

Dane County, Sauk County: To put \$4 million to plan construction of Great Sauk State Trail connection over the Wisconsin River

Posted on Wednesday, Oct 13, 2021

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi joined Sauk County officials, along with representatives from the state and local entities to announce their plans to invest \$4 million for planning and preparation of construction to link the Great Sauk State Trail with the Walking Iron Trail. This connection would provide a recreational, scenic gateway over the Wisconsin River and make it possible to one day hop on a bicycle in Dane County and pedal all the way to Devils Lake State Park.

“We are excited to continue our partnership with Sauk County on this effort to connect the Great Sauk State Trail with the Walking Iron Trail,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “This is our latest investment in eco-tourism and the kind of project that makes Dane County a popular destination. When complete, this connection will draw people of all ages outdoors to enjoy the scenic beauty of south central Wisconsin and the Wisconsin River.”

County Executive Parisi’s budget includes \$2 million for Dane County’s share of the project’s preparation and planning work. This funding matches the dollars put forward by Sauk County in its county budget for the coming year.

“The budget requests by Dane County Executive Parisi and Sauk County Administrator Miller continue a remarkable partnership between the two counties with this project. Once the 2022 budgets are approved in November by their respective County Boards, work can begin that will result in a design and the engineering for the Wisconsin River Recreational Bridge,” said Marty Krueger, Chair

of the Great Sauk Trail Commission. “We are one step closer to connecting the two counties’ trail systems and creating a world-class destination.”

In 2019, the partners announced plans to conduct a feasibility study of building a bridge over the Wisconsin River to connect the Great Sauk State Trail with the Walking Iron Trail. The study explored design and cost options for a 500-foot bridge for pedestrian, bicycle, and snowmobile use in the existing rail corridor. The location is the former site of the 100-year-old Sauk City rail bridge demolished in 2018 after years of disuse and failure of a support pier during spring floods.

“Outdoor recreation, quality of life, and proximity to metropolitan areas have been shown to be key factors in attracting new residents, visitors, and employees to small communities. As our communities look beyond the pandemic and to the future again, we thank our county partners for their strong commitment to making this vision a reality,” said Christopher Long, Board Chairperson of Gateway to The Driftless Inc., a Northwest Dane County not-for-profit economic development initiative of the villages of Cross Plains, Black Earth, Mazomanie, and other public and private partners.

The Great Sauk State Trail is a 13-mile multi-use recreational trail connecting the Sauk Prairie community to Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area. Walking Iron Trail, as now envisioned is the seven-mile trail corridor from the Wisconsin River crossing site to the Wolf Run Trail in the Village of Mazomanie.