



The final stretch of the Inaugural Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Ride in Port Huron.

# Stronger Together

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Today, trails are more important than ever before. Throughout the pandemic, Michiganders flocked to trails in record numbers to find respite from these challenging times and improve their mental and physical health. The Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance (MTGA) was proud to help everyone #RecreateResponsibly and encourage existing and new users to enjoy our trails safely.

With the renewed importance and appreciation of trails in our communities, MTGA has worked to find ways to connect our trail systems. We are very excited to be working on a new model in Southeast Michigan that thinks beyond our municipal or county borders.

We have witnessed success through collaboration with our work, and the work of the individual trail networks that make up the Great Lake-to-Lake Trails. We know this big-picture type of thinking about trails can succeed, because promoting the new Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Route #1 destination trail has led visitors to flock to southern Michigan. MTGA is committed to connecting four additional Great Lake-to-Lake Trails to further enhance Michigan's leadership in destination trails.

Michigan is blessed with thousands of miles of trails and connecting those trails to one another is a powerful tool in promoting tourism, creating economic impact, and ensuring everyone has access to our vast trail systems. Yet, while significant progress is occurring to fill gaps on Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Route #1 such as working to finish the Bridge to Bay Trail in St. Clair County;

connecting Concord to Albion, Sylvan Lake to Pontiac, and Kalamazoo to Galesburg; and routing around US 23 in Green Oak Township, we still have connections to complete.

That's because it takes extensive amounts of planning and collaboration to complete a destination trail or regional trail system. It requires that trail managers coordinate with cities, townships, counties, non-profits, non-governmental organizations, convention and business/tourism bureaus, and funders as well as local, state and federal government

officials. Realizing the difficulty and complexity of this task, MTGA is excited to be working on a new regional model of trail connectivity in Southeast Michigan.

The new, holistic approach began with the formation of the Southeast Michigan Trails Action Team, or SEMTAT. While the group continues to expand and define its structure, name and brand, current members include the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), MTGA, MDNR, MDOT, Huron Clinton MetroParks, Macomb County, Oakland County, St. Clair County, Washtenaw County, Huron-Waterloo-Pathways Initiative (HWPI), Wayne County, City of Detroit, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan and the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation.

To help think beyond borders and assess trail connection opportunities, action teams were created for Funding, Capacity, Branding and Marketing and Planning. The beauty of these teams is the resources shared. SEMTAT members can rely on their fellow experts in all stages of trail development and maintenance to help solve a problem in which their skillset or capacity is lacking. By working together, trail planners and funders are stronger.

Southeast Michigan is unique in that SEMCOG has an extensive pedestrian and bicycle plan for their seven-county jurisdiction and the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation is working to connect and eliminate gaps in the burgeoning regional trail systems here. Yet these desires for a unified vision of connectivity and regionalism can be found throughout the state and MTGA would like to expand the model to new regions.

Each model will vary based off capacity and need and include the regional partners committed to improving recreational opportunities. We know everyone loves their local trail. We also know the public would benefit from better coordination and collaboration, because trails shouldn't stop at the city limits. Trails should connect communities and people and welcome all to explore opportunities both on and off the trail.

When we collaborate, everyone benefits. Regional and destination trails allow for branding, wayfinding and mapping of the entire trail system, making it easier for citizens and tourists to find and enjoy our trails. We hope you join MTGA in supporting this vision and making

Michigan a world-class trail destination state.



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Dequindre Cut Trail near the riverfront in downtown Detroit.

Photo by Pravin Sitaraman