



Posted January 6, 2009

Trail could weave through Carolinas

By Tiffany Lane, Staff Writer

Monroe

How many people can one thread link? Try 2.3 million across 15 counties covering two states.

The Carolina Thread Trail, a regional trail network linking North and South Carolina, could soon be coming through Union County to encourage land conservation, cleaner air and physical activity.

"We need to get started now before everything gets paved over," said Sally Ormand, a Monroe resident who serves on the Carolina Thread Trail governing board. Ormand emphasized the importance of forming healthy habits, especially for children. "Our children need to be outside, running and playing," she said, adding that video games and computers often keep them indoors.

So far, Marshville is the only town to approve a resolution supporting the project, but several other communities are scheduled to meet with both Thread Trail and Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization representatives on Thursday. Wingate commissioners are also considering adoption of the resolution and the Monroe City Council will discuss it at today's meeting.

Travis Morehead, a community coordinator for the Thread Trail, said if towns choose to support the project, the county can apply for a planning grant. The Thread Trail is led by the Catawba Lands Conservancy.

Total project costs could average \$100 million to \$150 million over the next 10 to 15 years, but Dave Cable, executive director of the Catawba Lands Conservancy, said actual costs depend on the extent and "character" of the trail network as determined by individual communities.

Aside from cleaner water and bike trails, the trail network would also supply some funds.

"The Thread will ultimately raise some \$25 million in private capital, a portion of which will be given to communities as grants to help communities with catalytic funding for trail planning, design, acquisition and construction," Cable said.

The trails would not only protect wildlife, Morehead said, but encourage locals to walk instead of drive to work or shop. That would mean fewer cars on the roads, he said, decreasing the chances for automobile accidents and increasing air quality.

For residents living along the trails, Thread Trail representatives estimate that property values would increase about 4 percent. Businesses seeking green space would be attracted to the trails as well.

And for those worried that the trail network might promote crime, Ormand said studies have shown that trails, if anything, deter would-be criminals because there are more people around and police patrolling the area. People would also take pride in the trails and take care of them, she said.

So how large can the network be?

"It can be as large as folks in Union County want it to be," Morehead said. York and Gaston counties have already drafted master plans to include several more trails than originally planned.

"We are targeting to have most, if not all, of the community master plans in place within the next five years, and to have substantial mileage on the ground by that time," Cable said, adding that a large portion of the trail system should be done in the next 15 years.

For more information, visit www.carolinathreadtrail.com. For those interested in being part of the trail network, call 704-342-3330.

The name, Carolina Thread Trail, was inspired by a region with a rich heritage of weaving fabric. This intricate network of trails will weave together people, communities and nature into a tapestry that connects Carolinians for generations to come. —Source: www.carolinathreadtrail.org