

# Biking trail plan gets officials' OK

BY AMY GRIFFITH  
Staff Writer

BROOKVILLE — Efforts to construct a hiking and biking trail along the Whitewater Canal were curtailed in 1992, but with the official approval of Franklin County Commissioners Tom Wilson and Lou Linkel obtained at Monday's regular commissioners' meeting, a new trail group is making headway where no one has before. Commissioner Bob Brack was not present at the meeting.

Project coordinator Mick Wilz said much of the trail, which will run alongside the canal for about 2.5 miles from the Metamora aqueduct to an area near the Twin Locks, has been cleared by himself and 25 volunteers. The trail has been cleared with the blessing and support of all property owners with land adjacent to the trail, Wilz said.

What's changed since 1992 is the knowledge of land ownership, studies of trail benefits and community support for the project, according to Wilz. Lawsuits around the time of the first project shed light on who owns the land, and the national movement to turn old railway beds into trails has grown nationwide in the last 10 years, Wilz said.

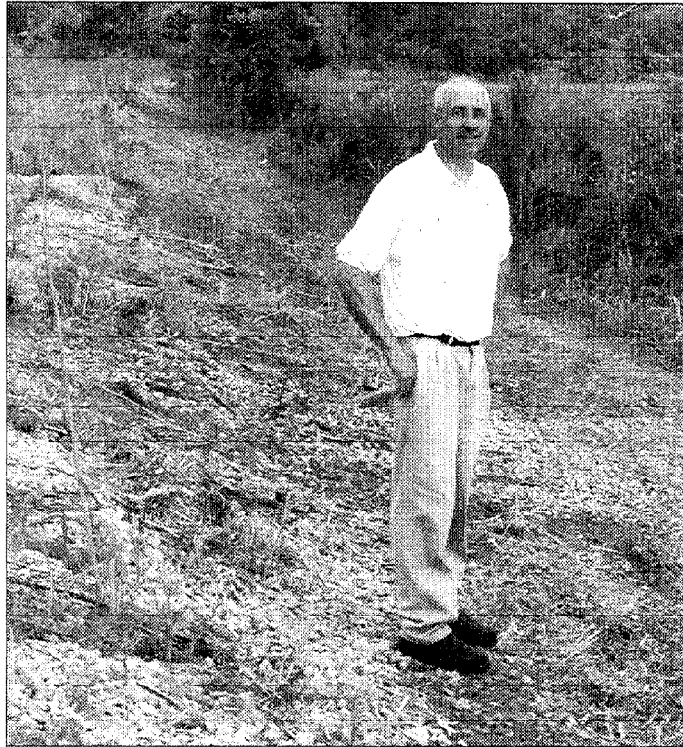
"Without any argument, I've secured five and a half miles of it," said Wilz.

Arguments in favor of the trail cited by supporters include recreational and fitness benefits for county residents, as well as economic development around the trail and boons to the county's tourism industry.

The trail would also be a way of preserving the history of Franklin County and the canal — which has been listed on the National Registry of Historic Places since 1968 — for future generations, Wilz said.

Wilz and the other members of the newly-formed Whitewater Canal Trail Committee are focusing on the stretch of the trail they've cleared, where all adjacent landowners have lent their support of the project.

Jay Dishman, the Indiana Depart-



AMY GRIFFITH / News-Examiner

Whitewater Canal Trail Committee member Mick Wilz stands on a portion of a recently-cleared hiking and biking trail along the Whitewater Canal. The trail was cleared of rocks, railroad ties and sticks by Wilz and about 25 volunteers, working every Saturday since January with basic farm equipment. The trail is not yet open to the public.

ment of Natural Resources's site manager at the Whitewater Canal State Historic Site, said at the commissioners' meeting the state is the primary owner of the land to be used for the trail, at least between the aqueduct and the Twin Locks.

Dishman said the DNR supports the project, and has formed a working agreement with the Whitewater Canal Trail Committee to allow the organization to build the trail. The state has no funds for the project at this time, but Dishman said the DNR has lent advice to the committee and hopes to form a partnership with the group in the future.

Wilz said it was likely the state would someday take responsibility for maintenance of the trail.

Eventually, Wilz said he would like to see trails all the way from Brookville to Metamora, and possibly from Metamora to Laurel. The committee expects that any expansion will occur slowly, as support is garnered from the community and adjacent landowners a little bit at a time.

The 2.5-mile trail being focused on now could be open to the public as early as this fall, provided that a state inspection scheduled for Aug. 18 finds it suitable for the public. The trail will be classified as "primitive," with a dirt surface until more funding can be secured, said Wilz. Handicap accessibility also will not be possible until funding is secured.

Wilson and Linkel said they agreed with the committee that the trail would

be a positive addition to the county.

Wilson said he believed it would bring more people to the county, and help businesses working nearby. Linkel agreed with Wilson in lending his approval to the project, but also said there was some controversy involved in gaining access to the land for the project.

"Personally I think it's a good thing, but I think there are a few issues that make me wonder if you can get the land," said Linkel.

Linkel said commissioners had heard opposition to building a trail from landowners with property beyond the 2.5-mile trail being focused on now. Vocal disagreements have been expressed at commissioners' meetings by Tom, Ron and Cody Ritz, who were involved in the original lawsuits in the early 1990s and believe the state does not own the land for the trail and needs to pay market value for it to property owners.

Wilz and committee members emphasized at the meeting that support for the 2.5-mile trail has been secured from adjacent landowners — the only ones directly involved at this time.

"It's not going to happen overnight," said Wilz. "This has to be a community project."

For more information or to volunteer to work on the trail, visit the Whitewater Canal Trail Committee's Web site at [www.whitewatercanal-trail.com](http://www.whitewatercanal-trail.com).

**Maximus contract:** Wilson and Linkel signed a contract with Maximus, a firm that audits management of county money, to examine county records and recover some of the county's indirect administrative costs incurred from management of programs including Medicaid, child support and civil defense.

The fee for the audit is \$4,500, with a guarantee that the county's payment to the firm won't exceed 50 percent of the indirect costs Maximus recovers for the county. The county has signed similar contracts with Maximus for the past few years, said Auditor Carol Monroe.

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of AMVETS, spearheaded the event after deciding several months ago that veterans of World War II should have an opportunity to see their national monument, which was dedicated May 29 in Washington, D.C. Sturgeon is a veteran of both World War II and Korea.

"Nobody thought we could raise enough money to pay for the trip," Sturgeon said.

About \$8,000 was donated to help pay for expenses through the help of WIFE radio and the Helpers On Bikes Organization (HOBOS).

Sturgeon said many World War II veterans rely on fixed incomes and could not afford the trip but a generous community assured they would be able to see their monument.

Veterans from three wars — World War II, Korea and Vietnam — made the trip along with several spouses.

Many sites along with the World War II National Monument were visited including the Korean War Veterans Memorial (dedicated in 1995) and Vietnam Veterans Memorial (dedicated in 1982.) All three monuments are located near each other between the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument.

Another stop took place in Arlington National Cemetery, where more than 290,000 veterans are buried, representing every war the nation has fought. Arlington Cemetery is on grounds once

belonging to Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

Also visited were the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the changing of the guard, gravesides of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, wife, Jacqueline, and two sons, and Robert Kennedy; the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial (dedicated in 1997) and the Marine Corps War Memorial (dedicated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower Nov. 10, 1954, the 179th anniversary of the U.S. Marine Corps).

The trip included a stopover at the AMVETS National Headquarters and Union Station in downtown Washington.

Bus driver Tom Smith ushered veterans through downtown Washington pointing out several sites of interest including Embassy Row; the Ford Theater, site of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination; the residences of all vice presidents; and Washington National Cathedral.

"It was a good deal for everyone," Sturgeon said. "Everybody had a lot of fun."

Sturgeon and all veterans and spouses who made the trip extended their appreciation to the community for its generosity.

Sturgeon said new uniforms for the Fayette County Veterans Honor Guard will be purchased with the remaining funds.

# Library: Problems

wall.

"This is supposed to be a new basement," Bailey said.

Sharpe said she was not happy about the progress of the building so far, but was unsure where the county would go from this point.

"We've come a long way and corrected a lot of problems," Sharpe said. "We're taking it one step at a time."

**Special exception:** David Kelsch was granted special permission by the BZA to allow an all-ter-

rain vehicle (ATV) safety training school on his property, which is located in an agricultural district.

"There is a need for ATV safety training," he said. "This way people will be educated before being turned loose to go ride."

Kelsch said the training school will teach eight students for three hours per lesson that will mainly consist of discussion.

"This is important for the safety of those in the community," he said.

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