

Dahlgren path becomes part of Potomac Heritage trail

By CATHY DYSON THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Tuesday, October 18, 2016 11:00 pm

Despite efforts by supporters the past two years, the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail hasn't become part of the Virginia park system.

But as of Tuesday night, the King George County trail has become part of a much larger one that incorporates 710 miles of walkways, paths and historic sites from the Allegheny highlands of Pennsylvania to mouth of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Board of Supervisors approved a memorandum making the 15.7-mile Dahlgren path part of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. Under the agreement, the Dahlgren trail will be included in Potomac Heritage maps and signs highlighting the trail will be placed in King George.

"It's an exciting day for our community," Supervisor Chairwoman Ruby Brabo said, adding that hikers and bikers seeking outdoor experiences may be drawn to King George and the county may see increased tourism revenue as a result. "It's been a long time coming."

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail runs through Pennsylvania, Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Virginia and offers a variety of landscapes. There are opportunities for birding and biking, hiking and viewing historic places, camping and seeing Civil War sites.

It isn't a single trail but more like a braid of them, said Dave Jones. He's president of the Friends of the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail, a group of volunteers that regularly maintains the path and sponsors events for Scouts, horseback riders and marathon runners.

The same memorandum King George supervisors signed is being presented to officials in other localities as well as to private and public partnerships. Locally, representatives from the Stafford County Board of Supervisors, Fredericksburg City Council, George Washington Regional Commission, Northern Neck Tourism Commission and Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania National Military Park have been asked to sign the memorandum.

David Brickley, a former state delegate who owns the Dahlgren trail, thanked the supervisors for their support. "This is a wonderful opportunity," he said.

Later, he said he hoped making the Dahlgren trail part of the larger Potomac Heritage trail would be an incremental step to state recognition. Twice in recent years, bills have appeared before the General Assembly to include the Dahlgren trail, and twice they've been rejected.



Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail

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Earlier this year, a mystery amendment prohibiting the state from taking on any new parks property appeared, and no legislator claimed sponsorship. Brickley said Tuesday night that he'd never seen anything like that during decades of work with the General Assembly.

He said supporters of the Dahlgren trail will continue efforts to have the path become part of the state park system.

Even if that happened, Jones said his volunteers would still maintain the trail, if necessary. Brabo praised their responsiveness; she said she recently took up mountain biking, and she called volunteers when downed trees or branches blocked the path. Volunteers always responded quickly, she said.

Brickley returned the favor, praising the supervisors who unanimously supported a measure to have the Dahlgren trail become a state park. That was in February, soon after Brabo became chairwoman and new members Richard Granger and John Jenkins Jr. joined the board.

Brickley referenced the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe, formed in the days of Gov. Alexander Spotswood to explore the realm for new Virginia territory. He said he didn't have a golden horseshoe to give board members, as Spotswood did his knights, so Brickley gave each supervisor a plaque.

On it was what looks like a gilded giant nail and the declaration that each supervisor is a member of the "Dahlgren Order of the Golden Spike."