

Mile-loop mountain bike trail blazed in Jefferson County

By Pam Chickering Wilson pchickering@gmail.com | Posted: Monday, June 20, 2016 9:10 am

JEFFERSON — Mountain bikers and hikers now have a new trail option with the completion of a mile-long loop next to the Jefferson County Health and Human Services building.

The trail, finished Thursday evening by a group of volunteers — chief among them members of the Jefferson County Bicycle Club — loops up and around a glacial drumlin and through woods, connecting to the existing paved Glacial River Trail that runs between Jefferson and Fort Atkinson.

The new trail, which does not yet have any signage but already has seen use, is the first of what planners hope eventually will be a network of intersecting trails in that area.

“The county has always owned the property, which is part of the original county farm,” said Kevin Wiesmann, parks operations supervisor for the Jefferson County Parks Department.

“For a long time, folks have felt that this area was underutilized,” Wiesmann said. “Then the idea came up of putting in some trails adjacent to the Health and Human Services Building, where staff could get out and blow off some steam.”

Some avid bikers attended the initial planning meeting for what first was envisioned as a walking trail, and they brought up the idea of the trail serving mountain bikers as well, Wiesmann said.

“There were no mountain bike trails in the county at that time,” he said.

In the spring of 2015, plans began in earnest for the new trail, and work began on the first mile loop, which was finished Thursday night.

“We worked with the International Mountain Biking Association to put the concept for the trail together,” Wiesmann said. Those professionals helped lay out the requirements for an official mountain biking trail and helped to train volunteers from the county.

“Then I and a couple of staff members went out on site and designed and laid out the trails,” Wiesmann said.

That portion of the process was finished this spring, and then it was just a matter of completing the trails with the correct surface, extending the full loop.

The county parks operations supervisor said that the Jefferson County Bicycle Club and its members played a big part in the process, providing not only input and support, but also dedicating countless hours of physical labor to make the trail a reality.

“There must have been 800 hours of labor put into that first mile loop,” Wiesmann said. “We’d have 10 people working on a Saturday for four or five hours at a time.”

On Thursday night, a group of around 20 volunteers got together to complete the final section of trail.

“This was the ninth full work day we had this year, and we had seven or eight of them last year as well,” he said.

The new trail does not yet have signage at its head or where it connects to the Glacial River Trail, but that is planned in the near future, Wiesmann said.

Eventually, plans call for more mountain bike trail loops to be added right in that area, but those plans are on hold for right now as the Jefferson County Parks Department attends to other priority projects.

“We’ll probably pick up those plans again in the fall,” Wiesmann said. “Several other loops have been conceptually designed, and we’ll have to do ground truthing.”

He explained that means getting into the woods and taking into account the location of each rock and tree to see exactly where the trail will run within the bounds of its basic design.

“We walk up and down, back and forth and find out all of the things we want to incorporate into the trail,” Wiesmann said. “We also use a chronometer to figure out the percentage slope, because we need to lay the trail out accounting to the very strict guidelines set by the international mountain biking association.”

Wiesmann said these trails must be designed to be sustainable, to resist erosion and to stand up to heavy use by bikes.

“Ultimately, we’d like to see about three miles of trail out there,” Wiesmann said.

When the trails are clearly marked and signage has been installed, the department officially will “open” the new loop, but people who are in the know already are walking and biking there.

Thursday evening served a double purpose for members of the Jefferson County Bicycle Club, which on top of providing a solid core of volunteers for the final work day on the new mountain bike trail also took the opportunity to donate \$1,000 to the Jefferson High School’s mountain bike drive.

The money will go to provide mountain bikes, helmets and related equipment for the school's physical education classes in order to get local students out on the area trails and give them experience in what can become a lifelong sport, fitness opportunity or pastime.

The Jefferson County Bicycle Club's \$1,000 donation will be matched by a local foundation, doubling the impact of those funds, as local backers continue to raise money for the new program.

Officially presenting the donation was Jodie Schommer, president of the Jefferson County Bicycle Club, while accepting it were Tanya Dwyer, a Jefferson High School employee, and her husband Rick. The Dwyers have been coordinating the campaign for the mountain bike program at the high school.

The drive, which is ongoing, aims to raise a total of \$10,000 to fully outfit the bike program.

To donate, people may write checks to the School District of Jefferson, in care of "bike fund." Donations may be dropped off at the school district office or sent to the district at 206 S. Taft Avenue, Jefferson, WI, 53549.