

Historic railbanking brings trail to Gastonia

Construction of the first phase of Gastonia's Highland Rail-Trail is expected to begin this summer following Gastonia and Norfolk Southern's historic railbanking of the 1.7-mile corridor scheduled for abandonment.

The federal railbanking of the "Class 1" railroad is the first in North Carolina's history.

The rail-trail is funded by the State Trails - Recreational Trails Program, Gastonia, Community Foundation of Gaston County, the local Carrie E. & Lena V. Glenn Foundation and the national Bikes Belong Coalition.

Negotiations began in 2003 when Norfolk Southern filed with the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to abandon five miles of the corridor from the northern edge of Gastonia to a mile north of Dallas. Elected officials of Gaston County, Dallas and Gastonia gave notice to STB of interest in public use.



Photo by Jack Kiser

Construction begins this summer on Gastonia's 1.7 mile Highland Rail-Trail.

In 2007 the county commissioners voted not to pursue railbanking due to concerns by Dallas and adjoining property owners as

well as concerns of the commissioners. Gastonia continued to support the federal **Highland Trail** *Continued on page 3*

Get out, walk!



Web site:
www.americanhiking.org/NTD.aspx

Briefs

Anybody who thinks **trails** don't sell houses in new subdivisions should read the recent prospectus for Village Square in the heart of Cary's Amberly subdivision. The word "trail" appears six times in the teaser to sell the 2,440 to 3,603-square-foot houses costing from \$374,900 to \$521,550.

A typical line on the Web site reads: "Soon these trails will connect to the American Tobacco Trail, a 22+ mile, multi-use trail project spanning three counties and passing through urban, suburban and rural landscapes."

The Web site is http://www.americanhomeguides.com/apps/ahgcontrol/display_community.php4?COMID=HPC-149259

The **Friends of State Parks** have published a 121-page North Carolina State Parks Map Guide. The comprehensive guide contains up-to-date maps and information for all active parks, recreation areas and natural areas. To view sample contents and order the book, visit the Web site at www.ncfsp.org/mapguide.html. Cost is \$18.

AL Capehart, president, and **CR Townsend**, chair of the board of directors of NCRT, were recognized at the April 9 Earth Share of North Carolina annual meeting as Primary Representatives of the Year for the 2007 Workplace Giving Campaign.

<http://www.NCRail-Trails.org>

NCRT 2007 annual report

North Carolina Rail-Trails began its 18th year in 2007 and continues as an all-volunteer, statewide 501(c)(3) non-profit. NCRT monitors the state's rail system, actively pursues corridor preservation, retrieval and conversion to public trails. NCRT fosters local leadership and currently supports local rail-trail initiatives throughout the state.

NCRT provides coordination between local, state and federal agencies, allied state and national organizations, and project funding sources. As an instrument in this networking, NCRT (www.ncrail-trails.org) advocates the statewide conservation of rail corridors to provide healthful recreation, historic preservation, transportation options and enhancement of the state's environment. Rail-trails promote eco-tourism, alternate transportation, safe commuter routes and a healthy infrastructure. NCRT is supported by dues, gifts and grants. As a land trust, NCRT specializes in federal railbanking of railroad rights of way and their conversion into rail-trails.

The primary objectives of NCRT are:

1. Establish regional demonstration rail-trails of state significance.
2. Obtain favorable rail corridor preservation and interim trail legislation.
3. Assist multiple local rail-trail corridor initiatives throughout North Carolina.
4. Foster a statewide network of non-motorized commuting and recreation trails.

North Carolina Rail-Trails
participates in workplace campaigns with



Earth Share
OF NORTH CAROLINA

Look for us when you give at work
For more information call
800-200-6311 or 919-687-4840

In 2007 the 16th volume of "Little Toot" had four issues. Over 800 members and friends received NCRT's newsletter. "Little Toot" has an outstanding record for an all-volunteer organization and is now available on line at www.ncrail-trails.org. NCRT is unique because its members' share a vision of trails on North Carolina's old railroad beds. An added option is Rail with Trail, e.g. the Libba Cotton Bikeway in Carrboro-Chapel Hill.

NCRT continues to provide pro bono consultation to local, regional and state



Depot will be part of Whiteville's 200th anniversary celebration in November.

agencies and groups in the retrieval, preservation and conversion of unused rail beds into rail-trails. NCRT supports the ongoing efforts of existing and developing rail-trails including, but not limited to:

American Tobacco Trail, Chatham, Durham, and Wake counties; Brevard Bike Path, Transylvania County; Burgaw Osgood Canal and Trail, Pender County; Coastal Carolina Trail in Beaufort, Pitt and Martin counties; and Deep River Rail-Trail, Randolph County; Dunn-Erwin Trail, Harnett County; Jacksonville Rail-Trail, Onslow County.

NCRT facilitates the Rail Corridor Round Table, which met five times in 2007. The Round Table is composed of representatives of NC DOT Rail Division and Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation, NC DENR, NCRT and local rail-trail

NCRT's 2007 annual financial report will appear in the Fall edition of "Little Toot."

advocates. The Round Table's purpose is facilitating communication, information sharing and advocating for the "The Best Possible Use of the State's Rail Corridor Assets."

NCRT's Board of Directors held a board retreat in September to begin a three-year work plan. In October the board contracted with 1000 Cranes, a business consultant firm specializing in plan development for non-profit, service-oriented organizations, to produce a business plan for NCRT's next three years.

The NCRT Board of Directors met quarterly in 2007 at project sites throughout the state:

Jan. 13 in Burgaw with a program on the Osgood Canal and Trail and the stabilization of the Burgaw railroad depot.

April 14 in Louisburg with a program on the Louisburg Bikeway.

July 14 in Brevard with a program on the Brevard Bike Path/Greenway.

Oct. 13 in Durham with a program on the Chatham section of the American Tobacco Trail (Durham, Chatham and Wake counties).

Board members represent bicycling, hiking, equestrian, conservation, health, historic preservation, transportation, and economic development interests. Board meetings are open to the public.



www.nccconservationnetwork.org
Charter Member

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Highland Trail

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railbanking reasoning that railbanking the portion outside Gastonia should be supported by the county and Dallas. That segment was ultimately lost to abandonment.

On Feb. 7 Norfolk Southern filed a consummation of abandonment for the five miles with STB, which eliminated any trail or future rail use of the corridor.

During the process of abandonment of the northern segment, Norfolk Southern announced plans to abandon a 1.7-mile section of the same corridor in the Gastonia city limits. Immediately Gastonia filed for public use with STB and began negotiations with Norfolk Southern. The city and the railroad shared mutual interests: closing several at-grade crossings, concerns about the railroad trench on the main downtown line and federal rail banking of the planned abandonment.

Norfolk Southern agreed to railbanking at no cost to Gastonia and granted salvage rights for the tracks and ties. Salvage proceeds will be applied to rail-trail construction.

Gastonia chose to railbank under the federal statute because the language is clear with respect to use of the railbanked right of way for trail purposes and return of rail service. Any property owners' claims must be pursued through the U.S. Court of Claims as a private claim against the United States. The North Carolina railbanking law is not clear as to whether state railbanking includes use of the right of way for a trail.

Continued in next column



Photo by AL Capehart

The bridge over NC 24 is the last step in the spring completion of Jacksonville's 5.2-mile Rails to Trails Greenway, which NCRT has worked on since 1990.

Jacksonville rail-trail ready

Jacksonville's Rails to Trails Greenway gets the finishing touches in the next few weeks for the 5.2-mile, \$4.1 million project that will eventually plug into a proposed 172-mile trail system in eastern North Carolina.

North Carolina Rail-Trails has worked on the trail since 1990 with Onslow County and Jacksonville, home to the Marines' Camp Lejeune. Today the trail stretches on abandoned railroad routes along Marine Boulevard to Camp Lejeune's main gate. The Ma-

The Highland Rail-Trail, an important segment in the Gastonia's Greenway Master Plan, will help connect the historic downtown to Rankin Lake Park, three other parks and Gaston College.

The trail goes under I-85 and serves an African-American neighborhood, the downtown and historic areas of the city center.

rine base has agreed to open 54 miles of its paths to the proposed trail system.

In mid-spring workmen hustled to finish construction of a mid-block crossing at Hargett Street, put down decking on the bridge over NC 24 and complete drainage around it. Landscaping, fencing and clean up were the last items on the checklist.

State DOT funding is being sought for the second phase of the greenway. Plans call to extend the trail along Lejeune Boulevard to downtown Jacksonville.

When the project kicked off with fanfare in December 2006, a 15 to 18-month completion date was projected. It appears to have been met. The project represents years of tenacity by all parties and included Congressional legislation to transfer 50 acres of Camp Lejeune land into the trail system.

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Name _____ Address _____

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Reason for interest in rail-trails _____

NCRT annual memberships: Individual - \$25, Corporate - \$100
Mail to North Carolina Rail-Trails, PO Box 61348, Durham, NC 27715-1348

NCRT is a 501-c(3) public non-profit tax exempt organization founded in 1990.
 All contributions and donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

ATT bridge design pondered



Photo by David Newton

Raleigh's Beltline pedestrian bridge is one of three designs under consideration for the ATT in Durham.

A high-tech, triangle-shaped bridge anchored from a single pylon is one of three designs being considered by Durham for a bridge that will span I-40 and provide the final link for the uncompleted, 22-mile American Tobacco Trail.

The "Triangle bridge" is the latest inspiration of designer Steven Grover of Berkeley-based SGA Architecture/Engineering. He presented his design to over 100 people in late April at Durham City Hall.

"We ought to be high tech," said Bill Bussey, vice president of the Triangle Rails to Trails Conservancy. He was enthusiastic about the pylon design but warned that Durham needs to move quickly on the project whose price is being drive up by inflation.

Another design under consideration is a low-profile arch of two cantilevered sections on either side of I-40. A third design is similar to the arching steel truss pedestrian bridge over Raleigh's Beltline near the N.C. Museum of Art.

Durham's I-40 bridge is part of the \$6.36 million project to connect the ATT from NC 54 to the Chatham County line by late 2010. When completed, trail users will have 22 uninterrupted miles from the Durham Bulls Athletic Park to western Wake County.

NCRT Summer Board Meeting

Saturday, July 12
10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
The Community Room
Gastonia Police Department
200 E. Long Ave.
Gastonia, N.C. 28052

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