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Groundbreaking whets appetite for Pocahontas SP multi-use trail

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At a small ceremony last weekend at Pocahontas State

(<http://www.richmondoutside.com/destination/pocahontas-state-park/>)Park, park officials and

members of Richmond MORE (<http://www.richmond-more.org>) recognized the start of

construction on the newest trail there. This trail will be a little different though, with a new type of trail user in mind: the disabled.



Wayne Goodman (from left), Greg Rollins, John Watts, Jim Beamer and Preston Curry are on hand for the groundbreaking ceremony of the Gateway Trail, a new path in Pocahontas State Park that will be designed with disabled cyclists in mind. Credit: Charles Poteat

According to RVA-MORE president Greg Rollins, the trail is being called the Gateway Trail, and it will be optimized not only for mountain bikes, but also three-wheeled handcycles used by the disabled, commonly referred to as "trikes."

"What we've found is that they want to be treated like everyone else," Rollins said. And that's exactly where this new trail comes in. The basic concept is to give disabled cyclists the same off-road experience as able-bodied mountain bikers.

Rollins also clarified that the Bell Built grant (<http://www.bellhelmets.com/bellbuilt/>), \$33,000 which the Richmond Region Ride Center (<https://www.facebook.com/richmondRegionRideCenter?ref=ts&fref=ts>) was awarded this summer, is not being used on this trail. This project is aimed at being a long-standing legacy project paying tribute to the Richmond 2015 UCI World Cycling Championship races being held in the region next September. Rollins said the Bell Built grant will fund an entirely different set of trails, with that project starting to take shape in November.

The idea for off-road riding for the disabled came from Wayne Goodman, who suffered a spinal injury in an accident while riding his mountain bike through Forest Hill Park in 2010. While the accident robbed Goodman of the full use of his hands and arms, he still has enough strength in his legs to power a custom-built trike that is similar to a handcycle. And he still wants to ride it off-road.

"Not long after I was injured, I began to reflect on how my accident was going to affect my mountain biking." Goodman said. "Being realistic, I knew that there was little chance that I would ever ride a mountain bike again. I was losing a huge part of my life and the thought of that weighed heavily on my mind."

It didn't take Goodman long to realize that the concept of handcycling could be adapted to his needs even though his accident affected more of his upper body than his lower. He quickly took to this new form of riding, and before he knew it he was taking laps on the fire roads of Pocahontas State Park.

Goodman knew that the idea could be taken a step further, a step deeper into the woods and onto narrower trails. Goodman is no stranger to creating new trails. As a former president of RVA-MORE, Goodman was instrumental in the construction of the North Bank Trail before his accident. But trails like North Bank or those in Pocahontas aren't quite right for handcycles, due to their wider wheelbase. "Unfortunately, most of those trails cannot accommodate a handcycle," he said. "They are too tight and twisty and in some cases, too steep."



A rider navigates the singletrack in Pocahontas State Park. New trails now under construction there will soon make the Richmond region an IMBA-designated "Ride Center." Credit: Va. State Parks

So Goodman approached Rollins about the idea, and they teamed up to pitch it to park officials, Rollins said. This was before the the Richmond 2015 announcement, and when that event was made public in 2012, the idea of these trails as a legacy project really took off.

According to Rollins, the new trail will be purpose-built for mountain bikes and handcycles, allowing the two groups to ride together. Rollins anticipates that park officials will declare the trail open to all users, but points out that they will likely be more enjoyable on wheels.

Access to the Gateway Trail will be out of a new parking area being built in the north end of the park on Courthouse Road. The first trail will be between two and four miles long and will be designed for introducing both handcyclists and regular mountain bikers to off-road riding. More trails will follow with similar designs in mind, with each new set of trails providing increasing difficulty. This will allow cyclists to progress in skill over time.

As far as Goodman knows, the project is the first of it's kind throughout the entire country. At the same time, he hopes to see the concept replicated elsewhere. "In Virginia, there are plenty of other places suitable also," he said. "The potential is enormous. At a national level, there is considerable interest in what we're doing here in Richmond. My understanding is that we are the first. Hopefully, others will follow."

Once the entire project is finished, Rollins says there will be 22 miles of handcycling optimized trails. When combined with the singletrack loops and the Lakeview trails that are already in place, this will bring the overall total of trails in the park for off-road cycling to 42 miles. "We are looking sometime in October for the trail to be open," he said.