

Trails in city parks to receive \$3 million in improvements

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By Diana Nelson Jones, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and the city's Department of Public Works has embarked on a \$3.02 million improvement of trails in Schenley, Frick, Riverview and Highland parks.

Work has begun in Schenley Park and should be completed by mid-summer.

The first work has been the Bridal Trail wall that supports the Lower Panther Hollow Trail below the Schenley Park Cafe and Visitors Center. Trails in Panther Hollow are closed during the work.

Nearly 100 new signs will be installed, and one new trail is being established in Highland Park. It will follow the old route of Butler Street, which is now a wooded hillside from Lake Drive to One Wild Place at the Pittsburgh Zoo.

"There are actually old foundations of houses there," said Phil Gruszka, the conservancy's director of parks management and maintenance.

Many of the 100-year-old culvert pipes along the trails are broken and need to be replaced, he said. Several bridges, both traffic and pedestrian footbridges, need minor repairs, too.

The 4.5 miles of existing trails will be enhanced, in most cases by being narrowed, he said. Pathways don't have to be as wide as 20 feet, as some are. That width makes them more vulnerable to wash-out.

"An eight-to-10-foot trail is as wide as is necessary and makes it easier to mitigate water issues," he said. "They can be cleared and maintained more efficiently."

Lora Woodward, public program manager for Venture Outdoors, said her group is "thankful for the conservancy's maintenance because we use the trails a lot. They require constant maintenance because of rain and erosion."

She said the labeling of trails will be especially helpful along Nine Mile Run in Frick Park, where some paths are unofficial.

To get federal money, the conservancy raised \$700,000 with help from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, local foundations, companies and individuals.

"This project will positively impact millions of park visitors for years to come and we are proud to be part of something that will improve the park experience for so many," said Conservancy CEO Meg Cheever.