

## **Meeting Summary from The Nature Conservancy's First Community Conversation Regarding Bush Bay Trail**

### Overview:

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026, The Nature Conservancy hosted the first of four Community Conversations regarding the Bush Bay Trail (also known as "Narnia") at the Hessel School House in Clark Township, Michigan, from 6:00-7:30pm. Total attendance included approximately 13 community members. The meeting formally concluded at 7:15, with most audience members remaining to continue discussion with presenting staff from The Nature Conservancy.

### Meeting discussion included:

- An informational presentation from The Nature Conservancy to clarify the ownership and legal situations that underly all management of the trail (see below for summary).
- Conversation regarding potential infrastructure, signage, and rules to be implemented across the whole trail.
- Responsible management of trash and parking, signage, enforcement of rules and regulations, and issues that will require cohesive management across all three properties.
  - Parking is actively being worked on, portajohns have been ordered, the design and permitting process for a boardwalk has been started, signage drafts for the trailheads and along the trail are being designed, and a process for determining rules will be worked on in the future.
  - Ongoing input will be sought through the live survey and conversations; however, final approval of rule sets and signage approvals will require consensus from all the landowners and must be determined by legal restrictions and each landowner's policies.
- Audience members were particularly concerned about public communication methods regarding the trail, and how to encourage visitors and social media "influencers" to talk about the trail in a way that promotes responsible recreation.
  - The focus of the June community conversation will be around how and what we should say in these responses.
- The presented information and discussion questions were also addressed in a publicly distributed survey (open from April 20 – May 27), as well as on feedback

boards put up in the Schoolhouse during the Community Conversation. This allowed attendees and the larger community to answer survey questions and provide feedback to The Nature Conservancy privately on site.

#### Background on the Bush Bay Trail:

The Bush Bay Trail, which crosses three private properties, gained viral attention on social media in 2023 and 2024 and visitation has increased significantly. This has led to damage to the fragile natural habitat and has impacted the experience for folks who knew it as a “local’s secret.” The Nature Conservancy provided a narrative of its involvement in the management of the Bush Bay Trail, which formally began with the donation of the John Arthur Woollam Nature Preserve to The Nature Conservancy in 2014.

In 2021, TNC agreed to monitor and manage the wetland mitigation easement, in a three-way agreement between Carmeuse Lime & Stone, Inc. (the landowner), and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE; the wetland mitigation easement holder), and TNC as the long-term stewards of the easement.

Due to the restrictions of the wetland mitigation easement, TNC and partners had to build a preliminary plan and research solutions to the issues surrounding increased visitation before acting. Preliminary plans addressed, 1) protection of the ecological systems, 2) infrastructure to address the number of visitors, and 3) messaging to influence ongoing use. The Nature Conservancy now seeks community input on proposed changes across the trail.

#### Next steps and upcoming events:

The next Community Conversations will be June 30<sup>th</sup>, August 5<sup>th</sup>, and October 13<sup>th</sup>. Summaries of the meetings will be available on TNC’s project webpage:

<https://www.nature.org/bushbaytrail>

The Nature Conservancy is also happy to receive feedback via email at [miplaces@tnc.org](mailto:miplaces@tnc.org), via the survey open from April 20 – May 27, or via an upcoming local event: TNC will attend the Aldo Leopold Festival May 27-31, Les Cheneaux Farmers & Artisan’s Market at the Hessel School House on July 5<sup>th</sup>, and the Boat show August 8<sup>th</sup>.