

PRCA Comments on Draft Michigan Trails Plan

1. Is the Plan, as written an effective tool for guiding the acquisition, development and maintenance of the Michigan trail system over the next five years?

Yes

2. Is the vision for Michigan's trail system comprehensive?

Yes

If "no" what should be added or deleted from the vision?

3. Are the seven overarching priorities the right ones?

Yes

If "no" provide specific suggestions for priorities that should be included or deleted.

An additional priority should be to maintain and promote the qualities that make existing trails and the areas they traverse desirable.

4. Do the actions proposed for each priority adequately address the priority and the vision for the Comprehensive Trail Plan

No

If "no" please provide specific information on how the actions should be modified or what other actions should be included that would help achieve the priorities and vision

Addressed by section below

5. Are the priorities and goals identified in the snowmobile trail section the right ones?

No

If "no" please what other priorities or goals would you like to see added.

It is completely inappropriate to label groups "extreme" in a state document for attempting to preserve quiet recreational opportunities for activities like cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, camping, hunting, fishing and nature observation in those areas of state forest which have been specifically created, conserved and managed for those values. It is no more extreme to suggest that motorized traffic be restricted in some of these areas than it would be to suggest that jet-skis do not belong in trout streams. (pg. 94)

No part of the proposed priority lower peninsula trail connection between trail #7 and trail #9 along the Cheboygan/Otsego County line, or Onaway to Indian River (pg.92) should go through the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

6. Are the goals and priorities identified in the ORV section the right ones?

No

If "no" what other priorities and goals would you like to see included?

The goal of opening northern Lower Peninsula state forest roads should be removed. This has led and is likely to lead to numerous conflicts with ORV's deviating into non-designated areas, which conflicts with the unique wilderness characteristics and the aesthetic, wildlife, quiet recreational and educational values currently associated with the Pigeon River Country and that its management plan seeks to protect for current and future generations.

Trail development priority #1 (pg. 79) to construct a route parallel to the MCCCT in the Lower Peninsula should include a statement that, consistent with the Concept of Management, the route should avoid going through any part of the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

Trail development priority #3 (pg. 80) to construct routes from the central Lower Peninsula to Mackinac City should include a statement that, consistent with the Concept of Management, the routes will avoid going through any part of the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

7. Are the goals and priorities identified under the pathway section the right ones?

No

If "no" what other goals and priorities would you like to see included?

The opportunity have a quiet experience is important to many non-motorized trail users. The Vision Statement (pg. 97) should include a statement that identifying some quiet areas for looped trails is a priority and the Pigeon River Country State Forest should be one of the quiet areas. Motorized uses in these quiet areas would not be expanded and may be further restricted.

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8. Are the goals and priorities in the equestrian trail section the right ones?

No

If "no" what other goals or priorities would you like to see included?

Expanding horse trails in northern Lower Peninsula state forests is problematic due to multiple reasons, not the least of which is acquisition funding restrictions, but also the underlying conflicts which led to horseback riding being deemed incompatible with wildlife activities like hunting and fishing in the first place.

9. Are the goals and priorities identified in the linear trail section the right ones?

Yes

If "no" what goals or priorities would you like to see included?

10. Are the goals and action steps identified under water trails chapter the right ones?

Yes

If "no" what other goals and action steps would you like to see included?

Provided that water trails recognize that increased water traffic has the potential to ruin the qualities that make some rivers desirable in the first place, particularly for anglers, of which there are 1.2 million in this state, and adopts a conflict resolution process to ensure that water trails do not damage Michigan's reputation as a premier fishing destination.

11. MSTAC and the DNR feel strongly that it must measure progress and success in achieving the vision identified in the plan. While there are numerous measures that could be used by the state and its trail partners, the draft Comprehensive Trail Plan has identified metrics for each priority recommendation. Are there other metrics that should be used in evaluating progress?

If "yes" what are they?

The success of this plan will hinge on how well the following action item from page 22 is implemented: "Trail expansions on state owned lands will be compatible with other values and programs associated with the land." Trails are by definition a route, a path to or through something. For recreational trail users, they are most often using the trail to travel through something - like a forest – and to experience that something along the way. If the values associated with the land are not maintained, then the value of the trail will diminish.

12. Are there any other comments about the Plan that you would like to share with us?

Michigan is not a one-size-fits-all state, and neither are its forests, rivers, lakes, fields and trails. It enjoys unique places that have developed management plans and methods tailored to preserve and promote the unique features of those places to provide outdoor experiences that cannot be found anywhere else in Michigan. If these areas and the trails through them are managed like every other place in Michigan, then they will lose many of the unique features that make them desirable destinations for trail users. We urge the addition of the following language to be inserted into the plan and applied to all sections of it: "The recommendations contained in this Plan are not intended to supersede local or regional land management plans, nor the authority of those committees charged with their oversight."

The asterisk on the High Country Pathway (pgs. 110/111 and 156) says that equine restrictions apply only within the boundaries of the Pigeon River Country. That is not correct. The equine restrictions apply to the entire High Country Pathway.