First Leg in 98-mile Regional Trail System Opens to Public

By Krystal Modigell | RS&H

Community members and commissioners alike are excited about the completion of a new recreational trail in Douglas County, Georgia. Since its ribbon-cutting on May 10, 2013, the new 0.75-mile trail is already attracting walkers, runners, joggers, and cyclists looking for a chance to escape, breathe some fresh air, and exercise as they explore the shady pathway. The trail is located in a Douglas County mega-park and runs near the smooth Chattahoochee River, providing users with a scenic route as they take in the beautiful natural landscape of Georgia.

Even though the completed trail is only three-quarters of a mile long, it is extremely significant in that it marks the first segment in a much larger planned multipurpose trail—the Chattahoochee Hill Country Regional Greenway Trail, which is proposed to span 98 miles through Douglas, Carroll, Coweta, and Fulton Counties. The overall trail network will promote active, healthy lifestyles, as well as provide an alternative transportation option among all four counties.

The completion of Douglas County's segment of the trail sets the stage and builds momentum for the region's future plans, as the new trail displays a detailed image of what the community can expect to see once the entire trail system is finished.

"Completing this pilot segment is a great accomplishment," said Sara Huie, project manager with facilities and infrastructure consulting firm RS&H who led the design. "It's a vision of what the whole trail system will eventually look like."

In order to enrich the area through environmental and cultural features, the first piece was designed with its own unique identity and distinctiveness, added Huie. The design team worked closely with a unique group of representatives from the four counties to decide on an overall theme with the goal of enhancing the park's existing character, while

The trail's features, like signage, represent natural colors and styles that blend into the environment.

paying particular attention to the environment and surrounding natural resources, like the river and animal habitats, she said.

"The look and feel was an important aspect of the project, since the theme will likely be carried out across the many features of the entire trail system," Huie said. "We wanted to carefully select an overall theme that represents and matches the surrounding suburban and rural character of the region."

The team selected features that blend into the natural environment. For instance, outdoor furniture, like benches and trash receptacles, incorporate natural elements like wood grain. Through color and style, features such as signage, furniture, bike racks, and water fountains mesh with the natural environment without intruding or taking away from the peacefulness of the natural landscape that guests will enjoy.

According to Huie, the team also developed standards for the trail's identification, directional, regulatory, and mile-maker signs, which allow for quick and easy navigation and wayfinding. Now that these standards are in place, they can be carried over to the new sections as more segments are added to the trail, creating a consistent, recognizable identity for the 98-mile regional trail network.

To ensure construction would not disturb the park's character, the trail carefully loops around ponds and other natural features, avoiding disruption of the land. The segment was built as an addition to the park's existing hiking trail in order to provide guests with another route and the opportunity to enjoy a smooth, paved foundation for a variety of physical activities. The trail is also wheelchair accessible, allowing all users to comfortably enjoy the woods and the entire park.

Fitting seamlessly into the surrounding environment, the first section of the 98-mile trail was a successful groundbreaking project that everyone in the community will enjoy. The trail encourages healthier and more active lifestyles through outdoor activities, while connecting people with nature.

"Eventually, when more segments of the trail are built and connected, it will be a great additional mode of transportation for residents and visitors of all four counties," said Huie. "It will also be a unique recreational opportunity giving people access to one of Georgia's great natural resources—the Chattahoochee River." ❖

The start of the trail features an inviting trailhead and rest area.