

Additional Public Comments Received by Email

"I won't be able to attend tomorrow night's meeting but wanted to share my input through email.

These are issues that are really important to me:

- Protecting threatened and endangered species - particularly plant species.
- Protecting Dry prairie, oak opening, and oak savanna remnants.
- Protecting habitat of protected species - especially snakes.

Management techniques that are especially important are:

- invasive species control, use of pesticides to accomplish this is very important for this to be effective.
- prescribed burning is extremely important
- daylighting the open grown oaks and reducing the abundance of tree species that are not typically abundant in oak opening communities.

Here's a little blurb if its helpful:

While once common, oak openings and oak woodlands are now among the most threatened plant communities in the world, with less than 0.01% of the original plant community remaining. Encroachment by woody plants and shrubs due to fire suppression has degraded these areas, and restoration is necessary. Restoring the oak opening will require restoring the vertical structure by decreasing the abundance of non-oak trees and shrubs. "Daylighting" the open grown oaks will require the removal of trees species that are not typically abundant in oak opening communities, including black walnut, cherry, elm, box elder and others. Care should be taken in the removal of these trees to avoid damaging the oaks. Shagbark hickory trees will generally remain unless the trees are crowding the white and bur oaks. Invasive shrubs such as buckthorn, honeysuckle, barberry, multiflora rose, prickly ash, and autumn olive, should be removed. Yearly treatment and removal of invasive shrubs will be necessary for a number of years, but re-establishment of prescribed burning will also aid in the restoration of the oak opening.

I value hiking, and i'm generally fine with sharing trails with bikers, but it does get annoying when there are a lot of bikers and you keep having to move over to let them pass. I also think that the blufflands should be protected from over-creation of bike trails. If new bike trails are placed they should be only allowed in areas that wont harm the environment. Rogue trails should be blocked off/removed.

I think that park and rec should hire out subcontractors such as Coulee Region Ecoscapes or Ku le Region Forestry to increase the amount of invasive species removal and prescribed burning that is completed.

Potential ideas for accomplishing these goals include:

- Identify dry prairie/oak savanna restoration areas with 1937-1940s aerials, available for free: <http://www.sco.wisc.edu/whaifinder/whaifinder.html>
- Coordinate with WDNR to identify areas of mapped rare species to prioritize areas of invasive species management, and encourage others to survey for and map other rare species that are not yet mapped.
- Coordinate Bike user efforts with conservation efforts by making the rule that all bike trails must also function as permanent Rx burn breaks. Design burn areas NOW for safe efficient large scale burning. Consult with dnr and possible future subcontractors to design this.
- When identifying new bike/hiking trails/burn breaks, prioritize the location in areas that have already been disturbed. Often trails have already been made by previous owners, therefore new ones/new environmental impacts do not need to be made. These can often easily be seen using the hillshade base map on the la crosse county gis

Thanks for listening and for considering my input. Let me know if you have any questions."

“Although I'll be unable to attend tonight's meeting, I'd nevertheless like to express my thoughts on the subject of increased bluff land access for the purpose of off-road cycling, a.k.a "mountain biking." I'm perhaps fairly representative of three increasingly common demographics in La Crosse, all of which can benefit from increased access in terms of health and fitness.

First, I'm middle-aged, unfortunately, and, as such, particularly vulnerable to both physical and mental decline. As you might know, once we pass the age of 40, we lose about four percent of our muscle mass every decade--if, that is, we do nothing to compensate for that loss. I also have knee problems that prevent me from running (which I did for 20-25 years, for better or worse), or even from walking. Bicycling, on the other hand, has allowed me remain meaningfully active--probably because of its lack of joint impact and limited range of motion at the knee. Off-road cycling, in particular, has proven valuable to me because of its inherently aerobic *and anaerobic* qualities. Also, as you might know, studies have shown that our brains and minds benefit as well from forms of cardiovascular activity that demand intense mental focus--as off-road cycling certainly does.

Second, I'm intrinsically predisposed to overweight and obesity. I was an obese child (back when there were only an average of two or three obese kids in every classroom, compared to today's eight or nine), and I struggled with my weight for many years thereafter. Off-road cycling--again, because of its combined aerobic and anaerobic nature, and, again, because of its unique tendency to demand the participant's attention and interest--has helped me immeasurably to become and remain both lean and fit. A still-increasingly overweight and obese population in La Crosse, the members of which will also inevitably experience orthopedic problems similar to my own, could benefit greatly from additional opportunities to take advantage of off-road cycling.

Finally, as you might have guessed, I stand among those many who have grown increasingly concerned with their health and healthspans. The science is fairly settled at this point that cardiorespiratory fitness is largely determinative of health--at least in terms of the chronic diseases partially within our control as responsible individuals. Like me, most of us are simply not capable of running (or, in many cases, even hiking or walking) into middle-age and beyond to maintain our health. Of course, our area offers many road cycling opportunities, as well. But the road cyclist literally places his or her life in the hands of innumerable others who have little or no interest in his or her well-being. Off-road cycling, by contrast, has emerged as a relatively safe and, again, uniquely effective means of taking personal responsibility for one's own health.

My interests in off-road cycling might be different from those of some others. But I'm sure you'll agree that health and recreation are closely intertwined. So, as public servants, I hope you'll consider the extent of our opportunities to improve our health and fitness when confronting issues related to increased access for off-road cycling.”

“Just wanted to say I think you did as good a job as anyone possibly could have at diffusing the tension and apprehension in the public hearing tonight. I was very impressed and swayed by your delivery.

Keep fighting the buckthorn!!”

“Thanks for the great job you and others did explaining your plans for creating a 10-year management plan for Bluff and Marsh Lands in the La Crosse Area.

I’ve lived in the La Crosse area since 1986. My primary interest in outdoor recreation is cross country skiing, canoeing and biking. I am a member and board member of the Friends of the La Crosse Marsh and I recently joined Friends of the Blufflands. My comments below are from me personally and not related to my involvement in these two groups.

With respect to survey you handed out at the meeting last night, I am unable to recommend a specific trailhead improvement “area.” I would just provide this potential guidance. I would only recommend improvements in portions of the trail system than can handle the additional use that would come with creating larger parking lots or bathrooms. With respect to parking lots or bathrooms, I think you would need larger parking lots first to justify having the bathrooms. I have a second concern that I mentioned to you last night. I am wondering if some existing “approved” or “marked” trails are placed in areas that are prone to serious erosion, are placed in environmentally sensitive areas or other site-specific factors that warrant them being redesigned or removed from the “official” trail system. Lastly, if rogue trails area becoming a problem, then there needs to be greater communication with trail users with signs and with more vigilant monitoring/enforcement.

With respect to the La Crosse Marsh, I believe there are portions of the existing trails that should actually be removed. These would be the “dead end” trails that were part of the original access route for the well heads placed in the marsh over 100 years ago. I also believe the trail running east of Lang Drive through the marsh needs to be relocated to the north so that it borders the La Crosse River on its south side. This will require the purchase of private property and some other trail modifications (raised boardwalks) in areas were the existing ground surface elevation is low. You will recall that last year there were major periods of time when this portion of the marsh trail was under water and not usable. If we look at future climate predictions, it is likely that we will continue to see larger precipitation events that will contribute great flow in the La Crosse River, which will result in increased frequency of over-bank flows and the flooding of the existing trail system in the marsh. We need to start planning for those changes now IMO.

Lastly, I am an avid canoeist and am also involved with a community of paddlers who descend portions or the entire Mississippi River each year. Many of these thru-paddlers need to stop and purchase food and supplies as the pass major communities like La Crosse. There needs to be places where they can pull-out near riverside park so these paddlers can gain better access the business community. This take-out could either be alongside riverside park or perhaps at the mouth of the La Crosse River where there is an existing take-out. However, I seriously believe a floating dock is warranted at this location due to changes in water level fluctuations and sedimentation problems that arise below the old trestle bridge. An improved take-out here would also be welcomed by those paddlers who descend or ascend the La Crosse River.

Thanks again for coordinating this meeting and an opportunity to provide these comments.”

“I’d like to share my perspective as an avid outdoor enthusiast and 10+ year resident of La Crosse. My family (wife and two kids ages 11 and 7) hikes, bikes, cross-country skis, and canoes, here in La Crosse and elsewhere. We organize our non-working lives around outdoor recreation.

Attached is a map of one of my mountain bike rides here in La Crosse. What you see highlighted in blue is what I’d describe as our easiest MTB trails (probably an intermediate/blue level compared to other trails in the upper midwest). It’s about 3 1/2 miles in total, and is basically exactly the same as it was when I moved here in 2006. In fact, all the MTB trails are basically exactly the same as they were in 2006, with the exception of a new section of the Still Hill trail, and the Rotary Vista Trail, which isn’t really a MTB trail, but more of a shared-use

access trail bikes may use to access upper Hixon. What's more, Vista is such a long, uphill trail, which so many steep sections, that it is only rideable by fairly strong, experienced bikers (my 7 year old really struggles on it, and he no slouch when it comes to mountain biking). Everything else is just too difficult and technically challenging to be accessible to any but the most experienced riders.

The fact that La Crosse, with it's really just amazing amount of easily-accessible open space, is in essentially the same place as it was in 2006 when it comes to mountain biking facilities is an enormous embarrassment. I can't stress that enough: we should be embarrassed at our lack of mountain biking facilities. In our area, I have seen the creation and expansion of amazing MTB facilities at Levis Mound (near Black River Falls), CAMBA (in the Cable/Hayward/Bayfield area), Lebanon Hills and Elm Creek (Twin Cities), pretty much all of Duluth, with their integrated trail system, and Copper Harbor. This is happening all over the country.

There is no reason whatsoever that La Crosse couldn't have the same type of trail system that Duluth has created, and that is drawing people to both visit the area and live there. I'm honestly not sure why we haven't already started on such an endeavor. If one is to believe the rumors, it is because of a combination of virulent anti-bike sentiment in the area, and incredibly short-sighted land-use acquisition through State-funded channels that arbitrarily prohibit biking as an allowable activity.

Whatever the reason, my perspective is that we in La Crosse are already 10 years too late. Even if the City embraces a Duluth-inspired approach to trail improvements, my 11-year year old (who is on the local youth MTB team) probably won't be able to ride those trails prior to graduating from high school. When we want to ride as a family, we are forced to travel to do so. What a shame. If we were deciding where to move as a young family today, I'd probably decide to move to Duluth instead of La Crosse to take advantage of better outdoor recreation opportunities. Think of all the young families making that same decision right now.

I suppose that I should be excited that the City is asking for input on a 10-year management plan, but the fact is that I'm pretty sure I was in meetings for similar input 5 years ago, and I know that there were meetings on these topics 5 and 10 years prior to that. What were the outcomes of those planning processes? From what I can see as an outdoor enthusiast, not much. We've got a couple new trails in Hixon (one of which is ridiculously off-limits to bikers, despite it being built like a MTB trail), and some new, not-super-well-designed trails on MVC properties, but other than that, it's really just the same trails we started hiking and biking on in 2006. Many were not well-designed in the first place, and I think it is safe to say that all suffer from a lack of maintenance.

Whatever the City decides to do with its (our) forests, I certainly hope that accommodations and facilities for mountain bikers are given a level of priority on par with other user groups. Not only is building trails for bikers a good idea, there is no justifiable reason to keep bikers off any trail open to hikers. I also hope that work begins on creating these trail networks immediately. Summer 2017 trail building season should be a busy one here in La Crosse!"

Dear Sunshine ~

I just wanted to say thank you for the role you play in our community. It's a blessing to have someone with your background, expertise, & passion in this position. Thank you for wanting to protect & conserve the natural beauty that is so unique to this Driftless Region and help educate us, the community, on how to do the same!

We were drawn to this area because of the beauty & outdoor recreational opportunities, and since moving here last summer, I can count on 2 hands the number of days someone in our family ~~hasn't been~~ ^{hasn't been} on the trails. We are outside year round. We enjoy hiking, trail running, mt. biking, xc skiing, snowshoeing, kayaking, & fly fishing. I take my kids on numerous "treasure hunts" in Hixon as well, and am building on their innate love to be outdoors with a knowledge that will hopefully lead into a better appreciation of the environment and a desire to protect these areas we love.

I believe the key to this process of passing this desire to love & protect our natural resources to future generations lies in the amount of recreational opportunities and trails that are available. I know you & your department realize this but also face some challenges moving forward. I'm thankful you were willing to host a public forum a few weeks ago and are planning to host more in the future. My hope is that this community can come together to see our common bond of caring for this region and what makes it beautiful and unique, while simultaneously being able to meet the needs of the variety of recreational user groups.

Thanks again for all you do!

P.S. I'm volunteering at the Mtb. Clinic on the 24th for Bee Week! Stop by if you're interested or just to say hi! ☺



THE BLUFFLANDS

A Plan For Conservation and Recreation Throughout the La Crosse - La Crescent Region

March 30, 2017

Re: The City of La Crosse Parks and Recreation bluff and marshland master planning process, and the Environmental Leadership Forum

City of La Crosse Board of Park Commissioners:

The following letter is meant to show our support for the process that your staff and other interested parties have taken to draft a strategic plan for the bluff and marshland areas of the City of La Crosse. Members of The Blufflands Coalition have been involved in similar activities for over 20 years in the La Crosse area and are energized by this process. At our latest meeting on March 29th, 2017 a motion was made and seconded to show official support from The Blufflands Coalition to the Board of Park Commissioners for this process. We have not specifically shown official support for the actual document yet, as the current draft is fluid based on significant recent public input. That official support of the document will be considered at a later date.

The Blufflands Coalition is very excited to work with you in a support role for your actions in these historically, economically, socially and environmentally important areas of the City of La Crosse.

Sincerely;

Charlie Handy

Interim Staff, The Blufflands Coalition