



Good News for the Montour Trail

December 2, 2010

We are happy to announce that, after a year and a half of negotiations, the Montour Trail Council has reached an agreement with MarkWest Energy Partners of Denver, CO, to build the three-plus-mile Westland Branch trail for us. We will see almost four miles of new trail, plus add a new township to our roster: that of Chartiers.

MarkWest is restoring the Westland Branch as a working rail line to connect its natural gas processing facility near Houston, PA to an active Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad line. MarkWest has committed to the Council build the branch trail, separated by a fence, alongside the restored railroad.

The new Westland Branch will intersect the Montour Trail's main line at Gilmore Junction, near Southview Road and Route 50 in Cecil. There will also be a considerable re-building of about a mile of the existing trail in the Southview area, but the main line trail is to remain open during construction. This is a good way to get the branch built; it had been relegated to some future time, as we have been concentrating on completing the gaps in the main line.

Your Board of Directors overwhelmingly approved the agreement for two main reasons. First is the need to provide a significant and stable source of funds to both help complete the gaps in the trail, and even more importantly to assure its long term maintenance. The 30-year lease agreement with MarkWest will go a long way to make sure we can afford new limestone surfacing, tractors and fuel for mowing, trail amenities for the public, and many other costs to keep Montour going into the future.

The second reason derives from Montour have been neighbors in our host communities for many years. In building the Westland Branch, we are providing them with an expanded recreational trail for their good health and appreciation of the rural countryside. But it is also helping to make their communities better in that rail transport is much safer than the many extra tank trucks that would otherwise be traveling on all of the local roads. We were in a unique position to help do both.

Survey work along the Westland Branch has been underway, and brush clearing will be starting shortly. MarkWest hopes to begin construction in early 2011, and is hoping for completion of both the rail line and the trail in about a year. We'll tentatively plan for a trail opening in the early Spring of 2012.

An advertisement in the Observer-Reporter has announced that a public meeting to explain the project will be held on Wednesday December 8th, 7:00 PM, at the Cecil Township Municipal Building, 3599 Millers Run Road, Cecil Pa. A good showing of Montour Trail supporters would be most welcome!

On behalf of our board, I wish to thank our over 1000 members, and our tens of thousands of trail users, for their ongoing support of the Montour Trail. Best of Holidays to you all!

Ned Williams, President
Montour Trail Council