

A Win-Win Solution: Trails and Rails

My name is Dan Mecklenburg. I am a long time advocate of rails and trails in my community of Tupper Lake. My family and I believe that the best solution that can come out of this series of hearings is for NYS to decide to upgrade the rails along the entire existing travel corridor and invest in improved year-round trails for use by residents and visitors of all ages.

I am here today to briefly describe the results of work done to research and demonstrate how and where such trails can exist while keeping the rail infrastructure as well.

The work was started beginning in January 2013. A local group in Tupper Lake met to establish plans for trails around the community and along the railroad corridor, advocating for both restoration of railroad and a trail beside it.

In May of 2013, a similar group in Saranac Lake named TRAC (Trails with Rails Action Committee) was formed with a similar agenda, and members of both groups got together. The volunteers from both groups began assessing the 100'-0" wide corridor for best trail construction by walking, measuring, and detailing such items as excavation involved, brush and tree removal, avoidance of wetlands, culvert extensions, areas which might require protective fence, and handling of complicated areas such as rock cuts, or fills across wet areas.

Our efforts were complemented by discussions with staff members at the APA and the regional office of the DEC. We determined that in the 23.9 miles between Tupper Lake, Lake Clear, and Saranac Lake along the rail corridor a trail network can be accomplished by creating 11.41 miles of rail side trail within seven sections in the corridor, and interconnecting with six already existing DEC trails paralleling the tracks outside the corridor. The combined network of trails inside and outside the corridor using the DEC trails provides a variety of vistas of nearby ponds and natural scenery for hikers and bikers during the summer season as well as for cross-country skiers and snowshoers during the winter months. These upgraded trails for winter use offer new opportunities separate from the trail in the corridor that is used by snowmobilers.

Past experience shows that DEC will be able to get local help to upgrade their trails. Our group has detailed over 130 cross sectional drawings and lineal maps of the trail beside the tracks. This would logically be accomplished along with and at the same time as track restoration. The DEC trail connecting Fish Creek / Rollins Pond / Floodwood Pond access to this corridor will require a small bridge and short linking trail. It is less expensive and less time consuming to rehabilitate this section of tracks and build a trail beside the tracks, than to tear up the tracks and build a trail.

We are very excited about development of this Win – Win trail system linking our

communities and various amenities that results in the maximum positive economic impact to our region. We will be forwarding the detailed drawings and maps to officials in Albany. We ask that your review be expedited as quickly as possible.

Daniel C Mecklenburg
Trail Committee of TRAC