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For immediate release

Georgia Coast Rail-Trail breaks ground

The Georgia Coast Rail-Trail is officially under way in Camden County. County workers cleared the first segment in late January, and construction began today.

The first segment stretches for 3.5 miles. The White Oak post office at Hwy. 252 is near the middle of the segment, which crosses White Oak Creek north of the post office. When completed, the trail is expected to comprise 68 miles stretching through four counties from Kingsland to Riceboro.

Amenities along the White Oak stretch will include two picnic shelters, benches, and rest room facilities along the trail. Catwalks for fishermen will be added to each side of the existing White Oak Creek bridge. At the trailhead in front of the post office, parking will be improved to accommodate more cars. Benches and a seesaw are already in place.

The entire trail will be 10 feet wide with a hard-packed surface. On this segment, the trail will be constructed with finely crushed concrete reclaimed from I-95.

“This is a fine powdery substance, called fines,” said Ed McBryer, board member of Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails Inc. and executive director of the Atlanta-based PATH Foundation, which is designing and building the trail. “It won’t be loose like gravel but will be compacted into a hard surface once it is put down. With generous help from Seaboard Construction Company, we will be using what used to be an impervious roadway and recycling it into a natural, environmentally friendly pervious surface. It’s the ultimate green project.”

McBryer said the trail will lend itself to walkers, runners, bikers and equestrians. “It will work for everything except in-line skates and road bikes with skinny tires,” he said. No motorized vehicles will be allowed on the trail.

“This is going to be one of the best things that’s come along to Camden County in a while,” said Nisi Zell, a county commissioner and member of the Rails to Trails board. “Everybody all over the county is excited about the trail, and all the commissioners are very supportive, as well.”

Funding still needed

The approximate \$400,000 cost of building the White Oak segment is being split three ways. The PATH Foundation is contributing one-third of the cost. Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails is seeking as much as \$150,000 in tax-deductible donations from foundations and local individuals to cover another third of the cost. Camden County, owner of the White Oak segment, is providing in-kind construction assistance amounting to one-third of the cost, including such things as clearing, grading, and providing benches, picnic shelters, rest rooms, and some building materials.

“To have this kind of public-private partnership shows what you can do when you bring people together to accomplish things,” said County Manager Steve Howard. “This is a great quality of life partnership that affects the lives of country residents and visitors alike.”

Plans call for the Georgia Coast Rail-Trail to be built on an abandoned CSX railroad bed that runs across marshes, maritime forests, and 43 rivers and creeks in Camden, Glynn, McIntosh and Liberty counties. Most of the prospective trail is now in private ownership and one of the organization’s goals is to bring about a cooperative use of that land.

“When the Georgia Coast Rail-Trail is complete, it will offer coastal residents and visitors access to a beautiful unspoiled ecological system and exceptional educational opportunities,” said Fred Freyer, who chairs the non-profit Rails to Trails. “We expect it to be used by families, nature lovers, bird watchers, cyclists, fishermen and everyone who’s looking for a healthy outdoor adventure.”

The city of Woodbine has already built a trail on a 1 ½-mile stretch of the railroad bed about two miles south of the White Oak segment. Opened in 1998, the trail has proved popular with locals looking for exercise or a place to walk their dogs.

The White Oak segment will be completed in early April.

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