

Cherokee County to help decide on location of trails

Carolina Thread to run about 100 miles through the county

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Cherokee County residents have the opportunity to help select sites along a trail that will link 13 counties across two states.

The Carolina Thread Trail is a regional system of greenways and trails stretching along a path connecting about 2.3 million people. The plan is to link people, places, cities, towns and attractions, but also to preserve natural areas.

As part of the trail system, Cherokee County will have about 100 miles of trails and water routes. Three public meetings have been held, but only a handful of residents took part in the process. Residents are asked to give their input on where they want to see walking, hiking, biking, horseback trails and places to canoe.

Carolina Thread Trail community coordinator Randi Gates said Cherokee County is in the early stages of the master plan process.

"We need to know what destinations that people would like to see connected," he said. "It could be state parks, city parks, there are endless possibilities."

The Carolina Thread Trail has a fundraising goal of \$40 million — \$25 million in cash donations and \$15 million in land donations — to complete the trail, which could take 20 years.

There are currently 70 miles in existing trails in Mecklenburg, Cleveland and Cabarrus counties in North Carolina. Other counties included in the project are the North Carolina counties of Lincoln, Gaston, Stanly, Rowan, Catawba, Iredell, Anson and Union. South Carolina counties included are Lancaster, York, Chester and Cherokee.

The Overmountain Victory Trail in Cherokee County will be part of the Carolina Thread Trail, Gates said. The county Overmountain Victory Trail steering committee members are also serving as members of the Carolina Thread Trail committee.

Committee chairman Paul LeFrancois said the local process started about two years ago, and now residents have an opportunity to give their input on a trail system that will be in place for generations.

"This is very much a public-driven process," LeFrancois said. "We want to encourage people to go online and complete the survey and let us know where you want trails."

The trail committee composed a list of destinations, including Broad River, Limestone College, state, city and county parks, and asked residents who attended the public meetings to decide where they would most like to see trails.

Doris Pearson, who serves on the committee, said the project was exciting, and Cherokee County was fortunate to be a part of the plan from the beginning.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for us to have more recreational opportunities here," said Pearson, an avid walker.

Catawba Lands Conservancy is the lead agency for the Thread, working in partnership with Foundation For The Carolinas, and many local partners.

The online survey is available at www.surveymonkey.com/s/cherokeecarolinathreadtrailsurvey.

<http://www.goupstate.com/article/20110807/ARTICLES/108071023/1051/sitemaps04?p=1&tc=pg>