

Snow boosts Down East trailside business

Bill Trotter | BDN 1/23/11 06:55 pm Updated: 1/23/11 07:51 pm



A sign on the on the Down East Sunrise Trail marks a turnoff for the North Street Cafe in Cherryfield.

ELLSWORTH, Maine — Outdoors enthusiasts who enjoy getting fresh air in Hancock and Washington counties have two things at their disposal this winter that they didn't have a year ago: the completed Down East Sunrise Trail and plenty of snow.

For area businesses and others associated with the 87-mile trail, the trail and the snow have combined to produce a busy winter. The full length of the trail was opened to the public last fall. Eastern portions of the trail in Washington County, near Machias, were first opened in fall 2009 after the state rehabilitated that part of the former rail corridor into a multiuse trail. The western portion of the trail, from Hancock to Whitneyville, opened last September.

Compared to last winter, the amount of snowfall along the coast has been significant.

According to the National Weather Service, only trace amounts of snow fell in eastern Maine after Jan. 20, 2010, and what snowpack had accumulated dwindled to only a few inches with subsequent rains.

This winter, however, a lot of snow and little rain has fallen along the coast. Approximately a foot and a half of snow fell Friday in eastern Maine, giving the region about 30 inches of snowpack. By comparison, Caribou in Aroostook County has less than a foot of snow for ground cover, even after Friday's storm, according to the National Weather Service.

Bob Meyers, executive director of the Maine Snowmobile Association, said Friday that this weekend was shaping up to be a busy one for snowmobilers. He said that the Down East Sunrise Trail, which intersects many pre-existing snowmobile club trails, was getting a lot of use.

"There have been some terrific places to ride Down East," Meyers said. "This is a significant, major trail. It is always good to have something new."

At the Franklin Trading Post on Route 182, something new includes increased business from trail users.

Britney Lupo, a cashier at the store, said Sunday that all-terrain vehicle riders, bicyclists, snowmobilers and hikers frequently stop at the business, which is located a few hundred feet from the trail.

"Business has picked up a lot, especially on weekends," Lupo said. "We're selling a lot more gloves, sunglasses and goggles."

Food has been a popular item. The trading post, which sells convenience items and gasoline, has an attached restaurant that is open from 5 a.m. to noon, she said. Trail users who come in after it closes often say they wish the restaurant was still open but end up buying pizza, hot dogs, sub sandwiches and other things they can take and eat on the go, she said.

Sundays bring the most traffic to the store, Lupo said, with snowmobilers and ATV riders frequently filling up on gasoline during their stops. She said that with the trail open, the trading post probably gets between 50 and 100 more customers on weekend days than usual.

"It's been pretty busy," Lupo said.

Kelcy Yeaton of the Narraguagus Snowmobile Club in Cherryfield said Saturday that club members rode their sleds and ATVs along the abandoned rail corridor before it was converted into a trail, but more users of all stripes are out since the trail opened. Yeaton said the club grooms about 30 miles of the trail to make it easier for skiers, snowmobile riders and other users. Even horseback riders have been known to use the trail, he said.

Seated at the counter in the North Street Cafe in Cherryfield, Yeaton said he saw about 30 snowmobiles on the trail pass by his property earlier that morning.

“It’s a lot busier now,” Yeaton said. “It’s good [for business] for this place right here.”

Yeaton said he hopes the popularity of the trail will bring out a lot of riders for the club’s second annual Andy Santerre Down East Snow Ride. The Jan. 29 event, named after the Cherryfield native and professional auto racer, is a benefit for the Beth C. Wright Cancer Resource Center in Ellsworth.

Sharon Bradley, an employee at the cafe who was tending to about a half-dozen customers on Saturday afternoon, said that the scenic trail attracts a lot of users, which brings more people into the cafe.

“If I had a snowmobile, I’d be out there every day,” she said.

Bradley said that on recent weekends, snowmobilers often have made up 75 percent of the cafe’s business and sometimes take up every seat in the house.

“Last weekend, there was standing room only,” Bradley said. “That’s unusual.”

She said that snowmobilers often enter the cafe in groups, which is good for business. She predicted that Sunday would bring in a lot of customers.

“It can get busy in a short period of time, so we try to be ready,” she said.

Information on the Andy Santerre Down East Snow Ride: <http://bit.ly/eQ37cQ>

BDN story about official opening of trail: <http://bit.ly/dUJkyT>