

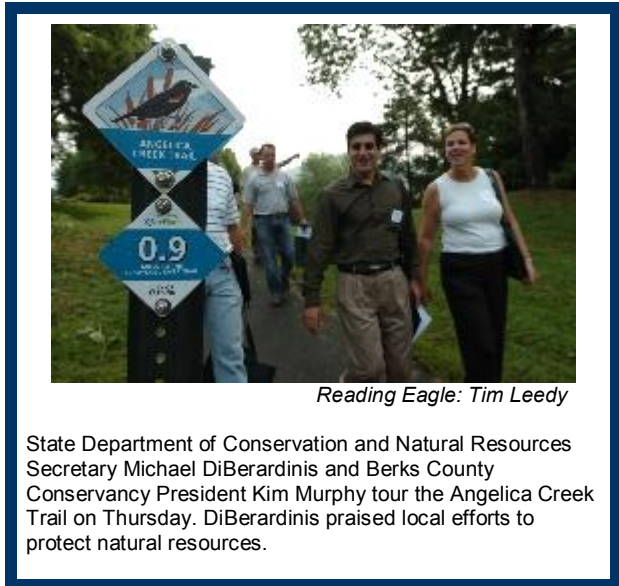
Berks praised for trailblazing pathway projects

By Don Spatz
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- Greater Reading not only is at the crossroads of a rich variety of natural resources, it has local leadership that is collaborating to promote and protect those resources, the state's environmental czar said Thursday.

"You guys are ahead of the game; you're moving while others need to catch up," Michael DiBerardinis, secretary of the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, told several dozen local leaders at Angelica Park.



Reading Eagle: Tim Leedy

State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Michael DiBerardinis and Berks County Conservancy President Kim Murphy tour the Angelica Creek Trail on Thursday. DiBerardinis praised local efforts to protect natural resources.

As a result, Reading and the surrounding communities have what he called some fabulous opportunities that didn't exist a decade ago, including the attention of his department that has grant money available.

DiBerardinis was helping the Berks County Conservancy get construction under way for a new section of the Angelica Creek Trail, leading from the park south to the Ken-Grill Pool.

It is paid for in part by funds from the William Penn Foundation and \$92,000 from the Russell Hiller Charitable Trust.

The trail is one of nine biking and hiking paths branching off the main Schuylkill River Trail and is part of the conservancy's greenway and recreation hub focus.

Ultimately, it will lead to the state's Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center in Cumru Township, and the department is providing a grant for a feasibility study to determine the route and costs for the rest of the trail.

"It's essentially a local effort that we (DCNR officials) are responding to," DeBerardinis said. "We want to go where there's not only great opportunity, but also great local interest; where the politicians and the policies want us."

He said the local interest and investment in environmental projects among the city, suburbs, the county, and a host of local agencies such as the conservancy and RiverPlace Development Corp., help his department focus on greater Reading.

But there are other factors, he said, among them that two of the largest state investments in French Creek State Park and the Nolde center are in Berks, and it is the confluence of the Schuylkill River and the state's new focus on the Schuylkill Highlands.

The highlands are forested uplands that run from mid-Bucks County to mid-Lebanon County, and from north of Kutztown to south of Honey Brook in Chester County.

"These help us pay special attention to this area," he said.

That special attention can win state grants in several areas, he noted, from protecting land from development to planning its growth, as well as helping out in tourism efforts and economic growth in ways that send a stewardship message.

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