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Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail in Belmont opens



RON MITCHELL, chairman of the Belmont Recreational Alternative Trail Team (BRATT), looks on as Belmont Board of Selectmen chairperson Ruth Mooney cuts the ribbon for the opening of the Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail at the Leslie Roberts Recreation Area on Saturday morning. (JIM CLARK/CITIZEN)



By JIM CLARK

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BELMONT—The Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail was officially dedicated and opened on Saturday morning.

The trail is a 1.8-mile stretch extending from the Leslie Roberts Recreation Area, the Belmont town beach, just off Daniel Webster Highway near the Belknap Mall to Osborne's Agway. It will soon connect with Phase 2 of the WOW Trail in Laconia.

The trail exists for the enjoyment of walkers, joggers, hikers, bicyclists and nature lovers. This winter, the trail will be used for snow shoeing and cross country skiing. The paving of the trail was completed last month, but the official dedication ceremony took place on Saturday.

The Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail project has been in the making since 1999, and was led by Ron Mitchell, chairman of the Belmont Recreational Alternative Trail Team. Roberts was present for the ribbon-cutting ceremony on Saturday, along with Belmont Board of Selectmen Chairperson Ruth Mooney, and Selectman Jon Pike.

About 30 people were present for the ribbon-cutting ceremony, and immediately afterward, they walked and rode bicycles along the trail. The weather couldn't have been better. The trail weaves through the woods over rolling terrain and features some breathtaking scenic vistas across the lake.

The opening of the trail is a dream come true for Mitchell and a number of others, who worked diligently in getting the financing for the project together. The total cost comes to about \$1.1 million, with about 83 percent, or \$920,000, coming through the New Hampshire Department of Transportation from funds allocated by the Federal Transportation Administration.

Belmont taxpayers contributed about \$190,000, along with \$38,500 in grants and gifts. An anonymous donor gave \$25,000 through the New Hampshire State Bike and Pedestrian Fund.

Also contributing funds were the Belmont Rotary Club, the Belmont Conservation Commission and the Bank of New Hampshire.

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Mitchell recounted some of the difficulties his group faced over the last 17 years to get the trail funded and then built. He thanked all of the people who made it possible "to keep the dream alive."

Mooney also thanked those who brought the project to completion, including the town's taxpayers, the Belmont Conservation Commission and the Belmont Rotary Club.

She offered special thanks to the state government for providing easements to state-owned property along the trail, along with local property owners who also granted easements. They included Bob Bolduc of Piche's Ski Shop, as well as Ron and Marsha Wagner and Phil Brouillard of Sunlake Village. She also praised the efforts of Rick Ball, the town's land use technician, for his years of dedicated work on the project.

HEB Construction did the engineering study for the trail, while R&D Paving of Franklin did the paving work. Nelson Communication Services was the general contractor.

The Lake Winnisquam Scenic Trail will soon connect with Phase 2 of the WOW Trail, which is expected to be completed in another month in time for Laconia's Pumpkin Festival. WOW stands for the Winnisquam-Opechee-Winnepesaukee Trail.

Phase 2 of the paved WOW Trail extends from the railroad tracks near the Laconia Public Library on North Main Street and goes all the way to the Belmont town line, a little more than one mile. The cost of the project has been pegged at about \$860,000.

Phase 1 of the WOW Trail was completed in May 2010. It extends from Elm Street in Lakeport to North Main Street in Laconia near the library, a distance of about 1.3 miles. A portion of the Phase 1 trail, located between Bisson Avenue and Lyford Street, is adjacent to Messer Street.

The cost of Phase 1 was estimated at more than \$820,000, all of it funded by grants, federal government sources and individual and corporate support.

When Phase 2 of the WOW Trail is completed next month, attention will then turn toward expanding the trail northward to Weirs Beach, and then beyond to Meredith, a nine-mile passageway that will be adjacent to the railroad tracks used by the Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad.

The plan is to one day have a trail in place that runs from Meredith all the way to Franklin.

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