

Mon River Trails Conservancy

Trail Restoration Project



What Public Health Problem Was Addressed?

In West Virginia's hilly rural counties, the safest, flattest places to walk, run, or ride a bike are generally the abandoned rail lines running through every county. Many of these abandoned rail lines have been re-purposed as rail-trails, including the nearly 50-mile network of the Mon River Trails System. Having safe, fun, and free places to be physically active is critical to meeting weekly recommendations from the US Department of Health and Human Services of 150 minutes of moderate physical activity (i.e., walking, running, and biking). It has been a focus on the Mon River Trails Conservancy (MRTC) to keep the entire 48 mile rail-trail in good condition for all ages to enjoy walking, running, and biking. This restoration work on a 5.5 mile section of the Mon River Trail restored it to a 10ft width and fixed the damaged surface. As a result, trail users will have a good experience which will encourage return visits and possibly longer trail adventures.

What Approach Did They Take?

MRTC hired a contractor, Mountain Valley Resources, to improve the drainage infrastructure, remove the encroachment of grass and debris from the trail, and resurface this section of rail-trail. This work cost over \$60,000 and required that we find multiple funding sources.

MRTC received grants from the Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation, Hazel Ruby McQuain Charitable Trust, Center for ActiveWV Grant Program in partnership with the WV Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease, and Viatrus. In addition, MRTC directed funding from the Monongalia County levy trails fund and donations from MRTC supporters in order to fund this work. These grant programs were essential and provided the financial assistance needed on a project that otherwise would have been financially out of reach for our organization.



What Were The Results?

In the short time since finishing this trail work, Mon River Trails Conservancy has heard from trail users that the restoration work on the 5.5 mile section has improved the trail experience and allowed for more use. Residents with recumbent bikes had stopped using this section due to the poor condition of the trail surface and have returned to enjoying this section of trail. Through communications with the contractor and also on social media, MRTC has heard stories of how much this section of trail means to the community. Several trail users said that they use it to commute to work in Morgantown from their home in the Fairmont area. A runner commented that "This section is important in the summer as it provides more shade during the hot, humid weather as opposed to the open paved asphalt sections of the trail." As a result of this work, the trail is in better condition and with the improved drainage, it is better protected against washouts from extreme storms.

What's Next?

The Mon River Rail-Trails are over 20 years old and are well-established in the community. Reaching this trail age means that we are seeing sections that need this restoration work. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our regional community and on MRTC. While MRTC unrestricted funding has decreased due to the cancelation of our largest fundraising events, trail use has doubled and nearly tripled on some sections of the rail-trail. Residents are using the rail-trail more than ever for outdoor exercise and as a respite to find beauty in nature. It has become a needed, critical space for health and well-being. According to trail counter data, trail users are spreading out and using more remote sections to help with social distancing. MRTC is planning to increase trail parking at Breakiron Trailhead on the Deckers Creek Trail and fundraise for the next section needed for restoration work- Opekiska to Pricketts Fort State Park. We continue to focus on improving trail access at trailheads, building more connections to and from neighborhoods, and restoring sections of the rail-trail to top condition to assure positive trail experiences.



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