BOARDMAN RIVER WATER TRAIL
DEVELOPMENT PLAN
This Plan was funded in part by the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, Department of Environmental Quality Office of the Great Lakes, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. Matching funding was provided by Rotary Charities of Traverse City and the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation.
BOARDMAN WATER TRAIL
Development Plan

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

PLAN PURPOSE

In 2013, a leadership team made up of representatives from roughly 25 non-profit organizations, local jurisdictions and governmental agencies within the greater Grand Traverse Region adopted the Boardman River Watershed Prosperity Plan. The Prosperity Plan served two purposes. The first purpose of the Prosperity Plan was to establish a formal management plan for the Boardman River that would be approved by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The second purpose of the Prosperity Plan was to provide a blueprint for multijurisdictional cooperation to improve the environmental, economic and social prosperity of the watershed region. The plan outlines five major goals, 19 specific objectives, and 100 strategies for the watershed. The following goals and objectives are relevant to this water-trail development plan.

**Goal Two.** Grow a sustainable economy that benefits and strengthens all of the watershed communities.

**Objective 2.1:** Focus and support economic growth in the watershed’s existing downtown hubs.

**Goal Three.** Improve the quality of life and advance greater social equity throughout the watershed in order to retain and attract businesses, a talented workforce and student and retiree residents.

**Objective 3.1:** Advance educational opportunities for watershed residents to expand potential economic and social opportunities.

**Goal Four.** Provide and manage expansion and improvement of recreation opportunities in the watershed to attract a talented workforce, student and retiree residents, and visitors from around the world.

**Objective 4.1:** Manage and capture opportunities for diverse water-based recreation in the watershed.

In 2014, representatives from Networks Northwest (the area’s regional planning organization) worked with the nonprofit Land Information Access Association (LIAA) as well as local officials and paddlers from throughout northwest Lower Michigan to establish the “Northwest Section” of the Lake Michigan Water Trail. This planning effort coincided with similar water-trail planning efforts along the coastline in the Upper Peninsula and in southwest Lower Michigan to create a contiguous water trail along Michigan’s entire Lake Michigan coastline.

In 2015, noting the positive results of the local Lake Michigan water trail planning effort, the development of nearly 41 different water trails around Michigan, the potential economic impact of water trails in local communities, and building on the goals and objectives of the Prosperity Plan (listed above), LIAA worked with Grand Traverse County, Rotary Charities of Traverse City, and Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails (TART) to secure a grant from the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program (CZMP) to create a development plan for a water trail on the Boardman River.

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Economic Impact of Water Trails

According to a 2013 study by the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development, the estimated annual impact of the Huron River Water Trail in Washtenaw County is $33 million.
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Boardman Water Trail Development Plan is to outline the activities, process and framework to establish a water trail along the Boardman River. The resulting efforts of this Plan will seek to improve public access to the Boardman River, complement ongoing conservation and environmental initiatives along the river, raise awareness of the unique and valuable natural resources within the river corridor, and provide for a safe and responsible recreational water trail.

ASSUMPTIONS

Throughout the planning process, community stakeholders, public officials, property owners and citizens throughout the study area worked to develop and refine a series of assumptions for the water trail. These assumptions summarize the specific goals and expectations for the water trail and ultimately establish the benchmark for success of the water trail.

- The water trail should balance safe recreation with ongoing conservation and restoration efforts.
- The river supports paddling, fishing, boating and swimming.
- The water trail complements and is integrated with surrounding land-based trails.
- The public has points of access to the river.
- The river and the ways it is used will continue to evolve.
- Downtown Traverse City should have better connections to the river.
- The river will continue to be managed and maintained through inter-jurisdictional public, private and non-profit partnerships.
- Paddlers will respect private property along the water trail.

WHAT IS A WATER TRAIL?

A water trail is a designated route on a navigable waterway such as a river, lake, bay or canal that is that is designed, implemented and managed to foster educational and recreational experiences for the user. Water trails are intended primarily for non-motorized uses such as kayaking, canoeing and stand-up paddleboarding. However, in some circumstances water trails can be used by wind-powered vessels (e.g., sailboat, wind-surfer).

Water trails can be classified by experience (e.g., urban, natural, historic, industrial) or by skill level (e.g., beginner, intermediate, advanced). For some water trails, experience classifications may vary from one section of the trail to another. In addition, skill-level classifications can vary depending upon weather, water conditions and impediments.
(e.g., woody debris). The quality of trail assets such as access points, maps, signage and facilities can impact the use and success of a water trail. Furthermore, proximity to nearby amenities (e.g., hotels, camping, restaurants) can also impact the use and success of a water trail.

**STUDY AREA**

The Boardman River is located in Grand Traverse and Kalkaska counties in northwest Lower Michigan. The river begins in the Mahan Swamp in Kalkaska County and flows for 179 miles before it empties into Grand Traverse Bay on Lake Michigan. The proposed water trail outlined in this plan begins at “The Forks,” a river access site owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). From there, the proposed water trail would flow north for roughly 29 miles before emptying into Grand Traverse Bay. Areas upstream of this location were deemed not suitable for recreational purposes because of a lack of woody debris management. Along the way, the proposed water trail would flow through six local jurisdictions: Union Township; East Bay Township; Paradise Township; Blair Township; Garfield Township; and the City of Traverse City.

**PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RIVER**

The Boardman River has a fairly stable stream flow, largely due to the region’s abundant supply of groundwater. The flow and location of nearly 20 miles of the river is significantly influenced by three remaining dams. Upstream of the former Brown Bridge Dam, the river is a cold, high-quality, healthy river. Woody debris, abundant gravel and stable river banks provide for a quality fishery habitat. Downstream of the former Brown Bridge Dam, the river has significantly less woody debris, warmer temperatures, and a mix of mostly sand with some gravel. Above the Boardman Dam, the river gradient increases significantly, creating some small rapids just upstream of Boardman Pond.

**Dams**

Beginning near the mouth of the river in Traverse City and traveling upstream, remaining dams include:

**Union Street Dam.** The Union Street Dam is owned by the City of Traverse City. Built in 1867, the dam was used to supply power to an adjacent flour mill. Today the dam works to maintain the water level of Boardman Lake. In addition, the dam provides a significant barrier to the migration of the invasive sea lamprey into the upper reaches of the river. The Union Street Dam is a significant barrier to paddlers in this stretch of the river. The lack of formal take-out amenities on the upstream side of the dam have led to significant shoreline degradation. The lack of formal put-in amenities on the downstream side of the dam have led to injuries, as paddlers have tried to maneuver and launch over existing dam infrastructure.

The City is currently working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop designs for a new dam. Preliminary plans call for the dam to be modified to allow better management of fish passage while still continuing to serve as a...
Map 1.1. Study Area
barrier to aquatic invasive species. Local officials are considering whether the dam could also be modified to include a whitewater park for kayakers. The ongoing discussion about modifying the dam provides an opportunity to consider better ways for paddlers to portage this impediment.

**Sabin Dam.** Sabin Dam is owned by Grand Traverse County. Built in 1906, the dam was used by Traverse City Light and Power (TCLP) to generate hydroelectric power until it was decommissioned in 2005. The dam effectively holds water in Sabin Pond, about 40 acres in size.

**Boardman Dam.** Built in 1884, the Boardman Dam is also owned by Grand Traverse County and was used by TCLP to generate hydroelectric power until it was also decommissioned in 2005. The dam effectively holds water in Keystone Pond, about 40 acres in size.

Boardman Dam is slated for removal in 2017 and Sabin Dam is slated to be removed sometime thereafter. The removal of these two dams (along with Brown Bridge Dam, which was removed in 2012) is part of the *Boardman River Dams Ecosystem Restoration Project*, a long-term regional conservation effort that aims to restore 3.4 miles of the Boardman River to its more natural cold-water state, reconnect 160 miles of river habitat, and restore more than 250 acres of wetlands.

The removal of the Sabin and Boardman dams will provide new opportunities for a proposed water trail. First, the section of the river where the dams are located is one of the steepest sections of the river corridor. As a result, the realigned river would create a longer stretch of “rapids,” beginning just upstream of Beitner Road (where there are currently rapids) to the Sabin Dam site. Rapids in this part of the river would be enticing for intermediate and advanced paddlers, but might be too dangerous for beginner or inexperienced paddlers. Signage about the dangers and risks associated with paddling this section of the river would be important to include at access sites. Given the unique history of the dams and the nature of the dam removal project, interpretive signage about the removal effort, the restoration process, and the history of the dams could also be included at selected access sites.

Finally, once the river has settled into its realigned position, new access sites could be added. Currently, there are two parking areas near the Boardman Dam which are used by kayakers to access the river. Additional infrastructure (e.g., a kayak slide and steps) would likely be needed to get kayakers from the parking areas to the realigned river. The Boardman River Nature Center, which has a picnic shelter, parking and public restrooms, is located adjacent to Sabin Dam. Similar to the areas near the Boardman Dam, additional infrastructure would likely be needed to get kayakers from the parking lot to the realigned river.
RELATED PLANNING EFFORTS AND RESOURCES

There have been numerous plans and studies, both regional and jurisdictional, focused on the development and/or enhancement of the Boardman River. These documents proved very useful in the development of this water-trail plan, providing both contextual and background information as well as information about future plans and projects associated with the river. In addition, a handful of national and state resources were used to develop this plan.

**National**

**State**
- Michigan's Great Lakes Water Trails. Website and Resources. LIAA. Funding for this website and database was provided by the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, Department of Environmental Quality, Office of the Great Lakes, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. www.michiganwatertrails.org
- 2016 Michigan Water Trail Summit. Presentations. Funding for this Summit was provided by the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, Department of Environmental Quality, Office of the Great Lakes, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- Agency Policy on State Water Trails Designation, 8-18-2016 Draft. Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

**Watershed/Regional**
- Boardman River Assessment, 2014 Draft. Michigan Department of Natural Resources.
• West Boardman Lake Trail Planning Project, 2016. Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails, Inc.

Local
• City of Traverse City Parks and Recreation Plan, 2016.
• Garfield Township Recreation Plan, 2012.
• Blair Township Master Plan, 2009.
• Grand Traverse County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan, 2013.
• Union Township Master Plan for Parks and Recreation, 2011.
Map 1.2. Study Area
CHAPTER TWO – THE PLANNING PROCESS

BACKGROUND

The development of this plan required comprehensive data collection, extensive community input, research of existing planning documents, and site visits. Ultimately, all this information was used to address and provide recommendations regarding the development of a water trail on the Boardman River. While the review of existing planning documents and site visits occurred early in the planning process, community outreach activities continued throughout the development of this plan.

INVENTORY

Organizations

In order to develop appropriate goals for the long-term management, oversight and funding of a water trail along the Boardman River, it is important to understand which agencies and organizations are currently working on the river. The following local units of government, agencies and organizations currently play roles in the management of the river.

- **Conservation Resource Alliance.** Streambank restoration, programming, culvert management.
- **Grand Traverse Conservation District.** Monitoring, restoration, access site management, woody debris management.
- **Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians.** Restoration, dam removal.
- **Rotary Charities of Traverse City.** Long-term planning and funding, access site development.
- **TART Trails, Inc.** Terrestrial trail planning.
- **Michigan Department of Natural Resources.** Land use management, shoreline restoration, habitat restoration, access site management.
- **Trout Unlimited.** Fish surveys and fish habitat restoration.
- **Michigan Department of Transportation.** Road stream crossings.
- **Traverse Area Paddle Club.** Access site improvement, river cleanup.
- **Outfitters.** Equipment sales and rental businesses, paddling events.
- **Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.** Water quality monitoring.
- **Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay.** Macrophyte and sediment surveying.
- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.** Sediment assessment, dam improvement.
- **Private Enterprises.** Accommodations, access site management.
- **Local Jurisdictions.** Access site management, land use management.

**Working on the Boardman**

There are a number of agencies and organizations currently working on conservation, restoration, and recreation efforts on the Boardman River.
Designations

Large portions of the Boardman River have been designated a “Natural River” by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (see Map 2.1). The designation establishes zoning restrictions for private land adjacent to the river. These restrictions are intended to guide future development and better protect the natural characteristics of the river. The designation also places restrictions on public land along the river, including access sites and the extent to which signage and other amenities can be placed along the river.

The following Natural River regulations are described in the Boardman River Natural Rivers Plan.

Land Use and Development Requirements

Building Setbacks

Vegetative Buffer
“Country Scenic,” 50 ft. along both sides of the river; “Wild Scenic,” 75 ft. along both sides of the river.

Stream Alteration. To protect the natural character of the Boardman River and the natural flow of its waters, no damming, dredging, filling or channelization of the stream channel will be permitted until reviewed by the local zoning board and approved by the Department of Natural Resources under authority of Part 301, P.A. 451 of 1994.

Improvements for fish habitat, bank stabilization or other resource management practices that may alter the existing natural character of the stream are encouraged to be designed to look as natural as possible. Approval of such improvements by permit must be obtained from the Department of Natural Resources. To remove trees fallen across the river, the property owner’s consent should first be obtained. To perform extensive removal of log material from the bottom, permission must be obtained from the Department of Natural Resources District Fish Biologist.

Signs. Only those signs necessary for identification, directions, resource information, and regulation of use shall be placed along public-use areas of the designated river and tributaries. The Department of Natural Resources shall post signs at access sites and on state and county road bridges emphasizing respect for private property rights and penalties for littering and trespassing. Signs for the sale of products or services shall be prohibited in the natural river area, except that a business may advertise on lands on which that business is established or operates. Signs and outdoor advertising devices must be (1) related to permitted uses, (2) not more than one square foot in area for residential uses and not more than four square feet in area for any other areas, (3) not illuminated by any neon or flashing device, and (4) not attached to any tree or shrub.

Canoe Landings. Docks or landings may be constructed parallel to the bank, not to exceed 10 feet in length and not protruding into the stream. The use of “natural” materials such as rocks or logs is encouraged.
Access Sites

The Project Team performed site visits to 16 identified access sites along the river. Almost all of these access sites can be defined as “formal” access sites — sites identified on a map, marked with some signage, and supported by some degree of amenities. However, some access sites can be defined as “informal” — sites without amenities that paddlers are nonetheless using to access the water and nearby businesses. In addition, the Project Team performed site visits to four river obstructions: Boardman Dam, Sabin Dam, Union Street Dam and the DNR Fish Weir.

These visits included field documentation (using the asset record form) of site conditions, available amenities, and a variety of other characteristics that typically support water trails. In addition, the Project Team paddled different sections of the river. This allowed for a more thorough analysis of the conditions of the river, the identification and location of hazards and obstacles, the float time between access sites, and the mapping of roads and bridges that cross the river. Additional assessments were conducted using aerial photography and discussions with community stakeholders. Map 2.2 illustrates each access site, Map 2.3 illustrates each river obstruction, and Map 2.4 illustrates each river crossing.

PUBLIC INPUT

Steering Committee

A steering committee was established at the onset of the project to help frame the issues and opportunities related to the water trail, discuss potential management options, provide overall guidance to the planning process, and make recommendations. The steering committee consisted of representatives from several local units of government and community organizations:

- Conservation Resource Alliance
- Traverse Area Paddle Club
- TART Trails Inc.
- Grand Traverse Hiking Club
- Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay
- Fife Lake Township
- East Bay Township
- Rotary Camps Water Committee
- City of Traverse City Parks and Recreation
- Networks Northwest
- Garfield Township
- Grand Traverse Conservation District
- Boardman River Clean Up
- Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians
- Grand Traverse County
**Stakeholder Interviews**

In an effort to get in-depth information about how the Boardman River is managed and what activities are currently underway that might contribute to or impact the development of a water trail on the river, the Project Team conducted interviews with staff members and public officials from several local units of government as well as staff members from community organizations.

**Local Units of Government**

- City of Traverse City
- Garfield Township
- Blair Township
- Grand Traverse County

**Community Stakeholders**

- TART Trails, Inc.
- Conservation Resource Alliance
- Grand Traverse Paddle Club
- Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians
- Grand Traverse Conservation District

**Public Meetings**

In an effort to secure community input on the proposed water trail, the Project Team facilitated two public meetings. The public meetings were held on July 27, 2016, and September 28, 2016. The first public meeting introduced the project and solicited information about the current usage of the river as well as concerns and opportunities about the proposed water trail. The meeting also included a *red dot/green dot* exercise to gauge response to a variety of themed images. The diagram below lists subjects that evoked a positive response in green, and subjects that evoked a negative response in red. The second public meeting provided an opportunity for community members to comment on draft recommendations.

![Amenities and River Experience Diagram](image-url)
Map 2.1 Natural Rivers Designation

Map showing the natural rivers designation in the Boardman Water Trail Development Plan area, with specific sections marked as Country Scenic, Wild and Scenic, and Not Designated. The map highlights areas such as East Grand Traverse Bay, City of Traverse City, Garfield Township, Blair Township, East Bay Township, Union Township, and Paradise Township.
Chapter Two: The Planning Process

Map 2.2 Access Sites

Boardman Water Trail Development Plan
Access Points by Ownership

- City
- County
- Private
- State
- Township

Legend:
- Boardman Water Trail

Access Sites:
1. The Forks Access Site and Campground
2. Ranch Ruffalo
3. Sheek's
4. Brown Bridge
5. Shumsky
6. Belcher
7. Lone Pine
8. YMCA
9. Medall Park
10. 16th Street
11. 12th Street
12. Hull Park
13. Hannah Park
14. Riverbank Steps
15. Clinch Park
16. City Boat Launch

Date Source:
Michigan Geographic Framework
Map 2.3 River Obstructions

Boardman Water Trail Development Plan

Obstruction Points by Ownership

City
County

1 - Boardman Dam - Cass Road
2 - Sabin Dam
3 - Union Street Dam
4 - Fish Weir

Miles

Data Source: Michigan Geographic Framework

LIAA
Map 2.4 River Crossings
CHAPTER THREE – RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Through meetings with the steering committee, community stakeholder interviews, and the public meetings, one thing became clear: the preservation and conservation of the Boardman River is extremely important to the agencies and organizations that work on and around the river, the local governments that line the river, and the citizens who live and recreate on the river. The ongoing dam removal and restoration project along the river is a testament to that commitment and sentiment. Therefore, the development of a water trail on the Boardman River must strive to balance the needs and activities of all these stakeholders.

Although there was almost uniform agreement that there should be a water trail on the Boardman River, the public input process revealed two competing ideas about how a water trail should be developed. Some felt that providing better amenities (e.g., formal and accessible launches, signage) at key access sites would enhance the paddling activities that already occur on the river. It was also suggested that these amenities could help limit the environmental impact of informal access sites (e.g., erosion, trash), establish expectations for how the river should be used, and establish expectations for the type of behavior that is acceptable along the river. Many noted that the river is already hosting large paddling tours and that local jurisdictions (e.g., Garfield Township, City of Traverse City and Grand Traverse County) are currently working on projects to provide better access to the river.

Others felt that better amenities and additional marketing would only attract more people to a resource that is delicate, in a state of flux, and not suitable for certain types of paddlers (e.g., youth, inexperienced paddlers, paddlers with a disability). In addition, many people felt that a water trail shouldn't be developed until several key questions can be answered, most notably:

**Can we determine the current load on the river, by section?**
**And can we determine the reasonable load the river can handle, by section?**

Additional questions regarding which organization(s) would be responsible for funding, maintaining and managing the water trail also were raised. Each of these questions are very important and should be addressed before many of the other recommendations in this plan are implemented. At the same time, how do stakeholders address the people (and crowds) already paddling the river (essentially using the river like a water trail) each year? The fundamental question and dilemma that developed out of this planning process is something that has been often cited by land and resource managers:

*How do we determine the maximum amount and type of visitor use that a resource can accommodate while achieving and maintaining desired resource conditions and a visitor experience consistent with the purpose for which the resource was established?*
Even without the user loads on the river specifically quantified, one way to determine if we have balanced the needs and activities of all the river’s stakeholders is to establish and monitor the *expectations* for the river and water trail. For example, when paddling in areas of the river upstream from the YMCA site, paddlers should expect to be surrounded by a natural environment with abundant wildlife. Paddlers should expect to negotiate around woody debris and rapids. Paddlers should expect little to some interactions with other users. Paddlers should also expect to treat private property with respect, and have minimal exposure to trash and other paddlers smoking or drinking on the river. Paddlers should also expect to be served by more informal amenities — gravel parking lots, vault toilets, simple landings, and accessible launches only in certain locations.

On the other hand, when paddling in areas downstream of the YMCA (including Boardman Lake), paddlers should expect to see natural elements within a more urban context. Paddlers should expect to have more interaction with other users, including motorboats. As a result of this additional interaction, paddlers should expect to have more exposure to trash and people drinking and smoking on the river. Paddlers should also expect to be served with more formal amenities — paved parking lots, restrooms, signage, trash receptacles, accessible launches, kayak storage, and links to nearby businesses and outfitters.

The community must continually work together to determine if these expectations are being met and are changing. If expectations do change, how will these new expectations be managed?

The following recommendations are grouped under operational, physical improvement and development/identity themes. Because there is no collective framework for a water trail at this time, the recommendations are not prioritized. That said, the following operational recommendations would provide such a framework and help stabilize a collective water trail planning effort. At the same time, local jurisdictions could implement (and in some cases already have implemented) physical improvements to access sites along the river that support a water trail.

### OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following operational recommendations would help stabilize and provide a framework for a collective water trail implementation effort. In some instances, the recommendations may take several years to realize, whereas others are more fundamental to moving this plan forward.

**Secure a Steering Committee**

In order to move forward, it is essential for the community to secure commitments from community stakeholders to continue the steering committee that was established for this planning effort. Many of these stakeholders are listed earlier in this plan. However, additional stakeholders should be invited, including residents along the river. A regional organization will likely be needed to house and facilitate the steering committee.
Secure Jurisdictional and Stakeholder Support

Once the concept of a water trail is solidified, it will be important to secure resolutions of support from communities and agencies in which the water trail and access sites are located and owned. Language about the water trail and its amenities should also be included in local recreation and master plans. In addition, the steering committee should continue to speak and collaborate with regional partners that may be able to contribute to the development of the water trail (e.g., public safety agencies). The steering committee should also support and work with stakeholder organizations on their ongoing programs and efforts that support the river (e.g., the paddle club annual river cleanup).

Determine and Establish a Formal Framework for Making Decisions and Developing an Action Plan

Ultimately, in order for a water trail to be established along the Boardman River, an organization or agency (or a collection of organizations and agencies) will be needed to organize and oversee the development of the water trail, help secure funding, and make decisions. This type of entity could come together in several different ways. For example, on one end, the participating jurisdictions could establish a formal recreational authority. On the other end, the participating community stakeholders could all adopt on a Memorandum of Understanding to work together. Once a formal body is in place, it can help develop an action plan and determine which agencies would be responsible for things like river maintenance. In addition, the entity could help lead efforts that address the questions listed above related to carrying capacity of the river.
SITE SPECIFIC IMPROVEMENTS

The following series of potential site improvements were created to show general recommendations for improvements at each access site. These development recommendations should be used as a general framework and planning tool throughout the development and implementation of these access sites over time. It is important to note that these recommendations are not intended to be the final design of each access site. While some recommendations might be easier to implement (e.g., signage), further design work will be required to carry all these recommendations into construction documents and eventually into implementation. It is also important to note that agreement as to the extent, funding and timeline for such improvements would require the approval of the owner of each access site.

The Forks Access Site and Campground
Union Township
Ownership: DNR

Site Information
The Forks launch site is located in Union Township, adjacent to a small state campground. The launch site is equipped with a small parking area, trash receptacle, kayak ramp and small platform. Vehicles access the launch via Brown Bridge Road. The campground is equipped with a pit toilet and a handful of campsites.

Recommendations
Due to the remote location and natural surroundings of this access site, only minimal improvements should be considered. However, given that this access site would essentially function as the “first access site” on the proposed water trail, it should have some additional amenities. Most importantly, the access site should have a sign kiosk displaying information about the water trail.

Many paddlers expressed how difficult it is to get into their kayak from the existing platform. This is due primarily to the small footprint of the platform itself and its height off the river. Local paddlers and local officials should work together to develop an alternative platform design. An accessible launch could be considered. However, additional barrier-free amenities would need to be added to the site to make the launch a realistic and practical improvement.
Scheck’s Place
Union Township
Ownership: DNR

Site Information
Scheck’s Place is located in Union Township, adjacent to a large equestrian campground. There are two access sites onto the Boardman River from Scheck’s Place. The first access site is immediately adjacent to the campground and is actively used by equestrians. The small gravelly beach at this site makes for easy access by paddlers. While rare, there can be conflicts between paddlers and equestrians. The second access site is just downriver. This site is very primitive with virtually no amenities outside of a small wood rail to help paddlers get in and out of their kayak or canoe.

Recommendations
The location of the second access site could allow for an accessible kayak launch. However, additional barrier-free amenities would need to be added to the site to make the launch a realistic and practical improvement. Additional improvements could include a vault toilet, trash receptacles and a kiosk displaying information about the water trail. Additional signage should be placed along the shore near the equestrian access site to direct paddlers to the second location.
**Brown Bridge**  
**East Bay Township**  
**Ownership: DNR**

**Site Information**  
Brown Bridge is located in East Bay Township, at the site of the original Brown Bridge Dam. Due to its existing amenities, accessible location, and proximity to access sites both upriver and downriver, it is a very popular access site. On the ridge above the river, the Brown Bridge access site has trash receptacles, a vault toilet, ample parking, picnic tables and connections to non-motorized trails. Paddlers access the river via a small platform. The platform and parking area (and other amenities) are connected by a long narrow set of stairs. There is also a sign on a tree near the platform that directs paddlers to the site.

**Recommendations**  
This past year, there have been several discussions to relocate the launch site just upriver to a more accessible area. This plan supports that recommendation. Depending on the location, an accessible kayak launch might be feasible. However, like many of the existing sites along the river, additional barrier-free amenities would need to be added to the site to make the launch a realistic and practical improvement. Given the space near and around the access site and parking area, Brown Bridge could also include a couple of campsites. A kiosk with information about the river should be included as well.

Until another launch site is developed, the existing launch platform could be improved. Many paddlers expressed how difficult it is to get into and out of their kayak from the existing platform. This is due primarily to the small footprint of the platform itself and its height off the river. Local paddlers and local officials should work together to determine an alternative platform design. In addition, given the steep slope between the parking area and the launch platform, a kayak ramp should be located adjacent to the existing staircase to allow paddlers to more safely get their kayak to the water.
**Schumsky’s Canoe Launch**  
**Blair Township**  
**Ownership: DNR**

**Site Information**  
Schumsky’s Canoe Launch is located in Blair Township via Schumsky Road. Given its proximity to access sites both upriver and downriver, this is also a very popular access site. Schumsky’s has just a few amenities for paddlers. There is a large parking lot, which can get very busy, especially on weekends during the summer months. In fact, many paddlers noted that on some weekends, cars are parked all along Schumsky Road. The access site has a vault toilet and only one trash receptacle. Paddlers access the river via three long wooden steps.

**Recommendations**  
On busy weekends, parking at Schumsky’s can be difficult. A more formal parking lot with defined parking spaces may allow for more efficient parking. An accessible kayak launch might be feasible at the current location. However, like many of the existing sites along the river, additional barrier-free amenities would need to be added to the site to make the launch a realistic and practical improvement. A kiosk with information about the river should be included as well.
Beitner Park
Blair Township
Ownership: Grand Traverse County

Site Information
The access site off Beitner Road is located in Blair Township. This access site is also very popular because it is often used as the last take-out before the rapids just downriver. The Beitner Road access site has a vault toilet, trash receptacles, a large paved parking lot, picnic tables and access to non-motorized trails. Paddlers access the river via a small set of stairs and a large platform. The access site also has a sign kiosk displaying information about the river system, woody debris and river etiquette.

Recommendations
During the planning process, several paddlers noted that the platform at this access site made it difficult for paddlers to enter and exit the water. An accessible kayak launch might be feasible. However, like many of the existing sites along the river, additional barrier-free amenities would need to be added to the site to make the launch a realistic and practical improvement. A kayak ramp at this location would also prove to be very helpful for paddlers. Given that Beitner is the last stop for many paddlers, a kayak locker would be an ideal amenity at this location. The locker would allow people to secure their kayak and gear while they retrieved their car from access sites upriver. The sign kiosk at this access site is very helpful. However, a new kiosk could be developed to match the design and information that we are suggesting for all the access sites along the river.

Lone Pine
Blair Township
Ownership: Grand Traverse County

Site Information
This access site is located in Blair Township off Keystone Road. The Lone Pine site is actually not very accessible, though there is a fairly large, paved parking lot near Keystone Road. The parking area has a large trash receptacle, signs and access to several non-motorized trails. But from there, paddlers have to negotiate a very long and steep staircase to get
to the river’s edge. Once there, there are no physical amenities; paddlers just access the river via a small beach near the base of the staircase.

Recommendations
Due to its relative difficulty in terms of access, this plan recommends that the Lone Pine site be removed from the list of access sites along the proposed water trail. Instead, this plan recognizes that a new, more accessible access site could be located just upriver, near Oleson’s Bridge. However, this new location would also require consideration of amenities such as parking and accessible access to the river’s edge.

YMCA Site
Garfield Township
Ownership: Garfield Township
Site Information
The YMCA access site is located in Garfield Township adjacent to the YMCA South facility. The access site and surrounding area were recently purchased by Garfield Township. Currently, the access site features one trash receptacle. Paddlers access the river via a long platform. There is parking nearby next to the YMCA building, and restrooms can be accessed within the YMCA building during business hours.
Recommendations
Garfield Township recently received a DNR Trust Fund Grant to redevelop the site into a premier access site for paddlers. Plans call for the access site to include an accessible launch, an accessible parking lot, a picnic pavilion, vault toilet, changing rooms and interpretive signage. It is the recommendation of this plan that any signage developed under this project be similar to the signage recommendations (aesthetics and information) described for the other access sites discussed in this plan.

Medalie Park
Garfield Township
Ownership: Grand Traverse County

Site Information
Medalie Park is located off South Airport Road at the southern end of Boardman Lake. Medalie Park has a number of amenities that make it an ideal location for an access site along the proposed water trail. The park has ample parking, a picnic pavilion, formal restrooms, running water and trash receptacles. This past summer (2016), Grand Traverse County contracted with a private outfitter to rent kayaks out of the park. At this time, paddlers access the water via a small viewing platform.

Medalie Park has also been identified as a primary trailhead for the proposed Boardman Lake terrestrial trail. Plans for that trail, as well as additional improvements to Medalie Park, were developed through a planning process that was concurrent with the planning effort for the water trail.

Recommendations
Given its location on the north side of South Airport Road and its potential tie-in with the proposed Boardman Lake terrestrial trail, Medalie Park could serve as an ideal location for the first access site of the more urban section of the proposed water trail. This plan recommends the installation of an accessible kayak launch at the park. An initial site visit to the park demonstrated that the launch could be located near the “channel” on the west side of the park. However, due to a prevailing north wind, it might make sense to locate the launch along the river on the east side of the park where it’s more protected. Ideally, the launch site and surrounding pathways would connect to any configuration of the proposed
Boardman Lake terrestrial trail. Accessible parking spaces should also be included in any future design. In addition, kayak lockers should be located near the accessible launch, providing visitors an opportunity to lock up their equipment for short periods of time or residents an opportunity to store their equipment at the park all summer.

**16th Street**
*City of Traverse City*
*Ownership: City of Traverse City*

**Site Information**
While not necessarily identified as a primary access site, paddlers participating in the “Paddle for Pints” event are using a hillside near 16th Street to access Right Brain Brewery. This past year, Right Brain Brewery installed a series of steps on the hill to help reduce erosion and provide better footing for paddlers. There are currently no amenities for paddlers along the water’s edge.

**Recommendations**
On some weekends, as many as 400 paddlers use the stairs as part of the “Paddle for Pints” event. This kind of traffic can be harmful to both the lakeshore and the hillside leading to the brewery. As long as paddlers are allowed to use this site, the City should work with the promoters of Paddle for Pints to provide better amenities at this location. These amenities should include some type of docking system, trash receptacles, signage and a formal pathway up the hillside.
12th Street  
City of Traverse City  
Ownership: City of Traverse City

Site Information  
On the west side of Boardman Lake, just off the TART Trail near 12th Street, the City of Traverse City has installed an accessible launch. The launch is connected to a small park that includes a picnic pavilion and picnic table.

Recommendations  
The accessible launch at this location allows paddlers an easy way to access the pavilion and picnic table and provides respite for those paddlers that might be paddling the entire length of the lake. However, the access site is not really connected to any other infrastructure (e.g., parking) that would sufficiently support people walking or carrying their kayak to the launch. The City may wish to keep the launch in this location or decide it might be better used at another location within the City, like Hull Park.

Hull Park  
City of Traverse City  
Ownership: City of Traverse City

Site Information  
Hull Park is located at the northern end of Boardman Lake. Hull Park is ideally situated near the Traverse City Area District Library, the TART Trail, and commercial businesses. Hull Park is also home to the Traverse Area Community Sailing organization. Hull Park has several amenities that would make it an ideal location for a launch on the proposed water trail, including, restrooms, several docks and a boat ramp, large grassy areas to allow for staging your kayak, parking, running water, trash receptacles and a pavilion.
Recommendations
Given its location on the north end of Boardman Lake and its tie-in with the TART Trail and other amenities, Hull Park could serve as an ideal location for an access site on the proposed water trail. An accessible kayak launch could easily be installed off one of the existing docks near the boat ramp. In addition, kayak lockers should be located near the accessible launch, providing visitors an opportunity to lock up their equipment for short periods of time or residents an opportunity to store their equipment at the park all summer. A kiosk describing the water trail, proper paddling etiquette, the history of the lake and nearby businesses could also be installed in the park.

City Boat Launch
City of Traverse City
Ownership: City of Traverse City

Site Information
The City Boat Launch is located near the mouth of the Boardman River, adjacent to Grandview Parkway. The City Boat Launch is primarily designed to serve motorboats and has a large parking lot. However, paddlers can access the river here as well. A pedestrian boardwalk lines the Boardman River before it terminates at the launch.
Recommendations
The City of Traverse City recently adopted plans to redevelop the site. The plan calls for the installation of an accessible launch adjacent to the current dock facility. It is the recommendation of this plan that any signage developed under this project be similar to the signage recommendations (aesthetics and information) described for other access sites in this plan.

Clinch Park
City of Traverse City
Ownership: City of Traverse City

Site Information
Clinch Park is located off West Grand Traverse Bay, west of the mouth of the Boardman River. Clinch Park has a number of amenities that make it an ideal access site for the proposed water trail, including restrooms and changing stations, a picnic pavilion (with food), running water, park facilities, a busy beach, connections to the TART Trail and downtown Traverse City, kayak rentals and an accessible kayak launch.

Recommendations
Given its popularity and proximity to downtown and the Traverse City Marina, kayak lockers should be installed near the accessible launch site. The kayak lockers would provide visitors the opportunity to lock up their equipment for short periods of time and residents an opportunity to store their equipment at the park all summer. A kiosk describing the water trail, proper paddling etiquette, the history of the bay and nearby downtown businesses could also be installed in the park.
SITE SPECIFIC IMPROVEMENTS - OBSTRUCTIONS

The following is a list of recommended improvements at each physical obstruction along the Boardman River. These recommendations should be used as a general framework and planning tool throughout the development and implementation of improvements at each obstruction. While some recommendations might be easier to implement, further design work will be required to carry all these recommendations into construction documents and eventually into implementation. It is also important to note that agreement as to the extent, funding and timeline for such improvements would require the approval of the owner of each obstruction.

**Boardman and Sabin Dams**
*Garfield Township*

As previously noted, the removal of the Sabin and Boardman dams will provide new opportunities for a proposed water trail. Once the river has settled into its realigned position, new access sites could be added. Currently, there are two parking areas near the Boardman Dam that are used by kayakers to access the river. Additional infrastructure (e.g., kayak slide and steps) would likely be needed to get kayakers from the parking areas to the realigned river. The Boardman River Nature Center, which has a picnic shelter, parking and public restrooms, is located adjacent to Sabin Dam. Similar to the areas near the Boardman Dam, additional infrastructure would likely be needed to get kayakers from the parking lot to the realigned river.

**Union Street Dam**
*City of Traverse City*

As previously mentioned, the Union Street Dam is a significant barrier to paddlers in this stretch of the river. The lack of formal take-out amenities on the upstream side of the dam have led to significant shoreline degradation. The lack of formal put-in amenities on the downstream side of the dam have led to injuries, as paddlers have tried to maneuver and launch over existing dam infrastructure.

The City is currently working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop designs for a new dam. Preliminary plans call for the dam to be modified to allow better management of fish passage while still continuing to serve as a barrier to aquatic invasive species. Local officials are considering whether the dam could also be modified to include a whitewater park for kayakers. The ongoing discussion about modifying the dam provides an opportunity to consider better ways for paddlers to portage this impediment.

**Dam Obstructions**

Removal of the Boardman and Sabin Dams will provide an opportunity for new access sites along the realigned river.
Boardman River Fish Weir

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources operates a fish weir in downtown Traverse City. The weir is used to help guide salmon up a fish ladder where they are then harvested. When the fish weir is “up,” paddlers can safely navigate through the gates of the weir. When the fish weir is “down” in September and October, paddlers must portage around it. Currently, paddlers must climb out of their kayaks and onto a small and difficult step and ledge on the south side of the river. Then, they must pull their kayaks out of the water and portage before negotiating a climb back into their kayak. Local paddlers have discussed developing a more accessible portage on the north side of the river, closer to the fish weir building. This option would require substantial infrastructure and investment as the bank on the south side of the river is quite steep. Local officials should continue to work with paddlers and officials from the DNR to develop a safe portage around the fish weir.

SITE SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

- Develop construction documents for large physical improvements to access sites and obstructions.
- Establish a system of universal accessible launches at key locations, including the YMCA site, Hull Park and the City Boat Launch.
- Support ongoing development projects for the YMCA site and the City Boat Launch.
- Determine the appropriate type and placement of access sites and amenities at Boardman and Sabin Dams after the dams are removed and the river is realigned.
WATER TRAIL IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Trail Branding and Identity
As the proposed water trail is developed, a distinctive logo should be established. The logo should represent a unique brand and identity for the Boardman Water Trail, setting it apart from other trails (both water and terrestrial) in the region. The logo should also help reflect the water trail’s identity throughout future planning and development efforts — on signage at access points, online and on paper. Creating a logo and brand helps to establish the trail as a legitimate trail system while developing a positive, attractive image that the public can recognize and embrace.

Trail Media

Trail Map
One of the most critical components of a water trail system is to develop materials that identify the routes, features, and access sites of the water trail. In most instances, unlike a terrestrial trail, a water trail does not have a built route one can easily follow. Navigating a water trail requires a map to provide the paddler with information about the water system. Paddlers are dependent on the information they gather prior to getting on the water. Local leaders should work with the paddling club to develop a water-resistant map that also has historical, cultural, and local/regional information for trail users.

Website
Once the water trail map has been developed, all the trail and related information should be placed on the Michigan Water Trails website at http://www.michiganwatertrails.org.

Trail Signage
One of the most basic and important physical improvements for each access site is signage. Signage helps to provide a sense of arrival and can deliver important information about the entire trail system, guide users to their next destination, promote river etiquette, promote safety, and educate users about the historical, cultural, and environmental assets of the community. It will be important to develop a comprehensive wayfinding and trail signage system for the water trail. Signs at access sites might be in the form of a large kiosk, whereas other signs might be smaller, providing direction to key access sites and other amenities.

In areas where the water trail connects to or is in close proximity to the TART Trail system, the water trail should be included in existing TART wayfinding signs.
Education and Safety

Paddler education and safety are very important components of a water trail on the Boardman River. While paddlers will be using the trail at their own risk, loss of life or injury is often avoidable. There are good sources of paddler education and training that should be made available to users of the proposed water trail. For example, the Coast Guard Auxiliary offers a variety of educational materials and programs to help teach paddlers about safety and decision making skills, such as the Operation Paddle Smart program, Paddle Smart “If Found” ID stickers for boats, and paddle craft inspections. The Coast Guard offers these paddle stickers and paddle craft inspections free of charge. Other lifesaving tools, such as developing “float plans,” should be promoted as standard practice. Programs like these are often accompanied by brochures and other forms of media which could easily be incorporated into kiosks at access sites. An educational and safety program that utilizes these types of materials should be developed.

Leveraging the Water Trail for Economic Development

Water trails can have a significant impact on the local and regional economy. Water trails help attract and support tourism and new business opportunities. In addition, local residents often spend money on trail-related activities and businesses. The outdoor recreation industry is now recognized as one of the leading economic drivers in the United States, surpassed only by Pharmaceuticals and Motor Vehicles and Parts in terms of consumer spending. In addition, the impact of outdoor recreation reaches beyond the outdoor industry, directly fueling such major economic sectors such as manufacturing, accommodations, food services and retail trade. According to a 2013 report from the Outdoor Industry Association, spending on outdoor recreation supports 6.1 million direct jobs and $80 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue. The report states, “outdoor recreation is a growing and diverse economic super sector that is a vital cornerstone of successful communities that cannot be ignored.”

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, paddle sports, largely fueled by stand-up paddling and kayaking, is one of the fastest-growing outdoor activities in the United States. A 2015 Special Report on Paddlesports prepared by the Foundation notes that more than 21.7 million people — or 7.4 percent of Americans — participated in paddling activities in 2014. Kayaking, which is the most popular form of paddling, had approximately 13 million participants in 2014. The Foundation also notes that the percent of Americans participating in kayaking increased from 3 percent in 2010 to 4.4 percent in 2014.

Nationally, paddlers are evenly represented across age groups but tend to be more highly educated, with 49 percent of kayakers and 43 percent of canoeists achieving a college degree or higher. Furthermore, 55 percent of kayakers and 48 percent of canoeists have incomes greater than $75,000. In 2014, kayakers across the United States took an average of eight trips during the year, contributing to 105 million trips overall.

In Michigan, the outdoor recreation industry generates $18.7 billion in consumer spending annually. A comprehensive understanding of consumer spending in Michigan on paddling is still largely incomplete. However, Michigan Blue Economy, a report from the Michigan Economic Center and the Grand Valley State University Annis Water Resources Institute, noted that the small but growing canoe and kayak industry annually contributes roughly $140 million to Michigan’s economy. In 2013, the Huron River Watershed Council commissioned an economic impact analysis for the Huron River Water Trail from the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development. The analysis
found that the Huron River Water Trail generates more than $49.5 million annually from current users, including $33 million in Washtenaw County alone. The report also went on to note that studies show that the average paddler will travel roughly 79 miles a day for a day trip and 117 miles for an overnight trip, meaning paddlers throughout the northwest Michigan region would travel to enjoy a multi-day trip on the Boardman Water Trail.

According to a report from the River Management Society, which summarizes notable findings on the economic impact of water trails in three different communities in the United States, “towns that already have dining, lodging and rental services are more likely to see an increase in paddlesports tourism when they advertise and promote their water trail, as contrasted with communities that market their water trail, but do not provide standard amenities for paddlers.”

The report also identifies the key trail tourist amenities that tend to successfully attract new audiences and generate economic activity — all of which are amenities that the Traverse City area offers in abundance:

- **Access to the water**
- **Outfitters: rental and shuttling services**
- **Lodging: camping, bed and breakfasts**
- **Dining: restaurants, breweries, grocery stores**
- **Integrated recreation: hiking and biking paths**
- **Activities: museums, interpretive centers and other activities**
- **Proximity: neighboring towns with similar amenities**

The report also noted that guides and outfitters, lodging and food are typically the top visitor expenditures for trail tourists. Therefore, communities with lodging, dining and outfitter/rental services already in place can expect to experience a more substantial economic benefit.

As the link between water trails and economic development is better understood, communities along the proposed Boardman Water Trail (especially Garfield Township and Traverse City) should look for ways to capitalize on the water trail to maximize trail-based tourism for future economic development opportunities — that is, to redefine the community as a “Trail Town.” The Trail Town concept was first developed by the Allegheny Trail Alliance, a coalition of seven different trail organizations along the Great Allegheny Passage, a 150-mile multi-use trail running through Pennsylvania and Maryland.

A Trail Town is an active, attractive and interesting place with accessible and comfortable spaces, hosting a variety of activities and promoting social interaction and a strong sense of place. A Trail Town should meet both the needs of the trail users and residents of the community. A Trail Town also has the physical amenities that support trail users such as accessible launches. A Trail Town also has the business amenities to support day-trip users (e.g., kayak rental) and overnight trail users (e.g., campground, casual restaurant and laundromat). Using the basic elements of the Trail Town strategy, local officials and economic development officials can help create a local and regional tool for water trail-based economic development.
Basic Elements of a Trail Town Strategy
1. Entice trail users to get off the trail and into the town.
2. Welcome trail users to your town by making information about the community readily available at the trail.
3. Make strong and safe connections between your town and the trail.
4. Educate local businesses on the economic benefits of meeting trail tourists’ needs.
5. Recruit new businesses or expand existing ones to fill gaps in the goods or services that trail users need.
6. Promote the “trail-friendly” character of the community.
7. Work with neighboring communities to promote the entire trail corridor as a tourist destination.

Many of these elements could be incorporated into places along the Boardman River where the connection with the urban environment is strong, especially near Medalie Park, Hull Park and near the Union Street Dam. Additional connections could be made along the river as it winds through downtown Traverse City. The boardwalks along the river would allow paddlers to easily access the shops and restaurants of downtown. An additional connection could be made at the location of the Downtown Farmers Market, where plans are currently being developed to possibly open the site more to the river.