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6/22/09 | 35 comments

OUTDOORS

# \$20M in trail funds sought for district

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BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY NICK SAMBIDES JR.

East Millinocket resident (from left) Brian Wiley, Katahdin Forest Management President Marcia McKeague, state Rep. Herbie Clark, D-Millinocket, and U.S. Rep. Michael Michaud of Millinocket joke during a groundbreaking Saturday at the site of a proposed multiuse recreational bridge off Route 11 just outside Millinocket.

**TOWNSHIP 3 INDIAN PURCHASE, Maine** — U.S. Rep. Michael Michaud is seeking \$20 million in federal funds to pay for multiuse recreational trails and bridges within his district just like the planned bridge over the Penobscot River's West Branch he helped break ground for on Saturday.

The 2nd District Democrat said he inserted within a pending \$450 billion federal highway and transportation infrastructure bill a \$15 million appropriation for multiuse trails and \$5 million for bike-pedestrian trails.

If the measure passes this summer, the funds will be distributed over six

years. The \$15 million also would help maintain snowmobile trails, he said.

"This is a great opportunity to help the region grow in a different way," Michaud said Saturday after a groundbreaking ceremony at the site of a proposed multiuse recreation bridge, near Green Bridge off Route 11 a few miles southwest of Millinocket.

The \$20 million might seem like a Congress member's pipe dream, but Michaud has been a member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure since his election to Congress in 2002.

Several years ago, he helped Millinocket get a \$500,000 federal transportation grant, a key part of plans to build a \$625,000 walking and biking trail along Millinocket Stream next year. The local match of \$125,000 will consist almost entirely of state transportation funds and in-kind service donations.

Michaud said he supported the multiuse bridge and trail effort because he liked the unifying, comprehensive work of its primary, volunteer organizers, East Millinocket resident Brian Wiley, Millinocket Town Councilor John Raymond and Millinocket resident Paul Sannicandro.

"There are a lot more needs than we have money for," Michaud said. "The more people work together, the easier it makes my job."

He said he also saw the economic potential of their efforts. The volunteers and the volunteer committees they helped form have been working with landowners, snowmobile clubs and federal and state officials for three years

to create a multiuse trail for ATV riders, bicyclists, bird-watchers, campers, hikers and snowmobilers.

That system would connect the Katahdin region to the rest of the state's ATV and multiuse trails — and the millions generated annually by ATV riders — by a 23½-mile trail that will run from the Millinocket Timber Cruisers clubhouse to trail networks by Seboeis Lake and then on to southern Maine.

“It is my hope that the continued cooperation between landowners, the state and recreation [organizations] should help create more multiuse trails,” Michaud said. “If the different organizations can put forward a long-term vision of what the trails should look like, an aggressive trail program, hopefully, we can make it happen.”

Wiley was pleased that the district might receive more trail funding.

“There was only \$1 million in the state for trails two years ago, so that's fantastic,” Wiley said.

The Katahdin region is one of the few areas in the state that lacks an organized ATV network, which, proponents say, will resemble the Katahdin region's vast, lucrative and internationally renowned snowmobile trail system, except that it will be available in more than just snowy winters.

The volunteers have worked diligently to break a deadlock with landowners, who fear illegal dumping, vandalism, insurance liability and damage by ATVs done to sensitive lands still used by the state's forest products industry.

Representing the Katahdin region's largest landowner, Katahdin Forest Management President Marcia McKeague expressed confidence that the 23-mile trail would be finished on schedule in 2011. She looks forward to riding her mountain bike on it.

“I am sure that we can find the right route for the trail,” McKeague said. “We are trying to find someplace that would minimize the interference with our ongoing forest management, someplace permanent, and we want it to be a trail that everybody can use.”

Debbie LeVasseur agreed. She co-owns the 5 Lakes Lodge on South Twin Lake with her husband, Rick LeVasseur.

“I am glad they are building this bridge for bikers because I hate going over [Green] bridge,” she said. “It's very high and kind of narrow.”

KFM, town officials and club members have signed a nonbinding agreement to build Phase I, a 13-mile trail linking the snowmobile and ATV clubhouse to the bridge and South Twin Lake, by December — in time for snowmobiling.

The Millinocket Town Council is due to vote on hiring a bridge builder at its meeting Thursday while KFM and the volunteers begin precisely mapping the 13-mile leg. Bridge construction should begin next month.