

Ride with Leinie proceeds donated to Conover, Phelps for trail maintenance, Torch Lake bike trail extension

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The Great Headwaters Trails Foundation (GHTF) Inc., made several donations this month with funds raised during the 2025 Ride with Leinie Bicycle Ride held on the Conover-Phelps Trail July 26.

The popular ride attracted a record 501 registered participants from 15 states and raised more than \$27,000, according to Laura VanValkenberg, GHTF president.

Following a recent vote of the GHTF Board of Directors, the organization donated \$2,500 to the town of Conover and \$2,500 to the town of Phelps for their respective Conover-Phelps Trail maintenance funds.

"We really want people to see how GHTF is still here, working to support the communities, even after trails have been completed," said VanValkenberg.

Town of Conover Chairman Karl Jennrich said the town of Conover is very appreciative of the donation this year and last year from the Ride with Leinie event.

"Conover, like all towns in Vilas County, are having budget issues and are forced to prioritize what we spend money on," said Jennrich. "The money will go directly to maintenance of the Conover-Phelps Trail. Both our towns benefit from this trail due to the bike riders coming to our communities to ride the trail and hopefully staying and spending dollars at local businesses throughout the North Woods."

Phelps Town Chairman Steve Doyen also said his town appreciates the donation from GHTF for trail maintenance.

"The town of Phelps is really grateful for the trail donations from GHTF," said Doyen. "It really goes a long way to help in maintenance of the Conover-Phelps Trail."

The organization also donated an additional \$15,000 to the GHTF Conover-Phelps Trail restricted funds account.

VanValkenberg explained



Taking part in the Ride with Leinie proceeds donation were, from left, Gary Meister, GHTF Board member; Laura Van Valkenberg, GHTF president; Steve Doyen, Phelps town chairman; Karl Jennrich, Conover town chairman; Cheryl Adams, GHTF Board member and Friends of the Conover-Phelps Trail; and Neil Adams, GHTF Board member and Friends of the Conover-Phelps Trail.

—Contributed Photo

that GHTF is actively working on the Conover-Phelps Torch Lake Park extension project, which will add approximately 2 miles to the existing Conover-Phelps Trail to the county-owned Torch Lake Park just south of the Conover business center.

"We are currently partnering with the engineering firm Becher Hoppe to develop a 30% engineering design for the extension, with costs to be covered through the GHTF Conover-Phelps Trail restricted funds account," said VanValkenberg.

The 2-mile trail extension would connect the popular 40-site campground and park to the 11-mile Conover-Phelps Trail.

Jennrich said the Town of Conover also supported the extension of the bike trail from the Torch Lake Campground to downtown Conover.

"The (Conover) board felt it could allow individuals and families to have a safe, dedicated trail into downtown Conover so individuals and families could patronize local businesses and also hook up to the Conover-Phelps Trail and ride all the way to beautiful downtown Phelps," said Jennrich.

"This extension will really help both towns with this accessibility of our recreational opportunities," added Doyen.

Planning for 2026

The remaining balance of the Ride with Leinie proceeds will support GHTF general operations and planning for the 2026 Ride with Leinie, according to VanValkenberg.

"Looking ahead, we are already planning next year's Ride with Leinie, which will be the 15th annual event, scheduled for July 27, 2026," said VanValkenberg. "The popularity of the ride continues to grow as more participants learn about the outstanding trail experience and the warm hospitality of Conover and Phelps. On behalf of our board and volunteers, thank you for your continued support and partnership in building and enhancing our trail system. We are excited to continue working with Conover and Phelps to expand and improve the Conover-Phelps Trail for the benefit of our communities and visitors alike."

Over the last three years, GHTF has given \$40,000 from the Ride with Leinie event to support the Conover-Phelps Trail (\$25,000 to the two towns combined and \$15,000 to the GHTF Conover-Phelps Trail fund).

Dick Leinenkugel, Eagle River resident and retired past president of the Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Company, promotes and participates in the 2025 Ride with Leinie event with his

wife, Jean. He was thrilled that the ride raised more than \$27,000.

"Jean and I are delighted that the Ride with Leinie was so successful in 2025. We thank all of our riders and especially the folks at the Great Headwaters Trails Foundation for organizing such a fantastic event," said Dick Leinenkugel. "We are so thrilled that we are able to give back to the silent sports in Vilas County. We also look forward to the Great Headwaters Trails Foundation being able to complete the River Trail to connect Eagle River with the rest of the Heart of Vilas County Bike Trail."

Leinenkugel was referring to GHTF's plan to complete an asphalt biking and hiking trail that would connect the communities of Eagle River and St. Germain with assistance from the River Trail Commission.

Portions of the proposed 10-mile long trail would run along the scenic Wisconsin River. The trail also would connect with the 52-mile paved Heart of Vilas County Bike Trail System that connects St. Germain, Sawyer, Boulder Junction, Manitowish Waters and Mercer. It's estimated the Heart of Vilas system attracts 70,000 bicyclists and hikers annually based on a recent assessment.

For more information about GHTF, visit ghtrails.org.