



PHOTO BY JEREMY RODGERS.

Arkansas's trail systems enhance our quality of life and our local economies, and grants are available to establish and maintain them.

Trail funding supports local development efforts

By Benjamin Askew

Adding public recreational facilities to your community not only adds to the personality of your city but also to the overall quality of life of its citizens. The addition of such facilities as motorized or non-motorized trails, for example, encourages locals to get outside and actively admire the beauty of their home while also enticing more people who are just passing through to stop and stay for a while.

The increased connectedness of communities that employ the use of recreational trails makes retail and work sites more accessible, which could lead to an increase in tourism and a newfound revitalization of local economic health. These benefits are a reality that is well understood by the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) as they prepare for yet another funding cycle for their Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant.

The RTP is a competitive, reimbursement-type, federal aid program established in 1993 that provides for an 80 percent federal share and 20 percent non-federal share for each project. It was created for the purpose of allowing cities, counties, state or federal government

agencies, and nonprofit groups to apply for funding for the construction or maintenance of recreational trails or trail facilities throughout the state. This program continues to be administered by the AHTD and the Federal Highway Administration to do exactly that, and it has had a relatively long and successful history of assisting Arkansas communities in seeing these projects through to completion.

Fifteen different projects were awarded funds from this program in 2016. One of the projects was the construction of phase two of Hot Springs' Northwood Trails, which is still underway. The RTP awarded Hot Springs \$48,000 to pursue this goal as part of their greenway efforts, and so far the funding has proven to be an incredible help in the construction of phase two.

Hot Springs Mayor Pat McCabe said "the greenway was just an overgrown streambed, and now it is a well-maintained, beautiful walkway with many activities along the way." He elaborated on the positive impacts these new trails will have on the community.

"These trails will enhance our tourism," McCabe said. "We are a significant player in the mountain-biking

world, and we want to enhance our community in that area.”

It’s just a five-minute bike ride from the trailhead to the downtown area, he said.

“This will certainly appeal to the cyclists in our community who just want to quickly and easily access the retail sites and prop their bikes outside the shops.”

For any who are interested in this program and the positive impacts it has to offer to your community, the applications for both the motorized and non-motorized trails can be found at the bottom of the RTP’s webpage on the AHTD’s official website at www.arkansashighways.com/recreational_trails.aspx. Historically, the deadlines for these applications have been around the start of each calendar year, but the deadline for the current funding cycle has not yet been decided. All interested groups should watch for updates on the AHTD’s website. However, there are still a few other things to keep in mind for communities considering this program.

When it comes to allocating the funds from this program, priority is given to the construction of new trails and for the major maintenance of existing trails. Although support facilities including restrooms, benches, trailhead parking, and lighting are also funded

on occasion, they have been viewed by the Arkansas Recreational Trails Advisory Committee as less important.

Eligibility of who can apply also needs to be taken into account by all interested parties. According to the RTP site, applications for trail projects will be accepted from city and county governments, state agencies, other governmental bodies created under state law (i.e. river authorities, planning districts), federal land managers (i.e. U.S. Forest Service, Corps of Engineers), and private 501(c)(3) organizations. The Program Management Division of the AHTD has specified, however, that the primary criteria for the eligibility of a group or project to be funded by this program is that the funded trail or trail facility be open to the public and not be exclusively privately used.

Anyone interested in this program can call the Program Management Division of the AHTD at (501) 569-2481 for additional information.



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