

## **\$1 million in grants to aid city trails, parks**

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TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources awarded \$1 million in grants Monday to improve trails and bridges in Pittsburgh parks and to help complete the bike trail to the nation's capital.

Half of the grant money will go toward the \$2.5 million bridge carrying the Great Allegheny Passage trail over a rail line in Duquesne, bringing the Regional Trail Corp. 1.3 miles closer to completing the trail between Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.

With the grant money, the route can snake in and around existing rail lines rather than follow busy roads for its final 9 miles between McKeesport and Downtown.

"The trail would have had to follow Route 837, where the sidewalk is barely four feet wide in places and studded with utility poles," said Linda Boxx, president of the Allegheny Trail Alliance. "This allows us to have a safe alignment, which is our No. 1 concern."

The Pittsburgh Park Conservancy will get \$250,000 to improve trails and add signs to Frick, Schenley, Highland and Riverview parks, said conservancy President Meg Cheever.

"We're all caring more than ever before that cities have space for city-dwellers to connect to the natural world," she said, noting the United Nations estimated worldwide urban population surpassed rural population for the first time this year.

The final \$250,000 will go to the "Treevitalize" partnership between the city, Allegheny County and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which aims to plant 20,000 trees around the area during the next five years.

In addition to restoring the city's tree cover, the plantings reduce pollution and bring together communities, said Marijke Hecht, Treevitalize director.

DCNR Secretary Michael DiBerardinis said the awards fit the spirit of the International Urban Parks Conference taking place in the city this week, which brought representatives from 31 states and 11 nations here to discuss the rebirth of urban green space.

"The future lies in walkable cities built around high-quality transit, recreational amenities and accessible trails," he said.

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