

## **Beauty of Rail Trail Open to all**

By Al Camp *The Chronicle*

CURLEW – People in the tiny town of Curlew near the Canadian border continue working on sections of the Ferry County Rail Trail while racking up national recognition for the project.

Work most recently included Ferry County Rail Trail Partners Vice President Keith Bell and Stotts Construction trail manager Johnny Metcalf spreading and compacting surface materials on the trail north of the tunnel along the Kettle River.

“This freshly surfaced four-mile segment brings the Curlew/Kettle River total to seven miles,” Ferry County Rail Trail Partners President Bob Whittaker. “Earlier this year surfacing was completed for the entire 5.5-mile length of the Curlew Lake section, bringing the grand total of miles surfacing improvements to 12.5 miles.”

So far a smidge more than half of the 25-mile trail has received a non-motorized surface between Curlew and Republic. “These improvements were made possible with non-motorized trail grants from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program,” Whittaker said.

On Nov. 22, Whittaker and many other state outdoor advocates met in Olympia with Gov. Jay Inslee. The meeting, organized by the governor’s Outdoor Recreation and Economic Development policy adviser, Jon Snyder, was an opportunity for a wide variety of outdoor recreation stakeholders to give direct comment to the governor on budget and police priorities and the vision for outdoor recreation in the state, Whittaker said.

“The group was impressive. I was thrilled to be a part of it and very happy that the governor was interested in hearing from our rural part of the state,” Whittaker said.

Other stakeholders attending (13 in all) included Kathy Young, president of Backcountry Horsemen of Washington; Glenn Nelson, contributing editor for High Country News, and Katherine Hollis, conservation and advocacy director for The Mountaineers.

“This trail embodies so many positive points - a community working hard together on a project to diversify our local economy and improve the health,” Whittaker said.

“It has been our biggest year ever,” he said of progress on the trail and what it means for the small communities.

Future efforts could include water access and overnight camping north of the tunnel adjacent to Bureau of Land Management land and the Kettle River. The group has requested money from the state’s Aquatic Land Enhancement Account. “It is a perfect fit,” Whittaker said.

The group also recently applied for a state Recreation and Conservation Office grant that would help augment the area’s cross country ski program.

The group’s efforts recently were recognized and the rail trail was named Trail of the Month from the national Rails to Trails group.

Whittaker said the group is “kicking butt” in getting the word out about what was once a rail line belonging to Burlington Northern for more than 100 years.

“Miles and miles of wonderful lake and river waterfront is once again open for everyone to enjoy,” Whittaker said. “The rail trail with its new flat, smooth surface provides excellent access for everyone free. They called us ‘the bad news bears of trails groups’ because we are a small, scrappy county doing so well,” Whittaker said.