

Is Mountain Biking an Extreme Sport?

- *“Mountain biking, of which **some derivatives are considered extreme sports**,...has **caused** concerns for potentially **unacceptable ecological impacts** (Wilson and Seney 1994, Thurston and Reader 2001).”*

No Appreciation for the Natural Environment?

- *“...these more extreme versions of biking encompass **[no] appreciation of the natural environment [during] the trip.**”*

Burgin, Shelley & Hardiman, Nigel. (2012). Extreme sports in natural areas: Looming disaster or a catalyst for a paradigm shift in land use planning?. Journal of Environmental Planning and Management. 44. 921-940. 10.10801/09640568.2011.634228.

Extreme Sports Don't Belong in EBRParks

*Extreme mountain biking causes “**higher impacts** [that] occur with high speed and steep, wet slopes, especially under **strong braking, skidding and cornering** (e.g. Goeft and Alder 2001, Chiu and Kriwoken 2003, White et al. 2006, Pickering et al. 2010a).*

*Such manoeuvres are common in mountain biking, especially under race conditions. **Additional ecological impacts** also occur with the creation of unauthorised, informal bike trails...”*

Burgin, Shelley & Hardiman, Nigel. (2012). Extreme sports in natural areas: Looming disaster or a catalyst for a paradigm shift in land use planning?. Journal of Environmental Planning and Management. 44. 921-940. 10.10801/09640568.2011.634228.



Tilden Nature Area illegal bike activity

**Mountain bike illegal
track marks are on
Sylvan Trail
Packrat Trail, and
Jewel Lake Trail**

Illegal Mtn Bike Activity Tilden Nature Area



Prior to illegal mtn biking, **over 40 bird species** occupied this habitat. The **mixed species guild** community, included the rare **Special Status** protected Olive-sided Flycatcher.



Species list:

1. Red Crossbill
2. Purple Finch
3. Lesser Goldfinch
4. California Towhee
5. Dark-eyed Junco
6. Golden-crowned Sparrow
7. Western Wood-pewee
8. House Finch
9. Pacific-Slope Flycatcher
10. Swainson's Thrush
11. Black-headed Grosbeak
12. Hairy Woodpecker
13. Brown Creeper
14. American Robin
15. Olive-sided Flycatcher
16. Wilson's Warbler
17. Orange-crowned Warbler
18. Song Sparrow
19. White-throated Sparrow
20. Lincoln's Sparrow
21. White-crowned Sparrow
22. Stellar's Jay
23. California Jay
24. Wrentit

Mountain bikes on Packrat Trail



Six Mountain Bikers raced through Packrat Trail at 6:30 AM on March 24, 2021

Mountain Bikes throughout Sylvan Trail



New 'No Bikes' Sign at Sylvan Trail – Red Circle & Slash

Over 40 Illegal Mountain Bike Trails...



...along the Tilden Wildcat Gorge, Curran, Meadows Canyon Trails Loop

Habitat Fragmentation...

Red marks the original trail



Yellow marks the
illegal mtn bike trail
resulting in
Habitat Fragmentation



... breaks apart continuous habitat, drastically cuts biodiversity and ecosystem productivity, and increases fire risk.

Driscoll, D.A. et al(2021), How fire interacts with habitat loss and fragmentation. Biol Rev, 96: 976-998.

Found at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/brv.12687>

Mtn bike night riding severely disturbs wildlife and habitat even more than daytime riding.

Many mtn bikers routinely use blindingly bright head lamps and go night riding in Tilden



Mtn Biker: "I'm sure the animals are even more scared by our bright lights and blazing speeds on the trail."

Found at: <https://www.singletracks.com/uncategorized/mountain-biking-at-night-strange-finds-over-the-years/>

Big Springs Trail illegal bike activity



**Spotted
Towhee
nest
on the
ground.**



Over 20 bird species nest on or near the ground, including California Quail, our state bird.



Photo by Toshimi Kristoff

**Mountain biking off-trail
destroys nesting habitat and
eliminates nesting activity.**

Big Springs mountain bike habitat damage

Grade of this illegally traversed slope is greater than 10 degrees.



Golden-Crowned Sparrow
Photo by Monte M. Taylor



Golden-crowned Sparrows
Stopped Foraging In This
Degraded Disturbed Habitat

Mountain bikes exceed 15mph speed limit on South Park Drive

Mountain biker yelled to us, “ Stay out of our way! We come down this road REALLY FAST!”



“They’re going to ruin the sport if they make people go 15 miles an hour,” said ...a veteran [mtn] biker.”

Found at:

<https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Mountain-bikers-beware-Marin-rangers-to-use-7223683.php>

Mountain bikers skipping up illegal slope



Direct and Cumulative Impacts

- Direct Impacts:

All wildlife are flushed or chased from the area



- Direct and Cumulative Impacts:
Native plant communities are killed.

- Direct and Cumulative Impacts:
Soil conditions are destroyed.



“...mountain biking is the greatest single threat to wildlife habitat integrity...”

*“Trails may degrade or fragment wildlife habitat, and ...alter the activities of nearby animals, causing avoidance behavior in some and food-related attraction behavior in others...
...disturbance of wildlife can extend considerably further into natural landscapes.”*

“the dominant source of illegal trail and new trail construction comes from mountain bikers.”

Impacts of Mountain Biking

By George Wuerthner

Found at:

thewildlifeneews.com/2019/06/18/impacts-of-mountain-biking/

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAmWI8A2gNc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOSQ8TYEiYI>



*“I am not against mountain biking...but we need to understand.
[Wildlife] don't have any other place to go.
It's their living room.”**

Dr. Christopher Servheen, wildlife biologist

Proposed Strategies

- Protect high value habitat from recreation. ***
- Restrict mtn biking to approved trails
- Require orientation and education classes
- Establish regular mountain bike enforcement patrols
- Study impacts and exclude damaged trails
- Increase fines - apply proceeds to restore damaged trails**
- Exclude repeat offenders – require permits

* Found at <https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2019/10/08/with-an-increase-biking/>

**“Heck, \$50 is less than a daily lift ticket...” Found at: <https://www.singletracks.com/forums/topic/illegal-trail-fines/>

***“the best option to minimize trade-offs between recreation and species conservation is to maintain some areas that are closed to recreation.” Found at: <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/csp2.93>



Managing the narrow trail

Trail Users Working Group
(TUWG)

East Bay Regional Park District
June 3, 2021

Jim Hanson, Conservation Chair
California Native Plant Society, East Bay Chapter

- What we're hearing
- What we're seeing
- How to manage for multiple uses?
 - the 2 E's

What we're hearing



...Rising mountain biking popularity

What we're seeing

Trail walking popularity rising



On foot -hiking and walking, running and jogging, and dog walking - combined with equestrians have been rising proportionally.

- 2011 District narrow trails study
- 2013 Master Plan Telephone survey
- 2020 Public Engagement Survey > 8,000 respondents

We're also hearing -

That *multi-use* on narrow trails can be expanded with:

Mountain Biking one day, hikers and equestrians others

Clear sight lines to see other users from afar

Pinch points, rolling dips, grade reversals

Grades < 10% Clear signage

Occasional bulb outs

Mt. bikes one way up trails



Bulb out example - EBRPD

In sum, manage multi-use on
narrow trails through*

Engineering

Education &

Enforcement

*The Park District standard is that **narrower trails** less than 8' wide are for pedestrian, assisted, and equestrian use (Ordinance 38).

“Multi-use” is the term used by the Park District to describe trails with mountain bikes and with on-foot, assisted, and equestrian users. Wider unpaved fire/service roads have typically been determined to accommodate this variety of uses.

Where are the 2 E's in this equation?

Park Natural Environment

&

Trail User Experience

different uses have differing impacts

Managing Impacts: **Park Natural Environment**

- Sensitive root zone of trees
- Trail conditions
- Park native flora
- Erosion

Managing for Park Impacts sensitive tree root zones



Hiking and Horses Trail



“Multi-use” – mountain biking, walking, & equestrian

Managing for Park Impacts

Trail Conditions



Hikers and Horses Trail



“Multi-use” – Mountain biking, Hikers, & Horses

Managing for Park Impacts native flora



Hiking and Horses Trail



Unauthorized mountain biking on a Hiking and Horse Trail

Managing for Park Impacts Erosion



Hiking and Horses Trail



Unauthorized mountain biking on a walking only trail

Managing for the Trail User **Experience**

- Safe and satisfying one
- Emphasize what actual trail users have said they favor

Managing for the Trail User Experience

A safe and satisfying trail experience



Hiking and Horses Trail



“Multi-use” – mountain biking, walk, & equestrian

Managing for the Trail User Experience

Emphasize what actual trail users have said they favor



Busy Redwood Park Staging Area, 3/21

Park use is rising in general...and the **major trail use** continues to be hikers, walkers, assisted trail users, running and jogging, and dog walking,

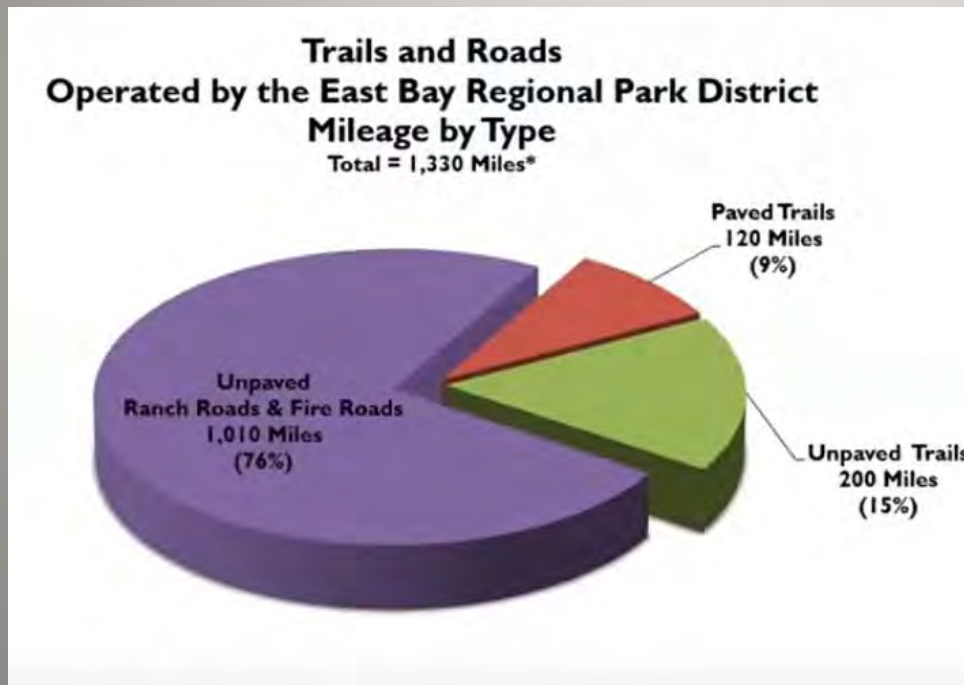


Hiking and Horses trail

Managing for the Trail User Experience

Emphasize what actual trail users have said they favor

25 Million annual regional park users



TUWG meeting, 11/23/20, Sean Dougan, EBRPD

Mountain biking has been at roughly the same proportion of trail use over time...

July 2020 EBRPD Park and Public Engagement" survey - 8,000 respondents & 2011 EBRPD narrow trails study

...and has access to 25% of natural surface narrow trails...

with access to 88% of Park trails in total (including fire roads, paved, unpaved).

**Note: Youth would like some technical trails*

The “2- E’s” as a starting place for trail planning

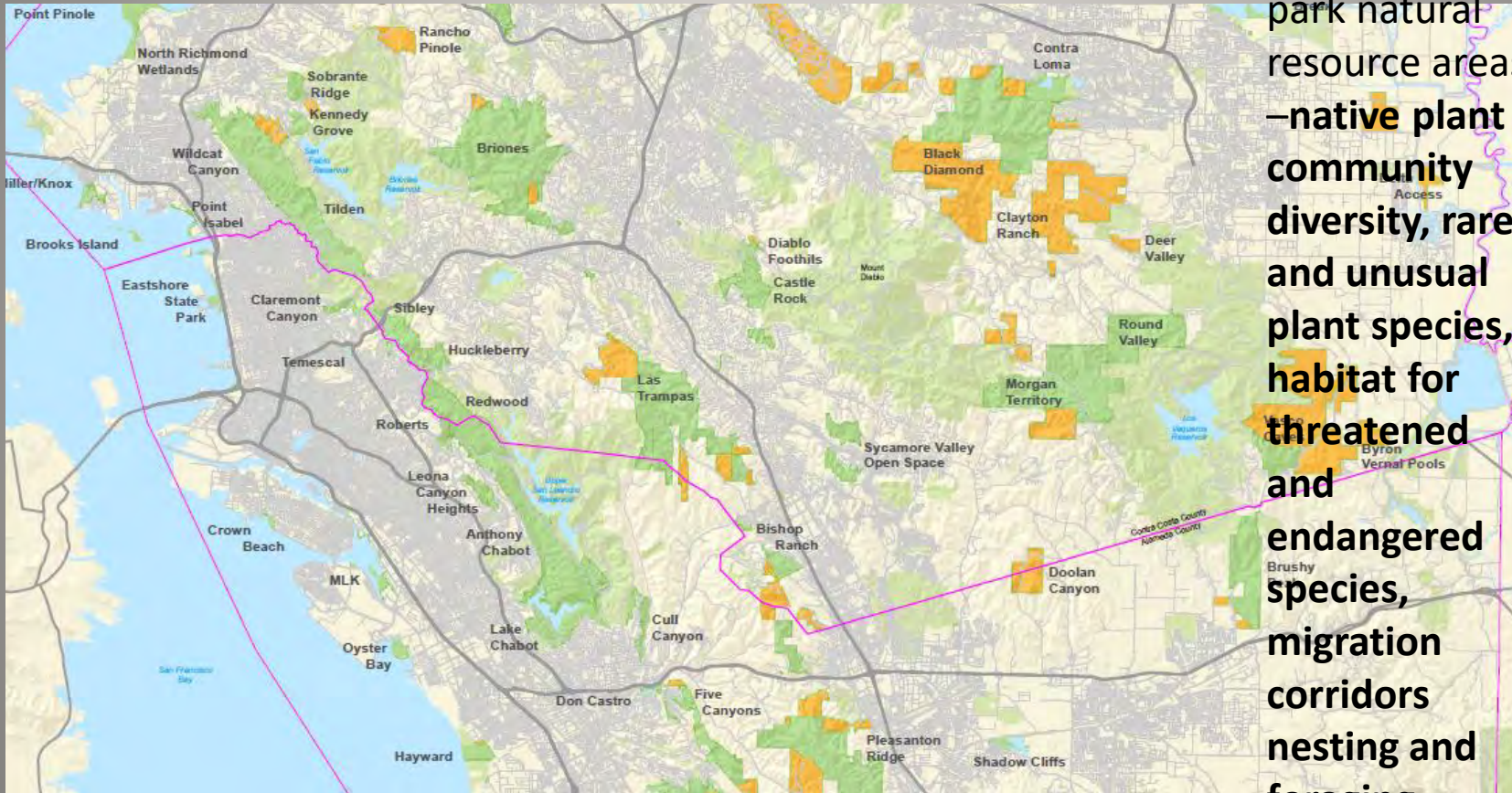
Park Natural Environment

&

Trail User Experience

I. Park Natural Environment

Design with a system wide evaluation of park natural resource areas –native plant community diversity, rare and unusual plant species, habitat for threatened and endangered species, migration corridors nesting and foraging habitat.



Land-banked parkland (orange), EBRPD, 6/2021

Manage different trail uses according to differing impacts

II. Trail User Experience

A safe and satisfying trail experience...being on the alert dodging mountain bikes on narrow trails is not a good experience, and sometimes a physically harmful one, for the majority of trail users

However, what we're hearing -

“Multi-use” on narrow trails can be managed in future parks in land banked properties with:

Mountain Biking one day, hikers and equestrians others

Clear sight lines to see other users from afar

Pinch points, rolling dips, grade reversals

Grades < 10% Clear signage

Occasional bulb outs

Mt. bikes one way up trails

Let's evaluate these proposed multi-use mitigations using the “2 E's”

II. Trail User Experience

All trail use types are greatly increasing in popularity, and thus the use of trails by both pedestrian and equestrian users compared to mountain biking appears to be rising proportionally.

What we're also hearing is -

Youth would like some technical trails (and it's difficult for them to have hikers and equestrians on those trails).

In sum, in talking about Park narrow trail policies, let's include from the start:

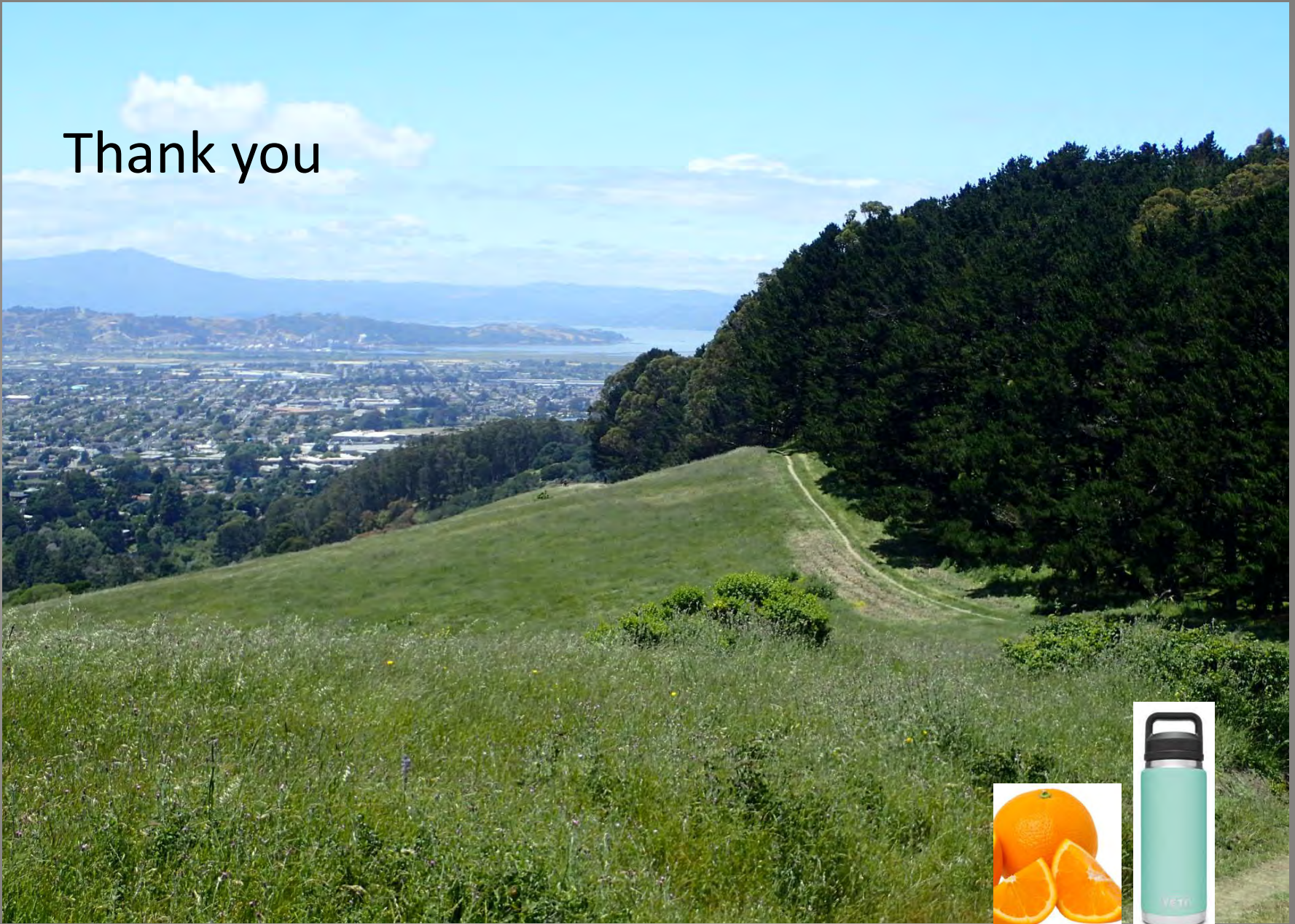
- Protection of the Park Natural Environment

&

- A Trail User **Experience** that works for all

to manage different uses that have differing impacts

Thank you



Sierra Club and STEP Perspective

Norman La Force, Chair Sierra Club East Bay Public Lands Committee

Helen Burke, Facilitator, STEP (Safe Trails, Environmental Protection)*

The major Conservation organizations that are participating in the TUWG have always supported appropriate access for recreation in our Regional Parks consistent with protecting and enhancing wildlife and wildlife habitat and protecting cultural sites and artifacts. We have always supported a user-friendly experience in our parks.

Park use has increased for all users. Mountain Bike use has also increased, but is still only 12-15% of total users based on current information.

There is a place for mountain biking in our Regional Parks especially for youth who are supervised and where they can be assured safe and interesting rides.

*STEP is an alliance formed during EBMUD's watershed management plan process, comprised of Sierra Club, Golden Gate Audubon Society, California Native Plant Society, Metropolitan Horsemen's Association, Claremont Canyon Conservancy, Regional Parks Association (RPA) and SPRAWLDEF (Sustainability, Parks and Wildlife Legal Defense Fund), that oppose mountain bikes on narrow trails used by hikers and equestrians due to safety and environmental impact concerns.

Mountain biking has inherent conflicts with habitat and wildlife protection and the user experience. Mountain biking access on narrow trails seriously challenges the user experience for hikers and equestrians. Narrow trails cannot be safely enjoyed or shared with mountain bikes. It is not just an issue of a few “bad apples.” If we are to arrive at solutions, we cannot ignore this fact. There are just too many examples of conflict

The conflict is due in part to the desire of many mountain bikers for a thrill experience.

Gary Fisher, pioneer in mountain biking put it this way:

“Mountain bikers...want corners, and obstacles to get over, and downhills ...often these trails were built in whatever woods were nearest by... no matter whose they were.”

Podcast, Outside, on mountain biking

<https://www.outsideonline.com/2390109/mountain-bikers-fighting-new-trails>

Just recently Scott Bartlebaugh also expressed this desire in discussing meetings with the Park District, stating in part:

“Advanced trails have not been explicitly defined but they [the Park District] have an understanding that there is interest in more technically challenging trails with drops and jumps.”

BTCEB Spring Advocacy Update
by Scott Bartlebaugh

Just three examples of technically challenging trails:

<https://youtu.be/0zLuqKNKOqs>

<https://youtu.be/vfRlsBbD11c>

<https://youtu.be/gJQtmxsx7j4>

On behalf of Sierra Club and STEP we called for various groups to engage in a process to try to find common ground and come up with solutions. We did this with EBMUD, but the TUWG apparently is not going to make recommendations for solutions. This is troubling because the participants in the TUWG not only have the knowledge of the issue, but also a commitment to reaching solutions. We should be making recommendations to the Park District Board.

We do know that a number questions need to be addressed for us to have a successful outcome for this working group.

1) **What does the mountain bike community want?** All narrow trails opened for mountain bikes, mountain bike parks like Crockett Hills, mountain bike only narrow trails and such trails in every park?

2) New trails in existing parks with Land Use Plans (LUPs) must go through the legal Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) process with full environmental review. If the mountain bike community wants to open up more narrow trails in existing parks with LUPs, where are the funds in the Park District's budget for a LUPA and for the increased costs of environmental review, trail maintenance, repair, and enforcement that will accompany those new bike trails. **Does the Park District have the funds to do LUPAs for existing parks and also LUPs for landbanked areas?**

3) The ecological health of the parks is critical. Before any new trails are considered, **Stewardship needs to evaluate and identify the larger, important natural habitat areas within the park system** that serve as refuge and corridors for wildlife for ground-based species, for bird nesting and habitat, and for rare native flora and important and sensitive native plant communities.

The notion advanced by the mountain bike community and Park District that engineering can resolve the user conflict issues and rogue trail concerns is not a solution because any engineered solution first requires assumptions about the values that you are engineering for, and narrow trails for mountain bikes assumes different values from narrow trails for hikers and equestrians.

The Mountain Bike advocates propose Three “Es” (Engineering, Education, and Enforcement) but that ignores two other: **“E’s:” Environmental protection and the User Experience.** You can certainly take a two-lane roadway and re-engineer and re-construct it to be a four-lane roadway, but the Environmental Impact and User Experience changes dramatically. Similarly, engineering narrow trails for mountain bikes assumes a different User Experience from a trail for pedestrians and horses and can have Environmental Impacts that are not present on trails designed for hikers and horses.

Sierra Club's and STEP's goal is to get a consensus on solutions we can recommend to the Park District Board. We need solutions that can work for the reasonably foreseeable future, not recommendations that will engender continued conflict and require Park District to spend resources in people and money on dealing with continued conflicts.

Norman La Force, Sierra Club

Helen Burke, STEP

I'm Mimi Wilson, President of Regional Parks Association.

Over 2 years ago, RPA and other major environmental communities became disturbed about how trails were planned and constructed in new E B Park properties.

We were alarmed that the goal of "all trails for all users" - especially in the newly-acquired McCosker property seemed justification to plot a narrow trail, allowing bicycles to traverse a sensitive patch of rare grasses listed in CEQA.

Proposed alterations to existing narrow trails to enable multi use also trouble us; studies without up-to-date baseline data are often inadequate to determine potential habitat disturbance. Thus from our voiced concerns..... the seeds of this trail users working group were planted.

This committee has begun to acknowledge serious personal safety concerns on narrow trails, and to touch on possible safety solutions.

But that discussion alone has mostly left out equally serious concerns -about wildlife disturbance and habitat destruction on multi-use narrow trails.

But not today....

Today is a loud shout out for coyotes and cougars, newts, and fence lizards, eagles and hummingbirds, cobwebby thistle and California poppies, shadowy redwood groves and endless vistas.

Today we talk of values.....of stewardship

Retired Park Naturalist Tim Gordon in his beautiful booklet *Heart of Wildcat Canyon* speaks of all parkland and entreats us....

"If WE do our job as stewards of the land, our grandchildren will be grateful

So, let us plan and develop and use the land..... as wisely - and as gently as we can.

Park land is a fine place to walk, run, breathe fresh air, and even go exploring on a bike.

It is a fine place in which to lose oneself—to sing, to dance, to write a poem, -- to enjoy the sights --and soundsand smells of this small piece of the natural world,a window on the universe— “

Trails allow us and our grandchildren to open the Parks' windows on the natural world.

It's the District's purpose.

But by its very nature, a trail and its users are an intrusion on the land.

Thus, the first step in planning must be the delicate balance between conservation and access and acceptance of ALL trails may NOT be for ALL users.

Wise trail users must never allow personal "fun" to ignore habitat protection and thereby render the land no longer "a fine place. "

Even gentle trail users must never become careless of their impact on the land through which they travel.

The proliferation of mountain bikes on the Parks' narrow trails has radically changed positive user experience and safety for many on trails never intended for 2-wheeled racers.

Solutions require good stewardship.

Good stewardship is hard work; it is never-ending & must involve policy, planners and people. Good stewardship requires us as users to speak out and for the park District to exercise its responsibility to listen carefully even to those conflicting voices offering solutions.

Hear what we have to say today, EB Parks.

Working together, we seek the values and joy that make our parks so vital to everyone's well-being.

We seek happy trails.....for plant life, for wildlife, for human life,