



PLACE

Making

Stories that illuminate our profession's commitment to building 'sense of place' in places all over Michigan.





Placemaking, Parks and Partnerships

Placemaking is gaining steam and attention as Michigan communities and regions strive to be vibrant, healthy and attractive places to live and work. Endeavors led by the State of Michigan's MI-Place Partnership Initiative, the Michigan Municipal League and others build even more momentum for this infectious movement underway in all corners of the state.

As parks and recreation professionals, we have always known the invaluable contributions parks, open space and recreational activities make to create "place". We wholeheartedly embrace this relatively new focus on placemaking as a strategy central to our mission and purpose. In doing so, we want to share our own stories, the stories that best illustrate our profession's commitment to building 'sense of place' in places all over Michigan. Stories that demonstrate the vision, leadership, and experience we bring to projects that are both ground-breaking and place-making. Stories that we hope inform and inspire others to pursue placemaking in their own communities with parks and recreation taking center stage.

To that end, the Michigan Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA) Board of Directors has identified placemaking as a priority for the Association and to show it in action. We are delighted to team up with our friends at Heart of the Lakes to bring you four such stories, or case studies, selected to provide just a glimpse into the breadth and diversity of placemaking initiatives led by the parks and recreation community at the county, city and township levels.

How do we define placemaking? There is no one standard definition, but perhaps the Project for Public Spaces best captures its essence, "A process that capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration and potential, ultimately creating good public spaces that promote people's health, happiness and well-being. It is both a process and a philosophy." It is also "both an over arching idea and a hands-on tool for improving a neighborhood, a city or region."

The best way to show how we define placemaking is by example. With thanks to our member contributors, MRPA is very pleased to present four outstanding case studies of placemaking in action. They are all led by parks and recreation professionals whose projects embrace the principles of placemaking, not the least of which are listening to their communities and collaborating with diverse partners. Building place around natural resource protection is a common theme in most of these examples, but as placemaking can vary widely in scope and scale, it is the lessons learned that are universal and we hope of help to all who are working to save, re-imagine, connect or discover "place".

These are the only the first of many placemaking stories we hope to share in the weeks and months to come, and we welcome your ideas and recommendations for others.

Enjoy!

Ann Conklin
Chief Operating Officer
Michigan Recreation and Parks Association



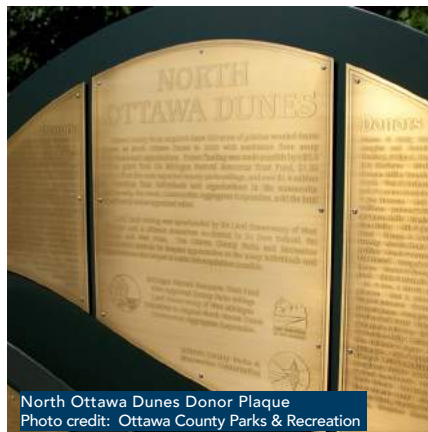
North Ottawa Dunes – *A Place Saved*

Ottawa County Parks & Recreation

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North Ottawa Dunes
Photo credit: D. Fogel



North Ottawa Dunes Donor Plaque
Photo credit: Ottawa County Parks & Recreation



North Ottawa Dunes—Lake Michigan Vista
Photo credit: Ottawa County Parks & Recreation

The Place:

Landscapes can define place, and no other natural feature does so quite like the coastal sand dunes of West Michigan. In the northwest corner of Ottawa County, between Grand Haven and Muskegon, over 500 acres of spectacular dune parkland extend two miles and serves as a greenway connector between two local parks and the 1,200 acre P.J. Hoffmaster State Park to the north.

The property had once been slated for sand mining and then for a large housing development, subsequently the local community rallied for its defense many times over the years. So when the property owners quietly gave Ottawa County Parks a short window of opportunity to acquire the property, the county and the community were ready to step up.

Even with an agreement to sell below market value, the availability of some Park millage funds, and the prospect of grants from such sources as the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, the \$7 million asking price was daunting and would require additional funding from outside sources. Ottawa County Parks turned to its partners for help, including the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, the Grand Haven Community Foundation, and key community leaders. Together, they launched a blistering fast campaign that ultimately raised over \$1.4 million from 700 individuals and businesses in a few short months.

The 513-acre North Ottawa Dunes acquisition was completed in 2005 but community engagement did not end there. With funding from the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, a public master planning process resulted in extensive community input and involvement. Preserving the unique natural character of the land was a strong theme.

The result is nine miles of trails for hiking and cross-country skiing that create a popular destination for hikers, bird watchers, trail runners and people just wanting to explore a vast wooded area. There are also viewing decks high in the dunes with scenic vistas of Lake Michigan and the surrounding country-side, as well as trail links to the neighboring state, city and county parks, which offer secluded beaches and other amenities. The City of Ferrysburg is working on new trails to connect North Ottawa Dunes to residential areas and Lake Michigan. Organized runs, hikes and interpretive programs are conducted annually in the park.

Why is it Placemaking?

The tremendous response from the community made North Ottawa Dunes possible, resonating with their desire to see a treasured asset protected for the public and to participate in planning for its management and use. It is significant expanse of open space that enables a rare southern Michigan opportunity to hike and explore for hours on end in beautiful, forested terrain with exceptional scenic vistas of Lake Michigan. Its location and links to city, county and state parks connect West Michigan, the second most populous area in the state, to its most iconic landscape—Great Lakes sand dunes and the Lake Michigan shore—a landscape that contributes to region's reputation as an attractive and thriving place to live and work.

Essential Placemaking Partners:

Ottawa County Parks and Recreation; Committee to Acquire North Ottawa Dunes, which included many community leaders as well as the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan; local philanthropists and businesses; neighboring communities such as Spring Lake Township and the City of Ferrysburg; Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund; and the Coastal Zone Management Program.

Placemaking Lessons:

- The large scope captured the imagination of the community and supporters—don't be afraid to think big
- The short time-frame for fundraising created a sense of urgency recognized by the community
- The community values preservation of high quality natural lands and is willing to put up the funds to get the job done, but leadership is needed to structure the opportunities for people to participate
- Partners are essential, and partnering with the local land trust, in this case the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, provided expertise, contacts and credibility to the project
- Connectivity, linking state, county and city parks, is highly valued by the public and the result is truly greater than the sum of the parts

Contributor: John Scholtz,
Director, Ottawa County Parks & Recreation
<http://www.miottawa.org/Parks/dunes.htm>



The Headlands International Dark Sky Park –

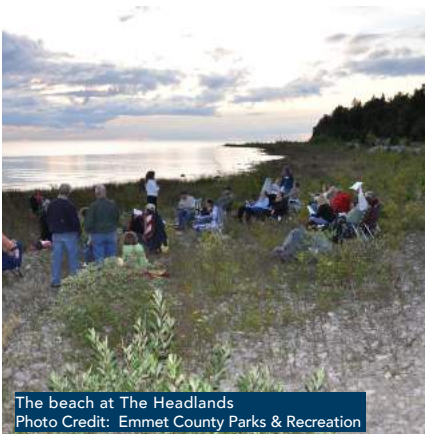
A Place Reimagined

Emmet County Parks and Recreation

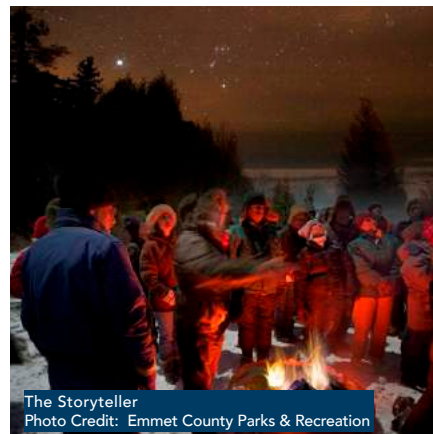
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Transit of Venus
Photo Credit: Emmet County Parks & Recreation



The beach at The Headlands
Photo Credit: Emmet County Parks & Recreation



The Storyteller
Photo Credit: Emmet County Parks & Recreation

The Place:

Emmet County has owned and operated the Headlands since the mid-1990s, a 600-acre parcel at the northwestern tip of Michigan's Lower Peninsula with 2.5 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. A recreational asset to the region because of its pristine natural features, development has been limited to five miles of trails and two houses to rent out for quiet events. Consequently, the absence of bright lights in the park and surrounding area made it an important naturally dark wilderness for many species of birds and animals.

A vision stemming from the desire to protect this singular natural resource ultimately created something much, much more. Several community members came together with Emmet County Parks and Recreation staff with the idea of seeking International Dark Sky Park designation. With full backing from the Board of Commissioners, the idea was launched—with results as brilliant as the Headlands sky at night.

Since the Headlands received designation, only the sixth in the nation to do so at that time, the County has welcomed thousands of visitors at all times and during scheduled programs for a glimpse of something that is increasingly harder to find—unobstructed views of the night sky. Eight hundred guests came to view the once-in-a-lifetime Transit of Venus in June of 2012. On clear nights, dozens of people can be found along the shoreline taking in the view, gazing through telescopes or photographing celestial wonders. Due to the success of designation, The State of Michigan protected an additional 23,000 acres of neighboring state land as night sky protected area.

Even park staff admit to being taken off guard by the tremendous public interest in a natural resource all too often taken for granted, and they certainly did not expect the growing economic impact of having a designated Dark Sky Park in the county. Nearby businesses in Mackinac City report an increase in foot traffic and overnight hotel stays, including extended stays, related to the presence and marketing of the park. Local merchants sell sky-related items, and one local ferry service created Dark Sky Cruises.

The Headlands offers monthly programs, led by a Dark Sky Park program director, that cover a variety of topics related to the night sky and the park in general. A new walking trail, the Dark Sky Discovery Trail, interprets the stories of the dark sky for each planet, through various stations, mediums and cultural docents. As now just one of seven International Dark Sky Parks in the United States and 12 in the world, the Headlands is an extraordinary regional and state natural asset, with a novel recreational focus that helps drive the local economy.

Why is it Placemaking?

The Headlands embodies the essence of Northwest Michigan as "place". Natural resources are recognized as an invaluable asset to the region, and the park embraces protection instead of trying to be something else. And while "keeping it natural" is the biggest reason behind its success, a "can do" parks team puts people first with their programs and plans with the recognition there is a longing for connection to the earth, water and sky, despite the pressures and advancements in the world. The property is significant to the members of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians as it has always been their gathering place on the Straits for hunting, gathering, fishing and socializing. Recognizing this historical significance is paramount to the "sense of place" the Headlands provides to tribe members and the greater community.

Essential Placemaking Partners

Emmet County Parks and Recreation, Emmet County Board of Commissioners, International Dark Sky Association, State of Michigan, National Park Service Dark Sky Management Team, Little Traverse Conservancy, The Straits Area Audubon Society, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa, Mackinaw Chamber of Commerce, Historical Village of Mackinaw, Central Michigan University, and many more.

Placemaking Lessons:

- Think out-of-the-box and inventively, it can reap great rewards
- Learn from naïve enthusiasm
- Leverage partner relationships that extend beyond the boundaries of the initiative to support and create a diverse set of recreational experiences for the user in a region, so that we are not creating or striving toward a monoculture from one place of recreation to the next. The goal should be to support others in developing the unique quality of a given area. A Dark Sky Park may not be the right fit for every community but the nature of the relationships and broad range of partnerships will help no matter the focus.
- Take a human based approach to recreational programming to increase accessibility for the broader public, especially in this case where there is a scientific element (astronomy) that might otherwise limit experiences to only one type of user
- Listen to others in the community and keep an open mind

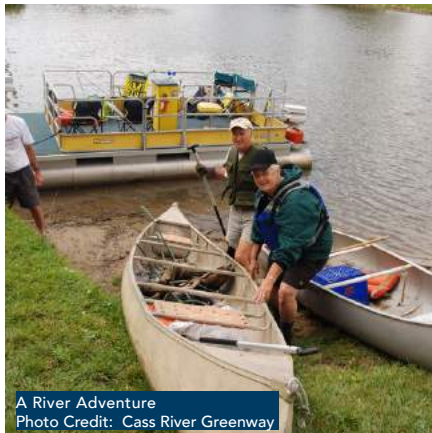
Contributor: Laurie Gaetano,
Director, Emmet County Parks and Recreation
<http://www.emmetcounty.org/headlands/>



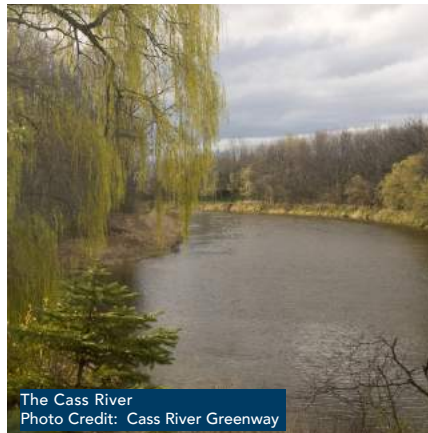
Cass River Greenway – *A Place Connected*

Frankenmuth Parks and Recreation

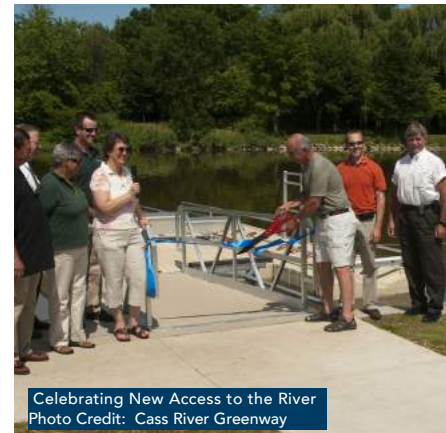
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A River Adventure
Photo Credit: Cass River Greenway



The Cass River
Photo Credit: Cass River Greenway



Celebrating New Access to the River
Photo Credit: Cass River Greenway

The Place:

The Cass River Watershed, located in the Thumb area of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, flows through six counties and at least nine communities before it joins the Saginaw River and eventually Saginaw Bay. For years, many communities along the Cass River "turned their backs" on the river, perceived to be dirty and contaminated. Few appreciated its value until a visionary group saw its potential and formed the Cass River Greenway Committee in 2007.

The group of local volunteers, assisted by professional resources and municipal leaders, is taking a regional approach to meet its objectives of enhancing recreational opportunities and the environmental well-being of the Cass River Corridor. They had three goals:

- development of recreational opportunities that enhance local quality of life and support ecology based tourism
- promotion and preservation of wildlife habitat and natural lands
- improvement to water quality

Each designed to engage and educate local residents, property owners, and visitors about the abundance of natural assets the region offers that support and strengthen the community and local economy.

Significantly, the Greenway Committee recognizes that planning for recreation, water quality, trails and open space can end at county, township and municipal borders, resulting in a patchwork landscape that makes little sense to the user and greater separation of communities. Instead, the Committee works to connect communities, enable cooperation across borders, and strengthen regional ties with the river as the vital link.

Taking a lead role in the Committee, Frankenmuth Parks and Recreation developed a bike route map for the lower Cass River. They also provided technical assistance to two other communities and coordinated three successful applications to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund for universally accessible canoe and kayak launches. With the development of just a few launch sites, there are more recreational activities on the river than ever. Recreational boating, commercial river tours, fishing, hunting, bird watching, and nature viewing are growing in popularity as people turn to the river as a vital recreational resource, with a deeper "sense of place" and caring for all who explore the river.

Why is it Placemaking?

The Cass River Greenway Committee brings communities throughout the Cass River watershed together through a natural resource they all share. They recognize that by making the river the centerpiece, new recreational opportunities can be made available for local residents and visitors. When combined with efforts to improve wildlife habitat and water quality, all elements work together to build a deeper appreciation for the river, its environs and the multiple benefits it provides as a place to enjoy and celebrate.

Essential Placemaking Partners:

City of Frankenmuth Parks and Recreation; volunteers and local residents; local governments; University of Michigan-Flint; National Park Service: Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program; Michigan Department of Environmental Quality; Saginaw Bay RC&D; Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy; Conservation Districts; Road Commissions; and Saginaw Area Stormwater Authority

Placemaking Lessons

- Cooperation from local governments is vital for success along a waterway like the Cass River. If lacking, there would be gaps in the Water Trail, plans for improvements to larger issues like water quality would not be as effective, and an overall sense of concern for the river would be greatly diminished.
- Identifying or developing a grassroots volunteer group, who bring selfless motives to the work, a sense of pride and ownership about the project and usually work tirelessly to see it through
- Placemaking may not be so much about the place itself, but more about the process and sense of community, identify or ownership in that place
- Collaboration, coordination and building upon activities in neighboring communities are crucial—rather than competing with each other, the end result is better for everyone if communities work together.

Contributor: Daren Kaschinske,
Director, City of Frankenmuth Parks and Recreation
<http://www.cassriver.org>
<http://www.frankenmuthcity.com/outdoor-activities/boating>



North Oakland Placemaking Group – *A Place Discovered*

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Independence Township Parks, Recreation & Seniors



The Community Focuses on Placemaking
Photo Credit: Clarkston Area Chamber of Commerce

The Place:

In 2013, a new placemaking initiative was launched in North Oakland County with a committee of energized individuals called the North Oakland Placemaking Group. Independence Township Parks staff served as the catalyst, first inviting representatives from the Clarkston Area Chamber of Commerce, the City of Village of Clarkston representatives, and Independence Township Trustees to attend a Placemaking Training offered by the Michigan Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA). Each entity had been doing elements of placemaking before to improve the quality of life for its residents, but each in their own sector and only occasionally together on a specific project.

The idea to work more collaboratively had been discussed between the communities for many years. But it was only after the training that it was decided to make placemaking the framework for more regional cooperation. Rather than just looking for partners for a specific event, community building, or other need, the North Oakland Placemaking Group is about restructuring the way businesses, schools, parks and recreation, government planning and zoning work together on the shared goal of making a place better. Hence, the emphasis is as much on process as it is about individual projects.

The Group meets monthly with help from a designated staff person from the Chamber of Commerce. They held a focus group session and invited over 200 community members to analyze the community in terms of assets and needed improvements in five categories: Natural Space, Art and Culture, History, Recreation, Events/Sense of Discovery. Ideas generated by the community focus group and the Placemaking Group to date include a new Council of the Arts and improving event timing to avoid heavy loading of events in one season. Placemaking is catching on as the Group now fields calls from potential volunteers who want to get involved.

Why is it Placemaking?

The Group is establishing a regular process for multiple governments and agencies to jointly generate and pursue projects with the specific purpose of making the greater community a more attractive place for current and future generations. The Group seeks input from the community and considers potential projects through a regional lense. Parks and recreation kick-started the initiative with their well-established connections and partnerships, and the Chamber's staff support keeps it moving.

Essential Placemaking Partners:

Independence Township Parks, Recreation and Seniors; Clarkston Area Chamber of Commerce; City of the Village of Clarkston; and Independence Township Trustees.

Placemaking Lessons:

- A multidisciplinary team from different organizations attending placemaking training was key
- Getting decision-makers from the various government units on board and attending meetings is crucial
- Dedicated staff time to the Placemaking Group is invaluable
- Finding a way to get community input was needed and the focus group approach worked well

Contributor: Ken Elwert,
Director, Independence Township Parks, Recreation and Seniors
<http://www.twp.independence.mi.us/Services/ParksRecandSeniorsOverview.asp>



Resources *and Additional Information*

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General Information

The preceding projects demonstrate how parks and recreation makes a valuable and tangible addition to placemaking. MRPA knows that our industry is more important than ever, but to ensure a seat at the table, we need to be well-versed in the “how” and “why.” Read on for additional resources and information to gain a better understanding of how to get involved, to make placemaking a reality in your community.



MI Place | miplace.org

MI Place is a “statewide initiative with the purpose of keeping Michigan at the forefront of a national movement known as placemaking. It’s a simple concept that people choose to live in places that offer the amenities, resources, social and professional networks, and opportunities to support thriving lifestyles.” The site, Miplace.org, is designed as “the gathering place to showcase” placemaking work, where people can interact about projects, progress, and inspiration.



MML Placemaking | placemaking.mml.org

Part of the Michigan Municipal League website, this Placemaking area showcases articles, videos, plans, and other resources that seek to capitalize “on the distinctive assets of community to integrate a mixture of uses that connect people and places on a human scale.”



Project for Public Spaces | pps.org

“PPS is a nonprofit planning, design, and educational organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities.” Their “Placemaking approach helps citizens transform their public spaces into vital places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation, and serve common needs.” PPS.org contains information about services, training, and projects devoted to Placemaking, as well as resources and a blog.



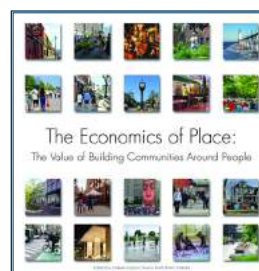
MRPA Placemaking Resource Center mrpaonline.org/placemaking

MRPA strives to keep an updated resource area dedicated to placemaking – so that our members can be on the forefront of this movement – and work to improve their communities through collaboration.



Michigan Main Street Program michiganmainstreetcenter.com

“When a community participates in a comprehensive revitalization effort, its downtown or traditional neighborhood commercial district can experience a return of economic vitality.” The Michigan Main Street Program offers a Four Point Approach™ to encourage “economic development through historic preservation in ways that are appropriate for today’s marketplace.” The four points include design, economic restructuring, promotion, and organization.



The Economics of Place: The Value of Building Communities Around People

The Michigan Municipal League and Center for 21st Century Communities has worked together to create a book that “focuses on placemaking as an economic development tool.” The text features stories and research from urbanists, practitioners, and entrepreneurs that help tell the story of challenges specific to our state, as well as lessons learned around the country.





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Credits:

A Publication of the Michigan Recreation and Parks Association
Proving Parks And Recreation Matter
www.mrpaonline.org

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