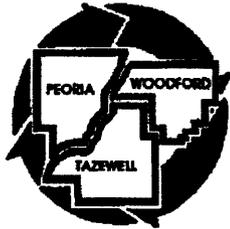


E1-849



# TRI-COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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October 23, 2003

Mr. Kevin M. Seals  
Project Manager  
Hanson Professional Services Inc.  
Springfield, Illinois 62703

**Re: Request for comments/consultation on proposed construction of 1,800 ft of connecting track and abandonment of 7.5 miles of existing track in Peoria County, Illinois**

Dear Mr. Seals,

The existing Keller Branch rail line the Peoria, Peoria Heights, and Western Railroad (PPHW) is considering abandoning is an integral link in completing the overall Rock Island State Trail. This link will not only improve the region's recreational capabilities, but will also supply an opportunity to enhance public awareness of local ecosystems in Central Illinois.

Trail users have an opportunity to experience urban, prairie, wooded, and agricultural environments as they explore trails. The Keller Branch rail line currently under consideration for abandonment will complete the final link to the 27-mile Rock Island State Trail. This trail will further expose trail users to our most unique and valuable natural resources; the Illinois River Bluffs and the Illinois River. It is this personal connection with local habitats and natural resources that inevitably gets the community committed in volunteer conservation efforts.

The *Mossville Bluffs Watershed Restoration Master Plan*, completed in 2001 through the collaborative efforts of the City of Peoria, Peoria County, and Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, outlines opportunities to restore forested bluffs such as those seen along the Keller Branch in an effort to reduce erosion and sedimentation of the Illinois River. By granting the public access to our natural areas, these sites would be prime locations for habitat restoration and public education on watershed issues; these types of projects may otherwise go unnoticed by the community.

Please know that the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission fully supports this undertaking. This is an excellent opportunity for the citizens of the City of Peoria, and all the surrounding communities to experience the diversity of the Peoria County landscape. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Environmental Planner, Melissa Eaton at 309/673-9796 x 232.

Sincerely,

Larry G. Koch  
Chair, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission

Cc: Steve Van Winkle, City of Peoria

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