

EYE ON: Georgia Coast Rail-Trail

Famous for its beaches and barrier islands, antebellum charm and Spanish moss, the Georgia coast grabs plenty of attention from tourists. But about 10 miles inland lies another captivating world of waterways, wetlands, estuaries and pine forests.

For decades, CSX trains rolled through the heart of this largely undeveloped coastal habitat. When the railroad closed service on the route, it allowed the right-of-way to revert to adjacent landowners in the 1990s. Today, a newly formed nonprofit organization is rallying to reacquire and develop 68 miles of the corridor as the Georgia Coast Rail-Trail.

With a board of more than 30 members, Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails, Inc., has kicked off a fundraising and publicity campaign to gain support for the project. The group hopes to capitalize on a positive feasibility study done in 2007 and the route's many natural attractions. "The greatest thing about this trail is where it goes," says Fred Freyer, chair of Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails. "And where it goes is through pristine, beautiful coastal property, including marshlands, swamps and timber forests. It's just stunningly beautiful."

As a fairly remote route with sparse urban connections, yet always within a few miles of Interstate 95, the Georgia Coast Rail-Trail would offer a rare combination of accessibility and outdoors solitude. The northern end begins about 40 miles southwest of Savannah in Riceboro. It's a "whistle stop," says Freyer, and the corridor doesn't reach a much bigger community until the southern end in Kingsland.

An old swing bridge on the proposed trail corridor; (below left) the route is known for its sleepy coastal waterways and wetlands.



Trail Under Construction:
Georgia Coast Rail-Trail

Location: Riceboro to Kingsland, Ga.

Used Railroad Corridor:
CSX

Length: 68 miles

Proposed Surface:
Concrete, with grassy shoulder for equestrians

The town of Woodbine has completed its segment of the trail—the two-mile Woodbine Riverwalk. Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails plans to develop the rest of the pathway in similar increments, with an "ambitious" completion date of 2015, says Freyer.

The trickiest hurdle to development could be the first: securing ownership of the full right-of-way. Ordinarily, acquiring a trail of this length could involve negotiating with dozens, even hundreds, of adjacent landowners. Freyer says this 68-mile stretch is unique in that it involves only 18 property owners, including several timber companies and two municipalities. "I feel we'll be able to work with them," he says, though no agreements have been formalized so far.

The next stage will be to gather the necessary funding for the estimated \$49 million project. "It's going to be a challenge in today's economic times," says Freyer, "but we're out stirring the pot. I believe it will happen."

of funding for trails.

"We will be applying for TE funds," says Jamie Kendall, Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails fundraising chair. However, the TE program requires an organization to own a corridor before receiving funding for it. "We're trying not to put the cart before the horse," Kendall says, but she thinks the funding process will snowball as soon as the group gets a few miles of trail on the ground. "We're in this for the long haul."

Freyer says he's optimistic because of the broad-based community support for the project. The nonprofit has brought together elected officials, bike shop owners, local businesses and a number of other supporters behind the vision of this trail. "It's just going to be a wonderful experience for people to get on it and enjoy nature."

For more information about the Georgia Coast Rail-Trail, contact Kevin Vienneau, project manager, at 912.262.2872.

trail tales

New Trail Funding Available

The February economic stimulus bill, known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), included approximately \$800 million for states to use on Transportation Enhancement (TE) projects. This amount is roughly equivalent to what Congress allocates for one year for TE projects in the current transportation bill.

TE is the single largest source of federal funding for rail-trails and also funds other types of bicycle and pedestrian projects, such as repairing historic transportation structures and promoting pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Unlike TE funds that require a local match of at least 20 percent, these stimulus funds can be used for up to 100 percent of the project cost. States must give priority to projects in economically distressed communities that can be completed within three years. States have only one year to identify projects and start spending the money. In March 2010, any funds that are not obligated to a specific project will be withdrawn and redistributed to other states that have spent all of their funds.

Several states around the country have identified TE projects for stimulus funds, including:

● I-84/I-384 Multi-use Trail, Conn.

ARRA Funds: \$2,000,000

This project will perform necessary repair work on a well-utilized trail, including removing deteriorated asphalt, patching and sealing cracks, and resurfacing approximately 8,000 feet.

● Vestal Rail-Trail, N.Y.

ARRA Funds: \$1,636,690

This project will extend the rail-trail by nearly a mile and includes the construction of a bridge over Choconut Creek.

To learn more, visit www.enhancements.org/recovery.asp or call the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse at 888.388.6832.

What's the farthest you've traveled to reach a rail-trail?

by James A. Artis, Fayetteville, N.C.

I traveled 2,630-plus miles from Fayetteville to Idaho to ride the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes. I joined a group of 30 cyclists from around the country who gathered in late June 2008 in Kellogg, Idaho, to experience the thrill of recumbent "triking" across the panhandle. It was a blast, especially the 19-mile ride from Mullan back to Kellogg. The slight downhill grade gave just the boost for some incredible speed on our super-low trikes.

My journey to the trail began in mid-June with a drive to southwestern Virginia. I spent a week riding in the Virginia and eastern Tennessee mountains. It was scenic, fun and good fitness training for the Idaho ride. Then I drove by myself for

three and a half days to Kellogg to meet up with the group and ride the rail-trail.

I'd serviced my car before the trip, but it still took three alternators to get me there—including two in South Dakota. There were times I wondered if I should continue my journey west or just return home, because it seemed this rail-trail experience was not meant to be.

Well, for the beauty of the trail and lake at Coeur d'Alenes, the trip was definitely worth it. From there, I drove to Seattle to ride the Seattle-to-Portland Bicycle Classic, and then to Iowa for RAGBRAI [Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa], a seven-day ride across the state, with brief riding stops in St. Paul, Minn., and Morton, Ill.

Total experience: Fantastic. I'll do the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes again anytime!

James Artis spins through the Idaho panhandle on his "super-low" trike.



GREGORY McLEAN



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NEXT ISSUE:

What is the worst weather you've experienced while on a rail-trail? When we posed this question to our eNews readership, we got an enthusiastic response. So here's a chance for our magazine readers to share their own war stories.

We want to hear from you!

Deadline Aug. 1, 2009.

Essays should be no more than 250 words in length and may be edited for publication. If your essay is chosen, we'll ask you to provide a picture of yourself to accompany the essay. Send your essay and contact information to magazine@railstotrails.org or Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Magazine/Trail Tales, 2121 Ward Court, NW, 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20037.

Space is limited; additional essays not included in the magazine can be found at www.railstotrails.org/magazine.