

## Featured letter: Rock River Trail has great potential

**Posted: Monday, October 15, 2012 4:00 pm**

I recently attended the dedication ceremony for the Beloit section of the Rock River Water Trail. It took place at a canoe launch in downtown Beloit. A few weeks earlier, the Janesville section of the water trail was dedicated. Both cities now have signage designating public access points to the river, as does the City of Jefferson further north.

Attending the ceremony was Frank Schier, who dreamed up the Rock River Trail Initiative. He is the editor of an alternative newspaper in Rockford, Illinois, and a self-professed “river rat.” Many years ago, he saw the potential of the Rock to draw more canoeists, kayakers, boaters, anglers, and even sailboats in some of the wider stretches. He envisioned the river attracting bicyclists, hikers and motorists who want to follow its shoreline. He felt the river was under-used and under-appreciated. He had a dream for increasing public access to and appreciation of the river.

Schier and a group of like-minded people consulted with the National Park Service. In 2010, they established the Rock River Trail Initiative. In April of that year, an inaugural paddle was held. Now all 11 counties along the river are represented on the council of the Rock River Trail Initiative.

The first phase of the initiative is to place signage along the 320 miles of river, from the headwaters at the Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin to Rock Island, Illinois, where it meets the Mississippi River. Signage and maps show access points, resting places, portage points, restrooms, shelter, parking and camping. While the water trail is designed for use by paddle craft, it is also helpful for fishing, hunting, boating and wildlife viewing.

The trail has camping at over 20 sites. For the more adventurous, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management owns three islands in the river, each of which are available to the water traveler for primitive camping.

Future phases of the Rock River Initiative will be to develop hiking, biking and driving trails along the river. These routes will highlight points of interest such as natural areas, historic sites, restaurants and other attractions.

Ultimately, the Rock River will be a destination for local residents and tourists alike. It will increase recreational opportunities and improve the quality of life in the 37 cities and villages along its route.

The Wisconsin constitution states that all navigable waters are owned by the people and cannot be owned by any individual. It’s called the Public Trust Doctrine. That is the spirit of the Rock River Trail Initiative: creating more public use, appreciation of, and respect for the river.

**State Sen. Tim Cullen**

**D-Janesville**