

Firelands Rails to Trails, Inc.

North Coast Inland Trail – Huron County

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Dear Members and Friends of Firelands Rails-to-Trails, Inc.

This past year has been one of challenges for FRTTI. We maintained the trail and finished the Monroeville Depot and have spent considerable time, money, and energy in the assessment of our Norwalk Double Arch Bridge and the need for a Connector Trail in Wakeman. Late in the year, we also experienced a trail closure due to a pipeline repair that required excavation for several weeks. Despite challenges, we have steadily made good progress in development and maintenance of your recreational trail – with more to come!

Our trail was maintained by a dedicated crew of people who cut down “widow-makers” during the cold wintery months; primarily by cutting down dead ash and elm trees. Warm weather storms also meant clearing fallen trees from time to time. Additionally, mowing the trail was accomplished, through the warm season, by a hearty crew of small and large tractor operators and trimmers.

Perhaps the reader may have noticed as well, we have been steadily removing bollard posts along the older section of the trail. Removing bollards is a good thing as they are both a protection but also a hazard to trail users.

We have a contractor ready to build a Connector Trail in Wakeman between the end of the Wakeman Bridge approach ramp and the paved new trail beginning at Route 60. We are holding back on the connector pending work by Buckeye Pipeline on their pumping and electrical substation in Wakeman.

Once the Buckeye Pipeline work is done and the trail installed, the North Coast Inland Trail, in Huron and Sandusky Counties, will be contiguous from the Lorain County Line to Elmore inclusive of two Huron County “work-arounds” and three city bike routes (Norwalk, Bellevue, and Fremont). Bellevue’s portion of the North Coast Inland Trail has been significantly upgraded from the center of town to County Road 177 and the existing trail by way of a new railway parallel to Route 20.

In the future, we will have to address paving our section of the North Coast Inland Trail; likely by applying for grants. This ultimate goal is particularly important as we are part of US/Ohio Bike Route 30, as well as part of the northern-most east/west transcontinental bike route across the USA.

Our Depot has been renovated inside and out! This year, the east room of the Depot, the old Baggage Room, was finally renovated and is open for use. Thousands of manhours have been put into this historic structure by members of FRTTI. We will likely be adding some historic artifacts to the east room in the future. The dedicated actions of many, many people have preserved a part of our rail and local history and is a highlight of our trail.

A number of our members were able to have the Depot open for visitors this year. Our plan is to develop a schedule of Open Hours at the Depot on weekends so the public can enjoy the collections therein and take a break along the trail in this 19th century historic depot.

Looking ahead, we have many things before us. The first thing will be the aforementioned Connector Trail construction in Wakeman. A bigger project will be the preservation of the Norwalk Double Arch Bridge eastern headwall. Erosion has caused a failure of the southern-most part of the head wall, and we will be addressing this in '18.

We hired a riverine engineer to evaluate the situation as well as having a diver investigate the integrity of the headwall and bridge foundation. The bad news is that we will have some repair work to do as well as the clearance of the west vault of our bridge that has been silted in. The good news is that the structural integrity of the bridge is NOT affected. We were relieved by this assessment, to say the least! We will solicit bids for this work in the spring of '18.

In consideration of the financial investments we make to conserve and preserve the trail and its fixtures, our readers may be surprised to know that we are now 28% owners of the trail! We, along with Lorain County Metroparks, are the majority owners of the trail. To that end, we seek to increase our financial support base, and hope you will be part of it. Indeed, we are now offering Life Memberships in FRTTI for a donation of \$1000 per member. Large donations help us do the big projects that have to be done both now and in the future. Please consider us in your year-end and tax season charitable donations!

I think, however, that our biggest challenge, now, is *not* material *nor* financial. It is *not* a matter of paving, tree removal, depot maintenance, mowing, or any of the other myriad of things we do year in and year out! **To me, the biggest challenge is growing the next generations of trail members, workers, and supporters.**

FRTTI has been blessed by a cadre of dedicated, energetic, smart and wise members who have brought into existence the trail across Huron County. What I see as our *next critical challenge* is to encourage younger generations to continue this work and become as enthusiastic about it as have been the current workers and leaders in FRTTI.

My goal is to "work myself out of a job" and pass on the mantle of leadership to a younger person, in point of fact, to our current vice president. I want to move our organization to recruit people in their twenties, thirties, and forties who will pick up the challenges of the trail and move it forward. Too many voluntary organizations in our society have failed to do this and are experiencing decline; churches, military and social service clubs and the like are experiencing such erosion. **We need to meet this by actively seeking younger members to "replace us" and mentor them along the way!**

We aren't building the North Coast Inland Trail for today, but *for future generations*. Indeed, if one looks at the trail map of Ohio one sees recreational trails growing together and connecting all across the Buckeye State. They bring health benefits and financial benefits to the people and communities in which they reside. Having dedicated volunteers and workers for the future is what really matters.

My wife's university motto (Wittenberg U in Springfield, OH) is: "Having light, we pass it on to others!" I think that Wittenberg's motto can be adapted for us in FRTTI: **"Having a trail, we pass it on to others!"**

Thank you for your support, your work, and your participating in 2017.

Lance N. Franke, President
Firelands Rails-to-Trails, Inc.
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