

Mark Ireland  
Topsham  
LD 29

Hello. I am Mark Ireland in Topsham. I've been very excited about the creation of the Merrymeeting Trail. LD 29 will be an amazing asset both personally and for the communities linked by the trail. My wife and I subscribe to the Rails to Trails Conservancy, and have purchased trail books that cover NH, VT and parts of NY. Maine doesn't have many long trails. As we move into retirement, we are actively planning several vacations that will include bike trails. Having done many of the systems in Stowe VT, Cape Cod and the Hudson River Valley we have grown to appreciate not just the trail itself (great exercise, the feeling of community connection, views along the way and occasional kiosks highlighting the history, geology and plant life on the trail). But we also really appreciate the ability to visit adjacent towns, hopping off our bikes for a coffee, lunch or ice cream. We can even envision staying over in one town and continuing our trip the next day. We'd otherwise be doing all this by car, but we get to travel without polluting the air and without having to find parking. This has become one of our favorite activities built into traveling. It's also a great way to meet people, to see innovative bikes, some made for disabilities, some with dogs on board, some enhanced by electric batteries etc. I should also mention that when we are staying near a rail-trail, we also build in shorter walks, often with our dog, along the trail. This will be an amazing community asset for Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond, Gardner and beyond! I know that a trail beginning in Topsham would bring great pride to my community. I thank the committee members for your work and urge the passage of LD 29.