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Missing piece of River Valley Trail falls into place, will connect path from Niles to Mishawaka

By Mary Beth Spalding South Bend Tribune Mar 30, 2019



A sign marks the end of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail in 2017 at Brandywine Creek in Niles Township. Tribune File Photo/BECKY MALEWITZ

Becky Malewitz, South Bend Tribune

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NILES — A missing mile of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail is scheduled to be filled in this year, giving walkers, runners and cyclists a continuous 17-mile path from Niles to Mishawaka.

Work to complete the last link of the trail in Niles Township could possibly begin this spring and finish up by fall, a township official said.

The township board Thursday night approved accepting the low bid of \$1.2 million from Anlaan Construction, of Grand Haven, Mich., the low bidder that the Michigan Department of Transportation had also approved.

The township is partnering with the state on the project to build about a mile of winding, paved trail through Brandywine Creek Park and a small bridge to take the trail over the creek. The park, located at the corner of South Third Street and U.S. 12, is mostly owned by the state but managed by the township.

MDOT is paying the lion’s share of the cost — over \$627,000. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is kicking in \$300,000. The township is paying more than \$284,000.

“It’s still a lot of money, but you’re getting over \$1.2 million of trail in return,” township treasurer Jim Ringler said. “And it is the connecting trail. It’s the last part.”

Ringler said the township has more than \$200,000 in its trail fund, as well as \$30,000 in donations to put toward the project.

Getting the small stretch of trail done has been a goal for a few years. In 2017, the township parks board unveiled trail plans drafted by Wightman & Associates, Benton Harbor, and money for the project started falling into place. That winter, too, the township paid to cut down trees to make way for the proposed path. But a procedural problem last year caused the state to reject bids for the project.

Jill DeLucia, of the township parks board, last week called the prospect of finally getting the trail done “good news, for sure.”



There's even been recent talk in the county of extending the trail — which ends on the north side of Niles — by 9 miles on to Berrien Springs.

Township officials, though, were just happy to move their piece of the trail toward completion.

“That’s a wonderful thing,” trustee Herschel Hoese said. “I might even start walking.”

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