

Partnership hopes to prevent rail-trail damage

BY JIM DINO (STAFF WRITER)

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The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership is making a public plea for donation of materials and heavy equipment to prevent further damage to the Greater Hazleton Rails to Trails.

Bob Skulsky, the partnership's executive director, said damage occurs every time heavy rain falls.

The trail sustained severe damage from recent heavy rains, especially by the environmental education garden near the beginning of the trail on East Broad Street.

So trail users are urged to be cautious, especially when riding bikes, and watch for washed out areas.

Since the trail was built, Skulsky and the other volunteers who have spearheaded the effort to built and maintain the trail have installed drainage pipes with donated equipment and materials underneath the trail in places where it doesn't drain properly.

The only permanent solution to prevent further damage, Skulsky said, is to install better drainage facilities.

"We need to install a 24-inch concrete pipe at the gardens," Skulsky said. "We priced the pipe, and it will cost \$2,000. We also need a donation of heavy equipment to put the pipe in."

Skulsky said a pipe is underneath the trail there, but it is not large enough to handle the deluge that the trail sometimes has to endure.

If the larger pipe were installed, Skulsky said the two pipes there can be reused in another place where drainage is poor

"There are at least six other places in the first four miles of the trail that can use a drainage pipe," Skulsky said. "If we don't get the 24-inch concrete pipe, a plastic one may work, Otherwise, we will need four pipes - two more like the two that are there now."

Repeatedly fixing the trail from the many heavy rain storms, tropical depressions and hurricanes this summer has depleted the funds that the volunteers raised this year for maintenance and payment of insurance.

The partnership, the parent volunteer organization of the trail, receives no tax money or other funds to maintain the trail and relies strictly on volunteer services, material donation, equipment and operator help, fund raising and monetary donations to maintain and improve the trail.

"The money from fundraisers just about covers the trail's insurance," Skulsky said. "We spent the last of it on No. 10 limestone."

Materials needed include pipes, fine limestone finish, 2B stone, a large culvert.

Operators with heavy equipment and trucks can donate materials and services to help in this year of extraordinary storms and rainfall.

The No. 10 limestone provides the top surface on which people walk, run and bike.

Every time the trail washes out, more limestone has to be put down. That material costs \$600 a truckload.

Certain areas of the trail are not suitable now for young children in baby strollers until repairs are

made.

The trail volunteers, Youth Services volunteers, Penn State students and many others have been doing all they could to keep up maintenance on the trail this year.

They worked on the trail during the evening of Sept. 22, only to watch another storm undo their efforts.

"This trail is for the community, and the community needs to help," Skulsky said. Donations can be sent to the Greater Hazleton Rails to Trails, Storm Damage, Citiscape, 20 W. Broad St., Hazleton, PA 18201-6418.

For more information contact the partnership at 570-455-1509.

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