

LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project ID	HS-11
Title of Program	Fonta Flora State Trail - Lake James Loop Section
Program Category	Human Services
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Implementation Date	6/1/2016
FLSA Designation	Exempt
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Description of Productivity Improvement

The Fonta Flora State Trail "" Lake James Loop Section is an easy to moderate multi-use hiking and mountain biking trail with a primarily natural mineral soil surface. It is sustainably designed and constructed to minimize erosion and require minimal maintenance. The trail averages five feet in width and will be approximately 25-30 miles long depending on the final trail alignment location. The overall average trail grade or slope is 5% not to exceed 10%. This will allow the Trail to provide an enjoyable experience for trail users while protecting the natural resources through which it traverses.

The Trail provides residents and visitors with a county managed recreational facility that is unlike any other in Burke County. While some trails exist in other county recreational facilities, they are short, flat, and more urban in character. The Fonta Flora State Trail is more rural in nature and provides a much more diverse experience for users.

Description of why this project was initiated

The Fonta Flora State Trail "" Lake James Loop Section was initiated to connect a variety of recreational opportunities located near Lake James. This rural greenway also provides a unique

recreational experience that doesn't currently exist in the area for residents and visitors. It increases environmental protection through a secured corridor and promotes tourism as a regional destination in western North Carolina. The trail also serves as an asset for local residents at Lake James.

The Trail connects the Upper Catawba River Paddle Trail, Mountains-to-Sea (MST) Connector Trail, Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVNHT), and hiking and biking trails at Lake James State Park. The OVNHT will follow the same route as the Fonta Flora State Trail for the southern section of the trail. The MST Connector Trail will provide access to additional trails in the Linville Gorge, Wilson Creek, Pisgah National Forest, and over 300 miles of the MST from Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Stone Mountain State Park in Wilkes County. Proposed trails within and connected to the Fonta Flora County Park, Lake James State Park, and the Catawba River Greenway in Morganton will also be accessible from the Fonta Flora State Trail "" Lake James Section.

The Fonta Flora State Trail "" Lake James Loop Section utilizes a variety of trail types - natural surface, gravel, and asphalt - within an approximately 30 mile section of trail. This is not typically done with trail and greenway projects. The different trail types allow Burke County to take advantage of the setting and natural environment through which each trail section passes. Each trail type also offers a different experience to the trail users.

Several natural surface sections of the Trail are currently being constructed. These sections of trail are approximately five feet wide with an overall trail grade or steepness of 5% not to exceed 10%. This provides pedestrians and bicyclists of all abilities a safe and enjoyable experience. The trail design and construction incorporates the characteristics of a typical rolling contour trail that has a gentle grade, follows the contours of the terrain, is slightly outloped, and meanders and undulates frequently to remove water from the trail surface and provide an interesting journey for the trail user.

The Trail traverses a County Park, State Park, National Historic Trail and easements that cross private campgrounds, residential developments and Duke Energy lands. These easements increase environmental protection around Lake James through protection of the trail corridor. The corridor also serves as an important visual buffer where the trail runs near the shoreline.

The recreational opportunities that the Fonta Flora State Trail "" Lake James Loop Section connects already promote tourism in the area. The Trail will add another option that can be experienced in combination with the other choices that exist. As more and more of the Trail is constructed and developed, the area will become a regional draw for western North Carolina.

Local residents that live in close proximity to the Trail can utilize it for the recreational and health benefits that it offers. They may also experience increased property values which will translate into additional tax revenue for Burke County.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

While the local and regional economic effects of the Fonta Flora State Trail "" Lake James Loop Section will be significant, the immediate effects will be difficult to measure and quantify. A long-term study in the future will be able to quantify economic benefits such as sales and lodging taxes and increased property value and tax revenue.

Initial funding for the Fonta Flora State Trail "“ Lake James Loop Section amounted to \$40,000 in local funding from the Burke County Board of Commissioners. This funding was spent in support of the volunteer advisory committee, easement acquisition, and wayfinding designs and prototypes that were connected by a unique branding theme. Duke Energy committed approximately \$1,203,699 to the project through the Comprehensive Relicensing Agreement by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Also, Burke County has been awarded \$170,000 in Federal grants from the Recreational Trails Program for trail construction. A NCDOT STP-DA grant for \$570,000 has also been secured with a local match of \$300,000 provided by NC State Parks. These funding sources have allowed for immediate implementation of the Fonta Flora State Trail "“ Lake James Loop Section.

As of April 2017, approximately 12 miles of the Fonta Flora State Trail "“ Lake James Loop Section will be completed at a cost to Burke County of \$185,000. This 12 mile section of natural surface trail will be on the north side of Lake James. In addition, engineering for approximately one mile of gravel surfaced trail will be complete at a cost of \$29,000. Engineering and construction documents for two trailheads, associated amenities, and a facility design manual will also be completed at a cost of \$54,000. Burke County has committed \$44,000 in local funding for the construction of the primary trailhead located at Fonta Flora County Park in the late spring/summer of 2017.

The unique trail design promotes sheet flow of water across the trail as opposed to flow of water down the trail and limits the volume and velocity of water on the trail tread. This minimizes the amount of erosion that occurs on and around the trail which will minimize required maintenance. The design will save Burke County money and staff time in the future. Trail maintenance is critical to provide and sustain the experience trail users expect and appreciate. The primary maintenance of the natural surface sections of the Fonta Flora State Trail "“ Lake James Loop Section includes keeping the trail corridor trimmed of brush and vegetation, the trail tread debarred and clear of fallen debris, and water control measures cleared of leaves and organic debris.

Visitor use of the existing new trail is occurring based on personal observation. However, exact numbers are unknown. The completed trail segments provide residents and visitors with an additional county managed recreational facility that provides a higher level of service for all.

Other descriptive information

The Trail will incorporate multiple trailheads, supporting facilities, and trail connections around Lake James. Information detailing these amenities will be identified and provided at each trailhead. Each trailhead kiosk associated with the Trail will appear similar in design and rustic appearance. A persimmon color feather will be the blaze or symbol that guides trail users and ties the trail together. The consistent kiosk design and blaze of the Trail will help users quickly identify access points and sections of trail as the Fonta Flora State Trail - Lake James Section. Appropriate loop and out-and-back trail options will be detailed for trail users not interested in completing the entire loop at once. The target user group will be families and inexperienced trail users that are uncomfortable sharing the paved roads around the Lake with vehicular traffic. However, the hope is that a variety of trail users with all experience levels will utilize the Trail.