

WACF continues to support city's rec trail

By Julianne Endres
Watertown Area Community Foundation

Taking the road less traveled makes all the difference... typically.

There is at least one exception, however, to Robert Frost's view – that is, if you take the quote literally. The Watertown Trail System was meant for people of all ages to take... and take often.

Whether you are a walker (with or without a dog), a jogger or bike enthusiast, at one time or another you've probably ventured out on the trail. The City of Watertown, Watertown Park & Rec Department, State of South Dakota departments, the Watertown Area Community Foundation (WACF) and other supporters have been instrumental in expanding a trail from 6.5 miles to a trail system that now covers more than 30 miles.

Talk began in the fall of 2000 to expand the trail. The WACF awarded its first grant, \$250,000, to the trail effort in 2001 to help get the trail committee's proposed plan into action. Since that time, approximately \$40,000 has been awarded from the Watertown Trail Fund at the WACF.

That first grant prompted a lot of excitement.



“This system will provide something for everyone,” said Brenda Barger, Watertown Mayor at the time. “We’ve talked for a long time about how to show off what this community has to offer. This gift makes the project more real, enabling us to put a living project down on the ground.”

This map shows the different phases of the planned recreation trail around the southern portion of Lake Kampeska.

The proposed plan for “The Kampeska Loop” in the Watertown Trail System is divided into 4 phases.

- **PHASE 1** will travel from Pompeska to the southeast corner of Kampeska/South Lake Drive. It's a possibility for this fall, but more than likely will be next year.
- **PHASE 2** will go from the end of Phase 1 to old SD 139. Park & Rec will be partnering with the State on this section. SD Game Fish and Parks will design the portion of the trail that will go through the Sandy Shore State Park.
- **PHASE 3** takes you from the northwest corner of Sandy Shore (SD 139) to Parkview Drive/the northwest corner of the lake. This phase is divided into Part A and Part B and will hopefully be completed together with the help of matching Transportation Alternative Grants from the SD Department of Transportation.
- **PHASE 4** (from Memorial Park to SD 139) has been completed. This was an essential tie-in for Phase 3 and was a catalyst in applying for the SD DOT matching grants.

Another quote from the 2001 Watertown Public Opinion article about the WACF's grant toward the trail still has some truth today.

"We're excited about this opportunity for the community to come together," said Bruce Buhler, who chaired the first trail committee. "This is a start, but there is definitely a lot of work yet to be done."

The trail system effort is ongoing, said Jay DeLange, supervisor Watertown Park & Rec. Beyond expanding the trail, there's maintenance, which means mowing, sweeping and tree removal in the summer and some snow removal in the winter.

"We keep about 5.5 miles of the trail open in the winter because some people want to use the trail year-round," DeLange explained. "We also try to identify areas that need



Courtesy photo

Jay DeLange, director of Watertown Parks, Recreation and Forestry, looks over a map of the city's recreation trail.

attention whether that's means sealing cracks or filling holes."

Expanding the trail around Lake Kampeska is the current priority, DeLange said. The Kampeska Loop is divided into four phases. The completion of Phase 4 enabled the city to apply for a matching SD Department

of Transportation grant.

Regardless of where a proposed trail addition is planned, getting the actual path in place can be tricky at times.

"We tend to run into glitches," DeLange said. "Sometimes there are discrepancies as to where property lines are and such."

Terrain or landowners' intentions for the parallel property in any given stretch can also provide problems.

"Sometimes we have to move the trail a bit to improve visibility. We try to keep the public informed and we hear from both sides, whether they object or support a proposed plan," said DeLange.

But the community does love using the trail, and DeLange credits the city's ongoing support as well as other partners, for literally laying the path.

"For many years the city has allocated \$175,000 annually to help with the trail," he said. "Depending on the situation, sometimes we use city dollars; sometimes we look at using grant monies."

DeLange said most of the current projects could be funded if the city receives the DOT grant.

"I hate to say a date, but if we could have everything in the Kampeska Loop done by 2023 that would

be wonderful," he added.

The overall trail system includes several sidewalk feeder linkages. The most recent trail segments include the trail along the First Avenue Bypass from 19th Street East to the Redlin Art Center, and a section from Memorial Park to SD Highway 139. These are preferred trails for many, but the oldest segments, such as the trail behind Bramble Park Zoo, are also favorites.

What's around the next corner?

"It's ongoing," DeLange reiterated. "There will probably be more growth in the east. In the future, it would be nice to have a trail from the Redlin Center to the Premier Softball Complex and the ANZA Soccer Fields."

That may be a ways down the road, pardon the pun. Until then, he said, there is still plenty of trail out there to enjoy.

"You'd be surprised at how many people use the trails every day."