



Tuesday, January 27, 2004

Chamber updated on Iron Horse Trail opportunities

The benefits of being located along the Iron Horse Trail are now clear to those members who attended last week's meeting of the Elk Point Chamber of Commerce. Riverland Recreational Trail Society (RRTS) president Marvin Bjornstad and RRTS secretary Sheila Thompson were joined by Alberta's Lakeland manager Janice Kennett, Iron Horse Trail industry coordinator Wayne Nowak and Elk Point TrailRiders Snowmobile Club president Dale Rinas to give the Chamber an update on Trail activities and opportunities.

Bjornstad said the RRTS now has 278 members and is "looking at serving the needs of communities along the trail". The Trail, which officially opened last year, has grant funding in place from the Canadian Tourism Commission and other partners which can be used to develop the trail as a product, as well as grants "to build stuff along the Trail. The Trail itself is just a dirt trail, and doesn't need a lot of development."

Bjornstad said the Trail is "getting public acceptance" and is well underway. "There haven't been the problems that were anticipated." He explained that the Trail is owned by MuniCorr, Riverland has a licence to operate it, and Alberta's Lakeland is promoting it.

Elk Point's Iron Horse Trail staging area is one of seven slated for development, and will benefit from a \$15,000 grant from Alberta Trail Net for its development. "We're keeping \$3000 for signs in the staging area, leaving \$12,000 to be put with whatever town groups can come up with. We have to put a plan together, with a budget, to get the cash." The toilet donated by the County of St. Paul and installed by the Town of Elk Point is valued at \$30,000, "so we have a healthy donation to match ours". Other groups have suggested such amenities as a bridge or culvert just west of Highway 41 to allow motorized users to cross the drainage ditch safely, and potential ways to make the crossing on Highway 41 itself safer for trail users.

Bjornstad said the best staging area is the property between the Iron Horse Trail's north right-of-way and the drainage ditch along Railway Avenue. This land is now in the process of being turned over by CN, who had apparently forgotten to do so at the time the rest of the land was transferred, Bjornstad reported.

"We just want to work with whatever groups want to be involved. All we're asking is to put up signage along the right-of-way line near the trees." This would include staging area and Trail regulations signage as well as product club signage where businesses could advertise, plus recognition for corporate donors. Bjornstad noted that the snowmobile club has indicated that they wish to locate a building there, and the Lions Club is considering a trout pond at some point on the site. "It's 400 feet by half a mile - a lot could go there."

Dale Rinas gave further information on the cabin the TrailRiders hope to locate on the site, which is a 524 square foot log structure with a loft and an eight- by-18-foot deck. "The TrailRiders are proposing to donate it, but we want to use it as a clubhouse. We also have a light standard to donate."

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