

**East Bay Regional Park District
Trails User Working Group
Meeting Notes June 3, 2021, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (via Zoom)**

Meeting Attendees:

East Bay Regional Park District: Brian Holt, Devan Reiff, Sean Dougan, Amanda Sanders, Suzanne Wilson, Kim Thai, Captain Lance Brede, Sean Connelly

Moderators: Lou Hexter, Maria Mayer (MIG, Inc.)

Working Group Members: Rick Rickard, Joseph Mouzon, Luana Espana, Gary Fitts, Jess Brown, Norman La Force, Scott Bartlebaugh, Simone Nageon de Lestang, Austin McInerny, Bonnie Lewkowicz, Jim Hanson, Helen Burke, Morris Older, Mary Barnsdale, John Aaron Graves, Emily Scholz, Linus Eukel, Mimi Wilson, Jess Brown, Amelia Marshall, Kathy Roth, Michael Gregory, Sean Burke, Pam Young, Elizabeth Hudson, Marie Grisham, Antoine Chambers, Ian Baird, Adele Ho

A meeting of the Trail User Working Group (TUWG) was held June 3, 2021, via Zoom. Lou Hexter acted as the moderator for the meeting. The following is a summary of the items discussed. The meeting started at 9:33 a.m.

Welcome:

Devan Reiff welcomed everyone to the meeting and went over the agenda with the group. Lt. David Phulps introduced himself to the group. Suzanne Wilson, Sean Connelly and Neoma Lavalley also introduced themselves to the group. Brian Holt welcomed everyone, and gave an introduction: the District continues to look towards what a new normal looks like with slowly reopening of District facilities, including swim locations, camping, and moving towards returning to in person meetings in the future. It's important to acknowledge that everyone in this group is an environmentalist and a lover of the environment. Being a mountain biker or an equestrian isn't mutually exclusive, and doesn't stop you from being a protector of the environment. In many other parks organizations there are strong partnerships to protect the environment and to increase access. There were Wildflower Rides in Marin County, organized by the Native Plant Society and the mountain biking community. Resource protection is at the center of what we do as staff of the Park District. We have a mandate to protect resources, as well as provide public access. We hear often from the environmental stakeholder groups who will present today: there is the Park District's Environmental Roundtable. There has been a lot of disinformation shared recently on the Park District's position on multiuse trails, and trail planning in Briones. It is challenging to work through some of that misinformation as our Board responds and reacts to the messages. We're trying to do what is a shared goal: identify a way to continue to provide for the public's enjoyment of our parks in a sustainable way that protects resources. We acknowledge that trails have impacts, regardless of the type of use—hiking, biking, equestrian. Human presence on trails has impacts. It's our job to manage and plan for that in the least impactful way possible. Consider the impact of doing nothing which we are seeing the result of now. There is huge demand for access to our parklands, and recognizing that we can't police every action in the

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parklands. We need to meet the needs of our users; the impact of doing nothing results in user-built trails that don't go through the extensive planning and vetting process that Park District built trails do. Hoping the conversation today will be respectful, productive and solutions-oriented.

Reflections on the Previous Meeting:

Lou Hexter welcomed everyone. The last meeting was focused on equestrians -- great presentations from the equestrian groups: how horses behave and how humans on horses behave and the impact that has on trails. What's emerging is an approach towards strategies: engineering, education, and enforcement as a "three-legged stool" to manage trails to the benefit of all. Engineering -- designing trails to minimize conflict and preserves the environmental resources. Education -- make it clear what is allowed and supported on trails, and what some of the dangers and conflicts are. Enforcement -- there is not a large enforcement staff at the District, how do we become citizen scientists and citizen enforcers, in the "small e" sense of the word. Lou reminded people of the TUWG website. Landbank map has been updated to review. Take the time to review the documents and resources shared by different trail user groups on the website.

Park District Framing presentation

Neoma Lavallo, Principal Planner gave a presentation on "Planning for Conservation and Recreation." The planning process is four phases starting with Phase 1, Initiation where we look at Master plan priorities, putting together a project team and scoping, defining the project, performing a site assessment, opportunities and constraints, community stakeholder input and engagement. Phase 2 is Develop Alternatives where we use input to develop alternatives, and balance project priorities based on all stakeholder and staff input and community needs. Phase 3 is Refine Alternatives is additional community and stakeholder input, presented to community leaders and our Board. Might do Phase 3 multiple times to meet District and community needs. Phase 4 is the Final Plan/Alternative for formal adoption or approval by Park District Board. After that it moves to other departments for implementation of the plan.

Currently, the District has about 125,000 acres, and 37,000 acres are in landbank (not open to the public). Of the landbank properties, 19,000 acres are in some form of special conservation status, that's almost half of the landbank. Overall, 25,397 acres throughout the District are in special conservation status. Special conservation status are legal agreements that focuses the use of the property on conservation and restoration of habitat. There are often long term use management plans that show the goals for protected species on those properties. Conservation lands can be mitigation for certain development projects.

The East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservancy (Conservancy) lands are located in Clayton, Pittsburg, Brentwood and other areas of eastern Contra Costa County. Park District has 14,000 acres of Conservancy land acquired since 2007: parts of Black Diamond Mines, Deer Valley, Clayton Ranch, Delta Access, Vasco Hills. These properties were acquired as mitigation for development and are subject to the Habitat Conservation Plan with specific guidelines for recreation, with a focus on passive and low intensity recreation. The plan has to be approved by the Park District, Conservancy, and the US Department of Fish and Wildlife. No off-trail use, dogs on leash if allowed, aquatic habitat and pond setbacks, staging areas and access points are limited. A newly initiated project is the recently purchased Chouinard Winery in Castro Valley to be a staging area for a Garin to Pleasanton Ridge Regional Trail, a 2013 Master Plan regional trail, and to connect landbank properties to open in the future. In Phase I – Initial Assessment now, we are currently collecting staff input and conducting opportunities and constraints analysis. With Owens and Robertson landbank properties, balancing dual mission of public access and open space protection, connecting these two large parks (Garin and Pleasanton).

Kathy Roth asked if the Conservancy lands are just in Contra Costa County. Neoma answered, yes, all in eastern Contra Costa County. Kathy Roth asked if Conservancy lands and other mitigation lands sometimes intersect (in a Venn diagram). Answer: yes, all Conservancy land is mitigation land for developments in eastern Contra Costa County. There are also conservation easements on Conservancy lands. Kathy said she'd read conservation easement documents for many of these properties and doesn't see limitations pertaining to dogs. Two properties in the Clayton Ranch area that were purchased by Save Mt. Diablo and transferred the properties to the Park District and negotiated that they were subject to the Conservancy guidelines. Ultimately the properties are subject to the Conservancy's dog restrictions. Kathy sees no mentions of dogs in these documents, but does see other limitations. Neoma offered to take the discussion offline.

Morris Older asked of the 19,000 acres how many are prescribed against ever opening to the public at all? Neoma answered that very few if any would be prevented from public access. Maybe one conservation easement we have may not allow any public access. Others may have specific restrictions like no new trails – subject to only current ranch roads, or other restrictions. Morris asked that of the 37,000 acres in landbank, almost all will eventually open to the public, and the 19,000 acres

Conservationists Perspectives:

Mimi Wilson, President of the Regional Parks Association gave a presentation: since 1947, RPA's primary purpose has been protection of natural resources in the East Bay, including Park District lands. RPA has an elected board and disseminates information to the public; RPA and others became alarmed with the Park District 2013 Master Plan, which seemed to imply a goal of "all trails for all users." That seemed justification in the newly acquired McCosker property (Sibley) to allow bicycles to traverse a sensitive patch of rare grasses, listed in CEQA. Proposed alterations to existing trails without scientific research to evaluate wildlife disturbance also concerned them. The seeds for this Working Group were sown from this time. This committee has explored safety concerns on multi-use narrow trails. Not as much has been said about rogue bicycle trails. Today's presentations are about values and stewardship. "If we do our job as stewards of the lands, future generations will thank us. Let's use the land as wisely and as gently as we can...Parks are a window on the universe." (Tim Gordon, retired naturalist). A trail and it's users are intrusions on the land, so trail planning must allow the land itself to dictate the first steps. Designating trail use, before proper habitat studies, may render the land no longer a fine place. Good stewardship requires users to speak up when they're troubled. And the Park District must listen to all ideas to keep the parks a fine place. Respect the land, protect the joy that parkland gives us. Protect the trails for plant life, for wild life and for human life.

Norman La Force gave a presentation, speaking as the Chair of the Sierra Club East Bay Public Lands Committee and on behalf of Helen Burke, Facilitator of STEP (Safe Trails, Environmental Protection). The major Conservation organizations participating in the Working Group have always supported appropriate access for recreation in Regional Parks, when it is consistent with protecting and enhancing wildlife and habitat. They support user friendly experiences in Regional Parks. They recognize that park use is up for all users, including mountain bikers, but that mountain bikers only represent 12-15% of park users (based on current data). There is a place for bikers in the regional parks, especially for youth who are supervised and where they can assured safe and interesting rides. Mountain biking has inherent conflict with habitat and wildlife protection and the (park) user experience. Narrow trails can not be safely enjoyed or shared with mountain bikers. There are too many examples of conflicts between mountain bikers and hikers and equestrians. The conflict is due, in part, to the desire by many mountain bikers in a "thrill experience." (Quotes and links to YouTube videos are given in the presentation). Sierra Club and STEP called for various groups to find common ground and come up with solutions. The Working Group should be making recommendations to the Park District Board (for solutions to trails conflict). Questions to be addressed, in order to have a successful outcome for the working group: 1) What does the mountain biking community want? 2) Does the Park District have funds to conduct Land Use

Plans for land bank areas and LUP amendments for existing parks? 3) Park District Stewardship staff needs to identify the larger, natural habitat areas within the park system that serve as wildlife refuge and corridors. Engineering of trails is not going to solve trail conflict issues; the “Three E’s” (Engineering, education and enforcement) advocated by mountain bikers is missing two “E’s”: Environmental Protection and User Experience. Sierra Club and STEP’s goal is to get to consensus on solutions that can be recommended by the Park District Board of Directors. Solutions that can work for the reasonably foreseeable future, not recommendations that will engender continued conflict and require the Park District to use resources on dealing with continued conflicts.

Pam Young, of Golden Gate Audubon Society gave a presentation. Agrees with Brian that trails have an impact on the environment. GGA members have an ethics oath, and encourages that consideration. First question: is mountain biking an extreme sport? Extreme mountain biking causes higher impacts that occur with high speed and steep, wet slopes, especially under strong braking, skidding and cornering. In the Tilden Nature Area there is illegal bike activity there are over 40 bird species that are now rare. The Tilden Wildcat Gorge trails also have illegal bike activity (40 illegal trails). This level of activity results in habitat fragmentation. Mountain bikes night-riding and bright lights affect wildlife. Bikers do exceed 15mph speed limit There are direct and cumulative impacts where wildlife are flushed or chased from the area. Trails create damage to native communities. Some biologists now say that mountain biking is the single greatest threat to habitat viability. Proposed strategies: 1) protect high value habitat from recreation; 2) restrict mountain biking to approved trails; 3) require orientation and education classes; establish regular mountain biking patrols; 4) study impacts and exclude damaged trails; 5) increase fines; 6) exclude repeat offenders, and/or require permits.

Jim Hanson, Conservation Chair, California Native Plant Society gave a presentation, “Managing the narrow trail.” We are hearing that there is rising mountain biking popularity and also seeing trail walking, running and jogging are on the rise. (30% increase in park users, according to Park District). Also hearing that multi-use on narrow trails can be expanded with occasional bulbouts, mountain bike one-way trails, etc... and the three E’s (education, engineering and enforcement). Question: where are the 2 E’s in this equation? Park Natural Environment and Trail User Experience -- different uses have different impacts. In regards to the park natural environment there are sensitive root zone of trees, trails conditions, park native flora and erosion. Various photos were shown giving examples of those environmental concerns with trails and native flowers. Erosion is crucial to study, as well. The trail user wants a safe a satisfying trail experience, and emphasize what actual trail users have said they favor. Park use is rising in general and the major trail use continues to be hikers, walkers, assisted trail users, running, jogging, and dog walkers. Mountain biking has access to 25% of natural surface narrow trails, with access to 88% of Park trails in total including fire roads, paved trails. Youth would like some technical trails. Suggestions: 1) Design with a system-wide evaluation of park natural resource areas. Such as native plant diversity, rare and unusual species, habitat for threatened and endangered species, migration corridors and nesting and foraging habitat. Manage different trail uses according to different impacts. 2) Trail user experience: would be helpful to have a discussion about new trails, when looking at land bank parks—they are connected to existing parks. Include from the start (of planning for new parks and trails): the Park’s natural environment and the trail user experience. Consider the “two E’s.

Chat comments

Discussion if the Metropolitan Horseman’s Association is affiliated with STEP and if STEP has the right to say that they represent MHA.

Mary Barnsdale said in chat: I hope before TUWG wraps up, the Park District can share how good trails are designed and engineered.

Scott Bartlebaugh mentioned in chat: It appears in these presentations that cycling use is heavy as well. Crockett Hills is the only park with a significant amount of narrow trail access to bikes. The rest are very small sections with limited milage in any one park. It is not just youth that would like more technical trails

Kathy Roth asked in chat: Lafayette Reservoir has timed use for bicycles- how has that experience been for EBMUD? She also said - I think the elephant in the room is that we can have a planning process, signage, timed use, other rules, but in fact these areas are refreshingly wild and uncontrolled, so no matter what is decided there will be a population that is ignorant of or ignores the rules.

Mary Barnsdale said in chat: To me, this all supports that we need more trails, big-time. If everyone is squeezed onto the same limited trails, there are more conflicts and more impacts.

Amelia Marshall responded to Mary in chat: Mary, this is like the old idea that if you build more freeways, there will be less density. But unless you are far from the urban centers, more trails does not seem to reduce density. A pilot program should be considered so that this could be measured.

Mary Barnsdale responded to Amelia in chat: Building freeways was about reducing gridlock. If we have more trails, we're not going to suddenly have X times the park users.

Amelia Marshall said in chat: People will continue to gravitate to their neighborhood parks. There may be a role for specialized trails to be provided, but stewardship considerations should be foremost. The Park District must balance conservation and recreation.

Scott Bartlebaugh said in chat: Landscape planning and distribution of opportunities is an important consideration

Mary Barnsdale said in chat: We should look at how populations have grown, too. (The Park District Board is doing that exercise right now, looking at how Wards may need to be redrawn.)

Simone Nageon de Lestang said in chat: Thank you everyone for the excellent discussion. I have to leave the group early today but I want to note that the Bay Area Ridge Trail is pro-sustainable trails. Built to minimize and avoid resource impacts and built for all users, where it makes sense. Thank you for the excellent presentations on the development process East Bay Staff!

Questions and responses to the presentations

Morris Older said that it's easy to blame any one user group for damage caused to trails, but as someone who has worked on building trails, many trails were originally ranch roads, and not designed with maintenance in mind. Braided trails, and trails that are too steep are common in many parks. Gullies on trails goes back for long ways, due to erosion. This pre-dates mountain biking. The point is to manage impact.

Scott Bartlebaugh said that mountain bikers do not just want extreme sports trails, it is a spectrum. Some bicyclists enjoy community. The presentations show just a small portion of what the community is interested in. Restrictions are very heavy now, and as Brian mentioned has lead to illegal trail building. Using different tools to build trails that bikers can use would be more helpful.

Luana Espana was disappointed in the presentations. She felt like the presentations show bikers as the enemy. Also, Norman didn't mention his article that he wrote (in the SC *Yodeler*) and how it made some people in the group feel. Trails are negatively affected by walkers, runners, joggers, equestrians not just bikes. As a group we

need to see how we become solution oriented. We need to frame things in how to work together to solve issues.

Adele Ho thanked Luana as she said things she was thinking. As a PAC member who uses the trails in different ways and felt somewhat attacked during the presentations. There was some good solutions at the end of Pam's presentation, and enjoyed Jim's presentations. The two E's brought up are good. I would suggest that at some point show the big map of all the lands and where the restrictions and constraints are, where the demands are for more usage for different user groups.

The TUWG participants were split into five breakout groups. They were asked to answer the questions: What assumptions do you think are important for the Park District to consider in developing new trails? What ideas do you have for promoting conservation goals and minimizing the impacts of trail use?

Report Back from Breakout Groups:

Group 1 – Luana Espana was the reporter. Spirited group with different view points. Assumptions were looking at the new parks and understanding the demands, different parks developing trails could reduce heavily impacted current parks. The need for relief from overcrowding. Narrow trails debate. The opportunity to look at multiuse trails and designing good trails in new parks. Make sure environmentalists are included early. Equity is important to build trails where there isn't a lot of access to trails. What is available near new trails? Stables, etc... should there be more equestrian only trails if a stable nearby? What are the shifting demographics in the surrounding area and how should that affect trail design? How are we building trails that are more inclusive of community that has less resources; for example -- cars? Trail work could be a requirement to participate in trail events like races. Permitting process for certain types of events that require volunteer trail work hours. District could start an adopt-a-trail program where people and trail users can have ownership.

Group 2 – Mary Barnsdale was the reporter. Human presence has an automatic impact that needs to be minimized in parks. Also parks are for people. We need to find a sweet spot to balance everyone's needs. Devil is in the details. They questioned how closely planners work with Stewardship and found out it was closely. Disagreed about whether more trails need to be built. Suggested pilot projects with new ideas to see how it works out. Amelia said that when planners consider an area for a new park there is a general tendency to silo the task to the direct area (for example Roddy Ranch golf course), but if connected to Black Diamond Mines it could be a big impact.

Group 3 – Kathy Roth was the reporter. Assumptions: Goal: maintain the environment. Some areas are more sensitive than others. Recreation is also important. Population growth can be a tool to look where to build new trails. Trail design to minimize shortcuts, good grading and sight lines, minimize braiding. Ranch roads are too steep and cause erosion, but are important for emergency access.

Group 4 – Norman La Force was the reporter. Assumptions: The lands are a limited resource, how to handle that – maybe a cap on users. Important to look at future trends, connectivity is important with wildlife in mind. Education: Marin County Parks has a process to identify new trails where they are most appropriate. Recreational use has impacts.

Group 5 – Helen Burke was the reporter. Assumptions: Multiple viewpoints need to be considered, and one viewpoint shouldn't dominate. There will be competing interests and resources, the District needs to have

emphasized communication and planning. Can't design every trail for every use. Assume there will be more people using the parks and learning curve. The District will need additional funds for development and maintenance/repair. Expect natural disasters to have effects on the trails/parks. Ideas for Conservation goals: Start with looking at the land on a larger map. Create portfolio of trails that are multi-use and others as single-use. More enforcement. Lean on technology for cost effectiveness.

Joseph Mouzon we talked about a YouTube channel where park rangers tell stories about what it is like to be a Park Ranger. Could be an educational tool and employment encouragement.

Next Steps

Suggested Future Meetings (Subject to change): July 15 (Dog owners, Disabled Community, Cultural affinity and youth), August 5, and September 16.

Roddy Ranch public meeting coming up on July 1st you are all welcome to attend and participate.

Member Announcements:

No member announcements were made.

Meeting Close

The meeting came to a close at 12:05 p.m. (approximately)

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