

RRVT to HTT Connector Trail Project Update

Mike Wallace, Conservation Director

“Phase VI of the Raccoon River Valley Trail to High Trestle Trail Connector Project.” What is that? Well, it’s the Phase we have been waiting for. Phase VI is the **FINAL** phase of construction for connecting the Raccoon River Valley Trail (RRVT) to the High Trestle Trail (HTT). This project connects the towns of Perry to Bouton and on to Woodward. This 9-mile trail project, which is actually an extension of the HTT and thus will be named “High Trestle Trail,” has been in the works for many, many years (but who’s counting now?). The significance of this is that the final Phase was recently bid out and a contractor has been selected to do the construction of this section of the trail. What is even more significant is that the design specifications for this phase stipulate the project completion date of August 16, 2024. This answers the never-ending question, “when is the connector project going to be done?” There is a good possibility that the actual work will be completed before the August 16 deadline. Either way, it will be done in time to allow for plenty of late summer riding opportunities.

This project was not just a typical 9-mile trail construction project using property acquired from a railroad company. That option was lost decades ago when the railroad abandoned its property. This land then ended up being owned by many individual private landowners. This alone created a long process to find a route to make the trail connecting Perry to Woodward. I had to remind myself and others many times that this project was a marathon, not a sprint. There were many plan B’s and C’s and even more in order to finalize a route.

One of the more satisfying things I have witnessed as we approach the final connections of this project can be summed up by the saying, “if you build it, they will come,” from the movie *Field of Dreams*. Benefits of this trail extension project include improvements to our trail towns, new economic opportunities for businesses to capitalize on, amenities such as campgrounds adjacent to the trail, and overall improvement of viewsapes. New homes are being built close to the trails because recreational opportunities are important to homeowners when deciding where to live. There are, of course, many other positive economic impacts that are resulting from the creation of this new trail segment. It has been great to see the support of the citizens and city leaders of the little town of Bouton as they embrace this opportunity. With the trail comes people, and some may even stay. You can look around town and see many positive upgrades in the community. Bouton is excited about this trail, along with Perry and Woodward and the rest of the communities along the HTT and RRVT.

There have been many financial resources utilized to fund this important project. Federal, state, and local government grants and funds; local and statewide nonprofit foundations; and even some nationally known nonprofit organizations have all provided support. Local families and businesses donated funds to match the many grants we utilized. Last but not least, hundreds of grassroots individual donations have helped in so many ways, both from the actual dollar value contributed and from the large number of individuals showing support. It was definitely a group effort.

In 2018, Tate Boyd, pictured here with his sisters, donated his birthday money for the project. Little did he know how that act of kindness would help one of the most significant trail projects in Iowa. It is true that every penny makes a difference! Thanks again, Tate!

I have said in the past that we can see the light at the end of the tunnel for this project. The end of the tunnel is now very near, and there are bikers, walkers, joggers, roller bladders, skateboarders, dog walkers, and others all waiting for us. Yes, 2024 is the year this will happen. I can't wait for August – how about you?



Tate Boyd donating his birthday money to the "Let's Connect" project in 2018