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Cities Celebrate Funding to Support Trail Development

PONDERAY, Idaho – The recent \$650,000 environmental assessment grant to local jurisdictions is a boost to a project to connect the cities of Sandpoint, Ponderay and Kootenai with a shoreline greenbelt, city officials said.

The cities, along with Bonner County and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, formed a coalition for the assessment funding through the Environmental Protection Agency to evaluate potential contaminants along the two-mile shoreline corridor. The project area includes Black Rock, the site of a former silver and lead smelter.

“We’re so pleased to receive this grant, which will help us determine the level of pollution in the corridor, plan its clean up and help further our efforts to make a public trail,” said Ponderay Mayor Carol Kunzeman.

Kunzeman and other city officials in Ponderay, Sandpoint and Kootenai have been involved in planning of the proposed Pend d'Oreille Bay Trail. The trail corridor is mostly on private property, although the cities of Ponderay and Sandpoint, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also own property in the area.

A broad-based community effort is underway to explore options to create a non-motorized greenbelt along the northwest shore of Lake Pend Oreille, including property and easement purchases, trail amenities and a railroad underpass. Trail advocates say the benefits of such a trail include access to waterfront, a non-motorized connection between the three cities, and the potential for a waterfront park in Ponderay.

One end of the proposed trail would be anchored by the city of Sandpoint’s water treatment plant and Humbird Mill park.

“The environmental assessment of the trail corridor is an essential step to bringing this dream to fruition,” said Sandpoint Mayor Gretchen Hellar. “We’re pleased that the EPA saw the merits of the community project.”

The cities, working with the community based Friends of the Pend d'Oreille Bay Trail, are getting guidance for a concept plan through the assistance of the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance program. The planning efforts include community involvement at public events such as National

Trails Day on June 6 in Sandpoint, a community picnic in Kootenai on June 13, and upcoming workshops.

“It’s great to have federal resources made available for our communities to do the necessary planning to clean up old contaminants and create something that will make Kootenai, and our neighboring cities, a better place to live,” said Kootenai Mayor Margaret Mjelde.

For more information about the Pend d’Oreille Bay Trail, visit the Friends of the Pend d’Oreille Bay Trail website at www.pobtrail.org.

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