

EYE ON: The Tanglefoot Trail

For northern Mississippians, the dream of a local rail-trail is within a hairs-breadth of becoming a reality. Southern Mississippi's Longleaf Trace is a boon for the communities it passes through, and supporters of the proposed 43-mile Tanglefoot Trail project envision a similar success.

Winding through rural Mississippi, the trail would reconnect communities once linked by the rail line, which itself would follow a centuries-old trail used by Chickasaw Indians. The original pathway was dubbed The King's Highway for King Ishtehotopah, last king of the Chickasaw.

It's history such as this, including the proximity to the Natchez Trace, historic Civil War sites and the birth-place of Elvis Presley, that make up



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The Tanglefoot Trail is poised to become an impressive rural trail with historical tourism potential. (Below) The trail's namesake engine, "the Tanglefoot," with railroad workers in 1898.



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the selling points for a trip on the proposed trail. Additionally, the CREATE Foundation (a northern Mississippi community foundation) is seeking a National Heritage Area designation for the region—known as Heritage Hills. The Tanglefoot would further add to the area's tourism and recreation draw.

"We think [the Tanglefoot Trail] will have a significant economic impact," says Paul Dillard, Pontotoc County co-chairperson of the Rail Corridor Alliance (RCA), a collection of representatives from Chickasaw, Pontotoc and Union

- **Trail Under Construction:** Tanglefoot Trail
- **Location:** New Albany to Houston, Mississippi
- **Unused Railroad Corridor:** Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Railroad
- **Length:** 43 miles
- **Fun Facts:** The rail corridor was built by William Faulkner's great-grandfather, Colonel William C. Faulkner, in 1872. The name Tanglefoot comes from the narrow gauge engine of the same name used during construction of the railroad.

counties, the three counties the Tanglefoot would pass through.

Projections for the trail's direct economic benefit to the community have been estimated at \$3 to \$4 million annually. Dillard says the trail may even attract new businesses to put down roots in the area. "The trail would show that our communities can come together and act collectively.

And that makes a statement that might influence a decision for a corporation or industry to relocate."

Railbanking for the corridor is in negotiation. Now RCA is awaiting a decision from the state Department of Transportation on the application for a \$7 million Transportation Enhancement grant to help fund purchase and development of the trail corridor. "We're going down the roller coaster fast if this gets funded," quips Dillard.

To keep up-to-date on the progress of the Tanglefoot Trail or become a supporter, visit www.tanglefoottrail.org.