

Planned NW Corner bike trail could enhance Heritage Area

By Shaw Israel Izikson

Several groups are working together to create a bicycle trail that traverses the Northwest Corner.

The trail would not only entice cyclists to Litchfield County's terrain, which is considered by

many bikers to be ideal for their sport, it would also serve as a way to introduce visitors to the region's cultural and historical offerings.

Combining forces for the project are the Northwestern Connecticut Council of Governments (Executive Director Dan

McGuinness is an avid cyclist), Hare Planning of Cornwall and the Northwest Conservation District. Also involved is Sal Lilienthal, owner of the Bicycle Company in Kent, which plans bicycle tours here and abroad.

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The 45-mile Housatonic Covered Bridge Trail would travel along existing roads in Kent, Cornwall, Sharon, Salisbury, North Canaan and Falls Village. It would follow the Housatonic River and cross the covered bridges in Kent and Cornwall.

"Bicycling is a good way of seeing the heritage of the area," McGuinness said. "You can see the area better from bicycle than you can from a car."

The trail will include markers that point out historic features in the region, which is part of the federal Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area.

The group has applied for a \$10,000 grant from Bikes Belong, a national nonprofit organization that provides grants for bicycling projects throughout the United States.

If received, the grant will be used for mapping and planning and possibly for signs along the trail.

Earlier this month, the first selectmen in the participating towns unanimously endorsed the project and signed a letter of support for the grant.

Lilienthal said the group hopes to hear from Bikes Belong by some time in March.

"Everyone we have contacted has given us a positive response to the idea of a bicycle trail in the area," he said. "Cycling is a nice way to bring people here and hopefully stimulate the economy a little."

He said there is no set timeframe for the project.