

78,000 have biked new N. Idaho trail

COEUR D'ALENE — A new 73-mile strip of winding asphalt is becoming a top draw for bicyclists in northern Idaho.

The Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes drew at least 78,000 riders in its inaugural season, according to estimates from the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation.

"This is becoming a real bicycle destination," said Bill Scudder, the state's manager of the trail. "It's going to get a little bigger all the time."

The Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes was built over a decommissioned railbed from Mullan to Plummer.

Under the trail's asphalt are toxic remnants from the days when the route was used to haul heavy metals. But in the distance, riders can see clear mountain streams, dark cedar forests and quaint little towns.

Rider demographics have not been tracked, but Scudder said about half the visitors appear to be from outside of the region.

Jon Ruggles, president of the Friends of the Coeur d'Alene Trails, said the figure is actually closer to 100,000 cyclists because the state did not have a counter near Harrison, a small town on the south end of Lake Coeur d'Alene.

Ruggles said he calculates that cyclists generated \$5 million for local economies.

The popularity of the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes, along with the success of other trails, is fueling hope that North Idaho could become a national cycling mecca, Ruggles said. Planning is under way for connecting trails between the region's major trails, including a possible link between Centennial Trail and the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes.

"We're developing into the next Moab," Ruggles said, referring to the southern Utah cycling hotspot. "The potential is there, absolutely."