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Milan ATV Club works on grant for trail

By Edith Tucker
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STARK – Larry Gomes, trail master of the Milan Trail Huggers ATV Club who now lives year-round near South Pond with his wife Kate, has spent many hours at his computer preparing an application for a Recreational Trails Program grant to pay the bulk of the costs for a new 1.17-mile-long recreational trail in Stark.

The Bell Hill Connector Trail is designed to eliminate ATV's from 2.12 miles of gravel town roads: Leighton Meadow Road and parts of Bell Hill and Paris Roads.

“This proposed connector is a pretty complicated project because it involves two wetland crossings and one stream crossing,” Gomes explained. “This project to build a trail on private land would not be possible without the support of landowner Harley Mason, Jr. of Milan who gave permission for the club to cross his property.

This landowner wants the trail to run south of an Eversource right-of-way, resulting in three areas of permanent wetland impact, Gomes points out in the State Department of Environmental Services Dredge and Fill Permit which the state agency approved in May.

The eastern one crosses a 104-foot-long area of hydric soils with wetland plants plus a small intermittent stream. “The bridge approaches will be built using a Geo-Web honeycomb fabric filled with clean stone to create the trail base that will be capped with a clay gravel layer making a stable trail surface,” Gomes explained. “The river will be bridged bank-to-bank with a 12-foot-long by 14-wide bridge.

“The central impact area crosses a 116-foot-long wetland area with tufted grass and shrub-land” he continued. This area will be crossed with an 8' wide boardwalk bridge on helical steel posts elevated 3 feet over the wetland. Its planks must be spaced at least an inch apart to allow sunlight to reach growing plants.

About a fifth-of-a-mile of heavily logged higher ground located between these two wetlands will be excavated, its surface soils buried, and glacial till brought up to serve as the trail base, that also will be capped with a clay gravel layer. In addition, several 15-inch culverts for cross-trail drainage will be installed every 400-to-500-feet along the trail.

At the western end, a 24-inch culvert will also be installed so a seasonal brook can be crossed.

“This route will utilize an existing 110-foot-long snowmobile bridge over Phillips Brook,” Gomes explained. “An existing snowmobile trail that crosses this property north of the powerline cannot, however, be opened to ATV’s since it’s located near highly regulated gravel pits that are operated in the summer months.”

The club hired two consultants on whose expertise Gomes relied to design the project: wetland scientist Audra Klumb of A & D Klumb Environmental LLC of Webster, NH and structural engineer Bruce Stewart of Stewart Structural Engineering PLLC of Barnet, VT.

Pre-project expenses totaled a little over \$6,000 to pay for these two experts, along with the required NHDES permit fee and a database subscription used for required historical research, none of which will be reimbursed.

“Everyone wants to get ATV’s off town and state roads, but it’s a very expensive proposition,” Gomes explained. “Our club’s Board of Directors up-fronted this large sum of money, because they recognize that this project helps fulfill our mission of developing trails in Milan, Stark and Dummer and our goal of providing connector trails between the trail systems of three major riding areas: Jericho Mountain State Park to the south, North Country ATV Club to the west and Millsfield ATV Club to the north.



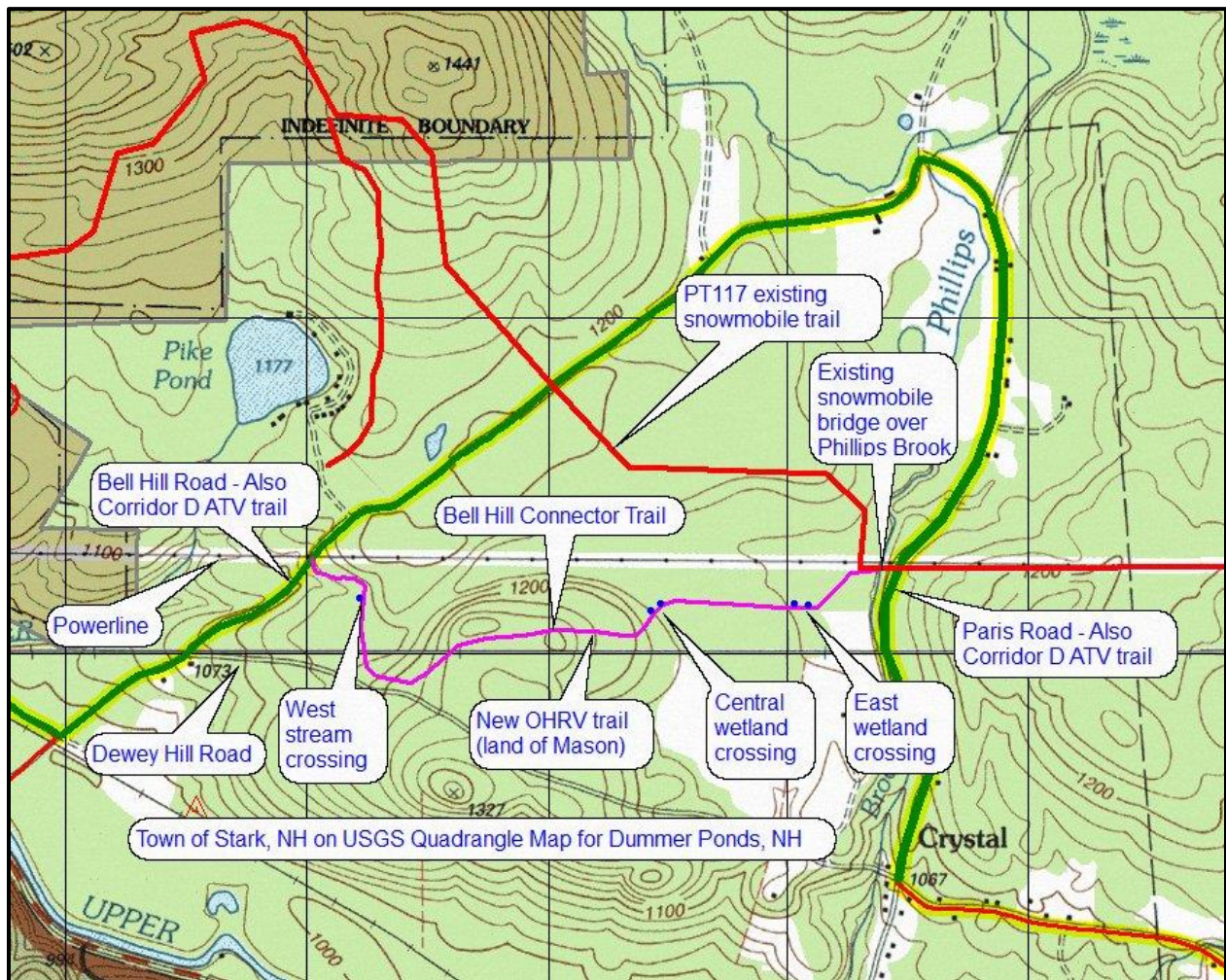
Larry Gomes of Stark, Milan Trail Huggers ATV Club trail master, just finished writing an Recreational Trails Program grant application for a new trail project in Stark to get ATVs off 2.2 miles of gravel town roads. (EDITH TUCKER PHOTO)

The total projected cost of this connector project is nearly \$143,000. The club has applied for almost \$80,000 under the competitive Recreational Trail Program. Nearly half that sum would be spent on hiring a dozer with operator (\$9,300) and an excavator with operator (\$28,250).

The balance would be used to buy materials. Administered by the State Bureau of Trails, these dollars are generated from federal gas tax dollars paid on fuel purchases for non-highway uses such as OHRV's and snowmobiles.

If the application is successful, the club will next apply for nearly \$51,000 under the state Grant-in-Aid trails program, all of which would be spent to buy the rest of the materials. The clubs match would be nearly \$12,500 in volunteer labor, currently valued at \$25.52 an hour.

If it all comes together as planned, work on the project would begin in June or July of 2021, Gomes explained.



Topo map showing the route for the proposed Bell Hill Connector Trail in purple.

The Milan Trail Huggers, chartered only six years ago, has 385 members and manages nearly 31 miles of trail. When the club has 'hands-on' work to do, 30-40 volunteers turn out.

In 2014 and 2015 the club was instrumental in establishing Corridor D, a 25-plus-mile east-west route between Berlin and Groveton. "The key to creating this connector was convincing the towns of Milan and Stark to allow OHRV's on town roads," Gomes said.

In May of 2015, the club took the lead in building a 66-foot-long bridge in West Milan that provides a convenient stop for riders to buy gas and food. That very visible project was funded by donations and built by volunteers.

This was followed by three RTP projects: construction of the Head Pond Connector trail in 2017; rebuilding of the Cedar Brook Road trail in 2018; and building the 90-foot-long Jim Herbert Memorial Bridge over Nash Stream in 2019, taking thousands of OHRV's off Northside Road and a town bridge in Stark.

Gomes, who has been an entrepreneurial software programmer, pointed out that his career has given him the ability to sit working at computers and focusing on a lot of details, including reading state law and agencies rules and regulations.

He said, "I'm glad to donate my time and energy to help local ATV and snowmobile clubs apply for funding to complete projects that help grow Coos recreational and tourist economy, and I'm very glad that Kate and I are able to live here."