

5.8 miles of trail repairs to be unveiled

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By Diana Nelson Jones, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

For years, the list of problems grew: Erosion, broken pipes, crumbling bridges in Falls Ravine trail, Nine Mile Run trail, Lower South Braddock trail, Upper Hollow Run trail, the Bob Harvey trail among many others.

Working with city parks foremen in the four Regional Asset District-funded parks, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy kept a list of infrastructure needs, recurring washouts and damage. Seven years later -- last year -- the nonprofit put \$3.72 million in funding to work.

Today, in a ceremony at 10 a.m. at the Schenley Park Cafe and Visitor Center, the conservancy will mark the near-completion of almost six miles of trail and infrastructure repairs and new signs in Frick, Highland, Riverview and Schenley parks. The work should be finished in two weeks, said its management and maintenance director, Phil Gruszka.

Mr. Gruszka said he has been heartened by park users through the process, even when they walked around the bulldozers instead of finding alternative routes, as signs instructed. "People love their parks. When people ask, 'What are you doing?' I love it, because it means they're paying attention."

Along part of the Falls Ravine trail in Frick Park on Friday, regular walkers, most with dogs, said they appreciate the new drainage cylinders, rebuilt footbridges, large gravel and fallen timber placed strategically to divert water rushing down the slopes.

"I love this park," said Jerry McKeithen of East Liberty. "I walk my dogs here every day, and you can tell they've done a lot to control the erosion."

Valerie Gateman has been walking her dog twice a day every day in the park while in the city from Canada visiting her daughter. "I've noticed the transfer of soil and gravel and bridge repair," she said. "But mainly I just notice the beauty."

Tom Armstrong of Squirrel Hill admitted he was "one of those people" who walked around the bulldozers rather than detour from the ravine trail.

"At first, this looked like a rich man's driveway in Ligonier. It was so perfect." The rustic feel has returned with the falling leaves, he said. "They've done a good

job."

The conservancy's project includes better signs over 1,700 acres of the four parks, which together have 35 miles of trails.

Over the past six years, the conservancy received grants of \$2.3 million through former Republican, now Democratic Sen. Arlen Specter and \$720,000 through Rep. Mike Doyle, D-Forest Hills. The conservancy raised approximately \$700,000 to get the federal money.

The matching funds came from individuals, foundations, corporations and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, said Laura Cook, the conservancy's communications coordinator.

The longest segment of the 5.8 miles of improvements is almost a mile long on Schenley Park's Lower Panther Hollow trail. In Highland Park, a new trail was created, running along Old Butler Street, from One Wild Place to the swimming pool.

Foot bridges, most of them historic, some built during the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration, had to be replaced using the same design and techniques as the originals, Mr. Gruszka said. "Where the infrastructure is a park amenity, it has to be restored."

He said trails that had widened due to past maintenance have been restored to their original width, in many cases from 20 feet to eight, "with more green edges," he said. "Less gravel and more green."

Some 100-year-old drain pipes and culverts had to be regraded and reangled for better storm-water management, he said.

"We had segments of trail that would wash away whenever we had a severe storm, and we wanted to eliminate as much of that as possible. But we realize we can't eliminate all water issues. We are in a park. We're not the turnpike commission."

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