BElMONT – After 15 years of planning, raising money and bartering with the state Department of Transportation, Phase 1 of the Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail is just about ready.

Yesterday, the owner of Piche’s, Bob Bolduc, accepted and then donated back the money he received for allowing a slope easement across his property. He said his store is holding special sale in July to support the trail.

Accepting the easement and donation were Belmont Land Use Technician Rick Ball and Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail President Ron Mitchell as they walked the portion of it behind the wholesale outlet.

“Fifteen years,” said Mitchell quietly. “It’s been a long, long time.”

“I sure am waiting for the day I can stick my shovel into the ground,” said Mitchell who has spearheaded the Belmont segments, working in conjunction with people working on the Franklin, Tilton, Northfield, Laconia and Meredith portions.

When the Federal Transportation Enhancement Grant first became available in 2002 and 2003, Belmont initially looked at three portions of a trail that was supposed to go from downtown Franklin to Meredith.

The phase being built now, and scheduled for a late August groundbreaking, runs from Agway, near the Mosquito Bridge, to the Belmont Town Beach. Phase 2, said Ball, is slated to go to Jefferson Road. However, with the Federal Enhancement Grant set to expire at the end of this federal fiscal year (Oct. 1) it would have to be re-approved by Congress.

Since its initial design, there have been a few changes and speed bumps...
– most notably a redesign near the Belknap Mall, a requirement for a fence along the railroad, and an archeological study last year that threatened to hold up the project to the point where it appeared the money would run out before it could be finalized.

With the hiccups behind them, Ball said he has negotiated all of the easements and has acknowledgments for the few he hasn’t finalized. Once those are completed, he said the plan goes back to the state Department of Transportation for a final review.

The final cost for this segment of the trail is $188,000 in engineering costs, $756,000 in construction costs and $10,500 in oversight costs.