

Join the Michigan Trails Movement



By Bob Wilson,
Executive Director
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What a remarkable and busy year it's been at Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance. Our work is blazing new ground to ensure that Michigan trails are headed in the right direction. We are enlisting more voices, more funders and more communities to the cause of Michigan trails. We are educating more elected officials in city, township, county and state government. We are working to assist local trail groups as they build and connect trails for stronger and healthier communities. We are doing all of this with a small, hardworking staff, an engaged board, and a wide network of dedicated volunteers. But this work could not have happened without trail supporters all over Michigan and it can only be sustained through continued support of all those who love Michigan trails.

More and more citizens seem to understand the deep value of Michigan trails – how they make our communities healthier places, get children to school safely, unite neighborhoods, preserve natural landscapes, boost tourism, help tell historic and cultural stories and let us experience the healing power of nature.

Read on to see just some of what we have accomplished together this year.

Legislative Advocacy and Promotion

- We worked to make sure that trails always have a voice at the table. This is critical, because trails policy and funding reside within many different pieces of legislation.

- We brought together partners from the environmental, tourism, recreation, and health communities to speak with one voice in support of trails.
- We worked hard to keep trails a nonpartisan issue – which can be difficult in the current highly politicized environment. We engaged elected officials across the political spectrum to help them understand what trails mean to their constituents and regions.
- We worked with the League of Michigan Bicyclists to pass bicycle safety bills including a 3-foot safe passing zone and mandatory drivers' training about cyclists.
- We hosted the first annual Michigan Trails Awards in the Capitol Rotunda, recognizing volunteers, trail group workers, state employees and legislators who have made a difference for trails in Michigan.
- We collaborated with watershed councils, paddle groups, the DNR and other organizations to advance water trails programs in Michigan.

- We have worked with the Nature Conservancy, mParks and the Heart of the Lakes Conservancy to provide voters with the chance to amend the Natural Resources Trust Fund to provide a decidedly new focus on trail development statewide. This simple change could mean millions of dollars in local recreation grants for parks and trails.

- We successfully lobbied the Michigan Legislature to provide \$3 million in general fund dollars to help finish paving of the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail.

The Great Lake-to-Lake Trails

- 2018 saw the most progress toward completion of the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Route #1, from South Haven to Port Huron, since we announced this trail a dozen years ago.

- In 2018 we held three Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Summits, bringing together trail owners and managers, friends groups, planners, tourist bureaus, business leaders and trail industry professionals. These meetings helped solidify understanding and cooperation among the 16 individual



Senator Hansen was recognized with an award for his leadership in promoting Michigan trails at the state capitol.

trails that make up this remarkable 270-mile destination trail.

- The Great Lake-to-Lake Trail welcomed its first employee – Trail Ambassador Andrea LaFontaine. Andrea has served as a DNR trail specialist, state legislator, and current Oakland County Parks Commissioner. She is working to help complete gaps, secure funding, launch a website to promote the trail, and prepare for the inaugural ride next September.
- That's right – the inaugural Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Ride will take place



**Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Ambassador
Andrea LaFontaine.**



Inaugural Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Ride

September 12 – 19

Take part in this historic inaugural event as we ride the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail route across southern Michigan with overnights in Kalamazoo, Marshall, Jackson, Brighton, Pontiac and Port Huron.

Visit our website for more details:
greatlaketolaketrails.org



September 12-19, 2019, with overnights in Kalamazoo, Marshall, Jackson, Brighton, Pontiac and Port Huron. Keep posted for details. We hope you can be a part of this historic event.

- We secured a gift from Mike Levine to fund fellowships for public historians to work with communities to tell their stories along their trails. Initial work will take place along the Great Lake-to-Lake

Trail following the completion of a demonstration project by the Michigan History Center on the Kal-Haven Trail.

- With Route #1 (South Haven to Port Huron) in good hands, we will be turning our attention to the four remaining Great Lake-to-Lake Trails. Planning meetings will take place throughout the year as this work heads north.

Donor Development and Partnerships

- We rely on donors, large and small, to help move trails forward. This year, we developed important new relationships and expanded existing ones to fund important projects and support our core trail mission.
- The Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation is supporting the Trails Ambassador position for the Great Lake-to-Lake Trail. We are working closely with the Wilson Foundation to help apply their considerable support wisely to connect trails across Southeast Michigan.

- We continue to work with Mike Levine to achieve his vision of a complete Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Route #1. Mr. Levine's support for the trail and the inaugural ride make us grateful for donors who recognize trails as a wise and enduring investment.

- McLaren Health System and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan have both stepped up to make trails a priority in their philanthropic efforts. Their partnership recognizes the critical role trails play in the health of all Michiganders.

We need your commitment to succeed. Great trails (and great trail states) don't just happen. Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance is the only statewide group working to build, connect, promote and protect nonmotorized trails in Michigan. It takes smart, tough, in-the-trenches work to keep the trail fires burning. Your support is essential.

Hoping to see all of you on Michigan trails. 🚲

Tour the Sunrise Side
Michigander Bicycle Tour
Explore the Iron Belle Trail and Michigan State Parks on their 100th Bday
Tawas City, Higgins Lake, Cadillac
2-Day Tour: July 13-14
6-Day Tour July 13-18

Register by June 30 at michigander.bike



At a presentation ceremony on May 28, 2018, the Michigan DNR officially unveiled a new sign for the Mike Levine Lakelands Trail State Park in honor of his tireless support for the development of the trail.