

# TAUNTON DAILY GAZETTE

## River trail project gets boost at Dighton kiosk dedication

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DIGHTON — The informational kiosk wasn't big and flashy, but the message at its dedication Saturday morning at Sweets Knoll State Park in Dighton was inspiring for all stripes of lovers of the outdoors.

The volunteer group Taunton River Trail Committee was joined by a gaggle of out-of-town bicyclists, known collectively as the Fall River Bicycle Committee, to celebrate the launch of what, for the time being, is a temporary bulletin board-style kiosk.

The final placement of what will become the fourth permanent kiosk along the Taunton River, courtesy of the National Park Service, has yet to be determined; it eventually could find a spot closer to the riverbank.

But the real focus of Saturday's celebration was on future development of a two-mile section of trail that would extend through the 56-acre site — as part of a 22-mile network of on- and off-street bike lanes and trails extending from Somerset through Taunton.

Edward Lambert, the outgoing commissioner of Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, expressed optimism that Gov. Deval Patrick and the Legislature will agree on a transportation finance bill including \$200,000 for the Dighton park, so that it can complete the bike- and walking-path design.

"Persistence does carry the day and it does get done," Lambert said, referring to the tireless effort it takes to develop environmentally friendly projects.

"I know this isn't a formal dedication, but these trails and connections help connect people," the one-time Fall River mayor added.

Lambert, who soon will become UMass Boston vice chancellor for government relations, lauded state Sen. Marc Pacheco, D-Taunton, calling him "a great friend of DCR."

Pacheco, who chairs a Senate committee on global warming and another dealing with environmental issues, said the goal is for “thousands of people” to eventually utilize the river trail.

He also praised the Kingston-based Sheehan Family Foundation and the Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts for their contribution and effort.

Lambert said the Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant, which owns two miles of right-of-way land nearby, has agreed to preserve the land in anticipation of the project’s success.

“They’re committed to the project if DCR is successful,” he said.

Lambert said it likely would be about three years before the entire project is completed.

Al Lima, coordinator of the river trail committee, said the three-year estimate is realistic.

Local real estate developer and investor Ronald Medeiros sold the land nearly three years ago to DCR after buying it at a Division of Capital and Asset Management auction in 2004.

He also sold back to the state a 65-acre parcel further north in Taunton and Raynham known as the Oxbow Preserve.

Medeiros, who lives in a house that overlooks the river, said he made a personal commitment years ago to preserve certain investment property for environmental purposes.

He said the sale of Sweets Knoll to DCR and Oxbow to Wildlands Trust were both “bargain sale” agreements, where he took a small percentage of the real estate’s actual worth.

“I took a \$1.2 million haircut,” he said referring to what he was paid for Sweets Knoll — pointing out that he could have developed and marketed the business-zoned land for condos or commercial projects.

But Medeiros said he intended all along to allow the land to be used for environmental friendly activities, such as kayaking, canoeing, fishing and swimming.

He also sold the bulk of a two-mile portion of railroad track once used by the former Boston and Maine Railroad Company for passenger cars running from Taunton to Fall River.

Bill Napolitano, environmental program director for Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District, said SRPEDD first started working on a Taunton River improvement concept in 1997.

The Taunton River was designated a National Wild and Scenic River in 2009 as a result of a bill signed by President Obama.

The Taunton River Watershed Alliance is also a member of the river trail committee. Its president, Dick Shafer, announced a canoe and kayak trip on the river scheduled for June 22.

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