

## **TRAILS TASK FORCE**

**July 10, 2019**

**Committee Members Present:** Deb Root (Chair), C. Clark, D. Decker, W. Dibble, K. Dirlam, G. Hanchett, B. Harris

**Others Present:** K. Ash (CCAC), J. Bailey (NYS OPRHP), G. Bartas (Saddle Dusters), J. Bunk (Summer Intern), B. Burnes (NYS Horse Council), G. Burnes (NYS Horse Council) M. Denhoff, L. Gridley, D. McDonnell, A. McKay, B. Riehle, F. Sinclair (CCAC), J. Schumaker (Genesee Valley Greenway), M. Washer

**Media Present:** C. Potter – *The Spectator*

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Trails Task Force Chair Debra Root.

### **Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Legislator Decker, seconded by Legislator Dibble, and carried to approve the Trails Task Force minutes of June 10, 2019.

### **Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway Presentation**

NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) Allegany Regional Director Jay Bailey attended the meeting to give a brief overview of the Genesee Valley Greenway State Parks. President of the Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway Joan Schumaker was also in attendance.

Mr. Bailey began by giving a history of the Genesee Valley Greenway stating the following:

- The Genesee Valley Greenway is a 90+ mile multi-use trail and natural corridor extending from the Village of Hinsdale to the City of Rochester, traversing Cattaraugus, Allegany, Wyoming, Livingston, and Monroe counties. Allegany County's section extends from the Village of Cuba to the hamlet of Roszburg.
- It consists of lands making up the former Genesee Valley Canal (1840 – 1878) and the later Rochester Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad (1882 – 1963) much of which was acquired by RG&E for use as a utility corridor in 1963.
- OPRHP purchased 118 acres from Penn Central Corp., 10 miles of corridor in Monroe County, the first segment of the "Old Genesee Valley Canal Trail" in 1984.
- In 1991, Parks & Trails New York formed a steering committee of interested stakeholders and held town meetings along the corridor. As a result, local committees in individual towns/villages obtained leases from RG&E to build the Greenway Trail.
- In 1993, the Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway (FOGVG), a 501(c)(3) NYS not-for-profit, type B Corporation was formed.
- In 1994, a public-private partnership consisting of the OPRHP, DEC, and the Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway formed to coordinate management of the trail.
- In 2000, New York State took possession of the entire corridor.
- In 2011, OPRHP assumed jurisdiction over Allegany and Cattaraugus County sections from the DEC and still works closely with the FOGVG to manage the facility.

- The Genesee Valley Greenway was developed and is maintained with a mix of State funds, Federal grants, donations, and volunteer labor.

Mr. Bailey showed the committee historical pictures of the canal dating back to 1882.

### **Goals of the Genesee Valley Greenway**

Mr. Bailey briefly discussed the following goals of the Genesee Valley Greenway:

#### National, Historic, and Cultural Resource Protection

Mr. Bailey stated that the Genesee Valley Greenway is very sensitive to maintaining the historic features along the trails such as the beautiful stone culverts.

#### Economic Development

Mr. Bailey stated that various studies have been done that show every dollar spent on trails and parks bring an exponential return to the community.

#### Community Involvement

Mr. Bailey stated it is difficult to manage and maintain a 100-mile trail, and they love to have trail adopters who mow, clean up storm debris, or just alert them if they see a tree down, etc.

#### Connections

Mr. Bailey stated they would love more physical connections to other trail networks to increase fitness as well as connections to local businesses and resources in hopes that people will come to the trail as their destination, but also know there are specific points they can exit the trail and go into the heart of a community to shop, eat, and/or stay overnight.

### **Notable Features of the Genesee Valley Greenway**

Mr. Bailey briefly highlighted the following notable features of the Genesee Valley Greenway in Allegany County:

- It is adjacent to Canal Warehouse in Belfast which is the only original building remaining in situ on the Genesee Valley Canal.
- It is adjacent to key village centers as well as Houghton College.
- There is access to the Genesee River, Wiscoy Creek, and Black Creek.
- It connects to the Finger Lakes Trail and North Country Trail.
- It has multiple trailheads and investment in trail infrastructure.

### **Recent and Upcoming Trail Work**

Mr. Bailey highlighted the following work that has recently been accomplished:

- Repair of small slide failure on Bull Street, Cuba
- Repair of culvert north of Hughes Street, Belfast
- Installation of water control device south of Hughes Street, Belfast
- Installation of fencing along river in Fillmore
- Drainage work in partnership with Town of Fillmore

- Repair of large culvert in Houghton
- Installation of six benches from Cuba to Belfast
- Brushing back of  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile section in Hinsdale

Mr. Bailey noted that they plan to replace a large culvert in Caneadea in the future.

## **Development Goals**

Mr. Bailey highlighted the following development goals of the Genesee Valley Greenway:

### Complete Continuity of the Greenway by:

- Resolving property title objections and encroachments.
- Acquiring property where needed or bridging gaps through partnership agreements.
- Building new trail and bridges where breaks exist.

### Preserve Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources by:

- Repairing and preserving historic stone culverts when possible.
- Being sensitive to other canal/railroad features as well as the natural environment.

### Increasing Trail Enhancements by:

- Building more parking areas, pocket parks, water access points, and developing campsites.
- Adding mileposts, interpretive signage, kiosks, benches, and bicycle racks where they are lacking.
- Expanding use of volunteers (i.e. trail adopters, service organizations, etc.)

Mr. Bailey noted they also hope to connect the Genesee Valley Greenway west to Olean and Allegany State Park as well as connecting south to the WAG Trail and burgeoning Triple Divide Trail (Genesee Susquehanna Greenway).

## **County Support**

Mr. Bailey stated that the best thing the County can do to help is to support their initiatives to increase connectivity and linkages to local businesses, services, and amenities. Mr. Bailey noted that they also appreciate any communication the County can provide in regards to ideas and opportunities.

Ms. Hanchett asked if there is primitive camping permitted anywhere. Mr. Bailey stated they do not have any specific camping designations; however, people can get off a trail and camp in Letchworth. Ms. Hanchett stated that camping, even if it's primitive, is a big draw. Mr. Bailey agreed and stated it is a goal; however, there have been concerns on how to administer and maintain. Ms. Hanchett asked if there are any trailhead sign ins. Mr. Bailey stated, no, there are too many trailheads for that. Legislator Harris stated that the number one priority is making the Genesee Valley Greenway a continuous trail without any road as the least desirable part is so much road hiking. Legislator Harris continued that they should think about the Erie Canal Trail and how enjoyable the pocket parks are as well as the available amenities. Legislator Harris suggested using the Greenway to get from point A to B, and then get with your local towns and

villages to establish parks. Task Force Chair Root asked if their system is multiuse and allows snowmobiles. Mr. Bailey stated most sections are multiuse and permit snowmobiles; however, north of Valentine Road in Rochester is not. Mr. Bailey noted that they do partner with various snowmobile clubs. Ms. Root asked what the allowable timeframe is for snowmobiles. Mr. Bailey stated 3 inches of snow is required for snowmobiling. Legislator Harris asked if trails are fully compatible with bikes. Mr. Bailey stated some sections are gorgeous and more bicycle friendly while others are cinder from original rail grade. There have also been areas where they have had significant issues with erosion and slide failures. Mr. Bailey indicated they have had a difficult time repairing and stabilizing those sections, noting that south of Black Creek and the Genesee River are major problems. Allegany County Concerned Citizen Karen Ash asked if any other off road vehicles are allowed in addition to snowmobiles. Mr. Bailey stated, no. Ms. Ash asked how complex the property title objections are and if litigation is involved. Mr. Bailey stated it varies. A lot of the title issues go back to railroad days, and sometimes people who think they own the property don't have a clear title to it. NYS Horse Council Regional Director Pauline Burnes stated that one of their members used to ride horses on the Erie Canal, but now that they are paving their trails, the horses have difficulty riding because they slip on the pavement. Ms. Burnes asked if Genesee Valley Greenway is planning on paving their trails. Mr. Bailey stated that stone dust is their preferred topping; however, from Genesee Valley Parks south to Scottsville Road is paved for two to three miles, and they do plan to pave certain sections where it makes sense. Allegany County Concerned Citizen Fred Sinclair stated that for several decades there has been a proposal to flood a section of the canal from Belfast to Rockville and create a linear water park, and asked if Mr. Bailey has seen those drawings. Mr. Bailey stated he has not, noting he hasn't looked at it enough to have an opinion. Mr. Sinclair stated it would be interesting to see what the feasibility is of that happening for canoeing and fishing. Legislator Dibble suggested the Task Force and Resource Management Committee take a look at the erosion issues.

### **Horse Trails Presentation**

WNY Regional Director for the NYS Horse Council Pauline Burnes attended the meeting to briefly present on Allegany County horse trails. Ms. Burnes gave a brief history of her career as well as her accomplishments in the horse industry.

### **New York State Horse Council Mission/Vision Statement**

Ms. Burnes began her presentation by referencing the New York State Horse Council mission/vision statement that follows:

*“To promote horse industry in New York State acting as a unified voice to impact legislation related to equine activities. To encourage, develop, and maintain land and trails suitable for public equine recreational purposes. To promote the education of the public for the protection and care of equines. To stimulate interest in equine sports and equine activities, and to promote safety in equine activities.”*

### **New York State Horse Council Trail Committee**

The NYS Horse Council Trail Committee represents equestrian trail user interests to New York State governing bodies. Committee members serve on the NYS Trail Council in Albany, and promote equestrian trail use in NYS by disseminating horse trail information and NYSHC trail activity information to horsemen. The committee further investigates and helps solve trail problems as they arise such as user group conflict, trail clearing, maintaining, rebuilding, and marking. Ms. Burnes briefly showed several pictures of horse riders through the years.

## **History of Allegany County State Forest Land**

Ms. Burnes stated there are over 43,382 acres of state forest land. Prior to 1929, much land was cleared with an attempt to farm marginal soils under adverse climatic conditions. In 1929, the NYS Legislature authorized the purchase to buy marginal and abandoned farmland to restore to woodland for forest products, watershed protection, recreational use, and wildlife habitat, and it would be managed by New York State. Ms. Burnes continued that there is a historic significance in shaping the landscape and forest that we now enjoy. Many other areas are experiencing a loss of open space; however, Allegany County has an incredible resource for recreation and outdoor activities promoting trails for health benefits and tourism. Legislator Dibble stated that adding in the wildlife management area, you get over 60,000 acres of DEC owned land in the County.

## **Goals/Objectives**

Ms. Burnes briefly highlighted the following goals and objectives of the NYS Horse Council:

- Develop partnerships between the DEC land managers and other public land managers, planning departments, non-profit equestrian organizations, outdoor clubs, colleges/universities as well as other trail users toward a mutual goal of improving, expanding, and maintaining equestrian/multi-use trails in a sustainable manner.
- Provide local equestrians who maintain trails, pay taxes, grow and use agricultural products, and support local businesses with a local resource for equestrian activities.
- Promote the development of “bed and barn” business opportunities.
- Promote economic development through tourism and recreation while protecting natural resources.
- Include trail riders and their horses to scope out projects on equestrian/multi-use trails in need of improvements and recognize volunteers for their efforts.
- Develop a master plan for the expansion, improvement, and sustainability of equestrian/multi-use trails in Allegany County that would include local equestrians in the development of the master plan and forming an equestrian trail committee.
- Identify funding resources for the design, construction, and maintenance of horse trails that serve as multi-use trail systems in Allegany County.

## **Trail Maintenance**

Ms. Burnes briefly discussed the Allegany Saddle Dusters Trail Riders Trail Maintenance weekend that occurred in late May 2019, stating after their weekend of clearing the trails, they arrived back on Memorial Day Weekend to non-horse campers leaving no room for truck and trailers. Ms. Burnes indicated they are working with the DEC regarding these issues.

Ms. Burnes showed pictures of various trail riders performing maintenance such as drainage and tree removal, flagging trees for removal, re-route for roots, etc.

## **Cattaraugus County Trail Master Plan**

Ms. Burnes referenced the Cattaraugus County Trail Master Plan and showed the committee a map with potential regional trail connections. Ms. Hanchett asked if Allegany and Cattaraugus connect anywhere on these trails. Ms. Burnes stated currently no; however, that is the future goal. Legislator Dibble noted they are working with Cattaraugus County to connect them.

## **County Support**

Ms. Burnes discussed the following ways the County can support the maintenance and improvement of horse trails:

- Form an Allegany County Chapter of the NYS Horse Council which will increase funding opportunities through 501(c)(3) status
- Lobby to protect open space and recreation areas
- Participate in trail maintenance days and encourage others to do so as well
- Bring a dish to pass and/or cook
- Practice good trail manners
- Donate money during fundraising campaigns
- Contact your state and local legislators to encourage them to support equestrian/recreation trails in New York State

Ms. Burnes noted they are also in need of getting our youth involved and interested in the maintenance of these trails. Ms. Burnes continued that it is also important to improve the trails because the wet mud pulls shoes and tendons in horses. Ms. Burnes referenced horses and riders who have gone down and how hazardous the extrication is to the rescuers, riders, and horses. Legislator Decker asked if it would be wise to start with the County's three colleges that have equestrian programs and start a chapter through them. Ms. Burnes stated that would be a great place to start, adding she has spoken with Houghton College who is interested; however, she has not spoken with Alfred University yet. Ms. Burnes has also reached out to Alfred State who referred her to Jonathan Hilsher, Director at the Alfred State College Center for Civic Engagement.

Mr. Sinclair asked if they are finding the system has improved enough that they have the connectivity they need in case of an emergency that would require calling 911. Allegany County Saddle Dusters member Gail Bartas stated they did experience an emergency two years ago, and they did have cell service to call out. Ms. Bartas continued that there are spots where there isn't service; however, for the most part it's good. Mr. Sinclair asked if they tell them their physical location or provide coordinates. Ms. Bartas stated that most riders have GPS units, and they provide coordinates. Ms. Bartas also works with the Emergency Management Services committee and lets them know when and where they have trail rides occurring so they are aware of their location.

Ms. Ash referred to multiuse trails and asked what other users equestrians find appropriate. Ms. Bartas stated they need to keep ATV and equestrian trails separate. Hikers use the same trail system as equestrians, and Ms. Bartas recommended that hikers talk to the horses so they are recognized as a person and not an unknown group passing by. Ms. Bartas continued that young horses are not used to various activities on the trails, so it's best to keep the users separate. Ms. Bartas noted that equestrian trails can be used for cross country skiing in the winter time. Task Force Chair Root asked if horse trails are a three or four season activity. Ms. Burnes stated the West Almond System allows riding from June 1 to September 30, which is when they

experience their issues with non-horse campers filling the grounds. Ms. Burnes noted that the Finger Lakes Trail is closed to horse riders due to the conflict in users.

Legislator Harris asked if the group's goal is to expand the system or spend energy repairing and improving the existing trails. Ms. Burnes stated their long-term goal is to expand while their short-term goal is to concentrate on re-routing the West Almond Trail System and addressing the poor drainage issues. Legislator Harris stated he has experience with sharing trails on Phillips Creek and how difficult it is to hike and run on those trails as hoof prints are dangerous to hikers and runners. Legislator Harris asked if they are also seeing this issue on dry trails. Ms. Burnes stated Mendon Ponds has well drained soil; therefore, hoof prints are not an issue making it a great trail for both horse riders and hikers. Ms. Burnes noted that there is enough land in the County to make separate trail systems that have better footing for both users.

### **Genesee River Wilds Presentation**

Planning Director and Genesee River Wilds Board Member Kier Dirlam briefly presented on the Genesee River Wilds. Mr. Dirlam began by stating that the Genesee River Wilds' mission is to restore, protect, and enjoy the upper Genesee River by combining conservation, recreation, and business.

### **Overview/History of the Genesee River Wilds**

Mr. Dirlam stated the Genesee River Wilds' effort is to help current and new organizations as they build along the river in the Genesee Valley as well as creating and connecting trails in and around the Genesee Valley into the larger "Triple Divide Trail System" and the "Western New York Greenways." The Genesee River Wilds also assists existing efforts with trail development such as the Genesee Valley Greenway, WAG Trail, Allegany Trails – Upper Genesee Trail, Finger Lakes Trail, Conservation Agencies, and Tourism promoters.

The original group met in 2008 to discuss ideas for the Genesee River Valley. In 2011, the Genesee River Wilds, Inc. was established, and in 2012, they received their 501(c)(3) status making them a not-for-profit organization.

The organization is set up to have the following multi-tier structure:

- The administrative board
- Professionals that bring technical strength to the organization
- Volunteers who provide financial and/or physical support for projects
- Individuals who wish to participate in events and activities

### **Triple Divide Trail System**

Mr. Dirlam stated the Triple Divide Trail System will be a conservation and recreation system stretching approximately 230 miles from Rochester to Williamsport, PA. This is being created by connecting existing trails, rail-trails, water trails, and nature park areas including Letchworth State Park. Mr. Dirlam showed a map of the Triple Divide Trail System and referenced the missing piece from Belfast to Wellsville that they need to figure out how to take on.

### **Five Phases to Connect the Trails and Blueways**

Mr. Dirlam briefly discussed the following five phases they will use to connect the Trails and Blueways.

### Phase 1 – Improve Existing Facilities

- Adding more signs
- Adding more parking areas
- Adding more infrastructure
- Creating better surfaces for bicycle trails
- Improving launches for kayaks and canoes

### Phase 2 – Construct New Facilities

- Create a new “pocket park” that consists of kayak and canoe launches, signs, parking lots, and complementary infrastructure. This can be accomplished best by building near bridges and public sites.

### Phase 3 – Add Trails

- Add existing trails to the existing trail systems
- In the sections of the 230-mile long system that do not have trails, create them by using old railroad beds and other existing infrastructure.

### Phase 4 – Add Parks

- By adding a forested streamside park, they will help to protect the river, and provide jobs, eco-tourism, and facilities for environmental education.

### Phase 5 – Ecological Improvements

- Continue to add trees as a buffer along the Genesee River and Pine Creek that will reduce industrial toxins, costly flooding, and the risk of overuse.

Mr. Dirlam noted that a lot of reports that come from the DEC tend to say that the majority of pollution to Lake Ontario comes from Allegany County due to erosion and sewer system runoff, and they are looking for us to improve ecologically.

### **Partners of the Genesee River Wilds**

Mr. Dirlam highlighted the following as partners and other groups related to the Genesee River Wilds:

- Allegany County Chamber of Commerce
- Genesee Valley Conservancy who is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to open space preservation in the Genesee Valley Region. They have helped protect more than 17,000 acres of natural resource and agricultural lands in the Genesee Valley region.
- Genesee Valley Greenway
- Allegany Trails – Upper Genesee River Trail in Wellsville
- Finger Lakes Trail which is a walking trail system extending across New York State



## **Parks Development**

Mr. Dirlam briefly discussed parks development and the “stone soup” method used where they go to the town or County and ask for use of a bridge/land to put a park in. Mr. Dirlam indicated that most of the time they are granted permission, and noted there have been private entities (Riverwalk Plaza and the Scio campground) who have also granted them permission. Mr. Dirlam highlighted the several parks that they have developed throughout the County.

Ms. Ash stated that she never knew there were access points until the Genesee River Wilds was formed and commended the group on the wonderful accomplishments they have made. Ms. Ash asked if a person was using GPS or Google maps, if could they identify one of the kayak signs. Mr. Dirlam stated that they do have all open and usable access points entered into the Google map database. Legislator Decker referenced the Scio access point stating that while it’s small, it’s always being used on Sundays when he passes through. Task Force Chair Root stated it is always busy with fishermen. Mr. Dirlam noted they would love to make that access point bigger. Ms. Burnes asked if they have a website. Mr. Dirlam stated they do; however, their Facebook page is much better and constantly up-to-date as they are able to be more live and energetic.

## **Adjournment**

A motion was made by Legislator Decker, seconded by Legislator Dibble, and carried at 11:52 a.m. to adjourn the meeting.