

## TRAILBLAZERS: Parks pay attention as trail biking gets more popular

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After spending the winter in gridlock traffic, cooped up in a stuffy car, so many Michiganders are eager to trade in four wheels for two and hop on their beloved bicycles.

And now's the time to pull the pedals out of the garage, because May is National Bike Month, and riding enthusiasts across the country are taking to the streets and trails to promote biking as an active, environmentally friendly pastime.

That group is growing by the day too, according to Joe Youngblood, director of Shelby Township Parks, Recreation and Maintenance. He said he's noticed more and more visitors on the nearly 8 miles of Shelby's Macomb Orchard Trail.

"People want to improve their health, and biking is great exercise," he said. "It's maybe not as stressful on your knees as jogging, and I think it's more (social). It's a nice way you can exercise as a family. I see a lot of families on the trail going for bike rides. You're not likely to take the whole family to the gym, so hitting the trail is a good way to spend time together and get some exercise in."

The spike in biking interest has prompted the township to make improvements to its trail system — which runs from Shelby to Richmond, along the old railroad — over the years.

But biking has become so popular that for many users, one trail isn't enough. Lots of municipalities are teaming up these days to connect their trails and allow bikers to ride uninterrupted from one community to the next.

"(The Macomb Orchard Trail) connects into Rochester and the Clinton River Trail and also connects to Paint Creek Trail," Youngblood explained. "And we've got grants to complete connections to River Bends Park and Iron Belle Trail, which will run all the way from Iron Mountain in the Upper Peninsula down to Belle Isle. It seems like biking and trail use is more popular than ever, and this is one way we can add to the quality of life for residents in Shelby Township."

Connections are growing for the trails tucked inside Oakland County's parks too. Katie Parady, park supervisor at Addison Oaks Park in Leonard, said her trails connect to ones at Bald Mountain State Park in Lake Orion and Cranberry Lake Park in Oakland Township.

But not every rider is looking to travel the state on two wheels. That's why Addison Oaks has a trail for every visitor, as Parady likes to think of it.

"We have paved aggregate trails, where you'll see parents come with their kids — some even on training wheels — to ride the paved 2-mile loop," she said. "Then the serious mountain bikers come to our single-track trails. You're going up and down, and you can really pick up speed at parts. We have riders from all over telling us it's the best trail in the state."

Addison Oaks' mountain bike trails are home to many major bike races too, including the Michigan Scholastic Cycling Association, which supports school cycling teams and clubs.

In the winter, when most bikers are storing their wheels away, the park welcomes riders to its new 6.5-mile fatbike trail. A fatbike — the bike equivalent of an all-terrain vehicle — is an off-road bike with oversized tires that can ride through snow or, as we're used to in Michigan, soft muddy ground.

"It's great to see bikers of all abilities out here," Parady said.

Call Staff Writer Tiffany Eshaki at (586) 498-1095.

### Did you know...

- ★ May is National Bike Month, which was established in 1956 by the League of American Bicyclists. Do you plan to celebrate?
- ★ May 4: Bike to School Day
- ★ May 16-20: Bike to Work Week
- ★ May 18: Ride of Silence, beginning at 7 p.m., to honor those injured or killed while biking on public roads.



TOP: A group of bikers hit the trails at Stony Creek Metropark in Shelby Township last summer.

File photo by Deb Jacques

ABOVE: The Macomb Orchard Trail has nearly 8 miles of paths for riders to enjoy, not including the connectors to neighboring trails.

File photo provided by the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development

LEFT: Paved trails, available at most of Oakland County's 13 parks, are favorites for families, according to park supervisor Katie Parady.

Photo provided by Desiree Stanfield of Destination Oakland

