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Last link in Des Plaines River Trail connects Cook Co. to Wisconsin

Ronnie Wachter | October 23, 2015

The Lake County Forest Preserve District opened a short stretch of trail in Lincolnshire on Friday, bringing to completion a single path on which pedestrians and cyclists can travel from west suburban River Forest all the way north to Wadsworth, just south of the Wisconsin border.

The 0.3-mile segment of asphalt was the last piece of the 45-mile Des Plaines River Trail, a joint project of the forest preserve districts of Lake County and Cook County that was 54 years in the making.

"Our customers have been talking about it," said Lisa Strong, who works at the Runner's Edge store in Libertyville. "They've been working on connecting trails ever since we moved here. All the work they've done on it for the past couple of years has really been phenomenal for the outdoor community."

The Cook and Lake trails are technically separate, but share one name and adjoin on a bridge that spans Lake Cook Road in Wheeling's Potawatomi Woods. The northern edge of the trail is at Russell Road in Wadsworth's Van Patten Woods; the southern edge is just north of North Avenue in River Forest.

On the Lake County side, the first pieces of the trail began appearing in the early 1960s, according to a statement from the forest preserve. The Board of Commissioners of that time saw it as a way to "protect the Des Plaines River floodplain and to preserve land along the river corridor," the statement said.

At 31.4 miles, Lake County's path is about two-thirds of the total trail. According to the statement, it took 142 land acquisitions of nearly 5,000 acres over 54 years to get the Lake County portion done.

Randy Seebach, the forest preserve's director of planning and land preservation, said the last purchase came in December, when the district bought 4.4 acres from the Par-King Skill Golf course along Milwaukee Avenue in Lincolnshire for around \$220,000. He said his crews started working on the last section in June.

"It's been going on for so long, it feels great to have it finished," Seebach said Friday.

The final 1,600 feet is paved. In Cook County, the majority of the trail is dirt, but the Lake County side has segments with gravel or asphalt. At one point, the trail criss-crosses with the cart path of the Lincolnshire Marriott Resort's golf course.

The trail is open to horse riders, dog walkers and cross-country skiers, and includes six canoe launching points on the Lake County side.