

News

C&D Canal trail improvements to be unveiled *** Local input sought on project**

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Cecil County residents will get their first glimpse next week into what could be the future of the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal.

U.S. Rep. Michael Castle (R-Del.) this week unveiled the conceptual designs for multi-purpose recreation trails along the man-made waterway between Chesapeake City and Delaware City, its sister canal town to the east.

Residents from both states are invited to attend a presentation of the drawings in Delaware on Dec. 5 and in Maryland on Dec. 6.

"We're 100 percent behind this project," Chesapeake City Town Administrator Patricia Garrett said on Wednesday. "It's something we tried to do on our own several years ago, but I guess it just wasn't the right time."

Castle has made improving the existing dirt trails on either side of the 14-mile canal a top priority in recent years.

Castle, a seven-term congressman and former governor of the Diamond State, said he believes the untapped resource could provide vital recreational amenities in areas of both states where residential growth is virtually exploding.

Last year, Castle met with Delaware officials, called U.S. Rep. Wayne T. Gilchrest (R-1st Dist. Md.) for input and secured \$150,000 in congressional funding for a study of the canal's recreation potential.

Since then, agencies from both states have been meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the waterway, to hash out a proposal.

Initial public hearings regarding the proposal were held in both states in April.

Next week, the various state and federal agencies involved in the project plan to unveil the latest drawings of their vision. The first phase, which would be limited to the north side of the canal, could include covering some of the existing trails with stone dust, adding trailheads, signage, waterless restrooms and unpaved parking areas.

The proposed changes would not impact existing recreational uses that occur along the canal banks today, according to a spokeswoman from Castle's office.

"Basically, the proposal calls for minimally invasive improvements that we hope will make the area more attractive to residents and tourists," said Castle's legislative assistant, Olivia Kurtz. "But none of the changes would take anything away from the hunting, fishing, dog-training and horseback riding that takes place there now."

Kurtz said the proposal also calls for federal funding to maintain the improvements and keep the area secure. Details regarding exactly who would be charged with those responsibilities have yet to be worked out.

"Personally, I think the Army Corps should have been doing that all along," Garrett said. "But regardless of who patrols the area, I think the popularity of the walking trails will help discourage some of the four-wheeler crowd that has given us trouble in the past."

Local residents are invited to inspect the conceptual drawings of the proposal and question the officials who helped to design them during an open-door meeting at Bohemia Manor High School on Dec. 6 from 5 p.m. until 8 p.m.

A similar hearing will be held in Delaware a day earlier at Gunning Bedford Middle School in Delaware City.

The conceptual designs are currently available at the Web site www.nap.usace.army.mil/Projects/CD/index.htm.

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