

Bowdoinham receives \$750K for Merrymeeting Trail

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Part of an old rail corridor that will be repurposed for the Merrymeeting Trail project. The trail will connect the towns of Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond and Gardiner. (Courtesy of the Bowdoinham Planning Department)

A small town sitting along the Cathance River has received a large federal contribution to a nearly two-decades-long trail project that officials hope will boost tourism and outdoor recreation in central Maine.

Bowdoinham's \$750,000 [grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Transportation is meant to improve connectivity on the 26-mile Merrymeeting Trail that runs through Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond and Gardiner.

It is the largest injection of funding the project has received so far, according to Yvette Meunier, Bowdoinham's director of planning and development.

“This is a major milestone for the Merrymeeting Trail,” Meunier said. “It’s going to allow Bowdoinham and Richmond to complete the full design and engineering work to move the trail forward between the two towns.”



An aerial photo of the Cathance marsh and railroad line south of Bowdoinham that is part of the Merrymeeting Trail. The town recently received \$750,000 for the project from the U.S. Department of Transportation. (Courtesy of the Bowdoinham Planning Department)

Bowdoinham is in the process of developing a contract dictating a two-year timeline with the U.S. Department of Transportation. Construction could begin as soon as 2028 or 2029.

The grant will make it possible to finalize the trail alignments, design safe road crossings, assess bridges and drainage, complete environmental review and permitting, and prepare bid-ready construction documents. It positions Bowdoinham to secure future construction funding and will provide safe off-road options for walking and biking while linking the towns and connecting to other major trails, Meunier said.

The Merrymeeting Trail connects to Maine’s most successful multiuse trails, the [Kennebec River Rail Trail](#) and the Androscoggin River Bicycle and Pedestrian Path, connecting Topsham and Augusta and closing a 49-mile gap [in the East Coast Greenway](#), a 3,000-mile trail from Florida to Maine, according to Meunier.

In 2015, the towns of Bowdoinham, Richmond, Gardiner and Topsham created the [Merrymeeting Board of Supervisors](#) to facilitate the trail’s planning, construction and maintenance. The board of supervisors is an interlocal agreement between the municipalities.

Bowdoinham plans on working with the town's board of supervisors, of which Bowdoinham Town Manager Nicole Briand is a member, along with the Maine Department of Transportation on the planning stages.

Bowdoinham hopes to attract more tourists who want to take longer trips, with cycling tourism being one of the fastest-growing tourist activities in the country, Briand said. An analysis by the California-based nonprofit American Trails stated that [the development of trails and trail systems makes a profound economic impact](#) on regions and the communities that surround them.

The Merrymeeting Trail will strengthen Bowdoinham and Richmond's downtown areas by promoting tourism and be an economic spine that connects the communities, Meunier said. It will help with Bowdoinham's economic goals of revitalizing the downtown area and growing outdoor recreation-based economies.

Bowdoin

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