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Farmer says thread trail is an asset to farming, exercising

Written by Jordan-Ashley Baker (O-N-E Staff Writer)

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Stanly Stewart did his homework on the Carolina Thread Trail. He has a pad of yellow paper covered in hand-written notes about why the trail is an asset to Catawba County and the surrounding area. He spent hours researching, and he can cite statistics detailing the trail's benefits.

After his research, Stewart came to a conclusion: The Carolina Thread Trail is a great idea.

"I can't see anything but positives from (the trail)," Stewart said.

If adopted, the trail system allows Stewart to continue doing two of the things he enjoys the most: farming and running.

Stewart has been a grain farmer for 35 years, and when he's not farming, he likes to exercise. Stewart runs about 30 to 50 miles each week. He runs short-distance races, such as 5K and 10K events. He hopes the thread trail will encourage more people to lead a healthy, active lifestyle.

"Obesity is an epidemic," Stewart said. "I'd love to go out and see people running."

The trail also benefits another important part of Stewart's life: farming. The Carolina Thread Trail received negative attention from local farmers because some farmers are concerned about the thread trail and the problems it could potentially cause. The trails, however, are not a threat to farmers, Stewart said.

"The major threat to farming is unbridled development," he said.

The Carolina Thread Trail controls development. Stewart doesn't like to think about farming land sold to major development centers. Selling land for development doesn't preserve the land or keep it safe for future generations, like the Carolina Thread Trail does, he said. He encourages other landowners to ask themselves what legacy they want to leave for future generations.

"What do you want to be remembered for?" he said.

Allowing land to be part of the thread trail ensures open land and green space for years to come.

"I just think it would be a great legacy for a landowner," he said. "I would much rather be known as someone who wanted to help."

Some people are concerned the trails will bring vagrants and trash to areas near their homes, but in Stewart's experience, that won't happen.

Stewart's family owns land around Murray's Mill. They decided to build trails around the land for people to enjoy the property. Since the area was opened to the public, the amount of trash has greatly decreased. Stewart attributes the decrease to the public's renewed interest in the land around the trails.

"When you light up an area, the dark goes away," he said.

The key to keeping land safe from vagrants and trash lies in opening the area to the public. Closing off an area only encourages people to hide, Stewart said.

"A locked door isn't going to keep a thief out," he said.

The Carolina Thread Trail doesn't have the power of eminent domain. If landowners don't want the trail on their property, the trail must go elsewhere.

Stewart wants to remind landowners by allowing the Carolina Thread Trail on their land doesn't mean they give up ownership of their property. Landowners are not responsible for the trail's care, and they won't be held liable in the event of an accident on the trail, he said.

Some farmers are also concerned people on the trails could be harmed by farmers' pesticides or farm equipment. Stewart said farmers can block off land near the thread trail when they're doing dangerous farming.

Some people have misconceptions about what farmers do for a living, Stewart said. He saw pictures online of trails going through cornfields and thought agricultural trails were a great way to encourage people to learn about local crops.

"The trails could bring public awareness to farming and help people understand how farming works," he said. "I think this thing can't be anything but good for farming."

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