Michigan Department of Natural Resources

State Trails Implementation Plan

www.michigan.gov/trailplan

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Michigan is home to one of the largest, interconnected trail systems in the country. This inviting network – and the associated quality of life, health and economic benefits it offers – is fueling Michigan's drive to be known nationally as "the Trail State."

Our trail system makes it easier for visitors and residents to do what they want to do – hunt, fish, camp, hike and explore – in Michigan's great outdoors. Trails promote a healthy lifestyle. They offer heart-pounding adventures for extreme sports enthusiasts. And they do a lot more. By hosting festivals and races, attracting out-of-state guests, creating jobs, attracting new residents, assisting in place-making, increasing property values and connecting people to Michigan's natural resources, our trails help drive Michigan's economy. An amazing network of partners has come together to acquire, develop and maintain these economic and recreational powerhouses.

State Trails Implementation Plan

The State Trails Implementation Plan (Plan) lays out the actions that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will take over the next five years to sustain Michigan's title as the Trail State. The plan builds upon the priorities identified by the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC) in its 2013 Michigan Comprehensive Trails Plan (www.michigan.gov/trailsplan).

The Plan fulfills a requirement of Public Act 45 of 2010 which charged MSTAC and the DNR with preparing a comprehensive trail plan recognizing all trail users. The act called for a three-step planning process initiated by the MSTAC's Equine Trailways Subcommittee (ETS), to prepare an equine trail plan by June 2011. That report is available at the ETS website (visit www.michigan.gov/mstac, select Equine Trailways Subcommittee). Upon receiving the ETS equine trail plan, MSTAC had a year to prepare "a plan for a state trail system that considers all trail users" and share it with the DNR, which then also had one year to prepare and adopt a comprehensive trail plan.

This State Trails Implementation Plan sets forth the DNR's five-year action plan. It spells out – for the trails community and interested citizens – the DNR's continuing commitment to acquire, develop and maintain our world-class trail system.

At the same time, our valued trail partners will also be working to sustain Michigan's reputation as the Trail State. An extensive network of state and local governments, nonprofits, foundations and volunteers are teaming up to develop and maintain Michigan's array of trails. Together, we have built an enviable trail system, but significant opportunities remain. The coalition that has created and is managing our trails must continue forward for the future growth and maintenance of those trails.

Plan Implementation

The following are the priorities identified in the MSTAC comprehensive plan with the DNR's priority implementation actions:

Priority: *Develop funding sources and mechanisms for trail maintenance and fill funding gaps for trail acquisition and development*

First year:

- Compile costs of maintaining and operating existing trails (including basic infrastructure, programming, interpretation and signs, and acquisition and development of priority trails and trail connections).
- Identify funding sources and gaps and develop a strategy to fill gaps (includes options that would lead to creation of a funding source for nonmotorized trails).
- Explore trail funding sources in other states to assist in developing the strategy.
- Ensure existing funding sources are targeted toward priority trail development and maintenance needs.
- Develop criteria for identifying priority trails and trail connections.
- Seek corporate sponsors for investment in recreational trails.
- Create a means to evaluate the economic impact of trails.
- Evaluate the equitable sharing of maintenance cost on multiple-use trails.

Second year:

- Transition the Recreation Passport to an "opt out" program.

Second and third year:

- Create a guide to assist local units of government and nonprofits in financing the acquisition, development and maintenance of trails.
- Continue to leverage grant funds for acquisition, development, maintenance and operation of multi-use trail corridors, priority trails and trail connections.

Third year:

- Begin implementation of funding strategy.

Priority: ***Ensure sustainability by maintaining trails according to established guidelines***

First year:

- Ensure DNR's ability to implement trails plan.
- Align DNR to implement trail plan and ensure effective, efficient management of the trail system.
- Retire trails that are no longer used, unsafe or causing resource damage.
- Develop a priority trail infrastructure maintenance list and assign responsibility each priority.
- Develop a means to protect the conditions and usability of groomed trails.
- Assess needs and conditions of all designated pathways.

Second year:

- Develop a sign manual for all trail types and trail interpretive opportunities.

Third year:

- Inventory amenities needs on priority trails and prepare appropriate funding plan.

Ongoing:

- Acquire permanent easements for snowmobile trails.
- Adopt development/maintenance guidelines for all trail types and use guidelines in annual inspections.

Priority: ***Expand trails and trail experiences to ensure broader public access to trail systems, outdoor recreation opportunities and Pure Michigan natural and cultural resources***

First year:

- Begin development of the Governor's Showcase Trail as outlined in the Governor's Showcase Trail Plan.
- Complete a DNR trails inventory.
- Identify priority gaps among trail types.
- Coordinate all trail organizations' (MDOT, federal, local and regional) processes and programming to maximize trail development and use.
- Identify opportunities to create 10 "experience" trails with partners, and then implement.
- Create one transparent "trail proposal process" that includes a system for public involvement.
- Determine, with partners, the definition of "designated" inland water trail. Evaluate against other states' and national criteria.
- Review DNR land use orders to ensure a fair, enforceable trail management program.
- Complete a park/trail and MDOT bridge inventory to identify priority infrastructure improvements.
- Explore the repurposing/reopening of existing U.P. state forest campgrounds or opening new campgrounds (with opportunities for a minimum of 20 miles of looped trails) for equestrians.

Second year:

- Designate five connected lake systems trails.
- Create an inventory of rivers with potential for water-trail designation.

Second and third year:

- Create development guidelines for all trail types and construct new trails to guidelines. Use innovative design to maximize safety.

Third year:

- Complete plan for providing interpretive and other programming for state trails.
- Begin designating water trails on rivers.

Fourth year:

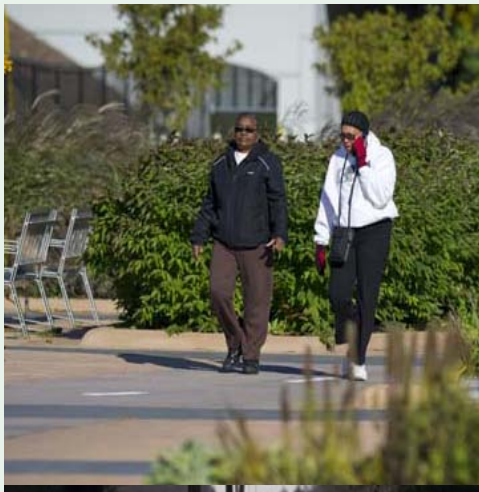
- Conduct a demand analysis to determine needs for signature equestrian state park.

Fifth year:

- Complete designation of the Great Lakes shoreline as a water trail.
- Complete designation of navigable waters as inland water trails.

Ongoing:

- Develop priority trails and trail linkages.
- Implement the 2008 Off Road Vehicle (ORV) Management Plan.
- Review ORV training program for effectiveness.
- Support the North Country National Scenic Trail through marketing and linking to other state trails.



Priority: ***Link trails, trail users and adjoining communities to create memorable trail experiences and enhance local prosperity***

First year:

- Prepare the case for creating a "Trail Town" staff position within the DNR.
- Update DNR policy to allow for a robust sign program that provides directional trail signs to adjoining towns, local businesses and other points of interest.
- Identify and remove barriers to locally funded improvements on state-managed trails.
- Improve the process for approving events on DNR-managed trails.

Second year:

- Create a toolkit to help communities leverage their areas' trail systems.

Priority: ***Develop, enhance and celebrate trail partnerships and collaborations***

First year:

- Define and document roles of DNR, "friends" and other trail organizations as they relate to trail development and maintenance. Formalize roles as they relate to individual trails.
- Address obstacles to volunteer organizations' trail development and management on state-managed land.
- Create volunteer recognition and incentive programs.
- Develop a standardized application for creating friends organizations for state trails and other DNR-managed facilities.

Second year:

- Organize a trail summit that will regularly happen every two years.
- Initiate opportunities for cross-country skiers and hikers to become better organized as user groups.
- Create a program to attract new volunteers.

Priority: ***Create and implement a statewide marketing plan that engages residents and guests in exploring Michigan's array of trail opportunities***

First year:

- Assign to the Quality of Life Leadership Academy a project to create a program that links trails with the public health community to promote trail use for healthier lifestyles.
- Complete, with partners, a trails marketing plan.
- Seek resources and partners to complete an online portal for phone and other online applications to identify trails and related amenities.

Second year:

- Develop and implement an iconic branding tag line for trails.
- Create an education program to minimize user conflicts and promote trail safety and the "leave no trace" ethic.

Ongoing:

- Obtain national exposure for Michigan's trail system.

Priority: ***Ensure the state's trail system compliments other plans and planning efforts, conserves the resources that enhance the system, and is compatible with the other values and programs associated with the land***

First year:

- Develop a conflict mediation process so that desired uses on multiple use areas are kept in balance or to mediate conflicts when they occur
- Develop a cross-walk between all strategic plans (SCORP, Blue Ribbon, Public Land Management Strategy, Regional Forest Plans, GPS, and Parks and Recreation Strategy Plan, Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan) and identify common priorities
- Develop legislative proposal to increase fines for lack of snowmobile trail permit
- Develop policy regarding timber management and wildlife habitat activities as it relates to trails

Ongoing:

- Ensure all state trails are sustainably developed

Priority: ***Lead (through the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council) efforts to maintain and enhance Michigan's reputation as "the Trail State"***

First year:

- Amend Public Act 46 (2010) to establish staggered membership terms for MSTAC.
- Restructure MSTAC and subcommittees and involve Michigan Department of Transportation, public utility companies, economic development and health agencies, Pure Michigan and other tourism organizations, and other appropriate interests.
- MSTAC will create and implement a process for tracking plan implementation progress.

Third year:

- Survey trail users to identify priorities and progress and continue to survey at least every three years.

Ongoing:

- Organize, with partners, yearly regional trail meetings.
- MSTAC should monitor for and make recommendations about safety issues.

Michigan's Showcase Trail

The Governor's Showcase Trail, when completed, will offer long-distance bicycling and hiking opportunities that stretch more than 900 miles from Belle Isle in Detroit to Ironwood in the western Upper Peninsula. Taking advantage of existing trail routes as much as possible, this Showcase Trail will also link many of Michigan's striking natural and cultural features. We'll continue to identify new linking opportunities to connect current trail networks with many of the local, state and international trail opportunities already in the planning stages.

"As the Trail State, we will need a Showcase Trail that celebrates these efforts and pulls together private and public trails into a signature Pure Michigan experience. With the addition of approximately 200 miles of additional trails in the Lower Peninsula and the U.P., we could hike or bike from Belle Isle to the Wisconsin border."
-- *Governor Rick Snyder*

Trail Facts

- 12,000 miles of trails, including*:
  - 6,407 miles of snowmobile trails
  - 3,627 miles of ORV trails
  - 2,626 miles of rail-trail--the most in the nation
  - 560 miles of forest looped trails
  - 900 miles of state park trails
  - 590 miles of designated equestrian trails including the 300-mile Shore to Shore Riding Trail for equestrians
  - 1150 miles of the North Country National Scenic Trail-750 developed.
- The Michigan Department of Transportation has paved more than 2,500 miles of wide shoulders on state highways which can serve as connections to off-road facilities.
- The US Department of Interior designated the National Water Trail on Lake Michigan in June 2011, 75 miles from Chicago Ill. to New Buffalo, MI. This section is part of a larger vision for nationally designated water trails around Lake Michigan.
- Michigan Heritage Waters Trails is an initiative to connect communities using navigable waterways. The first designated trail is the River Country Heritage Water Trails in St. Joseph County.
- From 1976 to 2012, the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) has provided grants totaling more than $164 million for state and local units of government trail acquisition and development.

*The list double-counts some trails as they may be available for more than one use.

Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council

The Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council (MSTAC) was created by Public Act 46 of 2010. Appointed by the governor, the 11 members include five representatives of the snowmobile and off-road vehicle (ORV) community (at least three must own snowmobiles) and two members from the Equine Trailways Subcommittee. One of the council members must be from the Upper Peninsula.

MSTAC is charged with advising the governor and the director of the DNR on the creation, development, operation and maintenance of motorized and nonmotorized trails in Michigan. In providing this guidance, the advisory council shall "seek to create a linked trail system." MSTAC conducts much of its work through four subcommittees or workgroups: equestrian trailways, nonmotorized, ORV and snowmobile. The Equestrian Trailways Subcommittee (ETS) was established with the passage of Public Act 45 (2010).

Members of the committee are:

- Frank Wheatlake (chair/snowmobile)
- Sandra Batie (equine)
- James Dickie (snowmobile)
- James Duke (snowmobile/U.P. resident)
- Thomas Dunn (ORV)
- Michael Foote (equine)
- Carolyn Kane (nonmotorized)
- Nancy Krupiarz (nonmotorized)
- William Manson, Jr. (snowmobile)
- Erin McDonough (nonmotorized)
- Greg Yager (ORV)