

“Hope for Hemlocks” Campaign Close-Out Challenge Grant to Fund a Sustainable Boardwalk in the Hemlock Wing at Pelizzari Natural Area

In late August, Peninsula Township received an exceedingly generous campaign close-out challenge grant to raise the remaining funds needed to construct a sustainable boardwalk in the Hemlock Wing at Pelizzari Natural Area (PNA) from two family foundations with local roots, the Thomas Family Foundation and the Tim and Libby Ash Family Foundation. Specifically, these foundations offered a combined \$80,000 and challenged the community to match this sum dollar for dollar.

In the past year and a half, Peninsula Township has raised \$177,025 of the needed \$320,000 dollars toward this sorely needed project from the following sources:

\$25,000: Oleson Foundation
\$50,000: Huckle Family Foundation
\$60,000: Peninsula Township (ARPA dollars)
\$2,025: Township Residents
\$5,000: Schmuckal Family Foundation
\$25,000: Biederman Family Foundation
\$10,000: Traverse City Track Club

Now, with \$143,000 left to go and a challenge grant in hand for \$80,000, we seek to raise a minimum of \$72,000 by year’s end, which will be matched dollar for dollar. Any additional funds raised beyond our immediate goal will go into a restricted fund for the benefit of PNA. We have a year-end deadline to meet this goal and will move swiftly to construct the boardwalk as soon as the final dollars are committed.

Background on Pelizzari Natural Area and the Hemlock Wing

Pelizzari Natural Area is an exceptionally popular park at the south end of Peninsula Township. In close proximity to city limits, it is minutes from Eastern Elementary, Central High School, and Northwestern Michigan College. Nearby high school teams and the local track club train on PNA's trails, and it's a top destination for dog walkers. The most beloved part of the park is the trail through the Hemlock Forest within easy reach of the main parking lot and just a few hundred feet from a heavily utilized informal entry from a cul de sac. Approximately seven acres in size, the hemlocks offer an ethereal atmosphere of natural remoteness that belies their proximity to Traverse City, but the stress of constant trail use is taking a toll and the gorgeous, old-growth stand of hemlock trees is at risk of being loved to death. Hemlock roots are shallow, and the trees are increasingly stressed because they respond poorly to compacted soils. Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) staff have cautioned the township that a boardwalk trail system is needed to preserve this keystone species that attracts so many users. With GTRLC's assistance, the township's goal is to construct a .3-mile sustainable loop within

the hemlock forest with 800 feet of universally accessible boardwalk, 500 feet of UA gravel trail, a modest section of bridge, and a small overlook. In 2023, the township contracted with Gosling Czubak, assisted by GTRLC, to develop a conceptual trail layout and cost estimates.

The need for an elevated boardwalk in the Hemlock Wing is well established, but it is exceedingly difficult for Peninsula Township to undertake infrastructure projects given its funding mechanism and budget constraints. As a general law township, Peninsula Township has limited taxing authority. Of all the taxes it collects, only 1.357% go to township administration. From this sum, the township derives its tiny parks budget, which in 2023 was \$211,000. In contrast, 70.6% of taxes go to local and state education, 14.35% to Grand Traverse County, and 6.24% to fire and police. Even the area library system at 1.99% receives more tax revenue than the township. Peninsula Township is rightfully recognized as a relatively affluent municipality, but several special circumstances require more tax dollars than is the case in most townships. For one, firefighting and emergency services needs on a narrow, 18-mile-long peninsula require three staffed fire stations rather than the one station that a typical six- by six-mile township utilizes. That's a significant financial burden due exclusively to the peninsula's unique geography. Additionally, township residents have taxed themselves on three different occasions for a nationally recognized Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program that preserves private farmland by buying development rights. Since its inception in the 1990s up until the third successful millage vote in August of 2022, the PDR Program has collected nearly \$20 million in tax revenues for agricultural preservation. Now the program is set to collect an additional \$34 million over the next 20 years. This is a substantial commitment by a small population of just over 4,000 households. Meanwhile, Peninsula Township is exclusively utilizing its ARPA funds to fund significant capital improvement needs in its parks system. To that end, it has committed \$60,000 to the sustainable boardwalk at PNA and earnestly seeks donations for the remaining costs.

There is no hyperbole in labeling PNA an overwhelming success. It serves as "nearby nature" for many thousands of people and is a favorite of families with young children as well as retirees. In addition to heavy use by township residents, many Traverse City residents make the short drive to recreate at PNA. As for visitors, an internet search of popular hikes always places PNA at or near the top of recommendations, with the park repeatedly featured in area publications, books, and media outlets. In fact, any home for sale within reasonable proximity mentions the park as reason to live nearby. New trail counters installed in the main parking lot in early 2023 reveal more than 100 visitors a day in the off season, with many more visitors from the township and Traverse City utilizing less visible access points, including members of the local track club, cross country skiers, families, retirees, high school sports teams, and others. This regional user profile is a point of pride, but the township's ability to bear the infrastructure costs of a park whose user base is several times larger than the local population (6,068 residents as of the 2020 Census) is a major management challenge.

Beyond saving the hemlocks, benefits to constructing the elevated trail include constructing a viewing platform and interpretive signage, which will further enhance the user experience via an educational component, and using a universally accessible (UA) design that will allow all our residents, from the very young to the very old as well as those who have mobility issues, to enjoy the unique and incomparable beauty of northern Michigan. Currently, there is not direct access to the hemlock area that would permit official UA designation, but it's well understood that how people access the area right now would permit some users who are physically challenged to enter and benefit from UA standards.

In addition, visitors to this exceptionally popular part of the park often veer off the existing trail during wet and muddy seasons, causing damage to additional hemlocks while impacting their personal safety and violating the seclusion of nearby neighbors. Constructing this elevated boardwalk will save the hemlocks, keep visitors safe, and protect the privacy of neighbors. In addition, the hemlocks capture carbon and filter pollutants so that they don't enter East Bay, the source of drinking water for Traverse City. All of these positive outcomes align with the township's mission to promote the health, safety, and welfare of township residents and visitors.

It is important to note that there would be no Pelizzari Natural Area without the ongoing collaboration between township residents, the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, and Peninsula Township. In 2008, after years of effort and encouragement, GTRLC secured a purchase option on the land. That fall, township residents passed a successful millage to cover most of the costs. In addition, the conservancy and residents worked together to privately fundraise nearly half a million dollars to cover appraisals, surveys, option payments, opinion polls, educational information, and soil remediation on a formerly farmed portion of the property. Thereafter, with the aid of conservancy staff, volunteers poured thousands of hours into trail building, signage, tree plantings, invasive species control, habitat restoration, and fencing to safeguard adjacent private property. A low-impact parking lot opened, and the public at last had access to a natural area that rapidly became a beloved community resource.

PELLIZZARI NATURAL AREA

OWNED AND MANAGED BY PENINSULA TOWNSHIP

GTRIC: protecting significant natural, scenic and farm lands, and advancing land stewardship, now and for future generations

GTRIC.ORG



LEGEND

Hiking Trail

Trail Maps



Pelizzari Natural Area, Peninsula Township



Trailhead and Parking Area



*all distances are approximate



Map by GTRIC

Pelizzari Natural Area Hemlock Loop - Opinion of Probable Costs

Peninsula Township

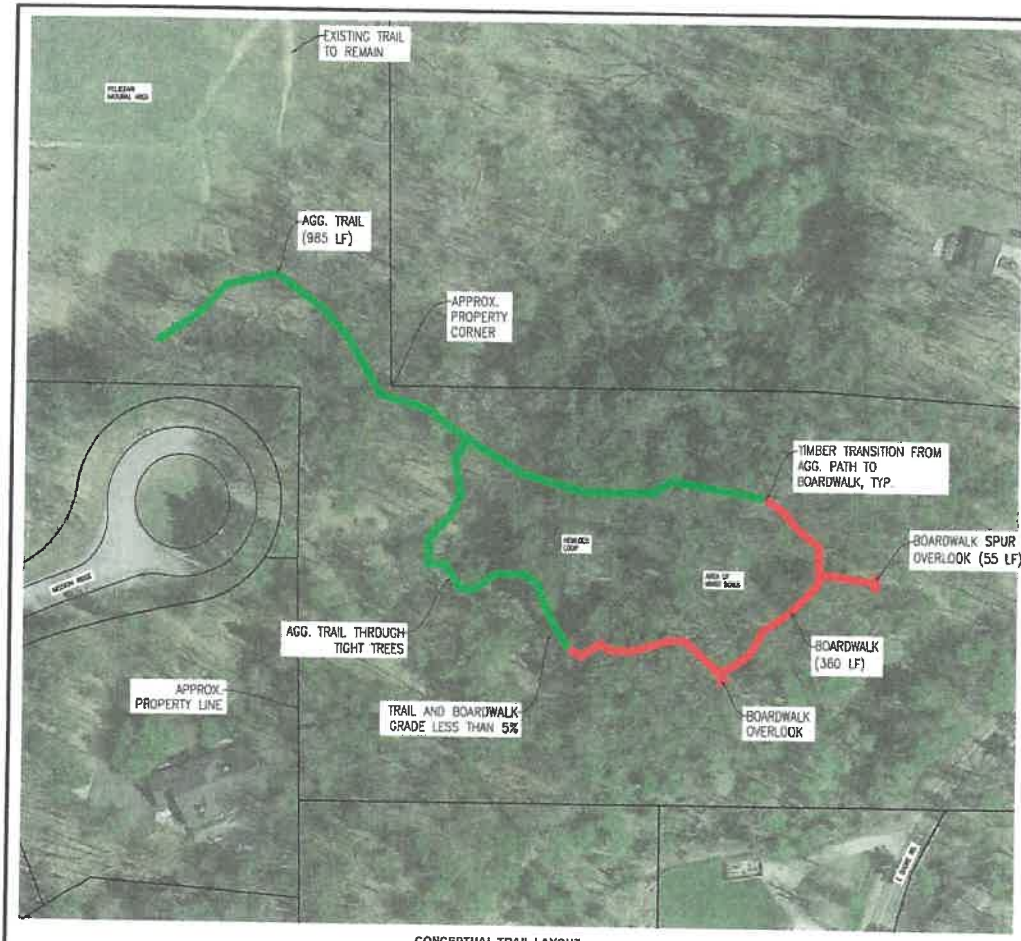
7/28/2023

Pelizzari Natural Area - Hemlock Loop

Item	Item	Qty.	Units	EST Unit Cost	Original EST. Total	Notes
	General Cond & Mob. (7.5%)	1	LS	\$15,699	\$15,699	
	Removals	1	LS	\$5,000	\$5,000	Remove trees as needed
	Soil Erosion and Sediment Control	1	LS	\$3,500	\$3,500	
	Earthwork and Grading	1	LS	\$12,000	\$12,000	Making trail level (<5%) throughout aggregate trail area.
	6' wide Aggregate Pathway	1000	LF	\$15	\$15,000	3/8" to fines
	Woven Geotextile Fabric	656	SYD	\$4	\$2,624	For trail stabilization
	Sand Fill	200	CYD	\$20	\$4,000	Leveling under trail for
	Boardwalk (Timber Transitions)	2	EA	\$2,500	\$5,000	Leveling under trail for
	6' wide boardwalk Bump out	1	EA	\$3,000	\$3,000	Prefabricated boardwalk system
	6' wide Boardwalk (Pan Foot)	390	LF	\$310	\$120,900	Boardwalk Frame, Decking, and Toe-kick
	Boardwalk Installation	390	LF	\$125	\$48,750	Installation of
	Benches	3	EA	\$1,500	\$4,500	Backed bench (type and style to be determined)
	Site Restoration	1	LS	\$5,000	\$5,000	Edge of trail restoration
	Construction Subtotal				\$244,973	
	Construction Contingency (15%)				\$36,746.0	
	Construction Total				\$281,719.2	
	GCES Fees (excluding CE)				\$39,000.0	
	PROJECT TOTAL				\$320,719	



Gosling Czubak
engineering sciences, inc.



CONCEPTUAL TRAIL LAYOUT
SCALE: 1" = 40'

LAYOUT LEGEND

- PROPOSED 6' WIDE AGGREGATE TRAIL
- PROPOSED BASED BOARDWALK (PREFABRICATED)
- APPROXIMATE PARCEL BOUNDARY

LAYOUT NOTES

1. ALL PARCEL BOUNDARIES ARE APPROXIMATE BASED OFF AVAILABLE COUNTY GIS MAPPING DATA.
2. QUANTITIES ARE APPROXIMATE AND TO BE FINALIZED WHEN TOPOGRAPHIC SURVEY IS COMPLETED.
3. WORK WITHIN R.O.W. SUBJECT TO ROAD COMMISSION REVIEW AND APPROVAL.



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 AND DESIGN
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NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION

**CONCEPT TRAIL LAYOUT
 PELIZZARI HEMLOCK LOOP
 PENINSULA TOWNSHIP**

DATE	10/24/18
DRAWN BY	JKL
CHECKED BY	JKL
DATE	10/24/18
PROJECT NO.	2018000001.00



The exposed roots of the hemlock trees at Pelizzari Natural Area

