Universal Access Trail Coming Soon to DeYoung Natural Area!

(Dec. 2014) We’re thrilled to show off the work happening now on a new Universal Access (UA) trail at DeYoung Natural Area. Come spring, people in wheelchairs or pushing strollers will be able to enjoy the beautiful quarter-mile loop on the lakeside portion of DeYoung Natural Area. This winding trail takes visitors through a majestic, mature cedar forest full of songbirds. It ends at a popular UA fishing and wildlife viewing deck, where visitors can take in nearly a mile of natural shoreline that has been protected at this natural area. The 480-foot boardwalk pictured is being built now by the SEEDS Youth Conservation Corps, a program which works with area students to provide hands on learning and green job skills training.

The boardwalk pictured is just one part of the new UA trail. Come spring, a smooth surface path leading from the parking area near the big barn will be added. The path, like the boardwalk, meets standards for people with disabilities. “We can’t wait for people in wheelchairs or families with young children in strollers to experience this peaceful trail, with its giant cedars,” says Stewardship Staffer Jenee Rowe.

Invasive black locust harvested from the National Park is being used to construct the boardwalk. Black locust crowds out native trees but as lumber, it’s super durable, and rot-resistant. Pictured NMC student David Runstrom. “The students are learning a lot from working on the boardwalk,” says SEEDS’ Bill Watson, who adds that the rough-sawn locust “has a grit to it that is unlike treated lumber. It won’t get slippery and slimy.”

Hikers who happen upon the boardwalk crew are really excited about the improvements, says Jenee. “Families with loved ones at the nearby Orchard Creek will be able to wheel them down via the TART trail all the way to the DeYoung Fishing Pier,” she says. Please note that the UA trail is still a work in progress; look for an official spring 2015 opening. We are grateful to the Oleson Foundation, the Andy Kisellus Trust and the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation for helping to fund this great new improvement!