

Trail Talk

By Steve Litts, Executive Director
Dickinson County Trails Board

UPCOMING PROJECTS FOR 2010

Your Dickinson County Trails Board has several projects on our agenda for this summer. Here's a rundown of the work you will be seeing:

Garlock Slough Trail: This will be a new trail running from Three Cross Roads, near the First Lutheran Church, north over DOT and DNR land and emptying out into a new trail head at Emerson Bay Recreation Area. Also, the First Lutheran Church will begin construction on a trail rest area on their church grounds. This will be a welcomed pause as walkers and bikers enjoy their journey around the west side of West Lake Okoboji. We anticipate official DOT approval that will set a March or April bid letting date.

Silver Lake Trail: The bid letting date awaits final design approval from the Iowa DOT, but we anticipate starting this project in early summer. It will connect the town of Lake Park with the housing and recreation areas on the west side of the lake, now only accessible by Hwy. 9, and ultimately provide a spur off the planned rail trail, around Silver Lake.

Trail Renovations: As announced here previously, the bids have been let and contracts signed for major renovations to the Spine and Poyzer trails. The \$233,000 project will be funded in part with \$186,000 of federal stimulus funds. We should know more about the scheduling of this work in the near future. DCTB makes every effort to schedule work so trail use interruptions are minimized, especially at times annual trail events are planned. If your group anticipates using the trails this summer for a large group event (and we hope you do) keep us informed about the details of your event so we can try to schedule trail renovations around your event.

Railroad: We are working to develop a schedule for weed control and mowing along the railroad bed. We will also write grants that will fund the removal of the scrap railroad ties, install safe and attractive side railings and a solid floor to the tressel bridges along the route.

Grant Writing: DCTB will be writing at least two grants this summer for October submittal: a second grant to pay for the purchase of the IANW railroad. Readers of this column will recall that we received a grant of \$525,000 towards the purchase of the railroad. A balance of \$330,000 remains plus costs for tie removal and improvements mentioned above. We will also be writing a grant for the trail into the beautiful Yarnes Wildlife Management Area. I recall visiting this area before the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation had raised the funds necessary to save this from development. On that cold spring day we saw a Bald Eagle in a tree along the shoreline of Spirit Lake. Twice this summer I've seen a Bald Eagle flying over the lakes area: once over Hwy. 71 as

we approached Milford and once flying over the four-way stop at the Polaris corner. Our corner of the world just gets better and better, and we're proud that recreational trails has been able to be a partner in widening your access to its natural beauties.

Miscellaneous: We have two smaller projects that we hope we can work into our work schedule: Renovation and reshaping of the trail behind the old Okoboji City Hall and the connection of the trail from Peoria across the railroad tracks to the East Okoboji Slough trail. We are also working on improving our trail crossing signage. We have also contracted to have the drainage ditch on the east side of the railroad near Jackson Street in Spirit Lake cleaned out to improve drainage. Adjacent landowners are reminded that dumping of lawn wastes in the right-of-way creates drainage problems for all who live along that area.

HEARD ABOUT THE LAWSUIT?

A class action lawsuit has been filed by the lawfirm of Baker, Sterchi, Cowden & Rice, L.L.C., from Kansas City, MO. DCTB and Dickinson County are not a part of this lawsuit and the trail is not in any jeopardy. It only involves landowners adjoining the land that was rail banked. Any award that might come out of it would be paid by the Surface Transportation Board, a federal railroad regulatory agency. The presentation I attended in Okoboji included compliments about the railbanking program and recognized that land along a recreational trail often increased in value.

NATIONAL BIKE to WORK DAY

May 21st (3rd Friday in May) is National Bike to Work Day. Put this on your calendars and be looking for more details as your DCTB Bike to Work team gets out our plans to make this day a fun and healthful spring event.

That's the news for this month. Be checking next month's column and our website for additional information on trail construction and activities. (<http://www.co.dickinson.ia.us/> and click on Trails Board) Until then, as always, Happy Trails to you and yours.