Friends of the
Blufflands

Friends of the Blufflands

FoBL Mission, Part 1

- To be a voice for a wide variety of blufflands users who value the region's blufflands for:
  - the natural habitat and the diverse plant and animal species it supports
  - the scenic beauty they provide for residents and visitors
  - the outdoor nature study and nature-based recreation opportunities that they provide
  - the values green space provides to local communities and their residents
- Leading to higher quality of life

FoBL Mission, Part 2

- To promote sound conservation practices to maintain the health of the Coulee Region blufflands
  - Forest management / reforestation
  - Prairie management
  - Control of invasive species, encourage native species
  - Preservation of rare and endangered species
  - Advise on trail placement and construction
  - Keep in natural state (undeveloped)

Who is Friends of the Blufflands?

- 41 member households
  - And growing. please join!
- Board of Directors
  - Pat Wilson – President
  - Fred Skemp – Vice President
  - Stephanie Hanna – Secretary
  - Pat Caffrey – Treasurer
  - George Arimond
  - Jon Rigden
  - Sunshine Love
- Thanks to Willie Bittner

Finances

- August
  - $10,000 – DNR Grant to Park Dept. for Pollinator Prairie on Fitzpatrick Tract
  - $5,000 – Funds from Northern Natural Gas to Park Dept. for the Skemp 2 reforestation project
- September
  - $500 – Grant from **After Hours Rotary** for tools and supplies for Zoerb Prairie maintenance
  - $500 – Pesticides pledged by **Park Dept** for use in blufflands
  - $1,000 – Challenge grant from **Jon and Ann Rigden** for tools and supplies for work in the blufflands, to be matched by Friends of the Blufflands members
- October
  - $1,315 – Match from **Friends of the Blufflands** for challenge grant
- December
  - $500 – Grant from **La Crosse Community Foundation's Shelterbelt Fund** - Gabe & Annie Berendes
- March
  - $255 – **People's Food Co-op** Beans for Bags Program
- Current Balance - $5,071

Tools and Tool Box in Place

PFC Beans for Bags

We partner with

- City of La Crosse Park and Rec Department
  - We work with Recreation Coordinator Leah Burns, Brandon Carey, and Jay Odegaard
  - Environmental Leadership Forum (ELF)
- Bluffland Coalition
  - We work with Chuck Zauner (Project Coordinator), Charlie Handy (La Crosse County Planner)
  - “The Blufflands, A Plan for Conservation and Recreation Throughout the La Crosse – La Crescent Region”

FoBL also partners with

- Pheasants Forever
- USFWS
- Mississippi Valley Conservancy
- WisCorps
- After Hours Rotary
- Department of Natural Resources
- Audubon Society
- Prairie Enthusiasts
- Outdoor Recreation Alliance
- Friends of the Marsh
- Neighborhood Associations

What are we working on?

- Reforestation
  - Two 6.5 acre plots and one smaller one – John Rigden, Fred Skemp

Reforestation

Skemp 2 Reforestation

- MVC purchased 22 acres Dec 2007, seven acres of which were in cultivation. Trees (bur oak, white oak, swamp white oak, red oak, shag bark hickory) were planted in the fall of 2010.
- Land transferred to city Dec 2012 with a conservation easement to MVC.
- Friends of the Blufflands has taken on active management of the site, doing habitat management and restoration according to plan approved by DNR, MVC, and the Park Dept. Jon Rigden leads effort.
- 2010 trees initially unprotected, and many were lost. Tubed, then cages eventually placed around about 300 or so trees in 2016 and 2017. Herbicide used around caged trees 2017 and again in 2018 for weed control. Goal at this time is for an upland forest composed mainly of oak.

Skemp 2 Reforestation

- In 2019 Northern Natural Gas took out 90 trees, 20 of which were caged, while installing a cathodic protection electrode to decrease corrosion of the gas line. Northern Natural Gas paid $5,000 to the Park Dept for the disturbance of the tree plantation.
- The Park Dept. is paying out the $5,000 to FBL as we incur expenses to restore and improve the tree plantation. That includes trees, cages, pesticide expenses.
- This spring we bought 300 tree seedlings from the DNR (100 cherry, 100 red oak, 100 shagbark hickory) and planted them, with assistance from Viterbo University students.

Viterbo Service Outing – Skemp 2

June on Skemp 2

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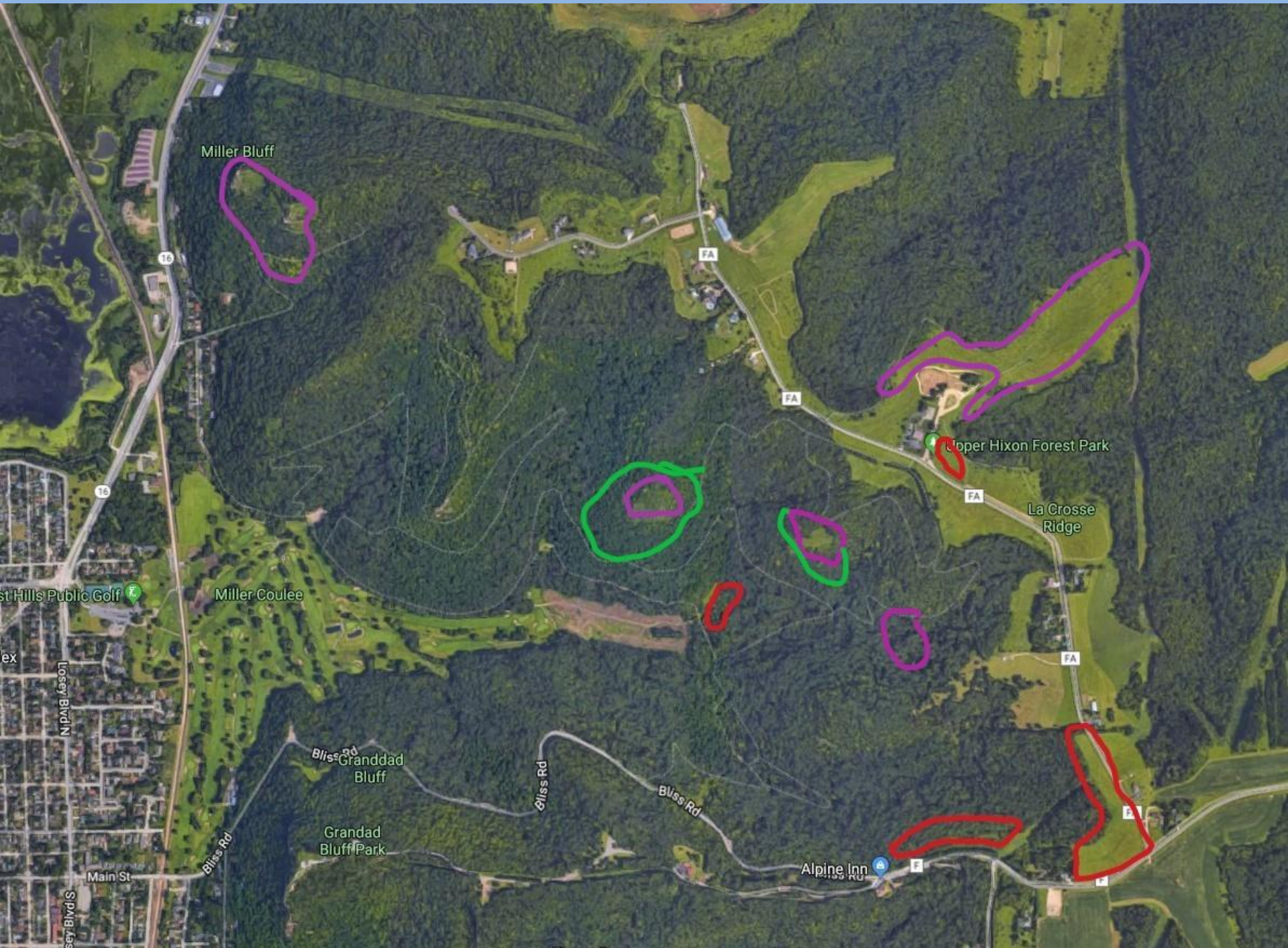
  - Lookout, Zoerb, Birch, Thompson
  - Pollinator prairies – Mathy, Fitzpatrick
  - Miller Bluff, Juniper Partners


Miller Bluff
16
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Upper Hixon Forest Park
La Crosse Ridge
Miller Coulee
Losey Blvd N
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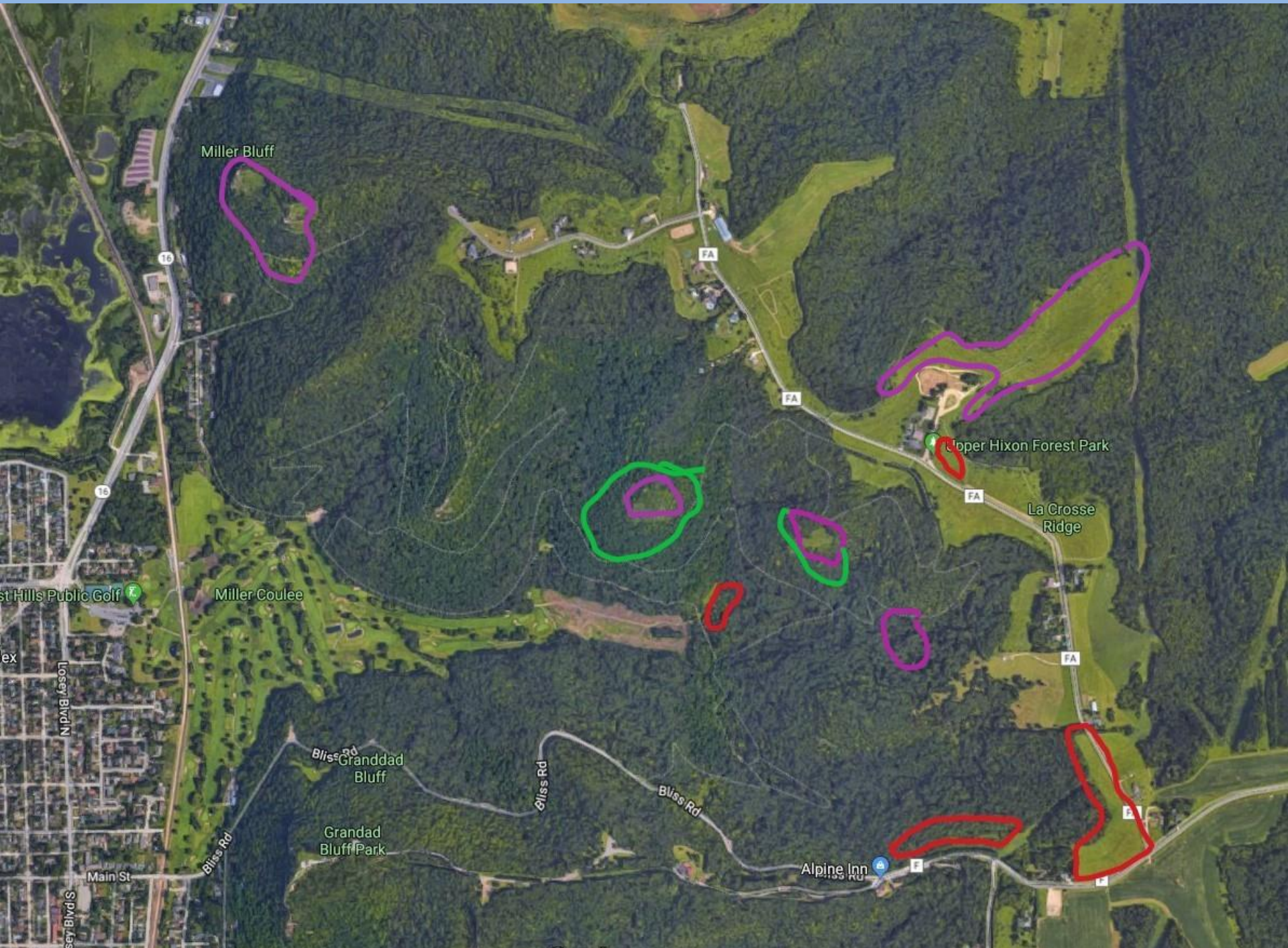
Alpine Inn

Zoerb Prairie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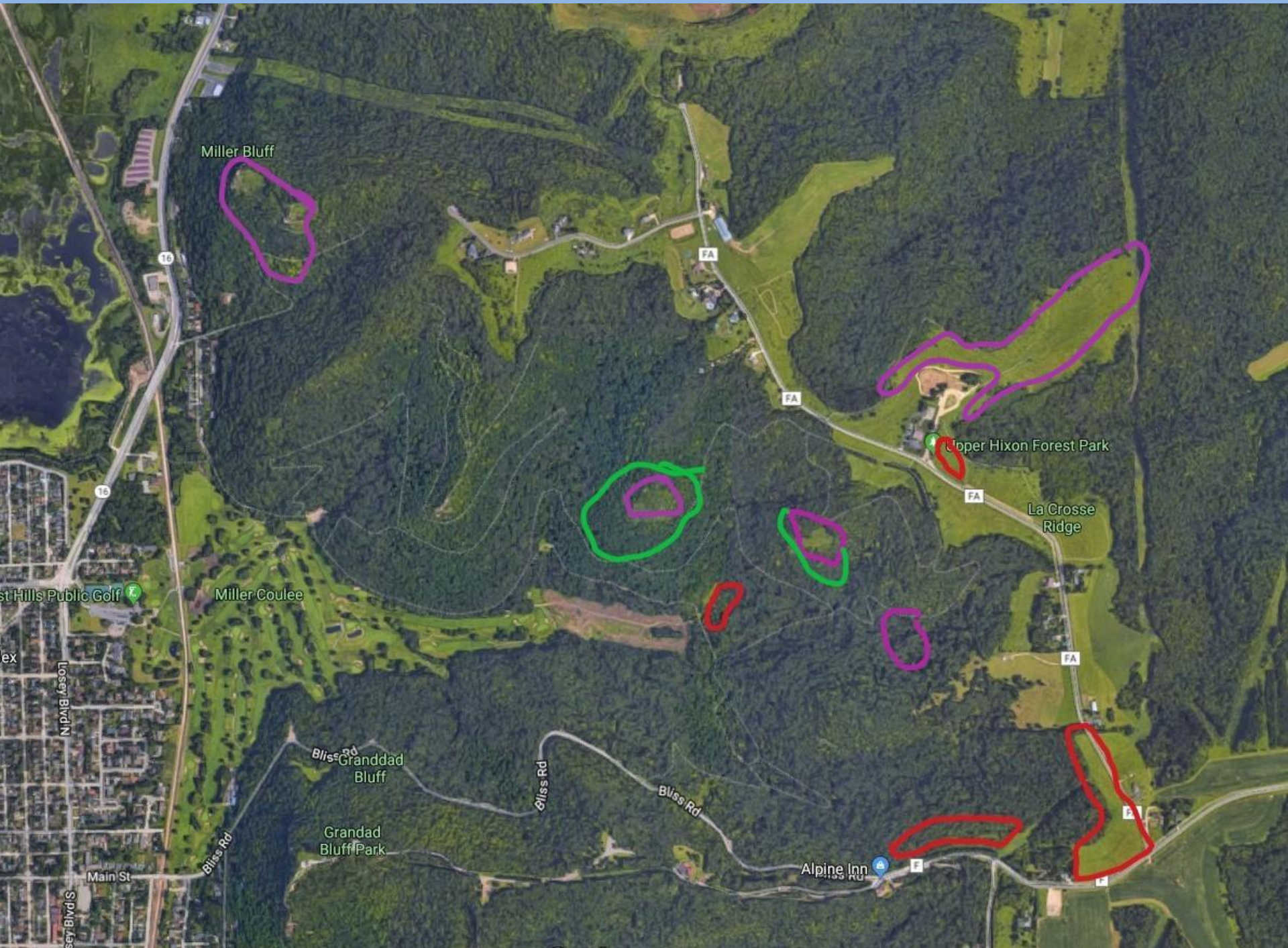
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Pollinator Prairies

Fitzpatrick Pollinator Prairie

- $10,000 DNR Habitat Partnership Fund Grant
  - Mike Nied originally identified the grant opportunity
  - Pat Wilson contacted the DNR to get information on funds, scoring, and application
  - Brandon Carey took the lead on applying for the grant on behalf of the Park Dept
  - Work is scheduled to be done this year by contractors
  - A 25% match requirement can be met with funding, equipment, or volunteer labor

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  - Pollinator prairie
- Invasive Species Control
  - All over – Buckthorn, Invasive Honeysuckle, Black Locust, Garlic Mustard, Oriental Bittersweet, Autumn Olive, Japanese Knotweed...
- Identification and protection of rare and threatened species

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- Environmental Education
  - Stephanie & George planning a Lower Hixon education trail
  - Working with Park Dept on interpretive signs – Sunshine, Steph, Pat
  - Participated in Earth Fair

Timber Rattlesnakes

(Crotalus horridus)

City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation, & Forestry · Friends of the Blufflands · Wisconsin Wildscapes

How to spot a Rattlesnake:

- Black chevrons running down their back
- Spade shaped head with no markings
- Tan, black, or sometimes gray in color
- Rattle at the end of the tail

Did You know?

Timber rattlesnakes have been protected by law since 1998.

Timber rattlesnakes can live up to 35 years in the wild.

Unlike most other reptiles, rattlesnakes give birth to live young.

Watch For Rattlesnakes

Rattlesnakes are common in La Crosse area blufflands, including Hixon Forest. In summer they lie in wait for prey in the forest underbrush and leaves. In cooler months they sunbathe on the rocky southern slopes of bluffs. They hibernate in large groups over the winter in rock shelters called hibernacula.

Sizing Up

Timber rattlesnakes grow up to 5 feet long and weigh up to 4 pounds, shedding their skin as they grow. Another row is added to their rattle each time they shed. Large rattles get brittle and break over time.

A Snake's Snacks

Timber rattlesnakes are 'sit-and-wait' hunters, waiting for prey to cross their path. Their diet consists of mice and squirrels; small birds; frogs; and other snakes, such as garter snakes. Rattlesnakes reduce tick populations by consuming ticks that are on their prey!

What to do if you encounter a Rattlesnake

- Leave it alone - you should never try to pick up or move a rattlesnake.
- Back away from the snake slowly and leave the area, giving the snake plenty of space.
- Watch for other snakes – rattlesnakes are often found in groups.
- Remember, these snakes can grow up to 5 feet long and can strike close to half that distance in any direction.
- Rattlesnake populations are very low; we can help by protecting their habitat and leaving them alone.

Shy But Deadly!

If a rattlesnake is coiled up, rattling its tail or hissing, it feels threatened. Leave it alone! While Timber Rattlesnakes are not very aggressive, their bite is venomous.

What to do if you get bitten by a Rattlesnake

- Move away from the snake immediately to avoid multiple bites.
- Stay calm.
- Remove any rings, watches, bracelets, and necklaces.
- Seek IMMEDIATE medical treatment.

What NOT to do if you get bitten by Rattlesnake

- Do NOT cut the snakebite.
- Do NOT apply any ice or heat.
- Do NOT attempt to suck out the venom with your mouth.
- Do NOT consume any drugs or alcohol.

Icons made by Freepik from www.flaticon.com
Photos by Matthew Levanowitz and Armand Bartz
Sign designed by Tyler Glase

Friends of the
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Friends of the Blufflands Activities
Prairie Maintenance:
Natural dry prairies – Zoerb Prairie, Lookout Prairie, Birch Point Prairie, others
Prescribed burns
Control sumac and other trees encroaching on prairie by cutting and herbicide treatment
Thompson Prairie – prairie restoration project
Pollenator prairies – one in Mathy Quarry area, one being planted on Fitzpatrick tract
Invasive Species Control
Buckthorn, black locust, honeysuckle, garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed, Oriental bittersweet, black locust... Use cutting, mowing, manual pulling, burning, herbicides as needed to control invasive species.
Forest Regeneration
Planting trees of desirable species to regenerate tree cover and animal habitat
Protect the new trees from deer browsing and other animal disturbance
Use mowing and pesticides as tools where needed to control weed growth and crowding around new trees
The Friends of the Blufflands Mission
The Friends of the Blufflands' mission is to promote sound conservation practices in the Coulee Region blufflands and to be a voice for a wide variety of blufflands users who value the area blufflands for the animal and plant habitat they provide, for the natural beauty they provide for residents and visitors to the area, for the outdoor nature study and recreation opportunities that they provide, and the values green space provides to local communities and their residents. We support the blufflands through ecosystem monitoring and enhancement, and stakeholder education.

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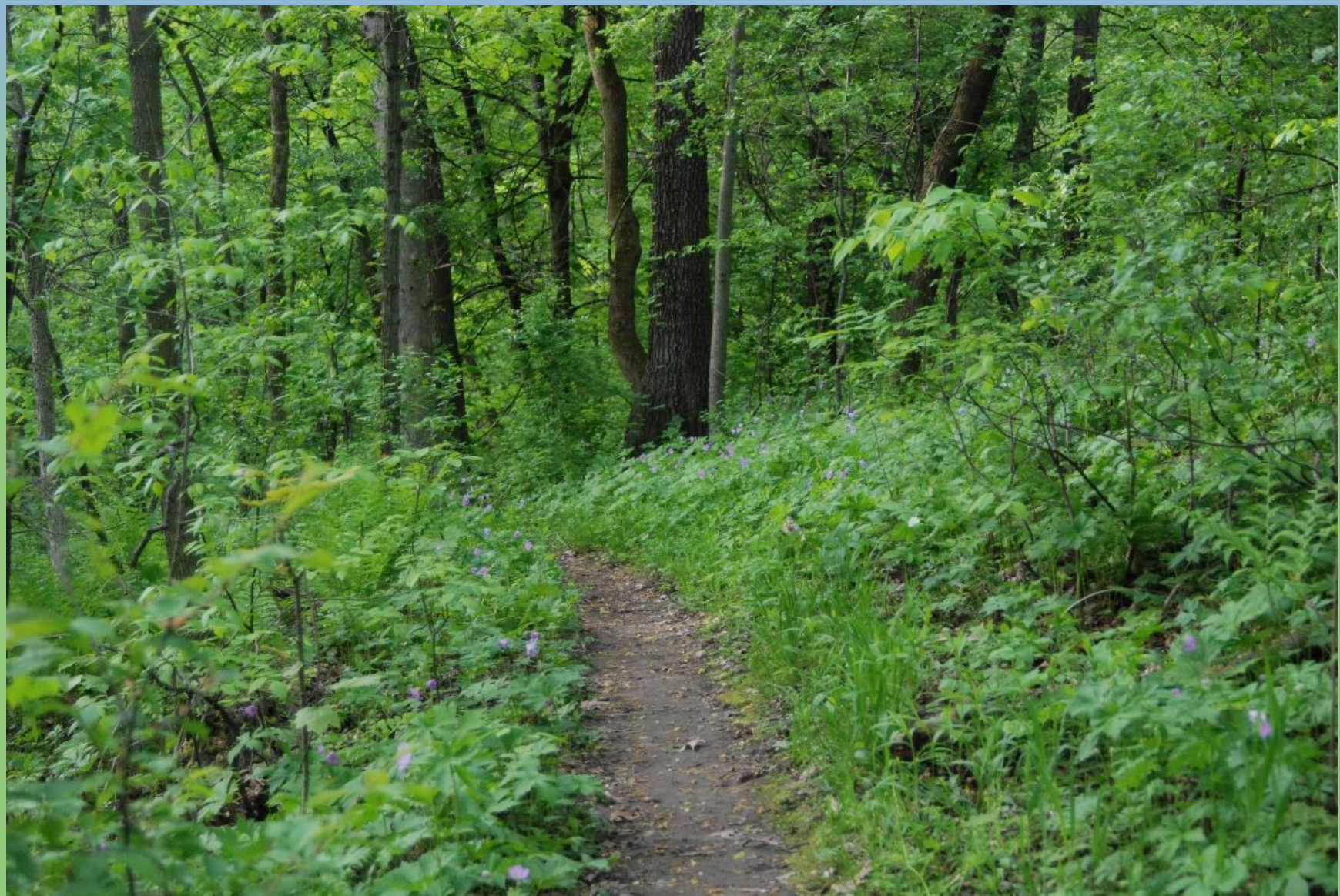
- Identification and protection of rare and threatened species
- Environmental Education
  - Steph & George planning a Lower Hixon education trail
  - Working with Park Dept on interpretive signs
  - Participated in Earth Fair
- Trails
  - Maintenance – George and Fred on chain saws
  - Trail layout and construction

Trails



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- Trails
  - George and Fred on chain saws
  - Trail building
- Primarily through Bluffland Coalition and ELF, participate in planning for
  - future land acquisition in the blufflands
  - future trail development in the blufflands
  - future user facilities in the blufflands

What's in the Future?

MVC Love the Bluffs Campaign

- Improve the north blufflands – Mathy, Miller Bluff, and County B Trailhead.
- Signage and trail map updates
  - FBL needs to complete interpretive signs planned, propose more of them.
  - FBL help determine sign wording for guidance signs
- Volunteer land stewardship activities
  - FBL to identify needed projects & provide tools, MVC to help with publicizing the work outings and recruiting volunteers
- Outreach communication

What's in the Future?

La Crosse Park Dept. 2019-2021

- Miller Bluff: 6-7 acre prairie, to mow or burn, could be expanded to 10 acres (USFWS grant, contracted out fall 2019 – spring 2020)
- Zoerb Prairie: adopted by After Hours Rotary, contracted with Ku-le Region Forestry, with $2K from AHR and $2k from city.
- Dobson Tract: Rusty Patch Bumblebee nearby. Create pollinator prairie here?
- Juniper Partners: burn prairie, difficult due to access issues, contract out
- Grandad Bluff: Make Grandad Prairie a showcase, with trail from overlook. ORA has made this area a priority.
- Log Prairie: Small prairie near Bliss Rd, no work done on it, public could see it.
- Vista Prairie: a logical prairie to burn after other Hixon prairies
- Milson Prairie: much clearing needed, seen from golf course

What's in the Future?

La Crosse Park Dept. 2022-onward

- Mathy Pollinator Prairie expansion
- Lookout Prairie savanna project
  - Keep it going with volunteer labor
- Prairie maintenance and burns
  - Follow 3 to 5 year burn schedule
- Fitzpatrick Prairie
  - Herbicide spring 2019
  - Plant fall 2019
  - Mow 2 or 3 times a year for 2 to 4 years
  - 3 to 5 year burn cycle

What's in the Future?

- Forest Management
  - The trees are aging, but what can be done that doesn't encourage more invasives, especially with deer population
- Invasives are everywhere
- Heavy trail use
  - How do we prevent more social trails that damage habitat

What can you do?

- Join
- Participate in Work Outings
- Participate in Public Meetings on Blufflands
- Like our Facebook site so you get updates on activities
  - https://www.facebook.com/friendsoftheblufflands/

Thank You!

Challenges of Multi-Use Trails

- Maintaining user safety
- Protecting natural resources
- Providing a high-quality user experience

Conflicts on Multiple-Use Trails

- Recognize conflict as goal interference
- Provide adequate trail opportunities
- Minimize number of contacts in problem areas
- Involve users as early as possible
- Understand user needs
- Identify the actual source of conflict
- Work with affected users
- Promote trail etiquette
- Encourge positive interaction among different users
- Favor “light handed management”
- Plan and act locally
- Monitor Progress

User Safety Concerns

- User speed (often has more to do with speed differential than the speed itself).
- Mass of user and vehicle (if any).
- Sight distances.
- Trail width.
- Trail surface.
- Congestion (e.g., number of users per mile).
- Users overtaking one other silently/without warning.
- Trail difficulty (obstacles, terrain, condition, etc.).
- User skill level and experience.
- User expectations and preparedness (e.g., walkers who understand they may see bicycles on a particular trail can better prepare themselves for possible encounters).
- Emergency procedures.
- On-site management presence.

Resource Damage Factors

- Soil characteristics: type, texture, organic content, consistence, depth, moisture (e.g., muddy versus dry), temperature levels (especially frozen versus thawed), etc.
- Slope of surface and topography
- Position in land form (e.g., northern versus southern exposure)
- Elevation
- Type of ecosystem
- Type of wildlife
- Type of vegetation in trail
- Type of vegetation and terrain beside trail (influencing widening)
- Quality of trail design and construction (especially regarding drainage)
- Level of maintenance (e.g., effectiveness of drainage)
- Type of use
- Type of vehicle
- Level of use
- Concentration or dispersal of use
- Season of use
- Difficulty of terrain (to user)
- Up or down hill traffic direction
- Style of use or technique (e.g., skidding tires versus controlled riding)

High-Quality User Experience

- Number of encounters
- Number of encounters preferred
- Number of encounters expected
- Discrepancy between actual and expected encounters
- Motivations for participation (e.g., solitude versus social interaction)
- Preferences (desires)
- Expectations (what was anticipated)
- Behavior (as opposed to the number) of others
- Visitor attitudes
- Type of area (e.g., primitive versus urban)
- Location of contacts (e.g., trailhead versus campsite)
- Proximity of others
- Size of group * Size of group encountered
- User's experience level
- Perceived environmental disturbance
- Type of encounter * Obtrusiveness of visual impact (e.g., bright-colored versus earth-toned clothes, tents, and equipment)

AvidTrails – Troy Duffin

- Multi-use Trails
  - Speed difference is the main source of user conflict
  - Solutions
    - Design and build mountain bike specific trails
      - More enjoyable for bikers
    - Speed limits on trails
    - One-way trails
  - Recommendations
    - Build separate user-specific trails
    - Slow down and show courtesy when meeting others on the trail