

July 17, 2024

Dear City of La Crosse Board of Park Commissioners,

I'm writing to share my support for converting the Birch Trail to a shared use trail. I've been a resident of La Crosse for 18 years. The first 15 of those years was strictly as a hiker and I took up mountain biking about 3 years ago. As a result, I can see both sides of this issue being both a hiker and a biker myself.

My main impetus for writing this letter is because I became a coach for the Adventure Team this summer. Our goal in Adventure Team is to use the sport of mountain biking to teach area youth character skills and bike skills. I coach a group of 7-8 year olds and many of our group members have never ridden on a mountain bike trail before. Although a few Upper Hixon trails are labeled "easy", some of those "easy" trails are still too difficult for our youngest riders. Since access to either end of the Birch Trail is already shared use, it seems logical to convert the Birch Trail to shared use, allowing our young riders to have access to ride an easy 1 mile educational loop.

There is some concern from hikers about bikers being loud, barreling down trails, and generally disrupting the peacefulness of nature that hikers are looking for. I'm fairly confident that if the Birch Trail is converted to shared use, the primary users will be younger bikers who don't have the strength or speed to move excessively fast. Bikers who are looking for more of a thrill have access to plenty of trails across the street in the Star Wars galaxy system.

One of the main lessons we teach in Adventure Team is to be a respectful trail user. We talk extensively about greeting hikers with a smile and a wave, using bells to make our presence known, yielding to hikers when appropriate, avoiding muddy trails, etc. Exposing bikers to shared use trails starting at a young age creates more conscientious trail users as they mature into adults. I think we can all get behind that mission.

I strongly encourage you to think of the future of our community and provide our young riders with increased access to shared use trails that are at an accessible difficulty level.

In community,



Laura Lauderdale