

Beaver Island, MI
Trails Plan Recommendations
From Michigan State University
CSUS 491

Student project

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Chapter 1) Beaver Island Overview	3
Community Description	3
Chapter 2) Current Trails Assessment	4
Recreation Inventory	4
Resource Inventory	4
Summary of Current Trails State	4
Chapter 3) Why Trails	5
Economy & Tourism	5
Culture.....	5
Safe Recreation.....	5
Chapter 4) Current Trail Challenges	6
Informal Trails.....	6
Trail Mapping & Signage	6
Trail Uses	6
Accessibility	7
Sensitive Habitat	7
Private Property.....	7
Chapter 5) Next Steps.....	9
Mapping	9
Land Usage	9
Fencing and Notice for Private Property	9
Guided Easements for Passive Use	9
Land Manager Role in Managing and Controlling Use	9
Sale of Private Lands for Trail Use	10
Recreational Trespass Act.....	10
Gross Negligence	10
Liability Acts	10
Equine Activity Liability Act (PA 351 of 1994).....	10
Liability of Landowners (Part 733 of NREPA).....	11
Recreational Trespass Act (Part 731 of NREPA)	11
Trailways Act (Part 721 of NREPA)	11
Trail Use Designations & Expanded Trail Uses	11
ORV and ATV Trails	11
Non-Motorized Shared Use Trails.....	12
Winter Uses on Trails	12
Handicap Accessible Trails.....	12
Trail Usage Signage & Yielding	12
Trail Surfacing & Accessibility.....	13

Boardwalks	13
Crushed Stone	13
Wood Chips	13
Wayfinding Signage	14
Trail Blazes	14
Mileage and Location Signage	14
Map Signage	15
Branding	15
Management	15
Maintenance	16
Liability	16
Funding	16
Regulations	17
Trail Culture	17
Trails Groups	17
Chapter 6) Future Steps	18
Trail User Education	18
Educational Signage	18
Digital Applications	18
Community-led Workshops and Guided Walks	18
Collaboration Organizations	18
Marketing and Promotion	18
Developing a Strong Online Presence	19
Collaborative Marketing	19
Promoting Events	19
Printed Materials and Merchandise	19
Historical Signage	19
Identifying Key Historical Sites	19
Designing Engaging and Informative Signage	19
Chapter 7) Partnerships	20
Potential Funding Sources	20
Support from DNR	20
Local Trails Groups	20
Chapter 8) Resources	21
Appendix 1) Survey Results	23

Chapter 1) Beaver Island Overview

Community Description

Beaver Island, also known as America's Emerald Isle, is the largest island in Lake Michigan. The island offers a combination of natural beauty, history, and culture. The island located in northern Lake Michigan, is a great site for nature lovers and anyone looking for a peaceful getaway to have a quiet holiday and expand their horizons.

The island has an interesting-to-listen history that is influenced by multiple historical events. Those events have shaped how the island looks today. For example, there are still antiques from the Odawa, the indigenous American group who lived years ago. The history of shipwrecks on the Great Lakes, well-known in the area around Lake Michigan, is also one of the fascinating aspects of Beaver Island's past.

These historical influences have been blended to create a distinctive and varied cultural tapestry that is Beaver Island's community today. The island provides a variety of activities, such as exploring its breathtaking natural settings and learning about its intriguing past. It is a desirable location for people looking for peace and quiet as well as adventure because of its isolated beaches, woods, and recreational harbor. In addition to offering chances for enjoyment, Beaver Island's trails weave a complex narrative through the island's history and culture, enticing tourists to discover and value this exceptional region of the globe.

Visitors of Beaver Island always recognize its trail system, which provides an easy way to explore the island's rich natural and cultural history. These trails go through a variety of settings, from soft-sand beaches to woods and dunes, offering a distinct perspective on the island's magnificence. They offer a window into the island's past by offering a viewpoint of its historical attractions. Whether you're searching for a more daring hike to uncover the island's hidden corners or a leisurely stroll to enjoy the peace and quiet of the island, the paths suit a variety of interests and fitness levels.

An important part of the island's environmental conservation initiatives is the trail system. For the residents of the island and the visitors, the trails serve as more than just a means of transportation around the island; they are also instruments for cultural and environmental conservation, guaranteeing that Beaver Island's rich history will be preserved for coming generations.

Chapter 2) Current Trails Assessment

Recreation Inventory

Beaver Island has many activities for nature lovers. From the website, they have paddle board, jet ski, and pontoon rentals, providing visitors and guests with the means to see the beauty of the island on the water. There is the opportunity to hunt and fish, as well as a golf course. Beaver Island also has events that center around biking. For example, the slow roll tour is a guided bicycle tour that shares historic stories. There is also The Beaver Island Bike Festival which attracts guests to participate in fun activities including a bike ride, music, and food. These activities lead to the belief that biking is a very popular activity and use of trails on the island. The website also includes rentals of UTV's indicating that this is also a popular use of the trails. In addition, Beaver Island hosts an event called Warblers on the Water for bird watching, adding additional interests in trail usage.

Resource Inventory

With the seclusion that comes with island living, comes an untouched environment. Species that have struggles on the mainland in Michigan, have been thriving on the island. For example, Pitcher's thistle, ash trees, and milkweed. One reason for this is that invasive species have not infiltrated. The island's wildlife also includes smallmouth bass, sandhill cranes, deer, turkeys, bumblebees, and monarch butterflies. Not only does the island's seclusion create a thriving ecosystem, but also the biodiversity. The island has dunes, fens, forests, and swamps. There have been 16 unique habitats categorized on Beaver Island. Biodiversity is vital to the growth of an ecosystem as it allows for growth and survival of species. These environmental resources define the island and its draw. They are an important reason why people do and will continue to go on trails. These are also important to note when designing a trail system as they need to be protected.

Summary of Current Trails State

In summary, Beaver Island has lots of recreational activities and environmental resources that draw people to the island to visit or live. As discussed, there are many things drawing people to the trails. Improvements to the trails system will only increase the appeal. To improve the trails system, the current issues need to be addressed. The most notable challenges include accessibility of maps and trails, monitoring of trail use, and a lack of education on trail uses, according to conversations with the Beaver Island contacts. These will be further discussed in *Chapter 4) Current Trail Challenges*.

Chapter 3) Why Trails

Economy & Tourism

The improvement of the trail system on Beaver Island may result in a significant increase in tourism. It will bring more people to the area which in turn brings more spending to the area. It has been proven to boost local businesses and increase property value. Improved trails could help increase the local businesses on the island such as the charming gift shops. The return on this investment for the community would be great. In Michigan, outdoor recreation generates \$26.6 billion annually in consumer spending, 232,00 direct jobs, \$7.5 billion in wages and salaries, and \$2.1 billion in state and local tax revenue (Outdoor Industry Association, 2017).

Culture

Trails and outdoor recreation are a large part of Michigan culture. The Outdoor Industry Association estimates that at least 63% of Michigan residents participate in outdoor recreation each year, which is 12.5% higher than the national average. Michigan is most well known as being "The Great Lake State" and one of the best ways to experience this beauty of the lakes and other natural scenery is by trails. Michigan has thousands of miles of trails and a strong community of users. There are clubs and organizations for each type of user in Michigan. With this type of popularity and support, it is no surprise that the second's nickname is "The Trails State." There is even an Annual Trails Week in Michigan, further proving the value that trails add to the culture of the state.

Trails also encourage connections between people and communities. Trails have the ability to provide people with increased knowledge about their community through informative signage. They can inform the public about the natural, historical, and cultural resources around them. They also unify people as they may make connections with people who have similar hobbies and interests as them. Trails also promote inclusion in a community by providing access to people from all walks of life.

Safe Recreation

Trails are also vital for the safe recreation they provide. They are a secure place where people can go to experience the outdoors and the beauty of the world around them. They provide a place to connect with others, exercise, and enjoy nature within their community. American Trails says that communities with a high-quality trail infrastructure see improvements in health for their citizens which results in medical savings for a community. It was found that for every \$1 invested in trails, a \$3 savings in medical cost is correlated (American Heart Association, 2011). In addition to the physical health benefits of trails, there are also mental health benefits. There is a direct link between spending time in nature and a lower risk of depression (Stanford University, 2015)

Chapter 4) Current Trail Challenges

Through our team's contacts in the Beaver Island community and the community survey published on the Facebook community page, we learned of 5 particularly significant challenges of trails on the island right now. These challenges each have support and opposition and are often left undiscussed to avoid conflict. We would like to bring up these challenges by mentioning both arguments and taking a stance of compromise and problem solving rather than siding with one argument or the other. Another thing of note is that many of these problems are tied together.

Informal Trails

The first trail challenge our group learned about was a set of informal trails stretching across the island that have been created mostly by ORV users to access points on the island where roads and trails do not connect. Often these trails are developed through heavy use, whether that be high pedestrian traffic or heavy vehicle traffic. Trails which develop in this way often can give a good picture of where additional trails would be desired on the island, and where creating additional trails would have strong support.

Despite the positives, these trails also come with negatives. One is that these trails are not mapped or cared for, and therefore trail users can quickly become lost. Another is that these informal trails often cross through sensitive habitat areas, commonly flooded areas, and private property. Building trails through sensitive or flood-prone areas can be dangerous not only to trail users, but also to the flora and fauna around the trail, as is discussed more in the *Sensitive Habitat* section of this chapter. Because these informal trails are built through use instead of being built formally, they run the risk of crossing private property. Private property issues are discussed more in the *Private Property* section of this chapter.

Trail Mapping & Signage

In addition to informal trails, formal trails are mostly unsigned with paper maps. While this can give a more rustic feel to the trails, it can also cause safety problems and contribute to trail users getting lost. There are a number of alternative options to each of these problems which can be implemented in ways which allow trails to remain rustic while also increasing safety, comfort level of unfamiliar trail users, and availability of trail information. Options for trail mapping are discussed more in *Chapter 5) Next Steps - Mapping*, while options for trail signage are discussed more in *Chapter 5) Next Steps - Wayfinding Signage*.

Trail Uses

A controversial issue not just on the island, trail use designations and the distribution of types of trails has become increasingly important to the world of trails in recent years. This is especially prevalent with the rise of ORVs, ATVs, and E-Bikes. For the safety of both pedestrians and ORV users, it makes sense to designate some trails for ORV use and others for non-motorized uses, giving each use their own specialized spaces and improving experiences for them.

However, this begs the question of which trails should be designated for which uses, should new trails be created for specific uses, and how will these designations be enforced. While there are no perfect answers, multiple options are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 5) Next Steps - Trail Use Designations & Expanded Trail Uses*.

Accessibility

In our survey, multiple responses brought up that the rustic trails of Beaver Island are difficult for older community members to enjoy due to the challenging terrain. Trail accessibility is a key piece for any trail plan and ensuring that all community members have access to trails can help garner more support for trails. A good trail surfacing is the key to building accessible trails; however, this can be controversial at times due to the unnatural, man-made feel of some of these trails. Different surfaces have different feels and perceptions among the hiking community and should be considered to some degree with community input. More discussion on trail surfacing for accessibility purposes can be found in *Chapter 5) Next Steps - Trail Surfacing & Accessibility*.

Sensitive Habitat

Trails crossing through sensitive areas on Beaver Island can be controversial, however can also be incredibly beautiful. A trail which crosses through the nature found on Beaver Island immerses the trail user in one of the most unique and most ecologically diverse areas in the state.

Trails which cross through sensitive areas also run the risk of destroying the very nature which makes such a trail beautiful, particularly when these trails are built by high pedestrian volumes or ORV traffic. Trails can be designed to minimize this impact and preserve the natural beauty which the trail highlights. However, when they are not built with this in mind, they can end up degrading hills, uprooting plants, spreading invasive species, and creating obstructions to animal life.

Private Property

One of the smaller concerns we identified through our survey was that of private property rights for properties with trails running through them. While concerns over trespassing and disrespecting private land were not identified in our community survey, there were several concerns with property destruction from ORV usage on informal trails. These concerns can be helped with better signage and education around the ORV trails on the island, which are discussed more in *Chapter 5) Next Steps - Trail Use Designations & Expanded Trail Uses*.

In addition to those concerns, a few individuals also identified problems with trail users parking on private property, non-residents purchasing property which is adjacent to trails and attempting to close public trails, and trail users mistaking private driveways and trails for public trails. All of these are valid concerns and can be addressed by educating trail users and landowners of their

protections and of their responsibilities under law. In these cases, the concerns are mostly addressed by the following state laws:

- Recreational Trespass Act, which addresses issues with trespass on private land for recreational activities including hunting, fishing, and trail use.
- Recreational Use Act, which protects landowners who want to allow for easement and access of their property for recreational uses with specific exemptions from liability assuming they follow a standard of care.
- Michigan Trailways Act protects private property rights and includes specific liability protections for farmers.

In other situations, other laws may be applicable, however these three laws are the most referenced for trail activities and private property. Other reference points include:

- Equine Activity Liability Act (Act 351 of 1994)
- Liability of Landowners (Part 733 of NREPA)
- Recreational Trespass Act (Part 731 of NREPA)
- Trailways Act (Part 721 of NREPA)

These are discussed in further detail in *Chapter 5) Next Steps - Liability Acts*.

Chapter 5) Next Steps

Mapping

The latest map of the trails system per the Beaver Island website, is from 2013. With 10 years past, it would be beneficial to the community to invest in re-mapping the trails because it is likely new trails have formed. Also, if different designations for the trails are to be used, those designations should be clearly marked on the island's trail map. In the survey conducted, input indicated that people would like to see clear mapping identifying the uses of the trails. When the re-mapping is completed, it is important to make these maps readily available to the public in an easily accessible way. Online is the best way for many people to access as people can get an idea of the trails beforehand if they are tourists traveling to Beaver Island.

There was a more recent map published in 2018 called the Wojan-Cashman Map of Beaver Island. However, this map is only available in printed form. It is suggested that this map is digitalized and combined with GPS as a georeferenced map. It would also be beneficial to add the maps to an app such as Avenza Maps. On this app, one can add placemarks and photos, and measure distances. It can also be used offline without Wi-Fi or network connectivity. The Beaver Island maps can be uploaded to the app for all trail users to use.

Land Usage

Fencing and Notice for Private Property

An approach of well put-together research should be made to the implementation of visible fencing and signage, aimed at fostering effective communication of private property boundaries. Furthermore, community collaboration will be key. It should not just abide by legal considerations but also fall into a sense of shared responsibility and community engagement in the sustainable development of the trail system.

Guided Easements for Passive Use

An exploration of the existing legal frameworks should take place ensuring a thorough understanding of liability and responsibilities associated with guided easements. Moreover, a strategic focus on negotiation techniques will be important. Committed to developing effective negotiation strategies to engage with landowners, fostering an environment helping to get support for guided easements.

Land Manager Role in Managing and Controlling Use

A proactive and collaborative engagement strategy is suggested. Where regular stakeholder meetings should be scheduled, fostering open dialogues between land managers, trail users, and property owners. These meetings should aim to address concerns comprehensively and look over a collective approach to trail usage management. In addition, a dedicated focus on educational programs will be initiated, with a specific emphasis on training land managers. This training will entail effective control measures, underscoring the importance of community

collaboration and educational outreach initiatives. By taking stakeholder inputs and fostering a culture of continuous learning, this approach will seek not only to address immediate concerns but also develop a shared understanding of responsible trail management for the sustained benefit of the Beaver Island community.

Sale of Private Lands for Trail Use

A thorough study should be conducted to assess the economic and environmental impact associated with the acquisition of private lands for trail use. This study aims to provide a robust foundation for decision-making, considering the multifaceted aspects of such acquisitions. In tandem with this, community input will be actively sought through public forums, ensuring transparency and inclusivity in the decision-making process regarding land acquisition. By combining empirical data from the feasibility study with the diverse perspectives garnered through community engagement, our approach seeks to align the trail plan with both economic viability and community values, fostering a sustainable and harmonious trail system for Beaver Island.

Recreational Trespass Act

Launch a campaign aimed at informing the public about the intricacies of the Recreational Trespass Act. Emphasizing the legal implications of trespassing on private property, the campaign seeks to enhance public awareness and compliance. By showing a clear understanding of the legal framework, and promoting responsible trail use, mitigate potential conflicts, and contribute to a harmonious coexistence between trail users and private property owners on Beaver Island.

Gross Negligence

A systematic safety audit framework for the trail system, with the initial objective of identifying possible hazards and areas prone to instances of gross negligence. Through regular safety audits, and proactively assessing the trail's conditions, to make sure the timely identification of potential risks. Subsequently, corrective measures will be then implemented to minimize any hazards identified during the audit process. This results in a secure and enjoyable trail environment and should elevate the overall trail experience on Beaver Island.

Liability Acts

Equine Activity Liability Act (PA 351 of 1994)

Forge collaborations with local equestrian groups to develop and implement comprehensive safety programs. Actively engaging with the equine community, ideally to make sure the Equine Activity Liability Act is followed, which should build an environment of safety and responsible trail use.

Liability of Landowners (Part 733 of NREPA)

Organize legal workshops for landowners, ideally providing a comprehensive outlook into their rights and responsibilities. Which should create a supportive environment to trail development by Improving landowners' understanding of legal frameworks.

Recreational Trespass Act (Part 731 of NREPA)

Establish a dedicated legal advisory service designed to help landowners in navigating and addressing any problems with trespassing under the Recreational Trespass Act. Ideally empowering landowners with the knowledge and resources necessary to uphold their rights and manage things related to recreational trespass.

Trailways Act (Part 721 of NREPA)

Development of trail management guidelines, in accordance with the provisions of the Trailways Act. Ideally creating a framework which facilitates trail management as well as ensures the protection of private property rights.

Trail Use Designations & Expanded Trail Uses

Trail use designations including trail system rules, signage, and accessibility, are one of the most important aspects of a successful trail network. These aspects of trails not only create safer experiences for regular trail users, but also allow the trails to be enjoyed by everyone. Our community outreach identified five trail uses for improvement focuses, each of which have a strong group of supporters on the island. These each come with their own supporters and opponents and should be implemented at the discretion of the township and the community.

ORV and ATV Trails

Possibly the most controversial trail uses on the island, our community outreach survey identified ORV/ATV trail usage as one of the issues that must be addressed in any trail improvement plan. These issues appear to stem from ORV users being forced onto the same trails as hikers, bikers, and other trail users. This causes safety issues for all trail users and can even feel crowded with all the trail users sharing spaces.

There are a few key pieces required to solve this issue. First is restricting trail usage to nonmotorized activity on some trails across the island. This can be done by the township through ordinances; however, it will require some form of regulation. While regulation will be difficult, community support can help to enforce these rules as well.

Second, if the number of trails that ORVs and ATVs can use is restricted, new trails should be built and a few old trails adapted specifically for ORVs and ATVs rather than for other uses. Building new trails will allow for the construction of trails that can more easily withstand the impacts of ORV usage and potentially even provide an experience catered to ORV users rather than to hikers. If ORV trails are built, they should be built to allow both recreational usage and

transportation usage. These trails should also follow the signage regulations set by the Michigan DNR which are discussed in more detail in *Trail Usage Signage & Yielding*.

Finally, ORV usage education should be a key piece for visitors to the island. Because of the unique nature of traveling to Beaver Island, there is the ability to educate ORV tourists at the singular access point to the island with an ORV, the ferry. This could occur in multiple different ways, including as a partnership between the townships and the ferry company or as at either dock.

Non-Motorized Shared Use Trails

The current state of trails on Beaver Island consists of a network of shared use trails which allow all types of uses, motorized and non-motorized. However, as was mentioned above, for safety purposes, it makes sense to separate motorized trail use from non-motorized trail use. This can be done by ordinance and signage, however, will also require community cooperation and support to ensure rules are followed.

A non-motorized trail designation also begs the question of whether bikes and E-Bikes will be allowed on these trails as well. While these restrictions are beyond the scope of this trails plan, they may be warranted if the Beaver Island community so desires it. Community input is a key piece of establishing the final rules for a trail system and should always be taken into consideration before creating new rules.

Winter Uses on Trails

Cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling are growing uses on the island that should also be addressed. Snowmobiling can be addressed much in the same way as ORV and ATV trails and can be limited to the same trails.

In addition to a strong interest for more organized snowmobile trails, our team's survey identified that groomed cross country ski trails are also of interest to residents on the island, with 20% of survey respondents listing it as their number one trail use, they wish to see more of on the island. More outreaches should be done within the community to learn where these trails are desired, and if there is enough interest to invest in ski trail grooming equipment.

Handicap Accessible Trails

Multiple responses to our survey mentioned a lack of handicap accessible trails. Accessibility of trails is important to ensure older residents of the island can enjoy the natural features of the island as well. To be more inclusive to these trail users on the island, it is encouraged that some trails be constructed to accommodate those with physical challenges. Trail surfacing for handicap accessible trails is discussed more in *Trail Surfacing & Accessibility*.

Trail Usage Signage & Yielding

To establish trail, use rules and regulations, signage is a necessity. This is particularly important on motorized trails accommodating ORV and ATV traffic. Yielding guidelines, speed limits,

safety identification, maintenance recommendations, standard signage practice, and funding sources for both snowmobile and ORV/ATV trail signage can be found in the Michigan Motorized Trail Maintenance and Signing Handbook at [https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/-/media/Project/Websites/dnr/Documents/LED/digests/Motorized Trail Signing Handbook.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/-/media/Project/Websites/dnr/Documents/LED/digests/Motorized_Trail_Signing_Handbook.pdf).

An additional funding source for snowmobile trail signage is the Michigan DNR's Snowmobile Trail Improvement Fund. More information regarding this fund can be found on the DNR's website at <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/buy-and-apply/grants/rec/snowmo-trails>.



On non-motorized shared use trails, it is also important to establish yielding guidelines through posted signage at trailheads. This signage can often be paired with wayfinding signage at trailheads, and generally stand to establish a rule of thumb for trail users. The yielding guidelines used by the Michigan DNR (as well as other common trail etiquette which can be posted if issues begin to arise), which serve to ensure all trail users are respected, can be found at the following link: [https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/places/state-trails/nonmotorized-](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/places/state-trails/nonmotorized-etiquette)

[etiquette](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/places/state-trails/nonmotorized-etiquette).

Trail Surfacing & Accessibility

There are 5 generally used types of trail surfacing, ranging from full natural surface (like many trails on Beaver Island today) to asphalt paved trails. In order to provide an accessible trail that preserves a natural ambiance, there are three common alternatives, each used regularly in preserved areas such as State and National Parks.

Boardwalks

Boardwalks are a good option for trails which enter sensitive areas and wetlands. In addition to providing a scenic hike, boardwalks also are a firm and stable surface for those with mobility challenges. However, boardwalks can also be expensive, both to install and to maintain. In addition, surfaces can easily become slippery, and much of the accessibility is lost if trailheads are not built well.

Crushed Stone

Gravel and limestone trails are a more cost-effective option; however they also require more maintenance. When installed correctly and well maintained, these surfaced trails can be highly accessible and keep a relatively natural feel. If these trails are not maintained, however, they can quickly erode and wash away, causing holes, dips, and grooves to form, especially with gravel surfacing.

Wood Chips

Wood chips are a third option, and although they do have to be replaced periodically, they are cheap and easy to install. Wood chips are a less accessible option than gravel and restrict access to wheelchairs, however they also blend into the natural environment.

Wayfinding Signage

One of the top issues with trail accessibility, especially with trails on the southern end of the island, is a lack of consistent wayfinding signage. On Beaver Island, while some trails are well marked, others have limited signage throughout the trail. Our survey identified that two of the main changes to improve the trails on Beaver Island are clear mapping along trails and clear trail designation. There are three widely regarded solutions to these identified problems: blazes, mileage and location signage, and map signage. These options vary in cost, maintenance, and amount of information displayed, and can be used singularly or in tandem.



Trail Blazes

Trail Blazes are one of the most widely used types of wayfinding “signage” on trails and are regularly used along more rustic, low maintenance trails. In the United States, trail blazes are commonly found as single-color paint markings on trees, rocks, and other permanent items

CONTINUE STRAIGHT	START OF TRAIL	RIGHT TURN
SPUR LEADING TO A DIFFERENT TRAIL	END OF TRAIL	LEFT TURN

alongside trails, although other formats of blazes are also used occasionally. The standard blaze marking system for the U.S. is shown in the diagram to the left.

Trail blazes can be particularly useful in marking trails which traverse sensitive ecology and areas of high natural beauty, as are found throughout Beaver Island. Because trail blazes have a particularly low impact on the surrounding environment and low cost, these can often be an easy solution to problems with trail designation and navigation.

Mileage and Location Signage

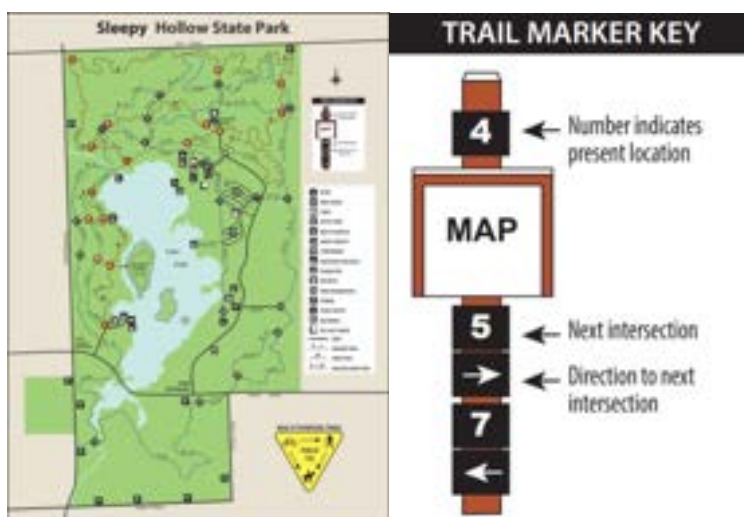
Although slightly more expensive, mileage and location signage can be extremely useful for safety and reassurances for trail users. This category of signage often appears as a location number and/or regularly spaced mileage marker, sometimes including GPS coordinates and other location information. This type of signage is particularly helpful for emergency situations because it helps pinpoint exact locations for rescue. It can also be useful for navigational purposes and provides comfort to trail users. These can be regularly spaced (0.1, 0.25, or 0.5 mile intervals) or used at key points along the trail such as intersections and sharp turns, and should also include the trail name on the sign. They can also include distance and direction from trailhead, which are helpful for hikers and other trail users.



Trail Directional Signage:

Map Signage

Signage which includes maps is often used on highly traversed trails through rustic areas, as well as at trailheads and trail intersections. Map signage can also be used at more regular intervals, such as with mileage and location signage, however for more rustic trails this can be considered distracting from the trail itself. A more common alternative to map signage at regular intervals is to place a large, full trail map at trailheads, with paper brochure maps available. Maps often include location numbers from mileage and location signage. Having a trail map at trailheads is common



Example of a Trail Map and a Trail Marker Sign used



Trail Mileage Sign: Photo

practice by many and gives confidence to trail users that they are at the correct location. Trail maps can also include private property boundaries, trail rules, locations of interest, and other details that improve trail user experience and safety.

Branding

Although it seems like an item of lesser importance, consistent trail branding is a key piece of establishing trails as trustworthy. By establishing a trails logo that can be featured on trails maps, signage, and other resources, a reputation can be built. Building a positive reputation through accurate maps, adequate signage, and regular trail maintenance can greatly improve credibility of trails organizations on the island and can help encourage responsible trail use through organizational credibility and positive reinforcement. Branding strategies outside of consistent logo usage on all signs and maps is discussed more in *Chapter 6: Marketing and Promotion*.

Management

The management of the Beaver Island trail system is a difficult task that requires careful planning, constant maintenance, and a comprehensive approach to accountability and safety. Beyond just keeping these paths as a recreational resource, maintaining them is crucial for safeguarding the island's natural beauty and cultural heritage, not to mention ensuring public safety.

Maintenance

An effective trail management system must have routine inspections and maintenance. To ensure the safety and use of the trails, this calls for routine inspections. Maintenance tasks include things like trash removal, mowing overgrown vegetation, repairing trail damage, and checking that signage is clear and educational. Seasonal obstacles such as fallen leaves in the autumn and snowfall in the winter must be given special attention to keep the paths usable throughout the year.

Inspections are necessary to identify potential hazards on the trails, such as unstable soils, crumbling walkways, or fallen trees. Regular inspections help identify these issues early and allow for timely corrections before they become serious risks to public safety. This proactive approach increases the lifespan of the trail infrastructure while also enhancing the user experience.

Liability

Liability insurance is an essential component of trail management. It protects the governing body—be it the local government, a nonprofit, or a community organization—from lawsuits stemming from accidents or injuries received on the trails. This insurance typically covers things like injuries to individuals and property damage.

Having liability insurance is crucial because it shields you from lawsuits and ensures that victims of trail accidents will get just compensation. It also demonstrates a commitment to safety and responsible management, two things that are necessary to maintain the public's trust and support for the trail system.

Funding

The sustainability and expansion of the Beaver Island trail system depend on a robust and flexible funding strategy. Several sources of funding will be incorporated into this plan to ensure the administration, development, and upkeep of the trails. Below are ways to fund trail and ensure its sustainability:

1. Grants

- a. Apply for federal and state funding for environmental conservation, recreational development, and community initiatives.
- b. Funding from local government organizations should be pursued for community development projects like trail maintenance and improvements.

2. Donations

- a. Promote donations from both private and corporate sources. A dedicated website or fundraising campaigns could be used to make this possible.
- b. Establish a sponsorship program whereby local businesses could contribute to part of the trail in exchange for recognition on guides, signs, and trail maps.

3. Fundraising Events

- a. Organize yearly events such as trail marathons, mountain bike races, or nature hikes that will help the path's finances. These events ought to have admission fees.
- b. Plan events like fairs, concerts, or art exhibitions to raise money for the trail system.

4. Partnership with non-profit organizations

- a. Collaborate with non-profits focused on history, recreation, and the environment. These organizations can provide both financial assistance and their trail management expertise.
- b. Grant applications combined with these organizations might open new funding sources.

Other ideas might be to start a merch that links people with trails and serves as a tangible product that reminds them of the island.

In summary, the Beaver Island trail system gains from a comprehensive funding strategy that blends traditional methods with innovative concepts to maintain, enhance, and grow the network for coming generations.

Regulations

Trail Culture

For a positive trail culture, the implementation of sustained trail etiquette programs, strategically involving local schools, community groups, and trail users to actively promote responsible behavior on the trails. Also, initiatives aimed at building a strong sense of responsibility among trail users should instill a commitment to preserving the island's unique natural habitat. Ideally developing a trail culture upholding sustainable practices which ensures the ongoing preservation of the island as well as building a relationship between the trail system and the broader local community.

Trails Groups

Establishing volunteer programs tailored for trail maintenance, building a sense of ownership and active community involvement in the preservation, and well keeping of the trail system. And advocating for the implementation of routine trail user surveys. These surveys should gather valuable feedback from trail users, capturing data of experiences and expectations. The data obtained through these surveys serves as a crucial resource for informed decision-making and helps future improvements to the trail infrastructure.

Chapter 6) Future Steps

Trail User Education

Educating trail users is a crucial point for retaining sustainable and enjoyable trail experiences. Beaver Island, with its unique natural setting and wildlife, offers opportunities for both recreational enjoyment and learning about the environment and responsible trail use. This education can be integrated through various mediums, including physical signage, digital resources, and community-led programs. By implementing a comprehensive education program, Beaver Island can ensure that trail users are well-informed, which in turn helps in preserving the natural beauty and sustainability of the trails.

Educational Signage

Signage along trails can serve dual purposes – guiding the users and educating them about the local flora, fauna, and trail etiquette. These signs can explain the importance of staying on marked trails to protect sensitive habitats, the significance of not leaving trash behind, and respecting the wildlife. Interactive and engaging signage, possibly incorporating QR codes linking to more detailed digital content, can enhance the learning experience.

Digital Applications

Creating a mobile application or a dedicated section on the community website can provide extensive information about the trails, including maps, descriptions of the natural environment, and educational materials. This platform can also include a section on trail etiquette, safety tips, and how to minimize one's environmental footprint while enjoying the trails.

Community-led Workshops and Guided Walks

Organizing regular workshops and guided trail walks led by local experts or volunteers can provide hands-on learning experiences. These sessions can focus on various aspects, including local history, environmental conservation, wildlife spotting, and understanding the ecological significance of the island's trails.

Collaboration Organizations

Partnering with local schools and youth organizations to incorporate trail education into their curriculum or activities can foster a sense of stewardship among the younger generations. This could involve field trips, participatory activities in trail maintenance, or educational programs tailored to different age groups.

Marketing and Promotion

Marketing and promotion are essential for increasing awareness and attracting visitors to Beaver Island's trails. Effective marketing strategies can not only boost tourism but also foster a sense of community pride and involvement.

Developing a Strong Online Presence

A robust online presence through a dedicated website and active social media channels is crucial. This should include stunning visuals of the trails, user testimonials, and up-to-date information about trail conditions, events, and any new developments. Regular updates and engaging content can keep the audience interested and informed. An idea that might be helpful is spreading the word in the media via influencers to promote events.

Collaborative Marketing

Collaborating with local businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and tour operators, can be mutually beneficial. Joint promotional offers, like discounts or package deals that include trail experiences, can attract more visitors, and benefit the local economy.

Promoting Events

Organizing trail-related events such as marathons, nature walks, photography contests, or bird-watching sessions can attract diverse groups of people. Promoting these events through various channels, including local media, travel blogs, and tourism websites, can broaden the reach.

Printed Materials and Merchandise

Brochures, flyers, and trail maps available at key tourist spots can aid in spreading information. Additionally, selling merchandise like t-shirts, caps, and other memorabilia featuring Beaver Island's trails can serve as both a marketing tool and a revenue stream.

Historical Signage

A strategic marketing approach can significantly enhance the visibility and appeal of Beaver Island's trails, attracting more visitors while promoting responsible trail usage. Integrating historical signage along Beaver Island's trails can significantly enrich the trail experience by connecting visitors with the island's rich history and cultural heritage.

Identifying Key Historical Sites

The first step involves identifying sites of historical significance along the trails. These could be locations with historical, cultural, or natural importance. Collaborating with local historians, indigenous communities, and cultural organizations can ensure the accuracy and inclusiveness of the information.

Designing Engaging and Informative Signage

The design of the historical signs should be visually appealing and informative, providing a brief but engaging description of the site's significance. Using durable materials that blend with the natural surroundings is also essential for aesthetic and environmental reasons.

Chapter 7) Partnerships

Potential Funding Sources

Explore federal grants, like what is offered by the National Park Service. In addition, applying for grants from private foundations dedicated to environmental conservation, outdoor recreation, and community development. These funding sources are discussed more in *Chapter 5) Next Steps - Funding*.

Support from DNR

Organize technical assistance workshops. Offering guidance on trail planning, design, and maintenance, ensuring alignment with industry best practices. Additionally, pursuing the DNR for Trail Town Designation. Mainly, and first, establishing a stable and guaranteed source from the DNR that can work with the DNR and Beaver Island coherently and is able to relay information needed and provide the assistance and input needed to both sides.

Local Trails Groups

Forge partnerships with local trails groups. Explore innovative funding initiatives, including crowdfunding campaigns, to supplement the financial foundation of the trail plan. Also, organizing community engagement events alongside local trails groups, building awareness, and instilling a sense of community ownership which will be important for the sustained success of the trail network.

Chapter 8) Resources

Island Contacts: Vicki Smith, Maria Dal Pra, Gina Mangra, and Wil Cwikiel

Class Contacts: Bob Wilson and Tim Novak

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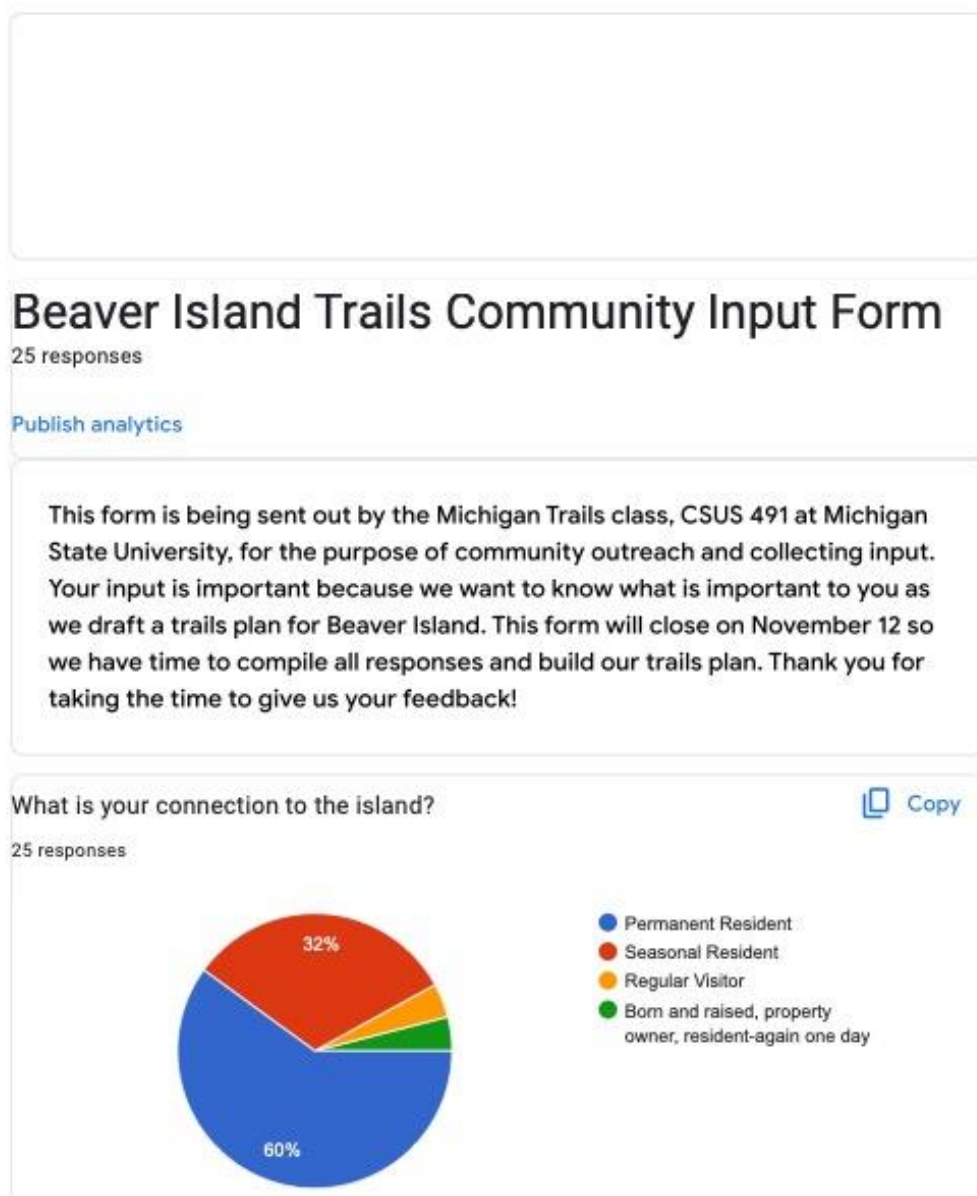
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Legal Resources: Recreational Use Act, Michigan Trailways Act, Equine Activity Liability Act (Act 351 of 1994), Liability of Landowners (Part 733 of NREPA), Recreational Trespass Act (Part 731 of NREPA), Trailways Act (Part 721 of NREPA)

Appendix 1) Survey Results



What are your perceptions of the existing trail system on Beaver Island?

25 responses

A variety of trails but their upkeep is poor

Need better parking at some trail heads, particularly west end of seven bridges

Lots of beautiful trails

Just ok

Good quality, but definitely needs more attention to down trees!!! Also, it would be nice for some groomed xc trails

Lots of trails but difficult to maintain

Good

They need to be clearly defined and mapped out

Most pretty good, but some need regular removal of downed trees and branches.

Great trails when you can find them.

A good start. A formal vision and strategy should be created and distributed including funding sources, maintenance plans, and awareness and marketing plans. Multiple stakeholders will be involved including local government, NGO partners, community activists, etc.

Very good but no enforcement for improper use

Some seem good, others hard to follow (not clearlymarked)

They have great potential and are already very enjoyable

They have been improving under the care of the Beaver Island Trails Association. More funding from the townships to BITA should be budgeted as in the past township administrations had budgeted \$10,000/yr.

Fair

I've been coming to the island for over 40 years. My main point is folks have traditionally shared the land and trails. The trail system is good but not as extensive as it used to be before off-island individuals started buying private land and putting up "No Trespassing" signs and blocking trails. Some private land owners have given land to the Traverse Bay Nature



Conservancy or provided easements to keep trails open. It would be nice to see more of an effort in this direction by local townships and private land owners. Additionally, many trails were kept open by occasional ORV and snowmobile use. The opinion of trail purists that trails should be for hikers only has led to some trails becoming overgrown and a lot of negative feelings toward ORV drivers and electric bikes.

We have enjoyed the trails we have used, noted the improvements made in recent years.

Beautiful

Underutilized for winter recreation and severe need to get bikers on their own trail/path along Kings Hwy.

Excellent but some need repair

Very nice

Some of them are in good shape

Developing

Improving but needing more loop trails on the island



If you are a regular trail user, what do you like best about the trail system?

21 responses

There has been a noticeable improvement in signage and mapping.

The fact that forest roads are available to ORVs.

Most are kept clear

Quiet spaces, quality maps

Diversity of types of trails (re: ecosystems , terrain,)

Yes, natural, quiet spaces

Variety, nature, wildlife

VARIETY

Varied ecology

The variety of natural communities you can visit with our trail system

Easy access and variety.

Solitude in the fall, fairly well marked.

The best is the solitude you can find on most trails and beaches. When you do run into other people they are generally polite and respectful.

The number of trails and different natural areas to experience

Peacefulness.....

Solitude

Rustic ungroomed trails

Many well marked.

They are easy to access



Occasional trail user. I forage, hunt, explore. This island has limited offerings so the trail system important

The forest canopies and abundant wild flowers

If you are not a regular trail user, what keeps you from using the trails?

8 responses

N/A

Ticks & mosquitoes

Mobility access

Finding them and where to park

As an aging person, I need wide, flat and clearly marked paths. LOVE when there are wooden walkways. Also prefer flat ground

Ticks

Sometimes weather, sometimes condition of the trail (vehicle ruts filled with mud and water), sometimes lack of effort on our part.



Presuming trails are used year round, rank your top uses of the trail from best to worst. Examples of trail uses include (but are not limited to) hiking, mountain biking, ORV use, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, bird watching.

23 responses

Hiking

1. Biking 2. Hiking

Snowmobiling, ORV use, hunting, hiking

Hiking and ORV use

Biking, running, xc skiing, hiking

Hiking, bird watching.

ORV, hiking, nature watching

Hiking and birdwatching, number 1. In Winter, snowshoeing. Would be nice to have some open for snowmobiles or ATV use.

Hiking, snowshoeing

Hiking, running, biking, cross county skiing.

Top..hiking. Bottom..ORV use

Walking, birding

Best to worst? Listed are how I use the trails/roads around this island year round: hiking, ORV, driving, hunting access, snowmobiling, educational tours

Hiking, birding, and snowshoeing

Best - hiking and snowmobiling, Worst - rude and disrespectful bikers and ORV operators.

I don't think any one use is better or worse than any other except to the extent that they conflict or pose a safety hazard. For example hiking and bird watching vs orv and bike traffic may conflict if both types of users are on the same trail at the same time.

Snowmobiling, hiking, biking



Hiking, dog walking

Hiking and biking

Hiking, ATV use, access to hunting, access to foraging, sight seeing

Mountain biking and hiking and bird watching in spring



Are there any trail uses that you wish to see more of on the island?

21 responses

No

ORV accessible

Cross country skiing but trails maintenance is needed regularly

ORV trails

XC skiing vs ORV

Those leading to remote beaches

ORV

See above

Snowmobile

Hiking, running, biking, cross county skiing.

Educational aspects

As we age, we have no ADA accessible trails or recreational assets.

Easements for closed trails through private land to connect trails

Our preference would be most of the uses listed above that do not negatively impact the natural environment. While there may be respectful orv users our expeirences in recent years whether it's on the trails or on the roads have been quite the opposite.

Hiking

Cross country skiing please!!!

ATV only type trails. That will keep the ATVs off the roads and off our dunes/beaches.

Cross country skiing groomed

ORV, ATV



Mountain biking loop trails



What do you expect to see in a trail system?

23 responses

A rich variety of non-overgrown trails, i.e. fallen trees, mud water pits from ATV use, encroachment from overgrown brush

Signage, good parking, regular maintenance

Signs at both ends, possibly length and terrain maps

Good sign markings

Better maintenance (sooo many HUGE down trees, especially on Kuebler that I don't have a large enough chainsaw to help with, large mudhole on Government Trail)

It's nice to have the gravel on French Bay Rd, but dang... VERY hard to bike on!!!! Especially if it's a biking trail route.

Well defined trails, clean outhouses

No branches in my face

Multi use trails accessible by all ages and physical abilities

Open trails without crawling over downed trees.

We'll defined parking/signage

Signage and way-markers, maintenance.

Safetywe have poor cell service on many trails

Wide, flat and well marked.

Accurate maps & signage, boot scrappers, educational kiosks, cognitive use for all uses; some trails for hiking only, some for ORV/vehicle use, future horse trails?, loop trails

Good marked trails with limited wet area. Quiet trails without ORVs.

A well marked trail

Common map, connecting trails for shorter or longer loops, guidelines (not rules) for all users



A clear and clearly marked path through a natural area.

Well marked

Depends on the use. It is my hope that existing trails are never closed off to snowmobiles due to a few favoring other uses. For many, especially the youth that live year-round, it's one of the best options for outdoor fun and entertainment one has that time of year.

We'll marked

Well identified trail head and signage at intervals. Clear enough for single file, or two person or ORV and knowing what type of access the trail provides. Places to stop along the way. The ability to know where you're at even when cell service is weak.

Walkable, good signage, good views and occasional interpretive signs



What changes would you make to improve the trails?

17 responses

Better Maintenance of trails

Clearing down trees and brush. Clear markings along trails

More ORV use

Arrows around state land trails (Middle Perron to Camp 3 and on down to Iron Ore Bay ... Gets a bit confusing if you're not familiar or frequent it. It took us a bit and it looks different in all the seasons of course)

Increase plant species markers, more trash receptacles

Dog leash rules

Clear mapping identifying uses, public and private lands

Addition of benches for older adults to use. Maps posted along the trails.

Better ORV enforcement

Accurate maps, boot scrappers & educational kiosks at all trail heads, designated hiking only trails, walking trails adjacent to the logging trails so use can be for hikers and ORVs/snowmobiles, some trails dedicated as fire lanes where needed, property/ownership details worked out so trails can be used publicly legally, state and county funds acquired to help maintain trails

Improve funding for signage to describe special natural features along the trails and pay for maintenance.

Common map, connecting trails for shorter or longer loops, common guidelines (not rules) for all users

Constant and clear marking of ingress and egress points.

Limited ORV use. Hiking with ORVs is dangerous

Grooming the trail that goes from town to campground for cross country skiing

Blocking access to motor vehicles. Maybe more parking availability



More loop trails. An east west trail across the island and more mountain bike trails

Are you concerned about private property rights and potential trespass issues?

24 responses

No

Yes

None ... More concerned about summer ORVs and not knowing the trails.

Not really, but some folks are.

Yes. Sometimes it appears that parking is on private property

Only in the sense that easements are obtained where needed

Yes,

No, generally folks are respectful on private or public land. The biggest concern is off-island folks that purchase property along commonly used trails and then try to close access to the trails for public use.

Yes! There may be roads/trails on private property that are mistaken for a public trail. In this instance, rather than just to presume it's ok to use, the landowner should be approached for permission, but our experience is that does not often occur.

Yes.....property destruction with ORVs

Of course.

Not necessarily on clearly marked trails

Not if people treat them with respect

Property owners must consent

I think they are all doable



Are there safety hazards on the trails you use?

21 responses

No

Yes

There are, but inherent with hiking.

Down trees

Large trees (waste high) and ORVs

Some trip hazards with roots and rocks

Weak bridges, fallen trees

None

Cell service for emergencies

ORV and hiker use on the same trails, widow makers (upkeep), invasive species

Downed trees

No, it's nature :>)

Occasionally, but then we evaluate the safety risk and decide whether to proceed or not.

Trails being used with motor bikes/ORVs. Not a good combination with hikers. Trail surfaces being ruined and difficult to hike.

Anything can happen, anywhere

Hills, trees, etc, but it gives a better feel for nature that way

Off leash dogs

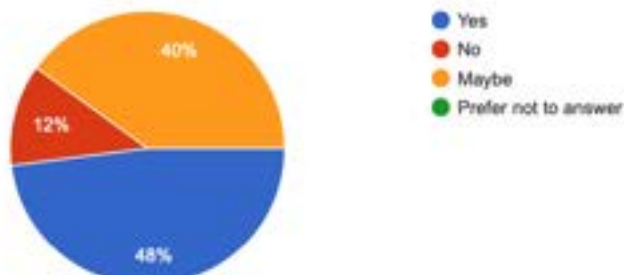
Trails aren't sidewalks so some danger is inherent



Would you be in support of organized events held on the trails such as a trail race, mountain bike race, or organized hike?

 Copy

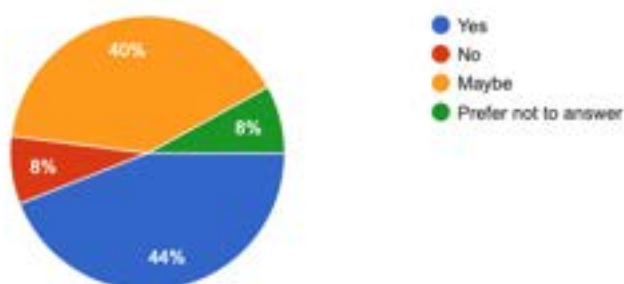
25 responses



Would you be willing to volunteer to help maintain and enhance the trail system?

 Copy

25 responses



Do you have any other comments to make?

12 responses

Thanks for working on this issue.

Super work! Keep it up, y'all!

Dog park or trail?

The beaver island trail system is a community treasure therefore the trail plan must focus on multi use to meet the needs of its residents (taxpayers) , not special interest groups or tourism.

Eco-Tourism could be a fabulous tool in growing the Island tourist economy. Also, highlighting important historic events and people on trails. Games including scavenger hunts.

No

The Northern Lake Michigan Islands Collaborative agreed at its fall meeting to have this as a top priority for 2024, including working with the new DNR biologist for the island and many others, needed to address all issues with the island's trail system and the outer islands' trail systems.

The townships, County, MDNR, LTC, tribes and others all need to work together in order to successfully addresses the issues with the trail systems of the BI Archipelago

Public education on proper use of the islands shorelines, trails, natural resources and more is needed. ORV users are confused about trails and often go onto private property or sensitive areas. Make an ordinance to use ORVs only on marked county roads.

Beaver Island is not like the mainland when it comes to how things get done. Folks generally are not in a hurry and more relaxed. Personal responsibility is more important than rules and laws. Sharing and borrowing is common place. Be respectful of property and possessions and nobody usually cares what you do. At least that's how it used to be when I started coming to the island as a teenager in the late 1970s. That way of living has changed, particularly over the last 10 years, as more "city" folks have bought property on the island and attempt to control what others do, including with the trail system. On Beaver Island This and That on Facebook you see people referencing State/National laws on trail use to try to limit how others use the trails. For example, if someone doesn't like ORVs on trails or roadways they will cite a rule or law that they think applies to stop it, even if it doesn't apply. Or, they'll try to get something passed through the townships. My niece made a Bicycle Tree (or there's the shoe tree by the big rock, etc.) along a trail on our private property that is open to the public. The negative comments about garbage and denigration of nature and what is or isn't art were petty and opinionated. What a bunch of fun suckers! Lighten up! What these people generally fail to consider is that the island's livelihood revolves around tourism and there is plenty of room for nature and fun in nature. People generally love the island because of the ability to wander



freely, enjoy nature, not have to worry about safety, and not have to worry about rules/laws like staying on the trail or what you can and can't do on a trail or on the beach, etc. Trust people to take personal responsibility and be respectful on the trails while also having fun. Don't create a bunch of rules for the trails that assumes they are not. This is Beaver Island, not the mainland. Thank you!

Not at this time

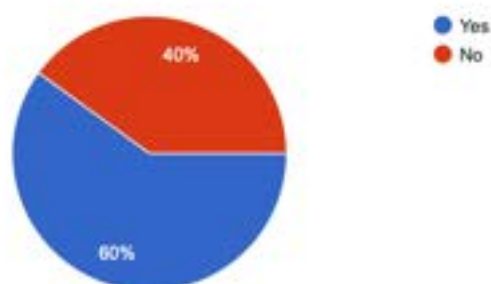
The ORVs are destroying and taking away from the peace and solitude

We need more loop trails

Would you be open to us following up with you on your response?



25 responses



Contact Info

Thank you for being open to follow ups! If we have any questions regarding your responses or would like you to further elaborate, we will reach out!



Name

15 responses

Dennis Callan

Beth Croswite

William Berry

Amanda Bedell

Judi Miller

Jacque LaFreniere

Chris Sorensen

Robert Anderson

Shelby Harris

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