

Pennsylvania grant to fund link between Point State Park, Mon Wharf

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By Jacob Axelrad and Jon Schmitz / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A \$2 million state grant will pay for a better connection between Point State Park and the riverfront trail at the Monongahela Wharf, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources announced Friday.

The connection is one of two needed to eventually link the wharf and park with the Great Allegheny Passage trail to Cumberland, Md. The GAP trail today will celebrate completion of its last major missing section, passing through Keystone Metals and Sandcastle Waterpark.

DCNR Deputy Secretary Cindy Dunn will take part in a 9-mile bike ride from Sandcastle to the Point that starts at 11 a.m.

In a statement announcing the \$2 million grant, she said the department has invested nearly \$10 million in the GAP trail, which connects with the C&O Towpath at Cumberland to provide 330 continuous miles of trail from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C.

"We've made investments not only in the construction of the path, but also in connections to trail towns, to tie destinations together, to provide visitors with opportunities for wellness, recreation and a chance to connect with nature, and to protect our history and natural resources," she said.

The \$2 million ramp will provide access to the park from the western part of the Mon Wharf, which currently is connected only by a 4-foot-wide passage beneath the Fort Pitt Bridge.

DCNR spokeswoman Christina Novak said a completion date was not yet clear. The project needs a permit from the Department of Environmental Protection because of its proximity to the waterway.

Separate plans are moving ahead for a switchback ramp from the Smithfield Street Bridge to the eastern end of the wharf trail. Stephan Bontrager, spokesman for Riverlife, said the \$3 million project is mostly funded and that groundbreaking is expected early next year.

Today's festivities on the Great Allegheny Passage include a 10 a.m. ribbon-cutting at Sandcastle, followed by the bike ride to Point State Park, and a 1 p.m. unveiling and dedication of a "Forks of the Ohio" marker in the park at the western end of the Great Allegheny Passage.

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