

Thread Trail Growing

By Staff Reports · heraldonline.com FTP

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The proposed Carolina Thread Trail is named in recognition of the prominence of the textile trade in both Carolinas. But, appropriately enough, it also would thread together hundreds of miles of trails and greenways through 15 counties.

While the rough plan for the trail always has included York, Chester and Lancaster counties, no trails had been designated for Chester County. That may change now that a group of Chester County leaders has proposed an abandoned rail line as the county's link to the trail.

The Chester County Council recently joined the list of other governing bodies in supporting the project, and leaders are seeking a grant to fund a greenway plan for the county. Trail planners are enthusiastic about the possibility of including a 22-mile abandoned rail bed once owned by CSX.

The tracks were pulled up years ago, and all that remains is a gravel-strewn path that begins at the former Great Falls rail depot and follows the Catawba River to York County. If it becomes part of the Thread Trail, the rail bed would serve as a link between Landsford Canal State Park and the planned state park at Dearborn Island.

In York County, a two-mile section of the Nation Ford Trail in Fort Mill will be a link in the interstate Thread Trail. That trail runs along Sugar Creek, and in time will continue to where Sugar and Steele creeks meet and link with the Ann Springs Close Greenway and 31 miles of trails circling Fort Mill.

Another planned trail will connect Kings Mountain State Park, west of Clover, with Crowders Mountain State Park in North Carolina. It, too, will be part of the Thread Trail.

Planners think the trail would take 10 to 15 years to complete at a cost of between \$100 million and \$150 million. But Charlotte businesses already have pledged millions for the trail, and various state or federal grants could help cover much of the remaining expense.

Even at \$100 million or more, the Thread Trail would be an inexpensive way for the state to promote eco-tourism and economic development along the trail's route. And the trail would add to the value of nearby residential and commercial property.

The trail, especially if it is linked to camping areas, also would be a boon to Scouts and other youth organizations that sponsor hikes and overnight camping trips. That could help promote healthier lifestyles for people of all ages, but inactive children in particular.

Tourism already is a \$16 billion a year industry in South Carolina and one state leaders are actively trying to make even bigger. A trail linking North and South Carolina and meandering from the Upstate to the Lowcountry would be a tremendous asset to add to the state's numerous outdoor tourist destinations.

And, as more and more counties join York, Chester and Lancaster counties in locating links to the trail, this is one good idea that promises to become a reality.

IN SUMMARY

Chester County leaders hope to turn abandoned rail line into a link on the Thread Trail.

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