

Greenway planned

Depot ready

When Burgaw hosts the North Carolina Blueberry Festival on June 23 there will be more than antique cars, crafts, music and a blueberry bake-off at the annual celebration of eastern North Carolina agriculture.

The anticipated 20,000 or more visitors will see a newly restored train depot – one of the oldest in the state – that can now host community groups. In several years the white depot with a spacious open-air pavilion on one side will be the hub of a planned, two-mile long urban trail and greenway.

And in the distant future, if the state appropriates the money for railroad service, the



Photo by CR Townsend

Burgaw Depot moves toward completion in time for Blueberry Festival.

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Rail-trails by the numbers

Where does North Carolina stand in the national picture of rail-trail mileage? Well down in the bottom third with 51 miles, according to the September 2006 figures on Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Web site.

North Carolina Rail-Trails computes the state's rail-trail miles at 78.6 miles, how-

ever, which indicates the problem in coming up with accurate figures. North Carolina is a step above the 11 miles in District of Columbia and the 12 miles in Hawaii.

But the Old North State's rail-trail mileage is nowhere near the nation's Top 5: Wisconsin, 1,533 miles; Michigan, 1,398; Minnesota,

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1,327; Pennsylvania, 1,130; and New York, 805.

In their heyday railroads served states whose economies, size, geography and politics differed widely. The result today is widely varying mileages in each state for abandoned railroad corridors, corridors that might be converted into rail-trails.

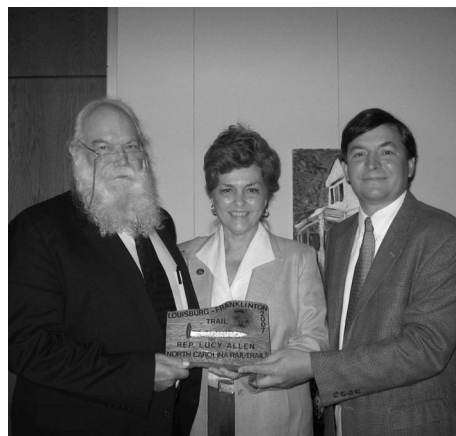
Still. A quick look at our neighbors is difficult to resist: Virginia, 198 rail-trail miles; South Carolina, 44; and Tennessee, 58.

And check this number: A 1936 Depression-era state rail map shows 5,200 miles of railroads in North Carolina. Today no trains run on 2,800 miles of those railroads.

Right now no one knows the exact number of miles of abandoned railroad corridors available for rail-trails and there is no time table, much less funding mechanism,

By the numbers (Continued on page 2)

<http://www.NCRail-Trails.org>



Golden Spike

State Rep. Lucy T. Allen receives North Carolina Rail-Trails' highest award, The Golden Spike, from NCRT board members AL Capehart (left) and Tony Reevy (right).

The legislator received the award for her leadership in conceiving, planning and funding of the initial phase of the \$589,388 Louisburg-Franklinton Trail. The 2.2-mile trail runs from the edge of downtown Louisburg to Vance-Granville Community College. Long-range plans call for extending the trail 10 miles into downtown Franklinton.

Greenway

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depot could handle freight and passenger service again and be part of a 27.2-mile rail with trail.

Workmen are racing to complete improvements that include painting, a new roof, replacement of rotten flooring and wooden siding and stabilization of the foundation and concrete piers. State Sen. R.C. Soles was instrumental in getting \$100,000 from the General Assembly to go with an additional \$30,000 that had already been appropriated for the project.

Before the improvements, the depot, which is more than 100 years old, hosted the local arts council and was used for storage. The arts council will remain in the restored 2,500-square-foot building where community meetings will be held for the town of 4,000.

Meanwhile, thanks to \$12,500 in town money spent for a landscape design for the Osgood Canal Greenway, town Planning Director Chad McEwen and his staff are drawing up grant applications to build an urban trail and greenway that describes a non-proportional two-mile long triangle around the downtown.

The trail runs along the canal to the south and east for about 1.25 miles and connects into the corridor of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, which has been railbanked by the state. Following the corridor for .75 miles, the trail then tacks back through the downtown to its origins along the canal.

"The trail will enhance the downtown," McEwen says. "It will make the downtown more bike and pedestrian friendly and provide buffering for the Osgood Canal, which is part of Burgaw Creek, an impaired water surface of the Northeast Cape Fear River."

Routing the trail along the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad right of way will require negotiations with the property owner,

the state Department of Transportation. There appears to be a precedent for encroachments on the right of way, either legal or de facto. Some driveways let onto the right of way and some industrial equipment is routinely parked on the right of way.

McEwen says crucial to an agreement with the state is that the trail not cross the abandoned railroad bed. "We don't want to spend the money required to complete this project and then have them (the state) tell us we've got to get off the railroad right of way," he says of the future possibility of rail service being reinstated.

The trail and greenway project does not yet have a price tag or a timetable. The grant applications will be sent to three sources: a DOT enhancement program, DOT's Safe Routes to School and the state's Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

While the Osgood Canal Greenway appears to be a matter of time, returning rail service to the old Wilmington and Weldon Railroad line is more complex. Restoring rail service would cost millions in state money as part of a larger transportation strategy to build a rail net from Wilmington's port to Fayetteville, Goldsboro and eventually Raleigh.

McEwen said he attended a meeting two years ago in Raleigh about restoring rail service. "I haven't heard any significant conversation since then," he says.

Were rail service to return to the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad line, North Carolina Rail-Trails would like to see rail with trail implemented on the 27.2 mile stretch from Wallace south through Burgaw to Castle Hayne.

"Our aspiration is that Burgaw's rail with trail set an example for Pender County's rail with trail," says AL Capehart, a NCRT board member. The lone rail with trail in the state is Carrboro's one-mile Libba Cotton Bikeway. There are 70 rail with trails nationwide.

Rail-trails in the area have been examined in a 1994 study, "Connections: A Rail-to-Trail Design Study for Pender County," led by Dr. Shishir Raval, a former N.C.

State University professor and NCRT board member. The plan was updated in 2002.

Be Active recognized

North Carolina Rail-Trails board member Shellie Pfohl's non-profit, Be Active North Carolina, received national recognition recently as the nation's best statewide organization promoting health and physical activity.

The Chapel Hill-based non-profit, of which Pfohl is vice-president and COO, was cited by the National Association for Health and Fitness for its work with public schools, its support of green space and its involvement with national health initiatives.

Be Active was praised for a 2005 report examining the financial impact of physical inactivity and unhealthy lifestyles on the state. The report estimated that the annual costs related to adult factors come to \$24.1 billion while childhood costs are \$38 million.

Delay in Greensboro

Problems with storm drainage have pushed the projected opening of a mile-long extension of the Battleground Rail-Trail in Greensboro back to mid or late 2008.

Design for the Pisgah Church Road to Markland extension should be completed by this summer. Purchase will follow with construction beginning by the end of the year or early 2008. Web site: www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/parks/facilities/trails

By the numbers

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for transforming all that potential into revenue-producing rail-trails.

For a complete overview of the national rail-trails picture check the Web at www.railtrails.org



Resource Contacts

NC Parks Trails Program	Darrell McBane	919-715-8699
NC DOT Rail Planner	Pam Davis	919-733-7245 x-274
NC DOT Bike-Ped. Div.	Tom Norman	919-715-2342
NPS Field Office, RTCA	Deirdre Hewitt	828-271-4779 x-272
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy	Betsy Goodrich	202-974-5122

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N.C. Rail-Trails: Where they are

Existing Rail-Trails

A. Strollway, 1.2 miles, Winston-Salem. Central business district south to historic Old Salem. B. Lake Brandt Greenways Trail, 5 miles, Greensboro and Guilford County. The rail-trail on the old Atlantic and Yadkin corridor connects 25-mile High Point-to-Greensboro Bicentennial Trail to parks and 27-mile trail system around Lake Brandt reservoir. C. Libba Cotton Bikeway, 1 mile, Carrboro. On active rail spur right of way. Connects Carrboro central business district to UNC campus. D. American Tobacco Trail, 22 miles, Durham, Chatham and Wake counties. Durham-to-New Hill corridor railbanked by NCDOT. Leased to local governments. Wake County section and first two sections in Durham are open to the public. For more information go to www.triangletrails.org E. Eagles Spur, 2.2 miles, Corps of Engineers. Stagecoach Road-to-Jordan Lake. Provides Jordan Lake access to Durham County spur of the American Tobacco Trail. F. Sabina Gould Walkway, 1.2 miles, Littleton in Warren County. G. Louisburg-Franklinton Trail, 2.2 miles from the Tar River in downtown Louisburg to the Granville-Vance Community College in Franklin County.

H. Skewarkee Trail, 0.9 miles. Connects downtown Williamston with the Roanoke River in Martin County. I. River to the Sea Trail, 11.5 miles, Wilmington. Partly on old Wrightsville Beach Trolleyway. J. Dunn-Erwin Rail-Trail, 5 miles on the Aberdeen and Rockfish Railway corridor, Harnett County. Federal railbanking by NCRT, purchased by Harnett County in 2006. K. Troutman Greenway, 1 mile in downtown Troutman in Rowan County.

L. Gold Hill Rail-Trail, 0.5 mile. Gold Hill in Rowan County. For more information go to www.historicgoldhill.com M. South Fork River Rail-Trail, 1 mile

on the old Carolina & Northwestern corridor on the South Fork River in Lincoln County. For more information, www.catawbalands.org N. Marcia Cloninger Rail-Trail, 0.7 miles on Carolina & Northwestern corridor in Lincoln County. Contact Chafin Rhyne, 704-735-1746. O. Forrest Hunt Greenway, 0.8 miles, Bechtler Development Corp. Alexander Mills community in Forest City, Rutherford County. P. Thermal Belt Rail-Trail, 8 miles, Bechtler Development Corp. Spindale to Gilkey in Rutherford County. Q. Brevard-to-Pisgah Forest, the first phase of 1.4 miles, beginning along U.S. 64 in Brevard, Transylvania County. R. Nantahala Bikeway, 0.5 miles, U.S. Forest Service. Nantahala Gorge, Swain County. S. Laurel River Trail, 3.6 miles in Madison County. T. Railroad Grade Road, 10 miles, Ashe County. Todd-to-Fleetwood. Local road built on section of abandoned Virginia-Carolina Railroad along South Fork of New River. U. Lansing Trail, 0.5 miles on the former Virginia-Carolina rail bed. Blue Ridge Resource Conservation and Development Council, Ashe County.

Development Projects

1. Jacksonville Greenway Rail-Trail, Onslow County. Phase 1 of 11-mile trail from Camp Lejeune to Jacksonville. For more information contact Mike Carter, 910-938-5313.
2. Cliffside Heritage Trail, 2.4 miles, Rutherford County. Cliffside to Caroleen. Contact NCRT, 828-495-4472.
3. Coastal Carolina Trail, 30 miles, Beaufort, Martin and Pitt counties. Contact James Rhodes, 252-830-6319.
4. Waccamaw Cypress Trail, 32 miles. Columbus County, Fair Bluff to Whiteville

Briefs

Rhonda Parker, the Jacksonville planning administrator who shepherded into reality the recently opened 5.2-mile trail in Jacksonville, is resigning and leaving the state.

"Rhonda's perseverance and professionalism were instrumental in getting this trail on the ground," said Carolyn Townsend, chair of North Carolina Rail-Trails. "We all owe her a debt of gratitude that will last for generations."

Norfolk Southern's likely abandonment of 18 miles of railroad between Brevard and Hendersonville has local area governments scrambling to convert the property into a linear park.

Josh Freeman, Brevard's planner, said railroad officials told him recently that they are entertaining two private offers for the property and told him essentially: "Make us an offer." The train line served Brevard's Ecusta paper mill, which closed about four years ago.

On May 24 about a dozen state and local officials met. Freeman said local governments will ask Natural Resources and DOT "to intervene and acquire (the property) and turn it into a regional linear park." Other options include acquisition by local governments or a non-profit. Railbanking is being explored.

Depot to Lake Waccamaw. Contact Terry Mann, 910-642-5029.

Initiatives & Studies

a. Elizabeth City Coast Guard Trail, 7 miles, Pasquotank County. Elizabeth City to Weeksville. Contact Dave Copley, 252-330-4514.

b. Deep River Nature Trail, 4 miles, Chatham and Lee counties. Trail loop study completed. Contact Margaret Jordan-Ellis, Deep River Park Association, 919-898-4814.

c. Granville Greenway Trail, 32 miles, Granville County. Oxford to Clarksville. Contact Jackie Sergeant, 252-492-7915x236.

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Mountain trails

Brevard resident and NCRT board member Mike Domonkos looks at rail-trails in Western North Carolina.

The Little Tennessee River Greenway in Franklin winds 4.5 quiet, asphalt-paved miles through Franklin. The 13-foot wide path is used for bicycling and hiking and has a children's park, picnic shelters, benches, an historic bridge and a new, covered bridge.

Almost two miles of the trail lie on the old rail bed of the Tallulah Falls Railroad, which carried passengers until 1946. All services ended in 1961. Check www.littletennessee.org/

Variouly named walking trails are on the abandoned 21-mile rail corridor of the Mt. Mitchell Railroad, which runs from Montreat to the mountain summit. At least five miles travel through Mt. Mitchell State Park.

The Mount Mitchell Railroad carried passengers and lumber for four years prior to June 1919. When the lumber supply was exhausted in August 1921, the railroad was converted into a toll road for vehicles. The toll road died in 1939 when the Blue Ridge Parkway opened, which offered free access for passenger vehicles.

Information, photos and maps are on the park Web site, www.ils.unc.edu/parkproject/visit/momi/home.html

The two-mile Commissary Trail starts at the park office's parking area and is an easy walk to Camp Alice - a historic logging and later tourist camp below the summit of Mt. Mitchell.

The Ecusta paper mill on the edge of Brevard closed about four years ago leaving rail-trail enthusiasts with one question: What will happen to the 18-mile rail corridor that runs from Hendersonville to the closed plant?

Norfolk Southern owns the corridor. Tracks remain in the rail bed and are asphalted over at the US 64 crossing where a sign reads: "Tracks out of service."

There has been no Surface Transportation Board filing for abandonment. Norfolk Southern is apparently waiting to see what develops at the Ecusta site where there is a For Sale sign out front and a large, undesirable collection pond. Several small businesses rent space in the massive complex. Observers wonder if the corridor will eventually become eligible for railbanking.

NCRT Summer Board Meeting

Saturday, July 14, 10:30 a.m.
Brevard Visitor's Center
35 W. Main St.
Brevard, N.C. 28712

NORTH CAROLINA RAIL-TRAILS INC. BOARD

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Pender County	Martin Beach	910-259-2151
Person County	Christy McCoy	336-322-0153
Pitt County	Charles Farley	252-355-6474
Rutherford County	Eric Wells	828-286-9673
Rockingham County	Katherine Mull	336-627-6270
Stanly County	Lindsey Dunavent	704-984-9560
Stokes County	David Simpson	336-969-6121
Transylvania County	Mike Domonkos	828-884-7648
Wake County	Leslie Kennedy	919-362-4011
Warren/Halifax County	Howdy Tomlinson	252-586-6270

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