

Sen. Marklein and Rep. Tony request restored funding for Elroy-Sparta, 400 Trail Repair

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MADISON— State Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) and State Representative Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) sent a letter to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Secretary-Designee Preston Cole today to request immediate restoration of funding in the State Budget to repair the Elroy-Sparta and 400 State Trails that were damaged by flooding in 2018.

Governor Tony Evers vetoed the legislative intent of the \$100,000 that was allocated to repair the Elroy-Sparta and 400 State Trails from the 2019-20 State Budget. The Governor left the funding of \$100,000, but directed the DNR to “prioritize repairs based on the best interests of the state and all trail users.”

Marklein and Kurtz asked the Secretary-Designee to use these funds to repair the Elroy-Sparta and 400 State Trails to restore the trails right away. More than 10 miles of the trails are currently closed because of flood damage and have no timeline for re-opening.

The legislators said:

“The Legislature’s budget set aside \$100,000 to repair the Elroy-Sparta and 400 State Trails that were damaged by serious flooding in August and September of 2018. Governor Tony Evers vetoed this provision in the budget, but left the funding in your agency to “prioritize repairs based on the best interests of the state and all

trail users.”

We respectfully request that you implement the legislative intent of this investment and direct your team to begin repairs immediately so that these sections of the Elroy-Sparta and 400 Trails may be re-opened for visitors to our communities.

As noted on the Department of Natural Resource’s (DNR’s) website, more than nine miles of the Elroy-Sparta Trail is currently closed because of storm damage that occurred nearly a year ago. However, your website also highlights this trail as “one of the most popular trails in the country.” As you know, it is a world-renowned bicycle trail that spans 32.5 miles, but nearly 27% of it is closed right now.

The Elroy-Sparta trail is linked to the 400 Trail, which is also closed from N. Dutch Hollow Road in LaValle to the Village of Wonewoc. This is a 22 mile trail that travels from Reedsburg to Elroy, where it joins the Elroy-Sparta Trail. Unfortunately, trail users cannot enter the trail in Reedsburg and follow it to Elroy at this time because of the damage. This also impacts use on the Hillsboro State Trail.

The closure of these two trails is extremely detrimental to the communities that host the trails. Bicycling in this region of the state is an essential component of our economy and a consistent tourism attraction for many months of the year. This year, our communities have noted a sharp decline in trail users which impacts local businesses such as restaurants, retailers and lodging. It also strongly impacts our reputation as “the” place to bike many miles of awesome, scenic trails.

The \$100,000 allocated to repair the Elroy-Sparta and 400 State Trails is a small price to pay to restore this reputation for our communities. The flooding in 2018 was devastating for all of our communities and the priority for our local governments has been to restore essential infrastructure and assist families in rebuilding their lives. The Elroy-Sparta and 400 Trails are important too, but our communities have had to focus their limited funding on other needs.

Again, we respectfully request that the DNR dedicate the \$100,000 in the State Budget to repair the Elroy-Sparta and 400 Trails. Thank you for your willingness to respect legislative intent. Thank you for your time and consideration of our request.”