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High Knob tower gets \$280,000 fed grant

By: JEFF LESTER / News Editor

Posted: Tuesday, July 7, 2009 1:40 am

A fundraising initiative to build a new High Knob observation tower is now more than halfway to its goal.

Friday morning in Coeburn, Ninth District U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher announced that the project has been awarded a \$280,000 federal Transportation Enhancement Act grant, according to a press release.

When coupled with the fundraising efforts of the High Knob Enhancement Corp., that brings available funds to at least \$400,000. The estimated cost to build the tower is nearly \$600,000.

The historic former tower was destroyed by arson on Halloween 2007. Boucher noted that soon afterward, he brought together interested local residents and government officials, U.S. Forest Service representatives and other stakeholders to develop a strategy for rebuilding it, and for developing other facilities in the High Knob area.

One result was creation of High Knob Enhancement Corp. The group has raised more than \$120,000 from more than 100 individuals, companies and local governments, Boucher said.

The \$280,000 federal grant will go to the Lenowisco Planning District Commission to administer. Boucher said he is working with other federal agencies to seek more funds while the High Knob group continues fundraising.

The forest service will own the new tower, and is now reviewing proposals for design work. Once the design and remaining fundraising are complete, construction can start in 2010, he said.

Like its predecessor, the new tower will offer views of five states in a 100-mile radius, Boucher noted. It will be built of durable fire-resistant materials.

Boucher recalled other recent efforts to improve High Knob, including:

r Breaking ground on a network of horse trails and improvements to existing trails along with installation of parking areas and restrooms.

r Upgrades to the 24-mile Chief Benge Scout Trail from High Knob to Little Stoney Falls.

Boucher thanked High Knob Enhancement Corp. representatives Lu Ellsworth, Rita McReynolds and Robby Robbins, along with Lenowisco officials Glen "Skip" Skinner and Duane Miller and state Del. Terry Kilgore for their efforts.

Boucher credited Commonwealth Transportation Board members Jim Bowie and James Keen for helping secure the federal grant, and he praised the Coeburn High School Ecology Club and the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America Club for their fundraising efforts.

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