

Bike trail inches closer to the river

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September 8, 2014 LISBON, OH - The Columbiana County Park District is close to realizing its long-term goal of reaching the Ohio River with the Little Beaver Creek Greenway Trail.

Park Board Chairwoman Dottie Betz said they recently signed a 25-year lease with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources that grants them access to an abandoned railroad bed that runs through state forest land in St. Clair Township. The plan is to clean up and repave the railroad bed and incorporate it into Greenway Trail. The lease requires trail development beginning within three years.

The bicycle/walking trail currently runs from Washingtonville on the Mahoning County border 12 miles south to Lisbon. From there, Betz said bicyclists would have to follow the back roads to St. Clair Township, where they would take Grimms Bridge Road to state forest lands.

After crossing the Little Beaver Creek at Grimms Bridge, bicyclists would turn right, or south, onto Stuart Road for about a half mile before being able to jump onto the converted railroad bed, which served as the Smith's Ferry branch of the former Youngstown & Southern Railway.

Betz said if everything falls into place the Grimms Bridge section of the trail will run about three miles from Stuart Road to just north of where the creek meets the Ohio River in Pennsylvania.

About 75 percent of the three miles lies within the state forest lands while the rest is in Pennsylvania, running through land owned by two groups. **Betz said the law prevented the park board from purchasing or leasing property in another state, so the Ohio River Trail Council - a Pennsylvania trail group - agreed to help.**

She said the ORTC has negotiated a purchase agreement with the owner of the parcel at the end of the trail near the Ohio River. The group is also in negotiations with the owner of the second parcel, which is only interested in granting a lease.

"Pennsylvania is really big on bike trails, so I expect there is a lot of funding out there" for the ORTC, Betz said.

Meanwhile, the park board will begin looking for state and federal funding to convert the railroad into an asphalt bicycle trail. Betz said the costs runs between \$750,000 to \$1 million per mile, and most applications require a local match of 20 percent to 25 percent.

"It's gotten more and more difficult for us because of the costs and coming up with the matching funds, but we'll give it our best shot," she said.

Source: <http://www.reviewonline.com/page/content.detail/id/577790/Bike-trail-inches-closer-to-the-river.html>