

Cyclists win round in fight over use of Badger State Trail

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Bicyclists easily won round 2 Tuesday of what could become a regular battle over use of the newly opened Badger State Trail by motorized and nonmotorized fun-seekers.

All three candidates put up by the Bike Federation of Wisconsin easily won election to the seven-member board of the Badger Trail Friends Group, an advisory body to the state Department of Natural Resources, a year after all-terrain vehicle and snowmobile enthusiasts posted a similar win.

In each instance, interest groups packed the group 's annual meeting - - 166 people showed up Tuesday -- signed up new members and voted their candidates onto the board.

At stake is influence over what decisions the DNR makes in regard to use of the trail. An 11-mile stretch of the 40-mile trail from Monroe to Monticello is open to ATVs this winter, the second year of a three-year trial period.

Bicyclists say ATVs damage the surface of the trail, which runs from the Illinois border to just south of Madison, and discourage bicyclists from using it.

"It 's not possible for us to share the trail with ATVs, " said Sharon Kaminecki, who runs a hotel and shop for bicyclists in Brodhead and was elected board vice president Tuesday. "We 've seen from the Cheese Country Trail that it 's just not physically possible, " she said, referring to a 47-mile trail between Monroe and Mineral Point used primarily by ATVers.

Craig Schmidt, board president and a snowmobiler, said "there 's no doubt the four-wheelers and the ATVers are rough on the trail. " But ATV advocates say their sport has more than 300,000 registered users in the state who need more places in southern Wisconsin where they can ride.

Schmidt said until Tuesday night, only one member of the board was a bicyclist. He was replaced, putting the board 's composition at 4-3, ATVers and snowmobilers to bikers and hikers.

Kaminecki said she wasn 't interested in who was on which side. Rather, she said the board elected a year ago wasn 't doing anything to promote the trail or involve the group 's members.

"We want board members who want to do something, " she said. "They took the positions to try to not move the group forward. "

Schmidt denied the board hasn 't been working to promote the trail, pointing out the group oversaw its grand opening in July.

In any case, it 's not clear that the board will have much to say about how the trail is used.

Steve Johnston, who is in charge of the trail for the DNR, said the group does not set the rules for the trail. "They can certainly put in their input and opinions, but they can 't change policy, " he said.

The back-and-forth does have one undeniable benefit: money. The 149 members who joined the group Tuesday paid membership fees totaling more than \$2,700 -- nearly twice what the group had in the bank at the end of the year.