



## FAQ about Michigan's Iron Belle Trail

[www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails](http://www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails)

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### **Why a statewide trail?**

Michigan's natural and cultural resources are spectacular, and hiking or bicycling is a wonderful way to experience the state's vast array of scenic views, cultural resources, vibrant communities and wildlife resources. Michigan's Iron Belle Trail links the wealth of existing trails, helps fill gaps where needed, and celebrates the partnerships that have developed and are maintaining the trails. The trail creates opportunities for rural economic development, healthy recreation and awareness of Michigan's natural resources.

### **How can I stay updated on Michigan's Iron Belle Trail progress?**

Acquisition and development of the trail is ongoing. Visit [www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails](http://www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails) and click the red envelope to sign up for email updates to make sure you receive announcements about Michigan's Iron Belle Trail and the entire Michigan State Trail system.

### **How long will the trail be?**

In its current proposed state, the hiking route will be 1,259 miles and the bicycling route will be 774 miles. The hiking portion of the trail will follow the current route of the North Country National Scenic Trail along most of its length. The bicycling trail connects many different segments.

### **What is the advantage to having separate routes for bicycling and hiking?**

There are numerous advantages:

- Two routes will showcase the state and its partners' extensive investment in trails. The two routes also allow for statewide and national marketing of the many trails that will comprise the bicycling portion of the trail and supports the national marketing that is already occurring on the North Country National Scenic Trail.
- Two routes allow for more economic development opportunities, both rural and urban.
- Two routes meet the expectation of long distance hikers and bicyclists by having the tread design and outdoor experience that they expect.
- Michigan has so much to offer that one trail would not do justice to our scenic landscapes, natural and cultural features, vibrant communities, spectacular water bodies and great existing trails.

### **As you have identified the trail corridor, what has been the reaction of the potential partners?**

There is great excitement about the opportunity to participate in Michigan's Iron Belle Trail in every community. These communities are proud of their trails and are excited about the opportunity to share them with new visitors. Funding has been identified from Michigan Natural National Park Service and North Country Trail Association are eager to partner with the State of Michigan to promote healthy hiking opportunities and greater appreciation of our natural and cultural resources.

### **What are potential funding sources to assist in acquisition and development of the trail?**

There are many options for funding the acquisition and development of the trail, all of which will be leveraged. The federal government provides limited funds to the North Country Trail Association and its volunteers to develop and maintain the North Country National Scenic Trail. The Association seeks private and other funding sources as well. Federal highway dollars, Recreation Improvement Fund, Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, local resources, businesses, foundations, trail

groups, and volunteers will all be involved in the development and maintenance of both the hiking and the bicycling portions of the trail. MDOT committed \$4.7 million in federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant funds to seven projects along the Iron Belle biking route. Funding gaps along this route continue to be a priority for TAP.

Partners are critical in managing and funding the trail. A complete list of land acquisition opportunities is being maintained and can be obtained by request from State Trails Coordinator Paul Yauk at 517-284-6141 or [yaukp@michigan.gov](mailto:yaukp@michigan.gov).

### **What is the impact on the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund?**

As is currently the case for trail funding, multiple funding sources are utilized to acquire and develop a trail. The Natural Resources Trust Fund will be looked to as one of many funding sources. The Department has been awarded a \$2 million acquisition grant from the Natural Resources Trust Fund as well as \$750,000 from the state's General Fund in 2015.

### **What happens to all of the other important trail projects?**

Michigan's Iron Belle Trail is a priority state trail. There are many priority regional and local trails that will continue to move forward for acquisition and development. In fact, acquisition and development along this statewide trail will enable the department and local communities to link portions of the state's larger trail network through connections to Michigan's Iron Belle Trail.

### **How does this concept complement the already-existing trail systems in Michigan, particularly the North Country National Scenic Trail?**

As America's longest National Scenic Trail (4600 miles), the North Country National Scenic Trail passes through 7 states and connects America's northern heartlands from eastern New York to central North Dakota, including 1150 miles in Michigan- more trail miles than any state along the North Country NST. As such, North Country National Scenic Trail serves as the principal hiking corridor in a vast network of trails across Michigan. Like two of its sister national scenic trails--the Appalachian NST in the east, the Pacific Crest NST in the west, the North Country NST brings an added cachet and uniqueness to Michigan's trails system and creates an even greater destination potential for Michigan's efforts at being The Trail State. By integrating North Country National Scenic Trail and its successful relationships with communities along its length, the North Country NST is an important factor in driving the economic potential of Michigan's Trails State initiative.

### **How will the trail benefit Michigan's overall State Trail system?**

Michigan's Iron Belle Trail is the newest addition to Michigan's 12,000 miles of recreational trails, which have earned Michigan the reputation as the nation's Trails State. This extensive trail network offers plentiful opportunities for hiking, bicycling, snowmobiling, kayaking and other trail pursuits. Michigan's Iron Belle Trail will raise awareness and interest in trails all over the state. It will also serve as an opportunity for partners to develop and test tools and partnerships to promote all Michigan trails.

### **Have the final hiking and bicycling routes been determined?**

A [draft route](#) is proposed for public comment. DNR and other partners are working to acquire and

develop segments along this route.

### **Who will be responsible for maintenance?**

Development and maintenance of the hiking trail is currently performed by chapter volunteers of the North Country Trail Association. Their continued participation is imperative to the success of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail. Michigan Department of Transportation is responsible for the US-2 bike route through the Upper Peninsula, or the Department of Natural Resources for the North Central Trail.

### **Why were certain trails not included?**

*Hiking Route:* The hiking route utilizes the route of the North Country National Scenic Trail, which is a major partner to accomplish Michigan's Iron Belle Trail. Out of the 7 states through which the North Country National Scenic Trail traverses, Michigan contains the longest section, making this trail a natural choice for the hiking route of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail. *Biking Route:* Starting at Belle Isle, the bicycle route also focused on existing facilities with opportunities to make logical trail connections. The bicycling route starts on the east side of the state through a network of developed trails, with the goal of connecting with one of Michigan's longest state rail trails: the North Central State Trail from Gaylord to Mackinaw City. As planning moves forward and the primary routes are finalized, there will be many opportunities for other communities to plan trail connections to the main routes. Ultimately, the trail will become an interconnected facility, celebrating a "Pure Michigan" experience with connections to many communities throughout Michigan.

### **How much of the trail has been completed?**

More than 60% of the both trail routes (bicycling and hiking) are already completed, and partners are working to establish temporary connectors which will be made permanent as resources become available. Federal, state and local units of government are working to complete the trail by acquiring trail easements from willing sellers.

### **Who sets the rules/use guidelines for the trail?**


Since Michigan's Iron Belle Trail comprises numerous smaller, existing trails, the use and rules are determined by the managing authority for each section of trail. In other words, different sections of the trail have different rules. Michigan DNR is working to compile a list of contact information and/or websites for all of the partners who manage sections of trail. If you have questions about use on a particular section of trail, please contact the local managing authority. In most cases, an online search will help determine who manages a trail.

### **Why was the trail in my community not included in the route of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail?**

*Hiking Route:* The hiking route of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail utilizes the route of North Country National Scenic Trail, which is a major partner in this statewide endeavor. Of the 7 states through which North Country National Scenic Trail traverses, Michigan contains the most miles, making it a natural choice for Michigan's Iron Belle Trail to lie along this existing route. This allows the trail to use existing infrastructure as much as possible, keeping costs down and drawing attention to other trails. The national recognition of North Country National Scenic Trail will bring additional attention to Michigan's Iron Belle Trail and Michigan's entire trail system. *Biking Route:* Starting at Belle Isle, the

bicycle route was also created with the goal of using existing trails and making logical trail connections to provide a statewide route. The bicycling route follows the east side of the Lower Peninsula, weaving through a network of developed trails with the goal of connecting with one of Michigan's longest state rail-trails: North Central State Trail from Gaylord to Mackinaw City.

### **If my community/trail isn't part of the trail, how can we get involved?**

As planning for Michigan's Iron Belle Trail moves forward and the primary hiking and bicycling routes are identified and developed, there will be opportunities for other communities to plan trail connections to the initial trail routes. Ultimately, the trail will become an interconnected facility, celebrating a "Pure Michigan" experience with connections to many communities throughout Michigan. A community toolkit will eventually be made available for communities along the trail (and other communities who wish to be involved) to take advantage of this statewide economic driver. Watch for details at [www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails](http://www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails) and make sure to sign up for email updates by clicking the red envelope. 

### **How do trail users cross between the Upper Peninsula and Lower Peninsula?**

Pedestrians and bicyclists have the option of crossing the Mackinac Bridge or taking a ferry to Mackinac Island.

***Ferry to Mackinac Island:*** Ferries are available in both the Lower Peninsula (Mackinaw City) and the Upper Peninsula (St. Ignace). This option allows users to walk/bike around the island on M-185 and enjoy the natural, cultural and historic resources at this classic Michigan tourism destination. The Mackinac Island Ferry service takes approximately 25 minutes from dock to dock, but is only provided at scheduled times. Visit [www.mackinacisland.org/transportation](http://www.mackinacisland.org/transportation) for schedules and prices of available ferry services.

***Mackinac Bridge Authority transport services:*** Pedestrians and bicyclists are not allowed to cross the Mackinac Bridge on foot or bike except on the [Labor Day Bridge Walk](#) (Sept. 7, 2015). Any other time of year, users can cross the bridge 24/7 with [Mackinac Bridge Authority's transport services](#). The fee is \$5 per bicycle (includes one person per bike); \$3.50 for a pedestrian to ride in a Mackinac Bridge Authority vehicle. For northbound users, there is a phone at the south end of the bridge. Instructions for using the phone are posted in the phone box. For southbound users, please visit our service window in the administration building on the north end of the Mackinac Bridge on the east side of the toll plaza. Transport service is provided on an as-needed basis, and service is normally provided within ½ hour of the call.

### **When will the trail be ready for use?**

The Department of Natural Resources has begun planning for a summer 2015 opening of significant portions of the trail. This statewide trail will be similar to the North Country National Scenic Trail, which opened with temporary connectors that were made permanent as resources became available. As of January 2015, 69% of the hiking route and 64% of the bicycling route are complete.

### **What's next for Michigan's Iron Belle Trail?**

- The DNR is planning to hold an opening ceremony in summer 2015, and to work with communities along the trail to hold additional local events as trail segments are completed.

- DNR staff are working with boy scout troops to arrange a day during which the entire length of the trail will be hiked, with each troop hiking a different section.
- [Michigan Trails Week](#) will be another important event in the timeline of Michigan's Iron Belle Trail. This weeklong celebration of Michigan's trail system takes place Sept. 19-26, 2015 and Michigan's Iron Belle Trail will be included in these efforts.
- In the coming months, Michigan DNR will release a toolkit of digital resources for communities to take advantages of the many benefits of this statewide trail, and to support the effort. Resources will include a logo and terms of use, a press release template for local ribbon-cutting events, standardized language for referencing Michigan's Iron Belle Trail and trail signage guidelines.
- The DNR will also compile a contact list of key individuals in other communities, as well as contacts within partner organizations who can support local efforts.
- Learn more about Michigan's trails at [www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails](http://www.michigan.gov/dnrtrails). You can also sign up for email updates by clicking the red envelope.