

# Kent bike trail receives \$5,000 grant

Advocacy group selects heritage area for support

BY RUTH EPSTEIN  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

KENT — A \$5,000 grant to enhance bicycling along the Housatonic Covered Bridge Trail was announced during a brief presentation Thursday at Kent Falls State Park. The money was awarded to the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area through Bikes Belong, a Colorado-based bike advocacy group.

Dan Bolognani, executive director of the heritage area said the groups involved are seeking support for the grant, as well as input from residents on what they think of the proposed routes as well as what they see as benefits or liabilities of a bike trail. Meetings will be held to allow for those discussions.

"We operate on the consent of the communities we represent and are seeking grassroots sup-

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» Nearly \$41,000 has been raised from area councils of governments, recreational organizations and conservation groups toward this project.

» Officials hope to extend the trail to Pittsfield, Mass., and eventually link it to one that ends in Pownal, Vt.

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port for this concept," he said.

The grant was awarded to alleviate problem sections of the trail, which traverses highways and steep roads that are not yet suitable for regularly used bike travel. The money, which is being matched by the heritage area, will help to remedy those areas of concern and move the trail closer to full use. Signs and mapping will also be created. Nearly \$41,000 has been raised from area councils of governments, recreational organizations and conservation groups toward this project.

The hope is to extend the trail throughout the heritage area from Kent to Pittsfield, Mass., and eventually link it to one that ends in Pownal, Vt.

U.S. Sen. Christopher Murphy, D-5th District, said the reasons for his support go beyond bike trails.

"We have seen tourism in this area drop off. The marketing is not as aggressive as in the past. By investing in outdoor infrastructure, we are investing in economic development. It's predicted these trails could bring in \$4



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The announcement of a grant to promote bike trails was made during a presentation at Kent Falls State Park on Thursday. Dan Bolognani, executive director of the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, and Linda Cook of the National Park Service speak during the brief ceremony.

million by bikers frequenting local restaurants and shops."

He joked that he has a per-

sonal interest in the project. When in college, his wife once biked from her home in Fair-

field to Burlington, Vt., going up Route 7. "She has threatened to do it again and bring me along. This would be an investment in the safety of two amateur riders."

He and Bolognani also emphasized the healthy lifestyle that comes with biking.

"We need to create more options for people to get out and exercise and make sure families have safe opportunities for outdoor recreation. This does that."

Linda Cook, superintendent of Weir Farm in Ridgefield and the National Park Service superintendent liaison to the heritage area, said people relate to trails on a personal level. "The heritage area is doing everything it should do to invest in the people in the communities."

Sal Lilienthal, the director and owner of the Bicycle Tour Company of Kent, has been an active participant in mapping out trail routes.

He spoke of the scenic beauty of the area which helps draw bikers.

Kent First Selectman Bruce K. Adams expressed his support. "This is a no brainer. It's got to happen."