

## Rock Hill embraces role in Carolina Thread Trail

By Matt Garfield · The Herald

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Rock Hill sits at the center of one of the boldest outdoor recreation initiatives to hit the Charlotte region.

The Carolina Thread Trail is expected to enter the city via a new U.S. 21 bridge over the Catawba River, making Rock Hill a prime place for outdoor lovers to start hikes, camping excursions and canoe and kayak trips down the river.

That's the word from the Catawba Lands Conservancy, which earned support from Rock Hill leaders this week. The City Council signed off on a resolution embracing the trail.

"It's pretty obvious that Rock Hill is at the epicenter of this project," said Saxby Chaplin of the Trust for Public Land, which is helping pursue the project.

The Thread Trail, under the leadership of the Catawba Lands Conservancy, will be a regional network of trails and greenways connecting communities and landmarks. This project could take 10 to 20 years to complete, but many legs of the trail should be in use long before that.

Potential pieces of the trail already are in place in York County. For example, a two-mile section of the Nation Ford Trail in Fort Mill running along Sugar Creek is a likely link. That trail could join with the Anne Springs Close Greenway and the 31 miles of trails circling Fort Mill. Another trail would connect Kings Mountain State Park, west of Clover, with Crowders Mountain State Park in North Carolina.

Chaplin said the trail crossing the Catawba River into Rock Hill will be akin to "opening the west for settlement" because it would allow hikers to head south to scenic areas around Great Falls and other southern destinations.

More than 30 jurisdictions in the Charlotte region have already signed the resolution, including York County.

A 'green interstate'

The Carolina Thread Trail is envisioned as a "green interstate" that will use public and private money to link existing trails and attractions with paths and greenspace. It will span for 7,300 square miles over 15 counties, where more than 2 million people in North and South Carolina call home.

Its inception comes at a time when local conservationists are stepping up their calls for bolder thinking in promoting outdoor life in York County.

"Eco-tourism is the second-largest economy in South Carolina, second only to tourism itself," longtime local conservationist Harry Dalton wrote in a recent Herald guest column. "The river is a wonderful resource for water-related economies such as rafting, canoeing and fishing. At the top of everyone's conservation list are water quality and streamside parks and trails."

Building the trail could cost from \$100,000 to \$600,000 per mile, depending on its size and intricacies. A rough project cost estimate is between \$100 million and \$150 million over 10 to 15 years.

York, Chester and Lancaster are among the 15 counties that could receive grants to join the trail system.

The trail also is designed to pass through Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cherokee, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union counties in the Charlotte region.

The name, Carolina Thread Trail, is taken from the textile industry that once served as the region's lifeblood.