

Council set up for river trail initiative

Posted: Thursday, November 3, 2011 11:43 am

The Rock River Trail Initiative, a public-private partnership in Illinois and Wisconsin whose mission is to develop a multi-use trail of recreational, scenic and historic interest along the river, has established a trail initiative council.

Frank Schier, the founder of the trail initiative and editor and publisher of The Rock River Times in Rockford, Ill., and Greg Farnham, commissioner of the Lake Sinissippi Improvement District in Hustisford, serve as coordinators of the Rock River Trail Initiative.

"We are very pleased to announce the initial membership of the Rock River Trail Initiative Council and to have these talented and respected professionals join us," Schier said. "The newly-appointed members to the council represent the 11 counties within the two-state Rock River valley."

Seven Wisconsin residents will represent the trail initiative in the five counties of Fond du Lac, Dodge, Jefferson, Dane and Rock. Those residents are Dick Flynn, director of public works for the city of Waupun; Bill Ehlenbeck, parks manager with the Dodge County Land Resources and Parks Department; Joe Nehmer, director of Jefferson County Parks Department; David Schreiber, principal of Schreiber/Anderson Associates; Paul Benjamin, director of the Rock River Coalition; Joleen Stinson, community coordinator of the Rock County Parks Division; and Sheila De Forest, city councilor for the city of Beloit. Representing the six Illinois counties of Winnebago, Ogle, Lee, Whiteside, Henry and Rock Island are Webbs Norman, executive director emeritus of the city of Rockford Park District; Tom Lindblade, president of the Illinois Paddling Council; Erin Folk, superintendent of recreation for the Oregon Park District; Drs. Robert and Sonia Vogl of the Friends of the Rock River and Illinois Renewable Energy Association; Debbie Thompson, artist and director of The Next Picture Show Gallery; Dave Druen of the Rock Falls Canal Trail Blazer Volunteers; Dorothy and Charles Brown of the Natural Area Guardians; and Chad Pregracke of Living Lands & Waters.

"The trail initiative has also appointed advisers to help our efforts to establish a recreation water trail and a scenic and historic road route along the river," said Farnham. "These advisers provide recommendations on special issues pertaining to the water trail and road route and we welcome their valuable input."

Those who have been named advisers are Bernie Turner, director of the Winnebago County GIS; Josh Prescher of the Lake Sinissippi Association; Gail Scott, director of the Jefferson County Health Department; Robert Soltau, a metropolitan planning manager in Beloit; Kurt Sampson, curator with the Dodge County Historical Society; Gerry Luiting, Janesville deputy fire chief; Brian Christianson, chairman of the Rock Koshkonong Lake District; and Michael Reibel, Ogle County planning and zoning administrator.

In addition, other parks and resource agencies will provide support to the trail initiative. Those people include Tim Dimke, executive director of the Rockford Park District and an Illinois member of the Mississippi River Coordinating Council; Joe Vanderwerff, county engineer for Winnebago County; Sam Tobias, planning/parks director for Fond du Lac County; Kevin Connors, director of the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department; Brian Ramsey, director of the Beloit Parks and Leisure Services; Tom Presny, Janesville parks director; Tom Checkai, director of the Watertown Park, Recreation and Forestry Department; and Cyndi Keller, director of the Jefferson Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department.

"We look forward to the contributions of the new council members and advisers to establish policy and procedures for the trail initiative and to help guide development of the water trail and road route," Schier said. "This is an exciting opportunity for all of us to do something positive for our neighbors along the Rock River and for the economy, environment and quality of life in the river valley."

Schier and Farnham also indicated that the council will work closely with representatives of the Illinois and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources and the Milwaukee and Chicago offices of the National Park Service to develop the recreational water trail. The council will also work with other state, county and municipal agencies to establish the scenic and historic river route.

The Rock River Trail Initiative began in 2010 and was joined by public and private partners in Wisconsin in 2011. The mission of the initiative is to establish and interpret a Rock River water trail along the 300-mile river course from the headwaters in Fond du Lac and Dodge counties to the Mississippi River at Rock Island in Illinois. The group is also looking to create a separate Rock River route on roads within the river corridor to provide access to the natural resources, recreational opportunities, scenic beauty and historic and cultural assets of the Rock River Valley.