

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this letter as my application to be a member of the Board of Directors for the Arizona Trail Association (ATA). We are blessed to live in a place of such stunning and diverse beauty. Our trails provide the means to access, connect, and experience Arizona's environment. The Arizona Trail is the crown jewel of our vast networks of trails. I want to play a role in preserving the AZ Trail, as well as enhancing it for my children and future generations. As the AZ Trail continues to evolve, it is crucial that we develop sustainable trails that respect sensitive habitats and places of cultural significance. We also need to balance the desires of a variety of user groups while attempting to minimize the potential for user conflict. This vision must also include a firm commitment to educating users about appropriate trail etiquette and the ethics of conservation.

In 1994, for spring break my freshman year in college, two of my buddies and I drove for 40 straight hours in my Hyundai Excel from Fairfax, VA to Flagstaff, AZ. I had heard about Flagstaff from my high school guidance counselor, which is how I got the idea to drive out here. I had never been in the southwest before. We arrived in town a couple of hours before sunrise. Looking over a paper map using a headlight, we decided to drive to the Oak Creek Overlook. As the sun came up, I was in awe and my life was permanently changed. On the drive back into town, I caught my first glimpse of the Peaks, still covered in snow. The image is forever burned into my mind. Having grown up in Buffalo, NY, this place blew me away!

After graduating from college, I moved to Flagstaff in the fall of 1997 to attend graduate school in mathematics at NAU. Really, I moved here so that I could climb rocks on a regular basis. Over the next four years, using Flagstaff as my home base, I explored the southwest and developed a deep appreciation for wild places, the experiences they provide, and the lessons they teach us about ourselves and the world around us. Rock climbing was often the excuse that put me in these places, but looking back, the activity is immaterial. Seeking new ways to experience the outdoors, I also started mountain biking, trail running, and backpacking. The trails around Flagstaff are where I cut my teeth and learned to appreciate the significance of our natural surroundings.

My wife and I were married in Flagstaff in 2001 and then moved to Boulder, CO, where we lived for seven years. After wrapping up my PhD in 2008, we moved to Plymouth, NH. In 2012, we were blessed with the opportunity to return to Flagstaff. I am currently a professor of mathematics at NAU. My wife and I have two energetic sons and a dog. I am an avid mountain biker and my wife is a trail runner. As a family, we hike, bike, and run the trails throughout AZ. The trails are very much a part of our life. I have biked, hiked, and/or run all but Segments 19–24 on the AZ Trail. My family has been on many of the same segments as me. I also somewhat regularly restock and clean out the empties from the cache box on Babbitt Ranch.

My obsession with cycling began after I was forced to take time off from trail running and rock climbing due to a series of injuries. Several years of dabbling with endurance mountain bike racing and a desire to spend more time in wild places eventually led me to bikepacking. I love exploring new terrain on my bicycle, especially when I get to share the experience with

others. Over the past few years, I have organized several “underground” cycling events, the most recent being the Pinyons and Pines Bikepacking Race, which is a roughly 300-mile magnificent tour of Northern Arizona. I am also the co-race director of the mountain bike category of the Flagstaff to Grand Canyon Stagecoach Line 100 Mile Race, which is a fundraiser for the ATA. In addition, I have been a Bikepacking Roots Regional Advisor for the past two years. Bikepacking Roots is a non-profit organization with the mission of increasing the availability of and access to the bikepacking experience and the conservation of the landscapes through which we ride. As a regional advisor, I assist with route development and upkeep, as well as lend a hand with public land advocacy issues. Lastly, I am the faculty advisor for the NAU Cycling Club.

My experience teaching in a variety of settings, organizing and running workshops for teachers, and working in academia has provided me with the skills necessary for facilitating groups with diverse viewpoints. I also have some experience with grant writing. While not a statistician by training, I can certainly assist with the planning of data collection and statistical analysis. In fact, I have a couple of ideas for data-driven projects that I think could have a positive impact on trail planning and user experience.

Binary Bicycles, Flagstaff Bicycle Revolution, and Squirrel’s Nut Butter currently support my cycling pursuits on some level. These Arizona-based businesses have chosen to invest in me, not because of my abilities on the bike, but rather because I am a good role model and steward of our environment.

I strongly believe that I can positively contribute to the mission and vision of the ATA. If given the opportunity, I would enthusiastically accept a position on the Board of Directors.

Sincerely,



Dana Ernst