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(Neb)-Rails-To-Trails Grant Moves Cowboy Trail Improvements Ahead

By: John Axtell Posted at: 02/11/2019 04:47 PM

CHADRON - The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has awarded a \$65,000 grant for the Cowboy Trail to be shared between two local non-profit organizations - Sheridan County-based Cowboy Trail West and Chadron-based Northwest Nebraska Trails Association.

The grant will serve as a match for \$350,000 state grants awarded each of the groups last September to help complete hard surfacing of the western-most section of Cowboy Trail from Rushville to Chadron.

Cowboy Trail West and the Trails Association needed to raise about \$88,000 each by March 1st to secure the state grant and both groups say the conservancy's grant puts them over the top for the match.

The Cowboy Trail was created more than a quarter-century ago when the Conservancy acquired the recently abandoned 321-mile Chicago and NorthWestern Cowboy Line from Chadron to Norfolk. The trail, the longest rails-to-trails conversion in the country, runs over the old railbed.

Most of the Cowboy Trail has been hard-surfaced, generally with crushed limestone, but work on the western end had lagged until Cowboy Trail West was formed in 2013 to remove railroad ties and trash on the right-of-way around Gordon and Rushville.

The group has since received multiple grants for hard-surfacing and replacing or repairing bridges, completing the trail most of the way between Gordon and Hay Springs. The Trails Association began about 3 years ago with similar clean-up work between Hay Springs and the current end of the active rail line about 4 miles east of Chadron.

The new grant comes on the heels of the Conservancy's announcement of its commitment to complete the Great American Rail-Trail, a nearly 4,000-mile multi-use trail spanning 12 states nationwide from Washington, D.C., to Washington State.

The Cowboy Trail is one of 12 gateway trails that make the vision of the Great American Rail-Trail possible in each state. The Conservancy plans to reveal the complete route of the Great American Rail-Trail in the spring.

Conservancy vice president of trail development Liz Thorstensen says "the grant and the promise it holds for completing the Cowboy Trail are examples of the momentum the Great American Rail-Trail will deliver to trail development along its route as this vision becomes reality."