

The Trailblazer



2019 Overview

One of the most amazing features of our rail-trail is the ability to experience it in all four seasons of the year. Whether you are competing in a spring 5k event, riding a summer-long, self-contained cross country bicycle trip (yes, we do have our share of those on the FMCIS Trail), day tripping in the crisp fall weather on your bicycle or snow shoeing from town to town on a snowy winter day - it's all good!

Another wonderful by-product of our rail-trail is how it continues to build community support and pride through all our communities. Through the years we've been noticing an uptick of community events. 2019 included a block party (Pewamo), a fund raiser for a fire recovery project (Fowler), a Christmas parade (St. Johns), a community mural project in St. Johns that resulted in the Legendary Artists Passage in the trail tunnel under BR 127 and many, many other events. The Welcome Centers in many of the towns have become like town squares - a place to gather, to meet up, and many times serving as a handy water/snack/restroom break for cyclists and runners.



How do YOU use the trail? How would you like to see it used in the future? For instance, the Village of Fowler is envisioning the addition of an ice skating rink near their Welcome Center and adjacent to the trail. We'd love to hear your ideas and see your photos! Contact us by e-mail (cistrail@gmail.com) or visit us on Facebook (The Fred Meijer Clinton Ionia Shiawassee Trail).

2020 Annual Meeting/Trail User Appreciation

Join us at the Friends of the FMCIS Trail's 2020 annual membership meeting starting at 7 pm on Wednesday, March 11, 2020 at Main Street Pizza, located at 207 N. Clinton Street in St. Johns, Michigan.

This year we welcome as our keynote speaker, Ron Gunderson. Mr. Gunderson serves dual capacities as Chairperson of the Mid-West Michigan Trail Authority and serves as the Trail Maintenance Coordinator of the FMRVRT. He will give us an update of the exciting development of the FM River Valley Rail Trail from Ionia to Greenville.

At this meeting we will also be holding elections for board member positions for each of the three counties (Clinton, Ionia and Shiawassee counties) to serve three-year terms. Public comments are welcome at this meeting.

Support Your Trail

... by becoming a member or renewing your membership in the Friends of the FMCIS Trail. Dues remain at the same low cost: Individual - \$5.00; Family - \$10.00; and Corporate - \$100.00. These membership dues help us pay for trail promotion and events, purchase of trail amenities, maintenance and development of our website, and of course, publication of our newsletter and brochures. It also gives dues paying members the added privilege of running for and participating in board elections. Membership application/renewal forms are included with this newsletter, but can be found on our website - www.cistrail.org.

News from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Jill Sell, Southwest Michigan Trail Specialist, Michigan DNR

FMCIS Surfacing Update as of (1/29/20) ... The test sections have been able to partially answer some questions of how to fix the surfacing issue but have not provided a definitive answer. The recycled asphalt section seems to have held up the best over the course of the year, but additional engineering will need to be completed prior to any construction. The DNR currently has no preference on a surfacing solution.

We currently have \$450,000 federal Recreational Trails Program funding set aside for the resurfacing project. The Recreational Trails Program is a set aside of federal transportation funds so the process to obligate and spend these funds can be time consuming. MDOT is the designated manager for all federal transportation funds in Michigan so we are working with them on how to best manage this project. MDOT's involvement on this specific project is multifaceted since they hold the railbanking agreement for the trail. The \$450,000 in funding is likely not enough to complete the entire project and we'll have to go through the additional engineering and see where the cost estimate ends up. The project will most likely have to be completed in phases.

From our Trail Manager - Barry Culham

Thank You! ... I would like to send out a big THANK YOU to all our volunteers! Our volunteers are the life blood of our trail. When I get a call or an e-mail that a tree or branch is down, it is a simple phone call or text and I am able to contact any of a number of people to help. To give you an idea of the work involved, last year we removed 144 dead trees from the trail - it's

Winter 2020

MONTHLY MEETINGS . . .

. . . are open to the public. We generally meet on the second Wednesday at 6 p.m. at the Main Street Pizza in St. Johns, Michigan. However, please check our website to confirm site and date. If you would like to attend one of our meetings, please check our website www.cistrail.org or contact Kathy Simon at 989/593-3642.

MISSION OF THE FRIENDS OF THE FRED MEIJER CLINTON-IONIA-SHIAWASSEE TRAIL

To promote the use and enjoyment of a safe, multi-use trail for non-motorized recreation along the Fred Meijer CIS Trail between Ionia and Owosso, Michigan.

THE BOARD OF THE FRED MEIJER CIS TRAIL

Our current board members are:

Ionia County:

- Janice Gustafson, Treasurer (2020)
- Doug Hyland (2021)
- Dave Weber (2022)

Clinton County:

- Allen Martin (2020)
- Kathy Simon, Secretary (2021)
- Joel Wickham (2022)

Shiawassee County:

- Craig Bisson (2020)
- Ardelle Rodgers, Chairperson (2021)
- Rick Church, Vice Chairperson (2022)

www.cistrail.org
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Be sure to "like" us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/fmcistrail

literally a never-ending process! We do our best to keep the trail open for users, but wind storms happen. If you see fallen trees and branches blocking the trail that are not easily removed, please shoot us an e-mail with the details, including location (nearest mile marker or road crossings).

Volunteers also came out in force on our annual Spring Clean Up Day last April, removing debris, tires, brushing and sweeping the ADA crossing pads at each road crossing and a host of other clean up efforts. The trail is maintained by all volunteers, so when you see a volunteer on the trail, please be sure to thank them.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer send us an e-mail (cistrail@gmail.com)

Tentative 2020 Maintenance Schedule: We are currently planning to seal coat the paved section of the trail in St. Johns sometime in June. Information will be posted when we know more and will put it on our website and Facebook page. We will also be doing our normal maintenance of removing some trees, brushing and mowing the trail.

For an update of where we stand on fixing the limestone portion of the trail surface, see "News from the DNR".

CIS Trail - Yesterday and Today

The CIS trail corridor you see today between Ionia and Owosso was once the Grand Trunk Railway, a very active passenger and freight route during the late 19th century and into the 20th century, rich with history and lore. Unfortunately, along with the speed and convenience of rail travel, it also brought the reality of train wrecks to the communities along the route. Tragedies that claimed lives, although not common, were a by-product of the times.

One such tragedy occurred in the Village of Muir in 1873:

"Before dawn on Friday, August 29, 1873, the westbound night express of the Detroit & Milwaukee (later Grand Trunk Western) stopped about a mile east of Muir after it had lost a driving wheel. The flagman went back to protect the rear of the train from a freight train that was following. He went back the required 800 yards and stopped although he knew the train was on a down grade. The freight train, rolling down grade, saw him. Despite reversing his engine and calling for hand brakes, the freight's engineman could not stop his train in time. He plowed into the rear of the passenger train. Two mothers and two children, all immigrants from Iceland, died in the wreck. Eleven Icelanders and three others were injured."¹



On June 6, 1905 massive flooding, caused by 8-12 inches of rain in the area, caused a culvert to wash out on the tracks three and a half miles west of Fowler. A maintenance crew was sent to repair the culvert, however the location was reported further west than it actually was. The work train plunged into the creek, killing five men.²

Another tragedy in 1944 claimed the lives of six Pewamo women.

On November 19, 1944, "... seven women were returning home from their jobs at the AC Spark Plug Factory in Ionia. While crossing at West Street, their vehicle was hit by the 'Flyer', killing all but one of the women."³

In September of 1952, just 5 miles west of Owosso near Burton Corners, a train was sideswiped by another when it failed to heed orders to pull off the track onto a siding. "... 'When he hit the switch, the engine started swaying back and forth and his engine hit the third car on my train just as he rolled over on his side.' Torque created by the sudden turning of the engine when it hit the switch loosened the rails under the speeding west bound train, and more than 150 feet of track were torn up. The west bound engine, tender, a railway express car and two mail cars were accorded [sic] up like a half-opened folding rule, two of the cars coming to rest on the edge of McBride Rd. ... " Two train crew members were killed and several other individuals were injured.⁴ (A finely detailed and well written narrative of this event was researched and written by Tom Manke and will be posted on our Facebook page and website.)

Unfortunately, many interesting tidbits of the life and times in this area are unrecorded or unknown to many of the current generations and may disappear forever. If you know of any historical events that happened along the trail between Ionia and Owosso during the active train years (or earlier) we would love to hear your stories. We plan to include them on our Facebook page, our website and hopefully in future issues of this newsletter. Please e-mail your stories (and photos, if you have them) to cistrail@gmail.com.

Many thanks for all the assistance provided in compiling this article.

1) Doug Hyland.

2) Jack Myers.

3) Quote from "Treasured Memories of Our Small Town", courtesy of Sandy Wolniakowski.

4) Quote from article by Dick Frazier, Staff Writer, September 26 issue of the State Journal; research assistance from Michael and Kim Savoie, Lola Martin and Tom Manke.

Spring Clean Up Day April 25, 2020

Last year we had a great turn out for our annual clean up day from individual volunteers to group efforts including a boy scout troop (Muir/Lyons) and a high school robotics club (Ovid-Elsie). Would you like to make a difference on the trail? Would you like to volunteer, but have limited time? Or do you know of a group that requires service hours? Then mark your calendar for Saturday, April 25 for the 2020 FMCIS Trail Clean Up Day.



Watch for more information on our website - www.cistrail.org - or our Facebook page.

Contact Us!

- E-mail - cistrail@gmail.com
- Non-Emergency Hotline – Text to 517-242-6931. Report problems - ie, branches/trees down, blockages, holes, unauthorized uses along the trail. (Include location and your contact information.)
- Emergencies on the trail - call 9-1-1