

Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve
Land Use Plan Amendment
Public Input Meeting
November 14, 2013
Antioch Community Center

I. INTRODUCTIONS

Director Lane welcomed attendees, provided a brief overview of the LUPA and noted that one of the purposes of this meeting was for the public to provide input into the planning process.

Senior Planner R. Breines introduced other EBRPD staff, reviewed the meeting agenda and provided an overview of the planning area.

There were ten public members in attendance.

II. SLIDE PRESENTATION AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

A. Planning Area

R. Breines identified the six properties (575 acres) that will be added to the 5,000-acre Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve as a result of this land use planning effort.

Public Inquiry: Will Deer Valley be included in this LUPA?

EBRPD Staff Response: No, only a six-mile segment of the Round Valley – Black Diamond Regional Trail will be evaluated as part of this LUPA. Deer Valley will be a separate park and planning will occur in the future after the District has acquired the land.

Public Inquiry: Does the District own the Roddy Ranch property?

EBRPD Staff Response: No, however, the District has a one year option on the property and is optimistic that they will be able to secure the funding to purchase the property.

Public Inquiry: What are the plans for the in-holding within the Deer Valley Area?

EBRPD Staff Response: The in-holding is privately held. The District is not privy to the owner's future plans for the property. There was a residential development proposal for private lands located between the Newry and Panhandle properties, known at one point as Zeka Ranch, but staff is not sure of the status of this proposal with the City.

Public Inquiry: When will the Clayton Ranch property be opened?

EBRPD Staff Response e: The Clayton Ranch property is owned in fee by the District and is currently held in landbank status. Opening the Clayton Ranch property is a high priority for the District and planning is scheduled to continue in 2014 with an introductory public input meeting anticipated for the Spring of 2014. No date has been set for opening the park. Opening will be contingent on adding staff and completing access improvements.

1. Arata Ranch Property (192-acres)

Public Inquiry: None.

2. Suncrest Homes Property (135-acres)

Public Inquiry: Will there be visual impacts from the proposed Suncrest – Sierra Vista – residential development?

EBRPD Staff Response: There will likely be visual impacts from some vantage points within the City, but minimal impacts within the park as adjacent ridgelines will serve to block views of the development from the canyon floor trail.

3. Seeno Property (60-acres)

Public Inquiry: None.

4. Newry Property (169-acres)

Public Inquiry: None.

5. Panhandle Property (19-acres)

Public Inquiry: None.

6. Horse Valley - Proposed Regional Trail Alignment

Public Inquiry: None.

B. Inventorying Park Resources

R. Breines gave a brief overview of the evaluation process for documenting the resources at the park including vegetation surveys and mapping, wildlife and pond surveys, and structural and utilities inventories. The natural resources evaluation identified habitat that supports four federally listed wildlife species; Alameda whipsnake, California Red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and San Joaquin kit fox.

Public Inquiry: What happens to California tiger salamanders when the seasonal ponds dry up?

EBRPD Staff Response: California tiger salamanders are adapted to, and benefit from, seasonally dry ponds. The salamanders hibernate in the summer months away from the pond, while some of their predators (e.g., bullfrogs) die off when the ponds remain dry for extended periods of time.

Public Inquiry: Have any mountain lions been seen in the Preserve?

EBRPD Staff Response: Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve provides fair, but not excellent, habitat for mountain lions; the deer population isn't dense enough to sustain much of a lion population. The more frequent wildlife sightings are of bobcats.

C. Developing a Park Concept: Opportunities and Constraints

R. Breines identified a number of opportunities and constraints associated with incorporating the new properties into Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve including; the proximity/ interface with additional residential properties, historic ranch buildings, nearby

utility infrastructure, four new staging /parking options, and legal agreements limiting development and use.

Public Inquiry: What is the status of Empire Mine Road? There are continuing problems with graffiti, litter, broken glass, and partying in this area.

EBRPD Staff Response: The road is currently closed to vehicular traffic and is within the City of Antioch's jurisdiction. Therefore, the City is responsible for patrol, maintenance, and clean-up of this area. However, the District is responsible for patrol, maintenance and clean-up of the Panhandle property, which it owns in fee. Based on the District's experience in managing other similar areas, staff is optimistic that increased legitimate use of the Panhandle property will diminish undesirable activities along Empire Mine Road and within the Panhandle area.

Public Inquiry: Are improvements proposed for Somersville Road? The road is in poor shape.

EBRPD Staff Response: There are currently planning efforts underway for improving this road under the District's paving program. However, it may be some time before funding can be secured for this project. The project will be expensive as the site is very constrained and the road subsurface needs to be redone before repaving can take place.

Public Inquiry: Will the LUPA consider walking / hiking improvements including, placement of trash receptacles, installation of benches, and installation of shade structure and/or trees?

EBRPD Staff Response: Though the District strives to limit constructed features in a preserve, the LUPA will consider benches in suitable areas with no natural sitting features like rocks. Shade trees and shade structures will be incorporated into the gateway design at the Arata Ranch entry. Shade structures and trees are typically incorporated into picnic and campsites. Trees in other locations, specifically the east end of the Preserve, have not been considered because the hot, dry climate of the site is not conducive to trees, except in the wetter, shadier canyons.

Public Inquiry: Will there be a plan to control star thistle? It is especially prevalent along Frederickson Road and at the eastern end of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve.

EBRPD Staff Response: The District has an IPM program in place that addresses a number of invasive, noxious species including star thistle. Star thistle is especially difficult to control. Ongoing control measures include goat grazing, mowing, and use of herbicides. In addition, the District has had some success with controlled burning at Round Valley.

Public Inquiry: Could volunteers help with mapping the locations of star thistle?

EBRPD Staff Response: The District has mapped and will continue to map star thistle locations throughout the District as part of its IPM program.

Public Inquiry: Will there be opportunities for community groups (e.g., eagle scouts) to be involved in the implementation of the improvements proposed in the LUPA?

EBRPD Staff Response: Yes, the District has a long history of working with volunteers. Ongoing internal District volunteer programs include the Volunteer Trail Safety Patrol (VTSP) and the Ivan Dickson Volunteer Trail Maintenance Program, as well as supporting community groups such as eagle scouts.

Public Inquiry: Will the LUPA address cattle truck drivers that drive recklessly on the main gravel trail?

EBRPD Staff Response: This is an operations issue. Indiscretions should be directed to the park supervisor who will then follow up with the cattle lessee to resolve the problem.

Public Inquiry: Will the LUPA address the controls on the overabundance of rattlesnakes in the park?

EBRPD Staff Response: Rattlesnakes are native and part of the ecosystem at Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve. The populations of these snakes rise and fall in a cyclical fashion. Predators (aside from humans historically) include raptors and king snakes, but the District does not actively control rattlesnake populations. Actions that can be undertaken to reduce the hazards presented by these species include: ongoing education and recommending that dogs be kept on leashes, especially when snake populations are high.

Public Inquiry: Where are there potable water sources in the park and will the LUPA consider additional water sources?

EBRPD Staff Response: Potable water sources are rare in the park. Most of the water is contained in seasonal stock ponds that are not potable for humans. Water at the group camp must be brought in by visitors; the backpack camp has a non-potable water supply, so water must be treated prior to use. Potable water is trucked into the park staff offices at Sidney Flat and upper visitor center. The addition of the Arata Ranch site will provide an opportunity to extend a municipal waterline from the adjacent development area into the Arata Ranch site in the near term, and extend it to Sidney Flay and ultimately the former Somersville townsite and mine area in the long term.

Public Inquiry: The Horse Valley - Regional Trail Alignment is a good proposal. Will this trail be developed as a narrow trail? In addition, the new lands should open up new trail loop opportunities in areas now limited to out and back experiences. Will these new trails be developed as narrow, multi-use trails that will accommodate mountain bikes? The trail system at Black Diamond Mine Regional Preserve should match the bike experiences offered at Del Valle Regional Park.

EBRPD Staff Response: The new 2013 District master plan includes policies that are more favorable to mountain bike use than past District policies. As a result, bike use will be considered as part of the regional trail and within proposed trails Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve LUPA.

Public Inquiry: Will the LUPA provide opportunities to reevaluate opening existing trails to mountain bike use, especially trails in the further outreaches of the park?

EBRPD Staff Response: Yes, the LUPA process will provide an opportunity to reevaluate the entire trail circulation system including potentially opening existing narrow trails to mountain bike use. Narrow sections of the Star Mine Trail could be among those the District will consider. In addition, the Clayton Ranch property will provide opportunities for large, multi-use trail loops and connections to Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve.

Public Inquiry: Will the LUPA address trail signage to provide better clarity?

EBRPD Staff Response: Yes, however, the park is currently signed and some the lack of clarity results from bootleg trails that are not a part of the official system and therefore, not signed.

Public Inquiry: What will be done about the damage caused by cattle on trails?

EBRPD Staff Response: This is an ongoing management issue. Operations staff smooths the Railroad Bed Trail prior to annual grading if cattle pockmarks are particularly bad. Other trails are regraded in the late spring after the cattle have been removed from the park when there is just a little moisture left in the soils.

D. Schedule

R. Breines concluded the meeting by providing the schedule for the LUPA and reminding attendees to sign in if they wish to be contacted about future meetings and availability of reports.