

Regional Trail Meeting Minutes May 7, 2008

Present: Angela Twitchell, Carla Rensenbrinh, Darryl Sterling, Tom Reeves, Ben Long, Heather Jackson, Kathy Durgin-Leighton, Nicole Briand and Katrina Van Dusen

Introductions:

- Angela Twitchell & Carla Rensenbrinh, are both on Topsham Conservation Commission & Topsham-Brunswick Land Trust- Topsham is currently working on their Head of Tide Park on the Cathance River and would like to extend their trail system along the Cathance River. Topsham has trails along the Androscoggin River, Foreside Park, Highland Green and some additional areas.
- Darryl Sterling, Richmond Community Economic Development Director- Richmond is working on revitalizing their Conservation Commission. Richmond has some trails but calls for new trails within various Town plans.
- Tom Reeves, Gardiner Conservation Commission & Consultant – Gardiner is currently working on a trail along the Cobbosseecontee Stream. Augusta is also working on expanding their trail system and making trail connections.
- Ben Long, Bowdoinham Biking, Walking & Paddling Committee, Kathy Durgin-Leighton, Town Manager, Nicole Briand, Town Planner & Heather Jackson - Bowdoinham has several one-way trails including one that goes down the Cathance River. Bowdoinham's Waterfront Plan calls for the development of trails along the Cathance River on Town owned land.
- Katrina Van Dusen, Regional Planner for Mid-Coast Council for Business Development and Planning. Katrina may be able to assist this regional project in some limited form in the next fiscal year.

Regional Trail possibility:

Everyone expresses interest in the idea of a regional trail connecting our communities and were excited about the interested in and possibility of a regional trail. A regional trail would be a great opportunity for economic development.

Tom Reeves shared his projects Forgotten Assets Map which included Gardiner, Richmond & Bowdoinham.

The group discussed the possibility of using the railroad as a trail.

- The railroad would make a great trail because:
 - it travels through our village centers,
 - it travels along the Kennebec River and Cathance River
 - its an existing corridor.
- Given the terrain and water located along the railroad bed a rail and trail project would probably be too expensive, as the Augusta to Gardiner Kennebec Rail Trail (rail & trail) cost about .5 million dollars per mile. However, there might be a possibly of a rail & trail in some locations.

- The most desired option would be a rail to trail, so that the trail could use the existing trail bed.
 - The barriers to pursuing this option would be:
 - The desire for and idea that passenger trains will return and use this track for Augusta to Portland service.
 - The precedent that was set with the Kennebec River Trail. That trail cost an average of ½ million dollars a mile to preserve the track for future service.
 - The way to pursue this option would be:
 - To do an analysis for the cost of train service (cost to repair the track for service and the cost government subsidies for the service) versus the benefit of having the service.
 - To do an analysis for the benefit of having a regional trail.
 - To do an analysis of the cost of a rail to trail versus a trail in a different location.

The group discussed the possibility of using the “old lead line,” which is an old New England Telephone Easement.

- Research would need to be done regarding the status of that easement and the possibility of it being used for a trail.
- Would the current easement holder allow it to be used for a trail?
- Would property owners be willing to give a easement for a trail in the same location as the existing easement?

Another possibility would be to create a new trail corridor and maybe using existing trails in some areas if possible.

Discussed options regarding how this project could be organized.

- Towns/City work individually (with support of others) within town/city but with an agreement to work together on overall regional project as “coalition” which includes other stakeholders (regional council, state agencies, non-profits, heathly maine partnerships, land trust, etc.) to gain support, resources and funding for the project.
- Form intragovernment agreement has the municipalities did for the Kennebec River Rail Trail.
- Regional Organization
- Find Land Trust or Non-Profit to champion project.

Discussed sources for planning/support:

- Regional Planning Council
- Oil Pipeline / Base Closure – fund planning for alternative economic development? (railroad study, old telephone easement research, regional council to do work plan, etc)
- Grants
- NPS – Trail Conservation Assistance Program

Discussed need for a project work plan.

- It would be great if our regional planning council, Mid-Coast Council for Business Development and Planning could create and coordinate this regional work plan.
- National Park Service Trail Assistance Program – could this program do this?
- Obtain funding to hire a private consultant.
- We could try to do it ourselves.
- We should try to get some work plans that other groups have created to use as a reference.

Next Steps:

- Tom Reeves will contact Sally Jacobs who worked on the Sunset Trail (rail to trail project) to see if she could come talk to us about the process that they went through. Possibly May 21 during the day, as Topsham's Town Meeting is that night.
- Tom Reeves will see if he can get someone from the Rails to Trails program to come talk with us.
- Try to get other people who have been on a regional trail project to come talk with us (East Coast Greenway, Kennebec River Rail Trail, etc)
- Nicole Briand will talk with Burnham Martin to see if he can meet with us to discuss the NPS – Trail Conservation Assistance Program and “how-to” Work Plans.
- Research different ways in which the Towns/City could organize: agreements, intragovernment agreements, coalitions, etc.
- Start the discussion with Town Officials, Selectmen, & Council: will they support a regional trail project, what kind of agreement would they be willing to enter into with other municipalities, ideas, etc.
- How could we obtain funding from the oil pipeline and/or the base closure to fund this regional economic development project???

Discussed next meeting:

- daytime meetings would work for most people, especially Staff.
- Having some day meetings could allow us to get “organized” sooner, but some night meetings will still be needed throughout the process.

Next Steps:

5/7/08 nb