

**MICHIGAN TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
February 18, 2021  
Microsoft TEAMS Meeting  
5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.**

**ATTENDEES:**

**Advisory Boards**

Ken Hopper  
Thomas Dunn  
Bob Wilson  
Jenny Cook  
Jason Jones  
Joe Kuchnicki  
Jim Kelts  
John Morrison  
Mary Bohling  
Kenny Wawsczyk

**Others:**

Andrea LaFontaine  
Karl Davenport

**DNR**

Paul Yauk  
Annalisa Centofanti  
Debbie Jensen  
Jeff Kakuk  
Dakota Hewlett  
Ron Yesney  
Amy Swainston  
Patrick Olson

Meeting was called to order at 5:02 p.m. by Bob Wilson, Michigan Trails Advisory Committee (MTAC) Chairperson.

**WELCOME**

Bob Wilson welcomed all to this special meeting, to discuss nonmotorized funding recommendations. Last year, MTAC, made a resolution to create a nonmotorized funding workgroup. The workgroup members are made up from all the trail advisory workgroups. This workgroup met 8 times last year and formed recommendations to present tonight. No action will be taken to make decisions on these recommendations.

**MTAC Resolution #3**

**MTAC Resolution 3-2020**

Resolved by the Michigan Trails Advisory Council that additional funding sources are necessary to help support and develop nonmotorized trails in Michigan. It is therefore resolved by the Council to create a workgroup that will compile recommendations for a variety of options for funding of nonmotorized trails in Michigan. This work group may consist of both members of the Michigan Trails Advisory Council and appropriate advisory work group members and will be assisted by appropriate staff from the DNR. The workgroup shall examine both current funding sources in Michigan and other states and work to develop new ideas and concepts funding. This workgroup may consult with other outside groups and organizations and sources of information in compiling recommendations. The workgroup shall submit their recommendations to the full Michigan Trails Advisory Council not later than December 31, 2020.

Ken Hopper, MTAC member and Nonmotorized Funding Workgroup Chairperson, said the purpose of this workgroup is to provide recommendations for funding of nonmotorized trails. Ken extended his thanks to everyone on the workgroup for their time and efforts. The workgroup has a good series of great suggestions to be presented tonight. These ideas are handed over to MTAC for them to figure out what is going to work the best.

Bob Wilson, nonmotorized workgroup member, said we came up with novel ideas, thinking outside of the box. Voluntary Trail Pass (VTP), being one of them. Currently, there is not a way to purchase a trail pass. Below are some of the concepts the workgroup came up with.

- MI Trails Trust Fund, very specific to nonmotorized trails.
- Specialty License Plate - sizable investment needs to be made by the organization. Group considered this as a potential route if a sponsor could support the initial expenses.

#### Voluntary Trail Pass (VTP)

Jason Jones, workgroup member, discussed Grassroots mechanism approach (see attached document). Jason said the workgroup considered what are the types of trail users and types of trails. Some of the thoughts included, but not limited to, water trails, natural surface trails, winter trails-Nordic trails, and linear trails. The objective is to incorporate a system that covers all these trails and users.

Bob Wilson said the workgroup went so far with the VTP concept because the workgroup members saw the potential with this idea, and it drove an interest because of the novelty of the approach. Jason said the group thought along the lines of having a trail mascot/gnome. The VTP will be a zipper pull tag for recognition. This concept seemed to be the most achievable.

#### SEE ATTACHED CONCEPT IDEAS

Ken Hopper said we have to consider with these ideas of how much effort it takes to push these ideas through. The funding needs to be protected from legislature.

Thomas Dunn, workgroup member, said he believes the VTP is a wonderful idea and would like to see it work. Getting it up and going will be the tough part.

Paul Yauk (DNR) thanked everyone that participated and for their diligence and hard work. Paul said to keep looking at all the options and do not allow legislature to be a deterrent. We have a great start. Paul thinks the support in Michigan is out there. Trail use has skyrocketed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and people are connecting the with outdoors now more than ever.

Bob Wilson commented that he understands that some believe that creating a new nonprofit might compete with other organizations out there, and this stems from public feedback (attached).

Joe Kuchnicki, Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup (SAW) member, commented he was skeptical, however volunteers are always a great way to get things going. Maybe a tier level can be considered, with a base rate.

Jason Jones said people are reluctant to give money to a "black hole". With the grassroots concept, people can choose a project/trail they support.

Thomas Dunn believes some of Steve DeBrabander's input (public comment) will be good to hear. A conversation with him should be considered in the future. Bob Wilson will see if Steve can attend the April MTAC meeting for further discussion.

Ken Hopper voiced a final comment, noting to have pride in being the trails state and take the lead in developing new ways of thinking about funding the non-motorized portion that other states could use as an example. Thank you!

Bob Wilson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:25 p.m. Thomas Dunn and Ken Hopper are first and second to approve the motion, with all in favor.

**FINAL NOTE: BOB WILSON SHARED A LINK; MSU Great Lake to Lake Trails video**

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**2020 MTAC Non-Motorized Funding Workgroup**      **Final Recommendations**

Workgroup members:

Ken Hopper -Chair

Bob Wilson

Thomas Dunn

Jason Aric Jones

Jenny Cook

Karen Middendorp

Kristie Walls

MTAC Resolution 3-2020

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Summary of proposed funding sources (existing or created)

1. Michigan Trails Trust Fund—Develop a 501 (c)(3) non-profit that would serve as a fiduciary and also find funding through an array of sources(donations, gov't funds, private industry funds, trail initiatives) and then determine how best to distribute to non-motorized trail efforts. This suggested mechanism would have a board made up of representatives of all disciplines of non-motorized recreational trail users that would develop funding sources and use existing sources in a focused manner.
2. Specialty Funding License Plates – Non-motorized Trail specific license plates would be developed and available as an option through the Michigan Secretary of State with a percentage of funds directed to Non-motorized trail efforts.
3. Michigan Voluntary Trail Pass—A voluntary fee (\$40) would be available for trail users to commit to and be recognized for with a display object(zipper pull) that would show their support and commitment to non-motorized trails in Michigan. Options would be available for

labor on their trail(s) of choice in lieu of the financial commitment. A certain percentage could be earmarked for State designated trails.

4. Natural Resources Trust Fund-- The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) projects provide for natural resource protection and outdoor recreation. By law, no more than 25 percent of the Trust Fund revenues available for appropriation each year can be used for development, therefore the majority of funding is allocated for acquisition projects. Final grant recommendations are made by the MNRTF Board to the state legislature for final approval.
5. State Waterways Account-- DNR Waterways Program Grants provide funding for engineering studies and infrastructure improvements. Michigan grant-in-aid harbors and public boating access sites managed by local units of government (city, village, township and county) and state colleges and universities are eligible to apply.
6. The Land and Water Conservation Fund -- provides matching grants to states and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.
7. The Recreational Trails Program (RTP)--provides funds to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail uses. The RTP is an assistance program of the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Federal transportation funds benefit recreation including hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, equestrian use, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, off-road motorcycling, all-terrain vehicle riding, four-wheel driving, or using other off-road motorized vehicles.
8. Recreation Passport Opt Out—Legislation currently exists to change citizens’ options for the Recreation Passport program. The proposed legislation would default to including the Recreation Passport fee, giving individuals an option to not participate in the program. The idea behind it is to increase the number of individuals participating in the program and thus increasing the dollar amounts available to go back to potential non-motorized trail uses. Similar programs have shown success in other states.
9. Grassroots Trail pass—A “Bottom Up” approach where the user would specify, via website, where their \$40(or more) would go geographically and project specifically.
10. Recreation Passport Premium—In addition to the \$40 fee, an individual is given the opportunity to pay an additional \$25 to reach premium status and be awarded a different color tab for their license plate or another designation as well as possible other perks.
11. Pay It Forward—Another option for individuals to purchase a recreation passport or voluntary trail pass for someone else or in honor of someone else.
12. Hybrid---A combination of any of the listed suggestions.

Let this serve as a summary of the workgroup’s activities and discussions to satisfy MTAC Resolution 3-20. The group’s notes and further detail regarding funding options discussed are available to MTAC as it is requested.



February 15, 2021

The purpose of this letter is to provide comments on the 2020 MTAC Non-Motorized Funding Workgroup's Final Recommendations related to MTAC Resolution 3-2020.

First, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on these recommendations. Putting a recommendation out for comments is a great first step towards the development of funding solutions. As representatives of the Iron Belle Trail Fund (IBTF), we felt it was important to provide our comments since there appears to be some overlap with the mission of the IBTF. The IBTF Mission Statement is as follows:

*The mission of the Iron Belle Trail Fund is to secure and distribute private resources that will be used to assist in the expansion and connectivity of the statewide recreation trail system which links communities, connects people to place through heritage, improves local economies, promotes health and wellness for all ages, and maintains Michigan's position as The Trail State.*

As you can see, we are focused on private fund raising and distribution of those funds to entities who are involved in building and connecting primarily, multiuse regional trails in Michigan. Through the four years that we have been in existence we have learned much about statewide trail fundraising.

We were initially focused on more of a top down concept in fundraising for strictly the Iron Belle Trail (IBT) and a couple of key connectors to the IBT. While we did have some success with that approach, we have evolved to more of a bottom up, project specific method of fundraising and have expanded our efforts beyond just the IBT, to multiuse regional trails statewide. We have helped to facilitate the funding of a multi-million dollars' worth of projects over the last three years and will likely be awarding around \$650,000 in numerous grants in 2021.

As stated above, our focus has been on funding multiuse regional trails and we have not specifically fundraised for trails that have a single user group such as equestrian, mountain bike, water trails or winter use trails.

As we all know, trail development is more expensive than most users realize and there is not enough money available to address all of the needs and goals that exist, especially funds needed for maintenance once a trail has been constructed.

Specific to your "Summary of proposed funding sources (existing or created)", we have the following comments:



- 1) Your list does not include the Iron Belle Trail Fund which already exists as a state-wide 501(c)3 entity active in private fundraising for primarily regional, multi-use trails as described above. Feedback that we have received from several potential funders is they desire a more coordinated approach to funding requests than what has historically been the case. At times they may receive multiple requests for trail funding, and they are left wondering what the vision for trails in a specific geographic area is and what the priorities are. Trail development appears very fragmented to them.

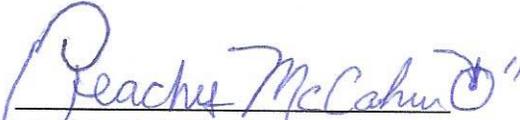
The addition of another entity making requests for funding for trails could likely add to these concerns and give the appearance of a less than coordinated effort to complete and connect trails state-wide. This is especially true for the regional multiuse trail system with the IBTF already actively engaged in fundraising. At a minimum, such fundraising needs to be coordinated, in any given geographic area, so that the chances of success are maximized.

Creating an additional fundraising entity, especially one that targets corporate level fundraising for regional trails would appear to be duplication of efforts already underway by the IBTF. Fundraising for expansion of single use trails such as equestrian, mountain bike, etc., would be less duplication but should still be done in coordination with other trail fundraising efforts to increase potential for success for all entities. As a result of these concerns, we do not support the creation of another (duplicative) entity that would seek private funding for multi-use regional trails.

- 2) We have no objection to the other "to be created" items from your list. Our suggestion would be to put the emphasis on maintenance of existing trails through the use of funds that may be obtained through these initiatives.

We believe changing the Recreation Passport to an opt out option would be excellent and would generate additional public funds for trail construction. In addition, recent changes to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund will likely result in more public funds being available for trail construction. Funding available from the Land and Water Conservation Fund has increased significantly in the last couple of years and as a result, there is more public money available for trail construction in that program as well. This is all good news for those of us that love trails.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions regarding these comments, feel free to contact Steve DeBrabander at the number below.

  
Peaches McCahill, Chair  
Iron Belle Trail Fund Board

  
Steve DeBrabander, Executive Director  
Iron Belle Trail Fund  
517-285-4096