

Friends of MacKenzie Trail awarded grant funding for improvements

BY RILEY CONNELL
CADILLAC NEWS

CADILLAC — The newly formed Friends of the MacKenzie Trail group has received state and local funding to continue trail improvement and maintenance.

Formerly known as the Cadillac Area Ski Club, the 30 to 40-member crew has kept its eye on the MacKenzie for many years. President Sam Hogg said his team knew that in order to receive grant funding to keep up their volunteer work, they had to consolidate into an official organization, and so the Friends of the MacKenzie Trail were born.

Although their name has changed, the tasks the group completes on a weekly basis have not. Some of their maintenance includes clearing of dead and fallen trees, drainage cleaning and repairs, and building trail structures.

Their most recent project — funded in part by National Forest System Trail Stewardship Partner Funding, and matched by dollars from the Cadillac Area Visitors Bureau — included a widening of the trail to eight feet, removal of dead and live trees obstructing the trail and the construction of seven new trail routes.

Total funding amounted to \$10,708, and without it, Hogg said those trail improvements made by the Friends over the course of 2022 may not have happened. There are only so many improvements that can be made without



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAM HOGG

Huron Manistee Nation Forest Recreation Specialist Travis Owens planning a reroute on the MacKenzie Trail. Local maintenance group, the Friends of the MacKenzie Trail recently received grant funding to complete a series of necessary trail improvements.

financial assistance.

Thankfully, Hogg said they've built strong partnerships with other natural resource stewards, such as the United States Forest Service, Caberfae Ski Resort and the Caberfae Ski Club. He said these organizations together have been able to keep the MacKenzie a safe, well-managed and beautiful trail for local and visiting

recreators; however, the Friends are the only group whose sole purpose is maintaining the trail year-round.

Hogg said every member of the Friends group has made use of the MacKenzie, whether it be for hiking, biking or cross-country skiing.

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He added that the trail is the only non-motorized system in Wexford County, making it ideal for those who want to enjoy a quiet connection with nature, himself included.

"I grew up in the area, so the Mackenzie was always there, and now I live right at Caberfae, so it's just a hop, skip and a jump from my doorstep," he said. "But there's always been a lot of people that are interested in the MacKenzie."

Outside the members of his group who like to traverse the MacKenzie, Hogg said there are hundreds of trail users, both

locals and tourists, who recreate there through the year, meaning consistent trail upkeep is crucial. Trail maintenance can also be an important part of natural resource protection and preservation.

"What trails provide is an important connection to nature, which is known to have health benefits," said U.S. Forest Service Recreation Management Specialist Travis Owens. "But from a natural resource perspective, we can use trails to help concentrate use and direct that use to decrease the impact to the surrounding natural environment."

Owens said poorly designed trails could actually damage natural resources through erosion and invasive species spread, so having a dedicated group like the Friends of the MacKenzie Trail is a great asset to the community.

Cadillac Area Visitors Bureau Executive Director Kathy Morin said the bureau was connected to Hogg through Caberfae Peaks part owner Pete Meyer.

When she heard word of the Friends group's need for matching funds, she said the bureau was eager to make up the difference and support a project that so closely aligns with the organization's mission.

"We invest in these types of destination development projects to improve major tourism

assets because we know they create a direct economic impact here in our community as well as providing us more opportunities to encourage responsible recreation and sustainability," Morin said.

Hogg said the trails of Wexford County are an asset, not only for the recreation industries that benefit from their existence, but for the residents and visitors of the region who can use trails to bond with their loved ones, or get outside for exercise.

As long as there is a MacKenzie trail, Hogg and his group will continue to volunteer their expertise and services to keep it in tip-top shape. He said there's much work to be done moving forward.

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