

## Michigan Trails Executive Update



### **Work begins on fashioning a new DNR budget!**

At Michigan Trails, we are actively engaged in the annual budget-making cycle with appropriation subcommittees set to begin hearings on the various department budgets. The budget making process for state agency work commenced in February with the Governor submitting his proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning October 1st. Once the budget proposal has been submitted, it is then up to the legislature to play its role in revising what the

Governor has submitted—as the saying goes, “The Governor proposes and the legislature disposes!”

This month, as the Senate is set to address the DNR budget, at the forefront of issues for Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance will be advocating for important new funding for the administration of a water trails program, along with our continued work on a multi-component bond proposal. As each Chamber has its own budget-making priorities, it will be important for trail users and advocates in the state to pay close attention to this process as legislators often are influenced by voices from the folks at home. Michigan Trails intends to help convey these budget issues to trail advocates and hopefully employ your voices from around the state to influence how the budget is finally fashioned. We have already convened face to face meetings with the Senate DNR budget chair and intend on continuing this important push to get trails issues before the legislature. There is promising discussion of full-funding for a state water trails coordinator.

Just recently, the Michigan DNR unveiled their most recent SCORP (Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan) and two big takeaways from that report are the fact that the single-most desired recreation asset for local park officials is non-motorized trails and that almost one third of all respondents participated in either paddling, canoeing, or windsurfing. This will provide great support to the move for a statewide water trails program.

On other fronts, work continues to develop the concept of unifying all the various component trails of the Great Lake to Lake Trail Route One so that the appropriate efforts can be made to complete this trail by the summer of 2019. Michigan Trails has scheduled a meeting for late April to convene all local trail managers along the Route to discuss a variety of trails issues with the goal being to unify operations of the trail and to help form the foundation for a trailways management council.

New legislation was introduced in the Michigan Senate by Senator Tom Casperson(SJR O and SB 763) to provide more flexibility in how the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) and State Park Endowment Fund may

be used to fund replacement of existing infrastructure. In addition the legislation will help in preserving the long term integrity of the fund by ensuring that the flow of funds continues into the Natural Resources Trust Fund once the State Park Endowment Fund (SPEF) cap has been reached.

The key points of the legislative package which includes both a proposed Constitutional Amendment and a series of statutory changes include:

- Removal of the MNRTF cap and ensuring the funding flows back into the MNRTF once the State Park Endowment Fund \$800 million cap is reached;
- modifying the grant expenditures from the MNRTF to allow for not less than 25% for acquisition and not less than 25% for development grants;
- clarifying that the MNRTF development grants include renovation and redevelopment of public recreation facilities that have reached their projected depreciated life expectancy;
- modifying the expenditures from the SPEF so that 25% goes towards accumulated principal, 50% goes towards State Parks, and not less than 20% goes towards local public development projects as defined in the bill (local grants from SPEF go away once \$800 million cap is reached and the funding flows back into the MNRTF).

Because this proposal is a proposed amendment to the Michigan Constitution, the amendment must be passed in the form of a Joint Resolution by a 2/3 vote of both the Michigan House and the Senate. Once passed by the legislature, the question of final approval will go to the voters, likely on the August 2018 ballot where it must be approved by a simple majority of the voters. Pay very close attention to this legislation as a Joint Resolution does not have to be signed by the Governor and there are many in the legislature who may want to use the NRTF and SPEF for a variety of purposes not related to the current purpose in law.

### **SB 596, Trailways Council on the verge of passing the Legislature: New Tools for Trail Managers**

SB 596, sponsored by Senate Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Committee Chair, Goeff Hansen is on its third reading in the Michigan House of Representatives. From there it moves to the Governor's desk for his signature. Key interest group endorsements came from both business and conservation organizations.

With our work on creating the Trailways Council for the Great Lake to Lake Trail Route One, this bill helps to set the stage for the further utilization of Trailways Councils to help manage multi-jurisdiction trails with specific discussion of signage, uses on the trail, maintenance, and history telling.

Another problem resolved in this key legislation is the issue raised by trails managers last summer about some township officials challenging whether trail amenities are a public good. This bill settles that by affirming clearly in statute that trail amenities such as benches, signage and trail connectors to trail towns are a public good and thus are legitimate public expenses.

Finally, the bill also supports a new Michigan history telling program being developed by the Michigan History Center that will help local trail managers to tell accurate and consistent local trail histories.

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