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Trails a key focus in Chocoley Township

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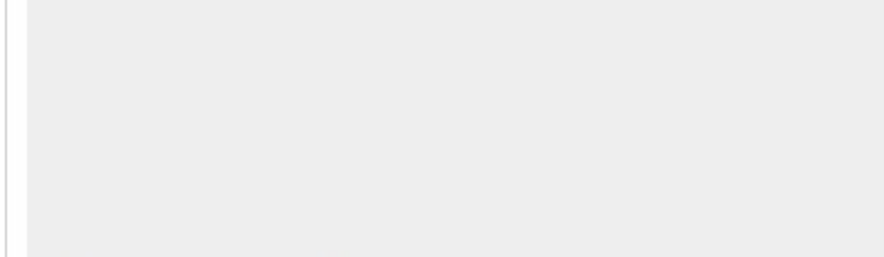
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HARVEY- Trails mean much more than getting from Point A to Point B. They provide a scenic way to get exercise. After all, you can't spot a pileated woodpecker pounding away on a tree from a treadmill inside a spa (unless you're by the right window at the right time, of course).

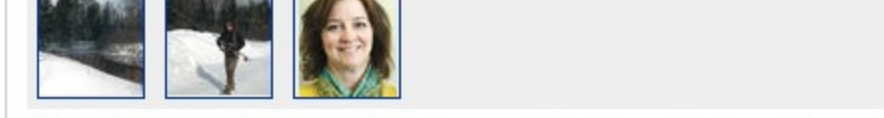
Chocoley Township's recently adopted Recreation and Natural Resource Conservation Plan for 2014-18 covers a wide variety of topics that entail wise use of the land and good recreational opportunities.

The topics range from developing sports and recreation programs in the township with local schools and clubs and establishing geocache sites in the township to working with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to establish a "Natural River" designation for parts of the Chocoley River.

Article Photos



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Evaluating recreational assets and areas in the township is another goal of the plan, as is establishing fishing and canoe/kayak access points, which, it is believed, would enhance the use of the Chocoley and Sand River watersheds.

Walking and biking trails, though, have been identified as particularly important in public opinion surveys.

Kelly Drake Woodward, township planning director and zoning administrator, has a good idea why trails are so cherished: Trail development is good for every age group and whenever people have the time.

"It's not just restricted to a particular time or season," Woodward said.

The Chocoley Township Board of Trustees also has decided to collaborate with the Iron Ore Heritage Recreation Authority to apply for a DNR recreation grant for Lions Field, where the authority wants to create a trailhead.

Carol Fulsher, administrator of the Iron Ore Heritage Recreation Area, said, "We just think it's a good gathering spot, and a good collaboration between the two organizations."

The Iron Ore Heritage Trail's east terminus is at the township's Kawbawgam Pocket Park, but Fulsher said more people use Lions Field, so the trailhead would be better suited to that site.

It is expected, though, there still will be a sign at Kawbawgam. (The Iron Ore Heritage Trail runs 48 miles to its western terminus in Republic.)

Woodward said the township can apply for a grant up to \$200,000, with the authority possibly providing up to \$25,000 in matching funds. The application deadline is April 1, with a decision to be made in October.

Woodward said a six-sided kiosk providing a history of the trail would be placed there, with upgraded restrooms and a warming shelter also part of the improvements.

A hockey rink already is at Lions Field, Woodward said, and its users also could benefit from the improvements.

"They could use a warming facility and bathrooms for that in the winter too," Woodward said.

The township's Recreation and Natural Resources Conservation Plan, according to Woodward, has to be updated every five years and sent to the DNR.

"You have to have a current recreation plan on file with them in order to apply for grants," she said.

Although trails are a priority, the township also is looking at improving many recreational and natural assets.

The plan is comprehensive and includes an inventory of Chocoley properties as well as properties maintained by other organizations.

The Upper Peninsula Disc Golf Association, Woodward said, turned the course at Silver Creek Church into an 18-hole facility, which provides another recreational opportunity: using the trails for snowshoeing and snow biking in the winter, maybe with lighting.

"It's right in the heart of our area," Woodward said. "It could be kind of a 'fit strip' thing, kind of like what Marquette has."

Woodward also noted the plan has site-specific action plans.

For example, the plan addresses Green Bay Street Park, noting it has the potential to be a destination fishing site and a plant demonstration area. To achieve those goals, partnerships with the DNR, Superior Watershed Partnership, Trout Unlimited 4-H and the Boy and Girl Scouts could be established.

Also mentioned is the Voce Creek Recreation Area, which has not been significantly developed. Road frontage on U.S. 41 is narrow, with the only available parking on the highway shoulder. Possible actions, according to the plan, include creating a small parking area to provide access from the highway, establishing an area for bow and small-game hunters (shotgun only) and growing beach grasses.

The recreation plan can be viewed at www.chocoley.org.

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