

MWVRec Path gets \$2.2m federal grant for Phase 2

BY TOM E ASTMAN THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

CONWAY — The Mount Washington Valley Trails Association has announced it learned Tuesday it had received \$2.2 million from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to help build a 2.2-mile extension of the Conway Recreation Path from Cranmore Mountain Resort in North Conway to the state's Scenic Vista in Intervale.

“This is very exciting news,” said Trails Association President Chris Meier on Thursday Combined with \$1 million from the Connie Davis Watson Foundation last spring, Meier said the federal grant will pay for the rec path extension.

“This means we're fully funded for Phase 2 and off to the races,” said Meier. “It allows us to start design engineering immediately: hiring a design engineer with an estimated timeline of finishing Phase 2 within five years (under the EDA grant guidelines.)” He said his hope would be to have engineering done within a year and construction to start in two years pending easements and right of way talks.

The EDA grant was announced Tuesday by U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. The grant is funded by the American Rescue Plan.

“President Biden recognizes the vital contribution the travel and tourism industry makes to the American economy,” said Raimondo.

The EDA investment, matched with \$989,985 in local funds, is expected to create 30 jobs, retain 15 jobs and generate \$70 million in private investment, according to grantee estimates, according to Raimondo.

Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development Alejandra Y. Castillo said: “The Economic Development Administration is pleased to partner with Mount Washington Valley Trails Association in its locally driven efforts to leverage its tourism industry to boost coronavirus recovery and response efforts.

“This project will enhance the visitor experience in North Conway, while also paving the way for job creation and more tourism-based economic development,” Castillo said.

Meier said the trails association has been negotiating over the past six months with landowners along the preferred route between Cranmore and the Scenic Vista.

“People have generally been very open to the path — there have been no roadblocks (in those ongoing talks),” said Meier, a partner at Cooper Cargill Chant Attorneys at Law of North Conway who also serves as Conway's town moderator.

He said the trails association's preferred route would be east and north of the power line near Cranmore, then alongside the Mountain Division railroad tracks owned by the Conway Scenic



Train tracks cross the woods along White Mountain Highway just north of the Intervale Scenic Vista in North Conway, as seen Sept. 15. The MWV Trails Association recently received a federal grant for Phase 2 of the Rec Path construction from Cranmore Mountain to the Scenic Vista, some of which will run alongside the Conway Scenic Railroad’s track corridor. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

Railroad through Whitaker Woods.

It would then veer to the Scenic Vista. “We have had discussions with Conway Scenic and the state Department of Transportation regarding the path and the railroad tracks,” said Meier, noting that a distance of 15 feet between the tracks and the path would be required with some type of buffer in between.

Meier met with Conway selectmen last June and informed them of the discussions with landowners along the route from Cranmore to the Scenic Vista.

Meier told them, “Parts of it are in town land (Whitaker Woods); parts of it are in state Department of Transportation (former bypass corridor) land, the northern section of that would be in a rail corridor; and there’s one section that we have to determine where we would go and that would be whether it goes under the power line across to Cranmore.”

At that meeting, he said, “We’ve walked (the route) a couple of times with Cranmore — the preferred route is on the other side of Kearsarge Brook. We don’t have all the easements so we’re in discussions with landowners — so we don’t have all the pieces, but right-of-way is obviously part of the development process.”

Larry Garland, vice president of the MWV Trails Association, and chair of the North Conway Rec Path, told the Sun in May that the general idea is to go from Cranmore through Intervale, skirting the edge of Whitaker Woods, picking up the rail line and crossing Dinsmore Road to the Scenic Vista.

Meier this week said about \$200,000 still needs to be raised for the 2.9-mile Phase 1 Rec Path now under construction from Cranmore to Hemlock Lane, just north of Walmart.

Phase 1 has a contracted completion date of next June but may be completed by November, with a grand opening in spring, Meier said.

The paved Phase 1 path is being built by crews from A.J. Coleman and Son, Inc. of Albany.

New Hampshire’s congressional delegation hailed the receipt of the \$2.2. million EDA grant for Phase 2.

“This latest grant from the Economic Development Administration reaffirms how critical the agency is to communities like North Conway, providing important federal investments to kick-start or enhance local

projects,” said U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.).

“This funding will do just that by constructing a recreational path for Granite Staters and visitors from all over to explore and admire the beauty of New Hampshire’s White Mountains. This is a win for our tourism economy and the region. I’ll continue to fight for funding to support the EDA’s efforts, which so often benefit exciting Granite State projects like this,” Shaheen said.

U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.) said: “Outdoor recreation is a critical part of New Hampshire’s way of life and helps power our economy. I’m excited to see these federal dollars that I helped secure head to the Mount Washington Valley to expand our trails.

“This project will attract visitors, create jobs, support small businesses, and bolster the area’s tourism and economy. I look forward to seeing it come to fruition.”

U.S. Rep. Chris Pappas (D-N.H.) said: “Outdoor recreation brings billions of dollars into New Hampshire’s economy every year, boosting our local small businesses and creating jobs. These funds for trail infrastructure will make the Mount Washington Valley an even more attractive place to visit, recreate, and do business.”

This project is funded under EDA’s \$240 million competitive American Rescue Plan Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation program.

EDA awarded \$510 million in grants to all 50 states and territories in 2021. The two programs are designed to accelerate the recovery of communities that rely on the travel, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors.

To learn more about the rec path, go to mwvrecpath.org.

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