for the future of Michigan's trail system, has received endorsement from several state departments and key players across the state. We applied for 3 grants to fund the project, have received one for \$22,675 from Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network, and are awaiting word on two more. (more on page 4)

- Assisted in the formation of the Heart of Michigan Trails Network, a new regional trails effort spanning the tri-county region of Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham Counties. Mid-Michigan had lagged behind other areas in the state on planning for a regional trail network, but no more! Stay tuned for new trail developments from this energized, determined group!

- Made preliminary plans to partner with the Michigan Recreation and Park Association for our 2006 annual State Trails and Greenways Legislative Day, to be held next June. Stay tuned to a continuing update on these projects in future newsletters and on our website. ■

It's Official!, Continued from page 1

support from Shiawassee, Clinton, and Ionia to proceed with the acquisition of the Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail

- Completed a concept plan for trail connections within Battle Creek's Lakeside School District

as part of Westlake Elementary's Safe Routes to School project. Fred Meijer Heartland Trail also received a preliminary plan for a trail connector to Stanton Elementary School as part of this project.

State and Local Trail Players to Join Forces

MTGA will strive for new milestones this year as it convenes state and local trail planners, builders, and advocates to plan for the future of Michigan's interconnected state trail system. This event will be similar to the three statewide trails and greenways conferences in 1998, 2000, and 2002, which drew 250+ people together for education and the inspiration of new trail connections, but there will be one BIG difference. This time Michigan's now-educated audience will collaborate on a vision for an interconnected statewide system of trails and greenways and formulate goals and action steps to help remedy the critical issues which hamper our progress on achieving that system. Nancy Krupiarz, Executive Director, commented, "The time is right now to inject Michigan's trailways program with new ideas, increased coordination, and new trail planning and marketing tools. It's essential for our state economy."

The project will begin with a kick-off at the University of Michigan-Flint on April 13, 2006, where participants will identify the 6 most pressing issues, which if not resolved, threaten to slow, if not halt progress, on Michigan's trails. Ideas for forum topics abound, with lack of maintenance dollars, increasing trail tourism, and cross-jurisdictional planning being just a few which have surfaced as possible targets for discussion. The forums will generate goals and action steps, together with impact statements and proposed players, which will then be folded into a vision and action plan. A statewide GIS trails website will also be developed as part of the project, with an interface for trail planning and one for trail trip planning. The Michigan departments of Natural Resources, Transportation, Labor and Economic Growth, and Community Health, as well as the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, as well as many regional and local trail stakeholders have already indicated their willingness to take an active role in the project. "There has not been a statewide trails master plan since the passage of the Michigan Trailways Act in 1993, and this will certainly be a step in the right direction," stated Barbara Nelson-James, project steering committee member and MTGA board member. A grant for \$22,675 for this project has already been received from the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network to begin the project, and more proposals are pending. ■

Michigan's Safe Routes to School Program has Funding!

The Safe Routes to School program, of which MTGA has been a steering committee partner, over the last 3 years, has received funding in the latest federal transportation bill passed late last summer. Approximately \$19 million over the next five years will be available for infrastructure and programs in Michigan to make it easier, safer, and thus, more enjoyable for students to walk or bike to school. Funding guidelines are being developed by the new Safe Routes to School Coordinator, Mike Eberlein, together with the state Safe Routes to School state steering committee.

MTGA has been involved on the state level, providing trail information in the toolkit, training pilot schools, and working with the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness on policy and also on the local level, evaluating, and reporting on the potential for trail connections. Log on to the MTGA website at www.michigantrails.org for the reports prepared for pilot schools in Belmont, Battle Creek, and Stanton.

MTGA is available to provide an orientation to the Safe Routes to School program. It is hoped that all trail groups will want to become involved in this program which has the potential to connect a nonmotorized transportation system at the neighborhood level.

For more information on the Safe Routes to School program, log onto the official website at the Governor's Council for Physical Fitness: www.saferoutesmichigan.org. ■