

Raising Funds for a Better Quality of Life

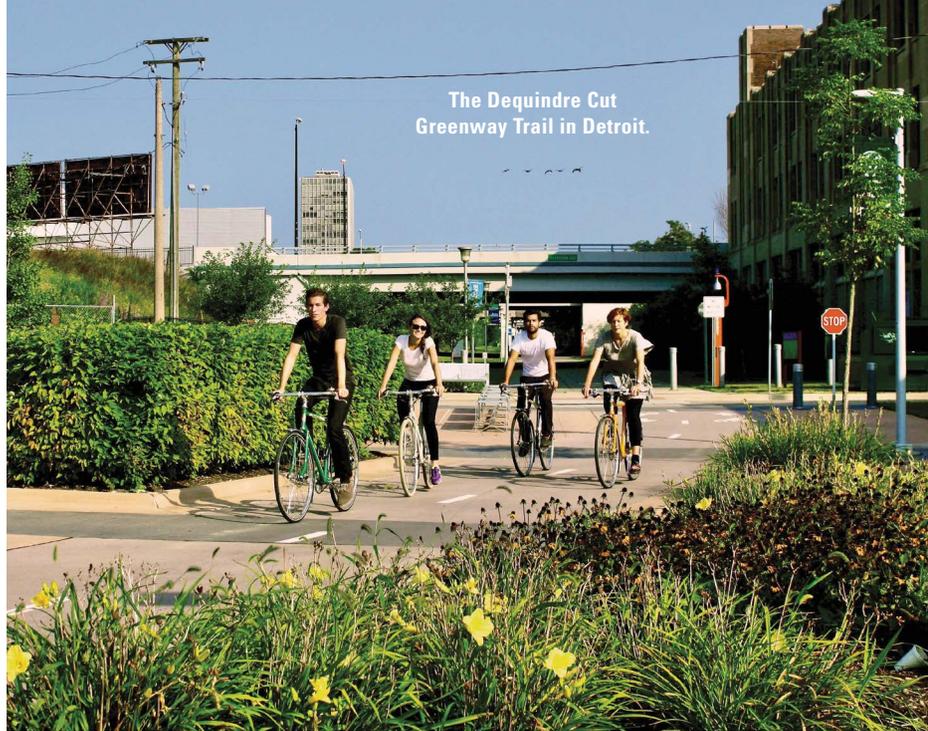
BY STEVE DEBRABANDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MICHIGAN TRAILS FUND

The Michigan Trails Fund (MTF), formerly known as the Iron Belle Trail Fund, is committed to raising private funds for regional biking and hiking trails throughout the state of Michigan for all our citizens and visitors. Our new name and mission went into effect on January 1 of this year, although we have been fundraising state-wide for about a year and a half now. The new name more accurately reflects our state-wide mission of fundraising for regional biking and hiking trail projects.

We have an incredible network of trails here in Michigan – “The Trails State.” A tremendous amount of work has been completed by too many people to even try and list in this article. We have had the pleasure of meeting, learning from, and working with many of these trail champions in the past. Our goal is to connect and extend the existing trail system by providing private funds that can be used to match public funds to complete these trail projects.

The MTF is overseen by an impressive 11-member Board of Directors, that are made up of individuals throughout the state. A list of members of the MTF Board can be found at the MTF webpage and the address is shown at the bottom of this article.

Since 2017, the MTF has been successful in not only fundraising directly for grant dollars but also indirectly through its advocacy efforts and leverage programs among funders throughout the State. This has also helped communities meet their public and private funding match requirements for their trail projects. It is estimated that the number could be close to \$75 million in indirect and



“I’ve heard it said that the easy trail segments, the low hanging fruit, have been completed and now we’re left with the challenge of connecting those segments. I personally do not believe there were any easy trail segments in the past, just some were harder than others! Creating and connecting regional hiking and biking trails takes a lot of effort, patience, local champions, talented people, and money.”

— STEVE DEBRABANDER

direct involvement of MTF. This year, 2022, we will be awarding an additional \$1.3 million in grant dollars directly which will leverage even more funds for high priority trail projects throughout the state. Projects funded include land acquisition, trail engineering and design, trail planning and trail construction projects.

We are very thankful to our private funding partners which include many foundations and corporations throughout the state. These funders understand the importance of creating a safe, continuous recreation trail system in our state. We also appreciate the Governor, the legislature and the DNR for their role in striving to make Michigan the number 1 trails state in the Union.

We are all very aware that trail use has increased significantly during Covid-19 as our citizens seek a safe way to recreate in our great state. In addition, with remote working now being a very common experience, people can decide where they want to live and work. One of the criteria that people are considering when deciding where to live is what the quality of outdoor recreation opportunities exist in that area. Specifically, people are looking for locations that have a well-connected and safe trail system.

We, at the Michigan Trails Fund, believe that it is even more important now than ever to extend and connect our existing trail system. The citizens of our state desire more trails and the resulting improvement in the quality of life including improved health that results from increased exercise.

We are committed to our mission of assisting trail advocates, both public and private, in obtaining private funds that can be used for trail projects and as match for additional public funds with the ultimate goal of a continuous, completed trail system within the state of Michigan.



Please feel free to contact Steve DeBrabander, Executive Director of Michigan Trails Fund at Steve.Michigantrailsfund@gmail.com or at 517-285-4096. Also, please visit our website at www.MichiganTrailsFund.org.