

# Canal trail closer to completion - LeaderHerald.com | News, Sports, Jobs, Community

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AMSTERDAM - The Erie Canalway Trail, a bicycle and hiking trail from Buffalo to Albany that cuts through the heart of the Mohawk Valley, is about 75 percent complete, and progress is being made to develop one of the few remaining gaps, in Montgomery County.

Canalway Trails Association New York, a statewide group that helps towns manage the canalway, and Parks & Trails New York, a nonprofit group that helps protect land and develop park space statewide, said in a recent report just six stretches remain undeveloped along the 360-mile path, including seven miles between Amsterdam and Rotterdam Junction.

Much of the local gap, which starts along Route 5S, 1.5 miles east of Route 30, and runs along the Mohawk River on an old railbed, has been purchased by the state.

The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation used a federal Transportation Enhancements Program grant to secure the abandoned railway corridor from CSX. The state is applying for another Transportation Enhancements Program grant next year to pay for construction.

"After many years of discussion, filling the gap in the Canalway is closer than ever now that the railway was bought," said Ken Rose, director of the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development and Planning.

The trail, when finished, could bring 350,000 tourists to New York annually, according to the Canalway Trails Association and Parks & Trails report.

"A lot of people stop on their way through to shop or eat along the canalway," Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce Tourism Director Gina DaBiere-Gibbs said. "Some stop at the Amsterdam Castle or Hazelnut Farm bed and breakfast in Fort Plain," which are close to the canalway trail.

Alan Vincent, president of Canalway Trails, stressed the importance of the Erie Canalway to the economic health of upstate New York.

"We believe that completion of the Erie Canalway Trail will not only enhance the quality of life in communities across the state," he said in a news release, "but will make the trail a world-class tourism attraction that, with modest investment, will help revitalize villages, towns and cities all along the canal corridor," he said

Officials estimate a \$50 million cost to complete the canalway, but expect it to bring in \$120 million a year in tourism revenue to upstate New York.

"The Erie Canal corridor has all the right ingredients to become an international bicycle tourist destination," said Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks and Trails New York. "Finishing the canalway trail will create jobs while making a valuable investment in the infrastructure of upstate communities."

The other gaps include six miles near Buffalo, 30 miles between Rochester and Syracuse, 12 miles near Syracuse, 20 miles between Utica and Little Falls and five miles between Cohoes and Watervliet.

The Canal Corporation, a public benefit corporation, maintains and operates the four canals in the state and operates as a subsidiary of the New York Thruway Authority. The Erie Canal navigation season ended on Nov. 15 and its locks will be closed for the winter. The canal will reopen May 1.

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