

The river trail's big impact

Independent study measures trail's true value

By **Natalie Gelb**

One asset featured in the new documentary, "Legacy," produced by WVIA on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley (LHV) National and State Heritage, is the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT).

LHV develops and manages the trail, and it works closely with the Rail-Trail Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Both organizations collaborate with the municipalities along the trail for planning, design, construction, and maintenance of the trail system, as well as other projects and programs.

The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT) and its companion, the Delaware and Hudson (D&H) Rail-Trail, together create the longest land trail system in northeastern Pennsylvania.

The trail travels from the New York state border to the Lackawanna River's confluence with the Susquehanna River at Pittston. It runs through 30 municipalities, including the cities of Carbondale, Scranton, and Pittston, and traverses Lackawanna, Susquehanna, Wayne and Luzerne counties.

The majority of the trail system is located in the footprint of LHV, with the northern portion extending into the Endless Mountains State Heritage Region.

Of the 70+ miles in the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail system, 56 miles are open to the public. Seventeen miles are rail-trails surfaced with paving or crushed stone, and 39 miles travel through municipalities, using sidewalks, streets, flood control levees, utility access roads, and municipal parks.

The remaining 18 miles of the trail system are under development. LHV anticipates groundbreaking for another four to five miles in the spring of 2012, including a section connecting Scranton and Taylor as well as a link between Archbald and Jermyrn.

In 2009, LHV conducted a survey of people who use the LRHT to determine usage patterns and the economic impact of the trail.

The independent economic evaluation



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firm estimated 128,000 annual user visits to the trail. The results indicated a direct economic impact of approximately \$28,251,862 to the region from trail-user spending.

According to a formula developed by the U.S. Dept. of Commerce, the economic impact of the Lackawanna River Heritage

Trail resulted in the creation and retention of 1,259.45 full-time jobs, excluding those related to design and construction.

The 2009 survey was completed prior to the opening of the Downtown Scranton Riverwalk.

Undoubtedly, a survey conducted today would yield much higher and more impressive numbers!

The Scranton Riverwalk, the keystone of the LRHT, is heavily used. Its users include growing numbers of students and faculty of Scranton High School, as well as residents who use the trail to get to commercial establishments, including grocery stores, offices and other locations in Central City.

Organized running and bicycling groups use the trail for regular practices as well as special fund raising events. College and medical students join visitors to the area in making the Scranton Riverwalk an increasingly recognized and appreciated amenity of life.

The number of users grows steadily as more and more people become aware that the trail is convenient and easily accessible.

"Heritage Partners" is the membership organization that supports the work of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley.

Active volunteers are called "Ambassadors in Action," and they assist the cultural and historic work of LHV, as well as the trail projects.

To become a Heritage Partner, or for more information about the trail, go to www.lhva.org.

Also, be sure to watch for "Legacy" on WVIA-TV, to learn more about the Lackawanna Heritage Valley! ■

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