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Another Voice / Recreation

Rail trails offer a chance to build connections

By Anne Bergantz

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The conversion of the Buffalo Pittsburgh rail line to a recreational trail is one of those unique opportunities that occasionally presents itself. It is an opportunity to build a connection between towns, between neighborhoods and between people.

The section of Buffalo Pittsburgh rail line being considered for abandonment starts in the Village of Orchard Park at the historic Richardson-designed trail depot and travels 27 miles southeast into Aurora, Colden, Concord, the Village of Springville and Ashford Junction.

Following Route 240, it winds through ski country, past Buffalo Ski Club, Kissing Bridge and Colden Tubing. The rail line continues over rolling hills, through wooded valleys, across fields and farmland and provides a breathtaking vista from a high trestle bridge. The rail company has cited challenging grades as a reason for ending rail operations. What makes a poor rail line makes a spectacular trail.


There are many questions about the potential conversion. Buffalo Pittsburgh Railroad filed to abandon the corridor in September. The Federal Surface Transportation Board agreed to allow the abandonment negotiations to proceed on Nov. 5. The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is now negotiating to "rail bank" the corridor, thus preserving the corridor for future rail use and, in the interim, allowing recreation access.

The negotiations are ongoing and can take many months. Residents and interested parties have time and opportunity to determine their vision for the Buffalo Pittsburgh rail corridor. No activity or recreational use is predetermined or guaranteed.

A nonprofit organization, Erie Cattaraugus Rail Trail, was formed to manage and maintain the corridor through grants and donations. There is no cost to taxpayers.

Communities all across the country have converted old rail lines to recreational trails with great success. In New York State, more than 100 rail trails cover more than 1,500 miles.

Trails preserve history, keep wildlife corridors intact, promote healthful activities, provide safe pedestrian access and are quiet economic generators. Trails build connections between people, add value and strengthen



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communities they are in.

As chairwoman of the Orchard Park Trails Task Force, I receive many calls from people who enjoyed using a rail trail in another community. They are enthusiastic about their beauty and benefits. I urge residents along the rail corridor to visit a rail trail before saying “not in my back yard.”

Western New York has several great rail trail examples: the Pat McGee trail in Cattaraugus County, the Peanut Line in Clarence, the Allegheny River Valley Trail and three Chautauqua rail trails — Paul and Nadine Webb Trail, Ralph C. Sheldon Trail and Allison Wells Ney Trail. When citizens see the positive contributions of rail trails, they become enthusiastic supporters.

Anne Bergantz is chairwoman of the OrchardPark Trail Task Force.

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