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First name: Lee

Last name: Smith

Organization: Mena Public Schools

Title: Superintendent

Comments: On behalf of the Mena School District, I fully support this project because of the connection to nature and the potential revenue increase for our district. During COVID, we in education learned the negative impact of keeping kids indoors and making them learn on devices. We saw increased rates of student depression and anxiety because of the lack of interaction and diversity of learning experiences.

We feel that getting outdoors and learning in nature is so beneficial to the social and emotional well-being of people - especially young people. This belief is being demonstrated by the district by investing time and money into an 80-acre outdoor classroom and the trails project perfectly compliments our efforts to increase exposure to nature. Our district has also invested in more than 30 bicycles for our Kindergarten through second-grade students to learn the joys of cycling in their physical education classes.

As stated, we see this project as a potential revenue booster for our area. We anticipate commercial property values to increase, thus increasing the per mil rate we receive as a school district from local property taxes, further benefiting our students and staff members.