



## Board fighting to keep trail at preserve

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The Flint River Trail was dealt a setback last month when a state advisory board rejected a plan for a portion of the 20-mile trail to run through Starr's Cave and Park and Preserve.

This week, the Des Moines County Conservation Board notified the Iowa Department of Natural Resources it plans to appeal the decision of the Iowa State Preserves Advisory Board to withhold approval of a sovereign lands construction permit.

The permit is required before the trail connecting Burlington to rural areas of the county can be constructed in the state preserve managed by the county's conservation department.

Des Moines County Conservation Director Kim Perlstein said the county's application was rejected because the trail would allow bicycles.

"They're saying that no state-owned preserve has bike trails because of the potential damage caused by off-trail biking. What's interesting is that there are two preserves in the state that allow horses. Which do you think would do more damage?" Perlstein said.

In his letter to the DNR, Conservation Board Chairman Dave Riley asks Director Richard Leopold for guidance in navigating the appeal process. A DNR spokesman was unavailable for comment Wednesday.

Construction of the Flint River Trail has started, with Tama Road south to the Flint River graded and filled.

Sections of the trail will be opened in phases. The four-mile stretch of the trail that runs through Burlington will be paved, with the remainder constructed with crushed stone.

The cost of the trail is estimated at about \$6.45 million.

As of last month, more than \$3 million has been raised toward the trail, with 70 percent of that money coming from grant funding, 12 percent coming from the city (\$151,000) and county (\$379,000) and about \$520,000 from the Vision Iowa fund that kick-started the project in 2004.

When the trail is finished in 2013, it will wind northwest of Burlington and connect the Mississippi River Trail, downtown Burlington, the Port of Burlington, Riverside Park, Thye Woods Habitat Preserve, the historic Zion school, the Big Hollow Recreation Area and the Flint River Valley.

"It will be an amenity for the entire region, but we need to get this issue at Starr's Cave resolved. We hope that happens," Perlstein said.