

Sisters explores bike park concept

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Cycling is perhaps the fastest-growing outdoor activity in Sisters Country. Locals are out in numbers on roads and trails, and visitors put the two-wheeler on the bike rack and make the trip to Sisters to try their hand at navigating the Peterson Ridge Trail and to race in events like the Sisters Stampede.

Now cycling advocates are exploring the idea of adding a new cycling amenity to the list of Sisters attractions: A bike park.

A bike park provides terrain features and obstacles for riders to navigate — from jumps to logs to ride along, rock gardens to flowing trails and “pump tracks,” where riders “pump” their bike through a series of banked turns.

An ad hoc committee of enthusiasts hosted a community meeting at The Belfry last Friday to introduce the concept and stir interest in the Sisters cycling community. The committee is looking at establishing a bike park on an approximately one-acre site

in the vicinity of the Sisters Park & Recreation District (SPRD) headquarters at the west end of Sisters. The park could include a trail around the already-existing Hysler Pines disc golf course along Highway 242.

One of the unique features of bike parks is the wide range of demographics and skill-levels they serve, with riders at all levels riding at the same time.

Committee member Casey Meudt, an avid cyclist and owner of Blazin Saddles bike shop, said, “If it’s your first week on a mountain bike, you’ll be able to use this park. If you’re a professional, you’ll be able to progress by using the park.”

The featured presenter at the community meeting was Woody Keen, a noted professional trail builder who has retired to the Bend area.

He described a variety of bike parks he has worked on in different regions, from Colorado to the Carolinas. He noted that parks can be elaborate, extensive and expensive or they can be relatively small, simple and cost less. They

can be built by professional trail-building companies, or solely by volunteers, or using a hybrid approach that brings in professional design and contracting and uses volunteer labor.

Keen is a passionate advocate for outdoor activities, especially for youth.

“We need to bring our kids back into the woods and get them doing what’s called ‘creative play,’” he said.

Keen noted that research shows that kids 6 to 19 in the U.S. spend 40 hours a week in front of an electronic screen of some sort.

Lisa Allenbach was on hand with her family, including her daughter Isabelle, who is a BMX racer. Allenbach whole-heartedly endorses the value of getting kids outside and active.

“Getting the kids out on a bike — there’s nothing better than that,” she said.

Allenbach said that a bike park would be a valuable training ground for local BMX enthusiasts like her daughter.

“It would be great to practice here, close to home, and get her strengthened up,” she



PHOTO BY DENNIS YUROSHEK

Bike parks provide all ages and skill levels with opportunities to ride on a skills course that is both fun and challenging.

said.

Keen anticipated a key question regarding the need for a bike park: Why have one when we live in the midst of acres of woods and miles of trails.

“A bike park is something quite, quite different from trails,” he said.

A bike park offers a conveniently located place to work on skills, a place where a mom and dad can take their kids and watch them while they ride, a place where beginners can get comfortable on their bikes and skilled riders can improve their handling skills. Riders can start small, on an inexpensive bike, and build up to new challenges.

A bike park, Keen says,

“lowers the barrier to entry to mountain biking.”

The nine-member committee, founded by Meudt and rider and race organizer Joel Palanuk, is assessing the need and desire for a bike park, the feasibility of a potential site, and pondering what one might look like, how much it might cost and how it could be funded. They are very much in the concept phase, but the enthusiasm level was high, indicating that a bike park may well be just a little way down the trail for Sisters Country.

For more information, contact Meudt at Blazin Saddles, 541-719-1213 or committee member Liam Hughes at SPRD, 541-549-2091.

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