

Trail Talk

By Steve Litts, Executive Director
Dickinson County Trails Board

As reported in the media last week, DCTB will receive \$186,365 in Federal stimulus dollars to perform our trail maintenance program this summer. You might wonder how this came about. Mid January we received a request for any "shovel ready" jobs in the county involving trails. Two were prepared and submitted: one for the maintenance project and one for a new trail. We wanted to cover both bases (repair and new). We also recognized it would assist the county in their budgeting process. Little did we know then just how important the Stimulus dollars would become. Our county supervisors had a daunting task in crafting the FY 10 budget. Though they had difficult decisions to make, DCTB extends our thanks to them for the high level of involvement they provided to all departments as they sorted through the many needs of the county and the limited resources available to them. You may not know, but less than half of the county budget is driven by decisions actually made by the county supervisors. In the final budget both the Trails Maintenance and Development budgets were cut significantly. Fortunately, the stimulus dollars we'll receive will allow DCTB to move forward with badly needed repair and resurfacing of many sections of the Spine and Poyzer trails. Final bid specifications are being completed as I write.

With the Stimulus funding comes some extra paperwork, plan reviews, etc. Thus, we may not get the work done prior to the start of the season. It could be scheduled in at various times throughout the summer or held up until after Labor Day. The Iowa DOT's process time will drive much of that. It is my hope that the work would be done by the end of October at the latest. The deadline for bid letting is January, 2010, so DCTB is well in front of that. This maintenance project is yet another example of how trails provide economic benefits to our county.

If like a number of people, you've been wondering about our progress with the purchase of the IANW Railroad, here's the scoop. DCTB has had productive discussions with the owner of the railroad and in collaboration with the Oselola County Conservation Board an appraiser has been hired to provide a yellow book appraisal that will meet Iowa DOT requirements. We expect this appraisal to be completed in late April. To provide the necessary time to complete the appraisal process and Iowa DOT funding for the purchase, DCTB has requested a six-month extension for completing our negotiations.

In previous columns I've addressed the need for both cyclists and drivers to use common sense and courtesy in sharing the road, but it's a reminder that can't be repeated too often. Enjoy the return of warm weather but remember to put safety first. Iowa's Bicycle and Pedestrian Encouragement Guide is now available. It is a FREE guidebook published by Iowa's Safe Routes to School program, and it's an amazing tool with step-by-step guides to encourage safe walking and bicycling. It's easy to use and easy to access. If you would like to take a look at the guide or would like to print your own copy visit www.iowasaferoutes.org/encouragement/

Last month I discussed the merits of STOP v. YIELD signs for trails. I know from observation and reports from our S.A.L.T. patrol that many cyclists don't observe STOP signs – on the trail or on city streets. The Iowa Bicycle Coalition recently spent five minutes at an Iowa intersection to see how motorists stopped. You guessed it, many didn't. You can watch a clip of this short survey at <http://iowabike.blogspot.com/2009/03/who-stops-at-stop-signs.html> Safe use of the streets is everyone's responsibility.

And remember, you can now find a list of trail events, board agendas and minutes of our meetings on the Dickinson County Website. Go to <http://www.co.dickinson.ia.us/> and click on Trails Board. Until next month, as always, Happy Trails to you and yours.