

Groundbreaking set for Shawnee Parkway

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By CHARLES OWENS
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GHENT — It was about 22 years ago when officials first proposed the construction of a new scenic two-lane highway stretching from Crumpler in McDowell County to Ghent in Raleigh County.

Today, after years of planning, ground will finally be broken on the first segment of the Shawnee Parkway. A groundbreaking ceremony will be held at 1:30 p.m. near the border of Mercer and Raleigh counties in the Ghent community, Karen Zamow, a communications officer with the West Virginia Department of Transportation, said.

Gov. Joe Manchin is expected to join local and state officials for today's groundbreaking ceremony

A grassroots effort to build the Shawnee Parkway began in 1986. The road is proposed to extend 21.7 miles from Ghent in Raleigh County where it will continue through Mercer County until reaching the Crumpler community in McDowell County where it is then proposed to connect with the King Coal Highway.

"It's been a long time coming to get this section going," Mercer County Commission President Joe Coburn, also a member of the Shawnee Parkway Authority board, said. "As you know, that road hits Mercer County in three or four different places. It will open up (the area), and make it closer for people passing into it. It will also open up McDowell County for people coming through there."

Coburn said the Shawnee Parkway also will extend near the Indian Ridge system of the Hatfield-McCoy Recreation Trail.

It will benefit Mercer County by the Hatfield-McCoy Trails being located near there."

Coburn said the first segment of the road to be constructed in Ghent will bring the scenic corridor close to the Mercer County border.

The Shawnee Parkway is planned as a two-lane 55 mph highway, and will connect with the King Coal Highway near Crumpler in McDowell County.

Zamow said the Shawnee Parkway has been in the planning stages for about 20 years.

"This is the first section to be constructed," Zamow said. "It is 1.26 miles."

Zamow said Marvin Murphy, a state highway engineer, will represent the DOH at today's ceremony.

According to earlier reports, the proposed routing of the parkway will attempt to mimic the old county Route 1 along the Mercer and Wyoming county line before connecting with Interstate 73/74 at Crumpler in McDowell County.