

## ***Track chair expands access in state park for mobility-challenged***

### **Donated by Friends of Ludington State Park**

By Steve Begnoche

An Action Track Chair purchased for Ludington State Park by Friends of Ludington State Park will improve access to miles of trails, the 1.8-mile walk (one way) trek to iconic Big Sable Point Lighthouse and the beach to people with mobility challenges.

The powered, tracked chair is now available to use, by reservation on the Friends of Ludington State Park website, <https://friendsofludingtonstatepark.org>, at no cost to the user.

Life-long area resident Jamie Spore, who uses a wheelchair having been born with spina bifida, recently used the Action Track Chair in the park on the Logging Trail and the beach near the Lake Michigan beach house.

“I had a blast!” said Spore, the 2016 Miss Michigan Wheelchair who serves on a Michigan barrier free design board. “It was so cool to be able to explore parts of the state park that I’ve never seen before even though I have lived here all my life.

“The Logging Trail reminded me of an enchanted forest like the ones you read about in children’s books. The warming shelter was so neat, too.”

But the best was yet to come.

“My favorite part of the day was visiting the beach. That was a blast! That was the first time in my life I ever successfully drove through sand,” Jamie said.

Earlier this spring, the park installed an FLSP-purchased SeaCoast EnChroma viewer on the Skyline Trail. The viewer enables color blind individuals to see color. A bike fixing station to be installed near the park headquarters also is an FLSP-funded project. In 2021, FLSP purchased a universal access kayak/canoe launch for use at the Hamlin Lake beach.

“Over the past 10 years, we have really focused on accessibility improvements for our visitors,” Ludington State Park Manager Jim Gallie, stated. “We’ve been fortunate to have such a great partnership with the Friends of Ludington State Park.”

FLSP, a 401(c)3 non-profit is marking its 30<sup>th</sup> year of helping Ludington State Park with a goal of making improvements to the park, its environment and the visitor experience through fund-raising for projects the park often is unable to do on its own and in providing volunteer support.

“The playground at Hamlin, the accessible beach walkway and now the EnChroma viewer and track chair, are all made possible because of this partnership,” Gallie said.

"The Friends are excited to have provided the track chair to allow individuals with mobility challenges increased access to the beauty of the Ludington State Park," said Patrick O'Hare, FLSP president. "Because we expect the track chair to be a very popular, we are currently fundraising for a second track chair to be added in May 2023"."

A Community Foundation for Mason County grant, funds donated to FLSP as the charity recipient of the Pure Ludington Brrrewfest and donations from individuals were used to purchase the track chair and a trailer for it.

"We expect that the track chair will get a lot of use by people visiting the lighthouse," Gallie said. "I expect that is where it will be most popular."

Spore said she was pleasantly surprised by how easy the chair is to control.

The rider uses a mounted joystick to control the chair.

It also has an option for a person walking behind the chair to control it by a handheld joystick if the rider is unable to operate a joystick.

Users of the chair will be required to be able to transfer into or out of the chair on their own or have someone with them who can assist in the transfer.

"Use of the chair will be limited to some areas, primarily so we can access the chair with our equipment in case it breaks down," Gallie added. "The beaches, lighthouse road, pathways around Hamlin and the Logging Trail are where we're going to start out allowing its use. If we discover more locations where we can get our equipment and trailer, that may change."

"We really appreciate the Friends group help in getting this chair for our visitors."

"It was fun!" Spore said of the track chair outing. While riding, she proclaimed, "It's a good day to be Jamie!"