

EXHIBIT A



Freeborn County Board
411 S. Broadway Ave.
Albert Lea, MN 56007



Hayward City Council
20532 810th Ave.
Hayward, MN 56043



Albert Lea City Council
221 E. Clark St.
Albert Lea, MN 56007

Sept. 15, 2026

Commissioner Sarah Strommen
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Commissioner Strommen,

We are writing to urge the Minnesota DNR to complete the Blazing Star State Trail through Myre-Big Island State Park by paving the final half-mile of gravel. This is not a request to start a project. **It is a request to finish one that has been more than 20 years in the making.**

20-plus years. 8.1 miles completed. Just 0.5 mile to the finish line.

Our communities waited more than two decades for the DNR to build the bridge over Albert Lea Lake and connect the Albert Lea and Hayward sections of the trail. Through all those years, our patience sometimes ran thin, but our support for the trail never wavered.

When the bridge and adjoining trail segments were finally completed in 2025, we were ready to celebrate. We planned a ribbon-cutting, a big celebration, and new routes using the completed trail for our annual Rock-n-Roll the Lakes bike ride. The Freeborn County Trail Association and Albert Lea Area Cyclists even raised more than \$70,000 to build a bicycle shelter at Albert Lea's trailhead.

Then came the disappointing news that the DNR pulled that final half-mile of gravel from the 2025 project. That decision left bicyclists navigating a rough, haphazard gravel section.

We have been informed that the DNR is delaying the final paving segment while it decides about rerouting the trail – possibly delaying the trail completion by years. If this is accurate, please install a floating marsh bridge, or similar solution, for the unpaved segment, so that riders can finally enjoy the full trail. A floating marsh bridge has been successfully used on the Mesabi Trail.

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With the final half-mile paved, we can promote the completed trail, attract more visitors to Albert Lea, Hayward and Myre-Big Island State Park; strengthen our tourism economy; and keep connecting to our new trails.

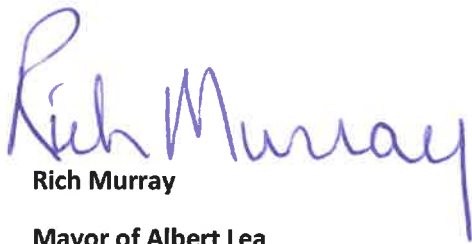
Please pave the final gravel section, complete the Blazing Star State Trail, and finish the job.

Sincerely,



Nicole Eckstrom

Vice-Chair of the Freeborn County Board



Rich Murray

Mayor of Albert Lea



Anthony Cox

Mayor of Hayward

CC:

DNR Deputy Commissioner Barb Naramore

DNR Division Director of Parks and Trail Ann Pierce

DNR Region 4 Director Brian Schultz

DNR Acquisition and Development Specialist Scott Haugen

DNR Government Relations Unit Supervisor John Waters

DNR Parks and Trails Unit Supervisor Carter Vogel