

Man explores tourism possibilities with Sunrise Trail effort

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Members of the Sunrise Trail Coalition walk a section of railroad tracks near Cherryfield on Wednesday. (Bangor Daily News/Kevin Bennett) [Buy this photo](#)

corridor into a multiuse trail system.

And just as the coalition members were interested in Tenan's grand idea — an upscale lodge, restaurant and lounge overlooking the water — the Cherryfield native was eager to get their approval.

"The only way this project can work is if the trail is built," Tenan, who works by day for Sargent Corp. in Stillwater, said Wednesday after leading a brief tour of his land.

Tenan admits his motives for working with the Sunrise Trail Coalition are somewhat selfish, but he also believes his project could help restore Cherryfield as a tourist destination.

In turn, coalition members believe that Tenan's vision exemplifies the kind of economic development potential that is possible if and when the trail finally is completed.

"Funding for our cause is precarious," Sally Jacobs, co-chair of the trail coalition, said Wednesday at a regular monthly meeting that preceded Tenan's impromptu tour. "But as more potential businesses show interest, legislators will have to take notice."

Jacobs, who has worked on the trail project for more than 15 years, said some money has been raised privately and additional funding has been set aside by the Maine Department of Transportation.

Still, it's not enough to sustain the coalition's ambitious plans for a trail system that could accommodate hikers and bikers as well as snowmobile and ATV riders.

DOT officials have previously estimated that it will cost between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per mile to convert the old rail bed that runs from Washington Junction in Hancock to Ayers Junction in Pembroke.

With a stretch of old train tracks on one side and the gentle current of the Narraguagus River purring on the other, Arthur Tenan stood atop a small hill surveying his family's property.

Tenan has daydreamed many times before about his grand plans for the 9-acre parcel, but on Wednesday afternoon he wasn't alone.

With him were members of the Sunrise Trail Coalition, a nonprofit organization that for years has been working to convert 85 miles of the former Calais Branch Rail

The coalition is working with Sen. Dennis Damon, D-Trenton, on a Trails for a Healthy Maine bond in the amount of \$10 million, but Jacobs said she's not sure if that will be approved.

Without significant funding, the trails will be minimal, but either way, the group is moving forward with its plans.

The bidding process already has begun and as early as this summer, parts of the abandoned train tracks will be torn up to make way for the graded trail, Jacobs said.

Still, it's potential businesspeople such as Tenan who could play a big role in convincing those in Augusta that a trail system could be a springboard for many other recreational tourism opportunities.

"Cherryfield is important to me because I grew up here and I want to see it restored, but it's only one spot on the potential trail," Tenan said.

Tenan, who actually was looking to sell his property not long ago, decided instead to develop it when he began following the work of the Sunrise Trail Coalition.

"The location couldn't be better. This is why I took the property off the market," Tenan told members.

The Cherryfield man envisions a lodge with three or four suites and another six or eight cabins. The dining area and lounge he said could accommodate 100 people.

If that goes smoothly, Tenan said he sees further development to coincide with the trail system, including a visitor hub with ATV and bike rentals.

"It's really amazing how you grabbed this opportunity," Jacobs said.

At the coalition's meeting earlier in the day Wednesday, members discussed a handful of other recreational tourism businesses that would be interested in associating with the trail system.

"Most businesses are reactive and don't have the initiative that [Tenan] has," said member David Whitney. "But that old saying of 'build it and they will come' is true."

The coalition meets again in April, at which time members could learn the fate of their \$10 million Trails for a Healthy Maine bond.

For more information

about the Sunrise Trail Coalition, visit the Web site at www.sunrisetrail.org.

<http://www.bangordailynews.com>