



Bells Gap Railroad Trail
Bellwood-Antis Community Trust, Inc.
Blair County, PA

Project Description:

Those looking for a place to go cycling, hiking, running, horseback riding, cross country skiing or bird watching need to look no further than the Bells Gap Railroad Trail in Blair County.

The trail runs along Route 865 and connects Roots Crossing to the eastern border of State Gamelands #158 after passing through downtown Bellwood. The majority of the trail has about a 2% grade and is very shaded so those of all experience levels can enjoy the trail, even on extremely sunny days. Currently, 2.25 miles of the trail are complete, though a rockier section suitable for hikers or mountain bikers extends into the gamelands.

Based on the completed portion's popularity, Hazel Bilka, Executive Director of Bellwood-Antis Community Trust hopes to develop the trail that runs into the gamelands and make it accessible even to those on street bikes.

"We've gotten a phenomenal response from local people, in particular. They love it and want us to build more! There's only one other Rail-Trail [in the area] and that's in the other end of the county so it's great to have this one here," Bilka said.

Enthusiastic about visitors' positive responses to the trail, she is quick to point out how the trail has, and continues, to benefit the community. Stressing that it promotes a healthy lifestyle, she recalls one woman who lost 40 pounds



by walking on the trail each morning.

The trail also encourages outdoor education. Visitors have reported seeing a variety of wildlife including hawks, turkeys, porcupines, possums, deer and foxes. The trail runs along a gap in the mountain and provides panoramic views across a reservoir, which was filled with Canadian Geese this past spring.

With money from Growing Greener grant funds, DCNR provided \$188,000 to the project. Along with the Bellwood-Antis Community Trust, another partner in building this trail was the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. The Bells Gap Railroad trail is now one of the conservancy's nearly 1,500 miles of trails within a 14,000 mile network.

Quote: Brian Clark, describing his visit to Bells Gap Railroad Trail on a snowy day in an online visitors' book

"The hike that day was beautiful as there was snow on the trail, and ice covering all the trees, it was really a "winter wonderland"... The view from the point overlook was great, and you could REALLY see the snow covered trail wind it's way down through the valley towards the reservoir, and the big change in elevation as the trail went around the horseshoe curve below the overlook."

Amount of Growing Greener funding awarded, year and matching sources:

2004: \$188,000

Local Match: \$188,000