

Agonikak National Trail Complete to Watersmeet

Watersmeet, Mich., township, Wilderness Lakes Trails Inc. and the Ottawa National Forest have announced that work on the revitalized Agonikak National Recreation Trail was completed and is now available for public use.

The 12-mile Agonikak Trail connects the Watersmeet Town Park and the Ottawa National Forest Visitor Center to the town of Land O' Lakes.

The Agonikak Trail is a component of the 38-mile Wilderness Lakes Trails' bike and pedestrian system that will traverse two states (Michigan and Wisconsin) and encircle the Sylvania Wilderness Area once completed.

"This has been a remarkable project," said Alan Piel, Michigan director of Wilderness Lakes Trails Inc. "It demonstrates what our governments on the federal, tribal, state and local levels, working in concert with local businesses, nonprofit organizations and individual donors can accomplish for the benefit of residents and visitors."

The \$1.4 million project was funded primarily through three separate grants from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund totaling \$1.04 million.

The Ottawa National Forest provided \$100,000 in funds through the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, prepared the project's environmental assessment and provided a bridge design, construction materials and support through the course of construction.

The Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and other donors contributed the remaining balance of approximately \$80,000 of the required matching funds.

The Watersmeet township provided the conduit for receiving grants and dispersing funds. Its monetary

investment in the project was \$57,000 dispersed over four years, approximately 4% of the total project cost.

In addition, the Michigan Department of Transportation added three miles of eight-foot paved shoulders while resurfacing Highway 45 to make trail access from local roads safer.

Logan Jacisin, a boy scout for Troop 323 in Ironwood, Mich., designed, built and installed two bike-cleaning stations at trailheads on the Agonikak Trail as part of his Eagle Scout project developed to help keep the trail free of non-native invasive plants.

Piel described the improvements to the Agonikak Trail.

"The trail is 10 to 12 feet wide, with compacted gravel resulting in a very smooth uniform surface," he said. "A 40-foot pedestrian/bicycle bridge was constructed to cross a picturesque section of Duck Creek, one-half mile south of Highway 2.

"The 12-mile trail is well-suited for walking and hiking and is very bicycle-friendly, although riders of skinny-tired road bikes may prefer using the road bike route shown on the biking and hiking map downloadable at wildlakes.org," he said.

The initial reworking of the Agonikak Trail began in the fall of 2008, as part of a National Public Lands Day project. Local volunteers from the Land O' Lakes Fish and Game Club in conjunction with the Ottawa National Forest revived the neglected trail by setting signposts and brushing the trail.

This first stage of the Agonikak Trail restoration allowed immediate use by hikers, mountain bikers and cross-country skiers.

Today, that trail has been transformed into 12 miles of trails surrounded by remote lakes and forests of the North Woods.

