

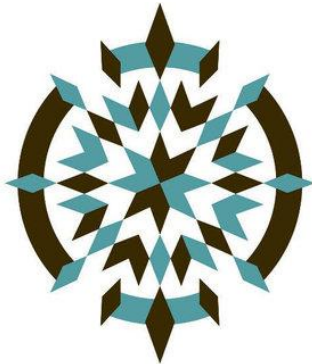
## Residents propose 124 miles of trails

### Catawba County proposal would link parks, rivers and historic sites to Carolina Thread Trail network.

By Dianne Straley

Posted: Sunday, Jun. 27, 2010

After six months of study, residents of Catawba County have proposed creating 124 miles of walking and biking trails that would link parks, rivers and historic sites.



The paths would weave through six areas of the county and be part of the Carolina Thread Trail network, which proposes paths and greenways through 15 counties in North Carolina and South Carolina.

Catawba's paths would head to future trails in Alexander, Burke, Iredell and Lincoln counties.

Mary George, Catawba County's assistant planning director, says it probably would take 15 to 20 years to build the trails.

That seems like a long time, she said, but a project of this scope is a complex undertaking. "I tell people the Appalachian Trail had to start somewhere."

Other states also have ambitious plans for trails, some of them already in use. The 425-mile Palmetto Trail in South Carolina is two-thirds complete. It crosses South Carolina from Oconee State Park in the mountains to the Atlantic, just north of Georgetown.

County commissioners and elected officials in Catawba's municipalities will see the proposed routes in a few months, when they consider the draft plan for adoption.

The cost is undetermined and depends on whether the paths are paved sidewalks or dirt trails, whether property owners donate easements or a city buys land. The final arrangement will probably be a mix of all those elements, George said.

Planners hope developers will build paths or allow easements through their property, which George says will make their developments more attractive to buyers.

The group proposing the trails is a private, nonprofit organization and does not have the power of eminent domain, so it cannot force a property owner to sell land. Catawba Lands Conservancy is the lead agency working on the project, and the Trust for Public Land is the lead consultant.

The trails would be built voluntarily by communities along their path. The first signs could go up next year on routes that are already in place, such as the North Main Avenue Historic District in Newton and Hickory's greenway.

Those Carolina Thread Trail signs show a patchwork quilt, emphasizing the region's textile history and the connections between communities.

Catawba's proposed trails could follow utility rights of way, roads or rivers in six parts of the county. Each of those areas would be connected by trails.

The proposed 124 miles snake through the county and come within walking distance of 27 parks, 24 schools, six libraries and three YMCAs.

Stanly Stewart and his family have built about 2 miles of trail that run through the 175 acres they own around Murray's Mill in eastern Catawba County.

Bandys High School uses the trails for cross-country running, and visitors to the historic mill are encouraged to walk them.

Stewart, a 53-year-old farmer, wants the county to include his trails in the Carolina Thread network. "I want to see people be able to walk and see the countryside," Stewart said. "I would just hate to see the whole county be paved over."

The official Carolina Thread Trail map will evolve over time as local governments add trails to the plan. The trails will unite 15 counties: Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union counties in North Carolina; and Cherokee, Chester, Lancaster and York counties in South Carolina.

After public workshops earlier this year, George and her staff have narrowed the suggestions to 21 "high priority" sites where trails should be built. Some of those include:

Murray's Mill, off Interstate 40 in eastern Catawba County, is on the National Register of Historic Sites and was the last milling complex in Catawba County.

St. Paul's Church and Cemetery, two miles west of Newton. The church dates to at least 1771.

Bunker Hill Covered Bridge, built in 1895 over Lyle's Creek, is one of only two original covered bridges in North Carolina.

SALT Block, a complex of buildings housing art, cultural and science organization on the campus of the former Claremont High School, located on Third Avenue N.E. at N.C. 127.

North Main Avenue Historic District, with 100 historically significant buildings in Newton.

### **More Information**

Want to know more?

To offer opinions and see maps of the proposed trails in Catawba County and more information, go to [www.surveymonkey.com/s/CatawbaCTT](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CatawbaCTT). For information on the regional plan, go to [www.carolinathreadtrail.org](http://www.carolinathreadtrail.org).

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/06/27/1522902/residents-propose-124-miles-of.html#ixzz0sXbSXOxS>