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## Group wants to create recreational destination

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By: **By Tom Cherveney, Forum Communications Co.,** The Jamestown Sun

REDWOOD FALLS, Minn. — Their goal is to make the Tatanka Bluffs Corridor a recreational destination with brand recognition on par with the state's best, like the Brainerd Lakes Area or North Shore.

Ambitious yes, but that goal started to look possible on Dec. 17. Board members with the non-profit coalition behind it introduced their new partner: The National Park Service.

"There's nothing more powerful than a vision whose time has come," said Loren Kaardal, one of the board members and organizers of Green Corridor Inc.

The enthusiasm voiced by Kaardal came as Randy Thoreson, an outdoor recreational planner with the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, outlined the federal government commitment to working with the local Green Corridor group to develop a water trail between Granite Falls and Fort Ridgely State Park near Fairfax.

The 45-mile long water trail will be the backbone of a larger initiative to develop and promote outdoor recreational, historic and cultural resources in Renville and Redwood counties, according to board members.

Thoreson's role will be to provide technical assistance and help foster ties between the local group and other potential partners. He brings experience with assisting a variety of water trails throughout the Midwest, along with the resources of the Park's Service staff in the 11-state Midwestern region.

Many resources already exist in the corridor area, but there is a lot of infrastructure yet to build, according to Brad Cobb, director of the Green Corridor coalition. Board members said they are working on projects ranging from developing new recreational trails, acquiring public lands, to proposing the state's first residential history center in conjunction with the Renville County Historical Center and Museum in Morton.

Thoreson said he was impressed by both the group's success in promoting its vision, as well as what he saw when the coalition members led him on a tour of the corridor last summer. "The beauty of this whole corridor is unbelievable," he said.

The group has already succeeded in obtaining state funding to acquire lands to protect assets in the corridor and make them accessible to the public. Its work has made possible the newly-designated, 182-acre Whispering Ridge aquatic management area along the Minnesota River. It also won funding to acquire 45 acres to the Fort Ridgely State Park horse camp and trail area.

Recently, the Lessard-Sams Outdoors Heritage Council recommended that \$1.6 million be awarded to the group for additional acquisitions of critical habitat lands in 2010.

The achievements are getting noticed. The Green Corridor's coalition recently won the 2009 Mid-American Trails and Greenway Conference Award. It was awarded at the conference's annual gathering earlier this fall in Kalamazoo, Mich.

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