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Greenway plan closer to reality

Jan Shinpaugh, Managing Editor 28.JUN.07

Marion County residents are one step closer to the reality of having its own Greenways and Trails association after a project proposal was approved by a committee to present to the public.

"All we're doing are concept maps. These are future (tentative) projects," said Daniel Carter at the June 21 meeting at the Church of Christ in Kimball.

The project maps will be done by Andrew Carroll, with Geographic Information Systems (GIS), a Tennessee company that provides geographic information for the environmental industry and conservation community. Carroll, a GIS co-coordinator at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, also has a private company.

The work and maps will cost \$3,040. That work includes base map design, and hard copy supplies. This amount will be presented to the Marion County Chamber of Commerce, and the committee could know by early August if the chamber will pay the bill.

Because the chamber of commerce is a private non-profit organization, the work does not have to be submitted for bids, Carter said.

Following the commissioners' acceptance of the plan, there will be three public meetings held in the fall of 2007, with dates yet to be determined.

"Our next step is to put it on paper and take it to the public," Carter told the Greenway Committee members.

The first phase includes providing hardcopy maps and digital images to help in the planning process.

The second phase will be to identify future focus areas within Marion County, which could be used as part of the trail.

This includes, on a tentative plan: Marion County Park to Prentice Cooper Tennessee River Trail; Town Greek Greenway from Jasper Town Hall to Industrial Park to City Park; Battle Creek Greenway from South Pittsburg to Kimball; Sequatchie River Greenway corridor from Jasper to Whitwell; South Pittsburg to Bridgeport; South Pittsburg Mountianside Trail; and South Cumberland Wildlife and Recreation Trail Map.

The existing/planned trail corridors are: Monteagle Goat Trail, Prentice Cooper trail System, Franklin State Forest Trail System, Fiery Gizzard Trail, public lands, South Cumberland Wildlife and Recreation Corridor, and potential scenic bike paths.

Planning ahead is vital to the healthy development of the county because the county has so much to offer, he said.

Marion County not only attracts tourists with its natural beauty, but also offers recreational activities for both tourists and residents.

The River Gorge Trust owns about 15,000 acres along the Tennessee River in Marion County, and 26 miles of the river, which flows through the county have been, designated a Tennessee Blueway.

The county also has Prentiss Cooper State Park on Suck Creek Mountain, which borders Hamilton County, Franklin State Forest that borders both Marion, and Franklin counties, Foster Falls Park and Raccoon Mountain, both of which are owned and operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority as recreational areas.

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Nickajack Lake, part of the Tennessee River, offers excellent fishing opportunities. Hale's Bar Marina, located on Nickajack Lake, has many recreational activities during its peak season, along with rental cabins on the water.

The Marion County commissioners had given their approval to the plan in October 2006, following a presentation by Carter. This, in no way, commits the county to pay for any of the projects. It was strictly an endorsement to allow the Greenways committee to proceed in its work.

However, with this support, Carter said, it will be easier for the greenway committee to obtain funding through federal and state agencies for its project.

Although the greenway project is not mandatory in connection with Tennessee's Three Star program, it can add needed points for Marion County, when the county next undergoes a review by state officials overseeing the Three Star program.

- Jan Shinpaugh, Managing Editor

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