

# LEADER TIMES

## Armstrong County seeks Water Trails inclusion

By Tom Mitchell

LEADER TIMES

Saturday, October 18, 2008

There's water, fish and wildlife. There are boaters and fishermen, but there's no connection to Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's system of Water Trails in Armstrong County.

However, if the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Pittsburgh, and the Allegheny Valley Land Trust and others have their way, the county will be a part of the state's Water Trails program in the next year or so.

Hanna Hardy, PEC program manager, said all the county lacks is a trail sponsor. However, Ron Steffey, AVLTL executive director said the AVLTL is anxious to partner with the PEC and local organizations as well, to create additional water access and enhance water recreational activities that would connect the county with established trails in Clarion and Allegheny counties.

County Commissioner Patricia Kirkpatrick said the county is developing the Open Space Greenway and Recreation Plan, and the county's waterways are an integral part of that plan.

"We have identifiable assets in the county that we need to capitalize on," Kirkpatrick said. "We are rich with natural resources, especially waterways, but they're underutilized. We have more than 50 miles of river in the county. There's a great potential for economic stimulus, but we need to bring organizations into a partnership. The plan is in draft form now, but the commissioners are anxious to see it in its final form."

Kirkpatrick said the county's waterways have great potential not only for recreational use, but also for consumption and agriculture.

"What we need is a recreational authority that can coordinate the efforts of various groups. That need has been identified in the recreational plan. Developing our abundant waterways is a quality of life issue. It will attract visitors and investors, and I believe it will serve to keep our young people here," she said.

Hardy said the PEC will welcome aid from different organizations to make the county a part of the state's Water Trail system.

"We're looking for support from county commissioners, municipal authorities, conservation groups, watershed groups, sportsmen's clubs, outfitters and business owners," she said. "Armstrong County already has several, well-developed river access points, but there are several more that could be developed even further.

"Primarily, sponsoring groups would publish a water trail guide and maps

outlining access points and facilities and also safety information. Printed guides would give waterway users the 'where to,' the 'how-to,' and pertinent safety information."

She said that groups also would sponsor signage and coordinate their efforts with the Tourist Bureau and Chamber of Commerce to promote water related events. All efforts would be in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Steffey said the DCNR and Fish and Boat Commission have provided matching fund grants for waterway developments in the past and are likely to continue to do so. He said that the AVLTL raises part of its funds from a riverside campground in Mosgrove.

"As the AVLTL develops land trails, we want to invest dollar for dollar, in partnership with the PEC, to develop access to the Water Trail," Steffey said.

He said that presently, there are Allegheny River access points at Riverfront Park in Kittanning, and boat launching facilities in Cowanshannock, along River Front Road, Rosston, and Templeton. In the past year, the Fish and Boat Commission enlarged the parking lot at the Rosston boat launching area.

Steffey said the AVLTL recently submitted design and engineering plans to the DCNR to develop a 12-mile stretch of land that starts in northern Armstrong County, in Redbank, and runs through Clarion County. The trail will provide access to the Allegheny River.

"We (AVLTL) also own 30 acres of land that border Red Bank Creek," Steffey said. "We would like to develop a parking lot and access for canoers and kayakers to have a takeoff point. We're also are looking to purchase an old 40-mile rail line, owned by the Pittsburg-Shawmut Railroad, that runs from Lawsonham to Brookville for another Rails to Trails project. The trail would also provide access points to Red Bank Creek.

"One thing we've learned through all our efforts so far, is that the people of Armstrong County would like to see more access to the river and other waterways."

Steffey said efforts are underway to develop launching points and Allegheny River access from Buffalo and Mahoning creeks. He said that the Roaring Run Watershed organization has accomplished significant cleanup and development of the Kiskiminetas River, and the organization could prove a valuable ally in developing the county's portion of the Water Trail.

In Western Pennsylvania, the Ohio River Basin Water Trail runs 85 miles from the Kinzua Dam to Emlenton. The trail takes up again in Freeport, running 30 miles to Pittsburgh. Two other parts of the trail run from Connellsville to McKeesport and from Fairmont, W. Va., to Rices' Landing in Pittsburgh. All trails come under the jurisdiction of the county they run through. For additional information on Pennsylvania's Water Trail, visit [www.fish.state.pa.us/watertrails/trailindex.htm](http://www.fish.state.pa.us/watertrails/trailindex.htm).

Steffey said AVLT is willing to partner with organizations or groups willing to help make an Armstrong County Water Trail a reality. He may be reached at 724-543-1783, or by e-mail at: [armtrail@alltel.net](mailto:armtrail@alltel.net). For information about the Water Trail system Hardy may be reached at 412-481-9400, or by e-mail at: [hhardy@pecpa.org](mailto:hhardy@pecpa.org).

*Tom Mitchell can be reached at [tmitchell@tribweb.com](mailto:tmitchell@tribweb.com) or 724-543-1303, ext. 220.*