

FRENCH RIVER GREENWAY



Perryville Trace trailhead

January 24, 2011

French River Greenway Steering Committee

National Park Service

French River Connection

Dudley Conservation Land Trust

Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

US Army Corps of Engineers

Quinebaug - Shetucket National Heritage Corridor

Oxford Open Space Committee

Dudley Rail-Trail Committee

Webster Recreation Committee

Midstate Trail Committee

Massachusetts Riverways

Central Massachusetts Striders

Bay State Trail Riders

Grand Trunk Trailblazers

Visit us on the web at

<http://www.frenchriverconnection.org>

Vision

The French River Corridor extends 26 miles from its source in Leicester MA to its confluence with the Quinebaug in Thompson CT. After passing through the Army Corps Hodges Village project in Oxford, and a long, secluded, narrow reach, the river enters a broad, wild area bordered by marshes and coves, providing significant wildlife habitat. Farther south, the river becomes the border of Dudley and Webster. Here the river is bordered by industrial complexes. South of the Webster town center, the river again enters a wooded corridor, passes the wastewater treatment plant and the historic Perryville area with its granite block dam, and exits the state.

Once heavily used and polluted, the river corridor has had decades to recover, but might be lost again to redevelopment of its banks if action is not taken. Our vision is of a French River Corridor that is a valuable community resource for residents and an attraction to visitors. Leaders in many communities throughout the United States, including some very nearby such as Putnam and Thompson CT, have had the same ideas and have protected and preserved their river corridors for future generations by engaging landowners, officials, and the public in such a vision.

Our vision includes:

A Greenway Trail which not only provides unmotorized recreational opportunities, but includes preservation of abutting natural landscapes for the benefit of native species and the preservation of scenic beauty

Links to other regional trails such as the Midstate Trail

Car-top access to the river for paddlers and anglers through the development of a companion "Blueway"

Development of natural and cultural points of interest along the trail to make them safe, accessible, and informative

Improvement of urban riverfront as a catalyst to economic revitalization

Development of a shared positive identity for French River communities



Background

The French River Greenway concept is over twenty years old, and there have been many study reports supporting access to the river and trails in the area. This is not a particularly long time for the development of a trail or greenway. What has changed is the presence of grassroots advocates working to make it a reality. Here are some of the precedent documents.

French River Greenway Plan June 1990

- *Provides a resource inventory of natural and cultural features of the river corridor*
- *Envisions protection of the riverine ecosystem, riverwalk and park system, boating access, historical interpretation, and land development controls*
- *Many specific suggestions for making the river a community resource*

CMRPC Southwest Subregion Inter-Community Trail Connection Feasibility Study October 2001

- *Recommends a trail joining the Grand Trunk, through Ardlock Acres, around Perryville, through the Webster Wastewater Treatment Plant, and eventually onto the Webster Branch of the Boston-Albany Railroad all the way to Oxford.*

A Landscape Planning Study of Webster, Massachusetts, undated

- *Recommends opening the French River as the starting point for the “greening” of Webster, resulting in an improved quality of life and business climate and contains a number of French River Trail concepts*

Oxford Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2006

- *A survey conducted as part of the plan development showed 51% of respondents favored development of hiking trails*

Webster Open Space and Recreation Plan, 1997

- *Among the approved objectives is implementation of the French River Greenway Plan. This objective was confirmed and clarified in an update approved in 2009.*

Dudley Community Development Plan, May 2004

- *Action Plan includes formation of a trails committee to improve hiking, biking, and x-skiing and to work with state/regional agencies on trail connections with other towns*

The Trail



Much of the proposed trail already exists as railbed or roads. Approval of landowners is required to determine the exact trail route.

Current Projects



French River Park plan



Installing the boat launch



Leovich Landing



Boat launch at Leovich Landing



Perryville Trace Trailhead



Walking the Trace

Key Events

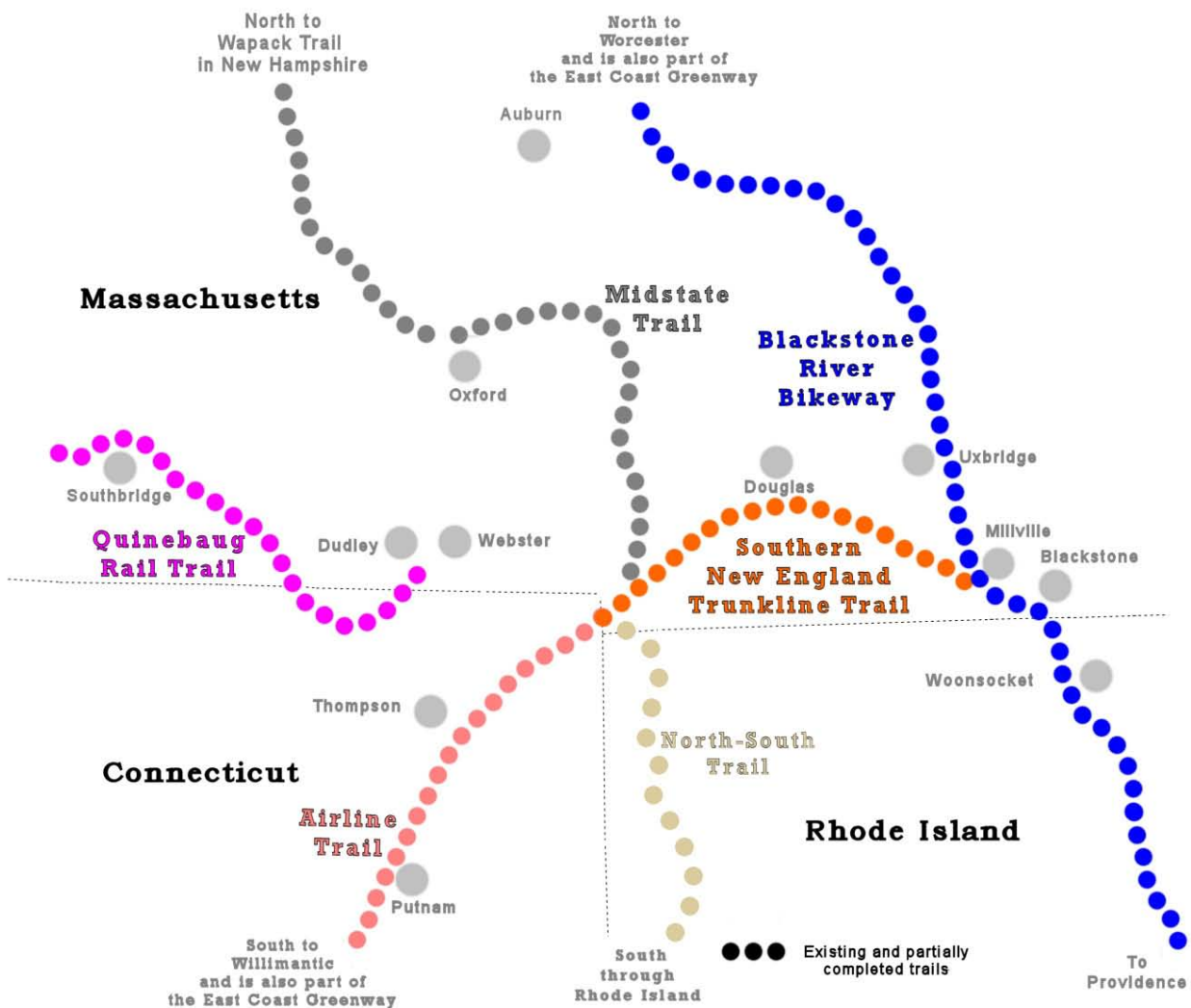
These are some of the events in recent years that have added ideas and momentum to the French River Greenway.

- January 2005 **State buys P& W railbed for much anticipated Quinebaug Rail Trail.** The proposed 11 mile trail, from Southbridge to the area of the Wastewater Treatment Plant in Webster, provides an attractive alternative implementation of the Perryville loop documented in the 2001 CMRPC study. The French River Greenway provides a suitable terminus for the Quinebaug Rail Trail and a link to the Midstate Trail in Oxford.
- March 2005 **French River Connection founded as a grassroots membership organization.** The vision of the French River Connection is for the French River and its shoreline to become a resource that is used, enjoyed, and treasured by residents and visitors to the French River region. The river's natural and cultural heritage will be appreciated and protected, recreational activities and gatherings along the river will be encouraged, and the economic benefits of a healthy, active riverfront will be realized.
- August 2005 **French River Greenway Trail concept mapped.** The proposed trail, making maximum use of unused land and avoiding obstacles, stretches seven miles from the Connecticut State Line to the Midstate Trail at Hodges Village, with its 15 mile trail system. At its southern end, the trail includes the 2.8 mile Perryville Loop where it is joined by the Quinebaug Rail Trail. A four mile loop, mostly on roads, provides access to Webster Lake at Memorial Beach and to downtown Webster.
- October 2005-April 2006 **Riverfront Revitalization study conducted.** This study, arranged by the Green Valley Institute and conducted by Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning students at the University of Connecticut, began in October with a public charrette and results were presented to the public in December, with a report being produced in April. The study points out opportunities, including the Greenway, in Webster and Dudley to make use of the river corridor for recreation and economic revitalization.
- September 2006 **State funding authorized.** The Acts of 2006 earmark \$250,000 in the Massachusetts Community Investment Capital Program. This funding, which is subject to bonding, is for plans for the French River Greenway linking the Quinebaug Rail Trail with the Midstate Trail, and was obtained by Senator Richard T. Moore.
- October 2006-June 2007 **Car-top access study conducted.** This study, performed by the University of Massachusetts Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning Department, identifies and characterizes opportunities for paddling access points along the river, complementing the Greenway with a "Blueway." The study was performed with a grant from the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor to the Oxford Open Space Committee.

- October 2006 **National Park Service technical assistance grant awarded.** Supported by many organizations, the French River Connection applied for and received a two year grant of technical assistance from the National Park Service under the Rivers and Trails program
- November 2006 **Steering Committee Organized.** A Steering Committee, consisting of partners in the National Park Service grant, and other interested parties, serves to steer the further planning and development of the trail and perform appropriate tasks. The inaugural meeting was held January 29, 2007
- December 2006 **\$10,000 donation received.** A local business with downtown riverfront property, perceiving the value of a revitalized waterfront, made this substantial donation to pursue the vision in Webster.
- January 2007 **\$10,000 received from Fields Pond Foundation.** This grant funding enabled the initiation of baseline mapping tasks while awaiting Community Investment Capital funds. This task was contracted to CMRPC and was completed in June 2007 and updated in 2008.
- March 2007 **Prospectus published.** The first version of the document you are reading now was published.
- October 2007 **Webster Riverwalk Prospectus published.** A document outlining a potential Riverwalk loop through downtown Webster was published
- March 2008 **Riverwalk Trail Log initiated:** The committee began work on a Trail Log for the riverwalk. The Log documents conditions on the ground and provides alternatives for implementation. The Trail Log was completed in July 2008.
- April 2008 **Work begins on the Perryville Trace.** Under a license agreement with the owners of the property, trail building for the one mile round trip Perryville Trace was begun.
- July 2008 **Perryville Trace is formally opened.** In a ceremony held at the trailhead, trail enthusiasts and neighbors celebrated the opening of the first segment of the French River Greenway
- August 2008 **Funding included in the Environmental Bond Bill.** \$250,000 for the French River Greenway is included in the Environmental Bond Bill signed by Governor Patrick
- September 2008 **Work begins on French River Park.** Under a license agreement with the owner, work began to clear a downtown riverside parcel to become a green space and boat launch on the Riverwalk.
- November 2008 **Leovich Landing Fundraising Initiated.** The French River Connection and the Dudley Conservation Land Trust partnered to purchase four acres where Dudley Road crosses the River in Oxford, to serve as both a boat launch for the Blueway and a trailhead for the Greenway

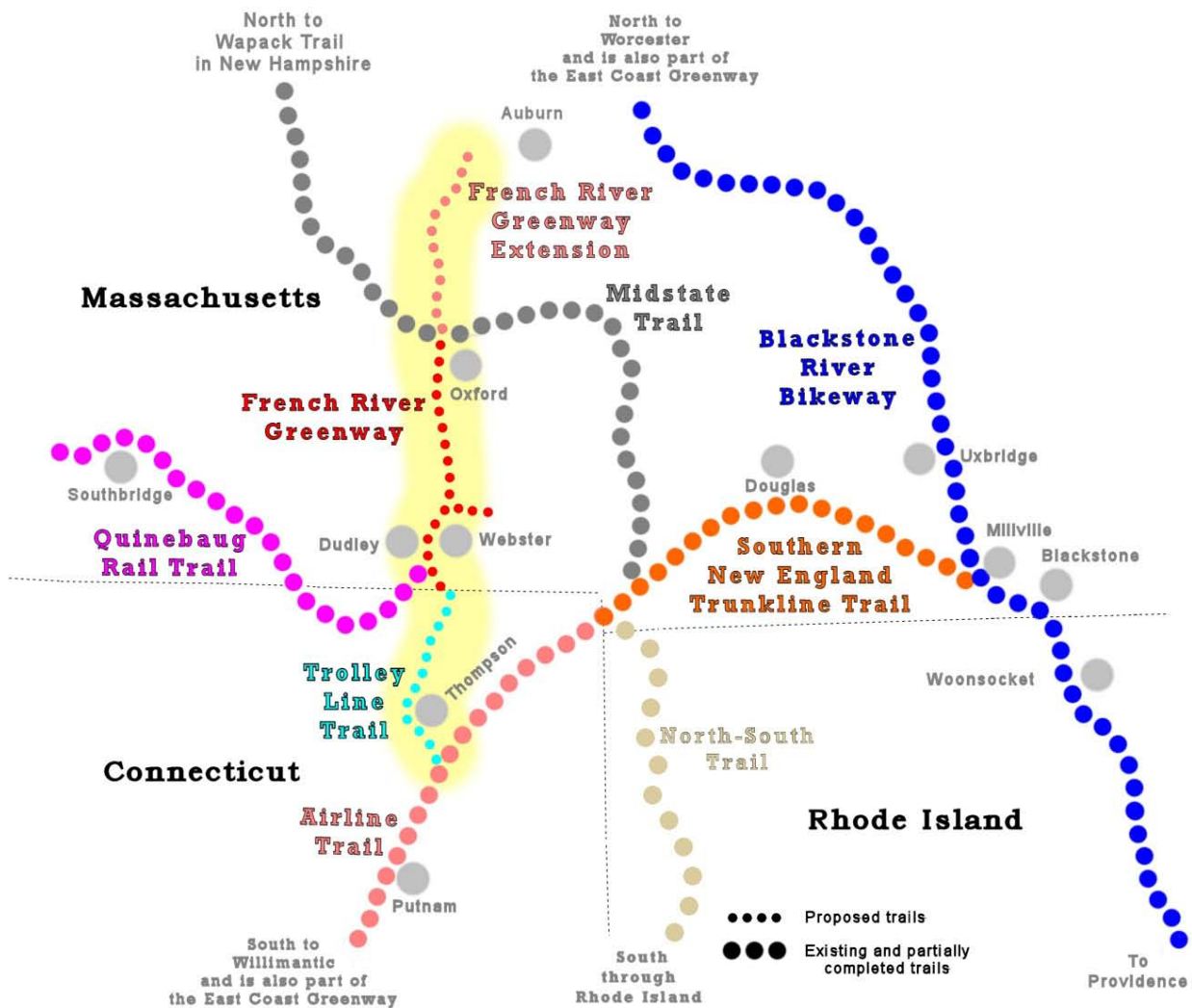
- June 2009 **Purchase of Leovich Landing Completed.** Following a successful fundraising and grant-writing campaign, Leovich Landing was purchased for approximately \$70,000.
- October 2009 **French River Park Leased.** The town of Webster and the French River Connection completed a lease agreement with the owner of a 1.66 acre riverside parcel in downtown Webster, clearing the way for the town to seek funds for park development
- October 2009 **French River Park Engineering Funds Secured.** The Webster Redevelopment Authority donated \$30,000 to the French River Connection to support engineering work for French River Park development, and an engineering contractor was hired.
- February 2010 **French River Park Community Development Block Grant Application Submitted.** Following a public hearing where the park was well received, the Webster Office of Community Development included the project in its annual grant submission. Plans for the park were subsequently approved by the Webster Conservation Commission and other agencies.
- April 2010 **Leovich Landing Plan Approved.** The Oxford Conservation Commission approved plans for the development of Leovich Landing
- May 2010 **Grant Funding for Leovich Landing Received.** The Last Green Valley awarded a \$6000 partnership grant to the French River Connection for the development of Leovich Landing, to be matched by in-kind donations of labor and materials.
- June 2010 **French River Park Funding Approved.** Following state approval of funding, the Webster Office of Community development initiated competitive bidding for park construction.
- September 2010 **Leovich Landing Completed.** Work on this project began in July, and it was substantially completed in September as an Eagle Scout Project of Oxford Troop 147.
- October 2010 **French River Park Construction Begins.** Following contract award the previous month, Contractor Henry Ceppetelli began work on the park, to be completed in the spring of 2011.
- December 2010 **Webster Riverwalk Funding Requested.** As part of a pedestrian circulation plan, the Webster Office of Community Development requested state funds for 25% design of the riverwalk from the railroad museum to Peter Street.

Existing and partially completed trails in the tri-state area

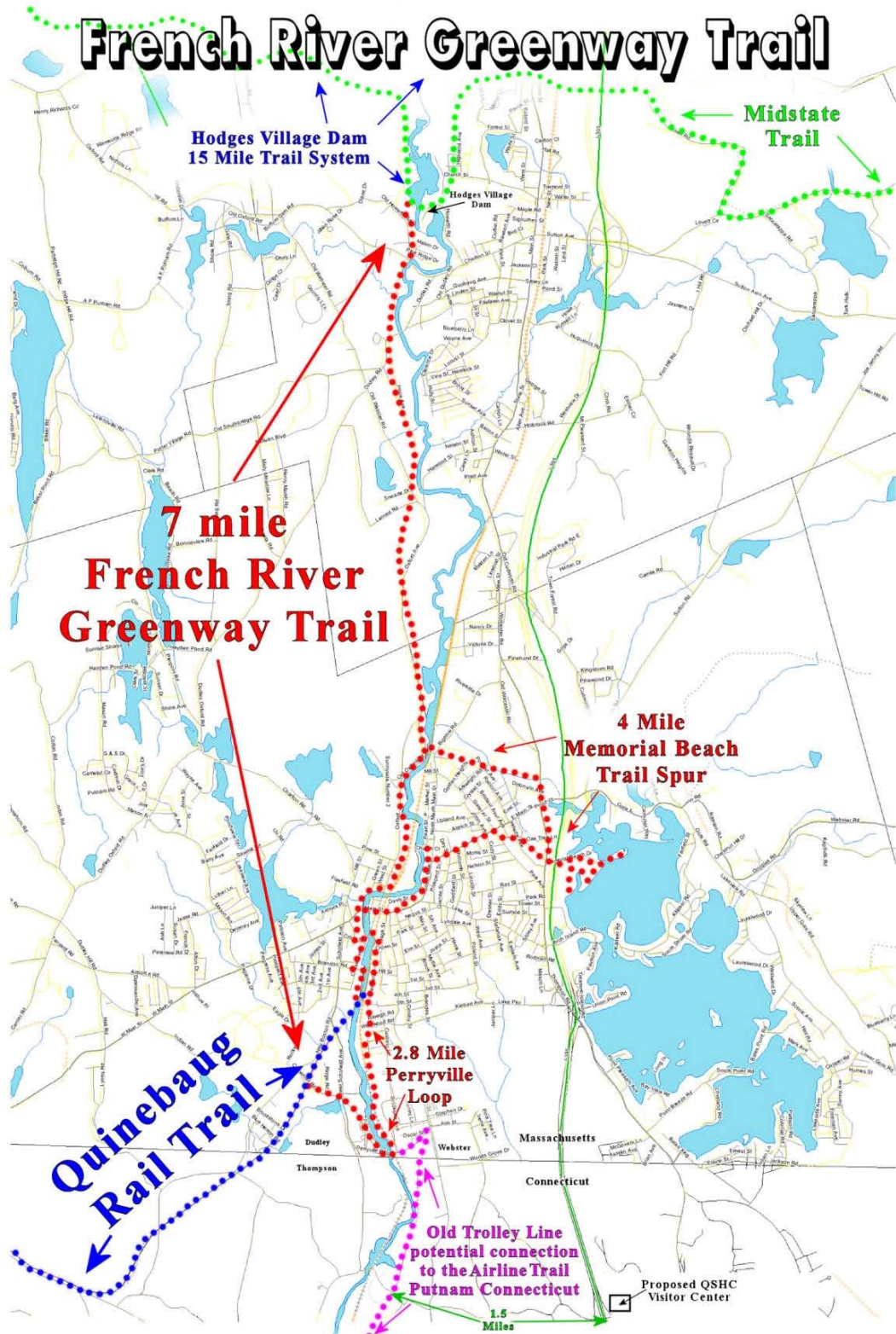


A number of trails are in various stages of development in the tri-state area.

Proposed Trail Network with French River Greenway and Trolley Line Trail



The French River Greenway and the Trolley Line, a potential trail in Thompson CT, add a high value connection to the trail network



The proposed French River Greenway includes both secluded and urban sections, and takes advantage where possible of town-owned and unused land. The final route has not been determined, pending consultation with, and approval by, landowners.

Representative Trailside sites

These are just a few of the points of interest that can be developed not only for the enjoyment of trail users, but for all residents and visitors.

The Perryville step dam is an excellent site for a small park and a boat launch. This is the turning point of the Perryville Loop, and the closest point to the “Trolley Trail”. It is now the Perryville Trace trailhead.



This 1868 stone arch bridge, the main street between Webster and Dudley, could become visible from a small park adjacent to Historic Stevens Mill.

This park could expand to encompass both sides of the river and become a central meeting place.



This property in downtown Webster is the site of French River Park. It will include a boat launch, tables and benches, parking, lighting, an accessible path, and a bike rack. If the townspeople should wish it, other amenities can be added



This railroad bridge, just south of Collins Cove, is the entrance to the Memorial Beach Spur. The view is spectacular, affords a great point of interest with or without the spur.



How Trails Improve Communities

From www.railtrail.org, website of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

Trails and greenways are too often seen narrowly when it comes to their benefits. People tend to focus on the recreational or environmental aspects of trails and greenways, failing to see the big picture - the total package of benefits that a trail or greenway can provide to communities including public health, economic and transportation benefits, and even the effect on community pride and identity. When seen as a whole, the evidence about the far-reaching benefits of trails and greenways is compelling, especially given the minimal public investment involved compared to other undertakings with the same community goals.

Health

Trails and greenways create healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe, accessible and low- or no-cost places to walk, cycle, hike or run. Trails make it easier for children and adults to fit exercise in their daily routines by connecting them with places they want or need to go. Communities that encourage physical activity by making use of trails can see a significant effect on public health and wellness.

Transportation & Livability

In addition to providing a safe place for people to enjoy recreational activities, greenways and trails often function as viable transportation corridors.

Conservation & Environment

Conservation corridors have all the traditional conservation benefits of protected lands and parks, but have the additional benefits due to their linear nature. As tools for ecology and conservation, greenways and trails help preserve important natural landscapes, provide needed links between fragmented habitats, and offer tremendous opportunities for protecting plant and animal species. Trails and greenways can play an important role in improving water quality and mitigating flood damage. Greenways preserve open space that provides natural buffer zones to protect rivers and ponds from pollution caused by fertilizers and pesticides on yards and farms, and from urban runoff. They can also serve as flood plains that absorb excess water and mitigate damage caused by floods. In addition, they allow people to experience nature with minimal environmental impact.

Economy/Revitalization

The economic effects of trails and greenways are sometimes readily apparent (as in the case of trailside businesses), and are sometimes more subtle, such as when companies establish new factories and offices in communities with amenities like trails. There is no question, however, that countless communities across America have experienced an economic revitalization due in whole or in part to trails and greenways.

- According to a 1998 study, the direct economic impact of the Great Allegheny Passage exceeded \$14 million a year--even though the trail was only half-finished at the time. In Confluence, Pennsylvania, one of the first trailhead towns, the trail has encouraged development of several new businesses and a rise in real estate values.
- In the months following the opening of the Mineral Belt Trail in Leadville Colorado, the city reported a 19 percent increase in sales tax revenues. Owners of restaurants and lodging facilities report that they are serving customers who have come into town specifically to ride the trail. The trail has helped Leadville to recover from the economic blow of a mine closure.

- Visitors to Little Miami Scenic Trail in Ohio spend an average of \$13.54 per visit just on food, beverage and transportation to the trail. In addition, they spend \$277 per person each year on clothing, equipment and accessories to use during trail trips.

Historic Preservation/Community Identity

Many community leaders are surprised at how quickly trails become sources of community identity and pride. These effects are magnified when communities use trails and greenways to highlight and connect historic and cultural sites.

Education

Trails and associated corridor lands offer the opportunity to educate youth in ecology, conservation, and stewardship of valuable community resources. Trails may provide access to sites which contribute to education in local history and geography, and active trail organizations provide experience in civics at the local and regional level. All of these topics come alive when presented on site in a safe, clean environment.

How Landowners and Abutters Benefit

Adapted from www.railtrails.org, website of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

Benefits to Landowners

Trails and greenways increase the natural beauty of communities. They have also been shown to bolster property values and make adjacent properties easier to sell.

- A 1998 study of property values along the Mountain Bay Trail in Brown County, Wisconsin shows that lots adjacent to the trail sold faster and for an average of nine percent more than similar property not located next to the trail.
- In a 2002 survey of recent home buyers sponsored by the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders, trails ranked as the second most important community amenity out of a list of 18 choices.
- Realizing the selling power of greenways, developers of the Shepherd's Vineyard housing development in Apex, North Carolina added \$5,000 to the price of 40 homes adjacent to the regional greenway. Those homes were still the first to sell.

Landowners who donate easements or title for land in the trail corridor or who put conservation restrictions in place can receive both a charitable deduction on their income tax and a reduction in property taxes.

Many landowners make donations to leave a legacy for the enjoyment of future generations to the communities in which they have lived and worked. It can be a gift of, and a gift to, a well-loved place.

Stewardship

Trails and greenways are cared for by users. No longer will the area be a dumping ground, a derelict hangout, or an ATV or dirt bike track. Annual maintenance organized by trail groups and performed by users will ensure it remains a community resource.

Options for transferring land or trail rights

| Options | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Informal "handshake" agreement These usually consist of either a verbal agreement or a letter by the landowner and the trails organization. They are the least permanent form of trail access agreement, but they allow a landowner and trail organization to try out a potential trail alignment on a trial basis before potentially considering a more permanent arrangement.</p> | <p>Easy, flexible; allows the landowner and the trail group to “try out” a potential trail route on a trial basis</p> | <p>Not a permanent arrangement; often stops when the land is sold</p> |
| <p>License agreements License agreements, signed by both the landowner and the trail organization, grant access for a certain period of time with an option to renew. They are useful because they clearly define the understanding between the landowner and the trail group with respect to the trail. The license offers clear terms for trail use and maintenance, and allows either party the option of terminating the agreement with advance notice - usually 60-90 days. The downside of a license agreement is its impermanence. Portions of the trail may be lost when parcels change hands or are developed. Losing trail links means the trail organization must find new routes, build and maintain new trail, and make continual changes to trail descriptions and/or their guidebook.</p> | <p>Leaves land in private ownership</p> <p>The agreement clearly spells out the responsibilities of the trail maintaining organization and the landowner</p> | <p>Not a permanent arrangement</p> <p>Changes easily as ownership changes</p> |
| <p>Trail Easements A trail easement is a permanent right-of-way: a long, narrow strip on a parcel of land through which a trail is maintained and the public may pass. The land continues to be owned by the original owner, and the trail easement is conveyed to a nonprofit organization (or other entity, such as the town) by donation or purchase. In return for conveying these rights, and subject to standards specified in the IRS code, the landowner may be entitled to tax benefits. The trail easement may be any width that is comfortable for the landowner and useful for trail building, maintenance, and intended types of uses (25-50 feet is typical). A trail easement is legally binding, remaining in force when the property is sold or changes hands. The trail organization is responsible for monitoring the land at least annually.</p> <p>Sometimes trail easements are part of a larger land conservation easement project; a conservation easement is oriented to the conservation of land resources (for example, a working farm), while a trail easement secures the right of public access and use.</p> | <p>Leaves land in private ownership</p> <p>Can be tailor-made to the needs of the landowner and the trail organization</p> <p>Is permanent and runs with the property</p> <p>More tax advantages for the landowner if it is part of a larger land conservation project</p> | <p>Can be less effective if not carefully written and monitored by the trail organization</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Donation of Land Donations can be especially attractive options to landowners in areas that are rapidly developing, because of the associated increase in land values and taxes. Land donations ensure that the landowner's wishes for that property are assured for perpetuity; some landowners have donated trail segments as memorials to loved ones. The landowner may be eligible for tax deductions for a charitable donation.</p> | <p>The landowner may qualify for tax benefits</p> <p>Liability is passed to the trail organization</p> | <p>Can be expensive for receiving organization if there are problems with property (for example, if title is clouded, or property contains hazardous materials, etc)</p> |
| <p>Option or Right of First Refusal A right of first refusal provides an opportunity for the landowner to offer the trails organization a chance to match a purchase offer received by the landowner at a future time, if and when the owner decides to sell the property. Another possible arrangement is for a trail organization to purchase an option of a right of first refusal with a clear understanding of the purchase price up front. This allows the organization time to secure the funds.</p> | <p>Little or no cost in the short-term</p> <p>Safeguards the opportunity for the trail organization to not lose a trail segment should the property change hands, but does not permanently obligate either party</p> <p>Doesn't change whatever current trail arrangement there is</p> | <p>None in the short term</p> <p>Trail organization may be unable to complete the transaction</p> |
| <p>Purchase of Land In some cases, fee simple purchase of the trail corridor may be possible and/or appropriate. Trail ownership allows permanent control of the land, but the cost of purchase may be beyond local ability. Areas where there are planned facilities such as parking, camping sites, shelters, or expensive bridges, or where there are critical trail corridor connections, may warrant fee simple purchase to protect the trail organization's investment. In some cases, a trail group may be able to seek a donation of land, or to structure a so-called "bargain sale," in which the owner agrees to sell property for less than the full market value.</p> | <p>Landowner receives compensation, trail organization receives full rights and title to land</p> <p>Avoids complex long-term administration and/or management issues that occur sometimes with other trail arrangements</p> | <p>Can be expensive; organization may not have the funds or the capacity to raise them</p> <p>Trail organization must be able to cover ongoing land ownership costs – taxes, stewardship, management and maintenance</p> |

Landowner Liability

Landowners are often concerned about liability that may arise from allowing the public access to land. Recognizing that this poses an impediment to the preservation of land for public enjoyment, Massachusetts has enacted a statute stating that landowners are not liable for personal injury, including to minors, or for property damage so long as there is no mandatory charge for use and the landowner does not willfully or recklessly allow a hazard to exist:

Chapter 21: Section 17C. Public use of land for recreational, conservation, scientific educational and other purposes; landowner's liability limited; exception

Section 17C. (a) Any person having an interest in land including the structures, buildings, and equipment attached to the land, including without limitation, wetlands, rivers, streams, ponds, lakes, and other bodies of water, who lawfully permits the public to use such land for recreational, conservation, scientific, educational, environmental, ecological, research, religious, or charitable purposes without imposing a charge or fee therefor, or who leases such land for said purposes to the commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof or to any nonprofit corporation, trust or association, shall not be liable for personal injuries or property damage sustained by such members of the public, including without limitation a minor, while on said land in the absence of wilful, wanton, or reckless conduct by such person. Such permission shall not confer upon any member of the public using said land, including without limitation a minor, the status of an invitee or licensee to whom any duty would be owed by said person.

(b) The liability of any person who imposes a charge or fee for the use of his land by the public for the purposes described in subsection (a) shall not be limited by any provision of this section. The term "person" as used in this section shall be deemed to include the person having an interest in the land, his agent, manager, or licensee and shall include without limitation, any governmental body, agency or instrumentality, nonprofit corporation, trust or association, and any director, officer, trustee, member, employee or agent thereof. A contribution or other voluntary payment not required to be made to use such land shall not be considered a charge or fee within the meaning of this section.

The statute was updated in 2008 to be more specifically inclusive in defining the protections it affords:

Chapter 513 of the Acts of 2008

AN ACT RELATIVE TO PUBLIC ACCESS TO RECREATIONAL TRAILS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 17C of chapter 21 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2006 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the word "limitation", in line 3, the following words: - , railroad and utility corridors, easements and rights of way.

SECTION 2. Subsection (b) of said section 17C of said chapter 21, as so appearing, is hereby amended by striking out the second sentence and inserting in place thereof the following 2 sentences:- For the purposes of this section, "person" shall include the person having any interest in the land, his agent, manager or licensee and shall include, without limitation, any governmental body, agency or instrumentality, a nonprofit corporation, trust, association, corporation, company or other business organization and any director, officer, trustee, member, employee, authorized volunteer or agent thereof. For the purposes of this section, "structures, buildings and equipment"

shall include any structure, building or equipment used by an electric company, transmission company, distribution company, gas company or railroad in the operation of its business.

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