

## Secretary leads trail efforts

### DCNR chief attends H&BT Rail Trail ground breaking

By RON MORGAN

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Ground was broken Thursday afternoon in Broad Top Township, Bedford County, for work on another section of the 10.6-mile H&BT Rail Trail. On hand for the ceremony was state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) secretary Ellen Ferretti, who assisted other state and local officials in the gala celebration.

The latest part of the rail-trail project, which is being funded in part by a DCNR \$80,000 Community Conservation Partnerships Program grant, calls for two miles of trail construction from Broad Top Township's Cooper Recreation Area, a few miles south of Hopewell, to the old H&BT Railroad Trestle, near Cypher Station. The township owns the rights of way through multiple municipalities, including Broad Top, Hopewell and West Providence townships and Hopewell Borough, all in Bedford County.

As a part of the second phase of the trail work, the Broad Top Township Supervisors, relying on \$307,000 in PennDOT Transportation Enhancement funding, will begin work on the decking of the 350-foot-long railroad bridge this summer.

The bridge, which spans the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River, will provide access to the remaining section of the old rail-



Photo by RON MORGAN

Participants in a ground breaking ceremony Thursday for the development of another section of the H&BT Rail Trail system in Broad Top Township, Bedford County, were, from the left, Bedford County planning director Donald Schwartz, Rails to Trails of Bedford County Inc. president Jim Veach, Broad Top Township secretary Dave Thomas, state Sen. John Eichelberger Jr., state DCNR Secretary Ellen Ferretti, Broad Top Township supervisors Donald Hedge Jr., Robert Figard and Donald Black, State Rep. Jesse Topper, Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Corp. director Steve Howsare and Bedford County Commissioner Barry Dallara.

road right of way that concludes in the Tatesville area, near Everett. In an effort to contain costs, the township is supplying project labor for the bridge work and other aspects of the trail project.

Other work includes fencing, ADA-accessible features, landscaping, signage and other related site improvements, explained Donald Hedge Jr., chairman of

the Broad Top Township Supervisors. The 10.6-mile recreational trail project is the first for Bedford County, said Ferretti.

In her brief congratulatory remarks, Ferretti pointed out rail-trail development projects are good for the state in terms of economic development and preservation of both the envi-

ronment and the state's colorful history and heritage.

"Pennsylvania has more open rail trails than any other state in the nation and is among the top states in rail-trail mileage," Ferretti told the audience. "And why is that? Because support of these

**See Trail**

Page 2

# Trail

From Page 1

projects is a sound economic investment."

Ferretti said recent economic impact studies of 11 of the state's longer rail-trails showed the trail systems "produce a strong economic boost to local communities," adding that the 11 trail projects have generated more than three million visitors a year and \$91 million in user spending on an annual basis.

"Trails are all about connections and we know users who come will be making those connections — to the towns and abundant natural resources found along the way," she said.

Ferretti went on to say the survey data suggests trails rank as the number one recreational interest among Pennsylvanians who also want to see trails close to home, Ferretti noted, to date, the state boasts 177 open rail trails, totaling 1,709 miles, adding that the DCNR continues to be a big supporter of trail projects.

Locally, Ferretti cited the H&BT Rail Trail as an important part of the area's outdoor recreational menu, including the nearby Juniata River Water Trail (a component of the Pennsylvania Water Trail system), Trough Creek and Warriors Path state parks, the Mid State Trail and the crowd-drawing Raystown Lake.

"With today's ground breaking, you have accomplished a major milestone," she concluded.

Numerous other dignitaries shared congratulatory remarks and saluted the Broad Top Township Supervisors for their foresight and dedication to the project, along with the involve-

ment of the Rails to Trails of Bedford County Inc.

State Sen. John Eichelberger Jr. said development of the rail-trail will add to the quality of life in the area as well as enhance economic development efforts by drawing trail users, both local and out of the area. As an activist in the Southern Alleghenies travel promotion efforts for many years, Eichelberger said development of the valuable infrastructure will prove to be a worthwhile investment.

State Rep. Jesse Topper of Bedford also cited the project as a meaningful resource for the region, saying the township and community involvement in the project represents a good example of "working together to get things done."

Bedford County Commissioner Barry Dallara said he is "very pleased" with the hard work the township and Rails to Trails of Bedford County have put into the multi-phase project and looks forward to its completion.

"Thank all of you for your commitment to the project," he said.

Bedford County planning director Donald Schwartz also recognized the efforts of the local leaders and many volunteers involved in the rail-trail development, saying that as a "big advocate" of recreational trails, he envisioned the project as a spark plug for generating economic development in the region.

Former Bedford County Commissioner Steve Howsare, who now serves as executive director of the Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Corp., also praised the efforts of both the township and Rails to Trails of Bedford County for their involvement in the project and had special praise for Broad

Top Township's long history of "forward thinking."

Ned Millard, past president of Rails to Trails of Bedford County, and new organization president Jim Veach were introduced, with Millard thanking the township supervisors for their untiring efforts in the development of the trail system, adding he expects to see a bright future for the use of the trail.

Serving as master of ceremonies for the event was Kellie Goodman Shaffer, executive director of the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, who said the "business community" of the county appreciates the township and rail-trail organization's efforts, adding the chamber is pleased to assist local leaders.

"Thank you for keeping the history and heritage (of the H&BT) alive and for the beautiful trail system you are creating," she said.

Highlighting the official ground-breaking event were Broad Top Township Supervisors Robert Figard, Donald Black and chairman Donald Hedge Jr., all of whom thanked DCNR and other funding sources for their support of the project. The supervisors also recognized township employees who have been a part of the trail development work. "We really work well together," said Hedge.

The chairman concluded his remarks by saying numerous trail users are already taking advantage of the completed section of the rail-trail between Riddlesburg, Hopewell and the municipal-owned Cooper Recreation Area. "It's money well spent; the project is a good thing!"

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