



Carolina Thread Trail receives \$58,000

December 01, 2010

By Karen Cimino Wilson

HARRISBURG, N.C. -- Harrisburg will soon have its first finished stretch of The Carolina Thread Trail thanks to a \$58,000 grant from Advantage Carolina.

The grant will pay for the construction of 2.3-miles of trail along the Rocky River in Harrisburg. The trail will be a natural surface of compacted dirt and will be made for walking, running and biking.

The trail will start at Pharr Mill Park and then loop back to the park, said Dan Sullivan, director of parks and recreation for Harrisburg. He said eventually it will be linked to other sections of The Thread.

Sullivan said the project fits well with residents' priorities based on recent surveys.

Located in Cabarrus County, this segment of The Thread is part of a priority corridor identified and supported by the community.

The Carolina Thread Trail is a 15-county, two-state initiative designed to inspire and facilitate the creation of a regional network of trails, blue ways, and conservation corridors to eventually link more than 2.3 million citizens. Communities plan and implement their portions of the trail with help and guidance from the Carolina Thread Trail.

Catawba Lands Conservancy is the lead agency for The Thread, working in partnership with Foundation For The Carolinas and many other local partners.

Since The Thread's launch in 2007, eight of 15 counties have fully adopted countywide master plans encompassing 876 miles of planned trails. The project has transitioned from planning to building trails on a regional scale, with 67 miles now open for public use.

Segments of The Thread have already been completed in Concord and Kannapolis, but the grant awarded this week will help Harrisburg complete its first segment.

"With this one trail done, hopefully it leads to another trail," Sullivan said. "This Carolina Thread Trail is a way to connect Concord to Kannapolis to Harrisburg. We just need to fill in the gaps."

The Advantage Carolina fund is designed to support the overall economic health of the Charlotte Region through support of initiatives in four key areas: economic development, regionalism, education and inner city development.

Advantage Carolina's support in 2009 funded the yearlong planning process of developing Lincoln County's master Thread Trail plan. The master plan was fully adopted by Lincoln County on Nov. 16, 2009.

The \$58,000 grant also will help pay to train 16 volunteers in the techniques to construction natural surface trails and how to manage volunteer trail construction teams.

Sullivan said the current project will be built by Advantage Carolina and the trail will be maintained by Harrisburg, but the training may lead to future sections of the trail being built by volunteers.

"We'll be able to bring on (volunteers) while the trail is being built," Sullivan said. "That way if they want to build a trail as a scout project or any folks who are into building trails can come in and learn."

The volunteers who will receive the training will be selected through an application process and taught by a professional trail educator. Graduates of the training program will lead trail construction projects to advance The Thread in communities throughout the region.

"We're extremely grateful to Advantage Carolina for this grant and for recognizing the value this project adds to our regional trail building initiative," said Alex Rankin, President of Concord Engineering & Surveying and member of The Thread's Governing Board.

"In a time of reduced local funding and staffing, volunteers will provide the enthusiasm and 'boots on the ground' for turning trail concepts into miles of natural trail open for public enjoyment."

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