



Office of Administration

PO Box 885
1087 Newell
White Cloud, Michigan 49349
Phone: (231) 689-7200
Fax: (231) 689-7205

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**Contact: Christopher Wren
231-689-7200**

Construction Begins on Michigan's Dragon at Hardy Dam

Groundbreaking for Michigan's Dragon at Hardy Dam, a 46-mile multi-use non-motorized trail system around historic Hardy Pond, took place today at Sandy Beach County Park. After the ceremony guests were invited to tour the first completed section of trail at Brower Park. Construction of the trail began early September on Consumers Energy property that houses the Hardy Dam Hydroelectric Project that is licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Soon hikers and mountain bikers will enjoy a one of a kind loop trail system around Hardy Pond that will showcase our pristine natural resources, great views and additional access to popular recreational areas that already encircle the impoundment.

This project was initially the vision of Dave Wright, Big Prairie Township Supervisor, back in 2009. Moving that vision from a thought to reality was started the next year with initial planning and talks with Consumers Energy and multiple community stakeholders. Finally in 2015, once the idea gained significant traction, Newaygo and Mecosta Counties committed \$150,000 each to fund the professional development of the trail system in order to receive approval from Consumers Energy and ultimately FERC. That approval came in 2019 and the project moved into the construction phase.

A major investment of \$500,000 was received from the Fremont Area Community Foundation and made the proposed construction timeline a reality. Shortly after this generous investment was received, professional fundraising began and the project has, to date, received initial donations from the Mecosta County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Nestle Waters North America, Bissel Inc and White Cloud Rotary. We are so grateful to these partners for their generous gifts that made construction a reality this

year. We also look forward to gaining new partners who see the value in this project moving forward.

The final trail system will be a 46 mile linear County Park jointly managed by the Newaygo and Mecosta County Parks Commissions. In addition, the West Michigan Mountain Biking Alliance (WMMBA) has entered into a volunteer maintenance agreement with the Park Commissions to assist with routine maintenance of this world-class trail system. Without community partners like the WMMBA, this project would not be possible.

Construction currently is taking place near Brower Park, Newaygo State Park and soon near Sandy Beach County Park. These three sections will be open for use by the summer of 2020. Three other sections that connect the one built this year are part of three grants that were submitted to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the project will hopefully receive notice of award in early December. The remaining trail sections will be built in 2021.

This is a very exciting moment in history when a project 10 years in the making, with partners from multiple agencies and companies, becomes a reality. In addition to enhanced recreation opportunities for residents and visitors, the Dragon serves to be a significant draw to the area which will create more jobs and provide a positive economic impact in both Counties. Once completed, the Dragon will be a one of a kind trail system not found anywhere else in the world that will draw outdoor enthusiasts from all over the globe.