

FRIENDS OF COOKS RUN

Proposal for Public Use of Cooks Run

Submitted to the Iron County Board of Commissioners

June 3, 2026

Submitted by: Don Lintner, Chair · Cooks Run Steering Committee
Crystal Falls, Michigan · 414-426-3014 · info@friendsofcooksrun.org

SECTION 1 — TRANSMITTAL LETTER

June 3, 2026

Lynette Lorenz, Project Representative
Iron County Courthouse
2 South Sixth Street, Suite 7
Crystal Falls, MI 49920

Dear Ms. Lorenz and Members of the Iron County Board of Commissioners,

On behalf of the Cooks Run Steering Committee — nine Iron County and regional conservation, recreation, and heritage organizations — we are pleased to submit this proposal in response to the Request for Proposals for Public Use of Cooks Run, issued February 10, 2026.

We propose the formation of Friends of Cooks Run, a Michigan 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, to serve as the County's dedicated partner in the stewardship, restoration, and public development of this remarkable 121.56-acre property. The County retains full ownership. The Friends group provides the volunteer labor, grant-writing, fundraising, and community engagement needed to make Cooks Run the public asset it has the potential to become.

We are transparent that certain deliverables in the RFP — specifically items 3 and 6 regarding financing without any county support — cannot be responsibly met by a forming volunteer organization on this timeline, and would not produce the kind of working partnership that delivers lasting, broader-based benefits to Iron County. We respectfully invoke the waiver provision stated in Section V of the RFP, which reserves to the Board the right to waive any irregularities, inconsistencies, and bidding provisions as it determines to be in the county's best interest. What we propose in their place is a true collaboration: the Friends group bringing volunteer labor, organizational capacity, fundraising, and grant-writing, and the County contributing its appropriate share as property owner. We believe this proposal, taken as a whole, represents the best available path to fulfilling the deed's requirement that Cooks Run be used solely for public purposes — sustainably, hand-in-hand with the County, and for generations to come.

This proposal shall remain binding for ninety (90) days from the submission date. All programs described herein will operate in full compliance with the deed restriction for Cooks Run.

We welcome the opportunity to present this proposal in person and to answer any questions the Board may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Lintner, Chair
Cooks Run Steering Committee
On behalf of the Friends of Cooks Run

SECTION 2 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cooks Run is one of Iron County's most underutilized assets. Its 121.56 acres encompass a nationally registered historic WPA log cabin, a high-quality trout stream, diverse forest and wetland habitat, and a location just off US-2 — one of the Upper Peninsula's most traveled tourist corridors. For decades the property has sat at the end of an unmarked road, largely unknown to the traveling public, while its historic cabin slowly deteriorates.

The Cooks Run Steering Committee — formed in September 2025 and representing nine Iron County and regional organizations — proposes to change that. We propose the formation of Friends of Cooks Run, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, to partner with Iron County in the stewardship, restoration, and public development of the property.

The Partnership Model

The County retains full ownership and ultimate authority over Cooks Run. The Friends group takes on the work: recruiting volunteers, writing grants, raising donations, restoring the historic cabin, building trails, and developing programming. This is the model used successfully by Friends groups at parks and natural areas across Michigan and the country.

What Cooks Run Can Become

With a highway sign on US-2, a parking area, a restored cabin, and interpretive, hiking and biking trails, Cooks Run becomes an Iron County destination — a place that stops travelers, tells a story, and sends them hand-in-hand to local restaurants, motels, outfitters, and small businesses across the county. The economic data is compelling: western Upper Peninsula visitors spend an average of \$101 per day trip and \$357 per overnight visit. A modest 1,000 visitors per year generates the equivalent of a full timber harvest every three months — and unlike a single harvest, this revenue stream renews every year and grows as the site matures. The bigger picture matters here. A well-developed Cooks Run promotes ongoing economic vitality across Iron County, draws new visitors and dollars to local businesses year-round, and builds community pride in a way no one-time timber sale can. The goal is to harvest a continuous, broader-based stream of benefits — recreational, educational, cultural, and economic — that compound over decades. See Exhibit A for the full economic comparison.

A Scientific Foundation

Cooks Run is part of something larger than its 121.56 acres. The U.S. Forest Service has designated formal project and management areas within the Ottawa National Forest that encompass large landscape-scale zones, because forest management decisions — particularly along river corridors — carry landscape-level ecological impacts. The Cooks Run parcel lies within one of these designated areas, which means a robust body of existing USFS and Michigan DNR science already provides a foundation for sound, defensible land management decisions at the site. Rather than viewing timber management and conservation as opposing interests, Friends of Cooks Run believes a well-coordinated forest management plan — developed with full input from all partners and grounded in that existing science — could actively enhance trail building, improve trout habitat, support protection of the historical features on the island, and accelerate site development. The goal is to ensure that all of the site's values become synergistic and cumulative rather than stand-alone. The Iron County Watershed Coalition has proposed a collaborative scientific assessment process building on this existing USFS and DNR framework, and has explored partnerships with Michigan Technological University, Northern Michigan University, Purdue University, the Lac Vieux Desert Environmental Department, and local high schools. West Iron County, Forest Park, and Watersmeet biology students would participate in supervised field data collection — turning Cooks Run into a living outdoor classroom for Iron County's own children. Friends of Cooks Run supports this cooperative, science-based approach as a cornerstone of the site's educational mission.

The Ask

We ask the Board for a long-term partnership agreement — a minimum of ten years — that gives the Friends group the time horizon needed to build an endowment, pursue grants, and develop the property in phases. A real partnership requires meaningful contribution from both sides. The Friends group brings volunteer labor, organizational capacity, fundraising, and grant-writing capability that no single agency can match. We ask the County, as the property owner, to bring its share to the table: extension of road maintenance to include the parking area, assistance with US-2 signage installation, joint advocacy with the Road Commission for site access, and a willingness to direct a portion of future timber revenue toward a dedicated property maintenance fund. These are baseline contributions any owner makes when entering into a stewardship partnership of this scale — modest in dollars relative to the long-term, broader-based economic return Cooks Run will generate for the county. We ask that timber harvest decisions be made jointly, with adequate time for the partnership to take root, for the existing USFS and DNR science to be fully considered, and for all of the site's values — recreational, historical, ecological, and economic — to be evaluated together. A coordinated, hand-in-hand approach to forest management could in fact enhance trail building, improve trout habitat, support protection of historical features on the island, and accelerate site development more effectively than stand-alone approaches to each.

Cooks Run has been waiting a long time. The community is ready to go to work for it.

| *Exhibit A — Economic Value to Iron County handout*

SECTION 3 — RESPONSE TO RFP DELIVERABLES

The following responds to each of the nine deliverables listed in Section II of the RFP. Each is addressed directly where possible; where the waiver clause is invoked, we explain our reasoning and propose an alternative approach.

Deliverable 1 — Nonprofit Organization for Year-Round Public Programs

We propose the formation of Friends of Cooks Run as a Michigan 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, emerging directly from the nine-organization Cooks Run Steering Committee. The Friends group will operate a non-discriminatory public use program on a year-round basis.

Year-round programming will begin modestly in Year 1 — seasonal trail access, site interpretation, and community volunteer events — and grow as funding and organizational capacity develop. All programs will be open to the public regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or any other protected characteristic.

See Section 5 for the full 501(c)(3) formation plan, including formation steps and timeline.

Deliverable 2 — Conceptual and Organizational Plan for Public Programs

Friends of Cooks Run envisions a multi-phase program development plan organized around the site's unique combination of natural, historical, and recreational assets.

Phase 1 — Foundation (Year 1–2)

- Basic site improvements: parking area cleanup and grading, ADA-accessible path to cabin, picnic tables, vault toilet
- US-2 highway wayfinding signage to bring passing traffic to the site

- Island trail opening using existing two-track drives and single track along the berm, with footbridges over wet areas
- Cabin stabilization: log repair, exterior staining, window protection, interior safety improvements
- Site interpretation: historic signage outside the cabin, connection to the broader Iron County CCC/WPA heritage constellation including Camp Gibbs
- Community volunteer workdays to build local ownership of the project

Phase 2 — Development (Year 3–5)

- ADA-accessible fishing platform using existing concrete weirs as footings
- Interactive nature and historical trail signage — designed to engage children
- Expanded trail network for hiking, snowshoeing, and mountain biking
- Cabin interior interpretation: historic displays, CCC/WPA exhibits
- Structured educational programming in partnership with local schools and university partners
- Environmental Impact Study field seasons in coordination with ICWC and Michigan DNR, with advisory input from USFS regarding adjoining national forest lands

Phase 3 — Destination (Year 5+)

- Potential connection to Ottawa National Forest trail network
- Seasonal events: fishing clinics, guided nature walks, historical tours, winter snowshoe events
- Cabin developed as a museum-like interpretive center — open to the public for historic and nature exhibits, not available for private rental
- Possible future rustic campsites as endowment and infrastructure mature
- Ongoing university research partnerships and annual student field programs

Educational Programming — Local Schools as Partners

A defining feature of the Cooks Run vision is its potential as an outdoor classroom for Iron County's own students. Through the Environmental Impact Study framework proposed by the Iron County Watershed Coalition, high school biology students from West Iron County, Forest Park, and Watersmeet schools would participate in supervised field data collection at the site. This gives local students hands-on experience in ecological field science — on county-owned land, in their own community, guided by university faculty and agency professionals. This is exactly the kind of educational investment that strengthens communities and keeps young people connected to the land they grow up on.

Deliverable 3 — Financing Method for Public Programs

WAIVER CLAUSE INVOKED: The RFP requires a detailed financing method without support from the County of Iron. We invoke the waiver clause and propose a collaborative partnership financing model instead. Requiring a volunteer nonprofit to finance programming on publicly owned land with no county contribution is not a partnership — it is a transfer of burden. The Friends group will carry the heaviest load: volunteer labor, fundraising, grant-writing, and day-to-day stewardship. But for that effort to translate into the broader economic vitality and community benefit the property can deliver, the County must remain a working partner — not just the title holder. We believe the Board's waiver authority exists precisely for situations like this, where rigid adherence to the original deliverable would foreclose the very partnership the deed restriction calls for.

Primary Funding Sources

- Grants: Michigan DNR Heritage Fund, Michigan Natural Resources Trust fund, Michigan Recreation Passport Grants, USFS Ottawa National Forest community programs, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Michigan Historic Preservation Network, Trout Unlimited Northern Great Lakes Initiative

- Additional grant partners: Superior Watershed Partnership (SWP), Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition (UPEC), WE Energies Mitigation and Enhancement Fund
- Private donations: annual giving campaigns, major donor cultivation, community fundraisers
- Member organization in-kind contributions: volunteer labor, equipment, materials
- Fred Waara Chapter, Trout Unlimited: fisheries programming support and potential grant co-sponsorship
- Long-term: endowment earnings

County Partnership Contributions Requested

We request two specific county contributions that are consistent with the county's role as property owner and that represent minimal incremental cost:

- Winter road maintenance: the Iron County Road Commission independently manages road planning and funding. We ask the County Board to partner with Friends of Cooks Run in making a formal request to the Road Commission — through the long-term road planning and funding process — to include the Cooks Run parking area and drive in their maintenance scope.
- US-2 signage: county labor and equipment for installation of wayfinding signs on US-2. Sign materials cost is estimated at approximately \$2,400; installation using existing county highway crew capacity would be a minimal additional cost.
- Road Commission opportunity: we ask the County Board to join with us in requesting that the Road Commission consider including cleanup of the parking area, grading of the drive to the cabin, and designation of two ADA-accessible parking spaces as part of their planned summer work on Cooks Run Road.

Deliverable 4 — Tentative First-Year Budget

The following represents the Steering Committee's best current estimate of Year 1 priorities, based on site assessment and materials research. All figures are estimates pending formal bids.

Year 1 Capital Priorities

- Cabin stabilization — log repair (Abatron Wood Epox), exterior oil-based stain compatible with original creosote finish: approximately \$1,200 in materials plus volunteer labor
- Window protection — Plexiglas or Lexan panels replacing OSB window coverings (vandalism protection): approximately \$180 per 4x8 sheet
- Basement stair railing: approximately \$100
- Outdoor light fixture repair at cabin entrances: materials \$200
- Loft ceiling repair (roofing nails protruding through roof decking): volunteer labor
- Picnic tables: approximately \$800 each
- ADA-compliant benches: approximately \$500–\$1,000 each
- US-2 highway signs: approximately \$300 per sign plus installation; two double-sided signs estimated at \$2,400 total (installation via county road crew)
- Island trail opening: volunteer labor plus at least two footbridges (cost TBD pending site assessment)
- ADA parking area and trail surfacing: approximately \$2,000+ for 500 feet of trail at 4 feet wide, depending on ground conditions
- Rented portable toilet on site to serve volunteers and initial visitors: approximately \$275/month for 4–5 months in the first year (\$1,100–\$1,375 estimated)

Year 1 Summary

- Estimated Year 1 cash outlay: \$6,000–\$10,000 depending on scope and volunteer contribution
- Estimated volunteer labor value: significant — trail work, cabin work, event coordination drawn from nine member organizations
- Funding strategy: initial community fundraiser to seed Year 1 operations, supplemented by member organization in-kind contributions and early grant applications

Year 2 Priority and Summary

- Vault toilet, ADA compliant: \$9,000–\$30,000 plus excavation cost depending on model and site conditions; replaces rented portable toilet from Year 1

| See Exhibit B for the Proposed Site Improvement Map.

Deliverable 5 — Usage Fees

General public access to Cooks Run will be free of charge, consistent with the deed's requirement that the property be used solely for public purposes. No fees will be charged for trail use, fishing, or general site access.

- Optional donation stations may be installed at the parking area and cabin
- Specific structured programming — guided historical tours, organized educational events, group reservations — may carry modest fees in future phases as determined by the Friends board
- Any fee structure will be reviewed annually and will not create a barrier to public access

Deliverable 6 — Financing for Maintenance and Improvement

WAIVER CLAUSE INVOKED: The RFP again requires a financing method without county support. We again invoke the waiver clause. The County owns this property. It carries a historic structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Transferring all maintenance responsibility to a volunteer organization while the County retains timber revenue is not a sustainable or equitable arrangement, and it is not the kind of partnership that produces lasting, broader-based benefits to the county. A working partnership at Cooks Run requires both sides at the table: the Friends group delivering the volunteer effort, fundraising, and grant capacity, and the County delivering the modest but essential contributions only an owner can make — road maintenance, signage, and reinvestment of a portion of timber proceeds back into the asset that produces them. We propose the following partnership maintenance model on that basis.

Long-Term Maintenance Funding

- Endowment earnings: building an endowment is the single most important long-term financial goal of the Friends group — a permanent fund whose earnings cover annual maintenance costs
- Annual giving campaigns and major donor cultivation
- Grants: historic preservation grants are specifically available for listed structures like the Cooks Run cabin
- In-kind contributions: volunteer labor for routine maintenance, member organization equipment and expertise

Timber Harvest Pause

The Iron County Watershed Coalition has proposed a period of coordinated scientific assessment before active timber management proceeds at Cooks Run, drawing on the existing USFS and DNR

landscape-level science for the area. Friends of Cooks Run supports this cooperative approach. Rather than viewing timber management and conservation as opposing interests, we believe a well-coordinated forest management plan — developed with full input from all partners — could actively enhance trail building, improve trout habitat, support protection of the historical features on the island, and help clean up legacy structures such as the old cinderblock building. The goal is not to prevent future timber activity, but to ensure that when it occurs, it is part of a unified plan that makes all of the site's values synergistic and cumulative. See Exhibit G for the full ICWC proposal.

We further propose that when timber harvest resumes after the pause, a portion of timber revenue be directed to a dedicated maintenance fund for the property — consistent with the County's role as property owner and beneficiary of the timber program.

Deliverable 7 — Staffing and Hours of Operation

All staffing will be volunteer-based in Years 1 and 2. Friends of Cooks Run board members will coordinate site operations, programming, and volunteer scheduling.

- Site open to the public during daylight hours, year-round
- Staffed programming hours determined by volunteer availability and seasonal demand — anticipated to be weekends and select weekdays during peak seasons (summer, fall color, winter snowshoe season)
- Emergency contact and site steward program to be developed in Year 1
- Paid part-time site coordinator is a future goal as endowment matures — anticipated by Year 3–5 depending on funding growth

Deliverable 8 — Central Contact Information

Upon formation of the Friends of Cooks Run, the following will be established:

- Initial contact: Don Lintner, 414-426-3014, info@friendsofcooksrun.org
- Website: friendsofcooksrun.org — domain registered; full website to be developed upon county approval and 501(c)(3) formation
- Social media presence (Facebook at minimum) to support community outreach, event promotion, and fundraising

Deliverable 9 — Partner Organizations

This is the strongest single element of our proposal. The potential breadth and depth of organizational support behind Friends of Cooks Run is unmatched by any alternative approach.

Founding Coalition — Cooks Run Steering Committee Member Organizations

- Iron County Audubon — Lee LeBlanc Chapter
- Northwoods Heritage Guild — historical research and CCC/WPA interpretation
- Iron County Historical and Museum Society
- Iron County Trail Club
- Iron County Watershed Coalition — water quality, habitat, EIS coordination
- Fred Waara Chapter, Trout Unlimited — fisheries management, stream habitat, grant co-sponsorship
- Green UP
- Silent Sporters
- Wildlife Unlimited of Iron County

Additional Grant and Funding Proposed Partners

- Superior Watershed Partnership (SWP)
- Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition (UPEC)
- Trout Unlimited Northern Great Lakes Initiative
- Michigan Historic Preservation Network
- National Trust for Historic Preservation

Technical and Scientific Proposed Partners

- U.S. Forest Service — Ottawa National Forest (advisory input regarding adjoining national forest lands and existing landscape-level science; USFS personnel cannot operate directly on non-federal land)
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources — fisheries, habitat, historic preservation programs
- Michigan Technological University — Dr. David Flaspohler, Dean, College of Forest Resources and Environmental Science; indicated strong interest in Capstone survey site use and faculty research
- Northern Michigan University — Professor Jill Leonard (Biology Dept. Head), Professor Jacquie Medina (Outdoor Recreation Leadership), Professor Alec Lindsay (Biology/Ecology)
- Purdue University, Dept. of Forestry and Natural Resources — Dr. Marisol Sepulveda; Purdue has used Cooks Run as a teaching site for Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences students and is eager to continue and expand that partnership
- Lac Vieux Desert Environmental Department — Roger Labine, Water Resource Technician; strong interest in tribal and local student involvement in EIS field work

Proposed Educational Partners — Local Schools

- West Iron County High School
- Forest Park High School
- Watersmeet High School

Local student participation in EIS field data collection, under professional supervision, turns Cooks Run into a living outdoor classroom. Local students in art, design, multimedia, marketing, history, technical arts, building trades and other classes can get real world experience working with the Friends to generate fundraising materials, social media marketing, historical displays, and work on cabin restoration. All these learning activities build a generation of Iron County residents with a personal connection to the site.

| See Exhibit C for Student Partnership Opportunities.

County Partnership

- Iron County Parks and Recreation Committee — primary county liaison for the partnership agreement
- Iron County Road Commission — through a joint request by the County Board and Friends of Cooks Run, to include the Cooks Run parking area and drive in their long-term road planning and maintenance program

SECTION 4 — ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

IV-1 — General Organizational Information

Friends of Cooks Run is a forming organization, emerging directly from the Cooks Run Steering Committee, which was established in September 2025. The Steering Committee was convened to explore and advance the potential of the Cooks Run property as a public asset for Iron County.

The nine founding member organizations collectively represent hundreds of Iron County residents with expertise spanning conservation biology, fisheries management, historical preservation, outdoor recreation, education, water quality, and community organizing. All are established organizations with active memberships and strong track records of community service in Iron County and the broader region.

- No paid staff at this time; all-volunteer leadership
- Growth trajectory: 501(c)(3) formation upon county approval; board election within 60 days; immediate pursuit of startup grants and first community fundraiser

IV-2 — Compliance with Stated Deliverables

We are transparent with the Board that certain deliverables as written cannot be fully met by a forming volunteer organization on this timeline, and that requiring otherwise would foreclose the kind of collaborative, hand-in-hand partnership the property needs to thrive. We invoke the waiver clause provided in Section V of the RFP for Deliverables 3 and 6, and ask the Board to evaluate this proposal on the strength of our vision, our coalition, our demonstrated community commitment, and the broader-based economic and community benefits a true partnership at Cooks Run can produce.

We believe this proposal is the most credible, sustainable, and community-rooted response the Board will receive — and that it represents the best available path to fulfilling the deed's public use requirement for generations to come.

IV-3 — Pending Lawsuits and Judgments

There are no pending lawsuits or legal judgments against the Cooks Run Steering Committee or any of its nine member organizations, nor against any of their officers or employees, in the past five years.

IV-4 — Leadership Team

The following individuals are anticipated to serve on the founding board of Friends of Cooks Run. The board will be seated at the founding meeting following county approval, and will elect officers from among its members in accordance with the bylaws.

- **Steering Committee Chair:** Don Lintner
- **Board Members:** Jay Aldrich, Teri Demuri, Dorothy Felger, Charlie Jackson, Laurie Jackson, Rebecca Jorgensen, Kathlene Long, Kent Premo, Maggie Sheffer, Gerald Weeks

IV-5 — Financial Capitalization Plan

Friends of Cooks Run will be capitalized initially through community fundraising and member organization in-kind contributions. The long-term financial foundation is an endowment — a permanent fund whose earnings cover annual operating and maintenance costs, insulating the organization from year-to-year fundraising pressure.

Year 1 cash target: \$6,000–\$10,000 through a founding community fundraiser and direct solicitation of member organizations and supporters. Grant applications will be submitted in Year 1 for Year 2 funding. See Deliverables 3 and 4 for full details.

IV-6 — Proposed Service Contract / Partnership Agreement

We propose a long-term Partnership Agreement rather than a traditional service contract, structured so that both the County and Friends of Cooks Run bring meaningful contributions to the table and share in the broader-based, long-term benefits the property will produce. Key terms we would seek to negotiate:

- **Term:** minimum 10 years, renewable by mutual consent
- **Ownership:** Iron County retains full ownership and ultimate authority over the property at all times
- **Management responsibility:** Friends of Cooks Run manages public programming, volunteer coordination, fundraising, grant administration, and routine maintenance
- **County contributions:** US-2 signage installation assistance; Parks and Recreation Committee as primary liaison; joint request with Friends to the Road Commission for inclusion of Cooks Run parking area and drive in long-term road maintenance planning
- **Timber management:** joint decision-making, with adequate time for coordinated scientific assessment using existing USFS and DNR landscape-level data before active harvest proceeds
- **Timber revenue sharing:** a portion of future timber revenue directed to a property maintenance fund
- **Annual reporting:** Friends group provides annual report to the Board on programs, finances, and property condition
- **Amendment process:** material changes to the agreement require mutual written consent

SECTION 5 — FRIENDS OF COOKS RUN: 501(C)(3) FORMATION PLAN

This section is not required by the RFP. We include it to demonstrate organizational seriousness and to give the Board a clear, concrete picture of what the partnership will look like in practice.

What Is a 501(c)(3)?

- A federally tax-exempt nonprofit corporation under IRS Section 501(c)(3)
- Donations are tax-deductible to donors — essential for endowment building and major gift fundraising
- Eligible for the full range of charitable grants, including government, foundation, and corporate sources
- Must be organized and operated exclusively for charitable, educational, scientific, or literary purposes
- Governed by a volunteer board of directors with elected officers
- Accountable to the public through annual IRS filings (Form 990) and Michigan LARA reporting

Board Composition

The founding board of Friends of Cooks Run will be drawn from the nine Steering Committee member organizations and other stakeholders in the community. Officers will be elected by the Board from among its members at the founding meeting, in accordance with bylaws adopted at that time.

Formation Steps and Timeline

The following steps will be completed upon receipt of a positive county response to this proposal:

- Step 1 — County approval received: triggers formal formation process
- Step 2 — Incorporate as Michigan nonprofit corporation: file Articles of Incorporation with Michigan LARA; estimated 2–4 weeks
- Step 3 — Adopt bylaws and elect officers at founding board meeting: scheduled within 60 days of county approval
- Step 4 — Apply for federal 501(c)(3) status: IRS Form 1023-EZ (available to smaller organizations); estimated 1–3 months for IRS approval
- Step 5 — Open organizational bank account and establish financial controls
- Step 6 — Execute partnership agreement with Iron County
- Step 7 — Launch first community fundraiser and submit initial grant applications
- Estimated time from county approval to fully operational 501(c)(3): 3–6 months

Bridge Period

Many successful Friends groups operate under an informal stewardship agreement during the 501(c)(3) formation period. We are prepared to begin volunteer site work — trail clearing, cabin assessment, community outreach — immediately upon county approval, even before formal 501(c)(3) status is complete. The formation process runs in parallel with early site activity, not in sequence.

SECTION 6 — SIGNED STATEMENT

The undersigned, as authorized representative of the Cooks Run Steering Committee and on behalf of the proposed Friends of Cooks Run, hereby affirms the following:

- All programs and activities at Cooks Run described in this proposal will operate in full compliance with the deed restriction requiring that the property be used solely for public purposes.
- This proposal shall remain binding and in effect for a period of ninety (90) days from the submission date of June 3, 2026.
- The Cooks Run Steering Committee and its nine member organizations have no conflicts of interest with the County of Iron.
- There are no pending lawsuits or judgments against the Steering Committee or its member organizations or their officers in the past five (5) years.
- The information contained in this proposal is accurate and complete to the best of the undersigned's knowledge.



Don Lintner, Chair
Cooks Run Steering Committee
On behalf of Friends of Cooks Run
Date: June 3, 2026

EXHIBITS

The following exhibits are attached to this proposal:

- **Exhibit A — Economic Value to Iron County: Cooks Run as a Recreational and Heritage Asset (one-page summary)**
- **Exhibit B — Cooks Run Property and Proposed Trail Map**
- **Exhibit C — Student Partnership Opportunities**
- **Exhibit D — Northwoods Heritage Guild: Historical Background on Cooks Run CCC/WPA History**

Exhibit A Cooks Run

ECONOMIC VALUE TO IRON COUNTY

Iron County Board of Commissioners
Prepared by the Cooks Run Steering Committee
Iron County, Michigan 2026

Iron County holds a one-time decision about 121.56 acres on Cooks Run. The choice is not simply between two land uses — it is a choice between a single, finite payment and a permanent, compounding economic asset for the county and its businesses.

Option A: Timber Harvest ONE-TIME REVENUE EVENT

\$30,000

PROJECTED NET TO THE COUNTY

- Revenue received once, in full, at harvest
- Timber cannot be reharvested for 30 to 80 years — likely beyond the planning horizon of this board and several that follow it
- Harvest activity temporarily disrupts site access, scenic quality, and habitat
- Generates no visitor spending in the local economy
- Does not fulfill the deed's public-use mandate in any meaningful way
- Creates no ongoing county revenue stream

⚠️ NON-RENEWABLE FOR A GENERATION

Option B: Friends of Cooks Run RECURRING ANNUAL ECONOMIC ENGINE

\$100K-\$500K+

ESTIMATED ANNUAL VISITOR-DRIVEN ECONOMIC
IMPACT (PHASE 2+)

- Western UP day-trippers spend an average of \$101.61 per visit on food, fuel, lodging, and retail (UMich EGI, 2024)
- Overnight visitors in western UP average \$356.61 per trip — the largest share going to local lodging
- Revenue recurs and grows year over year as the site develops and gains visibility
- US-2 signage captures travelers already passing through — no new marketing cost to the county
- Promotional materials at Cooks Run actively direct visitors to Iron County restaurants, lodging, outfitters, and attractions
- Timber is preserved — harvest remains an option for future boards if needed

✓ RENEWS EVERY SEASON, INDEFINITELY

THE BROADER TOURISM CONTEXT — UPPER PENINSULA, MICHIGAN

\$1.6B

Total UP visitor spending in 2023 — growing
7.7% year over year
MED. / UPTA 2024

\$101-\$357

Per-visitor spending in the western UP —
daytrippers to overnight guests
UMich Economic Growth Institute 2024

\$13.9B

Michigan outdoor recreation annual
economic contribution — 118,000 jobs
statewide
Michigan DNR

HOW IT WORKS —

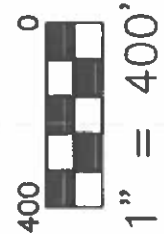
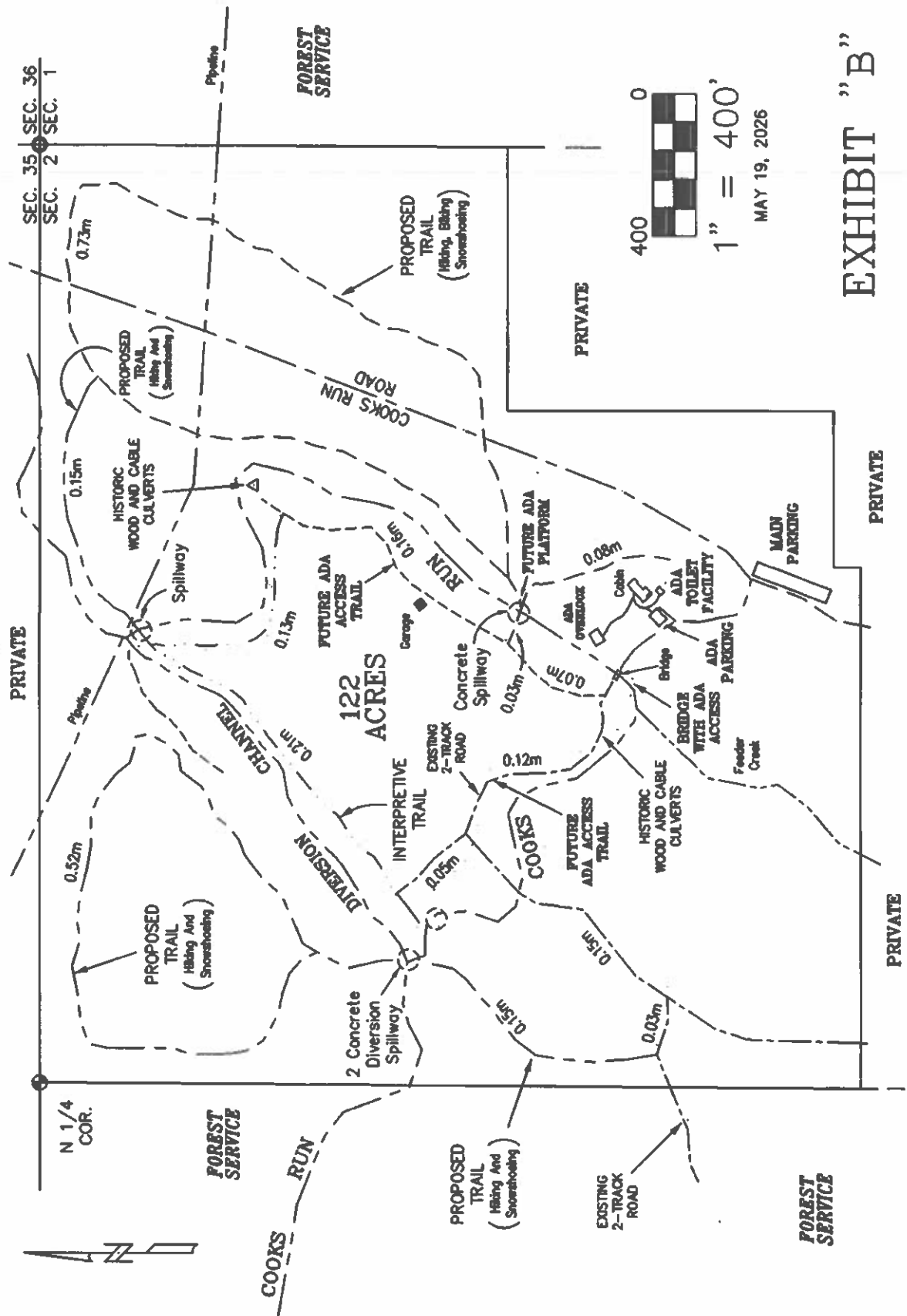
- Sign on US-2 → Visitor stops at Cooks Run → Picks up local brochures → Eats at Iron River restaurant → Books a local cabin → Returns next year

The timber harvest trades a permanent asset for a one-time payment. At just 1,000 visitors per year spending the western UP average, Cooks Run generates the equivalent of the timber value — every three months. This is a genuine partnership — the Friends group will lead fundraising, grant-writing, restoration, and operations, while the county contributes what it is already positioned to provide. For example, extending the existing winter road plowing to include the drive and parking area, or providing labor and equipment to install US-2 highway signage. These are the kinds of practical, low-cost contributions that make a public-private partnership work — keeping a valuable, renewable asset growing for Iron County indefinitely. The timber is preserved and remains an option for future boards if ever needed.

1,000 visitors/yr
@ \$101 avg
= TIMBER VALUE EVERY QUARTER

COOKS RUN PROPERTY

PROPOSED SITE IMPROVEMENTS
PARKING, TRAILS, VAULT TOILET



1" = 400'
MAY 19, 2026

EXHIBIT "B"

Exhibit C

COOKS RUN

Student Partnership Opportunities

A living outdoor classroom, historic site, and community destination — built with local students

🌲 Forestry & Ecology • Forest inventory and stand assessment • Stream health and water quality monitoring • Wildlife habitat field studies • Collaboration with MTU, NMU, Purdue faculty • USFS / DNR landscape-level science as curriculum resource	🏠 History & Heritage • WPA cabin: National Register of Historic Places • CCC era research, writing, and presentation • Architectural documentation and drawing • Connection to Camp Gibbs — one of Michigan's most complete surviving CCC camps • Oral history projects with community members
🎨 Art, Design & Fabrication • Poster and promotional design for 3–4 annual events • Interpretive trail sign design and content • Fab lab / CNC fabrication of installed site signage • Photography, video, and social media content • Real portfolio work installed at a public site	👥 Community & Leadership • Event volunteering and coordination • Student-led cabin and trail tours • Invasive species and stream bank restoration • Grant research and writing as classroom exercise • Civic engagement on a real county asset

Why this partnership works for your school

No cost to the district. Friends of Cooks Run carries all operational, financial, and insurance responsibility for the site. Real work, real results. Students produce signs, posters, and data that are actually used — not just graded. County-wide visibility. Your school's contribution to a public landmark recognized by the Iron County Board of Commissioners.

Exhibit D

Northwoods Heritage Guild: Historical Background on Cooks Run CCC/WPA

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects in Iron County, Michigan, during the 1930s and 1940s were focused on forest management, infrastructure improvement, and building public facilities. The Cooks Run Cabin, rearing pond structures, and surrounding forestlands are one such project (“Cooks Run”) that deserves to be maintained and improved in this 21st Century when, more and more, we are losing contact with our past and the land that provided us opportunities and recreation.

Cooks Run has potential to be a bright star in a constellation of Iron County CCC/WPA history. Other nearby projects prove it is not merely an outlier or remnant. A primary CCC site in the county is the closely located Camp Gibbs Recreation Area, which is one of the most complete surviving CCC camps in the state.

Camp Gibbs was established in 1935 by the 3604th Company. This camp, two miles south of the former lumbering town of Gibbs City, consisted of 19 buildings, including barracks, a mess hall, kitchen, officers' quarters, bathhouse, and garage. Today, 16 single-story, wood-frame gable-roof buildings remain, making it a key historical site of the era.

Key builders of Ottawa National Forest infrastructure, workers from Camp Gibbs and other local camps constructed miles of truck trails for fire control, erected fire lookout towers, and installed telephone lines. They likely built nearby Lake Ottawa's impressive log pavilion and visitor center. At Paint Lake, a separate CCC camp was active in the area, acting as a parent unit to the 3604th Company at Camp Gibbs.

Public works project are not just historical artifacts; they are *living* history.

Noteworthy projects include the multiple log structures still serving the public as part of Bewabic State Park near Crystal Falls. Transitioning from county park to state park, this facility serves tens of thousands of visitors each year. Pentoga Park's office and bathhouse (1936) are similar examples of efforts to improve recreational facilities in the area.

Cooks Run's expansive forestlands offer a unique recreational experience. Its well crafted log structure and interiors provide the opportunity for historical interpretation and ties together past and present, livelihoods and lifestyles. In a world increasingly disconnected from nature, Cooks Run has the potential to extend its history to future generations.