



# “Are We There Yet?”

**BY ANDREA LAFONTAINE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
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**E**mbark with us on an expedition! MTGA sets forth on a road trip, hand in hand with mParks, the resounding voice of Michigan’s parks and recreation community, and Heart of the Lakes, the statewide bastion supporting Michigan’s Land Conservation endeavors. Together, we have unveiled “Fresh Air Forums,” a series of enlightening townhall meetings.

While we have a roster of topics to explore, our paramount objective is to listen to YOU: nature enthusiasts, park and trail aficionados, allies, advocates, communities, organizations, and businesses. If you harbor insights about parks, trails, and open spaces, your voice is our compass.

Our journey encompasses geographically diverse locations, beckoning east-siders, west-siders, and northerners alike. We began

in Waterford (east) on March 15th, continued to Muskegon (west) on April 19th, and will culminate in Indian River (north) on May 10th. Based on the outcomes of these events, we may consider scheduling more dates and venues in the future.

Why this endeavor? The demand for outdoor sanctuaries surged during and post-pandemic. While one-time investments have bolstered infrastructure and maintenance, what’s our blueprint for sustainability beyond these initial allocations? We extol the virtues of these outdoor havens: heightened quality of life, enhanced physical and mental well-being, community and economic development, imbued sense of place, and talent attraction and retention. Yet, how do we pivot the narrative, asserting that access to such spaces is not a luxury but a vital necessity?

Our quest begins at the roots – our members, stakeholders, and fellow Michiganders who cherish the great outdoors. Together, we innovate, confronting fiscal challenges head-on, and forging pathways to augment our parks, trails, and open spaces. We, the “outdoor people,” etch this ethos into the very fabric of our Michigan identity.

We’re not there yet, but our bags are packed, brimming with anticipation for a future where appreciation for outdoor recreation and environmental preservation is palpable. Community members actively engage in stewardship initiatives, volunteering their time and resources to sustain the beauty and vitality of their surroundings. Local and State decision-makers prioritize funding for parks, recognizing



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their integral role in fostering well-being and fostering a sense of community.

Join us as we navigate towards a landscape where appreciation for nature flourishes, where dialogues transmute into action, and where our collective destiny unfolds amidst the splendor of Michigan’s great outdoors.

Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance (MTGA) is the statewide voice for non-motorized trail users, helping people build, connect, and promote trails for a healthier and more prosperous Michigan. Learn more, or sign up to be a member at [www.michigantrails.org](http://www.michigantrails.org). We invite you to follow up on Facebook (@michigantrails) or Instagram (@MichTrails) to discover opportunities to further enjoy and actively engage with Michigan’s trails.



“Fresh Air Forum” moderators (from left to right), Nichole Fisher, mParks; Andrea LaFontaine, MTGA; and Jonathan Jarosz, HOL.