

## Creeper extension study underway in Ashe County

Ashe County and the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund are authorizing a study to determine the feasibility of acquiring the abandoned Virginia and Carolina Railroad corridor from the Virginia state line to Lansing, a distance of 14 miles.

The dual-purpose project could provide riparian protection for Big Horse Creek and allow extension of the Virginia Creeper National Recreation Trail into North Carolina. Big Horse Creek is a New River tributary that originates near White Top, VA, now the closest Carolina access to the popular rail-trail.

The state clean water fund trustees have earmarked up to \$636,000 for corridor acquisition. The corridor in North Carolina reverted to abutting properties when service was discontinued in 1979. Ninety percent of that right-of-way is contiguous with the waterway.

The Creeper extension project is one of 300 listed by the New River basin American Heritage Rivers Program, a recently-created federal designation.

This project holds tremendous environmental and economic potential for Ashe County, said Tom Massey, western field representative for the CWMTF. All too often environmental and economic goals are viewed as competing interests.

However, this project can represent a win-win situation where water quality is protected and a significant enhancement of the local economy can result from the greenway trail, said Massey.

The feasibility study is being conducted by Region D Council of Governments. The COG expects to complete the study



## Making the connection

**A Rutherford County volunteer crew of construction professionals created a useable trail by installing decking, railings and approach wings on a 60-ft. bridge over an active CSX rail line in Forest City. The Forrest W. Hunt Greenway provides an off-road link between the recently annexed Alexander Mills community and the new elementary school of the same name. Prior to the new rail-trail, the only school access was NC 221. The bridge improvements were funded by a state Adopt-a-Trail grant.**

by this summer. About 60 abutting property owners will be individually contacted during the study, according to Kelly Coffey, the COG project coordinator.

Meanwhile, more than \$1.6 million in trail improvements are underway on the 35-mile Virginia sections of the Creeper. The U.S. Forest Service is repairing and upgrading many of the 31 trestles and bridges between White Top and Damascus, VA. Construction of a White Top trailhead park, replica depot and other visitor facilities is to be completed this summer.

## Whiteville depot restoration boosts rail-trail ambitions

A lease, a favorable court decision and restoration funding have made the historic 1883 Whiteville depot a centerpiece for Columbus County's Waccamaw Cypress Trail ambitions.

As the county and the Whiteville Chamber of Commerce negotiated a long-term lease, adjoining property owners challenged the Carolina Southern Railroad's control of the depot property. That issue was decided in favor of the railroad by a Superior Court last July.

In turn, that cleared the way for the NC DOT to recently award \$769,000 in discretionary Transportation Enhancement funding toward a \$1.6 million depot restoration project in the Whiteville business district.

An additional \$15,000 in state-administered Adopt-a-Trail and National Recreational Trails Fund grants have been awarded for trail study and development. The funds will be used in part for bridges and culverts on a new connector trail from city park to the rail corridor and the depot, a distance of two miles.

The Waccamaw Cypress Trail Committee initiated a trail study two years ago, first looking at 12 miles of abandoned rail easement from Whiteville east to Lake Waccamaw.

More recently, NCRT has assisted in opening the subject of rail-with-trail on 20 miles from Whiteville west to Fair Bluff. That section of the former Wilmington and Carolina line is now operated by the Carolina and Southern of Conway, S.C. The rail operator is open to the proposal if liability issues can be resolved.

## Alt bike/ped trail mapped at Brevard

Brevard's twisted path to a trail is being ironed out. First-phase construction of a three-phase bike/ped path project is expected this spring. NC DOT recently approved \$291,000 in Transportation Enhancement funding for construction.

All would have gone smoother and straighter had not adjacent property owners arose in protest and then challenged Norfolk-Southern's ownership of a two-mile section of the Transylvania Railroad.

There was a preliminary Federal District Court ruling adverse to the railroad, but the case was settled in mediation pending a request for rehearing and likely appeal by the railroad. In the settlement, only the adjacent owners who were plaintiffs were deeded quit claims by the railroad. The plaintiffs agreed not to publish, record or use the preliminary court decision, which in effect was rendered moot and inoperative.

As there was no final court order, there is consequently no precedential ruling on the issues. The railroad retains many miles of right-of-way in Transylvania and Henderson counties. The same title issues could be raised again in the future.

The abandoned rail corridor would have

## NCRT to accept Dunn-Erwin line

NCRT has initiated its first land trust action by applying to the Surface Transportation Board for an interim trail certificate in conjunction with federal railbanking of the Dunn-Erwin Railway, a 5.3-mile corridor between the two Harnett County communities.

The Conservation Trust for North Carolina is providing \$7,100 to NCRT for expenses to complete the railbanking and title transfer of the 63-acre corridor. The discontinued rail service segment is along the headwaters of the Black River, thus making the Aberdeen & Rockfish Railroad, the property donor, eligible for state conservation tax credits.

NCRT will assist in converting the railbed to a public trail, to be known as the Dunn-Erwin Connector.

more directly provided off-road connections. Instead, easements are being assembled for a more circuitous route to link many community facilities.

Beginning at the intersection of U.S. 64 and Fortune Cove Road, the initial segment will link the Transylvania Community Hospital, County Recreation Center, Brevard Sports Complex, Pisgah Elementary School, Davidson River Alternative School, and end at Morris and Ecusta roads.

Phase 2 will continue to the Davidson River Campground, where it will tie into established trails in the Pisgah National Forest. This segment is to utilize the former Carr Lumber railbed.

Phase 3 reverses direction from the U.S. 64 starting point and extends to Brevard Middle School, Brevard College and the business district.

The alternate project evolved when it was universally acknowledged that a bike/ped route was needed in the community. The Brevard Recreational Advisory Board appointed a subcommittee under Elaine Boyer to assemble a plan. A 1998 Adopt-a-Trail grant funded the study.

## Rutherford readies federal railbanking on Thermal Belt

Rutherford County parties are finalizing documents to apply for federal railbanking and interim trail use on 8.5 miles through Spindale, Rutherfordton, Ruth and a rural section to Gilkey.

The railbanking involves a three-way agreement between the Rutherford Railroad Development Corporation, Thermal Belt Railway and Bechtler Development Corporation, a nonprofit corporation created to manage economic development properties.

The Thermal Belt will apply for discontinuance of service for that section which does not presently have freight customers. The shortline railroad will continue to operate between Bostic and Forest City on tracks leased from RRDC.

National Recreational Trails Fund grants have been approved to begin trail development as soon as railbanking is authorized by the federal Surface Transportation Board.

## Board members' work recognized

Herb Carlton of the Sierra Club Cypress Group, the Coastal Carolina Trail Committee and a NCRT board member was recognized as the 1999 recipient of the Oliver Kehrlein Award from the National Sierra Club, headquartered in



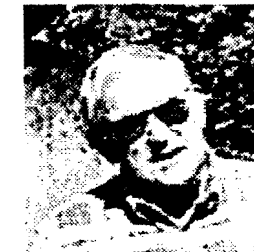
Herb Carlton

San Francisco. This award was created 25 years ago to honor club members who have used outings and volunteer service to protect or improve public lands, instill an interest in

conservation, and increase awareness and membership in the Sierra Club.

Since its founding in 1974, Carlton has served the Cypress Group as newsletter distribution chair, highway clean up chair, and in several other capacities. He is best known for the popular outings that he leads, particularly the base camp hikes in the Virginia mountains. In addition to being active in NCRT, he served on the Greenville, NC, Greenway Committee and the Bikeway Committee.

NCRT board member Dan Arrasmith was one of nine people to be named by *The Charlotte Observer* editorial board's annual Carolinas "environmental heroes"



Dan Arrasmith

working to preserve resources. While recognizing Arrasmith, the editorial pointed to all who are working with NCRT to preserve rail corridors and

promote rail-trails.

Arrasmith is one of the original NCRT directors and has served as vice-chair, editor and western NC projects coordinator. Before moving to North Carolina, he helped form Iowa Rails-to-Trails and creation of that state's first rail-trail which traverses four counties.

## Project Briefs

The Deep River Park Association of Chatham and Lee counties has initiated a master plan for a four-mile nature trail loop that will cross the Deep River on a historic camelback bridge and a Norfolk-Southern double Warren truss trestle. NCSU School of Design Assist. Prof. Shishir Raval, a NCRT board member, will direct a team of graduate students compiling the master plan.

NC DOT plans for railbanking and local visions of a rail-trail went bump instead of blimp when Norfolk-Southern pulled the Elizabeth City-to-Weeksville rail line off the market.

The seven-mile line formerly served the U.S. Coast Guard Air Station blimp facility on the Pasquotank River. The River City Bicycle Club is continuing to follow developments that include renewed freight service and the potential of a major blimp manufacturer coming to town.

The Pitt County Commission has adopted the master plan for the Coastal Carolina Trail and has authorized the Parks and Recreation staff to proceed with obtaining recreational easements on the 5.5-mile railbed from Stokes to Pactolus. However, the fall hurricanes and flooding have necessitated directing county resources to more pressing needs for the immediate future.

The City of Henderson has funded a rail-trail development plan for the corridor segment it is seeking to acquire from Norfolk-Southern between downtown and I-85 in Vance County.

## River conservation project includes Rhyne rail-trail

While Lincolnton pursues easements to extend the new downtown rail-trail within the city, a large conservation project holds promise for two miles of rural rail-trail south of the city limits.

The Charlotte-based Catawba Lands Conservancy capped a busy year by completing the purchase of 60 acres of what will become part of a two-mile, 250-acre buffer along the South Fork of the Catawba River. The North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund provided \$310,000 for the 60-acre purchase.

The project is the Paul and Agnes Rhyne Conservation Preserve. CLC and the Rhynes are now completing a 195-acre conservation easement that will avert development on both sides of the river and tributaries. The Rhyne family corporation retains control of large tracts above the river bottom.

After finalizing the 195-acre conservation easement, the next phase will include recreational opportunities, according to Ron Altmann, CLC executive director.

The former Carolina & Northwestern rail corridor follows the river bank the length of the project. The north end of the conservation project is about one mile south of the Lincolnton city limits. About two miles of easements would be needed to connect the two trail segments.

For news updates  
stop by the Info Depot:  
<http://www.NCRail-Trails.org>

## ATT dedication set for June 3 trail day

Construction of the American Tobacco Trail continues in Durham with a dedication ceremony scheduled for National Trails Day, 10 a.m., June 3, at the Durham Bulls Ball Park.

Five new bridges are in place and landscaping is underway. Paving of the first three miles will be complete with spring weather. Grading and paving of the next segment, south to NC 54, is scheduled for this spring and summer.

On January 3, Wake County Commissioners unanimously approved a master plan for the seven-mile ATT segment in Wake County. The next milestone involves completing an interim trail lease from NC DOT. The Wake Park and Recreation Department is developing a fiscal year budget which will request funds for further design and planning, plus trail clean-up and maintenance.

Chatham County still needs to accept an interim trail lease from NC DOT before work can begin in that county. Chatham County is currently in a budget crunch due to school needs and a new county office building. The Chatham section was the last segment to be acquired by NC DOT in August, 1998.

## Skewarky trail funded for spring development

The NC DOT bike/ped program has approved over \$300,000 in funding to develop the .8-mile Skewarky Trail from downtown Williamston to the Roanoke River in Martin County. The rail-to-trail conversion is scheduled for this spring.

## JOIN THE NORTH CAROLINA RAIL-TRAILS INITIATIVE, NOW!

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(Spring 00)

THANK YOU FOR JOINING NCRT

## Rail-with-trail subject of new study

NCRT board members Al Capehart, Harry Clapp and Tom Mappes attended the Second International Trails & Greenways conference in Pittsburgh last June. The conference was organized by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and co-sponsored by many government, industrial and environmental organizations, including CSX Transportation and Norfolk Southern railroads.

Of particular interest were sessions dealing with rails-with-trails. There are at least 50 existing RWT around the country and many more under consideration. N-S presented a policy, echoed by CSX, adamantly opposed to RWT.

The Federal Highway Administration has commissioned a two-year RWT study, which will be the foundation for federal guidelines. The guidelines are expected to be published about 30 months from now.

### Working April 22 Earth Day

Join North Carolina Rail-Trails and friends of the Carolina Heartlands Rail-Trail Committee for a trail work day, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, April 22, at Morven in Anson County. Bring gloves, lunch and water bottle. If you have tools, bring lopping shears, small chain saws, shovels and hoes.

For more information call Carolyn Townsend, NCRT, at 919/542-5422 or Myla Warfel, CHRTC, at 704/851-3891. Leave your name, phone number and message.

### NCRT board meetings

**Spring: 10:30 a.m. April 8, Russell Ruffy Center, Gold Hill Mines Historic Park, Rowen County.**

**Summer: 10:30 a.m., July 8, Andrews, Cherokee County.**

**Fall: 10:30 a.m., Oct. 8, Durham, Durham County.**

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