Walking the greenway

Roy Arthur highlights Halls trail

Roy Arthur is so excited, he can't stand it.

The Halls Greenway was completed two months ago, and various critters and species are beginning to appear along the nearly mile-long ADA compatible trail, which runs from the Halls Community Park to the Halls Branch Library.

"We're creating a habitat," Arthur, the Knox County Beaver Creek Watershed coordinator, said. "We'll be planting warm season native grasses this season. What you are going to see are quail and turkey. It won't be long before we'll be seeing deer, too. We've also got eight wood duck boxes we're going to put around the creek."

The Halls Greenway began several years ago when a committee was formed to study the project. Knox County greenway coordinator Karen Nolt designed the greenway, and construction, which began 18 months ago, Arthur said, was completed at the beginning of the year.

"It was an in-house project of the (Knox County) parks and recreation department," Arthur said. "It was built with TEA-21 federal highway money."

The trail features three bridges and an observation deck that was built as an Eagle Scout project. Arthur said the greenway will eventually extend under Maynardville Highway along Beaver Creek and will be connected to the Powell Greenway.

Flags placed along the trail signify where native species have been planted. The trail is also a prime spot for bird watching. Arthur said that the Beaver Creek Watershed Association will at some point be enhancing the wetland area located behind Food City.

"The wetland needs a drainage area," Arthur said. "The association will eventually build an elevated walkway of about 100 feet or so that will allow drainage into the creek."

Arthur said a wetland serves three functions:

"It soaks up water like a sponge and controls flooding," he said. "Also, plant roots act as a filter for pollutants. And a greater abundance of wildlife lives there. In the United States, 45 percent of all our endangered species live in wetlands."

Arthur said that the BCWA has designed two museum-quality signs for the Halls Marsh section of the greenway featuring various birds and species. The signs will be erected within the month.

"By summer, the association is hoping to build an elevated walkway that will begin behind the library and circle around the creek and pond," Arthur said.

Arthur said the walkway will be built in three stages, will include two observation decks and will be roughly 1,000 feet long.

"(Architect) Gary McGill has designed it to preserve the wetland. It will be built in sections, like a deck," Arthur said. "The only time anyone will actually be on the ground is when they are digging the post holes. It's going to be neat."

Arthur said that the new greenway will bring increased property values to adjacent property owners.

"Communities that preserve the 100 year flood plain have seen the land adjacent to the flood plain go up $10,000 an acre in value," he said.

Arthur said that several groups were responsible for the greenway, plantings, and other related projects, including the UT Water Resources Research Center, the UT environmental horticulture department, the National Resource Conservation Service, Hallsdale-Powell Utility District, Knox County Parks and Recreation, TVA, Knox County Department of Engineering and Public Works, and the Adopt-A-Watershed programs at Halls High and Halls Middle schools.

He said the greenway will be bursting with color as spring arrives: "In another six weeks or so, you are going to see a lot of color."

Parking for the greenway is located at the lower level of the Halls Branch Library on Emory Road, at the Halls Community Park off Crippen Road and to the left of Food City in Halls Plaza Center.

-- Jake Mabe

Knox County Beaver Creek Watershed coordinator Roy Arthur points out a stone bank along Beaver Creek on the Halls Greenway. Arthur said the bank was a WPA project during the Depression. (Photo by Jake Mabe)