

# BEAVER ISLAND TRAIL MASTER PLAN

## PROPOSED WORK PLAN

**PREPARED FOR STAKEHOLDER REVIEW –  
PLEASE PROVIDE COMMENTS TO:**



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In 2017, the Beaver Island Archipelago Trails Association (BIATA) was founded and incorporated with the mission: *To develop and sustain a trails system for the archipelago that serves the needs of hikers, bikers, kayakers, birders, and other outdoor enthusiasts with loop trails and destination sites which capture and interpret the unique natural, cultural, and historical elements of the islands so that people may explore them in ways that are mindful of the need to preserve and protect them for recreation, exercise, education, and renewal.*

# INTRODUCTION



Since its inception, BIATA volunteers — with the support of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Peaine Township and St James Township — have engaged in countless hours of maintenance and improvement of island trails and would like to further strengthen the island's trail system by planning for future trail improvements and system expansion. As stakeholders in the future of the island, we need your help with planning and, as a first step, we would like your thoughts on how the planning process might work.

We sincerely appreciate your time and attention to this and look forward to collaboratively creating a premier trail system on our beautiful island that can be enjoyed by all.

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# 01

## BACKGROUND

As a Great Lakes island known for its natural beauty, Beaver Island plays a special role in the tourism industry, which is a significant contributor to both local and state economies. Moreover, between its quiet wooded areas, vast sandy shoreline, and overall charm that is truly unique, Beaver Island is simply a special place to experience.

Many residents and visitors would like to experience Beaver Island through hiking and biking, and there are currently events that support this, such as the Beaver Island Bike Festival and the Warblers on the Water birding hike. However, Beaver Island possesses very few trails specifically dedicated to hiking and/or biking, which greatly limits access for people to experience this special place and adds a hinderance to the island's economic potential.

Most of what are considered "trails" on the island are actually Charlevoix County roads or old two-track logging trails originally created by the DNR, which have little connectivity, few destination points, and are somewhat dangerous given they are not level or maintained to public trail standards. With the exception of the short paved bike path on Donegal Bay Road, there are also no trails dedicated either to leisure cycling or to mountain biking; the only currently available means of cycling on the island is via gravel-covered county roads.

A more cohesive trail system would benefit both year-round islanders and visitors; developing a hiking and biking trail infrastructure on Beaver Island offers greater access for island residents and visitors to experience exceptional natural areas and engage in physical activity. In turn, this helps support the tourism economy, which is significant to the community and the state's economic health. For example, popular trail activities could extend the shoulder seasons. Additionally, related businesses, such as bike rentals, can be supported and expanded. The existing hiking and biking events would also be better supported and more hiking and biking events (e.g., spring floral walks, fall color tours, "polar bear rides," etc.) could be planned.

To help move this forward, BIATA membership participated in two planning sessions sponsored by the DNR, which focused on developing a more formalized trail system for the island. During these sessions, DNR officials suggested that BIATA work with stakeholders to develop a multi-use trail master plan. This is the start to that effort.

# 02

## PROJECT GOAL

The overall project goal is to create a master plan for the development of a system, that would connect through both public and private property, of unpaved, multiuse trails to be used for hiking, birding, running, recreational cycling, hunting, and cross-country skiing.

This plan will advance the trail-related values and goals found in existing plans, such as the Beaver Island Master Plan, Peaine and St. James Townships Recreation Plans, and the Management Plan for State-owned Lands on Northern Lake Michigan Islands. These values and goals include:

- Advance a trail system using the basic elements of the Trail Town Strategy (Beaver Island Master Plan)
- Maintain existing trails and expand and connect Island-wide hiking & biking trail systems (Peaine Township Recreation Plan)
- Lengthen bike trail to Donegal Bay (St. James Recreation Plan)
- Enhance opportunities for island-based recreation or subsistence activities compatible with the maintenance of ecological and cultural integrity (Management Plan for State-owned Lands on Northern Lake Michigan Islands )

BIATA also intends for the plan to be consistent with the management guidelines for Special Conservation areas approved by

the Northern Lake Michigan Islands Collaborative (NLMIC) The definition of a Special Conservation Area is:

Areas of publicly administered lands and water, typically associated with an Ecological Reference Area or rare Natural Community, that will be subject to limited management, and that will be left to undergo natural processes. Should a disease or invasive species issue emerge that threatens the ecological integrity of these areas, management will be scaled appropriately to the scale of the issue, with every effort made to intervene as minimally as possible.

Moreover, BIATA acknowledges and will honor the need to avoid intrusion into sensitive cultural or historical sites deemed of significance by the community and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

Ultimately, the master plan will be used to guide the phased development of multi-use unpaved trails, unpaved mountain biking trails, and associated amenities, such as signage, parking, seating, and restrooms, on Beaver Island and offer recommendations for the most cost-effective means of developing the new trail system by incorporating and improving the paths and roads currently existing on Beaver Island.

# 03

## WORK PLAN

### SUMMARY



#### PHASE 1: LAUNCH PROJECT

- Step 1. Provide notice & promote awareness
- Step 2. Understand the context



#### PHASE 2: EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES

- Step 1. Gather ideas
- Step 2. Test & refine ideas



#### PHASE 3: DEVELOP IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

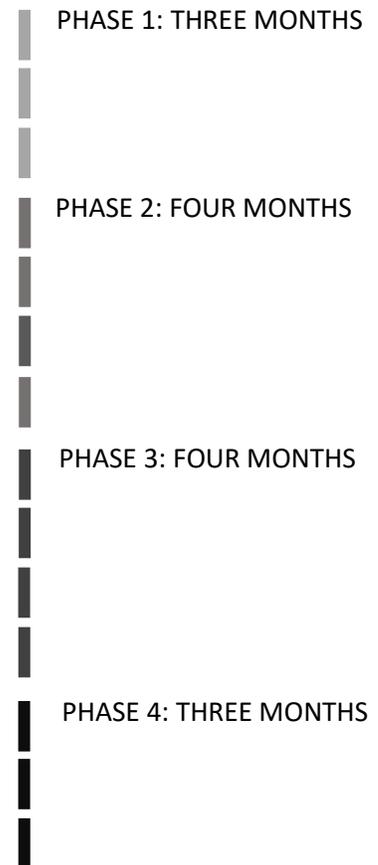
- Step 1. Formulate a strategy for moving trail concepts forward
- Step 2. Gather feedback on draft implementation strategy



#### PHASE 4: FINALIZE PLAN

- Step 1. Compile Plan components
- Step 2. Share draft of Plan for review and revision

#### ESTIMATED TIMELINE



# 03

## DETAIL

### PHASE 1: LAUNCH PROJECT

#### Step 1. Provide Notice & Promote Awareness

- A. Issue Notice of Intent to Plan  
Keeping in accordance with Michigan’s Planning Enabling Act requirements, we will issue a notice of Intent to Plan to all adjoining jurisdictions, railroad companies, and public utilities.
- B. Establish project website  
This site will serve as an online communication tool that provides background information and updates on the project, which will be hosted and maintained by the consultant.
- C. Issue press release  
The project team will develop a press release for use by BIATA and others to distribute.

#### Step 2. Understand the Context

- A. Review and document existing information  
The project team will review all available information related to existing trails and trail planning history on the island.
- B. Identify information gaps  
Based on the review of existing information, the project team will identify information needs and work with the appropriate entities to obtain necessary information.
- C. Develop existing conditions map  
This map will show the existing trails that includes information about property/trail ownership and trail materials and conditions. This map will be checked for accuracy with township and tribal government representatives, members of NLMIC, and the State.

#### Phase 1 Deliverables

- Project website
- Existing Conditions Narrative and Analysis
- Existing Conditions Map

Phase 1 Estimated Timeline: 3 Months

## PHASE 2: EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES

### Step 1. Gather ideas

#### A. Hold Possibility Sessions

The project team will hold a series of Possibility Sessions with NLMIC and the public at large. At these sessions, the project team will lead participants through exercises to prioritize values, learn where people would like trails, and work to detail the ideal characteristics of the desired trails.

#### B. Conduct a survey

Additional ideas will be gathered from NLMIC, residents, and visitors through an online and paper survey that is broadly advertised through all local media outlets and physical signs placed around the island with QR codes that link to the survey. Some opportunities for the paper survey to be disseminated include:

- Beaver Island Association annual meeting
- Swap market
- Irish Festival
- Trails Association meeting

### Step 2. Test & Refine Ideas

#### A. Draft initial Proposed Trail Map

Based on feedback developed during the Possibility Sessions, the project team will draft an initial future trail map (interactive digital and paper).

#### B. Gain initial sense of feasibility

Working with technical advisors and specific property owners identified along proposed routes, the project team will evaluate the conceptual trail map and talk through the issues and opportunities associated with the proposed trails.

#### C. Create second draft of Proposed Trail Map

Using what was learned from the preliminary technical evaluation, the project team will revise the Proposed Trail Map to include a description of each trail (length, materials, and other characteristics).

#### D. Gather feedback on second draft of Proposed Trail Map

The project team will share a second draft of map with NLMIC and other stakeholders, in addition to technical advisors, for review to ensure support of the proposed direction.

### Phase 2 Deliverables

- Initial Proposed Trail Map
- Feasibility Review Analysis
- Second Draft of Proposed Trail Map

Phase 2 Estimated Timeline: 4 Months

### PHASE 3: DEVELOP IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

#### Step 1. Formulate a strategy for moving trail concepts forward

- A. Address ownership requirements for trail development  
The project team will work with stakeholders and technical advisors to understand property ownership complexities and determine how public access can be achieved (e.g., easements) on various property types.
- B. Address environmental requirements  
The project team will work with stakeholders and technical advisors to understand environmental requirements and identify a process for addressing them.
- C. Develop cost estimates and identify potential funding sources  
The project team will work with stakeholders and technical advisors to determine cost estimates and potential funding sources for each trail type.

#### Step 2. Gather feedback on draft implementation strategy

- A. Meet with property owners  
The project team will meet with specific property owners, as needed, to ensure their support of any strategy related to their land.
- B. Discuss with NLMIC  
The project team will share the implementation strategy with NLMIC for review to ensure support.

#### Phase 3 Deliverables

- Implementation strategy that includes public access approach, how environmental requirements will be addressed, cost estimates, and potential funding sources.

Phase 3 Estimated Timeline: 4 Months

### PHASE 4: FINALIZE PLAN

#### Step 1. Compile Plan components

- A. The project team will complete a draft that includes background information, a narrative of the planning process, the proposed trail map with accompanying details of proposed trail segments, and the implementation strategy.

#### Step 2. Share draft for review and revisions

- A. The project team will provide a draft of the Plan to the NLMIC, the DNR, and those that received the Intent to Plan notice for review and comment. The draft plan will also be shared on the project website for public review and comment.
- B. The project team will make revisions to the Plan based on review and comments, then publish and disseminate for local entity adoption/support.
- C. An electronic and hard copy of the Plan will be provided to the DNR with any documentation of local approval/support.

## Phase 4 Deliverables

- Final Plan
- Resolutions/Letters of Support

Phase 4 Estimated Timeline: 3 Months

## INVOLVED PARTIES

### 01

#### ISLAND STAKEHOLDERS

Island stakeholders will be relied upon to provide local perspectives and wishes. The plan will be heavily shaped by input from members of this group. Members of this group include:

- NLMIC
- Township and tribal governments
- Island associations
- Individual property owners along proposed routes
- The public at large

### 02

#### TECHNICAL ADVISORS

Technical advisors include experts that can offer guidance on land use and natural feature considerations, permitting, trail development, and funding. This group will include:

- MDNR Wildlife Division
- MDNR Recreation

### 03

#### PROJECT TEAM

The project team will manage the project and regularly communicate with the other involved parties to ensure ongoing support for the process and project outcomes.

This group will include:

- BIATA
- Planning consultant