

East Bay Regional Park District

Trail User Working Group

Meeting Notes February 19, 2021, 10 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, Erich Pfoehler, Kim Thai, Sean Connelly, Captain Lance Brede, David Phulps, Becky Tuden, Matt Graul

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, Elena Miramar, Kathy Roth, Antoine Chambers, Ian Baird, Laura C, Adele Ho, Helena Gilbert, Emily Jean

The third meeting of the Trail User Working Group (TUWG) was held February 19, 2021, via Zoom. Lou Hexter acted as the moderator for the meeting. The following is a summary of the items discussed. The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m.

I. Welcome

Lou opened the meeting and reviewed the meeting agenda. Brian Holt provided announcements from the Park District, noting that even with huge increases in use of District facilities, staffing levels remain the same. Long-time General Manager Bob Doyle recently retired, and Brian showed a time lapse map that illustrated all the land acquired during Doyle's time in the Land Department (adding 47,000 acres), and his time as GM (an additional 18,000 acres). The District will be entering a new era with a new General Manager in the coming months. Brian observed that the Park District needs to safely and sustainably open land, currently in Land Bank status, and allow for new trail use. He reiterated that this group isn't set up to make policy for the Park District, as that is the role of the Park Advisory Committee (PAC). The TUWG will focus on identifying solutions to trail conflicts to make trails safe and enjoyable for everyone.

Captain Lance Brede of the EBRPD Police Department spoke next. He has been with the District for 28 years, and during that time, there has been a lot of growth. Currently the Park District covers 125,000 acres. Captain Brede reported that there has been about a 30 to 50% increase in the amount of visitors

since the beginning of pandemic. Along with this there has been an increase in violations and conflicts. With more people on the trail, there are more issues. The Park District budgets for 73 Officers, but the District is down ten officers due to attrition. On a daily average there is a sergeant and four to five officers to cover the entire Park District. We rely on our partners to do targeted enforcement to specific areas that have had repeated reports of violations. Many of the infractions are low level, where an officer has to actually witness the violation. We rely heavily on our volunteers to get out to inform the public on the current rules, but we can't use the Volunteer Safety Patrol during the pandemic until the area is back in the yellow tier of Covid restrictions. There have been a low number of bike-related violations that have been cited in the last year. As a police department we always continue to look at other agencies to see their best practices. One third of all Park District lands are in land banked status, a total of 37,359 acres. We need to work together to sustainably open these lands that the public invested in.

2. Working Group Survey Results

Sean Dougan, Trails Program Manager, next provided a brief summary of the Working Group Survey results. He noted that the survey is a possible test run of a survey which could be sent out to the general public. 25 people responded to the Working Group Survey: 64% of respondents are satisfied with current trail system. The majority of respondents enjoyed using the trail in the moment. The majority of people do travel to get to our trails. 75% of respondents enjoy trails narrower than 8 feet. Signage can be improved from the responses. Trail etiquette responses were split. This is useful for the Park District, and the Public Affairs department will be working on a video campaign about trail etiquette. TUWG can send comments offline to Sean or Devan on the survey questions if they have feedback.

3. Reflections on the Previous Meeting

Lou talked about the last meeting, noting the conversations that centered on the hikers' perspective, and reminding the Working Group members about the TUWG-specific website and resources gathered there that are organized by user group types.

Jim Hanson expressed that the discussion about narrow trails seems to be important and suggested that it should be an agenda item for a future meeting. He also would like a discussion about E-bikes, including legal analysis, from the Park District.

Norman LaForce requested that a memorandum developed by several TUWG members entitled, "Narrow Trails for All," should be shared with the whole group. Issues about narrow trails, he feels, need to be discussed in depth, more than what can be covered in a two-hour meeting. Brian Holt responded that the memo had been shared with the TUWG via email.

Morris Older stated that our mission in this group is to focus on the new trails that will be built in the future. He is looking forward to seeing how experiences on existing trails might influence how new trails are designed in the future.

Kathy Roth felt that the purpose of this group is to have some open-ended communication before we approach the issues with our hardened positions regarding potential user conflicts.

Helen Burke supported Jim Hanson's request to put narrow trails on the agenda. She thinks it's important to understand the problems and what it would take for groups to be on board before moving to solutions.

4. Bicyclists' Perspectives

To open this segment of the meeting, Sean Dougan gave a brief history of mountain biking, which was pioneered here in the Bay Area (Marin County) in the 1980s. Mountain bikes range from lightweight race bikes to heavy full-suspension downhill bikes. There is a spectrum of bikers' abilities and styles, and it is impossible to accommodate the full range of biker abilities. The pandemic has created an explosion in the use of mountain bikes. The main point is that we want to talk about HOW mountain biking can be accommodated in the Park District, not IF it should be. We have 200 miles of unpaved trails currently; 50 miles are open to bikes (25%). Bikes are not allowed on narrow trails except for the exceptions in Ordinance 38, section 409. Ordinance 38 also prohibits bicycles in certain areas completely. Our bike brochure has a section on trail etiquette. Bikes are supposed to yield to everyone, and everyone is supposed to yield to horses. Every two years there is an Ordinance 38 update. The Board will undergo this process in 2021. The following is an overview of some of the bicycle related issues covered in Ordinance 38: Bicycles are a two or three wheeled vehicle powered by personal power. It is unlawful to operate a bike in a negligent, reckless or unsafe manner. It is unlawful to operate a bicycle at unsafe speeds (usually 15MPH) or to be speeding when passing other trail users or areas with short sight distances. Bikes are not permitted on hiking or riding trails except on those designated or to ride across country. Bikes must go in single file when passing others and on the right side on blind corners (although this is possibly not the safest for going by horses).

Scott Bartlebaugh of the Bicycle Trails Council of the East Bay next gave a presentation on the off-road cyclists' perspective, along with Helen Gilbert-Snyder, who is a mountain biking coach at El Cerrito High School. Scott said that his desired outcome from the TUWG is to clarify and establish common interest, to better understand each other's perspectives and concerns. He noted that bikers often use the parks in other ways – as hikers, equestrians and dog walkers. Bikers are looking for better trail experiences for ALL users. Helen described what cyclists seek in their park trail experience: adventure, a place to play and be away from other people, a place to challenge themselves and to enjoy the outdoors. Steep fire roads with ruts from cow hooves are not ideal for safety for bikes and newer riders. With more access to narrow trails, they want the activity to be sustainable. There are lots of bicyclists – youth and adults – that would like to assist with trail maintenance projects (as volunteers). Cyclists do recognize some of the issues related to trail biking – that bikes can spook horses, that some cyclists are disrespectful, that illegal trail building can damage sensitive resources, and that bikes can be startling to other users and wildlife. Off-road cycling popularity is growing and adding to trail congestion. There is concern that advocacy doesn't seem to work in the public process. Park District staff are seen doing great land use planning and stewardship work, but it isn't being supported. There aren't any bike-only trails, just shared access trails. Money is being spent on policing and not on new trail access. The District does a great job of land acquisition but there has been very little narrow trail development over the last twelve years.

Helen talked about options for improving the situation. First, doing a Districtwide review and trails master plan; continue developing more effective education about trail etiquette, improved signage for uphill/downhill flow on trails. Design new, well-built trails with cyclists in mind. More trails would

disperse users. Two videos sent out prior to meeting show that cyclists are trying to make trail use better for all. Examples were given of other agencies (John Muir Land Trust, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District) with sensitive design of bike trails. Helen emphasized opportunities for youth who can be our next park stewards and who love outdoor exploration. It's great for their physical and mental health. These kids love exploring, they love the physical exercise from bikes and the mental health benefits it brings. They don't enjoy trail conflicts; they don't enjoy feeling like they don't belong. There is a window of opportunity right now to build a new generation of park stewards who will be part of these lands for the next half century. We can do this by educating on trail etiquette, by demonstrating thoughtful methods to reduce user conflict -- whether that's through time day or time-of-day specific trail use; user specific trails, or both. We can get these kids learning about conservation efforts as they build and maintain trails, building positive relationships and decreasing user conflict, if there's commitment to making changes and changing the methods we used from the past to the present.

Morris Older shared that Bill's trail in Samuel P. Taylor State Park is worth a good look for its innovative multi- use safety features. He provided a link to photos of mitigation measures on Bill's trail that he took: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/5sJPUVVUY7JYPaaf8>

Simone Nageon de Lestang offered that there are also environmental mitigation measures in place on Bill's Trail, like closing for certain winter months to reduce erosion/impact.

Amelia Marshall observed that the presentation showing horses and bikes on the trail together gave a false and misleading impression: The trail was way too narrow; the cyclist should not be so close to a horse to be able to reach out and grab it. And she noted that the cyclists did not yield to the horse. She believes that only wide trails are safe and enjoyable for multi-use.

Next, meeting attendees were split into five separate breakout rooms to discuss the following three questions:

- What are some of the experiences that bicyclists want to have in using trails, and can you relate to that experience?
- What are some of the issues that bicyclists experience and/or create on trails?
- What are some solutions to resolve the issues that users face (education, management strategies, etc.)? What role would your group play in these solutions?

Each group was instructed to choose someone to report back to the group at large. The breakout group reports are summarized here:

Group 1 (Scott Bartlebaugh, reporter): Goals – Some people preferred wider roads to narrow roads; some people look at days/times they ride to have it be less crowded; an uninterrupted experience is most enjoyable. **Issues** – Riders that aren't aware of others; some people riding up and off the trail to create a feature; creating "social trails." **Solutions** – Education for hikers to make sure they know that there will be other users; getting together to work on solutions.

Group 2 (Morris Older, reporter): Goals – Bikes want the same types of things as hikers and equestrians – to appreciate nature, unwind, meet physical and technical challenges. **Solutions** – Trails need to be designed for multi-use from the beginning; people are more willing to cooperate when trails

are purposely built to be multi-use; create trails specifically for the bikers who want technical challenges. Promote the “Slow and Say Hello” program. Equestrians can invite bikers to come ride bikes by their horses to desensitize the horse; this also would work for dogs. Cyclists can use peer pressure to deal with people who are not following the rules. There is still concern that education will be enough to fix these problems.

Group 3 (Adele Ho, reporter): **Goals** – Variety of experiences, from family time to adrenaline junkies, with most people looking for enjoyment of trails, getting fresh air and exercise. Challenges and technical trails are wanted to improve skills. **Issues** – the consequences of a conflicts between a bike and hiker or equestrian is bigger than consequences of people not picking up a bag of dog poop; ecological conservation issues when people go off trail. **Solutions** – Education; constructing some bike trails in strategic locales; not all trails for all people at all locations; dedicated trails; alternating days.

Group 4 (Kim Thai, reporter): **Goals** – want challenging trails maybe in larger park system; address safety issues; connection issues with having parks trails connected. **Issues** – poison oak. **Solutions** – bike park; access points for bikes so they can connect to other parks; land bank lands having trails created using lessons learned; education communication campaign; good environmental analysis of where trails should go. Tahoe Rim Trail as an example of different uses for different part of trails.

Group 5 (Simone Nageon de Lestang, reporter): **Goals** – Want intimate experience with nature. **Issues** – Social trails, speed control. It would be good to have Trail User Conflict survey as a formal survey. **Solutions** – Developing access plans, signage at the trails, clearer maps that identify opportunities for bikes.

5. Next Steps

The next meeting will be on Thursday, April 22, from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm, and will cover the equestrian perspective. Future meetings are currently envisioned to be in June (focus on environmental issues); August (focus on dog walkers and a synthesis discussion); and September (final recommendations).

Announcement: Morris Older has been awarded a Lifetime Volunteer Achievement Award.

6. Meeting Close

Meeting closed at 12:00 p.m.