

State trails, greenways are hoping for U.S. money

Several projects are ready to go if they are selected

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Leaders with some of the state's biggest trail networks will soon know whether they will get some of the \$22 million in stimulus money that was given to the N.C. Department of Transportation's Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation division.

Nicole Burris, a DOT spokeswoman, said that the state will announce in a week or two which projects will receive money.

In January, a group of leaders with various statewide trail systems met with Transportation Secretary Gene Conti to discuss "shovel-ready" projects that could qualify for stimulus money, said Kate Dixon, the executive director of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

The group compiled a list of six projects that include adding eight miles of paved greenway to the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in Wake County, improving a bicycle and pedestrian bridge on the Highland Rail Trail in Gaston County and building a greenway in Greensboro that would link Lee and Spring Garden streets.

Together, the six projects would need about \$8.1 million in stimulus money. The cost of each project ranges from \$150,000 to \$3.2 million.

None of the projects are in Forsyth County.

"In the short term, these projects create jobs as much as any other road construction," Dixon said. "It's the same sort of process, the same sort of jobs. In the long term, the stimulus money is an opportunity to make some changes in both our transportation system and economic system."

Two of the projects that would enhance the Mountains-to-Sea Trail are in Raleigh. When completed, the MST would stretch from Clingman's Dome in the Smoky Mountains to Jockey's Ridge on the Outer Banks.

"There will be people using the trail to walk across the state, but also people using it to commute and for their own exercise and health," Dixon said.

Greenways are an amenity that can draw businesses, said Ann Browning, the project director for the Carolina Thread Trail, a regional trail system that will ultimately involve 15 counties and includes the Highland Rail Trail.

"Trails and greenways enhance the quality of life in communities and provide economic opportunities through attracting businesses," Browning said.

The N.C. DOT will select projects that will put people to work immediately and have the support of local Metropolitan Planning Organizations, said Tom Norman, the director of the agency's Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation division.

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