

The Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park was paved from Sand Lake to Howard City in 2022

Connecting Trails. Connecting People. Connecting Communities.

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West Michigan Trails is all about connection. In the beginning, we were about connecting people to talk about trails. Over time we adopted a more direct trail building role, and now we are about connecting people to trails, trails to each other, and trails to communities.

Today WMT is partnering with the City of Grand Rapids to make a critical connection within our regional network. This new trail connection will be on the east side of the Grand River between Leonard and Ann Streets, downtown Grand Rapids. It will fill a gap between the City's River Edges Trail and Riverside Park – making the connection between the City and hundreds of miles of trails in West Michigan.

We are working with the communities between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids to build a trail from the northern edge of Kalamazoo County, through Allegan County, and into Kent County. This trail, often called the Interurban Trail for the old rail line it will mostly follow, will connect those communities to a large network of trails to the north and south.

Last year WMT helped fund paving the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park between Sand Lake and Howard City, extending the pavement nearly eight more miles. Construction on the remaining 22 miles of the trail should begin in 2023, the last section that will finally have the whole trail paved between Grand Rapids and Cadillac. It will be accessible to more user groups and be very attractive to bicycle tourists.

West Michigan has more than 850 miles of nonmotorized, multi-use trails — with more being constructed every year. The more trails are built and connected into a regional

network, the more people will use them. While communities are working to build and connect their trails and bikeways, WMT is working on another kind of trail connection: a consistent trail signage system that brings trails and other biking infrastructure together with unified directional, confidence, place-making, and mileage signs. Think of it like the signage system on the roadways across the United States: consistent and understandable signage as you navigate your way to a destination anywhere in the country. Our trails deserve similar tools.

A connected, visually consistent, and attractive wayfinding and regulatory signage framework across the region will provide many benefits:

- Welcome new trail users by clearly explaining the allowed trail uses
- Guide trail users through complicated or confusing transitions between dedicated trails and on-street routes
- Create awareness of the larger trail network
- Give trail users the confidence to explore farther than they ordinarily would

- Promote key destinations that may be slightly off the trail
- Give first responders and trail users the tools to identify a location in case of an emergency

WMT is working with Toole Design Group and other key public partners to create a preferred sign family concept and a wayfinding signage plan/implementation guide. The guide is needed before we move to phase two: the installation of signs on the trails which we aim to begin in the next year.

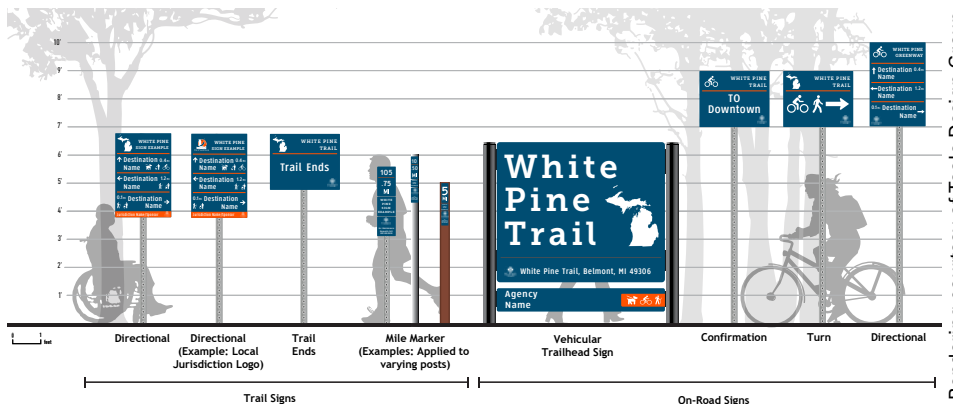
West Michigan Trails is also excited to announce a new partnership with an excellent and world-class cycling event in West Michigan: The Grand Rapids Gran Fondo. Originally the MSU Gran Fondo, the event started with the idea of bringing a West Michigan signature cycling event to the area that would showcase our beautiful state, welcome cycling enthusiasts of all experience levels, and raise money for a great cause.

Now rebranded, the Grand Rapids Gran Fondo 2023 features all the same iconic elements of this beloved cycling event: the well-known finish line festival on the streets of downtown Grand Rapids, professional timing, on-course amenities and police support, celebrity rider, and more. With the new name comes a new cause.

Now more than ever, people are looking for more trails to ride and explore. West Michigan Trails will receive 100% of the charitable funds raised at the event for the purpose of connecting trails and advancing the regional trails movement. West Michigan Trails is honored to be the charity partner for the Grand Rapids Gran Fondo and we look forward to continuing working towards a world-class trail experience in West Michigan! For more information, or to register, go to: grgranfondo.com



WMTrails.org



Rendering courtesy of Toole Design Group