



GITCHI-GAMI TRAIL RIDER

A publication of the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association

Fall 2016

President's Message

Waiting for the rainbow on the Gitchi-Gami State Trail

For the first time in 16 years, the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association Annual Ride in August was a truly sodden affair. After many days of glorious sunshine on the shore, threatening gray skies moved in overnight. Those bikers who started early and opted for one of the shorter rides were fortunate — encountering only an occasional sprinkle. But by afternoon and the return of the hardest riders to the starting point, it was raining hard, and it never let up. Ridership was down, as expected given the forecast. The sun never made an appearance, so we waited in vain for one of those exquisite rainbows that arc across the sky over Lake Superior. The next day dawned bright and crystal-clear, and we wondered why we missed perfect riding weather by just a day.

The ride could have been a metaphor for a rather disappointing year for the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. Yet again, no new trail was built and no major funding was secured. The MN Legislature failed to pass a bonding bill before adjourning last May, and the effort to convene a special session was futile. The bonding bill included \$2.2 million for a 3.3-mile trail extension, connecting existing bike trail in the city of Grand Marais on a gorgeous corridor alongside Lake Superior to the beautifully renovated Cutface Creek Wayside on Highway 61. The GGST extension was one of the priority projects recommended by the MN Parks & Trails Council and has full support of our legislators and local officials. We are very optimistic that if and when the legislature passes a bonding bill it will include much needed funding for our trail.

There is SOME good news. For several years, we have anxiously awaited the necessary funding and approvals to pave a half-mile trail on the gravel West Road, extending the 2.5-mile section of trail that begins in Silver Bay to Highway 61 just east of the Beaver Bay rest area adjacent to the Beaver River. When the MN Department of Transportation rebuilds the Beaver River bridge to include a dedicated bike lane, this trail extension will provide 17 continuous miles of paved trail from Gooseberry Falls State Park, through Split Rock Lighthouse State Park and the town of Beaver Bay, to the town of Silver Bay. After persevering through several years of negotiating with Beaver Bay Township and private abutting land

owners, acquiring funding, and planning, the MN Department of Natural Resources is finally set to pave the West Road trail segment next year.

The town of Tofte sits between a 3-mile section of trail starting in the town of Schroeder and traversing Temperance River State Park on the southwest, and a 7-mile section of trail connecting Tofte to the Lutsen Ski Hill Road on the northeast. However, there is no official trail in the 1.1-mile distance through the town itself. We now have funding in place to extend the trail from its terminus on the northeast side of Tofte into town. The plan includes moving parking areas away from the highway, with attractive landscaping paid for by local businesses. On the southwest side of Tofte, the DNR, with the assistance of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, is applying for federal funds to connect the town to the trail to Schroeder, possibly including an underpass beneath Highway 61. In the long run, eliminating grade trail crossings on busy Highway 61 is a goal of MnDOT, the DNR and the GGTA.

The North Shore has recently been added to the US Bicycle Route System (USBRS). This route, yet to be named but designated USBR 41 for the time being, starts at the capital in St. Paul, passes through Duluth and Grand Portage, and ends at the Canadian border. The route uses bike trails where available or bike-friendly local roads where there is no trail. About one half of the 325-mile distance is now on trails. No trail construction funds accompany this designation, but it is the hope of MnDOT and the GGTA that it will help local communities secure funds for new trail sections.

Through increased memberships and donations, the GGTA has been able to double the work that our dynamic Executive Director Michelle Pierson can devote to promoting and building interest in the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. Michelle was hired two years ago through a contract with the ARDC.

Like the resolute bikers on the Annual Ride, who managed to smile through the drenching rain, we keep up our spirits by envisioning the completion of our beautiful trail — the pot of gold at the end of our rainbow. Please join our quest!

~ Bill Blank, President

Trail Coordinator's Report

Although no new trail was built this season, DNR crews and contractors were busy with maintenance and repair work. The contractor is still working on a rebuild of trail in Temperance River State Park. This major reconstruction project is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.



Temperance River trail reconstruction

This fall we installed five patches on the trail near the Tofte Ranger Station — a needed short-term fix for that segment.



Tofte trail improvements

On September 27, Kent Skaar and I completed negotiations with the Beaver Bay Township Board on a revised trail plan for paving the West Road. The DNR made a cooperative commitment to address the cost, maintenance, and repair of shared road and trail, including ten culverts. The West Road is back on the construction calendar for next summer, and we are all excited about getting this segment built at long last.

This past summer our trails crew brushed fence lines that extend in short segments from Beaver Bay to Gooseberry Falls State Park.

The DNR and MnDOT have been meeting with Bluefin Bay owner Dennis Rysdahl to review plans for trail extension and parking modifications near the Coho Café on the northeast side of the Tofte town center, which we expect to be completed next summer.

~ Mark Rudningen, DNR
Trail Development Specialist

The Annual Ride “by the numbers” ~ created by Michelle

2016

16th Annual North Shore Ride in Review

A LITTLE RAIN DIDN'T DAMPEN SPIRITS

We welcomed 88 riders on Saturday, August 20th for our 16th Annual North Shore Ride! Though the skies were rainy, attitudes were bright and sunny! Our thanks to all who joined us and we can't wait to see you back on the trail!

RIDE LENGTHS SELECTED



By The Numbers



88
RIDERS



24
VOLUNTEERS



3,346
COLLECTIVE
MILES



63
PICKLE WEDGES
CONSUMED



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

NOW IS A GREAT TIME TO MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR OUR 17TH ANNUAL NORTH SHORE RIDE! JOIN US ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 19TH, 2017 AND EXPLORE THE SHORE WITH US!

www.ggta.org

#explore the shore · #bringyourbikes



give TO THE MAX

NOV. 17, 2016

Give to the Max!

Are you one of the many generous Minnesotans who donate to your favorite causes on “Give to the Max Day” — November 17 this year — maybe doing all of your year-end tax-deductible contributions on that day?

Please consider adding a GGTA membership to your donation list. You can access the GGTA GiveMN page by searching for “ggta” at the “donate” link on the website, www.givemn.org.



Check out a sample of the questions we've recently received in our mailbox. Do you have a question about the trail? Send it from the "Contact Us" link on the website, www.ggta.org, or email us directly at info@ggta.org.

Q: May I bike with my dog on the trail?

A: You may, but there are strings (should we say leashes?) attached. The Gitchi-Gami is a state trail and users must follow DNR trail rules. Your dog may accompany you on a trail ride or walk as long you use a leash with a maximum length of six feet, and the pup must be under your control at all times. And, of course, you must clean up after your pet. (But you knew that!)

Q: May I use my electronic bike on the trail?

A: Likely, yes! The DNR permits use of electric-assist bikes on state trails if the motor is 1,000 watts or less, is incapable of propelling faster than 20mph, and will stop functioning when the brakes are applied. The DNR also permits Segways and other electrically

powered assistive mobility devices on the trail. Remember to yield to pedestrians and slower trail users, and always remember to use an audible signal when passing.



Another way to enjoy the Gitchi-Gami State Trail

Q: When will the trail be completed?

A: It turns out we don't know . . . but YOU can be a part of the answer. With a little over 29 miles of 89 constructed, we have a long way to go. How can you help? Your membership in the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association is a good first step. We work with stakeholders along the trail corridor, including municipalities and businesses, and with the ARDC, DNR, and MnDOT in advocating for future trail construction. You can also let your legislators know what the trail means to you, and what you think a constructed trail will mean for local communities and economies along the North Shore.

A word about membership —

Now is a great time to renew your membership for 2017! Your membership fee is tax-deductible.

As a member, you are entitled to a substantial discount on the annual ride fee, as well as the knowledge that your membership fee goes directly to the GGTA's efforts to build the Gitchi-Gami State Trail — a vital recreational resource. Send your membership contribution in the enclosed envelope, join online through website links at www.ggta.org, or include the GGTA when you "Give to the Max"!

Executive Director's Report

My favorite days in recent months advocating for the GGTA were days spent ON the trail. On August 24, my family hit the shore for an organized ride through Adventure Cycling Assn's "#BikeYourParkDay." This park-to-park ride showcased the many assets we enjoy on the North Shore of Lake Superior.

In October, Board President Bill Blank and I joined Brian Fanelli of PedalMN and Leigh McAdam, award-winning Canadian travel blogger whose writings can be found at www.hikebikettravel.com, for a bike tour of the trail from Gooseberry Falls to Split Rock Lighthouse State Park. Showcasing our great trail on the greatest lake doesn't feel like work, but I know that the more people who KNOW about our trail, and the more people who USE the trail, the STRONGER our voices will be when advocating for the trail's future. (Ed. note: see the back page of this newsletter.)

Back at my desk, I have been busy working with trail stakeholders to look at possible funding streams for future trail construction. My ARDC coworkers and I recently assisted the DNR with an application for the Federal Lands Access Program, and we are working on an application for the annual federal Transportation Alternatives Program. I have been in touch with MnDOT as its effort to establish a bike route from St. Paul to the Canadian border (USBR 41) continues, and I hope that this effort will bring more attention to the trail.

Other items on my to-do list include seeking more interested folks to join us at meetings; we are in need of some passionate trail lovers to join our board!

I am also the face behind our Facebook presence. If you love riding on the trail and want to share your stories with us, please contact me at info@ggta.org. I will interview you to share your #TrailTale with our followers. And remember to "like" us!



~ Michelle Pierson
Executive Director

Gitchi-Gami Trail Association

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Sharing the Gitchi-Gami story . . .

On a cool October day, GGTA President Bill Blank, Executive Director Michelle Pierson, and PedalMN's Brian Fanelli took Canadian travel blogger Leigh McAdam on a tour of the trail. Just as this issue went to press, Leigh posted her story, "Discover Minnesota by Bike: The Gitchi-Gami Trail," with beautiful pictures and descriptive text, on her blog at www.hikebikettravel.com. Check it out!



L to R: Brian Fanelli, Bill Blank, Michelle Pierson



Photography by Leigh McAdam

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