

Expansion begins on Huckleberry Trail

By Jonathan Allen

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An expansion of the Huckleberry Trail will begin in this month. Virginia Tech, the Friends of the Huckleberry, and the Town of Blacksburg have worked out an agreement that allows for the expansion of the Huckleberry from the U.S. 460 tunnel to the Hethwood Bridge.

The first phase of the project will take Hethwood trail traffic off of Plantation Road and reroute it along Stoubles Creek. This will take one-third of a mile off the current Hethwood trail. The improvement will make the trail more suitable for Virginia Tech students and faculty to commute to campus.

The trail improvement will also lend itself to the current soil and water conservation plan by stabilizing the creek and adding to the buffer that keeps out livestock.

"We've been working closely with Virginia Tech and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to finalize the plans for this portion of the trail," said Bill Ellenbogen, President of Friends of the Huckleberry. "We appreciate the college's great cooperation and sharing their land so everyone in the community can benefit."

The trail will cross farmland that is managed and used by the college. Virginia Tech will be granting a property easement that allows for the trail to be expanded across university property.

The first phase of the project will cost \$78,000 and is being funded by the Hethwood Foundation/Foxridge, the Town of Blacksburg, and the Friends of the Huckleberry. Virginia Tech's Office of Transportation will begin culvert work in March and Sawyer Paving, a private contractor, will begin work in April. The project is scheduled to be finished in May.

The second phase will connect the trail at the US-460 tunnel to Plantation Road. The Friends of the Huckleberry hope to secure funding for the project in 2007.

The current trail extends 5.76 miles from Miller Street in Blacksburg to the New River Valley Mall in Christiansburg. This expansion helps bring the Friends of the Huckleberry closer to achieving their goal of taking the trail to the Jefferson National Forest.

The New River Valley District Planning Commission is planning a separate and larger trail project that would create a regional trail to connect the New River Trail and the Huckleberry Trail, a massive undertaking currently in the early stages of planning.