



Happy Trails

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Pieces of a recreation trail in Newton and Conover were in the spotlight on Sunday, even as dark rain clouds threatened.

Leaders in both cities dedicated segments of the Carolina Thread Trail – a planned 126-mile pathway that will meander through 15 counties in North and South Carolina. The trail is named for the counties' rich fabric manufacturing heritage.

Just after 2:30 p.m., members of Conover's city council lifted a white sheet off a sign that marks the Thread Trail on a stretch of the Gateway Trail off 1st Street.

"What we're signing today are those sections of the Thread Trail that are already there," said Randi Gates, Carolina Thread Trail community and grants coordinator for the Catawba Lands Conservancy. The conservancy is leading the effort to connect pieces of the trail, which will include sections that have not yet been built.

Conover Councilwoman Penny Corpening pedaled her bicycle along the trail to Sunday's ceremony. Evie Belle Hight, age 3, pedaled along on her tricycle.

"We just thought it would be great to come out and let her ride the trail," mother Autumn Hight said.

Newton leaders dodged rain showers to unveil a Carolina Thread Trail sign about 3:30 p.m. The sign marks the trail along the city's Heritage Trail Greenway near Radio Station Road.

The Heritage Trail includes segments from West 7th Street to Radio Station Road, and from Radio Station Road to N.C. 10.

"Hopefully, eventually, it will go on to Southside Park off 321," said Rob Glynn, a member of the nonprofit Catawba Valley Heritage Alliance board. "It takes a lot of momentum to get it going, but now that people are using it, there's more interest."

The alliance advocates for greenway and recreation spaces. Glynn said the organization has worked with the city since 1998 to sponsor events and make donations to help create the Heritage Trail Greenway.

"We're proud of the greenway," said Newton City Councilman Tom Rowe. "I've used it, my wife has used it, and Governor, my dog, has used it."

Pieces of the Carolina Thread Trail were also dedicated Sunday in Hickory and Murrays Mill.

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Hayman said Conover will "leverage" funds from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund grant that the city received in the past. Hayman said no additional dollars will be used to cover the match.

The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund is administered through the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation and was established in 1994 when the General Assembly dedicated 75 percent of the state's share of the excise tax on real estate deed transfers to the fund. The revenue is distributed to three programs: 65 percent to the state parks system for repairs, capital improvements and land acquisition; 30 percent for matching grants to local parks and recreation programs for development and land acquisition; and 5 percent to the coastal beach access program.

Since 1995, the Parks and Recreation Authority has received 1,291 grant applications with requests totaling about \$273 million. The board has awarded 672 grants for \$151 million.

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