

My Turn

Celebrate, protect trails

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The Taos News, 9/27/2018

Trails are good for economic development. A solid network of trails can attract outdoor recreationists, and their money, to spend in nearby communities.

Trails are also good for community health. When trails crisscross a community or a county, easily accessible to people regardless of their income level, residents are more likely to hike, bike, ride horses or run. (Maybe horses are no longer PC, but I prefer to meet a horse on a narrow trail than a speeding trail bike.)

Study after study has born both these facts out. Taos County is well situated to develop and promote trails for both boosting the economy and encouraging communities to get healthier. We have existing trails throughout the mountains, across the valleys and along the gorge. Efforts are underway to connect those trails.

A project is also underway to map and designate 500 miles of trail from one end of New Mexico to the other, following the Río Grande. On Tuesday (Oct. 2), the public is invited to a celebration at the Gorge Bridge, designating 52 miles of the Río Grande Trail within Taos County.

In Questa, the community is looking to create a network of trails within the village and up to Red River.

Crews work every summer now to expand and improve the amazing system of trails within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument.

The Enchanted Circle Trails Association is working on a project to establish on- and off-road trails from Taos to Taos Ski Valley and throughout the Taos Valley.

The town has created some bike lanes on established roads, and we hope to see those expanded in the future. Such trails, designed to make it safe to walk or bike around town, are good for residents and visitors. Walkable and bikeable paths will be another gem Taos can use to promote itself as a destination while also helping encourage its citizens to get moving and stay healthy.

What else can be done to promote trails and their use?

How about the town and county working with the Enchanted Circle Trails Association and some data mapping students to create an interactive web-based master trails list showing how all the trails connect across jurisdictions and where there are gaps? Such a project would require funding, but we think it could attract grants.

The county, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management could jointly work on trails day work projects with the help of groups, such as Amigos Bravos. Twice a year they could host

countywide “Trails Days” and ask the public to pitch in and help out with a little muscle to clear deadfall, repair erosion and pick up trash.

Maybe they could launch an “Adopt a Trail” program, where schools, nonprofits, families and groups could choose portions of favorite trails to maintain. Trail work “meetups” could be held. Heck, we can imagine all sorts of outdoor romances sparked by new trail advocates meeting over downed trees.

Finally, another way to protect trails and public lands: urge Congress to protect the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The fund has helped protect public spaces in all 50 states, including 1,200 projects in New Mexico alone, including the Río Grande del Norte National Monument. Revenue for the fund is generated from royalties paid by offshore drillers.

The LWCF will end Sunday (Sept. 30) unless reauthorized and fully funded by Congress. Find out more at savelwcfnewmexico.com/

We applaud the work completed on trails so far. We’re excited about the possibilities these pathways through our beautiful landscape represent for locals and visitors alike.