

The Trailblazer

LOOKING FORWARD

Happy 10th anniversary! Yes, hard to believe, but it's been 10 years since the grand opening of the Fred Meijer Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail in April of 2015. Much has happened throughout those years. The former historic railroad track that brought industry and supplies into the small towns of Ionia, Clinton and Shiawassee counties has morphed into a highly rated, well maintained recreational trail with great amenities and amazing views. In this issue we will look back at how far we've come, what the Friends Group does, and what our future might look like.



THE BIRTH OF A TRAIL – IN A NUTSHELL

In 1999, a grassroots organization was formed to research the possibility of turning the Central Michigan Railroad corridor, unused since 1992, into a recreational trail. This group eventually became the Friends of the Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee (CIS) Trail. In 2005 Fred Meijer and the Fred Meijer Foundation offered to donate over a million dollars for the development of the trail. In return, the Foundation asked that the trail be named in Mr. Meijer's honor. The Friends Group was formalized in 2006 to include a board of nine members (three representatives from each of the three counties the trail traversed). By-laws were adopted, a monthly meeting schedule set, we sought a 501c3 designation and we started collecting dues and donations from members. The board began actively promoting and building support for a trail and by 2006 all three counties had passed and signed resolutions supporting the trail.

In 2007, the 41.3-mile corridor was purchased by MDOT. Through an agreement between MDOT and MDNR, management of the trail was turned over to MDNR.

Fund raising began in earnest in 2011. With assistance from the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, the Friends Group was able to secure their first grant of \$15,000 from the Tri-County Bicycle Association (TCBA) through their DALMAC Fund. All in all, \$5,280,000 in grants and donations were secured by 2013.

A bid was sent out and awarded to Prein-Newhouse early in 2014. And on April 18, 2015, a ribbon cutting ceremony for the newly constructed Fred Meijer Clinton-Ionia-Shiawassee Trail was held at the St. Johns Depot.

WHAT DOES THE FRIENDS GROUP DO?

Maintenance of the trail is our biggest role. Mowing, weed control and brushing are all scheduled and contracted out, as is asphalt seal coating of the paved portions. These expenses are paid for by the maintenance funds from the Fred Meijer Foundation and administered through the Mid-West Michigan Trail Authority. With the help of volunteers, we remove downed trees and branches after wind storms and organize a trail clean up every spring (see Spring Clean Up Day: April 26, 2025). We also install amenities, ie, benches, information kiosks, bike racks and repair stations. Some of these amenities are paid for through dues and donations by private individuals in memory of loved ones. We repair and replace culverts, fences and signage. We also perform minor repair on bridges and fill the endless animal holes in the trail and shoulder. We print and publish trail maps/pamphlets, publish the annual trail newsletter and organize an annual membership meeting. We also collect membership dues (used mostly for non-maintenance expense) and liaison with the Michigan MDNR. Lastly, we convey updates and promote trail use through our website and social media.



Winter 2025

MONTHLY MEETINGS . . .

. . . are open to the public. We meet on the second Wednesday of the month at 6 pm. Generally, meetings are suspended during the summer months, so e-mail us at cistrail@gmail.com to ensure we are meeting. Meetings are held in the back room of Main St. Pizza Restaurant at 207 N. Clinton Ave., St. Johns, MI. 48879

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

To maintain and 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.

FRIENDS OF FRED MEIJER CIS TRAIL BOARD

Ionia County:

- Dave Weber (2025)
- Janice Gustafson
Treasurer (2026)
- Doug Hyland (2027)

Clinton County:

- Joel Wickham (2025)
- Allen Martin,
Vice Chair (2026)
- Kathy Simon,
Secretary (2027)

Shiawassee County:

- Barry Culham,
Trail Manager (2025)
- Craig Bisson (2026)
- Ardelle Rodgers,
Chair (2027)

www.cistrail.org
cistrail@gmail.com

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

WHAT DOES OUR FUTURE HOLD?

An objective of all trails is connectivity with other trails. We already connect to the Fred Meijer River Valley Trails on the west end. On the east end, the City of Owosso has been working on plans to extend our trail into their downtown and linking to the James Miner Trail. We are also optimistic that portions of the limestone surface will be upgraded by the MDNR to make the trail easier for cyclists to ride.



ANNUAL MEETING

This year’s annual meeting will be held at the Village of Muir Community Center, 122 W. Superior Street at 7 pm on Wednesday, April 9, 2025. Our keynote speaker is still pending , but will be posted on our Facebook page prior to the meeting.

SUPPORT YOUR TRAIL . . .

. . . by becoming a member or renewing your membership in the Friends of the FMCIS Trail. For the first time ever, we have made the difficult decision to raise our dues: Individual - \$12; Family - \$20; 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 also be found on our website.

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 lifeblood of our trail. The trail is largely maintained by our volunteers, so when you see one on the trail, please be sure to thank them.

We do our best to keep the trail open for users. If you see fallen trees and branches blocking the trail that are not easily removed, please shoot us an e-mail (see Contact Us!) with the details, including location (nearest mile marker or road crossings).



And if you are interested in becoming a volunteer, check our website for instructions or send us an e-mail (cistrail@gmail.com).

Tentative 2025 Maintenance Schedule:

We will be doing our normal maintenance of removing fallen trees, brushing and mowing all summer. We will continue our yearly project of clearing and chipping dead trees. Other various projects that we will be working on will be repairing the asphalt in the communities where trees roots are breaking through.

Spring Clean Up Day: April 26, 2025

The 2025 Spring Clean Up Day will be held on Saturday, April 26. This is a great volunteer opportunity for youth organizations looking for community service projects (ie, boy scouts, girl scouts, high school clubs or sport teams); for church groups and maybe even



families. We invite you to join us at our Trail Clean Up Saturday, April 26. If you can’t make it on that date, let us know at cistrail@gmail.com and we can plan an alternate time. Watch for more information on our website and Facebook page – or contact us at cistrail@gmail.com if you would like to volunteer your organization or group.

TRAIL USE

Our trail has experienced an uptick in trail usage, spurred on, no doubt, due to an increase in the use and popularity of e-bikes. This is not unique to the FMCIS Trail – it is a nationwide phenomenon with both positive and negative impacts. The Friends Group welcomes all legal uses of the trail, but it should be noted that as a State-owned trail, we are subject to MDNR regulations. These regulations are clear on which types of e-bikes are allowed and which are not allowed on State-owned trails (<https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/things-to-do/hike-and-bike/ebikes>). And, as always, we urge all cyclists to be considerate of others. This includes announcing your presence when passing others, and slowing down while riding through towns.

TRAIL ETIQUETTE

When enjoying a multi-use trail, it is important to show respect to other trail users. Here is a brief guideline of things to keep in mind:

- Stay to the right on the trail.
- If you need to stop (take photos, talk with friends, change a flat tire), move off to the side of the trail as a courtesy to other trail users.
- Bicyclists should yield to hikers, walkers and runners
- Even “good” dogs need to be on a leash 6-feet or shorter.
- Clean up after your pet does his/her “business”.
- Pack in/pack out. “Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints.”
- When approaching others from behind, let them know you are approaching. (Some cyclists use a bicycle bell, or say “on your left”).
- When walking/hiking/biking in a group, be courteous and mindful of other users trying to pass. Walk or ride single file, if necessary.
- Be considerate of others, especially in congested areas.
- Cyclists – reduce speed in congested areas.
- Nice, but not necessary – if you see branches or other debris on the trail that might cause injury to other trail users, consider moving it off to the side of the trail.
- Be safe, be alert, be courteous, have fun, enjoy the trail.

Source: Adopted from the West Michigan Trails website (wmtrails.org)

CONTACT US!

- E-mail Direct to Trail Manager - cistrail@gmail.com
- Non-Emergency Hot Line – Text: 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



Photo: Courtesy of Pinillas Trail <https://pinillas.gov/pinillas-trail-network-map/>