



Dear Friends,

As 2023 draws to a close, we reflect back upon our accomplishments in the past year and look forward to our plans for 2024 and beyond.

Our annual "A Toast to the Blue Star Trail" in June was enjoyed by almost 200 Trail supporters. A wonderful evening for all. And the generosity of those in attendance raised more than \$100,000 to support the Trail.

Our annual Lakeshore Harvest Ride in September brought together almost 600 participants from all over the Midwest. What a beautiful day! Thanks to the Ride participants, our generous sponsors, and the tireless efforts of our volunteers, the Ride generated almost \$40,000 to support the Trail.

On the north section of Trail, we have received conditional approval for a \$1,344,000 TAP grant as well as a \$300,000 DNR grant for Saugatuck City. Although the initial request for a \$300,000 grant for Saugatuck TWP was not successful, the TWP has re-applied and remains optimistic the grant will be approved yet this year. If that happens, we should be able to complete construction in 2025. Friends has committed \$205,000 for this project. The City of Saugatuck (\$50,000) and Saugatuck TWP (\$10,000) have also committed funds towards the required local match.

In the south, the Friends board is working with the stakeholders to finalize the details of the Trail project connecting the Kal-Haven trail to the Baseline Rd. trail. The estimated cost of this project is \$330,000. The plan is to pursue grants in 2024 to help pay for construction. If grant applications are successful, we anticipate construction in 2025.

Looking ahead, the next major section will be from Wiley Road south to M-89 in Douglas and Saugatuck TWP. Thanks to the foresight of MDOT with support from the Allegan County Road Commission and Saugatuck TWP, the current bridge reconstruction over I-96 is designed to provide adequate space for the Trail. If things continue moving forward smoothly, we could anticipate construction beginning as early as 2026. Friends anticipates the required local match for state/federal grants will be \$600,000.

Our local governments depend on the Friends to be in position to provide the majority of the funding for the required local match to obtain construction grants. Although we currently have sufficient funds on hand for both the north section (Saugatuck TWP, City of Saugatuck, and

Douglas) and the South Haven section, we need to generate additional funds to be ready for the Wiley Road to M-89 segment.

Our future plans call for construction heading north from Baseline through Casco TWP with the final segment connecting the north and south sections in Ganges TWP. This will require substantial additional funding from the Friends to make completion of the Trail a reality.

We rely upon your enthusiasm for the trail and continued generosity to have sufficient funds on hand to provide the local match when it is required. Thanks to your support, we have the required funds for both the north section and South Haven sections. However, we must continue to generate the funds that will be required to complete the future sections of the Trail.

Thank you for your ongoing support!

Friends of the Blue Star Trail