

Report Based on a Survey of Equestrians’ Experience with Multi-Use EBRPD Trails

Submitted to EBRPD Planning Department 11/5/20

by Amelia S. Marshall, Volunteer Equestrian Advocate
EBRPD Planning Department Trail Users Working Group

“The Park District seeks to provide opportunities on its trails for all modes of users, including hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikers.”

- General manager Robert Doyle in 2019 Trails Packet, page 10.

Introduction:

How do equestrians want to experience trail riding in the East Bay Regional Park District? Can a cohesive picture of the equestrian perspective be formulated, to guide the park district planning department?

This report presents preliminary data provided by equestrians in an online survey, plus personal communications, with several dozen people who ride in the Regional Parks, throughout Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. The goal of this report is to present their thinking and perceptions to assist the park district in future trail use planning.

Data Summary:

- Almost all respondents to the survey report that they have been in a potentially **dangerous encounter with a mountain bicyclist (87.5%) or an off leash dog (85%).**
- No respondent disagreed with the statement: “In parks with established equestrian use, **bikes and E-bikes should not be allowed on narrow trails** (less than 8’ wide).”
- Asked to evaluate **the novel “narrow multiuse trail” design** specified in the “2019 Trails Packet” document, **only 22.5% of survey respondents would be willing to take their horses** on these trails. They are perceived to be designed for bicycle use, and too narrow for safe use by equestrians.
- **A large majority (83.5%) of respondents felt that bicyclists should have their own trails**, where the cherished pursuits of downhill racing and hopping over barriers will not endanger other trail users.
- **Briones, Reinhardt Redwood, Diablo Foothills, Anthony Chabot, and Tilden Regional Parks were most often used** by trail riders in this survey, though many other parks were named and are regularly visited by equestrians.

Getting Accurate Trail Use Data Is An Elusive Goal:

Though accurate numbers are hard to find, it is obvious that there are a lot of bicycles on trails. This has caused equestrians to change their trail use patterns due to concerns for their safety. Speeding bicycles passing horses on wide trails and sudden encounters with bicyclists on narrow trails have made equestrians hyperalert. It's not a relaxing ride.

While the majority of bicyclists are courteous to other trail users, even a polite bicyclist appearing suddenly around a blind corner can spook a horse. A small, but highly visible, percentage of bicyclists exhibit a belligerent attitude toward equestrians. The occasional serious horse/bike accident sends a rider to the hospital. Yet most adverse encounters are not reported.

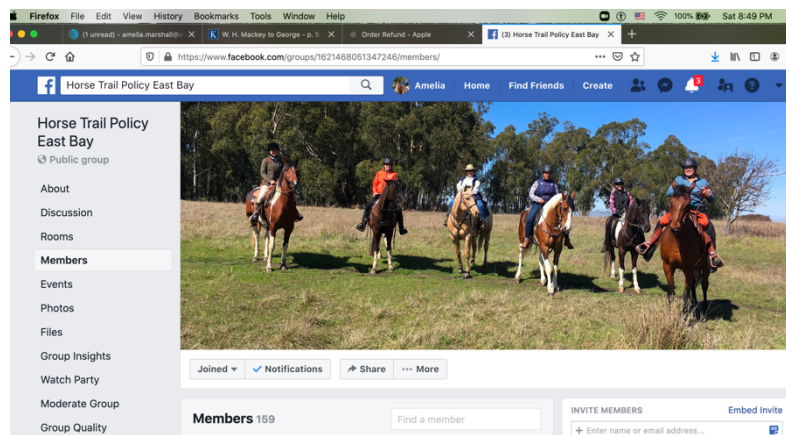
When bicycles “take over” a certain area, equestrians simply stop riding there. This will appear to park agency managers as a lack of interest, or a decrease in the population of horseback riders, rather than a reaction to adverse incidents.

Our goal is to preserve suitable trails as safe spaces where horses can be ridden without fear of unsettling – and potentially dangerous – encounters with other types of users.

Survey Methodology

To reach as many East Bay equestrian trail riders as possible, and to include their statements in this report, on August 3, 2020, we started a Facebook forum called “Horse Trail Policy East Bay”. Within ten days, 100 equestrians had joined the group. As of the date of this writing (November 5, 2020), the group membership numbers 160.

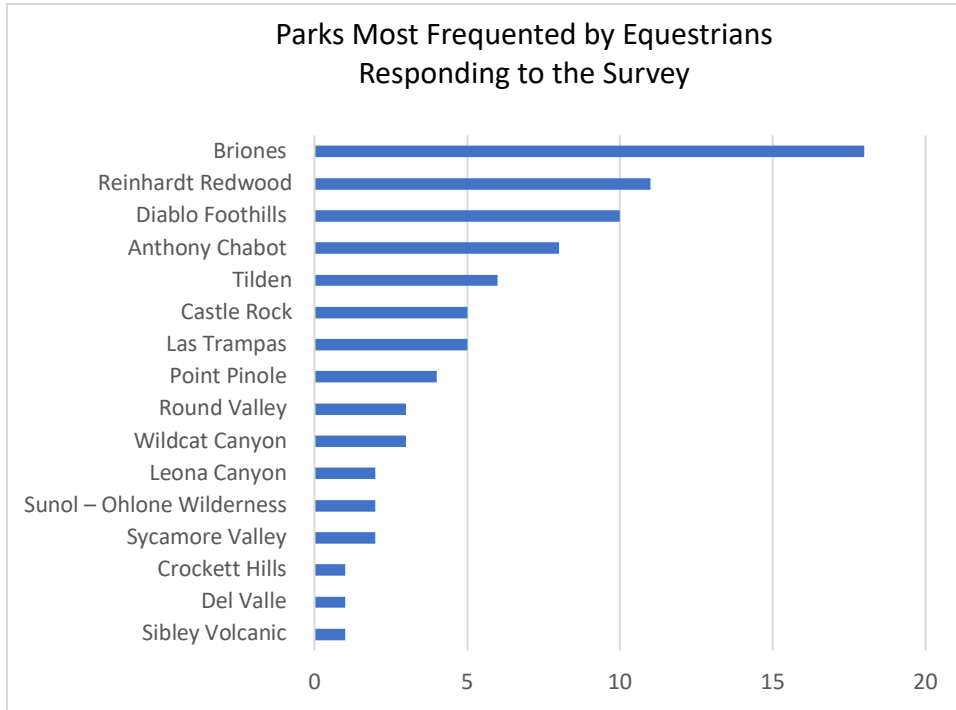
Within this forum, members were invited to complete a six-question survey using the SurveyMonkey platform. Fifty-three equestrians responded. Unfortunately, we discovered that only the first 40 responses could be viewed for free; to access the remaining 13 would require paying \$374. While our survey does not cover a large data sample size, the responses do present a cohesive picture of equestrians’ experiences.



Survey Results:

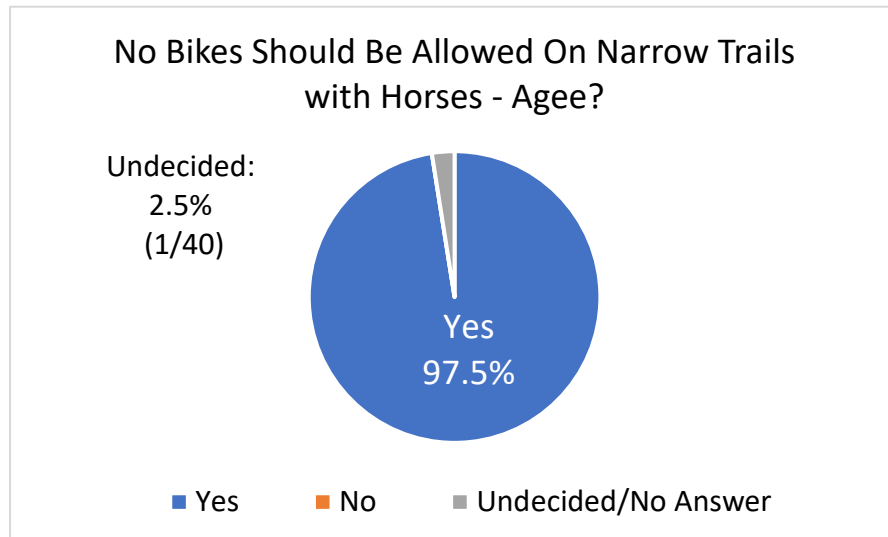
Question 1: What are the three EBRPD parks in which you have ridden the most?

In order of the number of times listed.

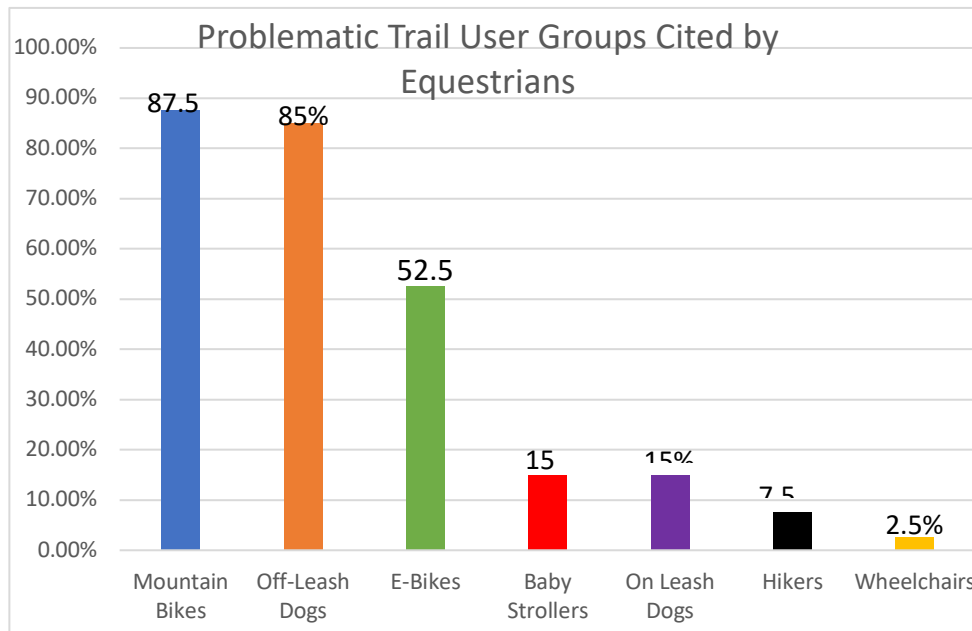


In addition to these “top three” parks cited in the 40 tabulated surveys, equestrians ride at Alameda Creek Trail, Black Diamond Mines, Brushy Peak, Contra Loma, Garin, Lake Chabot, Morgan Territory, Quarry Lakes, Shadow Cliffs, Sobrante Ridge, and Vargas Plateau Regional Parks. Horse trailer parking is provided at most of these parks. Access to Mission Peak Regional Park is typically from the Ohlone Wilderness.

Question 2: Do you agree with the statement: “In parks with established equestrian use, bikes and e-bikes should not be allowed on narrow trails (less than eight feet wide) , particularly those serving barns and equestrian centers.”

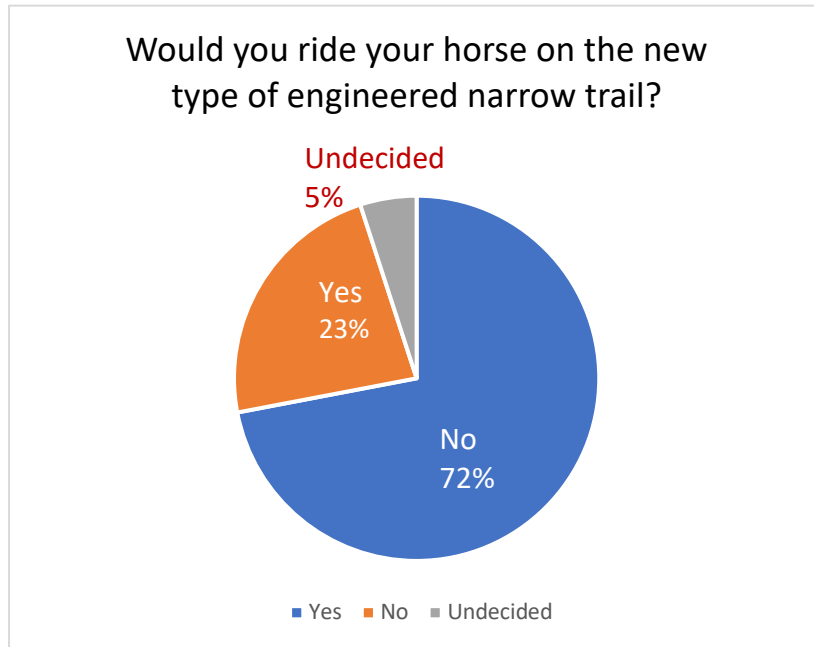


Question 3: With which of these types of trail users have you encountered a potentially dangerous situation while trail riding?

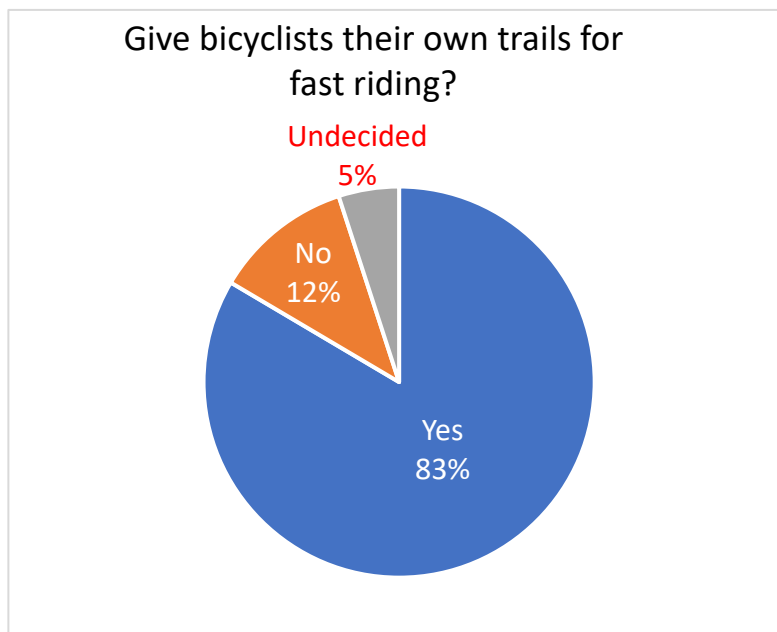


Question 4. Would you ride in newly developed EBRPD parklands on “narrow (8’) multi-use trails for everyone” as described in the EBRPD 2019 Trails Packet document?

Note: The 2019 Trails Packet document, the Sierra Club White Paper on EBRPD trail policy, and the 2013 EBRPD Master Plan were uploaded to the “Horse Trail Policy East Bay” Facebook forum along with the survey link.



Question 5. Should mountain bike riders have their own dedicated trails and parks, such as the pump/flow trails of Crockett Hills, where equestrians would never set hoof?



Question 6: Additional Comments:

Note: Many respondents did not provide additional comments. The following were received.

Response #3:

- It is extremely dangerous to ride on narrow trails where there is always the chance of a bike zipping around the corner. Often the rider is wearing earphones and can't even hear our pleas to slow down

Response #4:

- It would be nice if all trails could be multi-use, however there is too much risk to allow cyclists on single track trails that also allow equestrian use. The reality is that although there are conscientious bikers, enough cyclist go too fast and with zero regard for anyone else on trail - equestrian and hiker alike.

Response #6:

- I'd like to see more emphasis on teaching/requiring bike riders to know and use trail etiquette laws when they encounter horses on ANY trails.

Response #8:

- Bikes should not be allowed on singletrack unless there are designated days.

Response #9:

- I believe education to mountain bike users would be really helpful. Also use of cow bell as happens in many other counties will allow equestrians to hear bikes coming. Electric bikes too fast and silent to be safe.

Response #10

- Sharing the trails with bikers who call out and are respectful/considerate of equestrians is the ideal on any of the trails. [I have experienced dangerous situations with]: cars going too fast on access roads, drones and other remote flying devices being flown in the park.
- Q: Would you ride on] "narrow multi-use trails for everyone" as described in the EBRPD 2019 Trails Packet document? A. No, too dangerous for equestrians

Response #12:

- E-bikes and bikers are causing catastrophic damage to trails, as well as making it extremely dangerous for equestrians. They fly down the hills with no thought of who might be around the corner. I no longer ride down hills because I am very concerned they will spook my horse, and we will both go over a cliff.

Response #13:

- Mt bike riders can create very dangerous situations for all other park users esp. Horses due to their speed and attitude towards others...i have rode in briones for 40 years and the last 10 years have been the worst..i have seen it all but thier are no one to hand out heavy fines so they do whatever they please...most riders do ok with women bike riders not a problem but men a different story when horse riders beg for them to please slow down the F word comes up

Response #15:

- I currently avoid some parks, like Redwood, on weekends because of bikers

Response #16:

- As E-bike technology improves, they will fo faster and farther. In the 1970s, EBRPD preserved a portion of Chabot park for motorcycles. Later, EBRPD decided that they didn't want any motorcycles in the park and closed the motorcycle area. I think keeping E-bikes out of EBRPD parks is the common sense decision.

Response #18:

- Please do not allow bikes and e-bikes to ride on the narrow trails. Dangerous

Response #19:

- Unless someone changes State Law, horses have right of way on all roads and trails in California. Last I checked...Ca Highway Code.

Response #20:

- Please ... NO e-bikes EVER ... for the sake of Equestrians AND Pedestrians!!!

Response #21:

- EBRP used to have a motorcycle area off of redwood road. They should set aside an area like that for those cyclists who want fast narrow downhills, jumps etc

Response #24:

- User education is the key to safe trails. Bike riders are becoming a larger part of the equation and this needs to be addressed. The major fact to consider is, when a bike is introduced into the equation it increases the danger potential for hikers and equestrians. Bikers have a right to access to safe trails but they also need to be aware of the potential danger their presence adds. Perhaps requiring a trail permit that requires reading and agreeing to safety protocols.

Response #27:

- Horse riders live in fear of that one biker who does not follow the rules and happens to be flying down and around the next turn straight at you and your horse. Most bike riders are extremely friendly and trying hard, the problem is that 3-4% who cause the problems and don't follow rules.

Response #28:

- Unfortunately the next generation of mountain bikers are not thinking of others on the trails, I have had numerous close calls from bikers going too fast and being run off the trail. Luckily I have an exceptional horse right now who has taken off, but others have not been so lucky. I am a mountain biker as well, so understand their want for speed but this is dangerous in areas where you cannot see far ahead of you.

Response #30:

- Horses and bikes can share fire roads.

Response #32, 9/1/20

- Equestrians and mountain bikers should each have dedicated trails. I could tolerate hikers on equestrian trails with on-leash dogs as long as they do not have priority. I'm a rider, a biker and an off-leash dog hiker.

Response #33:

- I have no problem with bikes and off leash dogs in general, its just the occasional group that causes trouble. Like bikes unwilling to slow down and wait until a trail gets wider or people who don't grab their dog when it starts going after a horse. Most people are respectful and I don't think any user should be restricted to certain trails etc.

Response #34:

- Mtn bikers have caused serious accidents among themselves and in collision with hikers and equestrians, and this is well-documented.
- Q. Would you ride in newly developed EBRPD parklands on “narrow multi-use trails for everyone” as described in the EBRPD 2019 Trails Packet document? Yes / No
A: NO! NO! NO!

Response #38:

- Should mountain bike and e-bike riders have their own dedicated trails and parks, such as the pump/flow trails of Crockett Hills, where equestrians would never set hoof?
No, if it is feasible to provide safe trails then don't exclude us. It is getting harder and harder to find nice places to ride.
- I have no problem sharing trails that make sense. Maybe the single track trails should be eliminated completely and it would alleviate a lot of these issues.

Response #39:

- Most people are respectful and I don't think any user should be restricted to certain trails.”

Response #40:

- Bikes have been much more present on the Serpentine Prairie Trail, by redwood arena, and coming very quickly down from the gate above Redwood Road, which is really dangerous.

Discussion:

Where in the park district do people ride horses?

There are two types of equestrian trail riders: those who have access to a horse trailer and a powerful truck to haul it, and those who do not. The latter group includes young riders who do not yet have a driver's license, and low-income (“horse poor”) individuals.

Those without a trailer, by choice or necessity, gravitate toward trails in parks with adjacent barns – Briones, Redwood, Tilden, and Anthony Chabot, for example. And these are the parks cited by the most survey respondents.

For equestrians who trailer out, “destination parks” beckon. Within the park district, horse trailer parking is available at about 44 parks. Wildcat Canyon, Sunol/Ohlone, and Point Pinole are attractive to riders who do not necessarily live close by.

The survey results suggest that equestrian trail riders ride in many parks, but cluster in a limited number. It is in these parks (Briones, Redwood, Point Pinole) that trail conflicts are most problematic.

If park district managers are sincere in wanting to “provide opportunities on its trails for all modes of users, including hikes, equestrians, and mountain bikers”ⁱⁱ it would logically follow that it is in these specific parks a focus on trail safety education, law enforcement, and usage restriction should be a priority. There is no need for taxpayer dollars to be spent providing equestrian access to parks where no one is interested in riding.

What types of trail conflicts are most problematic?

A substantial majority – 87.5 per cent – of equestrian survey respondents report that they have been in a potentially dangerous encounter with bicyclists. A similar number – 85% - have been in such a situation with off-leash dogs. Yet the largest number of survey comments refer to bicycle rather than dog issues.

E-bikes:

The growing presence of motorized or electronically-assisted bicycles (e-bikes) has resulted in a new category of trail use conflicts.

Modern e-bikes use a rechargeable battery to assist the rider. Different designs have a range of power, with the some approaching the speed of mopeds. Type E-1 and E-2 are primarily assistive; they are capable of going 20 miles per hour. Type E-3 allow for “full throttle” operation and are capable of going 28 miles per hour or more. A software switch can convert the type E-2 to a type E-3, but only the factory-made E-3 is equipped with a speedometer. .ⁱⁱ

According to Anthony Ciaburro, EBRPD police chiefⁱⁱⁱ, the present situation (as of October 2020) is that e-bikes are not allowed on unpaved trails, but exceptions can be made for users with disabilities. However, the EBRPD public safety management team anticipates that within the next couple of years, class E-1 and E-2 will likely be approved for use on unpaved park trails.^{iv}

And how can you tell the difference between an incipiently approved Class E-1/E-2 and an unapproved Class E-3 motorized bicycle? You can’t, except by a close examination of the motor, said EBRPD police Sergeant Holly Sontag, in the October 20, 2020 meeting of the EBRPD Volunteer Hiking Patrol.^v

According to police chief Ciaburro:

“We pursue a philosophy called, ‘behavior over batteries.’ We make observations on what the patron (bicycle rider) is doing and how they are affecting other patrons and the environment verses the actual engineering of the bicycle.”^{vi}

Currently, bicycle advocates frame the presence of e-bikes on park trails as needed because they are assistive devices for persons with disabilities. Some claim that the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) allows the use of e-bikes on any trail where regular bicycles are allowed – even for persons who do not have a disability.^{vii}

It appears that the EBRPD police department neither wants to be responsible for trying to keep motorized bicycles out of the parks, nor in establishing whether individual bicycle riders have documented disabilities.

Given the aversion of most equestrians and hikers to speeding bicycles, will the “legalization” of e-bikes require that the park district rethinks the dogma of trails being designated multi-use by default?



“No E-Bikes” sign on the Goldenrod Trail at Woolridge Staging Area in Anthony Chabot Regional Park.

Nearby is the Carter horse corral.

Other trail users have complained about reckless E-bike riding on the trail to Lake Chabot.

Equestrian perspectives on multi-use trails:

Equestrians are highly skeptical of the concept of the engineered narrow “multi-use” trail as described in the *2019 Trails Packet*. While the description of this type of trail design may appear to be clear to trail designers and builders, from a user standpoint it is vague. No minimum trail width is specified. The specification fails to address the issue of how the design is supposed to reduce conflicts among user groups trying to pass each other.

While the new narrow trail design is being labeled “multi-use”, this type of trail is not appealing to equestrians.

The vast majority of survey respondents (97.5 %) feel that bikes do not belong on narrow (“single track”) trails, particularly near horse barns and equestrian centers. The same principle applies to trails in existing parks and the novel engineered trails planned for new parks.

A majority – 72.5% of survey respondents - would not take their horses on “narrow multi-use” trails described in the *2019 Trails Packet*. This trail design is perceived to be intended to

accommodate bicycles. The trail width is judged to have insufficient clearance for a group of bicyclists to safely pass a group of horses.

If only a small minority of equestrians are interested in riding on the novel narrow trails, then the park district, in effect, is providing the bicycle community with *horse-free* trails by driving equestrians out of those parks.

Equestrians who hold a dissenting view:

A minority of equestrians feel that they can share trails with bicyclists – at least trails that are the width of legacy “ranch roads” -- without difficulty. This dissenting view takes into consideration that bicyclists are a growing fraction of the trail user population, and that most bicyclists do not intend to be hostile to equestrians and hikers and therefore should not be “demonized”.

Would the new trails appeal to hikers?

The views of the hiker community regarding the new narrow trail design are beyond the scope of this equestrian survey. However, we note that leaders of the local Sierra Club felt moved to issue a “Discussion Paper Regarding Narrow Paths and Trails in the EBRPD,” to respond to the “2019 Trails Packet” prepared by the EBRPD planning department for the park district elected board of directors.

The Sierra Club “Discussion Paper” notes on page 8:

“We believe the notion of “narrow bike trails for all” is an oxymoron, and will in fact result in less use of narrow trails by all. Frankly, we were not aware of the implications of this policy statement until recently, believing that it meant a new type of carefully designed trail with moderate grades, open sight-lines, and a narrow trail but of adequate width for safe use by all users. Instead, we believe it might mean and should have stated, that the District will provide narrow single-track trails for mountain bike use only.”

Further, the stated reasons for building the “narrow multiuse” trails in new parklands are (i) because existing ranch roads are unsatisfactory and (ii) to prevent erosion. These objections clearly refer to the needs and impacts of bicyclists.

“While former ranch roads play an important part in public access to parks, these roads were not designed specifically for (*recreational trail use*) and do not always provide the most desired *user* experience or the best protection of natural resources.”

- General Manger Robert Doyle in his cover memo to the *2019 Trails Packet*, page 9

Substitute the words “for bicyclists” for “recreational trail use”; add the words “for bicyclists” after the words “user experience” to cast light on this quotation, in context.

Park District Preferential Treatment for Bicyclists Over Other User Groups:

The majority (83.5%) of survey respondents support the idea of bicyclists having their own dedicated trails. If riding fast is the goal, the district can build more “pump/flow” trails like the ones in Crockett Hills Regional Park. There cyclists can race downhill and hop over obstacles to their hearts’ content, in the absence of hikers and horses.

General manager Doyle tacitly acknowledges the emphasis on building bicycle trails that has been underway in the park district since the adoption of the 2013 Master Plan:

“Since 1990, the Park District has added nearly 56,000 acres of parkland. During that time, however, the Park District has built only 13 miles of new trails, with two-thirds of those trails located in a single park (Crockett Hills Regional Park).”

- Doyle memo cited, page 8

If the park district is undertaking a program of building trails specifically designed for bicyclists, it is only fair that a proportional effort be undertaken to provide bike-free trails for equestrians and hikers.

ⁱ Memo by general manager Robert Doyle, *2019 Trail Packet*, page 10.

ⁱⁱ “California Electric Bicycle Policy” chart from California Bicycle Coalition, https://www.aventon.com/blogs/aventon_bikes/difference-between-a-class-123-ebike

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CLASS 1,2,3 EBIKE?

May 14, 2019 • last updated on: July 08, 2020 • 3 min read

CALIFORNIA ELECTRIC BICYCLE POLICY										
VEHICLE TYPE	VEHICLE		USER				BIKEWAY ACCESS			
	PEDAL OPERATED	MAXIMUM MOTOR-ASSISTED SPEED (MPH)	MINIMUM AGE (YEARS)	DRIVER'S LICENSE	LICENSE PLATE	HELMET	CLASS I BIKE PATH	CLASS II BIKE LANE	CLASS III BIKE ROUTE	CLASS IV PROTECTED LANE
BICYCLE	YES	N/A	N/A	NO	NO	17 AND UNDER	YES	YES	YES	YES
TYPE 1 E-BIKE*	YES	20	N/A	NO	NO	17 AND UNDER	YES	YES	YES	YES
TYPE 2 E-BIKE*	NO	20	N/A	NO	NO	17 AND UNDER	YES	YES	YES	YES
TYPE 3 E-BIKE*	YES	28	16	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
MOPED	NO	N/A	16	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO

*YEARS 16-19

peopleforbikes | bpsa | CALIFORNIA BICYCLE COALITION

iii Email from EBRPD police chief Anthony Ciaburro to Amelia Marshall, September 28, 2020.

iv Email from EBRPD police chief Anthony Ciaburro to Amelia Marshall, August 24, 2020.

v The hiking patrol meeting was conducted over the Zoom videoconferencing platform, in accordance with public health guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

vi Email from EBRPD police chief Anthony Ciaburro to Amelia Marshall, August 24, 2020.

vii Email from Mike Udkow of the Bicycle Trails Council East Bay to the Friends of Joaquin Miller Park, September 26, 2020.

Mike Udkow

Inbox -...gmail.com

Yesterday at 1:20 PM



Re: [FOJMP] Electric and Gas powered bikes in JMP

[Details](#)

To: Amelia Marshall, Cc: Hines, Robert, Mike Sherwood, & 7 more

Reply-To: mikeudkow@gmail.com

Attached are the EBRPD rules regarding e-bikes. The bottom line, under the ADA e-bikes are allowed on all trails that regular bikes can ride on. That is why the EBRPD and all State parks were forced to remove all "no e-bikes allowed signs". Oakland could outlaw e-bikes in JMP but they would have to fight the ADA and enforce the ruling in the park. Good luck with that.

. Mike U