

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Memorandum of Understanding for Southwest Trail Signed

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Elected officials from Pulaski, Garland and Saline counties met in Little Rock on Tuesday, December 2nd with representatives of state agencies and several non-profit organizations to sign a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Southwest Trail. The agreement sets in place the general terms under which the 14 foot wide multi-use trail will be planned and constructed over a number of years. The Trail will run along portions of the abandoned Rock Island rail line and Hwy 70 in Pulaski, Saline and Garland counties.

Judge Rick Davis (Garland County), Judge Lanny Fite (Saline County), Judge Buddy Villines (Pulaski County), Mayor Ruth Carney (Hot Springs), Mayor Mark Stodola (Little Rock), Mayor Johnny McMahan (Bauxite), Mayor Jill Dabbs (Bryant), and Mayor Jeff Arey (Haskell) were present to sign the agreement. Other local governments expected to sign the agreement are the cities of Lonsdale, Benton, and Shannon Hills.

Additional partners include Metroplan, Arkansas Historic Preservation, Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas State Parks, Bicycle Advocacy of Central Arkansas, Bobby's Bike Hike, Saline Crossing, 501c3Boyz, Arkansas Bicycle Club, McClelland Consulting Engineers, Ageless Bikers Club, and Kimley-Horn & Associates.

The planned route of the Southwest Trail will run roughly along the route of the historic Southwest Trail. Originally little more than a footpath before Arkansas became a territory in 1819, it became a major means a transportation through the region in the 1820s. By the 1830s more than four-fifths of Arkansas's population had entered the territory via the Southwest Trail. The Southwest Trail was also one of the Trail of Tears routes to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) in the 1830s.

Saline Crossing is one of the nonprofit organizations interested in building the trail through Saline County. The group is dedicated to restoring the 1891 Saline River Bridge for use by bicyclists and pedestrians. The bridge, which is on the National Register and is one of the most endangered historic structures in Arkansas, was severely damaged by an overloaded truck in 1974 and has been out of use since that time. Members would also like to establish a regional park at nearby "Saline Crossing" on the banks of the Saline River where the William Lockhart family first settled in the spring of 1815. Ten acres of land have already been acquired for the park.

When completed, the Southwest Trail will connect with the Arkansas River Trail, adding nearly 50 miles to the existing trail network in Central and Southwest Arkansas. Bicyclists will be able to travel from the westernmost part of the Arkansas River Trail in Perry County in an elongated loop to all the way to Downtown Hot Springs, enjoying many scenic spots in Arkansas along the way.



**\*Saline Crossing Regional Park & Recreation Area, Inc.** is an open, grass roots organization formed to preserve the historic Saline River Bridge, circa 1891, on the Saline River and establish a significant and fitting public access to the historic birthplace of Benton at Saline Crossing on the Saline River.