

McLean County Greenways News

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From the Chair

Michael Brown, Ecology Action Center

Welcome to the very first edition of the new McLean County Greenways newsletter. Through this new publication, the McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee hopes to promote greenway initiatives and the fine work being done by numerous organizations in our community.

You may be thinking, just what are greenways? Greenways are interconnected natural areas set aside or managed for recreation or conservation. These areas take advantage of natural features such as creeks, streams or artificial features such as abandoned railways. The benefits are many, including watershed protection and restoration, habitat for wildlife, plus opportunities for hiking, biking, walking, canoeing, and more. You know your local greenways; you just don't call them that – Constitution Trail, ParkLands Foundation natural areas following the gentle curves of the Mackinaw River, Sugar Grove Nature Center near Funks Grove and many more.



It is my sincere wish that each of you continue to utilize existing greenways and support and improve efforts to expand them. I urge everyone to check out the McLean County Regional Greenways Plan found on the McLean County Regional Planning Commission website at www.mcplan.org. Share this newsletter with a friend or offer to contribute an article. Join one of the many partners of the Greenways Committee in their efforts to protect and restore our local natural areas and recreation corridors.

Best yet---get out and enjoy them.

Michael Brown, Ecology Action Center

Chair, McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee

IDNR Economic Impact Study

By Marla Gursh, IDNR

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is completing a trails economic impact study, from the perspective of local businesses and community residents. Selected communities with major trails, including Bloomington-Normal and the Constitution Trail, are featured in the study.

Respondents to the mailed survey indicated strong support for the Constitution Trail and recognize a variety of trail-related benefits. Over forty percent of businesses surveyed reported increase of revenues from added customer activity because of the trail. Some Bloomington business owners indicated a desire to see the trail expanded into downtown.

Thirty-six percent of B-N residents surveyed believe the trail has increased the value of their property, while the remainders have seen no negative impact to their property or neighborhood. Close to twenty-nine percent of those who responded use the trail to commute to work. IDNR will announce the results of the entire statewide survey soon.

Constitution Trail: From Concept to Treasured Amenity By Mercy Davison, Town of Normal Planner

In the late 1980's, the City of Bloomington and Town of Normal paved the way for one of the best amenities in the community---Constitution Trail.

The original section of the trail stretched south from Normal Town Hall to a newly-constructed bridge over Emerson and east from the current Connie Link Amphitheatre location to Airport Road, close to four and a half miles.

The concept was not without community concern. Would it bring crime? Would it decrease adjoining property values? Would the community even use it? More than twenty-five years later, the trail has developed into a linear recreational park of immense importance.

Today, the trail stretches and winds its way for close to thirty miles throughout the B-N metropolitan area. Ultimately, Constitution Trail will be a connecting point for the Historic Route 66 Historic Bikeway which will run from southwestern McLean County to Chenoa. Eventually, the Route 66 portion will also become part of the planned Route 66 State Trail from Metro East St. Louis to Chicago. To date, approximately seven miles of the historic bikeway have been built, far exceeding Route 66 progress in any other Illinois community or county. Future improvements have always been a part of Constitution Trail. The Town of Normal is collaborating with Illinois State University on way-finding improvements and signage where the trail passes through campus.

In 2011-12, the municipalities of Bloomington and Normal agreed to clear sections of the trail of snow for better access during the winter months. Another future plan is to add a trail section along Northtown Road in Normal. Since 2011, the city and town have undertaken a trail count initiative. Three times a year, volunteers monitor trail activity. Counts are done in February, May and September. Trail counters are stationed at sixteen locations along the trail with counts being done several days of the week.

Counter's note the user's gender, whether they are on foot, bicycle or another mode of transportation, such as rollerblades, wheelchair or skateboard. The highest trail activity was recorded on a Tuesday in September 2011 at the intersection of Mulberry Street and Uptown Normal where 396 people were counted using the trail from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Typically, the number of women and men on foot is relatively equal while men cycling outnumber women by almost three to one.

In May 2013, the trail count system will be expanded to an in-depth survey of trail users. Survey forms will include the user's demographics, frequency of trail usage, and whether trail usage is linked to expenditures at local businesses.



Ben Davison, a third grader at Metcalf Elementary School in Normal, volunteers as a trail counter near Emerson Street. Ben is among many trail users and enthusiasts who volunteer a few times a year to assist the Town of Normal and City of Bloomington in compiling Constitution Trail use information.

The philosophy behind the expanded survey is to better understand trail users for the purpose improvements, education and expansion. I encourage anyone interested in volunteering for future trail counts to contact me at mdavison@normal.org or at 454-9590.

McLean County Parks News

By Mike Steffa, Director of McLean County Parks and Recreation

It's been a busier-than-normal winter for the McLean County Department of Parks and Recreation. The streambank stabilization and wetland demonstration area at COMLARA Park is now a reality. Also, construction of a 26-station interpretive trail with an overlook at the wetland is also nearing completion. The project is near the intersection of 2300 North Road and 1300 East Road at COMLARA Park and Evergreen Lake. This tributary (Tributary 3) was chosen for the project because of this location.

The tributary was also dumping the most sediment in Evergreen Lake. It also had a major erosion problem so riffle structures were placed in the stream channel to slow the water flow. Rip-rap was also put along crucial shoreline of the stream to prevent soils from eroding, thus keeping the sediment from entering the lake. The wetland is designed to act as a filter which prevents nitrates, phosphates and more sediment from entering the stream.

We will soon announce a date for an “open house” of this area in April, so stay tuned. This project could not have been done without the assistance of Jackie Kraft at the McLean County Soil and Water District, Rick Twait at the City of Bloomington Water Department, Wayne Kinney with Midwest Streams, Inc., the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation, U.S. and Illinois Departments of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Jarrod Boyle of Boyle Excavating and McLean County Parks and Recreation staff.

The Parks Department is also working on removing invasive tree and brush species from COMLARA Park. Autumn Olive and Japanese Honeysuckle are targeted for removal. If you see areas that once had brush or small trees and no longer do, it is likely these species have already been removed. After removal, the Parks Department will concentrate on replanting these areas with native trees and prairie grasses and securing grant monies for this project. Donations are also being accepted.

To learn more, please contact me at (309) 434-6770.

Greenways Developments

McLean County was the recipient of an \$800,000 Illinois Transportation Enhancement Fund (ITEP) grant in January. The monies will be used towards construction of a 2.5 mile section of the Historic Route 66 Bicycle Trail. The section will stretch from Northeast Normal to just past the Village of Towanda. Construction of the section is expected to commence in spring or summer of 2014.

McLean County Wheelers Metric Ride

The McLean County Wheelers will be hosting their Metric ride on June 8, 2013 at COMLARA Park, 13000 Recreation Dr., Hudson. There will be three routes of twenty miles each, and a ten mile family ride. Registration begins at 6:30 am, and lunch will be from 10:30 am - 2:00 pm. The registration fee is \$25.00 until May 17, and \$30.00 after, including the day of the event. Details will be available at mcleancountywheelers.com.

Greenways Info

If you are interested in becoming a member, or are interested in attending McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee Meetings, please contact Rick Nolan at rnolan@mcplan.org or (309) 828-4331 ext. 26