

July 17, 2024

To: La Crosse Board of Park Commissioners
From: Marge Loch-Wouters

I am an avid hiker and outdoorswoman who hikes widely in the Driftless areas of MN, WI and IA. I also publish and share hikes and hiking tips at my *Hiking the Driftless Trails* blog (<https://hikingdriftlesstrails.blogspot.com/2024/07/prairie-hikes-of-summer.html>).

It has come to my attention that the Board is considering whether to change the designation of Hixon's Birch trail from hiking only to shared use.

I would respectfully like to ask you to consider leaving the designation as a hiking trail.

As a MN Master Naturalist volunteer and leader of hikes for people who are seeking an easy pace to accommodate recovery from illness or injury, for seniors and for those just who want to enjoy a more mellow nature experience, Hixon's Birch trail has been an important hike that I use often. All of my hikes are guided free of charge.

Easy access to both Birch Point - a prairie in the process of restoration and invasives removal - and Zoerb Prairie, a fully restored prairie has been vital in introducing people to Hixon's remnant prairies and the importance of these fire-dependent eco-systems. Being able to have the portion of the hike on Birch be one that only hikers use has made a real difference in the comfort level of these hikers and their ability to navigate without bikes (except for the first section of the Bicentennial trail to access Birch).

That comfort level, along with access to sweeping views and healthy and recovering prairies, are an important educational component of the hikes I guide. With so few hike-only designated trails in Hixon, this one with access to two of Hixon's prairie gems is worth preserving for those who would be hesitant to hike this trail if shared use bike traffic were part of the experience.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration on this matter.

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