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## Agency looks to give county part of Chehalis Western Trail

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State Department of Natural Resources planners want to transfer ownership of the 51/2-mile northern leg of the Chehalis Western Trail to Thurston County.

The county approached the state agency a decade ago about acquiring full ownership of the county's most popular trail. It owns the trail's 151/2 mile southern leg, which runs from Pacific Avenue to the intersection with the Yelm-Tenino Trail.

Talks have picked up steam in the past two years, Parks and Recreation Director Michael Welter said.

"It made sense for the entire Chehalis Western Trail to be under one jurisdiction's management," he said.

County commissioners would need to approve the transfer. A public hearing is scheduled for next week.

Maintenance of the trail would transfer to the county's public works department. The parks and recreation department is proposed to close May 31 because of budget cuts. County commissioners held a public hearing Monday night on reductions to close a \$5.4 million projected shortfall in this year's budget.

It's estimated to cost about \$2,800 a year to maintain each mile of the trail, Welter said.

The so-called Bridging the Gap project eventually would connect the DNR-owned and county-owned segments of the trail.

A bike and pedestrian bridge across Interstate 5 opened in February 2007.

Construction is scheduled to begin this summer on a similar 180-foot-long bridge over Martin Way.

Construction will cost between \$1.2 million to \$1.8 million and will be paid for with federal grants, county engineer Dale Rancour said. Construction will begin at the end of July, at the earliest, and is scheduled to wrap up in the spring of 2010.

It's unknown when construction would begin on the bridge crossing Pacific Avenue, the last span needed to close the gap.

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