

SANTA FE RIVER TRAIL; NEWEST STRETCH OF WALK ALONG CITY WATERWAY NEARS COMPLETION.

By: STACI MATLOCK

On a recent picture-perfect, warm spring afternoon, Kevin and Katja Theobald-Green were enjoying a stroll along a new concrete path beside the Santa Fe River. "We're happy to pay taxes for this," Katja Theobald-Green said. "I think it is a good investment."

Their son, Wyatt, 11, sat on the new brick retaining wall just behind houses in Barrio Canada, where the family lives. Their daughter, Imogen, 2, wanted to climb out of her stroller so she could walk on the wall, too. Metal railings separate the wide path from the drop-off to the river.

A little farther up the path, Manuel Ortiz, 8, was busy skateboarding on the concrete path.

"It's beautiful," said Kevin Theobald-Green of the new 3/4-mile stretch of the Santa Fe River Trail between Camino Alire and Ricardo Road, which is almost complete. "You can't believe how many people began using it before it was finished. People walk their dogs, run, bike on it."

The new path is part of a long-range plan by the city and Santa Fe County for a 13-mile trail along the river from Patrick Smith Park to N.M. 599. The Camino Alire/Ricardo Road segment will meet up with one completed from Calle Don Jose to Ricardo Road. The county's portion will accommodate horseback riders along with hikers, bikers, skaters and runners.

The millions of dollars required to finish this segment of the trail -- which includes a new foot and bicycle bridge crossing over the river at Ricardo Road and work to restore the river channel -- is funded by appropriations from the state Legislature and \$3.2 million from the parks bond. The trail is 8 to 10 feet wide, providing plenty of space for multiple users to enjoy the trail at the same time.

Engineering the trail required clearing out trash, brush and some trees and flattening a portion of the riverbank where it drops off steeply behind homes. Mesh wire and piled stone help keep the bank in place.

Brian Drypolcher, the city of Santa Fe's river coordinator, said it will probably take another two to three weeks before the new segment and bridge are completely finished.

A final and expensive phase of the city's trail effort will involve stabilizing the riverbanks with stone structures and trees, and replacing concrete drops with

boulders in the river channel to slow down high water flows, which have cut down into the bank, causing a 15-foot drop in some places.

One drawback to the new trail is the graffiti that has appeared on the back walls of homes and yards along the route. "The graffiti has increased," Kevin Theobald-Green said.

Still, the advantages are huge. The Theobald-Greens said the trail will make bicycling better and safer. "It is so hard to be outdoors and feel safe riding a bike (on the streets)," Katja Theobald-Green said.

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