

# Making Strides to Realize Our Vision



**WEST MICHIGAN**  
**TRAILS & GREENWAYS**  
COALITION



**John Morrison on a brisk fall trail ride on the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail near Reed City.**

*By John Morrison,  
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**T**here's no denying we live in a great state for trails. West Michigan is especially fortunate with the high concentration of nonmotorized multi-use trails we enjoy. As state-wide support and appreciation of trails grows, so too does our work in enhancing quality of life by advancing our regional trails movement. Last year saw numerous exciting developments, and the momentum continues into 2019 and beyond.

## **2018 Milestones**

An important high point in 2018 was the completion of the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail (page 89). This connection is

a major regional priority for nonmotorized trails creating a continuous trail between Hart and Muskegon. Numerous partners were involved in the acquisition, planning, funding, and construction of this project, and one very important partner is the Meijer Foundation. The foundation's patience and significant contribution were instrumental to the completion of the Berry Junction Trail and serves as an enduring testament to Fred Meijer's dedication to trails in West Michigan.

Another milestone is the paving of another section of the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park (page 75). This trail is a major draw for West Michigan locals as well as distant trail enthusiasts. Last year an 11-mile section between LeRoy and Reed City was paved creating about 40 miles of continuously paved trail between Cadillac and Big Rapids. This leaves an unpaved section of 29 miles between Big Rapids and Sand Lake – the last

unpaved section of the trail. Thanks to a \$3 million appropriation from the State of Michigan and many regional organizations working to raise additional funds, this final section will be paved in the near future, meaning the entire 93-mile trail will be paved between Grand Rapids and Cadillac.

Another trail seeing important progress in 2018 is the proposed River to River Trail between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. A grant from the DNR helped produce an initial planning document for the trail, and now regional communities along the planned trail are organizing and taking steps toward beginning phases. This is an important first step to the time and work it will take to complete this trail.

## **2019 Developments**

Momentum on closing gaps and completing trail connections continues in 2019.

Final sections of the Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail (page 91) begin construction this year with expected completion later in the year or in 2020. Finishing the Pioneer creates a continuous connection between Muskegon and Grand Rapids by linking the Musketawa Trail (page 90) to the White Pine Trail in Comstock Park.

Additionally, on the Muskegon side, two key connections on the Laketon Trail will link the Musketawa Trail to the Muskegon Lakeshore Trail (page 89). One of the connections is expected in 2019 and the other planned for 2020. Once completed, and with the completion of the Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail extension, it will be possible to travel over 170 miles, between Cadillac, Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and Hart, entirely on nonmotorized trail.

Construction in 2019 on the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley and Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trails (page 117 and 118) will close a gap between Greenville and Lowell, and then east to Saranac. These projects will nearly complete 125 miles of continuous trail in the Mid West Michigan Fred Meijer Trail Network. The Lowell Area Recreation Authority (LARA) continues efforts to close the final gap in Lowell in the near future.

A couple more exciting projects this year are completing the next phases of the North Bank Trail and the Spoonville Trail (page 93), connecting to each other in Nunica. This connection takes us one step closer to a great trail loop connecting

Grand Haven, Spring Lake, and Nunica through some beautiful and scenic trails.

### Realizing Our Vision

West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition vision of “a world-class trail experience connecting West Michigan” comes closer to realization with each new development and connection in the region. All great news, but there is much other work still to be done.

Of course we’re grateful for the abundance of trails in West Michigan. As the trails grow, the need for proper signage also grows. Our Regional Wayfinding Task Force made up of WMTGC and numerous regional partners is focused on creating a regional wayfinding signage guide in 2019. This guide will provide municipalities and agencies in the West Michigan region with tools to produce and install wayfinding signs on trails and in urban areas throughout the region. A unified sign family will create sign cohesion and a consistent and predictable source of information for people walking and bicycling to destinations along trails and bicycle infrastructure throughout the region. A consistent wayfinding system is a necessary development as we work toward an accessible and equitable trail network for all users.

Another effort toward our vision is bringing regional friends groups and

The final section of the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail was completed in the Spring of 2018.



trail managers together in ongoing West Michigan Friends’ Summits. These folks are integral players in trail planning, development, funding, and continued maintenance. In these summits participants will:

- Keep up with the current state of the trail system and exciting new developments that are underway.
- Network and collaborate with other friends groups and managers to share ideas and explore best practices.
- Strengthen our regional team to continue striving toward a world-class trail system.

Individuals interested in learning more about the Friends’ Summits can contact us at [info@wmtrails.org](mailto:info@wmtrails.org)

In 2020 WMTGC will host the Mid America Trails And Greenways (MATAG) conference in Grand Rapids. The multi-day conference represents nine Midwest states and has classroom sessions and off-site workshops. Classroom sessions focus on how to use trails as a tool for health and wellness, promoting trails and using them as a resource for economic development, and developing and maintaining community trails. Off-site workshops offer opportunities to see best practices in the field. MATAG 2020 will be at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel from August 30 to September 2, 2020. Learn more at [matag.org](http://matag.org)

I’ll say it again: we live in a great state for trails. With all the developments taking place and coming in West Michigan and across the state, and with the growing number of trail enthusiasts exploring our trail networks, Michigan only becomes a greater trails state for all of us to enjoy. 

*Learn more about the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition and how you can get involved and help our group realize its vision:*

[www.WMTrails.org](http://www.WMTrails.org)

A couple explores 11 miles of new pavement on the Fred Meijer White Pine Trail between LeRoy and Reed City.

