

The new Spoonville Trail near Nunica.

The West Michigan Trails Movement... Moves Forward

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WEST MICHIGAN TRAILS & GREENWAYS COALITION

Photo courtesy of Prein & Newhof

I am always inspired when I see the West Michigan map in the Directory of Trails in this magazine. Every time! We have an incredible trail network here in our West Michigan region. Behind every one of those trails are people – volunteers and professionals – who went through phases of dreaming, planning, momentum, setbacks, and ultimately success. There are more than 60 such stories in West Michigan represented on that map and in the pages of this magazine.

West Michigan Trails has played a role in many of those trails – sometimes a small role and sometimes a very significant one.

On this map I see incredible opportunities for active transportation and how so many of these trails have inspired local bicycle infrastructure with side paths and bike lanes along roads. I see great options and opportunities for bicycle tourism where from a bicycle seat – and not behind a windshield – residents and visitors can engage the natural beauty West Michigan provides. It's all there: beautiful farmland and woods and water; the songs of birds and the call of frogs and the peace of silence; the scent of wildflowers,

the smell of green in the tall grasses and the sweetness of apple orchards.

From the beginning West Michigan Trails has been about connection. Our beginning in the late '90s was Friends groups and people with an interest in trails meeting to connect the first few trails in our region at the time. Those meetings led to partnerships, collaborations, and extensive planning to connect numerous West Michigan communities with the expansion of existing trails and construction of specific new trails. And that planning led us to form as a 501(c)3 in 2005 to raise the money needed to build those trails connecting our communities and points of interest in the West Michigan region.

Our mission has grown to now work as the voice of the trails in our region, working to bring them all together in a connected and collaborative network. Today West Michigan Trails is partnered with the City of Grand Rapids to build a trail on the east side of the Grand River between Leonard and Ann Streets, filling a gap between the City's River Edges Trail and Riverside Park – making the connection between the City and hundreds

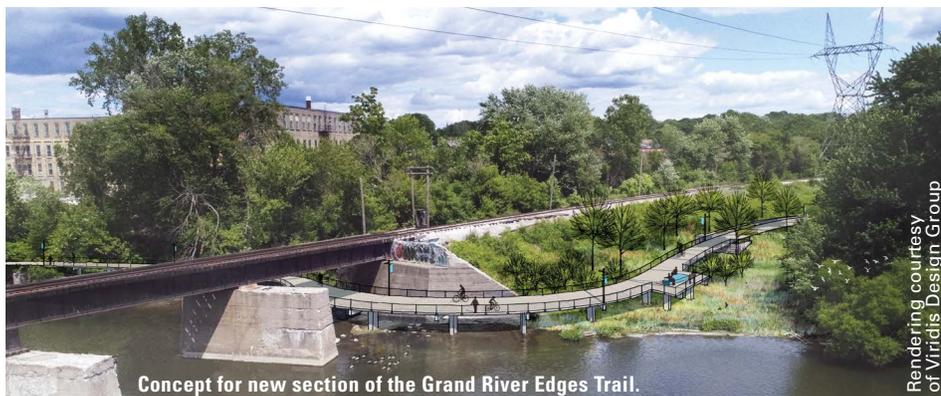
of miles of connected trails to the north, west, and soon to the east.

We are working with nearly a dozen communities between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids to build a trail through Allegan County, connecting those communities as well as large networks of trails to the north and south. We are working to get more (or even all) of the White Pine Trail paved. Yes, the White Pine is usable already, but paving it will connect it to more user groups and be very attractive to cycle tourists.

Beyond construction, West Michigan Trails is engaging with consultants for a regional signage plan to connect our trails in new and meaningful ways – like road signage that works across the country, but in this case to go from trail to trail letting users know where they are and what amenities are around them. We are aiming for work to begin in June.

With our new website (wmtrails.org) we will better connect with you and anyone else with an interest in our trails. We are connecting with trail users through events like The Fred, our 200-mile running relay race on the White Pine (it also includes shorter relays if 200 miles seems like too long a distance). Our West Michigan Trail Challenge is a great way for you to connect with and explore new trails – and earn some cool trail swag in the process! Information about these and other events, or how to volunteer for West Michigan Trails, is available on our website.

In the meantime, GET OUT! And explore and enjoy any of Michigan's great trails!



Concept for new section of the Grand River Edges Trail.

Rendering courtesy of Viridis Design Group



WMTrails.org