The Council recently completed a feasibility study on the Montrose Endless Mountain Trail (EMT) with funding from PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), community development funds (DCED), and matching Rail-Trail (RTC) funds. Strauss & Associates undertook the project with Campbell Thomas for mapping support, Bob Kley for title work, Conservation Matters, LLC for case reviews and Arora & Associates for engineering.

The 10.3 mile trail, also known as the Bridgewater Riding Trail, is among Pennsylvania’s oldest public rail-trails. It was established in 1944 when the Montrose Branch of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad (DL&W) was abandoned and property interests were transferred to the Bridgewater Riding Club. The equestrian club owned and managed the trail for around 60 years, when it was transferred to the RTC in 2008.

A feasibility study is necessary before any trail improvements could be potentially funded with federal or state sources. The study included the typical physical inventory of the corridor, suggestions on maintenance and management issues, potential improvements, revenue needs, and identification of every adjacent landowner. Railroad val maps were needed, and luckily archival research unearthed the original railroad surveys. But, more complicated was that railroad deeds and title needed to be researched, railroad width and boundaries had to be determined, past litigation needed review, and legitimate questions had to answered as to who ‘actually’ owns the trail corridor.

It was determined that RTC has a “prescriptive easement” which is defined generally as an un-granted right arising from continuous use and occupancy. In addition, the RTC owns some parcels in fee simple.

The next step, the Council has decided, is to work with abutting landowners to acquire easements for trail use. The section from Montrose towards Tiffany Corners may be the first step.

The Feasibility Study is available for review at the Susquehanna County Library, Montrose.

Photo: Agents John Marcan & Frank Trump pose with their new station at Alford about 1915. The station was built when the Lackawanna shifted its route through Alford to the west side of Martin’s Creek valley. Mr. Trump leans against the concrete bumper block for the track used by the branch trains to Montrose. Before the branch opened in 1891, Alford was called Montrose Depot. Susquehanna County Historical Society Collection
PVR & RTC—A Partnership That Makes Sense

An Editorial from the Rail-Trail Board

Several years ago, when the natural gas boom began in Pennsylvania, and Susquehanna County in particular, it became apparent that our local way of life was about to change. Soon the countryside would be dotted with wellheads and laced with a network of gas collection lines. These collection lines would feed into a midstream collection system and these systems, in turn, would move the gas into the interstate transmission lines. Since our D&H Rail-Trail is a linear corridor running through a region believed to represent considerable gas production potential, and, is traversed by the Tennessee Gas interstate transmission line at the southern end of Union Dale, the Board of Directors was approached by several companies who wished to develop a midstream pipeline within our right-of-way. Initially, the Board was not certain that such an undertaking would satisfy the many environmental viewpoints and concerns of our Board. But upon a thorough analysis, it was determined that the use of our right-of-way corridor actually represented the best case scenario for the protection of the local environment, due primarily to the fact that our trail was centrally located in the target area and it was nearly ideal for pipeline use in its present state. That is, the board argued, by using our existing right-of-way which is already cleared, we could prevent the need to disturb and clear another similar route within the same general area. In short, the railroad did the heavy work more than a century ago. So, the Board agreed it was reasonable and prudent to consider these offers.

As presented, the monetary returns were enticing, especially for an organization such as ours which, despite our many valuable and generous members, constantly seems to struggle to provide the first-class trail that we have always sought to create. But, we found that the lease documents associated with these offers were heavily weighted in favor of the pipeline companies and not as lessor-friendly as we felt our organization should require. With these thoughts in mind, the Board decided to appoint a Pipeline Committee to explore the possibility of creating a lease that would serve the organization beneficially in two ways. First, it would protect the value of our main asset, namely the trail itself, and allow us to continue to use this asset to its fullest potential. Secondly, it would be sufficiently financially generous so that we could continue to build and maintain the trail as directed in our mission statement, while, at the same time, also helping to provide for our long term operational needs and solvency. With this mandate, the committee hired a law firm with experience in the oil and gas industry, advised them of our needs and the parameters within which we would agree to work, and together, drafted a document to meet our specifications. During and throughout this time we continued to maintain contact, and had informal negotiations, with several interested pipeline companies. As a result of this contact we learned a great deal about the pipeline industry and its wants, but more specifically, we learned about its needs. Understanding the difference between the wants and needs was invaluable information during the creation of the lease document and it would prove to serve us well in the negotiations that would ultimately lie ahead.

About 6 months ago, as midstream activity started to impact our area, we realized the time to begin actually marketing our trail was upon us. At that point, we felt the value of our corridor was peakingly and to take advantage of the opportunity at hand, we needed to become more proactive. This led to the creation of a RFP (Request for Proposal), the purpose of which was to explain and promote our trail to prospective interested parties, and we sent it to approximately 30 companies involved in pipeline construction and operation. From this solicitation, we received an indication of strong interest from 2 qualified companies. Serious negotiations began with both of these companies in the fall of 2011, and by the middle of December of that year, we had decided on, and secured an offer from, PVR (Penn Virginia Resources) which was submitted to the Board. The Board of Directors, at a special meeting held later that month, voted to accept this offer, and after a few minor details were worked out regarding the timing of the transaction, the official papers were signed in mid-January bringing the process to a successful close.

Specifically, in addition to the financial compensation that we have secured, PVR, upon exercising their option, is committed to:
1. Building a state-of-the-art pipeline which will be buried adjacent to our currently established trail, and
2. Providing adequate drainage and a finished trail surface for the entire 28 miles of our trail north of the Tennessee Gas crossing in Union Dale.

All in all, it was a long, time-consuming process for the 9 committee members, but we fully expect the final result to be well worth the effort, and specifically believe that this was the best way to protect the local environment as well as to help secure the long term financial future of the Rail-Trail Council of Northeastern PA.
LIFETIME MEMBERS
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Christian & Deborah Kutch, Clifford Township, PA
Mary Ann Thomas, Newtown Square, PA

NEW LIFETIME MEMBERS
Kathleen & Rob Cable-Drill, Chester Springs, PA

NEW MEMBERS
Rebecca & Alan Bennett, Montrose, PA
Steven Cappellini, Mountaintop, PA
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Dennis Favello, Union Dale, PA
Paul Fogal, Jim Thorpe, PA
Gerald & Kathleen Franceski, Union Dale, PA
T. Fron, Johnson City, NY
Robert & Lynn Frink, Woodstock, CT
Joseph & Grace Gilhooley, Union Dale, PA
Alan Gillick, Dickson City, PA
Richard & Sandra Guman, Archbald, PA
Wayne & Joanne Har, Pleasant Mount, PA
Joseph & Lorraine Healey, Laflin, PA
William Heller, Union Dale, PA
Doris & Otto Hetrick, Trevose, PA
David & Nadine Hogan, Binghamton, NY
Joseph & Catherine Jerin, Mayfield, PA
Ask any old railroader about the D&H out of Carbondale, and Ararat will be the first topic brought up. One even said it should be called the Jefferson-Ararat Railroad.

Ararat Summit is a “lofty tableland” at 2040 feet above sea level. The most impressive assemblages of big engine power to be found anywhere in the East were necessary to haul anthracite coal out of the Lackawanna Valley over the D&H Jefferson Division. This was one of the longest grades in the eastern U.S. The northbound grade from Carbondale to Ararat averaged a continuous 1.2 to 1.4% over 19 miles. The southbound grade from Cascade Wye near Lanesboro to Ararat was 1.3 to 1.5% and 17 miles long. Typically, trains of 90-110 cars heading north out of Carbondale would have a 4-6-6-4 Challenger on the front, 2 or 3 more 4-6-6-4 on the rear, and one additional locomotive onto the back of the caboose. It was known as the “Forest City Kicker” which assisted in getting the train started up the steepest grade then dropping off at Forest City. The remaining pushers moved the train along to Ararat; one might turn around at the Ararat Wye and the other follow the freight downhill to Lanesboro at the Cascade Wye, where it would wait for a southbound needing the push.

The railroad at Ararat Summit was in an extensive cut below the surface grade where frequent slides occurred. A bridge carried cars and pedestrians over the railroad at the Summit, now Ararat Road. This bridge was removed after the railroad shut down and the cut filled in for the road. This now presents a challenge for the rail-trail, as user-friendly, ADA accessible ramps need to be constructed.

There was a railroad tower and manually operated switch at Ararat, from which day-to-day flow of traffic was controlled. The YD Tower was painted in Erie Railroad colors of cream-gray with dark green trim and red window sashes, as the D&H track and structures were owned by the Erie until 1955 when the D&H purchased the line.

North of the tower and wye was the railroad station, one of seven along the Jefferson Branch. In 1911 there were two stores, a hotel ‘The Ararat House’ and a post office that operated until 1969. Today little remains, just a handful of old homes north of the new Ararat Township building.

Lynn M. Conrad

Top: Photo of YD Tower looking north towards Lanesboro is by Henry W. Peterson. From the publication Delaware & Hudson Steam in Color, Morning Sun Books.

Center: Thanks to Matt Forsyth for information on Ararat’s YD Tower and use of the Ararat bridge picture. Matt is an ultra-detailed railroad modeler, with a “D&H and Erie fetish.” Check out his website at mattforsyth.com.

Bottom: Ararat Summit Station by Sherry Sparks. Prints of pen and ink drawings by Sherry Sparks are available of various railroad stations and railroad towns of the D&H. Matted prints range from $35 to $75. Check out endlesstreasures.zenfolio.com

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Membership Renewal Form

Please renew! The date on the mailing label on the reverse indicates when your membership expires.

☐ Lifetime/Founding $500
☐ Patron/Sponsor $250
☐ Club/Organization $100
☐ Family $35
☐ Individual $20
☐ Senior/Student $15
☐ I am available for trail cleanups.
☐ Call me to discuss a corporate donation.
☐ Send me Sam’s Club Business Membership Card.
☐ I am interested in finding out more about the “Trail Tender” program.
☐ I am sending an additional $_____ for quilt raffle tickets.
☐ Send my newsletter electronically (instead of by mail) to: __________________________

NAME __________________________ PHONE NUMBER ____________

STREET ADDRESS __________________________ EMAIL ADDRESS ______________

CITY __________________________ STATE __________ ZIP __________

Please update your address here if necessary. Make checks payable to Rail-Trail Council of Northeast PA

P O Box 32, Union Dale PA 18470 Phone: 570-679-9300 E mail: trails@nep.net
Women Teaching
Women Biking Workshop

The Countryside Conservancy is offering a series of biking workshops, aimed specifically at women beginning in April. The workshops will be held in different venues in Lackawanna, Wyoming, and Susquehanna Counties including the D&H Rail-Trail in Forest City, Lackawanna State Park, and dirt and paved roads with low traffic. The workshops will work on riding basics, as well as skills and endurance in order to gain fitness, confidence and have FUN. For more information, contact Caroline at carolinerose@epix.net. Check out news & events through countrysideconservancy.org

Spring Hike

D&H Rail-Trail Spring Hike, May 12th. Wildflower & bird identification with Nancy Wottrich. Area of trail to be determined.

Save the Dates

Saturday, June 16
The 3rd Annual Lackawanna Heritage Bike Tour, Mellow Park, Blakely. Supported bike rides along the Lackawanna Heritage Trail and the D&H Rail-Trail. See lhva.org for details.

Sunday, September 9
The 5th Annual D&H Distance Run—a course certified ½ marathon on the D&H Rail-Trail, 9 AM start. GetMeRegistered.com or call office for application.

Donations

In Memory of Margaret Borosh, Nancy Ross
In Memory of Bruce Ross, Ivan & Elaine Burman
In Memory of Don Felley, Nancy Ross
In Memory of Don Felley, Ned & Sylvia Holteen
In Memory of Don Felley, Don & Karyn Kintzer
Happy New Year to Nancy Ross, Ned & Sylvia Holteen
Happy New Year to June Felley, Ned & Sylvia Holteen
Quilt Raffle

Thanks to long-time member Kathy Stevens for donating a quilt “Feathers.” It is machine pieced and quilted in a medley of browns with pheasants and feathers, measuring 82" x 74". Suitable as a wall-hanging or for a full/queen bed. Raffle tickets are $2 each or 3 for $5. Drawing will be at the RTC meeting, July 26th. Send in your raffle donation and we will send you the ticket stubs!

Check out all the latest news on Facebook!