

Walking trail installed in Weldon Township park

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BENZIE COUNTY -- A new walking trail along the scenic Betsie River has been opened in Weldon Township in Benzie County.

The trail, which is at the Betsie River Day Use Park is located on Wolf Road, just outside of Thompsonville. The trail is almost a third of a mile long, and there are many natural features to be seen on the walking trail.

Aside from views of the Betsie River, the trail is home to many native plants and animals. One of those animals is the wood turtle, which nests in the area.

The trail features benches for people to rest while enjoying trail, and there will eventually be signage, including a sign marking the Betsie River Day Use Park Walking Trail and kiosks to provide information about different areas of the trail.

The trail came about when Weldon Township was awarded the Building Healthy Communities Greenspace Improvement Projects to Increase Physical Activity Grant, up to \$15,000, in February.

The township wanted to put in a walking trail at the park to encourage the enjoyment the natural area, as well as promote the healthy benefits of walking. The trail is on property that Weldon Township leases from the Department of Natural Resources. At the park is a kayak/canoe access site, as well as an ADA compliant ramp so individuals may access the Betsie River.

The township had until Sept. 1 to finish the trail, so they called local excavators. However, the excavators wanted to remove more trees than the township was comfortable with. Instead, the township contacted Jennifer Flynn, youth coordinator of the Traverse City SEEDS. Ultimately, the local youth that worked with the SEEDS program was able to put in the trail, and provided the benches, as well.

There is also the possibility of connecting the trail to other walking trails.

Ron Hitesman, township supervisor, said the township has had the park for a number of years, and saw the opportunity to extend the Day Use Park's ADA walkway and turn it into hiking trail.

"The township has talked about it for a couple of years, and this allowed it to come together," Hitesman said. "We were fortunate to get the grant, and to be able to work with the great SEEDS program. They did all the hard, physical labor."

