



Department of Conservation

Bureau of Parks and Lands Maine Forest Service
Maine Geological Survey and Natural Areas Program
Land Use Regulation Commission

Media Advisory

Please deliver to the city or assignment editor

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Ribbon-Cutting Set to Mark Opening of Winter Trail

CHARLOTTE, Maine – A brief ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held at 9 a.m., Saturday, Jan. 31, at Ayers Junction to acknowledge the opening of the eastern 49 miles of the 85-mile-long Down East Sunrise Trail to winter activities. The trail extension joins the communities from Perry, Pembroke, Dennysville, Marion, to East Machias.

“This is a happy occasion, and it marks the recreational and economic opportunities now available to eastern Washington County with the best snow conditions we’ve seen in years, especially with another foot of snow this week,” Commissioner Patrick McGowan of the Maine Department of Conservation said.

The event is being organized by the Dennysville Snowmobile Club, which maintains about 19 miles of the multi-use rail-trail, according to Joe McPhail, club president.

“We’re finally open for business,” McPhail announced in publicizing the event.

In July 2005, Gov. John Baldacci charged the Maine Department of Transportation with developing a trail management and maintenance plan for an interim multi-use trail on 87 miles of the Calais Branch Rail Corridor between Ellsworth and Ayers Junction.

The DOT formed the Calais Branch Trail Management Committee, including the Maine Department of Conservation, local trail groups, law enforcement units, National Park Service, municipalities, and regional planning and economic development agencies to develop a management and maintenance plan for rehabilitation of the corridor and construction of the trail.

The plan recommended that the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) becomes the long term manager of the trail and corridor. The DOT and BPL entered into an agreement for BPL to

oversee the corridor rehabilitation, trail construction and long term maintenance and in spring 2008, BPL contracted to begin the project.

The open trail stretches from Cherryfield to Machias and East Machias to Perry and is open to all kinds of winter activities, including snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. The MDOC already has received great reports of happy skiers and snowmobilers using the trail in harmony, proving again people can respect all trail users on a trail made for all to enjoy.

Four snowmobile clubs maintain the winter use of the trail, McPhail said. His club has more than 30 members and covers the area of Perry, Eastport, Dennysville, Edmund, Machias, Whiting, Lubec and Charlotte.

The MDOC has approved funding of this trail through the town of Machias, whose town manager has been very helpful and supportive through this project. The trail is expected to bring economic activity not previously experienced before in the region, as traditionally snowmobilers and skiers have had to go north to enjoy their sport on high-quality trails.

It should be noted that construction will resume in the spring, and the trail will again be closed until it is completed.

With the presence of numerous snowmobilers, the trail is expected to have a dynamic effect on the local economy, McPhail said, echoing sentiments of the MDOC's trail managers regarding their experiences in other regions on similar trails .

“We’ve already seen a massive amount of people on the trail,” he said. “There’s been an incredible explosion of activity.”

Local legislators and officials have been invited to attend the ceremony, McPhail said, adding, “It’ll be about 15 minutes, and then we’ll be out having fun.”

Another ceremony to celebrate the opening of the entire trail is planned for a later date when the entire 85 miles opens for multi-use year round.