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A River Runs Through Susquehanna Greenways' Plan to Connect PA Landmarks

By Weston Davis

Two landmark Central Pennsylvania trail systems may meet in the near future if local planners have their way. The 64-mile Pine Creek Gorge Rail Trail has connected Jersey Shore and Wellsboro since 1996. The scenic rail trail, which follows a creek-side route at an easy grade through the Tiadaghton State Forest and the Tioga State Forest, has been rated

by *USA Today* as one of the "10 great places to take a bike tour" in the world.

The Susquehanna River Walk is a three-mile loop trail that follows the levies on the Williamsport and South Williamsport sides of the Susquehanna River, crossing at the Market Street and Maynard Street bridges. The river walk is seen as a key component in linking local residents with the natural beauty of the river and providing opportunities for active living and physical fitness.

Currently, the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, in conjunction with transportation planners in Lycoming and Clinton counties, are in the process of securing funding to create not one, but two new trail systems that would span the 15 miles between Williamsport and Jersey Shore. In addition, a new river-valley segment is in the planning phase that would connect Lock Haven to Jersey Shore. Jerry Walls, chairman of the board of the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, a group involved in the effort, explains: "What we're trying to accomplish is to support both counties in the connection along the river valley floor. Not necessarily immediately adjacent to the river, the path will have to vary in its alignment because

of physical topography and property ownership conditions. But we want to see a trail along the valley floor that implements the *Lycoming County Recreation, Parks and Open Space/Greenway Plan*."

In addition to the plan to create river valley trails connecting Williamsport and Lock Haven with the Pine Creek rail trail via Jersey Shore, there is also an effort underway to take a higher road along the same route.

"They (Armstrong Township planners) now have a plan for extending the Williamsport area river walk in South Williamsport up through Armstrong Township to get on top of Bald Eagle Mountain, and then go across the top of the

mountain on the former Skyline Drive ... and (from there) have an easy trail across the top of the mountain close to Lock Haven," Walls said.

The mountaintop route would provide a fairly easy bike path down the length of the ridge, with spurs connecting to towns along the way. One spur would connect to Jersey Shore, where it would link up with the Pine Creek rail trail. Other spurs would connect at McElhattan, Catawba, and Lock Haven. The mountaintop route would also offer more challenging terrain, with smaller spur trails and loop trails intended for maintain biking and more remote recreation.

The two trails offer a distinctly different view of the area. Whereas the river valley

trail would wind along the Susquehanna for a close-up view of the sights and sounds of Central Pennsylvania, the mountaintop trail would offer more of a bird's eye view. "You can look at the whole valley upstream and downstream of Williamsport," Walls said. "At other places you can look over into the White Deer Valley all the way to Lewisburg. It's a phenomenal vantage point."

The unofficial hope is that all these trail systems could be completed in the next three to four years, depending on securing funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Department of Community and Economic Development, and Department of Transportation.

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