



## Trail will lead to recreation area

By WILLIAM SMITH

[wsmith@thehawkeye.com](mailto:wsmith@thehawkeye.com)

By the end of this year, local residents may be putting their feet down on the first portion of the 20-mile Flint River Trail.

According to Mike Norris of the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission, construction on the rail bridge over Flint Creek will be completed in April.

After that, it's just a matter of time until the Iowa Department of Transportation gives clearance to pave the initial quarter mile section that starts at the Port of Burlington.

"We hope to have a fall opening," Norris said.

Initial work on the trail already has started. The portion of the trail that reaches from Tama Road south to the Flint River has already been graded and filled.

When completed, bikers and walkers will be able to walk or pedal their way from the Port of Burlington to the Big Hollow Recreation Area. The trail will connect the Mississippi River Trail, downtown Burlington, the Port of Burlington, Riverside Park, Starr's Cave and Preserve, Thye Woods Habitat Preserve, the historic Zion School and Flint River Valley.

"It's an amenity our businesses are looking for, and it will boost tourism through the area," said Beth Nickel, executive director of the Greater Burlington Convention and Visitors Bureau.

While the entire trail won't be complete until 2013, sections will be opened in phases over the next four years. After the initial quarter-of-a-mile opening, sections will be opened based on the speed of construction.

Norris hopes to have a section of the trail from Mill Dam Road along the levee complete by 2010. The entire trail is estimated to be complete by 2013, a year later from the original projected date of 2012.

"We've had a couple of delays, but we're hoping to have most of it completed by 2013," Norris said.

The entire cost of the project is expected to be about \$6.45 million dollars, and more than half that money has been acquired by the Flint River Trail committee. That includes a \$555,000 Transportation Enhancement grant from the Iowa Transportation Commission that was awarded just this year. The trail was also awarded a \$150,000 grant by the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program, matching another REAP grant the trail received in 2006.

The second REAP grant will be used to repair the rail bridge this summer.

"The vast majority of this (trail funding) is coming from grant money, and if we don't use it here, it will be used somewhere else," Norris said.

More than \$3 million has been raised toward the trail, with 70 percent of that money coming from grant funding, 12 percent coming the city and county and 8 percent from the Vision Iowa fund.

The committee also is involved in a capital fundraising campaign, with a goal of raising \$645,000. Norris could not disclose how much money has been raised by the campaign.

"We're making good progress," he said.

Ninety percent of the land easements for the trail have already been acquired. Norris expects the county to provide an additional \$379,000 of matching funding for the next three years, which comes directly from the local option sales tax.

"The money is just not coming from people in Des Moines County. Visitors are actually helping pay for the trail," Norris said.

More than \$1.75 million in grant awards have been given to the trail, and about 75 percent of the trail will be constructed using federal and state grants.

The entire four-mile section of the trail that runs through the city will be paved, while 90 percent of the county's 16-mile section will comprised of quarter inch pieces of crushed stone.

The only bump along the trail so far is the possible ban on bicycles on the Starr's Cave Nature Preserve. The committee previously was told by the Iowa State Preserves Advisory Board that bicycles would not be allowed into the preserve, but Norris said the issue is still being debated.

To help keep the public informed on the trail's progress, the Web site [www.flintriver](http://www.flintriver)

[trail.org](http://www.flintrivertrail.org) has received a major overhaul and there will be a bike raffle in May.

Norris pointed out that despite the economic hardships the country is going through, the trail will become a valuable resource for the area that will bring money into the community.

"It's about making the area more livable," Norris said. "People want places they can take their families."