
COPPER HERITAGE TRAIL

CONCEPTUAL PLAN 2011



**A Proposed 40 Mile
Non-Motorized Rail Trail Route
Connecting The Historic Communities
Of the Copper Country**

Prepared For: Western Upper Peninsula Health Department

By: Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region
Po Box 365 Houghton, MI 49931

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Project History

Underutilized Resource

The Keweenaw Region is crisscrossed by abandoned rail grades from a long history of copper mining and related industries. These grades once connected the mines to transportation hubs and communities in the region. Today, a number of grades are mostly intact while others have been devoured by nature, encroached upon by new development or forgotten. Efforts have been underway to identify and preserve the grades for future transportation routes as well as for development as rail trails for both motorized and non-motorized uses. As they are developed, the trail routes are expected to provide a growing economic and healthy community role within the region. The extensive mining history coupled with the trail will provide the opportunity for interpretation of transportation in the age of copper along the route.



Project Support

This project is supported through funding received by the Western Upper Peninsula Health Department



Western Upper Peninsula
Health Department

(WUPHD) from the Michigan Department of Community Health - Building Healthy Communities program and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It is one of many activities to promote healthy living and address barriers to healthy eating and active living in the Keweenaw. WUPHD partnered with the Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region (WUPPDR) to initiate the development of a plan to support initial trail efforts. This plan is intended to be used as a guide for the development of the Copper Heritage Trail, a 40 mile non-motorized trail route from Chassell to Calumet. For the trail to become a reality, the support of numerous stakeholders, local governments, state government, Keweenaw National Historic Park and additional partners will be needed.

Trails for the Community

Benefits - The Copper Country Heritage Trail will be an asset to the region as a healthy community resource and as a tourism attraction. The proposed trail will connect existing recreation areas, heritage sites and neighborhoods while providing extensive opportunities for interpretive experiences. According to the Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse:

“trails make communities better places to live and visit. They encourage physical fitness and healthy lifestyles because trails are convenient places to get outside and exercise. They strengthen local economies, protect the environment and preserve culturally valuable areas.”



Existing Use of the Trail – Current use of the local grades are limited by unknown ownerships, lack of management and inconsistent trail surfaces. While the paved portions within the Cities of Houghton and Hancock receive high use, once the pavement becomes dirt, the trails are difficult to navigate and promote due to variable trail surfaces, lack of signage, encroachments and potential user conflicts. These issues must be addressed in order to make the connections and promote this potentially tremendous community asset.

Vision, Mission and Goals

Vision – The vision is a non-motorized trail network that connects our communities, special attractions and activity centers, providing both transportation alternatives and healthy living for residents and visitors.

Mission – The mission is to work in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Michigan Department of Transportation, Keweenaw National Historical Park, user groups, land owners, and local governments to identify, establish and improve rail trail routes throughout the region.

There are a number of work items that will have to be accomplished to get the trail on the ground:

Step 1: *Identify and agree upon a management agency to guide development and daily use of the trail.*



- Community outreach that educates local government boards as well as the voting public will be vital to garnering support for the trail and funding requests. There are a number of approaches to this step including:
- Various local governments, such as townships and cities, manage the trail through a joint management agreement (Recreational Authority).
- Counties taking over management and coordinate efforts between the agencies, with a possible joint operating agreement.
- A non-profit be formed to manage the trail and/or coordinate efforts of various government agencies.
- A friends group be formed to advocate for the development and maintenance of the trail, while the DNRE continue to manage it.
- Specific user groups maintain the trail for their purposes.
- DNRE continues to manage and maintain the trails.

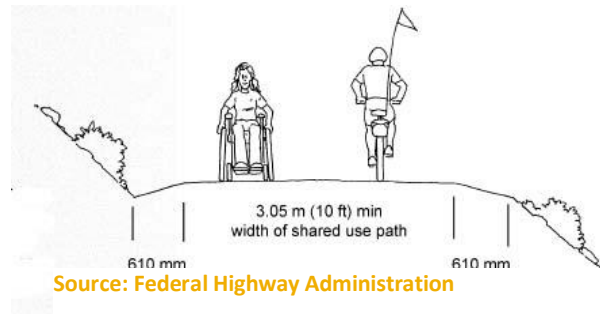
A recreational authority formed under Recreational Authorities Act: P.A. 321 of 2000 is suggested as the preferred alternative as it provides local control and has the ability to levy a millage of not more than 1 mil up to 20 years (See Appendix A: Recreational Authority Act).

Step 2: *Agree on surface type, identify future needs, develop signage scheme and prioritize projects.*

The ideal trail surface, to make it accessible to the widest variety of non-motorized users, would be a 10 foot wide paved surface. However, due to costs, potentially high user speeds in sections with numerous road crossings, areas of shared use with motorized traffic and other factors, alternative trail surfaces must be considered. Trail surfaces could include:

A non-paved pathway of dirt, limestone or similar could be considered to provide access off-highway to bicyclists and pedestrians. The cost to install a natural surface pathway would be less, however, additional ongoing maintenance would be necessary for this type of surface.

Trail surface will also be dictated by motorized use in areas where a shared trail is necessary to complete connections.



Both natural surface and paved surface trail segments will make up the Copper Heritage Trail.

Step 3: *Contract with MDNRE for management of grades currently owned/leased by MDNRE.*

The MDNRE is willing to lease the grades to a local entity if they take over management and liability for the grades. (Standard MDNRE lease agreement language can be found in Appendix B.)

Step 4: *Work through ownership issues and secure permissions as needed.*

Due to a lack of clear title to portions of some of the grades and to make logical, efficient connections to nearby attractions, a number of ownership issues will need to be addressed by working with the DNRE and local governments through research to clarify ownership, dealing with trespass and identifying good routes where no route currently exists or shared (non-motorized and motorized) routes may be necessary.

Step 5: *Seek funding and develop trail facilities (ongoing)*

Funding for trail management including: improvements, acquisition and maintenance will be an ongoing need. With a Recreational Authority in place, the Authority can levy a millage to help support operational costs. To keep projects moving forward, a trail coordinator position should be created so projects can be pursued on an ongoing basis. See Appendix C for a list of potential grant sources, compiled by the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Action Plan by Segment

The following is a brief overview of the affected communities, existing trail conditions, suggested trailheads, segment highlights and the needed improvements along each section of the trail. There are four distinct trail sections that are to be initially developed as the 40-mile Copper Heritage Trail as follows:

Chassell – Houghton

8.5 miles (Chassell Park to Kestner Waterfront Park)

Hancock - Lake Linden

10 miles (Portage Lift Bridge to Houghton Co. Historical Museum)

Lake Linden – Calumet

9 miles (Houghton Co. Historical Museum to Swedetown Ponds)

Calumet – Hancock

12.5 miles (Swedetown Ponds to Portage Lift Bridge)

Each segment will have common needs including surface development, safety enhancements and trail services (such as trailheads, bathrooms, restaurants, etc.). Offered in this plan are recommendations that will start the discussion but may be changed as trail efforts move forward. In addition to a final surface type, a comprehensive sign system that meets both snowmobile and non-motorized trail requirements will be needed for all sections. Included should be the traditional safety signs, but also road name, trail maps, directional signs to adjacent facilities, and confidence markers with the trail name and logo. Directory kiosks for the Copper Heritage Trail should be provided at main trailheads while maps and brochures should be developed that coordinate with signage to guide bicyclists/pedestrians along route and to sites off of main pathway. In addition, interpretive signage should be coordinated and developed in partnership with the Keweenaw National Historical Park along the route.

Action Plan by Segment

Chassell – Houghton

Communities - Chassell Township, Portage Township and City of Houghton

Existing Conditions - Within the City of Houghton the grade is paved from Kestner Park until just east of the Pilgrim River. The rest of the grade is a mosaic of dirt, stamp sand, paved driveway crossings, grass, and other materials. Because the grade has not been maintained as a unified trail, the various landowners have done their own 'maintenance' of each section, much of the grade is adequate surfacing but to provide connectivity some wet spots and lawns will need gravel. An Advisory Committee formed by the DNRE in 2005 developed a recommended management plan that can be found in Appendix D. The route is officially non-motorized use from April 1st to November 30th and snowmobile use in the winter. There remains a number of 'trespass' issues on the trail in the form of buildings, drainfields and other features that are not expected to affect the proposed non-motorized use.

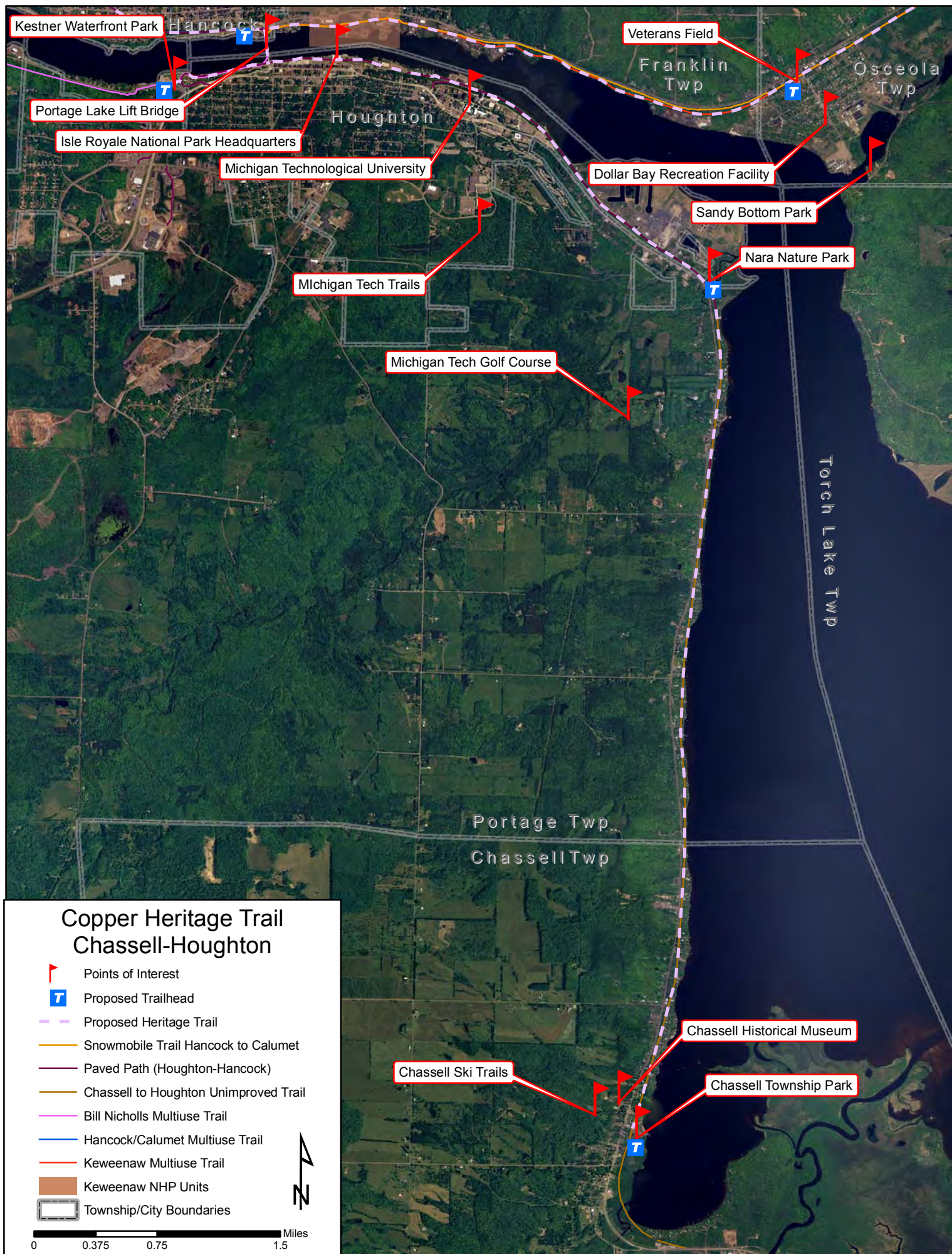
Trailheads – Signed trailheads could be located at the Portage Lift Bridge, Nara Nature Park and Chassell Community Park.

Highlights – Nara Nature Park connecting to Michigan Tech Trails, MTU Golf Course, Chassell Trails, views of Portage Lake, Michigan Tech and Portage Lift Bridge. Trail exists to Kestner Park and there is the potential to continue south along existing grades towards southern Houghton County along the Bill Nicholls Trail.

Needed Improvements – Consistent trail surface, vegetation trimming and signage. (Future opportunity to connect to Baraga County to the south.)



The Nara Nature Park is an example of a recreation site that will be accessible from the Copper Heritage Trail.



Hancock (Bridge) to Lake Linden

Communities - City of Hancock, Franklin Township, Osceola Township, Torch Lake Township and Village of Lake Linden

Existing Conditions – Currently ATV/Snowmobile trail is maintained from Bridge to Lake Linden along a DNRE grade that crosses M26 highway east of Dollar Bay and continues towards Calumet. An additional grade runs parallel to the DNRE grade immediately next to the Portage Canal but continues along M26 where the motorized grade crosses east of Dollar Bay. The grade has encroachments that would need to be addressed, sandy and wet spots that should be improved and overgrown vegetation. The ATV/snowmobile trail is developed on portions of the MDOT grade so shared use may need to be addressed. Paving would be recommended as this grade is separate from Snowmobile trail/ATV trail. From Dollar Bay to Lake Linden, a non-motorized paved trail should continue running parallel to M26, through the communities of Mason, Tamarack City and Hubbell and adjacent to the chain link fence constructed to keep traffic off of newly covered stamp sands. Routing may be tricky in communities but signed routes may be effective alternatives along quiet residential streets.

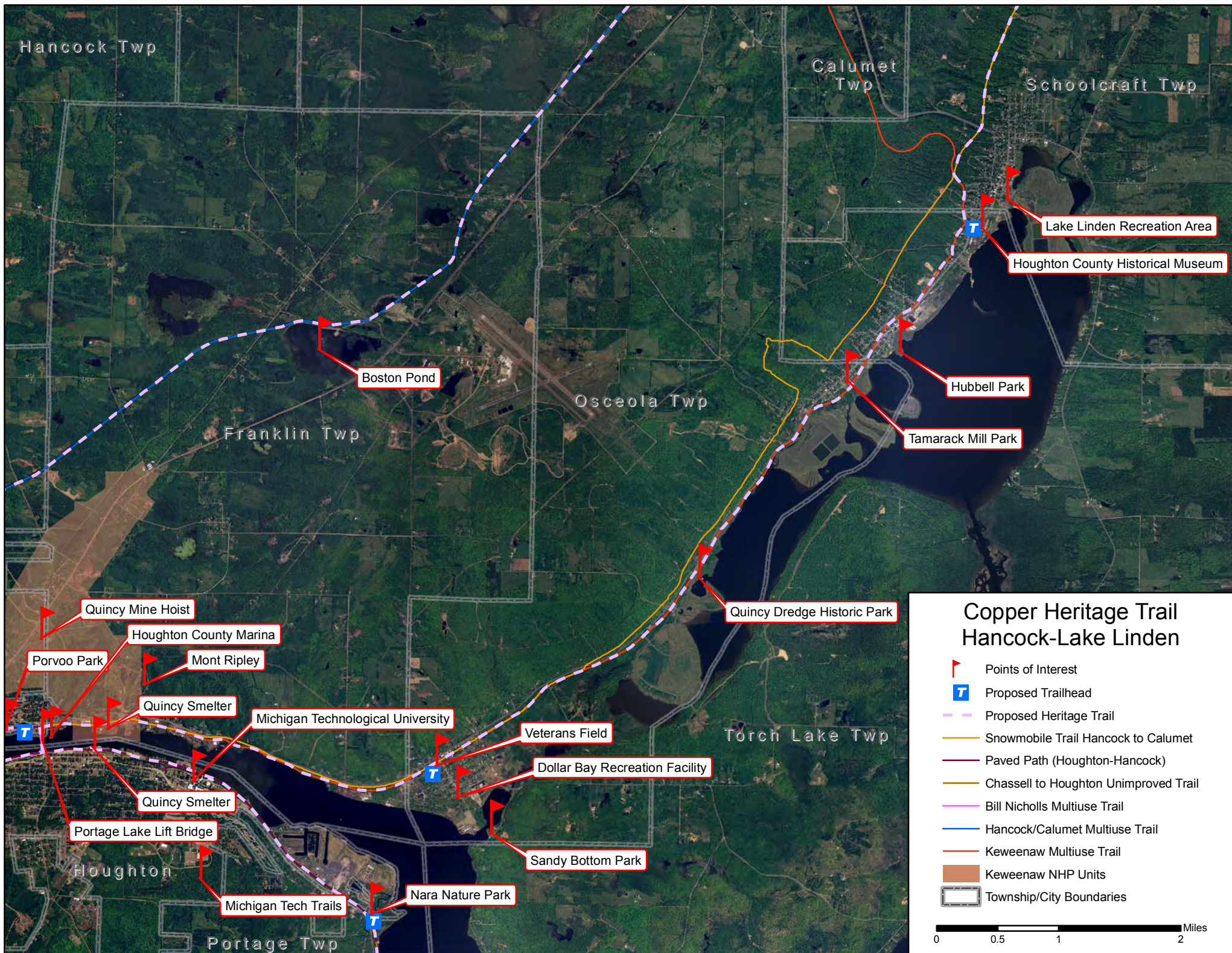
Trailheads – Signed trailheads could be developed at Porvoo Park in Hancock, Veteran's Park in Dollar Bay and the Houghton County Historical Museum in Lake Linden.

Highlights – Features along Trail: Quincy Mine, Mason Dredge, Houghton Historical Museum, Tamarack City Park, Hubbell Park and Lake Linden Park, waterfront for long stretches. There would be an option to use a motorized wooded route to Hungarian Falls or continue to communities.

Needed Amenities - Improved surface (paving recommended), blockages on trail need to be resolved (possibly share sections of MDNRE with motorized), and signage.



This section of trail between Dollar Bay and Lake Linden would be paved as part of the proposed Copper Heritage Trail as a second natural surface motorized grade is available west of M26.



Lake Linden to Calumet

Communities - Village of Lake Linden, Schoolcraft Township, Calumet Township, Village of Calumet and Village of Laurium

Existing Conditions – Snowmobile route on rail grade has potential for shared use. Need to work with Village to identify logical route to connect to snowmobile/ATV trail from Lake Linden, possibly using Keweenaw Multi-Use Trail connecting to snowmobile trail. Surface is hard pack dirt and gravel. Snowmobile trail is mostly a wooded route with few road crossings. In Calumet there is potential to develop spur routes within town connecting to historic sites. A second route could be considered along the rail trail that connects Lake Linden and Laurium, creating a looped trail between Calumet and Lake Linden.

Trailheads – Signed Trailheads could be placed at Houghton County Historical Society, Calumet Lake and Swedetown Ponds.











Highlights – Access to Lake Linden Park, Views of Traprock Valley, Calumet Lake and Keweenaw National Historical Park. Spur trail to be included to Lake Linden Park.

Needed Amenities – Improved dirt surface (share with motorized) and signage.

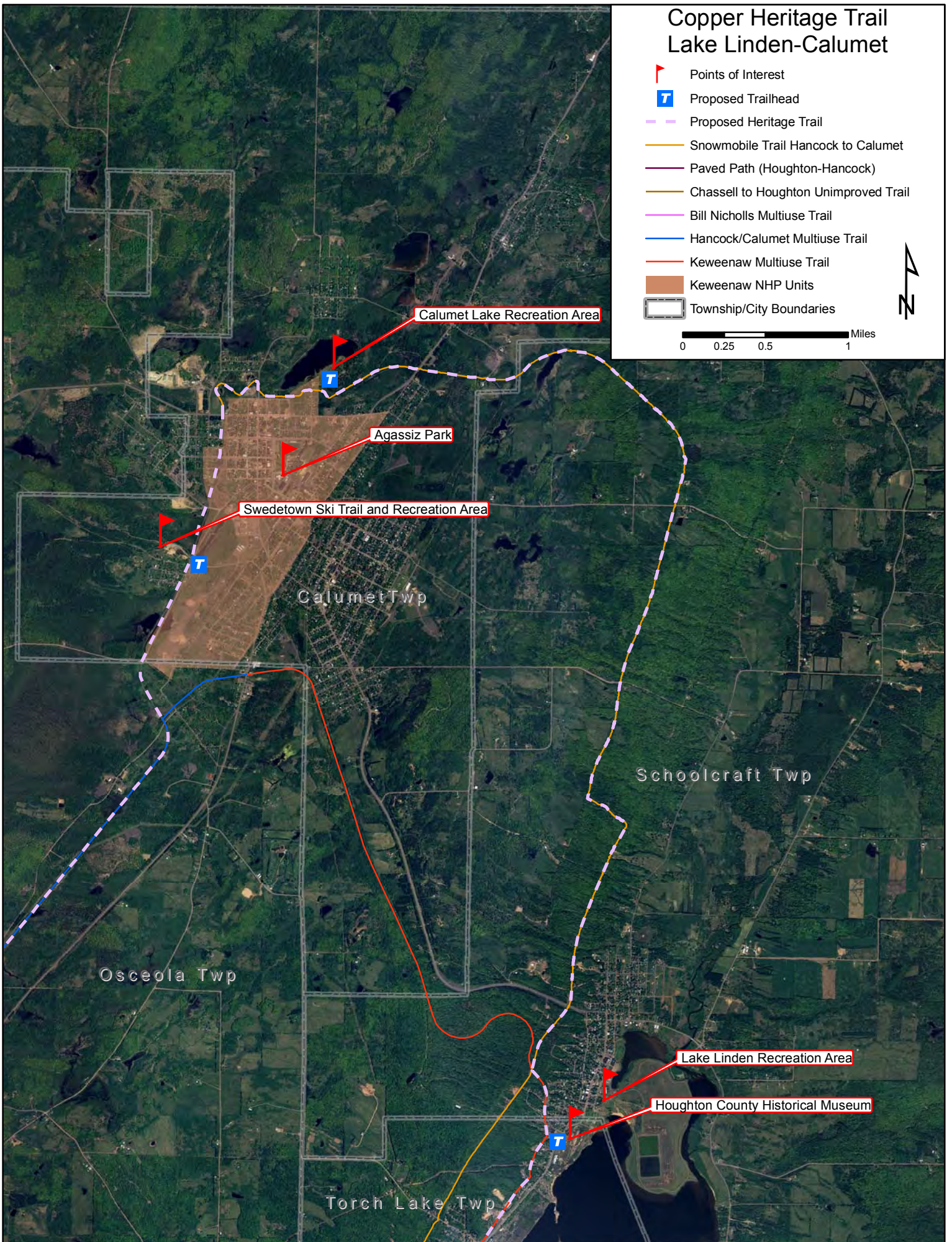


The Lake Linden Park could be connected to the trail via a spur pathway branching off of the main trail. Spurs would provide the opportunity to connect additional community assets that are not immediately accessible by the proposed trail.

Copper Heritage Trail Lake Linden-Calumet

-  Points of Interest
-  Proposed Trailhead
-  Proposed Heritage Trail
-  Snowmobile Trail Hancock to Calumet
-  Paved Path (Houghton-Hancock)
-  Chassell to Houghton Unimproved Trail
-  Bill Nicholls Multiuse Trail
-  Hancock/Calumet Multiuse Trail
-  Keweenaw Multiuse Trail
-  Keweenaw NHP Units
-  Township/City Boundaries

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles



Calumet to Hancock

Communities - Calumet Township, Osceola Township, Franklin Township, Quincy Township and City of Hancock.

Existing Conditions – The trail from the Swedetown area of Calumet to the Hancock waterfront is one of the mostly highly utilized routes in the area. The trail is primarily a motorized route in the summer and a snowmobile route in the winter. The bulk of the trail is hard pack gravel that is regularly maintained by the DNRE. The current surface is adequate for off road bicycle use if maintained in current condition. There is also 100 foot corridor width potentially providing room for a paved pathway in the future if desired. There are no ownership or trespass issues to address. In the City of Hancock the trail is paved from just north of Ingot Street to the Portage Lift Bridge and has stairways at numerous locations to access neighborhood parks.

Trailheads – Logical signed trailheads are the Porvoo Park in Hancock and Swedetown Trails in Calumet.












Highlights – Swedetown Trails, Boston Pond, Maasto Hiihto Trails, Houghton Fairgrounds and Hancock Waterfront.

Needed Amenities – Maintained trail surface and signage.

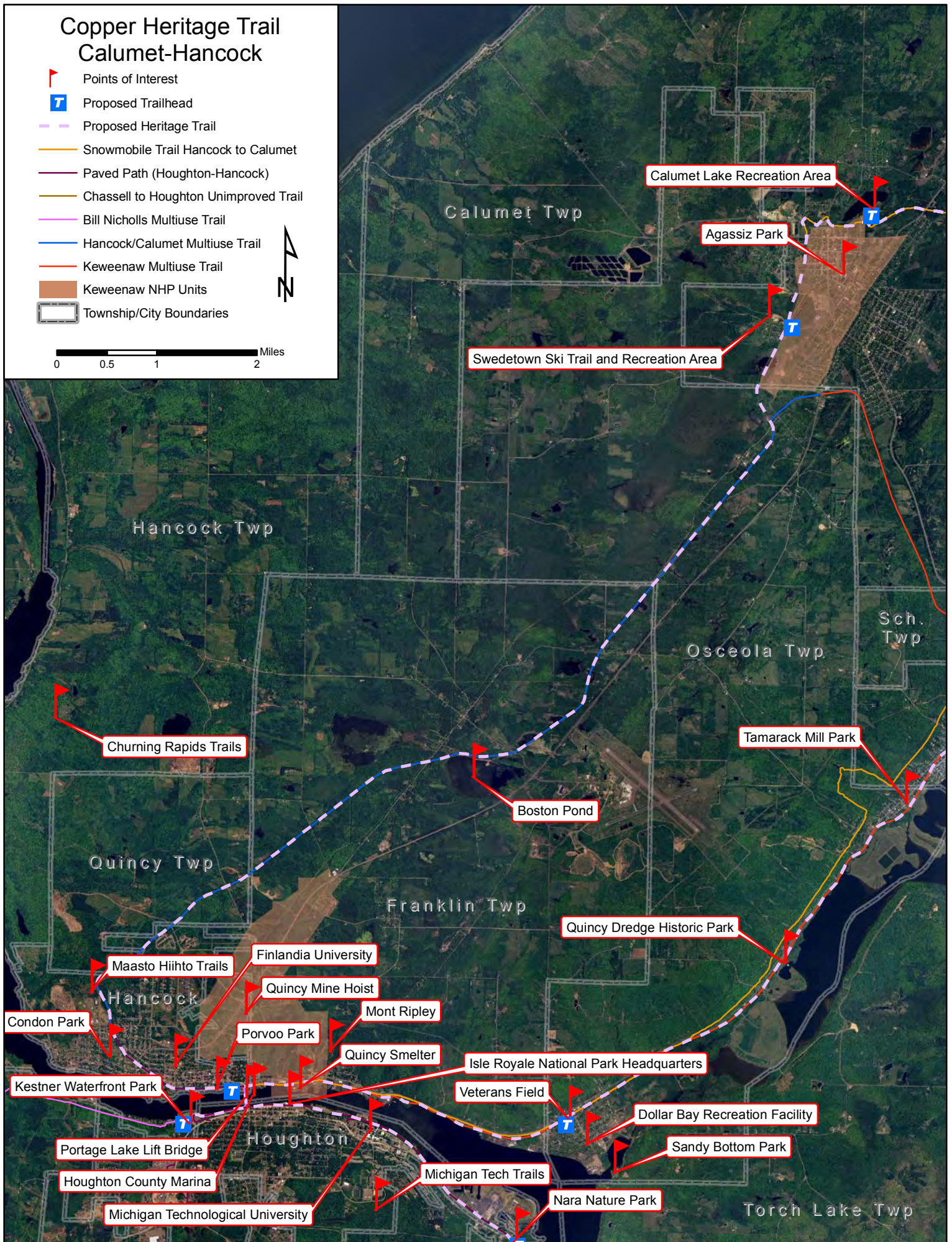


The Hancock/Calumet Multiuse Trail has a natural surface that can be utilized by both motorized and non-motorized. Paving is not recommended for all sections of trail along the Copper Heritage Route.

Copper Heritage Trail Calumet-Hancock

-  Points of Interest
-  Proposed Trailhead
-  Proposed Heritage Trail
-  Snowmobile Trail Hancock to Calumet
-  Paved Path (Houghton-Hancock)
-  Chassell to Houghton Unimproved Trail
-  Bill Nicholls Multiuse Trail
-  Hancock/Calumet Multiuse Trail
-  Keweenaw Multiuse Trail
-  Keweenaw NHP Units
-  Township/City Boundaries

0 0.5 1 2 Miles



Down the Trail and Looking Forward

As the Copper Heritage Trail moves forward there are a number of things to keep in mind including the types of users expected to use the facility and how to accommodate users based on conditions and costs. Additional things to consider when selecting a facility are continuity, parking, barriers, directness, accessibility, aesthetics, personal safety, limited stops, conflicts, maintenance, surface, traffic conditions and surface quality. **This plan is only a first step in developing the Copper Heritage Trail that will hopefully one day connect our communities, special attractions and activity centers.**



The City of Hancock has connected adjacent neighborhoods via staircases. It is hoped that this type of effort will be incorporated throughout all the communities providing both residents and visitors easy access to the Copper Heritage Trail.

Appendices

- A. Recreational Authority Act**
- B. Standard MDNRE Lease Agreement Language**
- C. Potential Granting Source (Michigan Department of Transportation)**
- D. Chassell-Houghton Advisory Committee Recommendations**