

Posted on Sun., Nov. 11, 2007

Follow the `Thread'

Trail would be a signature resource for Southern Piedmont

LAYNE BAILEY/Observer Staff

Naturalist John Muir believed that wilderness should be left intact, not just to preserve natural resources, but for the sake of people as well.

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread," he wrote. "Places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul."

Mr. Muir's words describe precisely why an ambitious plan to link 15 counties near Charlotte by trail is so exciting. If you don't know about that plan, you should. This trail won't be easy to pay for or piece together, and if it is to happen, organizers need everyone's help.

The Carolina Thread Trail would be a 400-mile network of hiking and biking trails stretching over 7,300 square miles. It would be a signature resource for North Carolina's most populous region, tying together greenways, trails and parks in the Catawba Valley (and some in adjacent counties, too.)

It would also cost between \$110 million and \$150 million. Organizers hope to raise some \$40 million of that; the rest will come from hoped-for government grants.

Why is this such an important project? Mr. Muir explained it well: People need natural places to sustain them for a variety of reasons, both physical and spiritual.

More than 1.4 million people live in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region. As it has attracted more and more people, it has fewer and fewer places where residents can seek respite from a relentlessly urban environment.

The pace of development also has gobbled up open space at a record rate. The Catawba Lands Conservancy estimates more than a football field is developed in our region *each hour*. The region urgently needs to preserve more land .

This trail will accomplish both of those things. It also will help with water quality and link spread-out communities, for the first time, by something other than a road. That's big.

Two land conservation groups have partnered to implement the trail -- the Catawba Lands Conservancy and the Trust for Public Lands.

But to make it happen, everyone needs to get involved. This is a chance for communities in the Southern Piedmont to work together on a one-of-a-kind resource that will add immeasurably to quality of life *and* sustain the environment.

The Thread Trail

To learn more, go to www.carolinathreadtrail.org, call 704-376-2714 or e-mail Dave Cable, trail director, at dave@carolinathreadtrail.org.

<http://www.charlotte.com/171/story/357796.html>