

August 14, 2009

REI Awards Trailblazers Grant for Fisher Farm

We learned this week that REI has awarded the Trailblazers with another trail building grant in the amount of \$7,000. For this year's grant we were nominated by the REI store at the Northlake Center. Store Manager Aubin Guinness and many of his associates have worked with us on several trail projects and last year we used their community meeting room for our IMBA Club Care presentation.

The grant will be applied to the expansion of the trail at Fisher Farm Park in Davidson. As many of you know, Mark Sullivan (The Cycle Path) has continued to lengthen and improve the trail since he initially conceptualized the trail several years ago. Under agreement with the Town of Davidson, the Trailblazers completed Phase I (2 miles) in the spring of 2005. Phase II (2.25 miles) construction started early fall 2005 and completed spring of 2006 bringing the trail to its current length of 4.25 miles. With the completion of this Phase III construction, the multiuse trail will be approximately 5.5 miles in total length.

I want to sincerely express the club's thanks to REI, not only for this newest grant, but for the continuing success of their mission which fundamentally incorporates direct, impactful involvement in the community and in promoting outdoor activities for their neighbors. I have always been impressed with REI's commitment to this goal. It's not just a marketing gimmick or promotional campaign to be "green" or to project an image. It has always been a part of their culture and really is projected by their employee/associates. If you have ever been a part of a trail work day where the REI associates come out, you know what I mean. They come out IN FORCE and they are glad to be there making a difference. These guys really walk the walk.

Thank you Aubin and the REI crew; we look forward to continue to work with you on lots of future projects.

By the way, if you were not aware, this is the third grant that the Tarheel Trailblazers have received from REI for local trail construction and related costs. The Dirt Divas have been the recipient of at least one recent REI grant that I know of. Also, Trips For Kids recently completed the Lakewood Community pump track and skills trail (built by Ben Blich's B4 Construction) with an REI grant.

We selected Fisher Farm Park as our target for the REI grant funds for several reasons. Below is some additional information that was included in the Trailblazer's REI grant application.

This additional trail length is greatly desired to enable the trail to better support special trail events that bring many participants into the park to use the trail system and to benefit regular users by creating an improved and longer trail experience.

The Fisher Farm multiuse trail has been used to host several mountain bike races including the local summer mountain bike series that rotates between area trails from week to week, two separate high profile, national mountain bike races (the Cowbell Challenge in 2008 and 2009 and the MTB Oktoberfest, U.S. Cup race series in 2009) The trail also supported a cyclocross race in 2008. It has hosted many local and regional cross country running meets and is used for practices by local middle and high school cross country running teams. The local women's mountain bike organization, the Dirt Divas, has used the trail for skills clinics in 2006, '07, '08 and '09. Also, the Piedmont Area Singletrack Alliance, a local SORBA mountain bike chapter, has held advanced skills clinics in 2007, '08 and '09 at the trail. Both the Divas' and PASA's skills clinics attract a lot of youth participation and are highly anticipated and well attended events. Finally, the town of Davidson Park & Recreation has hosted summer mountain bike camps for kids in 2006, '07, '08 and plan more in 2009.

This amount of "special event" use at this trail is almost unprecedented. The Fisher Farm multiuse trail is among the shortest trail in the greater Charlotte area, yet it attracts these special events more than any other facility. This is due in part to the beauty of the natural setting, accessibility, ease of parking and the availability of open space to allow event organizers and participants to set up temporary structures and tents that are used at the events. There is room to spread out at and near the trailhead allowing many people to easily participate.

The great thing about special event trail uses is the large number and diversity of people that they draw to the park. Races, clinics and other festival type events attract not only participants, but also bring entire families and others to the park that normally wouldn't directly participate in a biking or other sporting event. Getting families and onlookers out to the park creates a lot of support for increased involvement in the particular activity and gets new participants involved. Special event uses are great promotions for increased outdoor activity by kids and other community members. We believe these special use events have a great impact on increased participation in mountain biking and other trail uses.

Increasing the multiuse trail's length by over 25% will make holding special event uses much easier to support. A four mile track is a bit short for most mountain bike race events, but a five and one half mile or longer course really makes a difference to the organizers and participants. Also, the new terrain offered by this new extension will add considerable diversity to the existing trail layout. It will add a good bit of climbing and descending trail and some more technical riding challenges which will also attract special event use as well as everyday riders, runners and hikers.

Please let us know if you have any questions on this or any of our ongoing trail projects.

Jim Grover
President, Tarheel Trailblazers

Posted At : 1:07 PM. | Posted By : tom