State officials to launch a tourism initiative to promote trail network

By DANIELLE WOODWARD
Capital News Service

LANSING — Information for all Michigan trails – including those on the water – will soon be available at the click of a button under legislation recently introduced by lawmakers.

That kind of accessibility is part of the Department of Natural Resource's plan to attract tourists to Michigan's trails by improving them and making them easier to find.

Lawmakers recently introduced a package of five bills that would label all state trails as Pure Michigan trails, use "trail towns" to connect trails between communities and make trail information available both on a computer and through an app.

The department worked closely with the Michigan Trails and Greenway Alliance to develop the plan and the legislation to implement it.

The legislation also includes a bill that would take the snowmobile specification out of the Michigan snowmobile and trails advisory council.

"We are trying to get away from the impression of putting one trail above the other," said Rep. Tom Casperson, R-Escanaba, who sponsored the bill. "All trails are important and should be looked at equally.

The change is noncontroversial.

"The makeup of the council is still going to be the same and it will still be a committee that looks at trails in the state," said Bill Manson, executive director of the Michigan Snowmobile Association. "We understand that other trail groups have had problems with the specification so we have no problem changing it."

The legislation would also create a Pure Michigan water trail designation.

"Waterways should be recognized with activities like canoeing and kayaking," Casperson said.

"Michigan has some of the best statewide trail systems in the country," said Sen. Dave Hildenbrand, R-Lowell, a sponsor for one bill. "We wanted to enhance that by branding them with Pure Michigan."

Michigan is the leading state in old railroad routes that have been converted into public trails, said Jim Radabaugh, state trails coordinator for the DNR. More than 2,700 miles of such rail trails have been created.

Many Michigan towns hope to take advantage of the increased tourism brought in by the trails.

"We promote Gaylord as an outdoors kind of town so we get a lot of hikers, bikers and snowmobilers that come through our trails year round so we definitely promote as much information as possible on Michigan trails," said Pam Duczkowski, assistant director for the Gaylord Tourism Bureau. "We are all about anything that can help passing trail users take advantage of their time here."

The North Central State Trail passes from Gaylord to Cheboygan to Mackinac Island and is the main focus of the Land Information Access Association, a land planning organization, in establishing trail towns.

"The more connectedness we can develop among trails the better," said Matt Cowall, communications and development director for the association. "Both rural and urban communities can take advantage of the fact that trails run through their area. Communities can look at ways to better serve trail users and make sure they know where to get whatever they need as they pass through the communities."

The trails plan requires the DNR to develop a way for trail users to easily locate trails with a smartphone app and an online presence.

"There is a lot of trail information out there that is very hard to find and hardly anything on the Pure Michigan website on trails," said Nancy Krupiarz, executive director of the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance.

"We need to have a central landing page whether it links out to individual efforts or has all the information on one page. This will help elevate for tourism in Michigan."

A state trails plan completed last fall meets the needs of all trails rather than just rail trails, Krupiarz said.

"There are motorcycle trails which are unique and narrower and hiking, biking and horse trails that all have growing industries that can be further expanded," said Sen. Tom Casperson, R-Escanaba, who sponsored the legislation. "There is a lot of interest in these trails outside the state."

Officials thought it was important to incorporate trail standards that would apply to all trails rather than just rail trails.

"We have all the different types of trails so we thought we should have the best practices for development and a gold standard for each type of trail," Krupiarz said.

Michigan is following states like Kentucky, Maryland and Pennsylvania that have improved their trail programs to increase tourism, Krupiarz said.

The end game is being able to lay out what Michigan has to offer, where it is and how you do it for all to see, Casperson said.

Nominations are due for Catholic Service Award; deadline is May 1

MARQUETTE — The Catholic Diocese of Marquette is seeking nominations for the Legacy of Faith Catholic Service Award. The award was developed to create awareness of those who show exemplary leadership and commitment to carrying out the mission of the Catholic Church in word and action. It recognizes lifetime dedication and service to the Catholic Church. Nominees must have significant demonstrated leadership and service to the Catholic Church, their community, and beyond. The award may be given to a man or a woman — for example, a priest, deacon, woman religious or lay person.

While anyone may submit nominations, parish pastoral and finance councils, in consultation with the pastor, are especially encouraged to consider nominating someone from their respective parish.

For additional information on the Catholic Service Award criteria and a nomination form, visit www.LegacyOfFaith.net or contact Diocesan Development Director Terri Gadzinski at 906-227-9108 or e-mail: tgadzinski@dioceseofmarquette.org. The nomination deadline is May 1, 2014.

Last year's nominees will automatically be considered for the 2014 Catholic Service Award. It is not necessary to complete a new nomination form, but additional information for a past nominee can be submitted.

Award recipients will be honored at their parish during the summer of 2014 with an engraved medallion from the bishop as a token of gratitude, and their parish will receive a $250 Legacy of Faith grant for parish faith formation. Recipients will be further recognized at the Bishop's Ambassadors Dinner in October, and their exemplary service will be highlighted in The U.P. Catholic newspaper. Last year the award was given to Josie Benoit of St. Joseph Parish in Sault Ste. Marie and a posthumous award was given in honor of the late Lawrence Chouinard Sr. of Holy Family Parish in Gladstone.

MDOT needs all the help it can get from Adopt-A-Highway volunteers

With winter maintenance overruns cutting into non-winter maintenance budgets, the Michigan Department of Transportation is asking for more Adopt-A-Highway volunteers to help keep highway roadsides clean in the northern Lower Peninsula.

"The terrible winter far exceeded what we'd budgeted for maintenance, and aesthetic work like roadside mowing and litter pickup is the first thing we look to reduce in favor of safety-related work," said MDOT North Region Operations Engineer Bill Wahl. "We depend on volunteers to help fill that gap and clean up Michigan's roadsides each summer."

Participants adopt both sides of a section of state highway roadside to clean up over a two-year period. A minimum 2-mile stretch of roadway is recommended.

"We have several sections of highway up for adoption in northern Michigan, primarily on I-75 and US-127," said Rob Hall, MDOT's Gaylord Transportation Service Center (TSC) maintenance coordinator. "The best way to get started is to contact the Adopt-A-Highway coordinator in your county and find out what sections are available."

A list of coordinators is posted at www.michigan.gov/adoptahighway. This year's pickups are scheduled for:

- Spring: April 26 to May 4 (northern lower Michigan and the Upper Peninsula)
- Summer: July 12 to 20 (statewide)
- Fall: Sept. 20 to 28 (statewide)

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