Carter County will soon have a wonderful new walking and biking trail. The Carter County Fiscal Court has approved the creation of nearly four miles of multi-use trails in the Hitchins-Leon area. The working name of the new trail is The Little Sinking Creek Trail. There is also a Tygart Creek Trail under development in the Olive Hill area.

EK Railroad Drive, which runs from Rt. 773 near Hitchins to the intersection with Rt. 1661 in Leon, occupies part of the right-of-way of the old EK/CSX railroad through Carter County. The right-of-way, which is 100 feet wide, was purchased by the county from CSX in 1991. EK Railroad Drive occupies a relatively narrow portion in the center of the right-of-way, allowing plenty of space for a multi-use trail in parallel on either side.

Trails such as this one are common in other parts of the country, but relatively rare in Kentucky. That is changing though. There are plans for trails all along the old CSX right-of-way from Lexington all the way to Ashland. The rails-to-trails concept is being used to give communities all across the nation easy access to new recreational opportunities. In some areas, trails are used by commuters as a convenient, inexpensive and healthful way to get to work and shopping.

The Little Sinking Creek trail will soon have rest stop benches, camping and picnic facilities, signs and posters featuring information on local wildlife and plants, as well as the history of the railroad and local points of interest. Ultimately there will be trail support facilities with drinks, snacks and restrooms.

Much of the work on the new trail will be provided by volunteers. Pati Porter, the coordinator for rails-to-trails in Carter County, is interested in hearing from anyone who would be interested in joining the trail building team. There is an immediate need for help in trail clearing and creek cleanup. Volunteers will be making signs for the new trail, as well as benches and tables that will be provided at rest stops and picnic areas. Pati is hoping that we will also be getting some assistance in re-engineering the three old iron railroad bridges so that they will better accommodate both vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Pati is in the process of obtaining authority to spend a $50,000 grant from the Governor’s Office for Local Development on the new trail. The money will be spent in part on trail grading and surfacing material. The trail will have a rock base with a fine grained material known as stone dust on the surface. The trail will be about ten feet wide in most areas.

Pati has asked one of her volunteers, John Grace, to be the contact for anyone interested in helping with the new trail. John can be reached at 286-1717.