

N.R. 3/6/19 - Bob Wilson



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Senator Ed McBroom, Chairman
Senate Natural Resources Committee

Dear Chairman and members of the Committee:

Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance (MTGA) is the statewide voice for the nonmotorized trail community, helping to build and manage trails for a healthier and more prosperous Michigan. We advocate for a pro-trails policy agenda and funding while working with communities across the state to help promote land and water trails.

In the past year, we have enlisted 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 about the value and importance of trails. 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. Yet 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.

This love for trails has allowed us to accomplish much over the past year:

Legislative Advocacy and Promotion

- MTGA worked to make sure that trails always have a voice at the policymaking table. This is critical, because trails policy and funding reside within many different pieces of legislation.
- MTGA brought together partners from the environmental, tourism, recreation, and health communities to speak with one voice in support of trails.
- MTGA engaged elected officials across the political spectrum to help them understand what trails mean to their constituents and regions.

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- MTGA worked with the League of Michigan Bicyclists to pass bicycle safety bills including a 3-foot safe passing zone and mandatory drivers' training about sharing the road with cyclists.
- MTGA 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.
- MTGA collaborated with watershed councils, paddle groups, the DNR and other organizations to advance water trails programs in Michigan, resulting in the state's new water trail designation program.
- MTGA worked specifically with Senator Casperson and the Michigan Legislature, the Governor, 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. This simple change could mean millions of dollars in local recreation grants for parks and trails.
- MTGA worked successfully with Senator Judy Emmons and the Michigan Legislature to provide \$3 million in general fund dollars to help finish paving of the White Pine Trail--one of the state's landmark trails that accommodates both motorized and nonmotorized uses.



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 MTGA held three Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Summits, uniting trail owners and managers, friends' groups, planners, Convention and Visitors' Bureaus, business leaders and trail industry professionals. These meetings solidify understanding and cooperation among the 17 individual trails that make up this remarkable 275-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.
- The inaugural Great Lake-to-Lake Trail Ride will take place September 12-18, 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 trail philanthropist 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.

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- 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 this year as this work heads north.

Partnerships and Membership

- MTGA relies 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 Wilson Foundation to help apply their considerable support wisely to connect trails across southeast Michigan.
- We continue to work with local trail philanthropist 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 and 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.

The Future

We will continue to work with the Michigan Legislature, the Whitmer Administration and people across the state to further our mission of building trails for a healthier and stronger Michigan. With nonmotorized trails clearly being the number one recreational use and need of Michigan citizens (DNR Statewide Comprehensive Outdoors Recreation Survey 2018) we need to keep attention focused on building and maintaining our trails. Great trails (and great trail states) don't just happen. Michigan Trails and 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.

We will soon be extending an invitation to all committee members and the entire Michigan Legislature to hike, bike and paddle Michigan's trails in a series of legislative trail events. Look for these trail opportunities in Lowell, Detroit and Port Huron in the spring and early summer.

Hoping to see you all on Michigan Trails and joining us in our celebration of the most significant recreational movement in the state.

Bob Wilson, Executive Director
Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance

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