



Photo by Bob Goddard

Ribbon cutting ceremony for the newest section of the Idema Explorers Trail in Jenison.

# Making Meaningful Connections

BY JOHN MORRISON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WEST MICHIGAN TRAILS & GREENWAYS COALITION

In 2023 tremendous progress was made toward completing the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park. The first 13-mile segment was paved in 1998 and most of the work on the final 22 miles of the 93-mile trail took place last year. Look for a hard push this year as crews finish the details to complete the trail.

Some consider the White Pine Trail a “backbone” trail in West Michigan. On the West Michigan Trails Guide map on page 19, starting in Cadillac you can take the White Pine to Grand Rapids, then go to Muskegon on the Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail and the Musketawa Trail, and then to Hart on the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail and the William Field Memorial Hart-Montague Trail. All of this on 175 continuous miles of non-motorized trail – apart from one 1.5-mile gap in the City of Muskegon. That’s an impressive journey using eight connected trails in West Michigan. Michigan is full of these adventures!

Another exciting project being developed and constructed is a collection of connected trails, together called the Grand River Greenway. This east-west trail largely follows the Grand River between Grand Haven on the Lake Michigan lakeshore in Ottawa County and Lowell on the eastern side of Kent County. Ottawa County has made steady progress on the trail for some time. If you haven’t done



John Morrison

so yet, check out the section between Grand River County Park and Grand Ravines County Park. Numerous partners in Kent County are carrying the design forward with an aggressive plan to connect the trail through Grand Rapids to the City of Lowell passing through Plainfield and Ada. When completed the Grand River Greenway will connect trail users to a lot of parks and points of interest. It promises to be a destination trail, for sure.

West Michigan Trails works to make meaningful connections throughout the West Michigan regional trails system. Our region is blessed with communities, agencies, professionals, and dedicated volunteers committed to developing beautiful trails that, combined, add up to more than 1,000 miles.

West Michigan Trails plays an important role on a regional scale. An example is our rec-

ognition of the need for a system for consistent signage on all our trails. Last year we completed an extensive project developing our *Wayfinding Sign Concepts and Implementation Guide* for the West Michigan region to have a connected, visually consistent, and attractive wayfinding and regulatory trail signage system. We are currently working with numerous communities, agencies, and professionals to get the signs installed on many West Michigan trails.

This year we’re also working on a trails master plan for our region, taking inventory of the age, condition, and amenities of existing trails, as well as the stage of development of planned trails. We’re developing tools to help with setting priorities on the work that needs to be done on existing and planned trails based on things like impact, communities served, equity, and more. And we’re looking at the anticipated funds needed to accomplish the region’s goals in comparison to funding sources.

West Michigan Trails’ vision is a world-class trail system, and we’re excited to continue our work toward that vision.

