

## Agassiz Recreational Trail Receives National Award

On June 8, 2010, the Coalition for Recreational Trails (CRT), a national organization representing the nation's major trail interests, presented its 2010 Recreational Trails Program Achievement Awards. Among the recipients of the awards was the Agassiz Recreational Trail (ART), a 52 mile natural surface trail in Northwestern Minnesota.

ART received the 2010 Construction & Design award for planning and building a trail. The ART is a rail corridor running from Ulen to Crookston through Twin Valley, Gary and Fertile. It is an outstanding example of a trail accommodating multiple uses being open for walking/hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and ATV riding. The trail runs through beautiful farmland and has several impressive river crossings.

The creation of the trail and preservation of the corridor was a community initiative spearheaded by volunteers from the Fertile/Beltrami Sandhill SnoCruisers Snowmobile/ATV Club and trail advocates with the support of local and state officials. The trail is governed by the ART Board, a joint power collaboration between Clay, Norman and Polk Counties.

When the rail grade was abandoned by the railroad, many of the rail bridges were removed. The ART Board, with the leadership of trail advocates, was able to acquire funding from the State of Minnesota bonding funds, state snowmobile and ATV grant-in-aid funds, and matching Federal Recreational Trail Program grants to complete the connections of this trail by constructing and refurbishing several bridges. The bridges are impressive:

- 170 foot long bridge at 28 feet high over the Wild Rice River in Ulen
- 300 foot long bridge at 55 feet high over the Wild Rice River near Twin Valley
- 170 foot long bridge at 28 feet high over Mashaug Creek near Twin Valley
- 170 foot long bridge at 32 feet high over the Sandhill River near Fertile
- 7 more relatively shorter distance bridge crossing on the trail north of Fertile where  
3 of the bridges were new structures and 4 were refurbished.

The Agassiz Recreational Trail was a major grassroots community effort to acquire and maintain an abandoned rail corridor in a part of the state without many multi-use trails. The trail is now maintained by the local snowmobile/ATV club. According to the award nomination by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, administrator of the RTP grants in Minnesota, "The local community, spearheaded by volunteers, was able to secure funding to install these impressive bridges, and provide for a 52 mile continuous multi-use trail by gaining support from the Recreational Trails Program and the State of Minnesota.... (T)his corridor is now preserved for future generations as a recreational trail."

On Saturday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, the public is invited to the Grand Opening of three trail bridges on the Agassiz Recreational Trail. Opening ceremonies will take place at Heiberg Park, ¾ mile N of Twin Valley, at 9:30 a.m. The Ulen bridge ribbon cutting will be at 10:45 a.m.; the Mashaug Creek and Wild Rice River bridges near Twin Valley ribbon cutting will be at 11:30 a.m.; followed by a ceremonial trail ride back to Heiberg Park.

Gordon Gudvangen, Trail Administrator for the ART, indicated that ultimately it is hoped to extend the trail to other communities in the area with local support.



Pictured: Mary Ann Fowler, Exec.Dir, Rails To Trails Conservancy & Co-Chair CRT; Congressman Jim Oberstar; Gordon Gudvangen, ART Trail Admin.; Derrick Crandall, Pres, American Recreational Coalition & Co-Chair CRT