

# Grandad Bluff Park Trail Update

Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup> 2020

City Hall 6:00pm



# History of Bluffland Management Plans

## Past Management Plans

2005 Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan (*rescinded in 2014*)

2001 La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program – Master Plan renewed in 2008 (*expired in 2012*)

## Current Management Plans

Hixon Forest 2014-2020 Management Alternatives & Vegetation Inventory

2016 Bluffland Coalition Regional Plan (La Crosse County)

City of La Crosse Park & Recreation Department Strategic Plan

Environmental Leadership Forum Ten year Land Management Plan

## Future Management Plan

City of La Crosse Bluffland Master Plan



**2005 Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan (*rescinded in 2014*)**- New trails should not be built in existing Hixon Forest, due to the present abundance of trails, and potential complications because of the slopes. If new trails are ultimately deemed necessary, they should only be developed in disturbed communities...

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has identified a gradual change in the nature of recreational use, related in part to the changing demographics of the country. The popularity of activities such as mountain biking, snowmobiling and all-terrain vehicle use continues to expand, while many other activities seem to be decreasing in popularity. This in turn affects how public lands are managed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that use of the park is increasing. ...ultimate authority rests with the Park Board.

The greatest threats to the health of the forest are exotic species, an uncontrolled deer herd, and the lack of prescribed fire.

Additional trails should not be approved on non-disturbed or relatively non-disturbed lands. Reconstruction, rerouting, and other maintenance activities on pre-existing trails shall be allowed.

**La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program – Master Plan** - The Vision of the LBPP was to create an eight-mile long natural park adjacent to the City that would protect natural resources, created recreational opportunities for the public and provide an area for environmental education activities and allow for restoration of the irreplaceable bluffland environment. – La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program

**Hixon Forest 2014-2020 Management Alternatives & Vegetation Summary**- Currently at trail locations there are limits parking areas to accommodate 10-15 cars. These locations are adjacent to existing country roads. – La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program

**Alternative 2: Access lower Grandad Bluff and Emergency Responders** – This trail would start in the middle parking lot on Grandad Bluff Road through cover types #4 (old scenic quarry), #2 and #5, and terminate at the lower parking lot on Bliss Road. This unofficial trail already exists in this area. A new trail design would direct users to a safer maintained trail and allow erosion control measures to be placed on unofficial trail to reduce soil erosion.

**Remarks Stand 2**– An old quarry trail runs from the bottom southwest corner uphill to the northeast, to the old quarry, and could be cleaned up and used. An exit/entrance point off of Ebner Coulee Road would make this stand more accessible for recreation.

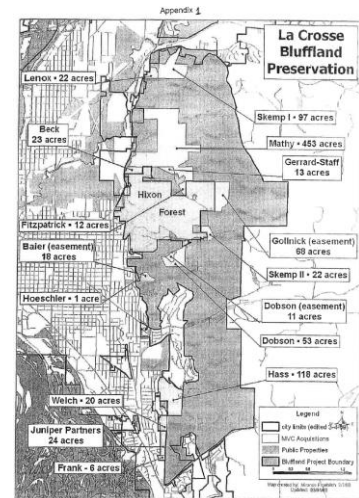
**Remarks Stand 4** – There is a trail (looks Unofficial) that starts near the parking lot and come down from the ridge road to this stand, it switches back twice, and look like an old quarry trail that heads downhill from this stand... this are could be developed for more intensive recreation – people were already using it at the time of this inventory.

**Remarks Stand 5** – it would be nice to limit the litter in this area. A hiking trail below grandad cliffs could be constructed if desired.

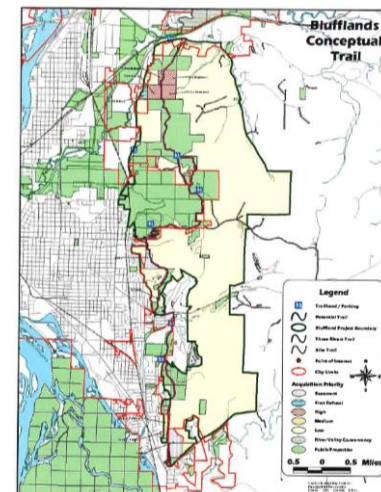
**2016 Bluffland Coalition Regional Plan (La Crosse County)** - Just over half of survey respondents noted that their favorite recreation site in the region is Hixon Forest (57%). The second most popular site was Grandad Bluff Park (18%), which is part of Hixon Forest. Respondents chose these locations due to their opportunities for hiking, ease of access and beautiful views. Approximately 90% of respondents have been to Hixon Forest and/or Grandad Bluff within the last 12 months.

One of the proposed new sites for biking trails is a parcel that adjoins the Hixon Forest property south of Grandad Bluff Road. When updating its master plan for the Forest, the City of La Crosse should consider new shared-use trails on the adjacent portion of the existing park.

**Environmental Leadership Forum Ten year Land Management Plan** - A voting process was used during the public input session on the 15th of March 2017. Attendees were given a list of the following areas and asked to vote for their top three locations. The details of the potential management conducted at these locations were described by the presentation. The top three trail design areas through this process include. Grandad Bluff (South), Mathy Tract and the Marsh (special projects)



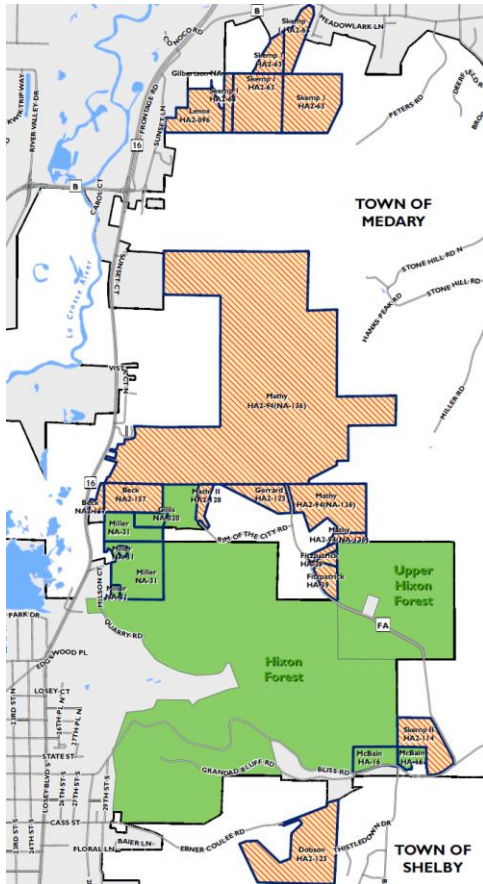
2008 Bluffland Master Plan



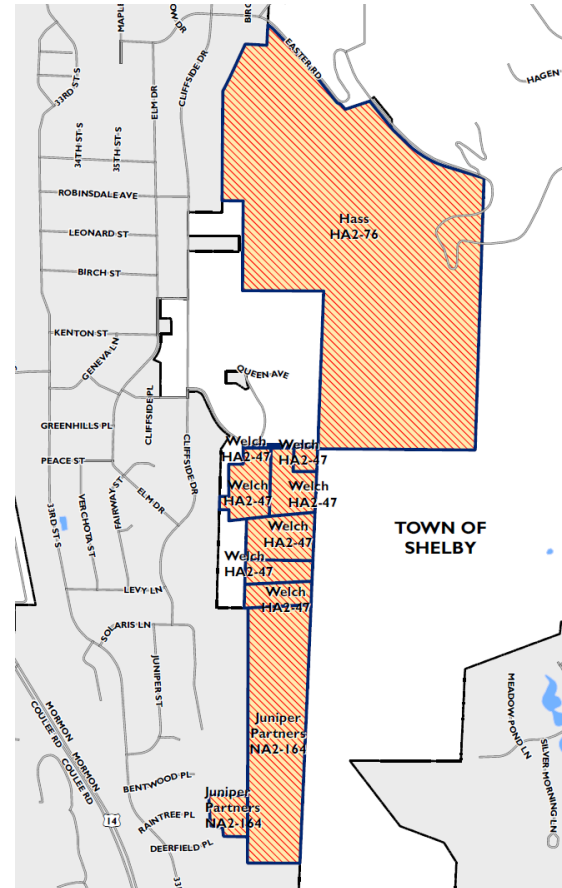
# Future City of La Crosse Bluffland Master Plan

## City owned Bluffland Properties

### North properties



### South Properties



## Master Plan tentative focus areas

### Natural Resource Management

Prairies, forest, invasive species, and wildlife

### Recreation Management

Future trail development and maintenance

Trailhead improvement opportunities

### Restoration Management

Forest and Prairie restoration

Conservation and protection of undisturbed lands

Ecologically of sensitive areas

Land Acquisition

Trailhead improvement opportunities

Hike only/limited use City owned land - 788 acres

Shared use land – 841 acres

Hixson Forest 590 acres

Grandad Bluff Park 125 acres

Upper Hixon 126 acres

## Trails today

Hike only trails today 11.7 miles

Shared use trails 17.02 miles



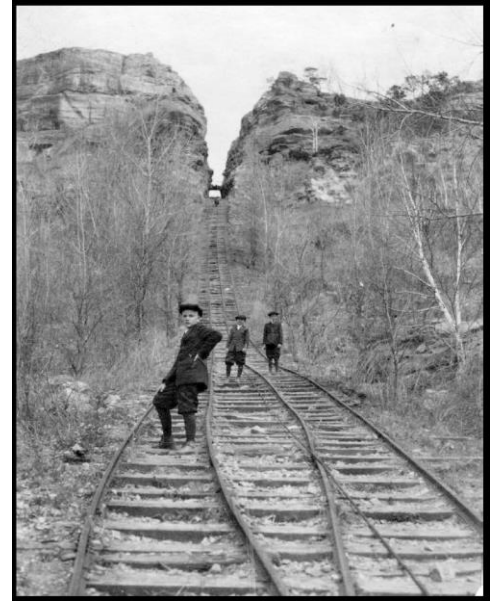
# Past and Current use of Grandad Bluff Park

1800's Bluff Quarrying

1950's trail system

2020- rogue/social trails, invasive species, spray paint/vandalism

Rogue trails approximate today 2-3 miles "rogue", unplanned social trails



- 1,000 square feet of graffiti removed in 2019
- 500 hours of volunteer time spent cleaning up property
- 2,000 pounds of trash removed



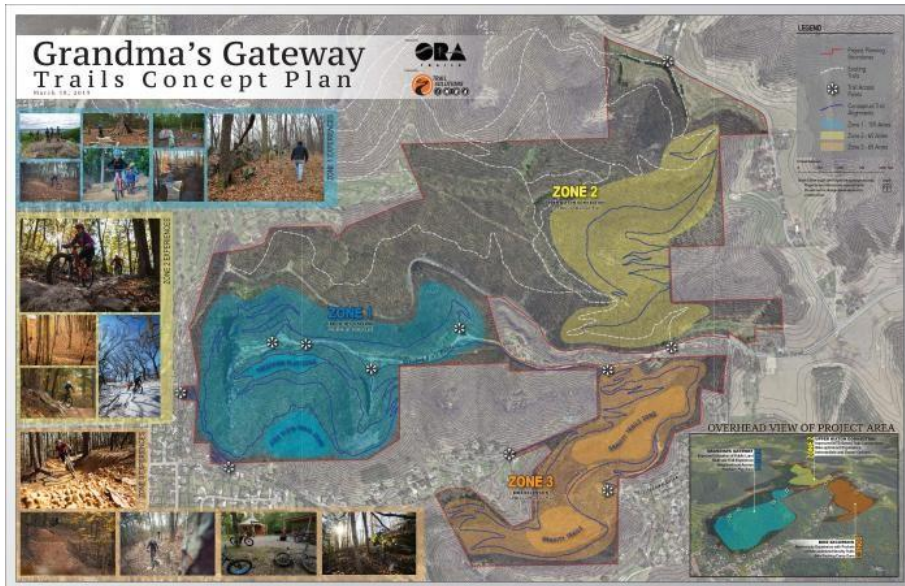


# IMBA Grant award September 28<sup>th</sup> 2017

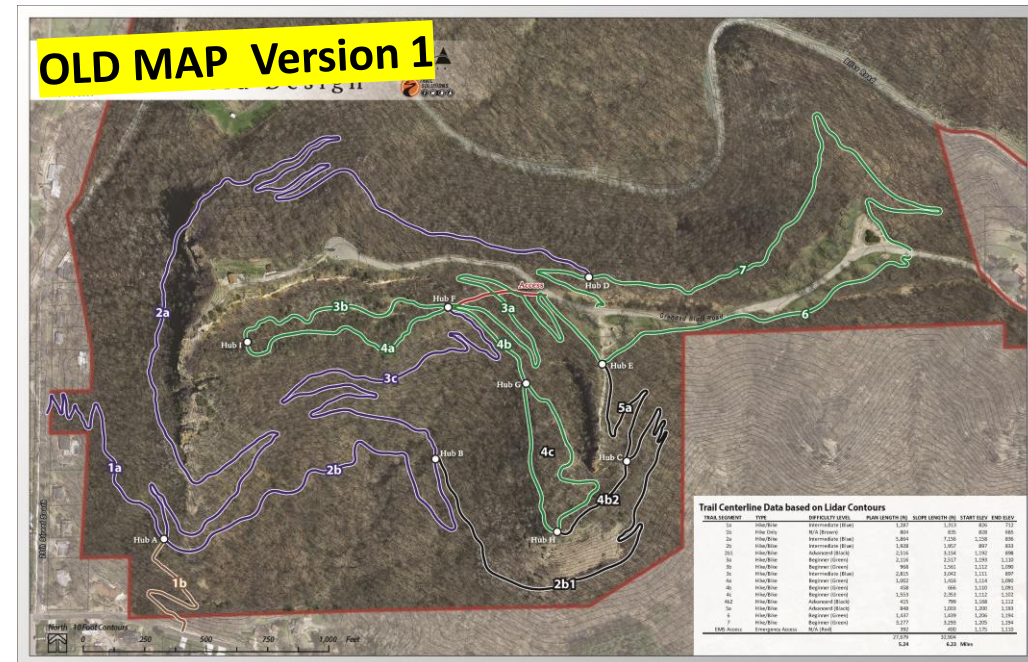
Planning Grant from International Mountain Biking Association

## Grant Deliverables

- Trail planning & design development
- Creation of trail specifications
- Bid documents



**Field Design 11/11/2018 & 5/19-5/23/2019 site visits by design team for a collective field design time in La Crosse 145 hours**  
When the conceptual design is refined in the field and the corridor flagged. The flagged alignment represented a corridor through which the trail would go, but not its precise location. Providing a corridor rather than a tight alignment at this step allowed for flexibility in the field to adjust the tread within the corridor to highlight various desired experiences and minimize environmental impacts. For example, winding the trail between trees provided a more intimate nature experience while also adding challenge.



## International Mountain Bicycling Association

IMBA Trail Solutions has experienced on more than 400 trail projects worldwide. IMBA staff excels at planning, design, construction and management of trail systems that provide high-quality sustainable experiences while simultaneously minimizing maintenance needs and environmental impacts.

## IMBA Designers

**Steve** - Civil engineering background focusing on stormwater management and stream restoration. Key team member in design development, master planning, project management, and construction implementation. Steve's knowledge of low impact design, erosion and sediment management helps ensure regulatory compliance and natural resource protection in a variety of trail projects.

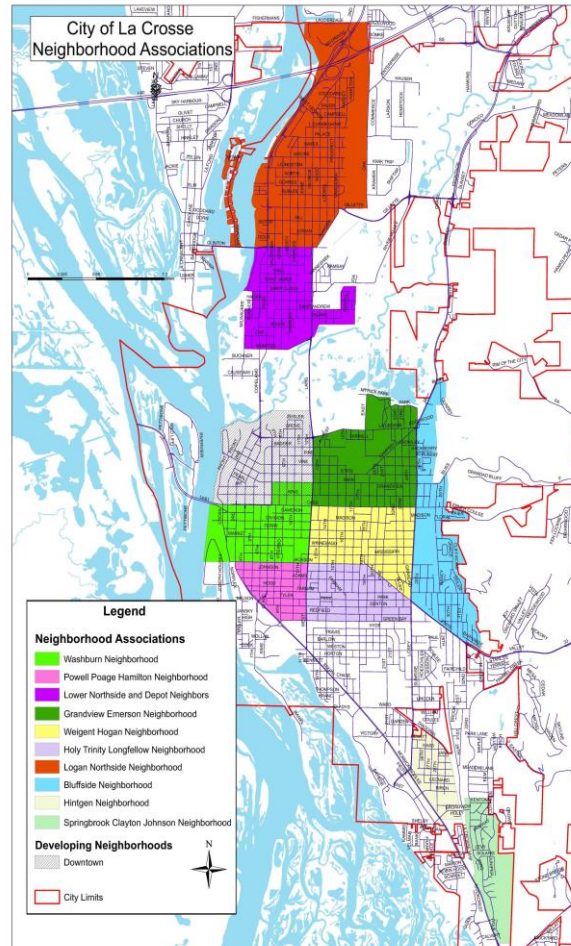
**Rich** - Has led trail projects, done assessments, and taught trail building clinics in 33 U.S. states and eight countries. Richard's depth of experience includes teaching the latest in trail design, construction, and management practices. His expertise is in the creation of multi-use trail systems that accommodate a variety of trail users and skill levels. Richard presents on and often consults on the topic of sustainable, risk-managed trails.

**Mike** - Mike was born and raised on bikes in Wisconsin. He received his degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Mike has extensive experience in resort and recreation planning, resort/facility capacity analysis, trail network and facility layout, and detailed site design and grading plans. His project management experience includes master plan processes, public outreach plans, project stakeholder partnerships, federal/state/local permitting, project implementation, and project budget oversight

# History of the trail plan for Grandad Bluff Park

## Neighborhood Associations

The City is very active in neighborhood planning and revitalization efforts. The City's intent in its neighborhood planning is to strengthen residential areas and to encourage people to live and to stay within the City of La Crosse. The City also hopes that stronger neighborhoods will help promote new business development and business retention



## Grandad Bluff Park Trail Plan - Project Timeline

- 8/28/18 The City of La Crosse & Outdoor Recreation Alliance announced as an award recipient of a trail planning grant from IMBA (International Mountain Biking Association)
- 11/11/18 First site visit from International Mountain Biking Association representatives to identify potential trail project locations
- 11/12/18 ORA meeting with Bluffs Neighborhood leaders and several neighbors
- 1/28/19 Bluffs Neighborhood Committee Meeting with ORA presentation on general vision and goals of the planning grant
- 2/21/19 Parks Board Meeting – Coulee Region Climbers Association presentation for Grandad's Bluff Park
- 3/28/19 Parks Board approval for the Grand Cleanup and 2020 Capital Improvement requests mentioning the project
- 4/20/19 Grand Cleanup Event to clean the area and introduce advocates to the concept of the plan. 350 hours and 6000lbs of trash removed, 800 square feet of graffiti removed, and 1 acre of buckthorn removal.
- 5/19-5/23/2019 IMBA trail designers second site visit and field design of the trail project.
- 6/24/19 Bluffs Neighborhood Association presentation on limiting bikes in Hixon Forest
- 7/18/19 Parks Board Meeting Status Update on Trail Plan for Grandma's Gateway
- 8/13/19 Environmental Leadership Forum Grandad Bluff climbing presentation (included discussion and of Grandma's Gateway)
- 10/21/19 Environmental Leadership Forum Grandma's Gateway Trail Update
- 11/19/19 Environmental Leadership Forum Grandma's Gateway site tour and hike
- 11/21/19 Parks Board Meeting – ORA Request to raise funds for Grandma's Gateway
- 12/11/2019 Meeting with Neighbors and Council Member Sleznikow
- 1/16/2020 Board of Park Commissioners public meeting to address the request to remove Neighborhood Access Points for the Trail Project. Request denied
- 2/3/2020 City Planning Commission – Property rezoning request for City owned parcels at 129 and 133 29<sup>th</sup> St. S
- 2/4/2020 Judiciary and Administration Committee - Property rezoning request for City owned parcels at 129 and 133 29<sup>th</sup> St. S
- 2/13/2020 Common Council - Property rezoning request for City owned parcels at 129 and 133 29<sup>th</sup> St. S
- 3/9/2020 Project Update presentation – 6:00 p.m. Common Council – 400 La Crosse St.



# Citizen Concerns

*Initial concerns*

Safety - Traffic

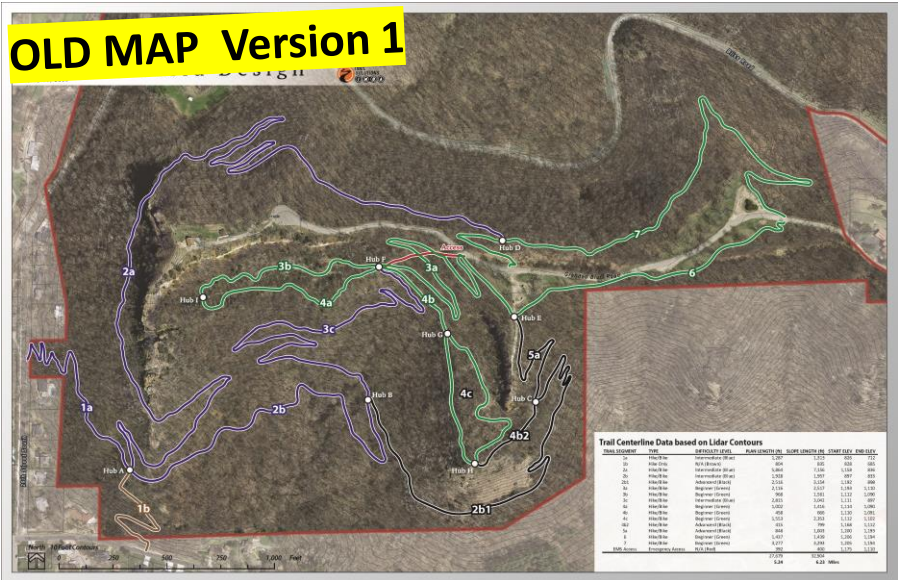
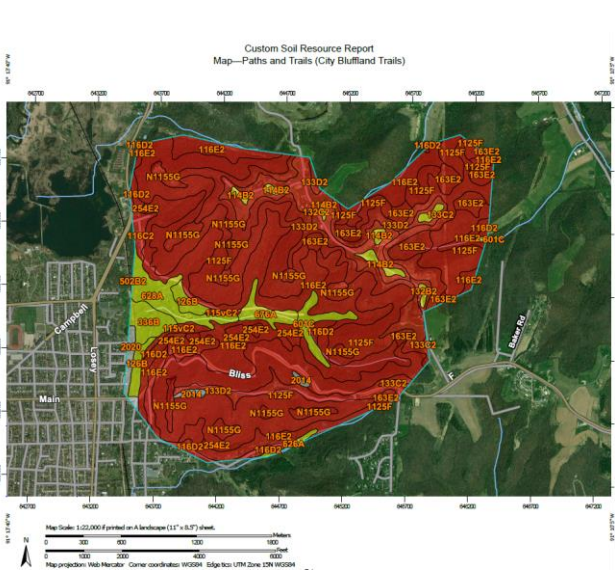
Soil stability

*Evolving concerns*

Hike only/shared use

Plants and sensitive habitat

Signage





# ISG Report

## Soil type & Erosion

### ISG Recommendation

Long-term, high-volume use of similar trails within region have shown that even in soils rated as “severe” for erodibility, with careful management pre, during, and post-construction, erosion is not an issue. Additionally, during construction, soils that are high in sands or silts and therefore more likely to erode would receive a layer of aggregates added to the bench in a process known as “capping.” Capping materials slowly are compressed into the bench with usage and help to stabilize the bench and prevent soil degradation in both dry and wet conditions. Following national and regional management practices of trails, they would be closed these during weather and climate events that would potentially harm the trail. Erodibility of many of the soils in the project area are listed as moderate to severe; however, sustainable trails are designed to minimize the possibility of erosion by creating uninterrupted sheet flow across the trail. Erosion control Best Management Practices (BMPs) as part of trail construction should further minimize erosion on the site. Erosion control BMPs will be addressed in the site construction Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) that would be developed.

*Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines*, by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Trails Division, 2007.

*Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience*, IMBA and Bureau of Land Management, 2017



## Neighborhood Access Safety

### Ebner Coulee Rd – ISG recommendation

Make the trail access points and signage prominent from the road. Consider adding guide signs at the nearest intersections to direct trail users to the correct location, and increase awareness of the trail facilities for vehicles. Parking should continue to be allowed. Parked cars have the effect of traffic calming on narrow neighborhood streets. The City and ORA Trails should continue educating the public prior to, during, and after construction of the access point and trails to create awareness and encourage proper use of the access points and trails.



## 29TH ST ACCESS



### NEIGHBORHOOD ACCESS POINT

PLEASE BE RESPECTFUL OF THE  
NEIGHBORHOOD AND PARK AT THE  
TRAILHEAD ON  
3400 GRANDAD BLUFF ROAD

City of LaCrosse  
Parks, Recreation & Forestry

608-789-7533  
129 29th ST SOUTH

### •Attention Trail Users•

### PLEASE AVOID USING TRAILS WHEN WET

Please only use trails when dry  
Damage from footprints and tire  
ruts ruin our trails  
If you are leaving tracks please  
turn back

City of LaCrosse  
Parks, Recreation & Forestry

### 29th St S. - ISG recommendation

The trail access point should be favor towards the south of center of the City property. The exact location should be reviewed in the field to ensure proper sight distance along the road. Moving the access point to the north of center causes southbound sight distance to be reduced. Make the trail access points and signage prominent from the road. Consider adding guide signs at the nearest intersections to direct trail users to the correct location, and increase awareness of the trail facilities for vehicles. Parking should continue to be allowed. Parked cars have the effect of traffic calming on narrow neighborhood streets. The City and ORA Trails should continue educating the public prior to, during, and after construction of the access point and trails to create awareness and encourage proper use of the access points and trails.



# Sustainable trail standards



## Aspen Trail in Hixon Forest Built to BMP Standards

shared use trail with the goal of handling hiking, running, biking & snowshoeing as the main uses of this trail.

**Appropriate for Shared Use:** Bike-optimized features can be appropriate for shared trails depending on their amplitude and frequency. A small feature placed strategically within the trail corridor would be enjoyed by riders but could go unnoticed by other trail users.

**Not Appropriate Features for Shared Use:** highspeed features, jumps, large drops, elevated structures, or any feature where the rider can not safely yield.

## IGS Recommendation

The design and construction standards referenced in the RFQ are the most current and nationally recognized trail building guidelines and are satisfactory for the proposed project.

Additional resources and BMP language that could be considered for inclusion or noted as additional guidelines include:

*Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines,*

by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Trails Division, 2007.

*Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience*

IMBA and Bureau of Land Management, 2017

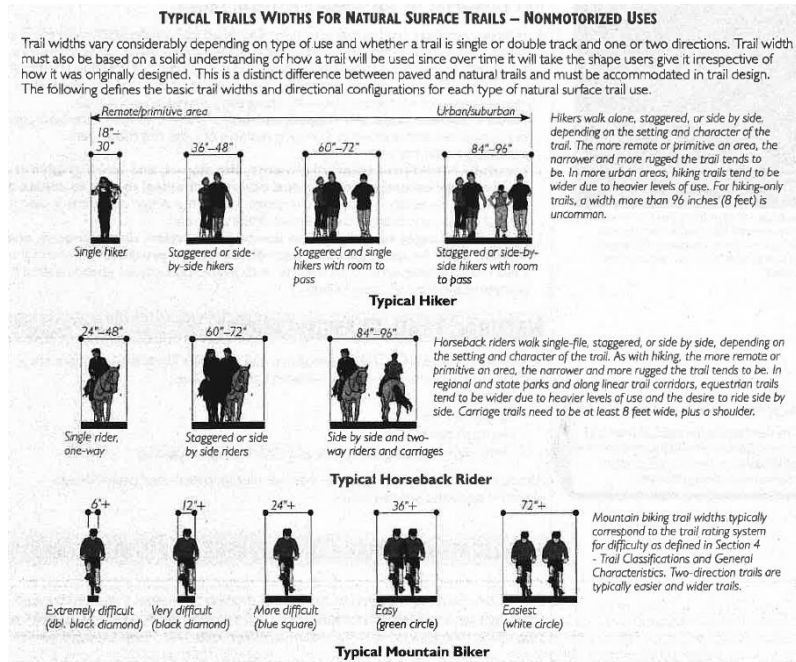


## ASPEN TRAIL BEFORE BMP





# Shared Trail Use



## Question – American Trails

Could you tell me the typical width of a shared-use trail? The reason is, my city is proposing to build mountain bike trails on a very steep hillside above several residences. The trail building company calls these multi-use but the widths seem too narrow to safely accommodate hikers and bikers at the same time. The tread widths are 30" and 24".

## Answer

The best answer that you will get for how wide a trail should be is "It depends." There are multiple criteria that are needed to take into consideration for a sustainable trail design. Some criteria are soil type, geography, terrain, watershed size, use, level of difficulty, tread type, etc.

Assuming the real question is if it is reasonable to have a mountain biking and hiking shared use trail width be 24" – 30", the answer is "Yes, it can be reasonable, assuming that the trail is designed in a sustainable way that takes into consideration all of the factors that come into play in trail design". If the trail goes straight up the hill, it is not well designed and should be questioned for a lot of reasons beside just the trail width. If the trail meanders along the hillside as it slowly climbs up the hill, it is probably a well-designed trail.

- Public spaces can foster greater tolerance, improve public health and strongly influence a person's sense of social value and belonging. The intentionality of how you plan, design and measure for these outcomes is critical for building more inclusive and healthy places.
- Shared-use trails best accommodate the needs of the broadest array of users, whereas single- or restricted-use trails tend to concentrate users, sometimes creating negative social impacts due to crowding.
- Sharing helps build a trail community. Visitors are encouraged to cooperate in order to preserve and protect a common resource, and encountering other types of users on a trail helps to establish mutual respect and inspire courtesy.
- Shared-use trails take better advantage of available space and trail mileage. Quite simply, they provide more trail for everyone to enjoy.
- Systems with shared-use trails require fewer miles than would be necessary to accommodate trails for individual user groups, and therefore have less impact on the surrounding ecosystem.
- Shared-use trails support the most visitors. Trails that lead to specific major destinations, such as waterfalls and scenic vistas, should be considered for shared use, since most visitors will be drawn to the point of interest regardless of the mode they'll use to get there. Likewise, trails that serve as major travel corridors can be more efficient when shared.

Shared Use trails allow two or more distinct user groups to access a trail, and have a number of advantages that have made them popular among trail manager and users.

## SHARE THE TRAIL

**PLEASE EXPECT & RESPECT OTHER USERS**

- STAY ON TRAIL, KEEP SENSITIVE HABITATS SAFE
- KEEP TO RIGHT, PASS ON LEFT, WARN BEFORE PASSING
- PEDESTRIANS & UPHILL TRAFFIC HAS RIGHT OF WAY
- LEAVE NO TRACE, CLEAN UP AFTER YOU AND YOUR PETS



# Plants & sensitive habitat

## Hixon Forest Plant Inventory – Prairie Specific Plants

3 rare prairie plant species identified in project zone

1 rare sedge specie located on prairies identified in project zone

**Trail is strategically designed to go around and not through Grandad Bluff Prairie**



**89 acres of sensitive habitat restored since 2016**  
**862 acres protected since 2002**



**Prohibited/Restricted Invasive Plant Species** - Land is impacted greater than 43% by invasive species

- Japanese Barberry
- Honeysuckle
- Reed canary grass
- Buckthorn
- Black Locust
- Oriental Bittersweet



# Questions from Citizens

- Is it possible for bikes, runners and hikers to share these trails? What is recommended width for shared use trails and what is width on proposed trail plan?
- In regards to the rogue and social trails on the West and South side of Grandad's Bluff, what is the restoration process to remove these trails and repair the existing landscape in order to prevent erosion and make these rogue trails disappear?
- How does the City weigh the rights of individual homeowners against the rights of the public in situations like this? Are there any other examples here in La Crosse where few property owners' desires have been deemed secondary to the desires of the public in general here?
- Would it make sense to have an easy hiking only trail from the overlook for families, older adults, visitors and those people with less abilities and experience?
- When if at all will the trails be off limits? Rain? Winter?
- If someone is seriously injured or worse on the trail who do you call and who assumes liability?
- There doesn't seem to have been an environmental impact study done for this project. Could excavating parts of the bluff and removing plants/trees to create trails lead to increased risks of landslides? This is unknown without a proper geological assessment. Is this assessment going to be done before breaking ground?
- Mr. Odegaard also made the argument that the new trails will be safer than the rogue trails that exist now and so will improve safety. But again, is this based on any evidence? In parks with marked trails, there are always rogue trails that go off of the marked trails. These new designated trails will bring more hikers/bikers to a steep area of the bluffs, which will lead to more people having access to potentially unstable areas just by going off trail a little ways to "explore off the beaten path". We already know that a contributing cause for many of the falls on the bluffs is hikers going off designated trail areas. This action will continue and potentially increase risks because of increased access to steep areas of the bluff.
- Additionally, because our street does not have sidewalks, pedestrians, including those entering and exiting their cars or loading or unloading their bikes, will be forced to walk on the street. With more cars and traffic and more people on the street, the risk of auto-pedestrian/bicycle accidents will assuredly increase. This risk is compounded by the speeding that happens on 29<sup>th</sup> street. In our experience very rarely does anyone drive 25 mph on this road.
- Is it true that a shared – use trail can't be less than a certain width? Does modern trail building account for potential erosion and water control? Do you have any data on home value appreciation following neighborhood level trail development ?
- How long have these plans been in the works and why were owners of property that abuts this are only notified in January?
- I would like to see a connection between this project, Hixon and surrounding communities through a comprehensive trail system/plan. Is this in the works?
- Having seen the new trail markers in Upper Hixon, I'm wondering about plans for overall mapping. Having suggested routes with estimated times would be helpful for new users.
- My question is about safety for hikers on the two trails from the base of the bluff. On the plan they are designated as hike/bike trails but the trails are only 30 inches wide, steep, and open to two way traffic. Collisions between bikers and hikers seem inevitable. Why not designate one trail as hike only and the other as bike only? Going forward let's have some trails designed for hikers by hikers.
- If ORA dissolves who will assume responsibilities?



# Current Plan today

- Eliminate 2A  
(seen on previous map)
- Added hike only segment (2A)
- Land Impact – under 3%
- Looking for ecologist to inspect trail corridor prior to construction
- Miller Bluff  
Future hike only trail design
- Master Plan for City Bluffland properties
- Friends groups

Construction timeline -May 20<sup>th</sup> – October 2<sup>nd</sup>

