



March 2, 2020

Friends of Jackson County Parks

Friends of Jackson County Trails

Trail Source we has been consulting, designing and constructing natural surface trails throughout the upper Midwest for the past 20 years. During an average construction year we design and build 15-20 miles of new trails.

Several years ago I was contacted by Sam Espy to come to assist him and a local group of citizens to evaluate a park as a site for a natural surface trail. Having driven past Jackson many times and stopping for food and fuel, I was intrigued by the chance to discuss a natural surface trail in the area. Since I was intrigued by the potential, I agreed to come and do a free first visit evaluation.

As we neared the park It became apparent to me that the area is not entirely flat. As we got closer to our destination, I became aware of the beauty of the valley which is where the natural surface trail would be built. We spent several hours walking the area and discussing the vision their group had for the trail and how it would blend in with the park setting.

Many times, when I do an evaluation for new trail, I am also asked to evaluate not only the site but also what the impact will be on the surrounding area, the other user groups in the park, economic impact and social impact of a new trail in an existing park. These are some of the same questions I was asked by Sam and his associates after we completed the design portion of the trail. Following are my thoughts and impressions.

1. **Is the site and soils appropriate:** Short answer is, yes, the site is appropriate and yes the soils are the appropriate type to support a natural surface trail.
2. **What will be the impact on the surrounding area:** The area around the park will see an increase in vehicle traffic. However, many people will also bike from Jackson to the trails so not every user of the trail will also drive a car to the site. I visited with a couple of the landowners in the immediate area and did not hear any resistance to development of trails within the park.
3. **What will the impact be on existing users within the park:** I did not see that there was a specific user group within the park at this time. At one time it appeared that some camping existed as well as previous usage by a local scouting group. At this time, it appears as if the park is not utilized to its fullest capacity and would benefit from having a new user group.

4. **What will the economic impact be on the community:** I will draw from experience in other areas where we have completed trail systems. Crosby MN. This area's economy was damaged dramatically when the iron ore mines closed in the late '60s. This trail system was opened in 2010 and now has about 25,000 visitors each year. Two new restaurants have opened, a microbrew facility has opened, a new group of camper cabins have been built and an old bank building has been converted to a pizzeria and hotel/hostel rooms in the upper level.

Lakeville MN.'s Lake Marion Park was very similar to Belmont Park. Lake Marion Park was a large park but the only area that was used was an area at the very front of the park was used for park programming of softball and soccer. The area behind this area did not have any additional development or usage. Trail Source built 7 miles of trails in this park and currently the usage is approximately an additional 6,000 visitors each year to the park.

5. **What will the social impact be on the community:** I can speak to what has happened in other communities where we have built trails of similar length and features. One of the major impacts on mountain biking in Minnesota has been the introduction of the Minnesota High School League team mountain biking. While the sport is not a sanctioned high school sport, teams are formed in the community and the athletes compete on a team representing the community high school as well as competing as individuals. This activity brings students of all age groups together as well as parents and coaches. Some schools have teams with as many as 30 participants. The ages start at about 12 years of age and up to 18 year old athletes. The High School League also requires all riders to spend several hours each week doing trail maintenance and some light construction. Participating in mountain biking is a lifetime sport. The health of all participants, no matter what age group, is improved. Riders can continue to ride well into late adulthood

In summary, we have found that the addition of a mountain bike trail into an area where properly designed and constructed trails are non-existent has a very positive impact to the community. The trail will provide programming opportunity for the parks department, the trail will allow for a high school mountain bike team to be formed and have a location where they can practice and develop their riding skills. The trail will also have a positive economic impact to the community as riders become aware of the trail and come from outside the area to ride and spend time in the community.

Thank you

Sincerely,



Tim Wegner
Trail Source Owner