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Ithaca conference to push trails as attractions, amenities

2-day event to feature speakers, field visits

By David Hill
Staff writer

The trail registry book at Lick Brook recently had entries made by groups from Hamilton, Ontario, Canastota, Britain and Israel.

The combination, it occurred to Finger Lakes Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp, shows the appeal and potential of trails in the region.

Zepp will talk more about trails' attraction and potential at the Finger Lakes Trails and Greenways Conference Sept. 23 and 24 at Cornell University. The Land Trust and the advocacy group Parks & Trails New York scheduled the conference to share success stories and ideas on creating, improving and linking trails for hiking and multiple users, both for the recreational benefit of local residents but also as an amenity for tourists and immigrants.

"We not only want to offer tools and strategies for effective trail advocacy, promotion and development, but also strengthen and broaden the increasingly diverse trails constituency to foster greater understanding and new working relationships among the trails, planning, business, tourism and health care communities," Parks & Trails Executive Director Robin Dropkin said in the announcement.

Ithaca was chosen in part because the Finger Lakes Land Trust was involved but also because it's at the center of growing interest in trail development, said Frances Gotcsik, director of programs and policy for Parks & Trails. It also offered chances for field visits on Sept. 23 to the Lick Brook Gorge Trail, the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, Cascadilla Gorge Trail inside the gorge and the Catharine Valley Trail in Montour Falls.

Another point of emphasis will be trails as attractions. A scheduled speaker on the second day is Craig Della Penna, who runs a bed and breakfast along a trail built from a former rail line in Northampton, Mass., and a real estate company that specializes in trail-side property.

Other speakers will talk about how trails helped revitalize their communities, including Pittsford along the Erie Canalway Trail, and the Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association in Dutchess County. Finally, discussions are planned on water trails in rivers, canals and even lakes, such as a network of landings with services envisioned along Cayuga Lake for canoeists and kayakers.

Organizers hope for 150 to 200 attendees, Gotcsik said. More information is at www.ptny.org or Parks & Trails New York at (518) 434-1583.