

The Express

OUR VIEW

Regional ridge trail proposal worthy of study

We're solidly behind an effort to study the feasibility of creating a 41-mile, regional mountain ridge trail from eastern Lycoming County into Clinton County.

And based on what we've read and what we're learning, it appears that many others support the study, too.

Lycoming County has invested \$30,000 into the study; Clinton County is chipping in \$20,000.

At issue is the feasibility of creating a multi-county, non-motorized trail for hiking, bicycling, horse-riding, skiing and for birders that runs along the mountain ridge tops between Muncy and McElhattan.

We understand the idea is in its infancy.

We encourage those behind the proposal to continue to expand their outreach and engagement to explain the plan and keep the study process as transparent as possible before making recommendations to stakeholders.

The concept is good.

Clinton County already is known as a mecca for hiking and outdoor recreation.

Consider the Megatransect, Hyner Challenge, Eagle Trek and Frozen Snot competitive-recreational trail hikes that attract thousands of people here each year.

The organizers of these events have a proven track record of being strong stewards of the land by building and maintaining trails.

Their events are attracting the attention of other stewards, bringing people here from all over the nation to see and experience the beauty that we locals see every day.

We believe this trail, if found feasible, could serve to strengthen that stewardship by bringing even more conservation-minded visitors and tourists ... by increasing the number of eyes on our trails in general to help police them ... by helping to protect the natural beauty of this area ... and by helping to protect our watersheds.

Helping to maintain good water quality could be a very significant benefit, as mentioned at this week's meeting by Brian Auman, a registered landscape architect with more than 25 years' experience working on community-based neighborhood revitalization, watershed planning, environmental restoration, greenway and green infrastructure projects.

Mountain stream banks could be improved to limit erosion.

Further, and importantly, a regional ridge trail could deter motorized vehicles and protect scenic vistas. Vehicle use on the trails is perhaps the greatest danger to the public watershed. Hikers and runners could discourage unauthorized vehicles.

"The recreational users are your best stewards and best police out there," Auman told those attending his presentation this past Monday night in City Hall.

The trail also would link "greenway" towns along the river, he added.

This potential project reminds us of Highland Cemetery in Lock Haven and how it was in such decline years ago, the victim of terrible vandalism. When volunteers — encouraged by the cemetery's board — stepped forward to clean up, maintain and even patrol the cemetery, it made a huge difference and still does today.

We see that same positive outcome here — it's already being played out by organizers and volunteers with the various recreational and competitive trail events.

We strongly encourage civic, elected and appointed officials to learn as much as they can about this study and proposal, and to consider all of the potential benefits.

Outdoor recreation in this part of the PA Wilds has such a beneficial impact on the quality of life here.

And, as we're seeing, it also has a very positive influence on our economy.

This study could serve as a catalyst to bring stakeholders together to better control use of the watershed, make it better, and ultimately, lead to greater protection of a very precious resource.