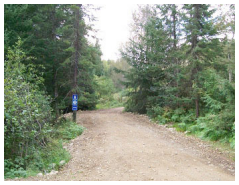

The Sno-Kats have finished work on a new trail into the west end of Crystal Falls, which replaces an older trail. (Sno-Kats photo)

CRYSTAL FALLS—The Chippewa Sno-Kats Trail Club has been busy this summer. That will mean better trails for snowmobilers this winter—and for those who ride all-terrain vehicles, too.

Club President Joe Chavis said the Sno-Kats, helped by a grant from WPPI Energy, has finished work on a new trail into the west end of Crystal Falls, which replaces an older trail.

The new one splits from the existing snowmobile-ATV trail along U.S. 141 and runs parallel to the east side of 141 south to Zavada Drive in the industrial park, connecting with the trail system in town.

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The Trail Club took on this project, explained Chavis, because the old trail had washed out and become impassible. “It degraded so bad that we could no longer groom” into town.

The Sno-Kats did this work without state help—the state would not fund improvements for that part of the trail or include it in the state-funded trail program.

“They didn’t want to add another half-mile to our trail system,” said Chavis. “They didn’t feel we needed it.

That’s how WPPI Energy entered the story. Chavis learned about WPPI grants available to non-profit groups. Through the city, he applied for a grant for the trail work, and WPPI approved $1,000.

Chavis then went back to the Sno-Kats, who agreed to pay the rest of the $7,000 project. The club contracted with Santi Excavating and got approval from the city, which owns the property.

The new trail is a little farther from U.S. 141—about 50 yards further east—because of the grade. “The runoff from the rain would hit the trail, run down the trail and washed it out,” Chavis said.

“We marked it off and re-routed the trail to avoid that runoff. Then Kenny [Santi] built a ditch system along that side and put in new culverts.” The water will now go from the ditch into the culvert and leave the trail alone.

“ATV and snowmobile riders using the trails will now have easy access to gas, food and lodging within the city,” Chavis said. “We hope this new trail will bring more tourism dollars into the community to help businesses prosper in all of Iron County.”

The Sno-Kats also have added a big new segment to the county’s ATV trail system, connecting Crystal Falls with Amasa along existing county roads.

The trail heads north along Rock Crusher Road near the city power dam. From there, it takes Enstrom Cutoff, WPA Road, Balsam Road, Premo Creek Road, Deer Lake Road and DNR Road before entering the east side of Amasa on Park City Road.

“It’s all county roads that are legally rideable for ATV use,” he said. The Sno-Kats checked with

the sheriff's office, the DNR, and Rob Ketona, the DNR's man in charge of ATV trails in the U.P., and got approval from all of them.

"We did this all on our own, and we made our own signs." The signs are similar to the MI-Trail signs: black on a white background with the letter "A" (its designated trail route).

The Sno-Kats are also discussing future expansion of the ATV trail north to the Watton/Covington area. This would use Old 141, Cable Lake Road and several logging roads that link with Ford Road, which goes north to Watton and M-28, where it would connect with the existing trail system north of M-28.

Chavis and Ketona looked over the route. Property owners would have to give their permission for the project to move ahead, "even though there are logging roads that exist through there, and people ride them all the time," said Chavis.

"It's something we've been trying to get established for quite a while now."

To Chavis, building up the area's trail system means building up tourism and bringing more money into the area.

"With the growing number of ATV sales, more and more snowmobile clubs are becoming involved with multi-use trails—so much more than even the Michigan Snowmobile Association has shown interest in becoming involved with the ATV side of trail riding."

Many snowmobile trails are becoming multi-use trails, including the county-owned rec trail between Iron River and Crystal Falls. "We want to have an established trail system to get people here to spend their tourism dollars.

"They want to ride. If we don't have a well-established trail system here, they won't come here. We want to make the towns as user-friendly as possible and have places for people to ride to."

The Sno-Kats, he noted, are always looking for more members. Monthly meetings are held at the Chippewa Resort on U.S. 2 west of Crystal Falls at 7 p.m. on the first Wednesday of the month.

Anyone interested can also check them out on Facebook or go to www.chippewasnokats.com, where membership forms are available.