



Birch Trail Usership Expansion Proposal

Usership Proposal

04.11.2024

The Narrative

The planning team has gathered data, user input, and city staff input to assemble a *proposal* to update the user allowances on the City of La Crosse's Birch Trail. The details of those findings along with a site map for familiarity are found throughout this *proposal*.

The property in scope lies in the northeast portion of Hixon Forest, connecting the Vista Trail and Bicentennial Trail near Highway FA at the top of the ridge. Since this trail was constructed around 2017, the allowed uses of adjacent trails has expanded to include bicycle and hiking traffic. The Birch Trail is an excellent example of a well designed and constructed sustainable trail. The grades are quite gradual, the site lines allow users to see others on the trail, and the construction follows the contours of the hill allowing for minimal erosion and improved user experiences. This trail connects two adjacent shared use trails and is very close to the very popular Upper Hixon Trailhead. The Upper Hixon Trailhead includes a pump track and bike area that is very popular with families and bikers of all ages and abilities. It has proven to be a great place for riders to learn basic skills and improve their abilities. Because of the diverse and varied nature of the terrain of the Driftless area, beginner trails with gradual slopes and achievable lengths are lacking. The Birch Trail would create an excellent opportunity for a short and easy shared use trail experience that takes users into the forest and past wonderful vistas. The trail length is minimal and can be accomplished by many ability levels.

In an effort to improve user experience and continuity of the trail system, while reducing misunderstanding and conflict, it is proposed to change the usership parameters of Birch Trail from hike only to shared use, including bicycles.

The Objectives

- Increase access for bicycles to a consistent and connected network of existing shared use trails
- Provide a great trail experience for beginner and learning riders to enjoy the experience of "in the woods" trails close to an existing and popular shared use trailhead
- Utilize the expansion of users on the Birch Trail highlight the value of savanna and prairie habitats and the work being done to preserve and promote them
- Increase user participation by increasing the usability and appeal of the trails of Hixon Forest.

The Process

- Coordinate with city staff to identify needs and potential solutions
- Evaluate the history, current uses, and opportunities of the site
- ORA Trails Board endorsement of expanding usership to include bikes and strider bikes
- Park Board approval
- Update of signs and maps

