

FRIENDS OF CLARE COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

2018 Rails to Trails Conservancy Doppelt Fund Grant

Friends of Clare County Parks & Recreation is pleased to announce that Clare is the recipient of a 2018 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Doppelt Fund grant in the amount of \$5000.00. This grant is intended to assist with increasing support for an off-road alignment of the popular Pere Marquette Rail Trail through the City of Clare, to help bicyclists navigate the gap and visit the city. This gap is referred to as the "Clare Gap".

Closing the Clare Gap translates to revenue for local businesses. Lost revenue is estimated to translate to tens of thousands of dollars annually assuming economic studies of other communities are accurate. People who ride bikes spend money--anywhere from \$16 to \$25 a day--when they visit towns and cities along bike routes. While there is a bike route both east and west of Clare, there is not a bike route **through** Clare. Instead there is a 2.5-mile gap, the Clare Gap, that keeps people out of the city and away from city businesses.

The popular Pere Marquette Rail Trail that was once the path for the Pere Marquette Railroad is now a path for bikers, hikers and casual walkers. It traverses streams, fields and woodlands from Midland to Reed City.

Joy Simmer, City of Clare's Parks and Recreation Director who sits on the Friends' Board is thrilled this project was one of ten in the country to receive an RTC grant.

"I hear the frustration of riders who don't know how to get through the Clare Gap that starts near the Clare Library on the east side of the city and ends at the Moose Lodge west of Clare because no trail exists, and neither does signage to assist them navigating through the city. Many just turn around and leave, taking money they would have spent with them.

"Thanks to the grant, we can provide maps and interpretative signage at both ends of the trail, and at the Clare Depot," she said. "We also can work to build a permanent trail through the city that eliminates the Clare Gap."

A portion of the funds in the grant are allocated to contract a person to assist with media development for the Rail-Trail and some minor fundraising activities.

The Friends of the Clare County Parks & Recreation group recently contracted with Angela Isaac, a resident of Clare who will be assisting on a part time basis. Mrs. Isaac has work experience that includes Human Resources, business and marketing. She is excited to be on board with the project, as she has two daughters who are active in many Parks & Recreation sponsored activities.

Rails to Trails Conservancy received nearly \$5.5 million in application requests for the 2018 grant cycle. The 2018 Doppelt Fund grantees mark the largest pool of RTC-funded projects to date, with more than \$140,000 invested in 10 projects nationwide.

“Trail managers commonly express frustration as they seek funding for projects that address important trail maintenance and development needs,” said Eli Griffen, RTC’s manager of trail development resources and the manager of the Doppelt Fund grant program. “These projects are often smaller in scope and scale, making them hard to finance within traditional funding streams. This grant program provides important resources communities need—in some cases, raising awareness of a project within the community, and in others, maintaining trails or providing the match funding necessary to acquire a corridor and build the trail.”

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is the nation’s largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Friends of Clare County Parks & Recreation is a qualified 501(c)3 under the IRS code and supports parks and recreational opportunities throughout Clare County. To learn more about Friends, their goals and grant program, go to clarecountyrecreation.org/ or visit their Facebook page.