

Pipeline company donates \$146G toward riverside trail

Money will go into footbridges and fill for 12-mile path from Danville to Bloomsburg

By **MICHAEL LESTER**
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LEWISBURG — Planners for a riverside hiking and biking trail between Danville and Bloomsburg are talking with renewed excitement about wrapping up the project in the next year or so after a decade of planning and work.

Williams energy, the Oklahoma-based firm proposing to expand the Transco natural gas pipeline through Columbia and

other counties, has donated \$146,000 for the North Branch Canal Trail.

"This is a real catalyst for moving this project ahead," said Trish Carothers, executive director of the Lewisburg-based Susquehanna Greenway Partnership.

The funding will be used to build wooden footbridges over small waterways and to fill topographic "breaks" in the 50-inch-wide towpath. It stretches about 12 miles along the Susquehanna

River between Danville and the Catawissa Boat Club off Legion Road in Montour Township.

Footbridges will be built at four spots, and another 14 gaps in the trail will be filled with hard plastic culverts and stone, said Bob Stoudt, director of the Montour Area Recreation Commission. MARC has been heading up the trail project.

The trail is one of 17 "conservation projects" across five counties to which Williams will contribute a total of \$2.5 million, the company recently announced.

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Trail 'Money has been a limiting factor' for project

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'Support fantastic'

"The money is unbelievably helpful," Stoudt said. "I'm tremendously pleased."

While grants such as these typically require a financial match from an organization, Stoudt says it was the hours of work on the trail put in by volunteers that convinced Williams the project was worthwhile.

Since January 2014, volunteers put in 583 hours, Stoudt said.

That's on top of the 149 hours worked by MARC employees.

Trail work to date has been done on a shoestring budget.

Years ago, early estimates had the project costing over \$1 million.

When the stretch between Danville and Catawissa is finished, the trail will have cost about \$250,000, Stoudt estimated, largely due to volunteer labor.

"The support for this trail from the surrounding region is just fantastic," he said. "Money has been the limiting factor."

'Awesome resource'

The trail, which will have a mowed grass surface once complete, remains closed to the public. Stoudt said it will be opened in sections as work continues.

The hope is to open the Montour County section by year's end, he added.

Once the trail is finished between Danville and the Catawissa Boat Club,



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planners will turn their attention to extending it to Streater Park in Bloomsburg.

The ultimate goal is to have a continuous recreation trail along the Susquehanna River stretching from Sunbury to the Wilkes-Barre area, said Carothers of the Greenway Partnership.

"This could really be an awesome recreational resource," she said. "It becomes a destination for people to come to and stay in the community. It can be an economic driver for tourism and recreation."

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