

President's Message



Molly McClure, CPRP

Trails... Creating Community... Connecting Communities

Trails are so many things to so many people. They offer us possibilities throughout the entire span of our life from our first time in our strollers, through our retirement years.

Trails connect us – to the outdoors, nature, historic areas, parks, recreation areas, schools, libraries, government, business. Socially – they create community, they connect our community – and they connect our community to other communities. Big job!

Parks and open space are among the primary factors in determining community livability and quality of life. One of the great things about living in Ohio is that we get to experience and enjoy all seasons...trails give us that 4-season sense of place for many important benefit opportunities:

- Places to walk, run, rollerblade, bicycle, ride horses, and cross-country ski
- Place for alternative mode of transportation that reduces the number of cars on the road and enables people a place to travel safely
- Fitness opportunities to help combat Ohio's obesity problem (Ohio has the 10th highest level of adult obesity in the nation and the 4th highest overweight level for high school students)
- Social opportunities - studies show that trails are most often used with another person
- Places to reflect and attain spiritual growth
- Increase property values of homeowners along trails and contribute to the economic success of businesses along the routes
- Places for protection of habitat and ecological biodiversity
- Improved visual and aesthetic quality to the landscape – whether you actively use a trail or not, you can still enjoy the beauty.

I confess – I'm crazy about trails - I spend as much time as I can, doing all kinds of activities on

all kinds of trails. It gives me the opportunity to truly observe how important and essential they are – I'm not alone, trail related activities continue to be very popular in Ohio. In fact, the 2003 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan revealed that trail activities are second to wildlife observation in the activity Ohioans participate in most. Since most wildlife observation takes place on trails – I think wildlife observation belongs in the category of trail activities. The

smiling faces you see on the trails motivates us to “keep on keepin’ on”...we are on target with our focus and investment in these essential facilities.

Whether we work for a large or small agency, we are all responsible for trails in one way or another. The little trails close to home are as important as the largest national network. We must all see ourselves as part of the big picture and look for ways to connect.





REGIONAL TRAIL EFFORTS

Collaborations and partnerships are essential for regional trail networks. A great success story can be told about a collaborative effort in the Cincinnati area for the **Ohio River Trail**. Thirteen entities comprised of Park Districts and Parks and Recreation Departments; County, City, Township and Village government; and business associations were led by our metropolitan planning organization, OKI Regional Council of Governments, for the planning efforts of the 16 mile trail connecting downtown Cincinnati to the Village of New Richmond. The vision for the trail began over 25 years ago but the committee formalized in 1995 when the entities recognized the need to join together to make something happen. Over \$200,000 was raised for the feasibility study, which provided planning answers for trail alignment alternatives, cost estimates, identification of resources and challenges along the route. Included in the study was a significant public involvement process and community educational component.

Now that the study is complete, we know the Ohio River Trail is a feasible project and we also recognize partnerships must be expanded beyond the 13 agencies on the planning com-

mittee to include individuals and businesses who can imagine the benefits of such a trail. The plan is not sitting on a shelf but it will be built in phases. In the City of Cincinnati, short segments have been built or are ready for construction in the near future. Other segments are engineered and funding is being sought. The Hamilton County Park District has been busy building trails and bridges to bring a significant section of the Little Miami Scenic Trail closer to an Ohio River Trail connection. They are also in the talking stages of planning with enthusiastic citizens from the Village of New Richmond who want to connect their community to the Hamilton County Park District's Woodland Mound Park. The momentum of trail construction is picking up because of the tenacity of the trail builders and the desire for the collaborators to support one another.

OHIO STATE PARK TRAIL SYSTEM

Scenic trails of Ohio's State Parks, forests, nature preserves and wildlife areas, provide places where you can discover breathtaking waterfalls, mature woodlands, caves and diverse plant and wildlife species. Visit OHIODnr.com for information on how to obtain the "Guide to Ohio Trails, which out-

lines locations of various trails and provides specific amenity information.

LARGER COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Ohio to Erie Trail – more than 450 miles long, consisting of paved and unpaved sections, travels from the Ohio River in Cincinnati, through Columbus, to Lake Erie in Cleveland. It is open to a variety of recreational uses. It passes through quiet woods, lush fields, rural villages and urban centers providing a wide variety of sights. Visit OhioToErieTrail.org or call 614-451-8776.

Buckeye Trail – 1,300 mile system encircling the 4 corners of the state, the trail system is identified by blue blazes on trees and poles and is maintained by the Buckeye Trail Association, a private non-profit volunteer organization. Visit buckeyetrail.org or call 1-800-881-3062.

The North County National Scenic Trail is 4,000 miles and includes 1,000 miles of the Buckeye Trail. Ohioans are connected to seven states from New York to North Dakota. The trail system is managed by a nationwide non-profit organization (NorthCountyTrail.org) working in partnership with the National Park Service.

FEDERAL TRAIL SYSTEMS

The backbone of our federal trail system is our National Scenic and National Historic Trails. The first interstate recreational trail – the Appalachian Trail – (2,173 miles) was conceived in 1921 as a highland greenway or wilderness belt accessible to much of the East Coast. Federal agencies are assisted by many partnerships with public and private entities. National Trails System information - nps.gov/nts.

Trails provide a treasured positive experience to the people we serve. It is up to us to connect the dots for our leaders who make funding and legislative decisions for trails. Be pesky about making sure our elected officials know what trails mean to the people in Ohio and your community. They need to know our vision for connection and that we are working together cooperatively toward this end. We need everyone's help when OPRA and NRPA (National Recreation & Parks Association) ask us to contact our elected officials for the benefit of Park and Recreation. Each of us can really make a difference.

Thanks for the opportunity you've given me to serve.

Happy Trails!