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Community Wellness Partners is a grant under the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership for the counties of the Cottonwood-Jackson-Nobles Counties. Community Wellness Partners works to build opportunities in Cottonwood, Jackson, and Nobles counties to address healthier eating, increased non-motorized transportation, healthier eating and physical activity in childcare, Safe Routes to School, physical activity in schools, and workplace wellness (among many other strategies).

CWP has supported the active living work taking place in Jackson County, Minnesota. The City of Jackson was the first SW Minnesota community to be recognized as a Bike Friendly Community in June 2018. There are miles of paved trails around the community and county, an active living for most of the communities in the county, Safe Routes to School Plans at the schools, and active trail/active living committees. Since 2017, there has been a growing enthusiasm among CWP and the Friends of the Jackson County Trails committee to research and develop an off-road/mountain biking opportunity for everyone to use at Belmont County Park in Jackson County, MN. This is a very fast-growing sport in Minnesota as well as nationally and there are very few opportunities available in the State of Minnesota.

Belmont County Park is relatively primitive at this day in age. CWP promotes walking and bicycling opportunities in our communities. An off-road trail would help achieve this strategy by allowing bikers, hikers, and walkers to occupy the future trail system. The landscape and terrain are ideal for an off-road trail. Friends of the Jackson County Trails has been working diligently, working with contractors to design a trail map with Trail Source, contacting other communities with similar off-road trails, and working with state representation.

The off-road trail plan cost \$7,500 for a 6.2 mile off-road trail design and approximately \$150,000 to construct. In discussion with the Friends of the Jackson County Trails, they concurred the park is underused, and this may be a creative way to utilize the land. We are continuing discussion with county officials, trail committee members, and other influential individuals to utilize in-kind funding, securing fundraising monies and the county committing to some of the need infrastructure.

Minnesota League High School League Racing is an equal opportunity sport. There are very inequities that exist compared to other sports—all genders and ethnicities are welcome to race, there are no tryouts, no benchwarmers, and everyone races.

No other community in SW Minnesota currently has a park system like this one. The Jackson County Commissioners support this project for a variety of reasons. CWP supports this off-road trail project because of the opportunities it will bring to Jackson County, including new/improved healthier lifestyle activities and choices, youth engagement with the outdoors, alternative opportunities for recreation, and improving health equity gaps.

Luke Ewald, Des Moines Valley Health and Human Services, Preventive Health Educator

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