

Negaunee Climbing Park



Who we are

The Upper Peninsula Climbers' Coalition is a non-profit Access Fund Affiliate. Our mission is to preserve and protect climbing areas in the Upper Peninsula. In doing so, we work with more than 20 different landowners. The UPCC is also the owner of Slug's Bluff—Michigan's First Climber-Owned Crag.

Our Board

John Miller - President

John first moved to the UP in 1998, and has been climbing since 1994. John is equally stoked to clip bolts, plug gear, boulder, ice climb, or develop routes around Marquette. In a typical year, he gets about 150+ days climbing/developing in the UP. John graduated from NMU (B.S. and M.P.A.) and MSU College of Law. When he isn't climbing with his wife, he is biking, skiing, SUPing, hiking, and playing with his dog.

Bill Thompson - Treasurer

For the last 30 years, Bill has lived and climbed in the beautiful Upper Peninsula of Michigan. While at Northern Michigan University, he was the director of the Outdoor Recreation Center leading adventure trips throughout the country and teaching classes for the outdoor recreation curriculum.

After he graduated from NMU with a Master's degree in Community College Teaching/Outdoor Recreation, he began a career at Down Wind Sports, an outdoor specialty retailer based in Marquette Michigan

He is a co-author of the guide books, *An Ice Climbers Guide To the Upper Peninsula of Michigan*, *A Rock Climbers Guide to Michigan's Upper Peninsula*, as well as the organizer of the country's largest gathering of ice climbers- the Michigan Ice Festival.

Kelly Laakso- Vice President

Having climbed since about 1982 at Taylor's Falls in Minnesota before the advent of indoor climbing walls. Since then, climbing has continued to be a passion taking Kelly to crags in the USA, big and small, from Yosemite to the Gunks and countless areas in between. Besides the lessons in friendship and self-discovery, it has taught Kelly how important access is to this endeavor.

Kamila Fassbender - Secretary

Kamila hails from the crags of Negaunee, though sometimes she pretends to be from Slovakia. She started climbing in 1996 upon seeing a climbing course poster in her high school dorm.

Her climbing adventures range from sport climbing in Slovakia, Austria & southern France prior to moving to the UP, to ice climbing in the UP, Colorado & Canada, and mountaineering in the Teton range and Canadian Rockies.

Today, she finds the greatest joy in seeing the smiles of people she introduces to climbing, especially the little ones. She loves fair weather weekend warrioring with inspiring people, whether it's climbing, biking, hiking or paddling, or volunteering with local trail organizations.

Other Board Members

Bryan DeAugustine

Brandon Snyder

Brian Weisner

Paul Demay

Brian Rajdl

Walter Krahn - Board Member Emeritus

Phil Watts - Board Member Emeritus

Jason Schneider - Board Member Emeritus

Our Projects

SLUGG'S BLUFF

Slugg's Bluff climbing area got its name after Leo 'Slug' Arbelius who owned this ten-acre parcel with his wife Alice Arbelius. Leo and Alice raised their family in Palmer, operated the local grocery store, and used Slugg's Bluff to graze their cows.

In the 1970s, climbers discovered this 80' tall quartzite cliff, and the Arbelius Family graciously allowed others to utilize this parcel for recreational uses.

Over the ensuing decades, the UPCC, in conjunction with NMU's climbing club (South Superior Climbing Club), organized numerous cleanups of this property. This involved the removal of all sorts of items that had been dumped over the lookout, as well as removing graffiti and garbage from the top of the escarpment.

In 2022, the UPCC approached the Arbelius Family to see if there was any interest in selling this undeveloped acreage. The UPCC had feared that the parcel would be sold, and that the new owner would not allow the public to access it. The Arbelius Family—in an act of unparalleled generosity—agreed to gift Slugg's Bluff to the UPCC. The UPCC, in return, has agreed to preserve this area for outdoor recreation and to erect a kiosk at the trailhead in dedication to the Arbelius Family.

Through this acquisition, Slugg's Bluff is now the first climber-owned climbing area in Michigan.

SILVER MOUNTIAN

Silver Mountain is one of the premier Midwest climbing areas, and it is located in the Ottawa National Forest.

The UPCC has worked closely with the Access Fund and the Ottawa National Forest to preserve this area. The UPCC has helped erase user created trails and camping areas, it has helped install kiosks and signage, and UPCOMING - the UPCC and Access Fund will spend several months creating hardscaped trails and belay stations with natural rock from the area. This will likely occur in 2023-2024, as we have received a favorable environmental study which was required prior to work commencing.

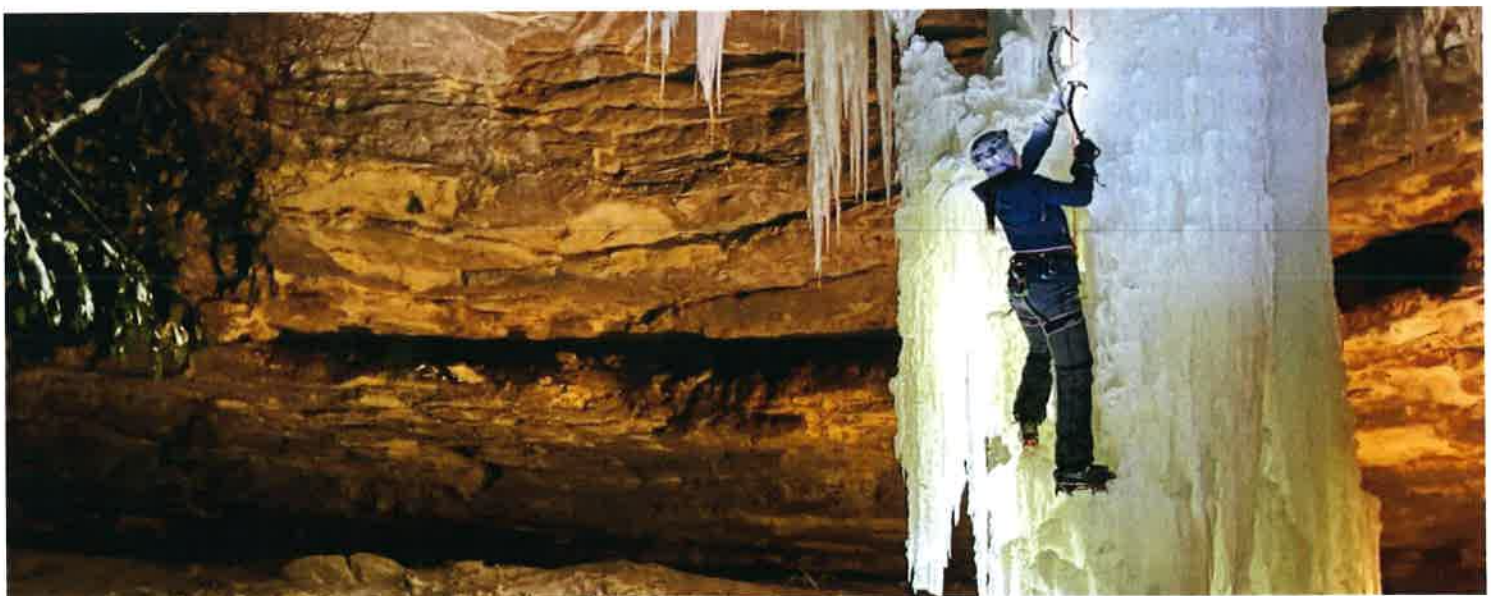
OUR VISION FOR NEGAUNEE

Outdoor adventure sports are rapidly growing in popularity with rock and ice climbing leading the charge. The Michigan Ice Fest has nearly tripled in size over the past 5-years, showing us that not only are there are more people climbing, but more people are willing to travel during both summer and winter months, to climb if the climbing is good and available.

Very few places offer good year-round climbing. Pictured Rocks has some of the best ice climbing in the world, but low-quality rock makes rock and mixed (rock climbing with ice climbing equipment) climbing impossible. Many locations have high quality rock but lack the ice to make them a winter destination. This is where Negaunee comes in. It has quality rock for summer rock and winter mixed climbing, access to water to produce ice for ice climbing, and best of all, easy accessibility for climbers.



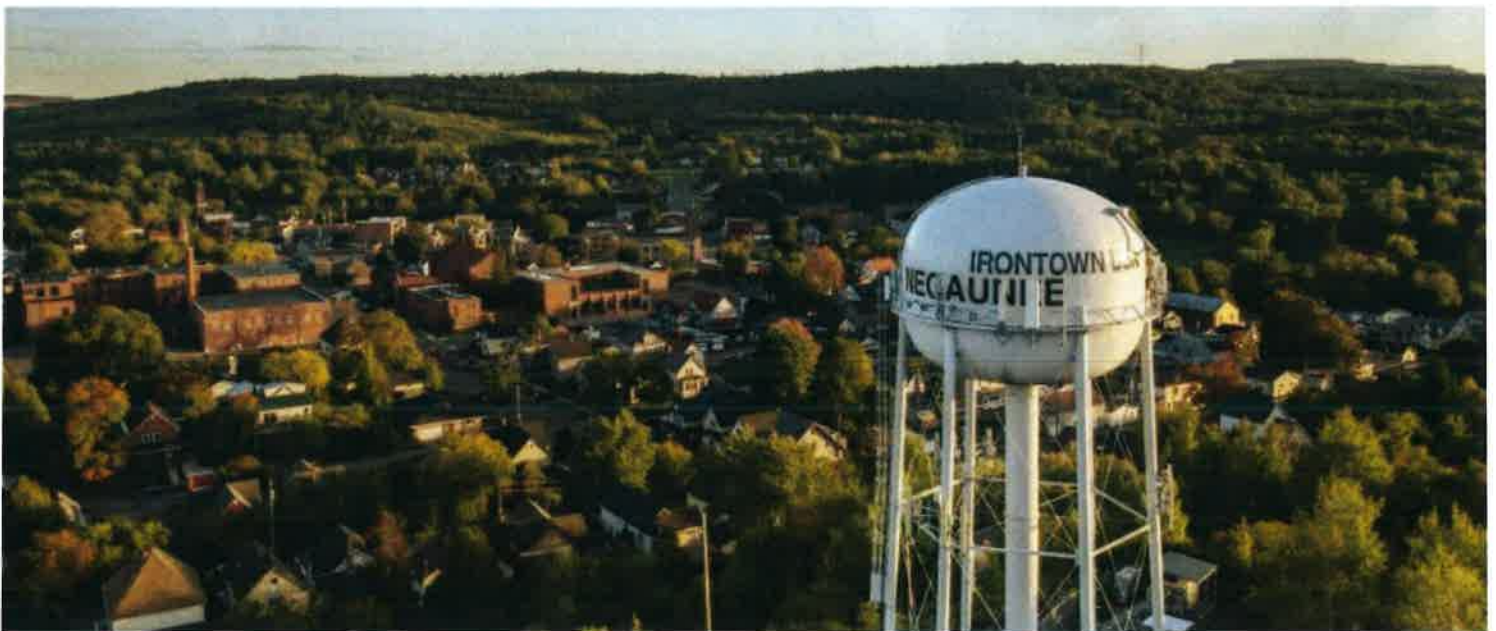
Our overall vision for the proposed climbing park in Negaunee will include dry tooling and mixed climbing aspects. Dry tooling is a form rock climbing that is performed on bare, ice-free, and snow-free, routes. Climbers use ice axes and crampons to ascend their route, but uses rock climbing equipment for and in their case belayers for protection. Alternately, mixed climbing involves both rock and ice surfaces for climbing. To ascend the route, the mixed climber uses ice climbing tools. Mixed climbing can vary from routes with sections of thick layers of ice and sections of bare rock.



We know that rock climbing is new to Negaunee and that the proposed locations for these activities would occur in abandoned mine pits. With this in mind, we understand that this park may cause some to question many aspects of the proposed project, based solely its location. However, UPCC would like to test the waters, by proposing this modest climbing park. This site was chosen due to its ease of access, physical needs, and for the limited risks that it could pose to climbers.



We hope one-day, the same success that has been found in Munising can be realized in Negaunee. Success that that has resulted in thousands of people from around the Midwest and world visiting this climbing location. We know Negaunee is primed to for this success, with its unique geology and access to public lands. When nurtured properly, this venue will draw visiting climbers that will contribute to the local economy and businesses of Negaunee.



Project Goals

1. Provide a year-round climbing venue for climbers of the Midwest which would include rock climbing and dry tooling.
2. Supplement the natural formations and expand climbing possibilities, including more moderate terrain for introductory climbing classes.
3. Focus on practical safety measures for climbers and create barriers to protect the public.
4. Provide an economic return to Negaunee and surrounding region.



Goal 1: Climbing Venu/Site Plan

To develop mixed and dry tooling crags providing a unique climbing opportunity for climbers in the Midwest.

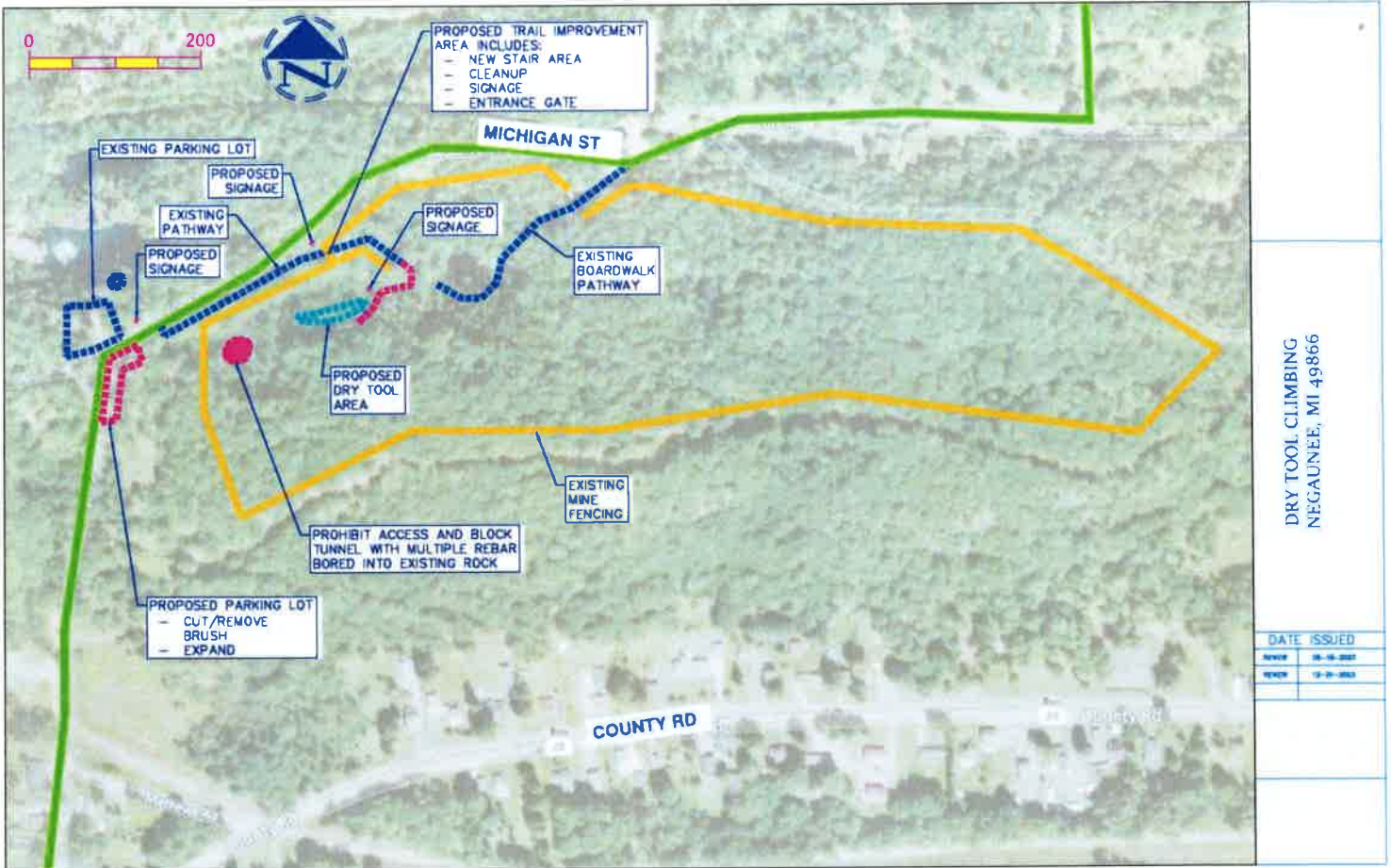
SOUTH PIT DRYTOOLING AREA



The site plan above represents how this climbing park will be laid out. The shaded grey area represents the entirety of the mine pit and its perimeter fencing. Parking will be located "old Michigan Avenue. Climbers will walk from this and other parking sites to the access gate. The red line represents the trail network that will be improved from the roadway to the base of the climbing area. The blue line represents the rockface of the cliff. The red boxed area represents the entrance of the tunnel where additional safety measures will be taken.

Although this may not fully represent all aspect of the entirety of the plan, it does represent the significant elements associated with this proposed project.

DRY TOOLING SITE PLAN



DRY TOOL CLIMBING
NEGAUNEE, MI 49866



Proposed dry-tooling wall in the south pit

COST

The cost in constructing this climbing venue is much lower than traditional parks. Below represents the necessary components and their estimated costs to construct this facility.

Item	Estimate
Chainlink Fence Gate	\$ 500.00
Signs	\$ 2,500.00
Rebarr Grate Covering	\$ 1,000.00
Kiosk	\$ 1,500.00
Misc.	\$ 500.00

Fundraising efforts will be made by the Upper Peninsula Climbers Coalition (UPCC) in partnership with City of Negaunee, either through private fundraising, grants, or placemaking grant opportunities. Ongoing costs to maintain the park will be provided and management by the UPCC.

Goal 2: Programing

The scope of programing for this park is limited by the physical conditions of the rockface. Such condition as being smaller in height and lacking the need for great skill, making tohis park ideal for all climbers. Dry tooling, the primary form of rock climbing for this site, utilizes ice axes to assessed the rockface. This method secures and attaches a rope from above and employees a belayer to prevent most falls.



Goal 3: Safety

Safety of this proposed climbing site is the top priority. UPPC has taken steps to carefully choose this location. Knowing that this site is located in an abandoned mine pit, we understand it may cause concerns for some.

With this foreknowledge, we have taken the following measures centered around safety, to help ease those with concerns and to provide a safe climbing experience. These measures are centered around climber access, gate access, signage, fencing, and locations beyond the climbing site.



ACCESS

Limited access to the climbing site will be put in place in order to prevent unqualified persons from utilizing the site. Access will be limited via a locked gate incorporated into the existing fencing that surrounds the climb-site areas.

Qualified persons wishing to climb at this site will need to contact the UPCC for access. This information will be relayed on signs, our website, the and city's website. Additional, internal controls to limit liability will be put into place, such as waivers, notices to climbers, and liability insurance to protect the UPCC and the City of Negaunee.



GATE ACCESS

Control of this site is pivotal, currently the site is surrounded by fencing that prevents individuals from accidentally falling into the open pit beyond the fencing perimeter. To access this site, an access gate will need to be installed. This gate will be made of chain-link fencing and will be 8-feet wide by 5-feet in height, the same height as the fencing. Although this will not guarantee that all unauthorized access will be negated, it is not designed for these means. The gate shall be in place to be recognized as the official point of entrance to the climbing park and for access to emergency first response personal. Climbers wanting to access the site will need to contact UPCC for access. UPCC will maintain controlled access through their adopted policies for this location.



Signs

Signs will be installed to help provide both safety warnings and direction to users as well as the general public. UPCC will install and maintain all signage associated with this project. Signs will be installed along the fence line where necessary with **“NO TRESPASSING”** signs and **“DANGER BEYOND THIS POINT”** signs.

Signs will be placed on the top (descending area) and at the bottom (ascending area) providing safety checks for climbers before descending or ascending. Additional signage will be placed at both the ascending area and the locked gate that advises **“CLIMB AT YOUR OWN RISK”**. A Universal rock falling sign will be placed at the base of the climbing area and **“TECHINCAL ROCK CLIMBING”** signs will be placed at both the ascending and descending areas. Signage will also be placed to the west of the climbing area that restricts access beyond the climbing area that reads **“STOP NO ONE ALLOWED BEYOND THIS POINT NO TRESPASSING”**. Finally, a sign will be located at the locked gate providing information on how to access the climbing site.

Signs Examples

Climb at your own risk!

- Access beyond this point is for dry tooling purposes only.
- By using this area you are voluntarily assuming all risk of injury or death. By the inherent nature of the property, many hazards exist, including, but not limited to: steep cliffs, falling rock and equipment, slippery and steep surfaces, falling trees, animals, uneven trails, and unforeseeable conduct of others.
- Do not drop or throw anything from the cliff - climbers below.
- Day use only - no camping or fires.
- Leave no trace. Leave your crag better than you found it.

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CLIMBING WALL RULES

- All climbers will wear a harness and helmet inside the fence (safety zone) at all times.
- Before the participant begins to climb, the climber must say "on belay" and "ready to climb" with responses from the belayer being "belay is on" and "climb on", respectively.
- No one will go behind the fence (inside the safety zone) unless directed to do so by a belayer or staff member.
- Listen to and obey the climbing wall staff at all times.

Access Contact

- Access beyond this point is for dry tooling purposes only.
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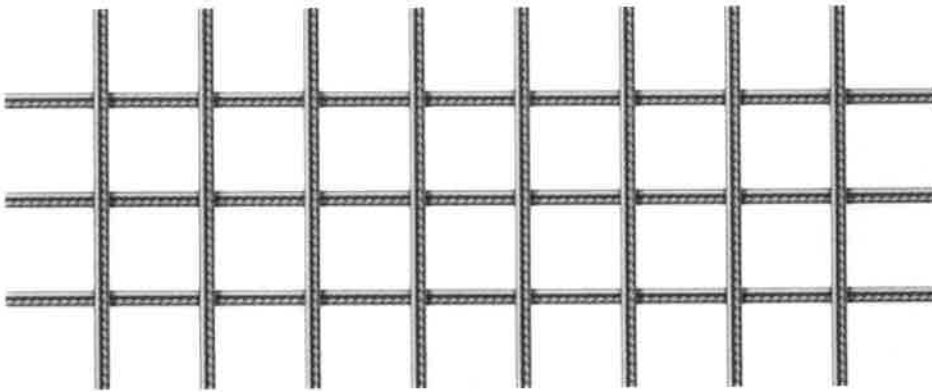
Fencing

Fencing is installed around the open pit where the proposed climbing park is located. All fencing will remain in place, with exception to the section that must be removed to install a gateway access point. Should additional fencing be requested, the city shall consider the merits of such fencing. Should the installation of additional fencing be found necessary by the city, the city shall install or cause such costs to be included in the scope of this project.

Beyond the Climbing Site

To the west of the climbing site, a pit mine drift continues west for approximately 450 to 500 feet, with the walls of the pit climbs dramatically to 80 to 100 feet in height. Located near the end of this drift is a tunnel once used for mining. The tunnel is not in good shape and unsafe for use. With this known, it would be required that a covering be installed over the tunnel opening to prevent entry to the tunnel. In addition, signage will be installed near this tunnel location.

Tunnel Rebar Grate Example



Goal 4: Economic Return

UPCC's goal is not just to provide a unique recreational opportunity within the city of Negaunee's public park system, but aide in economic development. What does this mean? UPCC's believes that when visitors are staying at hotels/motels, short-term rentals, or campgrounds, shopping at local stores, eating and drinking at local bars and restaurants; are contributing financially to the local economy, this is economic development.

A study conducted by the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), found in 2020, \$689 billion dollars was contributed to the outdoor recreation economy of the United States. This same study concluded that \$14.4 billion dollars of this figure represented climbing.

A study conducted by Dr. James Maples and Dr. Michael Bradley (Arkansas Tech Univ.) was released in 2020, on the economic impacts of rock climbing in Kentucky's Red River Gorge. Although this site has been long established and attracts over 100,000 visitors a year, should even a fraction represented in their conclusions be realized in the Marquette area, it would be a significant economic impact on the area. Their study concluded:

1. Climbers spend an estimated \$8.7 million each year in the Red River Gorge.
2. Climber expenditures support an estimated 104 jobs and \$2.6 million in wages each year.
3. Climbers spend an average of around \$75 per trip.

4. Recent increases in spending are explained by increases in visitations, expanded spending opportunities in the region, and local businesses courting climbers as clientele.
5. Climbers are well-educated professionals with 84% holding a Bachelor or higher degree.



The outcomes of these studies should not conclude that the proposed site in Negaunee will provide the same economic returns. The study conducted by Maples and Bradley provides the economic impact of only one well established climbing venue. The proposed Negaunee site will be much smaller and limited in use. However, should the full realized of this site occur, its impact could be similar to other venues that have realize great success.

Conclusion

UPCC has demonstrated in its proposal that it is committed to providing unique climbing experience that primarily focuses on safety first. We are also focused on ensuring that this park can truly be an asset not only to the Negaunee, but the all those choose to live and play in the UP. We assert, when built and promoted correctly, a special park such as this will build on Negaunee's unique history, recreational holdings, and will contribute to the local economy. Our hope one day is to realize the full spectrum that this park will offer.



Nathan Heffron, City Manager

April 24, 2024

RE: Recommendation to Advance Dry Tooling Park

Dave Nelson,

The Negaunee Parks and Recreation Commission was provided a presentation by the Upper Peninsula Climber's Coalition (UPCC) at their most recent meeting in April, concerning the installation of a dry tooling climbing park. After reviewing the UPCC's information the commission is recommending that the Planning Commission hold a Special Land Use Hearing at their earliest convenience on this matter.

I have provided a copy of the presentation by the UPCC for reference, should you have any question concerning this issue, please free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Nate Heffron

