

BETSIE VALLEY TRAILBLAZER



SPRING / SUMMER 2020 NEWSLETTER

COVID-19 & Flooding Make for a Year of Challenges



Sue Fi
Photography

We Need Community Support Now More than Ever!

Many who use the Betsie Valley Trail are unaware that no local tax dollars are used to support the trail. We are totally dependent on donations, grants, and the fantastic efforts of our valued volunteers. As a result, even in the best of times, the trail has always operated on a proverbial shoestring

Now, with the pandemic and a freeze on state spending, we can no longer count on operating funds which in the past were never in question. This has immediately impacted our trail reconstruction work along a 1½ mile segment along Crystal

Drive (see article on page 2). We were expecting to get started with this work by now, however the \$150,000 DNR grant, which we were awarded earlier this year, is being held up. Now the reconstruction work is on an indefinite hold.

You may notice this year's newsletter does not include the fun pictures of all the wonderful fundraising events we love reporting on each year. That means, we'll be missing out on these much needed operating funds. Please help us to keep the trail open for all. Renew your membership and send us your donation in the provided pledge envelope. As always, thank you for your support!

Facts about the Betsie Valley Trail

- ❁ The trail right-of-way is owned by the Michigan DNR. The trail is managed by Benzie County through the appointment of the Betsie Valley Trailway Management Council.
- ❁ We are the Friends of the Betsie Valley Trail, a qualified charitable organization, who provides financial, fund raising, and promotional support for the trail.

Ongoing Flooding Makes Murky Future for Trail Segment

Record high water levels in Lake Michigan and the Betsie Bay continue to cause significant flooding to the Betsie Valley Trail in the Frankfort/Elberta area. With sections of the trail underwater and no way to know when the water will recede to even allow for a damage assessment, the future of that section of the trail is unclear.

The Friends, with the help of Michigan DOT and the county Road Commission, have posted warning signs to motorists and trail users about the detour around the flooded trail. The one block section of River Road is the easiest detour around the flooded area and a new cross-walk has been painted on the road at the River Road / M22 intersection. Patience is needed, as the fluctuating water level often makes it difficult to provide definitive directions.



We hope the installation of the new signage and a crosswalk will help make navigating this small section of the trail a bit safer, but remember to use caution whenever traversing

roads, especially with increasing summer traffic. We encourage everyone to get out and enjoy all 22 miles of the Betsie Valley Trail and please send us your pictures and share your experiences!

Crystal Avenue Resurfacing Improvement Project on Hold



In January, we were awarded a \$150,000 grant by Michigan DNR under its Recreational Passport grant program. The grant, which requires the Friends to provide \$50,000 in matching funds, is to

improve the segment of trail from Beulah for 1.5 mi to County Farm Road (toward Frankfort).

The plan is to improve, but not pave, the trail surface and make

some modest efforts to protect the trail from washout. With the extraordinary efforts by our volunteers to provide all the needed paperwork and approvals, it was expected we would begin construction this summer.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has thrown this project into limbo. The State has frozen the funds that were going to be made available to get the work done and as a result, it is unclear at this time when, or if, the grant funds will be made available. We're proceeding with all steps short of seeking bids for the work, and still hope construction might be possible this year.

Consider Helping Out This Year – We Need Volunteers!



At the heart of our mission is the successful operation of the Betsie Valley Trail. We could not achieve this mission year-after-year without the help our volunteers. This year, we're more dependent than ever on the help we receive from our fantastic volunteers. The funds we have typically relied on from Michigan DNR for routine maintenance are somewhat uncertain and subject to restrictions and requirements that DNR has just announced. The Management Council and the Trail Care Coordinator are beginning to assess and take steps necessary to secure at least some funding.

The trail has remained open throughout the health crisis and funding challenges and it's getting more use than

ever. We're gratified and proud that the trail has assumed an increasingly important role in improving the health and welfare of our residents and visitors. We have continuously provided guidelines and tips for safe use of the trail during this time of physical distancing.

We have taken similar, careful steps in how we have utilized volunteer help on the trail. Along with reopening some funding, DNR also is imposing some new requirements and procedures to once again allow more volunteer work on state trails. Volunteers will be informed of those new guidelines in future communications from the Trail Care Coordinator. Even if there were no formal restrictions, common sense suggests we need to be slow

and step-wise about restarting our group volunteer work days. That said, there are still several opportunities where you can help out –including several self-directed roles.

Please visit our website and read our blog post, "[The Trail is Open and We Need Volunteers to Help Out](#)" to get the details. Or go directly to: betsievalleytrail.org/volunteer and submit a volunteer form.

We're in Search of a New Trail Care Coordinator

You may have read about John Rothhaar's great work as our TCC for the past four years in our recent blog post: "[Volunteer Spotlight on Our Trail Care Coordinator](#)". John is looking to transition out of his role by next year, so now would be a great time for a potential replacement to work into the position gradually or at least to investigate what's involved. We are working on a detailed job description and are considering making the future TCC a paid position. Feel free to contact John bvtcare@gmail.com to discuss your possible interest!





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**We Need YOUR Support Now
More than Ever!**

Annual Meeting Set for July 14th

The Friends of the Betsie Valley Trail will hold their annual meeting on Tuesday, July 14th at 2:00 PM. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend. We welcome nominations for Board membership from interested individuals now and throughout the year. The location is the Cabbage Shed in Elberta. Physical distancing will be observed. We will be meeting on the patio.

The Friends recognize **Beth Roethler, Owner of the Cabbage Shed** and one of our Board members, for her years of service and support of the trail.

“As an Elberta business we are so grateful to have such a beautiful resource as The Betsie Valley Trail. When we have families, couples, and friends travel

along the trail and then join us for either lunch or dinner on our deck we love to hear their adventures from the day. Sometimes it’s seeing a bald eagle fly over, or the turtles crossing the trail, or just the time spent with loved ones enjoying the beauty of Northern Michigan.”



“Trails like the Bestie Valley Trail are so imperative to small businesses and communities like ours. Having the ability to shop, eat, and travel on the trail helps you really see so much of Benzie County. We love taking our two small girls out on the trail through all the seasons and always look forward to the adventures!”



BetsieValleyTrail.org



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