

MICHIGAN HERITAGE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

The Value of Combining Heritage and Outdoor Recreation

The addition of heritage to outdoor recreation helps visitors discover a deeper, personal experience of a place. The outdoor recreation may be the destination driver, but it is the heritage that makes the place feel special, different and socially interesting—the opposite of generic. Heritage tourism responds to people's hunger to discover and understand the place they are visiting. All of this translates into visitors who stay longer, return, and spread Michigan's stories and experiences by word of mouth and social media. It gives them information to share beyond, "This is a beautiful place."

For communities, combining heritage and outdoor recreation take the community's stories out of the museum or library to places where more people encounter it. Doing so may also encourage people to learn more by visiting traditional heritage facilities. The act of creating trail and park heritage stories can lead to better local awareness of the broader cultural landscape (the diverse stories and experiences that make the community what it is), collaboration, stewardship of local heritage, and understanding of the shared experiences that bind the community together.

Heritage trails also enhance the offerings of private sector partners such as canoe and kayak liveries, tour providers and equipment rental shops. They give trail users another reason to go into town to shop, eat and take a break.

Adding heritage to outdoor recreation gives people one more reason to get outside and engage in healthy lifestyle activities.

Need

Communities and regions across the state are adding heritage to their outdoor recreation experiences, but we have no inventory of how many and what they are doing. The group's conversation included the "Tunnel of Trees" and the "Little Traverse Wheelway" (for bike riders); the Drummond Island Tourism Association application for kayak tours of shipwrecks; Houghton's city walking tour; the Iron Ore Heritage Trail and many MDOT-supported driving heritage routes.

There is no cohesive way to tell Michigan's story or even to direct people to what is available.

There are several databases of Michigan history resources—Michigan Historical Markers, sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Michigan history organizations—but they are not all connected, GPS coded, or themed.

Vision

Our vision responds to the desired outcomes and recommendations of The Future of Michigan's Parks and Outdoor Recreation: A Report to Governor Rick Snyder, created by the Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel:

- Recommendation 1: Identify and protect important natural, cultural, historic and prehistoric resources for the enjoyment and education of Michigan's residents and visitors, and expand efforts to engender stewardship of those resources.

- Recommendation 3: Make the development of statewide and regional systems of connected trail networks one of the state's highest priorities for outdoor recreation investment over the next ten years.
- Recommendation 4: Encourage greater connections between communities and their recreational assets to strengthen regional identities.
- Recommendation 6: Integrate tourism and economic development marketing in order to fully leverage the economic and social benefits that parks and outdoor recreation resources can provide.
 - Inspire Greater regional identity, differentiation, and collaboration
 - Protect and create opportunities to experience Michigan's natural, cultural, historic and prehistoric resources
 - Connect people to their places and to each other

Our vision is to use a cultural landscape approach to economic development and place-making that begins with a community's or a region's authentic heritage. We start with a focus on trails and tours that reflect, share and preserve that heritage:

Trails and tours that attract a variety of interests: local and more broadly thematic; broad definition of heritage that includes geology, natural resources, marine and traditional history

Variety of media: brochures, apps, guides, wayside signs, self-created (possibilities range from Google maps used by MTU to gaming platforms)

- Variety of access: walking, biking, driving, kayaking, boating
- Guides targeted to parents and teachers
- Targeting young professionals through interest groups, monthly book and interest clubs
- Ability to respond to market segmentation and the wide variety of user experiences sought by the public
- Some elements will be obvious and precise. Others could require exploration. Still others might be part of history geo-caching.
- A central point with examples of community success that other communities can learn from—a fluid system that allows each community or region to create something that gives it pride and ownership and encourages diverse experiences.
- A strategy to mold authenticity and quality

Plan

The following are the consensus starting points for accomplishing Michigan Heritage Leadership Council (MHLC) goals.

Natural Resources Trust Fund (NRTF)

Encouraging communities to include heritage in their outdoor recreation projects could start with the NRTF adding points to projects that do so. Before this happens, the MHLC will need to be able to offer the NRTF a best practices analysis (based on an inventory and examples of success) plus training and tools for local applicants to use.

Inventory

An inventory of trails and parks that incorporate heritage is essential to most of the other action steps. This may be accomplished through surveying the membership of the various groups that participate in MHLC organizations.

Value Proposition

The value of what we are proposing centers on helping communities and regions understand what unites them—the heritage elements that they value and do not want to lose. Such a shared vision is essential to knowing when to say "yes" or "no" to ideas for future development. It builds a sustainable tourism base founded on attracting the heritage tourists who stay longer and spend more when they travel. It creates community pride, identity, spirit and involvement. It attracts business by providing an enhanced quality of life. It requires that people from the cultural/heritage sector always be at the table.

GIS Database and Apps

Success in making Michigan a heritage trail and park state depends on our ability to organize and communicate Michigan's vast heritage resources. We cannot wait for the all-encompassing app to be funded and get started. Instead, we need to structure whatever we do so that it can be easily integrated into whatever programs, databases and apps others develop. A good starting point is the three large existing sources of data:

- Michigan's historical markers
- Michigan properties on the National Register of Historic Places
- Organizations in the Historical Society of Michigan's database

We will need to be able to flexibly organize the data to tell multiple stories. A logical starting point for this effort is to select two or three themes and determine how to structure the data to reveal those themes. The next step will be to figure out how to collect additional data.