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Trail enthusiasts get the ball rolling

Doug Howard
Reporter

Take a hike, or just a stroll. Those are just two of the options that would be available to residents and visitors using a multi-county trails and greenways system being discussed among six area counties this winter.

About 60 people, ranging from hikers and bikers to city, county, state and federal officials, gathered at the Wabash & Erie Canal Conference and Interpretive Center Thursday to see how a regional trail system might look, function and benefit White, Carroll and several adjacent counties. With the working title of the Central Wabash Greenway Charrette, the meeting also included Cass, Howard, Clinton and Tippecanoe counties and explored connections for a six-county 'greenway' development through a 'visioning' process.

"When you're visioning, you have to forget really," said Rory Robinson, a representative of the National Parks Service on hand to help guide Thursday's meeting. But reality did filter into the discussions.

"I think everybody realized the economic impact of what the Monon Trail has done in Indianapolis," said Janet Dold, executive director of the Greater Monticello Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, following the meeting. "It makes the quality of life better for the people who live there."

By providing a new source of outdoor recreation, a trail system could benefit residents, as well as broaden the appeal for tourism by providing something extra to keep visitors in the area for an extra day or two.



Jean Howell and Sherry Hensely, members of the Carroll County delegation to a six-county brainstorming meeting Thursday, propose points of interest that might be connected as part of a regional trails system. Still in the idea stages, the proposed Central Wabash Greenway could ultimately link Carroll, White and adjacent counties with trails in the rest of the state.

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In turn, those same visitors might spend an extra dollar or two during their stay. “We’re already a family venue. It’s just taking it a step further,” said Dold. She said she believes the government’s decision to add a pedestrian/cycling path alongside the expanding Sixth Street corridor is a step in the right direction. “It’s that commitment up front that I think this whole initiative is going to springboard off of.”

Cycling enthusiast Philip Prescott was part of the White County delegation at Thursday’s meeting.

Since moving to White County from Indianapolis recently, he has become interested in the idea of designated paths for walkers, runners and others to enjoy the outdoors safely.

“I really enjoy riding in White County,” said the Ohio native. “It’s beautiful. Roads are decent and really, the people are very good. You get respect on the road and that’s nice.

“Part of my interest is getting other people in the community involved in it, but also bringing some other people here to see what we have to offer.”

At a meeting last month in Reynolds, the public was invited to start penciling in potential pathways, from bike routes using existing county roads to potential connections for the Sixth Street pedestrian trail.

“I think the exciting thing about this, Prescott said, gesturing to a six-county map, “is that you have the bike routes that go across the county and into the region. But we’re also talking about the Sixth Street trail and some other areas in Monticello where you could get people out that aren’t comfortable with riding on the road or walking on the road, who can take advantage of what we have and get out and get active.

“It’s very exciting. And it’s something that I believe in.”

On the bicycling front, a short-term possibility is simply marking bicycle routes with signage, while a long-range possibility might include linking up with a proposed rails-to-trails systems in Pulaski and Starke counties.

Building on a meeting in Reynolds last month, Prescott said the White County group, which includes members of the White County Historical Society, Greater Monticello Chamber of Commerce and Monticello Parks Department, plans on future meetings for public input in the near future.

“We definitely got the ball rolling, as far as seeing what the other counties are doing,” said Prescott. “And opening up the discussion on how it can become a broad plan, versus just what we’re doing in White County or in Monticello.

“Hopefully, it will get the interest out in the community and people will come with their ideas and speak up about what they want and what they feel we need.

“I’m sure we have other people out there that have other interests besides cycling and running or walking that they can bring to the table. And that’s all part of a greenways or trailways plan,” he said.

The trail movement in this area began in December 2005, at a meeting held in Delphi, but the idea of connecting counties using greenways was already part of an ongoing state plan.

INDOT Director of Greenways & Bikeways Ray Irvin said the state is interested in maximizing cost savings and efficiency by collocating infrastructure — where possible — under or alongside abandoned rail beds that can be converted to recreational trails.

“There’s a 48-inch sewer main under the Monon Trail in Indianapolis that serves the whole north side of the city,” Irvin noted. “We put it in at a fraction of the cost it would have taken to put it down one of our major thoroughfares.

“There are other communities around Indiana right now that are putting water out to industrial plants or out to new developments on these corridors.

“We see a time in the very near future — and I have a group right now very interested in southwestern Indiana — of creating coal slurry and pumping it to our utility companies and plants rather than putting it on trains.”

Irvin noted that such a system has already been used in Germany for years, adding that Indiana has even looked at expanding the possibility to include piping biofuels.

“If we’re going to create large amounts of ethanol from our corn and biodiesel from our soybeans, why couldn’t we connect pipes in to these agricultural communities exactly where the old railroads used to run, exactly to where the old grain elevators use to be, convert that into a slurry and literally inject it into a pipe at the farm? Send it on

its way to the ethanol factory or biodiesel plant.”

For more information on Indiana greenway and trailway discussions, activities and events, log on to www.indianatrails.org.

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