

Paul Yauk (second from left) celebrates the official opening of a new section of the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park near LeRoy.



Paul Yauk LEAVES A LEGACY SPANNING TWO PENINSULAS

How a long public service career helped define the Trails State

Nationally renowned as the “Trails State,” Michigan’s vast and growing network of nonmotorized trails came about through the efforts of a long list of dedicated organizations, agencies, and individuals.

Leading the charge at the top of that list is Paul Yauk, State Trail Coordinator for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

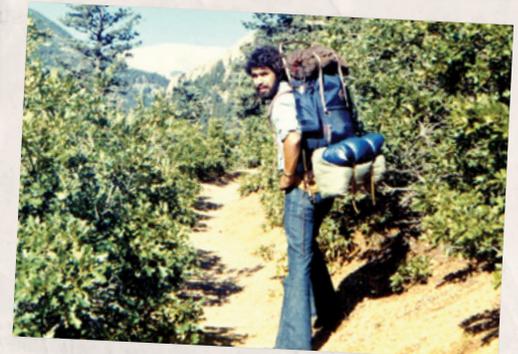
Anyone who knows Paul, knows he loves trails. Trails have been his lifelong passion, and fortunately for us, his life’s work. Paul will retire this spring, leaving a legacy of

more than 44 years of dedicated service to the Michigan DNR and all Michiganders who enjoy trails. Over the years, Paul has worked for 10 different department directors and held a variety of positions where he was responsible for recreation grants, solid waste planning, boating facilities, land acquisition, and most recently as the State Trail Coordinator.

Paul’s love for Michigan’s trails began during his childhood. His family would often spend weekends together hunting mushrooms and hiking the trails at Waterloo State Recreation Area. As a young man, he was an avid cyclist and enjoyed backpacking, camping and experiencing the wonder of nature. He now shares those same experiences with his children and grandchildren, spending time with family at State Parks and trails all across Michigan.

When asked if he had any favorite trail projects he worked on during his career, Paul notes, “I really enjoyed working on the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park, and the acquisition of Watkins Lake State Park, because of the amazing history and connection to the local communities.” He has witnessed many changes over the years, most notably, a massive upswell in public support for trails, and a strong demand for recreational opportunities in almost every part of Michigan.

“We are fortunate to have so much public land, and so many passionate people who



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work hard to create and maintain Michigan’s trails. Our trails provide countless benefits to the people of Michigan. It’s the people that make all of these trails possible,” Paul said.

Under Paul’s leadership, the trails staff within the Michigan DNR has grown tremendously and so has their scope of responsibility. The DNR now boasts one of the largest contingencies of full-time staff in the nation devoted entirely to trails. They manage thousands of miles of trails and continue to oversee the development of even more. As State Trail Coordinator, Paul has set a standard to steer the course of the department well into the future.

As many of his colleagues will point out, Paul’s kindness, good natured humor, and work ethic are what have made him successful throughout his career with the DNR. These same characteristics have enabled him to lead Michigan’s trails program down a golden path. His passion and willingness to help have endeared him to trail advocates, friends groups, financiers, and other trails partners. His leadership and positive persona will be missed, but he is leaving the state’s trails program on high ground and headed in a positive direction.

