

# **First Fridays Club**

## **February 6, 2009**

### **Environment**

- Human Powered Trails (HPT), Mike Charron
  - HPT is a trail system on 3000 acres of shared use trails (hiking, snowshoeing, mountain biking, running, some equestrian) on top of the bluffs, this used to be known as upper Hixon. This is a collaborative project with HPT, Mississippi Valley Conservancy (MVC), and the City of La Crosse. MVC gets land and the easements. The City of La Crosse is looking to make this trail system a city park.
  - This agency is volunteer driven and includes all ages.
  - It started by a group in 2000 who wanted a legal place to Mountain Bike (Biking is not allowed in Hixon Forest, those trails are not sustainable for biking). This group not only wanted to recreate, but give back as well.
  - The International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) taught the volunteers how to build sustainable trails.
  - Hiking is the #1 activity that brings people to the area and 3.4 million people in the 4 state area want a single track experience.
  - HPT is a 501 (c) 3 and the special equipment has been purchased for trail building, in part because of grants from the Community Foundation.
  - HPT and IMBA are looking at a Ride Center concept with La Crosse being the hub to area trails from Neillsville and Black River Forest to the Kickapoo Valley. This is a concept that could attract many tourists to the area. (Like Elroy Sparta trail – which was the 1<sup>st</sup> bike trail in the US).
  - IMBA is creating a design for the area with this concept.
  - The trailhead, by the Weather Station, included a Pump Track or Dirt Park which allows mountain bikers to practice, kids particularly like this attraction.
  - HPT includes a corps patrol and assists authorities with emergencies in the forest as they know the area.
  - Monday nights are trail building nights and anyone is invited to volunteer.
  - Thursday nights are Ladies ride nights.
  - Friday are Intro Rides for those new to Mountain Biking or do not know the trails.
  - There will be 4 trail days that include a cookout from May to September this year and 2 demo days where people can try out bikes from Trek and Giant.
  - HPT is developing its membership and people can become a member for \$20 or 10 hours volunteering.

- They accept donations, and need donations for gas for the equipment, upkeep, etc.
- Contact HPT through their website: <http://www.humanpoweredtrails.com/>
- Coulee Region Trout Unlimited, Eric Rauch
  - This is the regional group of the nation Trout Unlimited organization
  - The driftless area is unlike any other place . . . it has the most cold spring water in the world.
  - The Coulee Region has 700 miles of trout streams
  - Years ago, farming methods caused erosion which led to 10-12 feet of silt in the stream beds which had previously been on top of the bluffs.
  - Trout Unlimited is restoring streams and the species native to those streams by pulling the banks back, filling with rock, and ensuring no future erosion
  - In the four state area, \$10 million per year comes to the driftless area for trout fishing
  - This is an untapped resource, the area has world class fishing and wants to promote that yet remain sustainable
  - The current project is a Coon Creek funded by a governmental grant and the Community Foundation. This will be a permanent fix to recreate the prairie, make the creek sustainable, and eliminate and prevent erosion
  - Volunteers are always needed for scientific/ecological surveys or assisting in the restoration
  - Donations are gladly accepted
  - Contact Trout Unlimited through their website: [info@couleeregiontu.org](mailto:info@couleeregiontu.org)
- Myrick Hixon Eco Park, Jim Gallagher
  - Presents various environmental education programs to 5,000 kids per year.
  - Goals:
    - to get people and kids to understand the regional environment and basic ecology
    - help people understand what to do to preserve the environment
  - Will soon move into the new ecology center
  - The Myrick Hixon Eco Park is merging Hixon Forest Nature Center with Myrick Park Zoo in collaboration with Hixon, the City of La Crosse, and 8 area Rotary Clubs
  - Center will be hub for recreation activities and environmental education
  - It will be a learning campus
    - Nature center
    - Live indigenous animal exhibits
    - Feature learning as well as enjoyment

- Otters will be a key exhibit – they are fun to watch and their habitat is being destroyed
- 2 phases of the projects
  - Phase 1 – the Ecology Center
    - \$2 million project under construction
    - Completion scheduled for May for groups, classes
    - Includes interactive exhibits, multipurpose/meeting rooms, aquarium, nocturnal exhibit, offices, and gift shop
  - Phase 2 – The Zoo
    - Will include an aviary with mostly raptors, a farm exhibit, and indigenous species
    - This is a \$2 million project and in planning
    - Will open zoo exhibits as money permits
    - Goal is to open in 1 year and be complete in 2
- There are lots of volunteer opportunities for trail work, controlling invasive plants, and naturalists
- They continue to accept donations to support the Ecopark
- Contact MHEP at their website: [www.mhecopark.org](http://www.mhecopark.org)