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Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc.

2021 Special Edition

TERRY WENTZ CONNECTOR

DCNR Dedicates Trail Connector Project At Canoe Creek State Park

October 22, 2021

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn today joined state park, other DCNR and PennDOT officials to dedicate the site of a trail connector project that will close one of Pennsylvania's top 10 trail gaps.

The project includes half a mile of new trail construction, six-tenths of a mile of trail, two trail bridge replacements and other work, which will connect Canoe Creek State Park to the Lower Trail, when completed.

Trail users will be able to access the 17.5-mile-long Lower Trail from the park's day use area because of the project.

"We at DCNR are proud to have this important project underway, as it will help close the third biggest trail gap we've identified in Pennsylvania's diverse and expansive trails system," Dunn said. "I look forward to seeing this completed project and the added recreational value it will provide to the region. Thank you to our community partners, Rails to Trails of Central Pennsylvania, PennDOT and all of the other entities who helped make this great project possible."

The beautiful, 961-acre Canoe Creek State Park features a 155-acre lake, wetlands, old fields, and mature forests, which provide critical habitat for migrating birds and other wildlife. DCNR has worked with Rails to Trails of Central Pennsylvania to help develop and maintain the Lower Trail, awarding nearly \$500,000 to six projects in the last 20 years.

Others who were instrumental in the Lower Trail project include the Blair County Commissioners, Frankstown Township Supervisors, and Friends of Canoe Creek.

"People will be able to walk or ride safely from Alexandria and Williamsburg because of the collaborative effort to improve access to this park," said Canoe Creek State Park Manager Joe Basil. "I am excited for this project and the expanded recreational opportunities it will provide for this beautiful park."

To help achieve its goal of providing a trail within 10 minutes of every Pennsylvanian, DCNR focuses on closing priority trail gaps, working with local trail managers to connect existing trail

sections that are typically less than five miles long and are official recognized in a local trail plan.

Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc. formally dedicated and named the underpass under State Route 22 the Terry Wentz Connector. This has been a long anticipated event, connecting the Lower Trail to Canoe Creek State Park. One can say it has been the plan since 1989 when Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc. was just organized and had purchased the original eleven miles of trail.

One of the original nine founding members of Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc., Terry Wentz was the Park Manager of Canoe Creek State Park. He was a great outdoors advocate and loved his park as well as seeing the great future of rail trails. He always hoped/planned that the Lower Trail would connect to Canoe Creek State Park. For these and more reasons we are naming the underpass the "Terry Wentz Connector".

It is sad to say that Terry never saw his dream become a reality but Rails to Trails worked to make it happen in his memory.

The article below is a reprint from our June/July 2010 Trekker. It will give you some insight into who Terry Wentz was.

Terry Wentz: June 4, 1947 - May 30, 2010



On May 30th, Rails to Trails of Central PA, Inc. lost one of its very best friends. Terry Wentz died as a result of polymyositis and complications from pneumonia. Like the article on

Dean Lower's passing, I find this difficult to write without making it more personal. I have known Terry for just about 30 years. I first met him when he came to Canoe Creek State Park as the Park Superintendent. I worked under Terry for four years as a lifeguard supervisor. Little did I know then that we would continue to work together for over 20 years on the Lower Trail.

Terry always had a love for the outdoors. He was the park superintendent of Canoe Creek until his retirement in 2005. He worked in the State Park system for more than 30 years. Upon his retirement, he founded Waxwing Associates and continued educating groups about the outdoors. He was very involved in the Juniata Valley Audubon Society and his knowledge of birds was better than any encyclopedia. It was in the fall of 1988 that the idea of a rail trail in central Pennsylvania first surfaced. Terry was one of the people at the very first meeting. He was one of our 9 original founding members. He never backed down or became

discouraged as the group met with many obstacles over the years. He has been a board member since the inception of the organization. He has held every office with the exception of secretary, although he served as the Assistant Secretary/Treasurer for the past several years. Terry was always a “do-er”. He was instrumental in almost every area of our organization from its formation, helping to develop the by-laws by which our organization runs. He was one of the first people to walk what is now the Lower Trail; he acquired grants for the trail, for maintenance sheds, equipment, and the trail extension, just to mention a few things. He was also a first-rate volunteer, putting together the calendar of events for years, leading many hikes, taking care of the donation boxes, and overseeing many of the Boy Scout projects. Terry laid out the horseback riding path and signage, was instrumental in the development of the new brochures, and spoke to many organizations about Rails to Trails. These days, it’s taking at least four other volunteers to cover what Terry had always done. It was always Terry’s dream that the trail should connect to Canoe Creek State Park. It should be every trail supporter’s duty to work to make his dream become a reality. For what Terry has done to make the Lower Trail what it is today, we owe it to his memory to complete his dream.

Not only was Terry a great trail advocate and volunteer, but above all, he was a husband and father. Terry was married to Debbie (Haine) Wentz, who retired just last September. They were looking forward to many years of enjoying the outdoors while traveling. Terry had two sons, Ben, who lives in State College and Daniel, who lives in Birmingham, Alabama. Rails to Trails extends our deepest sympathies to Debbie, Ben and Dan. Terry, you will be greatly missed. Terry was a wonderful man who contributed so much to all he became involved with. He leaves very big shoes to fill. If every member would do just a percentage of what Terry did for our community, I still don’t think it would equal what he did.

Good- bye, dear friend. It is still so hard to believe that you are gone.

VOLUNTEERS MAKE OUR TRAIL!!!



Our Trail could not and would not exist without our very dedicated volunteers. All of our volunteers are greatly valued and we would like to thank each and every one who contributes to the trail and all of its operations. This fall the Altoona Mirror spotlighted one such volunteer. Below is that article reprinted from the September 13th issue of the Altoona Mirror:

WILLIAMSBURG — Volunteers are the key to maintaining and improving the Lower Trail as they take on tasks such as mowing, weed whacking and making repairs to keep clear the 17-mile biking/walking trail that runs from Canoe Creek to Alfarata.

One of those volunteers is Omaha, Nebraska, native Greg Williams, who moved to Williamsburg six years ago and has since taken on a key role in that upkeep.

“People like Greg are the heartbeat of the trail,” said Ethan Imhoff, president of Rails to Trails of Central Pennsylvania.

Imhoff credits Williams’ work ethic, which is critical to keeping the trail maintained.

“Our trail is completely maintained by volunteers. We have no paid staff. So without people like Greg, the trail wouldn’t exist. It’s that simple,” Imhoff said.

Williams and his wife, Cynthia Potter, were living in Philadelphia and looking for a place to retire and a place where they could continue to work on habitat restoration.

Williams said the duo were looking for a place that was less expensive to live versus Philadelphia.

With his wife’s grandchildren in Ebensburg and State College, “this was in the middle,” he said.

“This was perfect for us,” Williams said. “My wife is a naturalist. Being along a trail was like we scored.”

Since moving to Williamsburg, Williams, a former school teacher and principal, has been a very active volunteer.

He has 25 years of environmental education and habitat care experience and is a board member of Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light, one of 45 Interfaith Power and Light state chapters across the U.S. that lift a faith voice around the issue of climate change.

“PA IPL is a collection of congregations of people of faith who feel God is real, science is real and climate change is real. We are compelled to do something about it,” Williams said.

“Habitat restoration is the key thing that we do.”

Over the last five years, Williams has led hundreds of work parties removing invasive plants that have been crowding out native shrubs. He has planted and maintains thousands of native plants, like maple leaf viburnum, which support local fauna. His work parties tamp back the re-emerging non-natives and nurture the natives using protective tree tubes and stakes provided through a partnership with Chesapeake Bay Foundation’s 10 Million Trees Initiative, said Ed Donahoe, Rails to Trails past president and board member.

“We are trying to restore native plants, insects and birds and protect the ecosystem. Planting trees has been determined to be the number one way to soak up excess carbon in the atmosphere. Using a natural solution to climate change is one powerful tool,” Williams said. “I am not doing this by myself, I have had about 500 volunteers who work with me.”

Williams enjoys working with students and has managed and educated large groups of Hollidaysburg Senior High School students, who, for the past four years, have performed three days of community service every May.

In 2018, they removed grass turf and planted a large native wildflower meadow that supports butterflies and other beneficial insects.

“His knowledge and passion for ecology and helping restore native plant species is infectious and students respond to his enthusiasm,” said Mike Rawlins, social studies department chair.

“For the last several years, our students have learned about invasive species and why we should be restoring native plant life to help the life cycle of all species and they have helped remove invasives and plant native plants along the Lower Trail,” Rawlins said. “Greg is truly an asset to our community. His volunteerism has helped hundreds of students at our school.”

Williams is also partnering with the Penn State Sustainable Communities program to study and plan various environmental features and to make the trail more accessible for people in wheelchairs or walkers.

Rails to Trails officials can't say enough good things about Williams.

“Greg is a man of action. If he talks about an idea, and builds support for an idea, you can bet he's going to see it through,” Imhoff said. “He brings a positive energy and enthusiasm to the trail and our work.”

“All you have to do is travel the trail and you will see projects that Greg has implemented from start to finish,” Imhoff said, noting one of Williams' core projects is invasive species removal.

He credits Williams and his crews with the removal of thousands of invasives along the trail.

“He's worked on flower gardens, tree plantings, you name it,” Imhoff said. “You literally cannot travel far at all on the trail without seeing his work.”

Donahoe said Williams has organized hundreds of diverse work parties and educated a lot of people in his practical approach to environmental sustainability. He calls Williams a modern day “Johnny Appleseed.”

“Greg is transforming our 17-mile trail like no one else could. As invasive species are being removed, new native growth is starting to blossom. As each year goes by, those new plantings will continue to improve the beauty of our trail,” Donahoe said.

By Mirror Staff Writer Walt Frank.

Gregg has also been recognized by DCNR as a “Good Natured Pennsylvanian”, this appeared in DCNR's October 13th DCNR Resource Newsletter

Good Natured Pennsylvanians

Greg Williams is originally from Omaha, Nebraska, but has found a passion for his local trail and community in Williamsburg.

Greg is a board member of Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light, one of 45 Interfaith Power and Light state chapters across the U.S. that lift a faith voice around the issue of climate change. After a long career of teaching and environmental education, Greg moved to central Pennsylvania to be nearer to family. He and his wife were lucky enough to find a small plot of land adjacent to the Lower Trail.

He began to realize that one thing he could do to make a difference in climate change was habitat restoration and the planting of native trees and shrubs.

Greg got permission from the Board of Central Pa. Rails to Trails to begin that work on the Lower Trail, as well as at Walnut Springs Park in State College, on the Bells Gap trail in Bellwood, and at Detwiler Park in Huntingdon.

The trail serves as a slice of the natural world for the neighborhood as it winds along the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River, with many habitats that are threatened by invasive species.

Greg tries to get out daily and work at cutting back or pulling out non-native plants which don't feed the native food web; and replace them with native trees and shrubs provided by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

These native plants nurture the food web and add biodiversity which will make the area more resilient in the face of climate change.

Greg tries to create communities of volunteers at our different sites and give them the opportunity to work in their community and in the natural world.

“Climate work is dispiriting and hard to do alone,” he says. “The trees and shrubs we plant are a tiny down payment on the future of the planet since they are the best way to sequester the excess carbon that is causing climate change.”

Greg teaches volunteers how to identify different plants and how to open an area where the non-natives are shading out native plants.

“I love planting trees with this community of volunteers -- which has grown to at least 500 people who have worked at least once, and hopefully, been touched by the natural world,” Greg says. “Some of them have become as addicted as I and work regularly. Together we have planted more than 10,000 native trees and shrubs.”

Greg thinks volunteering makes a difference in our world but also in himself and the other volunteers.

Rather than sinking into despair about the dangers to the world, taking action gives hope to the volunteers and to others who witness the work. Greg thinks that level of involvement may be strong enough to turn the tide.

He also feels very fortunate to be able to find a volunteer opportunity that he loves doing and brings him so much joy.

“It has been rewarding to see the work spread, through Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light to groups doing habitat restoration in the Pittsburgh and the Scranton area, as well as in Philadelphia where it all started.”

Know of a good natured Pennsylvanian who is passionate about outdoor recreation and/or conservation that we should feature? Contact us at ra-resource@pa.gov to nominate someone



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VOLUNTEERS

This edition is dedicated to all the volunteers that make Rails to Trails of Central PA Inc. the wonder and successful organization that it is. Without volunteers there would be **NO** trail or organization. This newsletter highlights one past and one current volunteer that by their giving nature were not only recognized by our organization and the local community but by the state of Pennsylvania. And Terry was the **2010 National Trails Award Recipient**. As we enter 2022 let us all remember that without volunteers we would not exist.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS SEE YOU ON THE TRAIL IN 2022

KEEP YOUR ADDRESS CURRENT

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