



Parks and trails gear up for warm weather

By STACIE CARLSON
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With winter snows finally melted, outdoor enthusiasts are itching to get into some sunshine and onto area trails.

Around the area, nature preserves and camping facilities are preparing for a busy season. While they reopen trails and purchase new grounds, those people who use the facilities should be planning ahead as well.

"Because we had a tough winter, there are a lot of trees down over Pierce Stocking Trail," said Steve Yancho, acting chief ranger for Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore. "We're really focusing on removing the trees and clearing the remaining snow drifts. All in all, we'll be up and running in a couple of weeks."

In addition to general clean up, growing preserve areas are important. Grand Traverse County spent the winter acquiring and planning development of property. Although the new areas won't be ready to use this spring and summer, they will provide the area with some outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities in the future.

"We're really excited about this acquisition," said Tim Schreiner, director of parks and recreation for Grand Traverse County. "The first area is adjacent to Keystone Road. It's 95 acres, of which 40 acres will be developed into soccer fields adjacent to the already existing fields. This area will be one of the largest in the state."

We're also in the process of acquiring Maple Bay Farm just north of Acme. It's a 480-acre area with a half mile of bay shore frontage. Although there will be trails to the water, we're planning on keeping the area somewhat wild. We'll be enhancing it for wildlife and managing it in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources."

Grand Traverse County is also planning to construct a pathway by 2003/2004 between the library and park on Boardman Lake.

In addition, the Village of Kingsley will be developing Civic Center South, a 40-acre recreational facility that will include ball fields. Likewise, Kalkaska will tackle upgrades to the off-road vehicle Leetsville Cycle Trailhead over the next four months.

"Leetsville is a well-used trail and one that people really enjoy," said Jim Gray, fire officer of forest, mineral and fire management for the Department of Natural Resources of Kalkaska. "As in the past, we really want to stress safety this season. ORV users should ride with caution and know where they are at all times."

Although it may seem like all people have to do is show up to have a good time, planning should also play a role in outdoor activities. Of

Record-Eagle file photo

Babies, bladders and bikers are just some of the people who share the Traverse City area TART trail.

concern is safety and awareness.

"It's really important that people plan for conditions, especially if they're going to the islands," said Yancho. "If people take the time to become familiar with the park prior to their visit, they're less apt to be surprised."

"Last year, we had a person staying on one of the islands and he didn't realize that there weren't services there. He called from his cell phone to ask us where the Coke machines were. Although that was a funny example, lack of planning can sometimes have serious consequences."

For those who don't have cell phones, knowing where the nearest phones are will help in case of emergencies.

"It's really important to know an exact location when using the outdoors. That way emergency help can locate a person more quickly," said Gray. "At all of our campgrounds, the location of the nearest phone is clearly labeled, as are exact positions."

According to Schreiner, respect also plays a role in remaining safe. With so many different types of people using the TART trail, including people on bikes and roller blades and those walking dogs or pushing strollers, it's important to be aware of surroundings.

"Treat others as you'd like to be treated," said Schreiner. "Also, if



you're walking a dog, keep him or her on a leash. We've had a few dog attacks over the years."

Along with basic safety advice, there are several tips unique to northern Michigan.

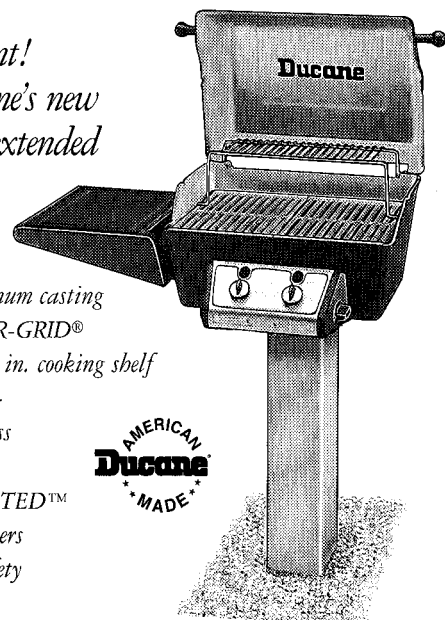
"Know what poison ivy looks like," added Yancho. "Last year, there was a woman changing her baby's diaper in a patch of poison ivy."

"Also, it's a good idea to stay out of the woods on really windy days. Falling branches can severely injure a person. Last, be aware of fire dangers during spring and dry times, as well as possible currents that may exist during days when there are big waves."

Stacie Carlson is a local freelance writer.

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