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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 11, 2016

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DNR awards \$100,000 grant to Maxeys for Firefly Trail

The Firefly Trail is a step closer to becoming reality following an announcement on April 1 that the City of Maxeys has been awarded \$100,000 in grant funding from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources through the Federal Recreational Trails Program.



“We are thrilled that Maxeys’ grant application was successful,” said Maxeys Mayor William Winkle. “The Recreational Trails Program is very competitive, so it’s a real testament to our city and our partners that we were selected. We are looking forward to having a portion of the Firefly Trail open and serving our citizens in the near future.”

In announcing the award, state Rep. Trey Rhodes of Greensboro said, “This is great news for the citizens of Clarke, Greene and Oglethorpe counties. With this funding, we are one step closer to providing a quality trail experience for our communities. Thank you to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for investing in this important initiative to promote economic development in our area and to enrich the lives of our citizens.”

The Firefly Trail is a proposed multi-use path to be built on or near the historic corridor of the Athens Branch of the Georgia Railroad. Stretching 39 miles from downtown Athens to downtown Union Point, it will connect three counties, seven municipalities and thousands of citizens with a safe, off-road path for walking, cycling, and other non-motorized travel. A natural-surface side-path in rural areas will accommodate horseback riding and mountain biking.

“More than 22,000 miles of rail-trails have been built in the United States, and everywhere they are built they have a profound positive impact on their communities,” said Mike Hall, President of Firefly Trail Inc., a non-profit corporation working to make the trail a reality.

“Trails are a proven way to improve health and recreational opportunities for the communities they serve,” Hall said. “They give people a place to exercise without worrying about cars or steep hills. They bring people together and enhance community spirit. In addition, long trails such as the Firefly attract significant tourism and provide powerful economic benefits. I love to travel around the nation to ride trails and visit the places they pass through, and I often see places like Traveler’s Rest, S.C., and Damascus, Virginia, where trails have brought in people, money and energy to turn the economy around.”

In awarding the grant, DNR acknowledged contributions by the City of Maxeys and numerous partner organizations, including Oglethorpe County, the GFWC Maxeys Woman's Club, Firefly Trail Inc., the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, the Southeast Off-Road Bicycling Association and others in the application for the grant.

"We're a small town, but we're determined and hard-working people," Winkle said. "When we come together, we get things done."

The award still needs the final approval of the Federal Recreational Trails Program, after which the cooperating parties will begin work acquiring right-of-way and making plans for construction. Federal approval is expected in early Fall 2016.

"With the grant award just now being announced, it's too soon to speculate on when our first segment of the trail will open, but we have taken a giant step in that direction," Winkle said. "The day will come when our families, friends and neighbors can go for a walk, a run, or a bike ride on a safe, level, off-road path through the heart of our beautiful town. We're proud to lead the way in bringing the Firefly Trail to Northeast Georgia."