



**East Bay Regional Park District
Trails User Working Group
Meeting Notes November 13, 2020, 10 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (via Zoom)**

Meeting Attendees:

East Bay Regional Park District: Brian Holt, Devan Reiff, Sean Dougan, Amanda Sanders, Suzanne Wilson, Erich Pfuehler, Lisa Baldinger, Kim Thai

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 McInerney, Bonnie Lewkowicz, Jim Hanson, Helen Burke, Morris Older, Mary Barnsdale, John Aaron Graves, Emily Scholz, Pam Young, Linus Eukel, Sean Burke, Mimi Wilson, Jess Brown, Amelia Marshall, Elena Miramar, Kathy Roth, Michael Gregory, Bob Coomber, Gabriela Mosco Martinez, Antoine Chambers, Ian Baird

A meeting of the Trail User Working Group (TUWG) was held November 13, 2020, 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 10:05 a.m.

I. Welcome

After welcoming everyone, Zoom meeting etiquette was reviewed. Polling was skipped due to technology issues. New members to the group were welcomed and offered a chance to introduce themselves and the group they represent. Brian Holt welcomed the group and emphasized that there are a wide variety of different perspectives held by members of the working group. Brian Holt shared a graphic showing daily percent change from pre-Covid baseline usage for parks. There is around a 22% to 29% increase in park usage. With increased usage, there will be increased conflicts. A map of land banked Park District land was shared to show that the Park District is working toward opening new locations and new trails. The Park District is constantly looking at how it can sight trails to avoid special species, but also engage the public by providing trails people want to take.

2. Reflections on the Previous Meeting

Lou Hexter reminded everyone that the meeting was being recorded. The meeting notes from the August meeting were shared. A Trails User Working Group webpage was created on the Park District webpage (<https://www.ebparks.org/about/planning/tuwg/default.htm>) for sharing of meeting information, notes, and serve as a repository for information that is key to the work the TUWG is trying to accomplish. Ian Baird asked if there would be a policy brought to the Board of Directors to be voted on. Brian Holt responded that the group is not a trail design review board, but there are a variety of issues the group can work through regarding different matters for the district. Amelia Marshall inquired what the criteria for posting items to the group website was. Devan Reiff replied that the webpage is intended to be a reference library, of documents



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from user groups, however not personal commentary. Bonnie Lewkowicz asked that when documents are posted that they are compliant with WCAG rules so that they are accessible for those who are disabled.

3. Update on Working Group Formation

Lou Hexter shared the updated Mission Statement. *“The Working Group will work directly with Park District staff to evaluate various trail interests, constraints, and conflicts that influence the planning, design, and implementation of new natural surface trails; as well as how we can best improve park trails without compromising the safety or enjoyment of any diverse group of trail users.”* Mimi Wilson brought up an issue with the mission statement as it doesn’t say anything about environmental concerns. Brian Holt suggested adding *“balanced with the District’s commitment to protect natural resources”* to the mission.

The Ground Rules were pretty well-respected at the previous meeting. Additional Ground Rules of *“Be respectful of diverse options”* and *“civility”* were added to the ground rules per feedback at the last meeting.

The groups discussion of consensus was also reviewed. *“Consensus building encourages dialogue. It clarifies areas of agreement and disagreement. It improves information used in the process. And it resolves controversial issues using structured, face to face virtual interaction among stakeholders. Consensus does not mean that all participants agree completely on every part of an issue. It means that they can support the decision completely even though they might wish the decision could be slightly different. Simply put, consensus is the willingness to go along with the decision either in active support of it or in not opposing it.”*

The work product for the group suggested includes – *“A set of issues and potential solutions for optimizing trail use for all user groups”*. We want to document and establish the different user groups experiences on the trails. Pam Young stated that the group needs to talk about assumptions. One is that all trail use breaks down the environment for animals and plants, also that all trails use causes negative results. Jim Hanson said that the work product piece is very important, and that the TUWG should consider new park development and creation of multiple use narrow trails. Brian Holt responded that there are areas where narrow multiuse trails can be workable. The goals are to minimize impact, but to also provide trail connections to the public. Simone Nageon de Lestang mentioned in the chat function that she would like to develop a work product that is actually helpful to the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) in their pursuit of designing new trails and allows trail development projects to run smoothly without threats of legal action. Austin McInerney typed in chat that he would like the work product to include: recommendations for designing new trails on land banked properties; ideas for creative management of existing trail network; strategies for managing e-bikes on natural surface trails; and better understanding of what the opportunities are for increased volunteer trail stewardship work.

The number of planned TUWG meetings was discussed. Lou suggested that there will be a total of six meetings, with at least one trail user group perspective discussed in detail at each meeting. This November meeting will talk about hikers, the next on bicyclists, then equestrians, then other groups, and a summary meeting as the last meeting. Next meetings will be scheduled for the months of February, April, June and August. Amelia Marshall mentioned that she thought the TUWG was a two-year process. Brian Holt replied that there was the possibility that the TUWG could go on as long as it is providing a useful product. Austin McInerney asked that people get away from positional statements to work collaboratively and listen to other’s



issues. Pam Young stated in the chat that she recommends one meeting should focus on environmental and habitat protection - baseline studies, avoidance minimization of impacts, assessing impacts, including significant effects, cumulative impacts. Lou Hexter stated that the meetings might continue longer than six meetings if needed.

4. Hiking Perspectives

Sean Dougan gave a presentation on trail-use demands Park District wide. The goal is to open Park District owned land that is currently in landbank status to allow use for the public. The main way for people to experience the parks is by designated trails and roads. The current trail types and percentages were shared; 76% unpaved ranch roads at 1,010 miles, paved trails is 9% at 120 miles, unpaved trails is 15% at 200 miles. Out of the 200 miles of unpaved trails, 100% is open to hikers, 57% is open to horses, and 25% is open to bicycles. The unpaved ranch and fire roads are not made with recreational use in mind, most are legacy trails. Legacy trails are those inherited at acquisition, often created for supporting grazing purposes. The Park District would like to create sustainable trails within new parklands, guiding people where the Park District would like them to go. Sustainable trails avoid and minimize impact on natural and cultural resources, can withstand the impacts of use and the natural elements while receiving only routine cyclical maintenance, and meets the needs of the users so they do not deviate from the established alignment. If trails are designed correct the first time, it will save staff time and money on removing unwanted trails and fixing issues that arise. The Park District recognizes that trails have impacts on the land, but also tries to reduce the impacts of the usage. The Park District also recognizes that there are different uses of the trail. Possible options for consideration include certain uses in certain areas, inclusive trails, improvements to signage, trail permit issuance, educational opportunities, trail user designs that reduce user conflict, staggered days of use, and single use trails.

Morris Older stated that he would like people to listen to each other. Amelia Marshall detailed that she is a retired engineer and it looks like the specified trail specifications in the California State Parks trail book are designed specifically for bicycles. Sean Dougan replied that the CA State Parks trail book includes trail designed elements that are for all user groups. There are certain elements that eliminate other user groups, for examples steps eliminate horses and bikes. Mainly the Park District is trying to manage water runoff on the trails. Austin McInerney questioned in the chat if the GIS department can provide details on slopes of existing trails? He also asked if conversations are underway with resource agencies to better define what is permissible under current requirements and what would need to be done to allow new trail construction within EBRPD lands?

Lisa Baldinger gave presentation on a recent Park District scientific survey results from 2020. Link to survey results: <https://www.ebparks.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=33553>

Ian Baird talked on the Orinda Hiking Club's perspectives as hikers. He stated that they don't like to hike anywhere there are bicyclists on narrow trails. All parks should be open to everyone, but not all trails. Brian Holt responded that there needs to be good stewardship for the land. Joseph Mouzon of Outdoor Afro spoke next, saying their organization is having good results in getting people out onto the trails this year. Their biggest complaint is that the facilities at parks aren't necessarily kept up, bathrooms for example. He is looking forward to making as many people possible happy through this group. Morris Older spoke last, saying he has hiked with many hiking groups and alone. He appreciates the recreation opportunities though the Park



District. Maps and signage are areas of concern, it could be helpful to include mileage and trailhead location on signage. Other trail concerns include closed bathrooms, lack of water fountains, trail width issues, and trail maintenance issues. Trails need to be built to encourage less ongoing maintenance issues. Morris finds that sharing trails has been better in more recent years, younger bikers have the training through high school biking teams. Loose dogs not an issue for hikers, but more so for equestrians. Jim Hanson noted that many of the group are from the hiker's perspective including the East Bay Native Plant Society and Sierra Club, he asked if the Park District's position is "narrow trails for all"? Sean Dougan responded by questioning if the group wants narrow use for all, or possibly some trails for individual user groups? Sean stated that the group is to discuss these possibilities. Linus Eukel said that updating mapping is important and would like to collaborate to include the three miles of trails at Fernandez Ranch. Norman LaForce mentioned that the Sierra Club also has aspects of the organization that serve as a hiking club. He questioned why the Sierra Club wasn't allowed the opportunity to be a spotlight speaker on the hikers perspective. Brian Holt responded that per the Sierra Club's direct request the Park District added two hiking clubs to the TUWG to provide insight on the hiker's perspective.

The meeting attendees were randomly split into six separate breakout rooms to discuss the following three questions: What are some of the goals that hikers have in using trails? What are some of the issues that hikers experience and/or create on trails? What do you think would improve trail user experience? Each group was instructed to choose a recorder and someone to report back to the group at large.

Group 1: Mary Barnsdale, Joseph Mouzan, Michael Gregory: Goals of understanding who is using the parks. Understanding how to use technology in parks and report violations. Suggested possibly alternating days for user groups on trails to improve user experiences. Improved signage, and education of users on how to use the parks.

Group 2: Austin McInerney, Gary Fitts, Norman LaForce, Gabriela Mosco Martinez, Antoine Chambers, Luana Espana. Goals for hikers are solitude and getting into nature, desires for physical exercise, sometimes strenuous exercise, social media pictures, good views. Issues hikers have include crowding, etiquette in sharing trails (ex. hikers using earbuds in middle of trails), lack of open facilities, people being intimidated/flashed and how to report that, poison oak on trails, abandoned bags of dog poop, lack of signage, some maps that don't show continuation of trails with adjacent lands. Improvement opportunities include knowing where better resources are, having more staff physically present, signage on how to report issues to Public Safety, having users make use of less used trails to lessen crowding, educating current users about other trails that are available.

Group 3: Amelia Marshall, Kathy Roth, Pam Young, Eileen Burke. Goals of hikers include encourage discussion to work with all groups, and that environmental protection is of importance. Issues for hikers are people having to leap off trails due to mountain bikers, destruction of environment by creation of bootleg trails. Solutions could be improved signage, code of ethics that each user group has, e-Bike legalization has permitting process. There is a genuine need for recreation.

Group 4: Mimi Wilson, Ian Baird, and Linus Eukel. Goals of hikers include safety as a priority, some walkers want simple flat trails, wider trails are good for socializing. Issues for hikers include people using bootleg trails for athletic conditioning, bicyclists need to call out when passing, signage should encourage good trail



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etiquette. Improvements suggested include better signage, particularly at trail intersections, education, way-finding tools on mobile phones, phased trail use for bicycles, having a trail reservations system for bicyclists.

Group 5: Rick Rickard, Jess Brown, Emily Scholz, Scott Bartlebaugh. Goals of hikers were big views and shade, arriving early for busy places like Mission Peak. Issues hikers experience is trail capacity and user density, access to restrooms and water. Challenge is weekend hikers don't know trail etiquette of picking up trash and/or dog excrement. Improve trail user experience by improving signage about etiquette, ways to get bikes out further from trailheads (where most of the hikers are), short/medium/long loops from trailheads. How can this group help the park district to build more mileage of trails in the future?

Group 6: Morris Older, Jim Hanson, Simone Nageon de Lestang, Bonnie Lewkowicz. Hikers goals include getting exercise, mental and physical health reasons, relieve stress and appreciate plants, nature, wildlife, and conducting research for accessibility while on trails. Issues brought up included trail etiquette and people not wearing masks, maintenance of amenities, lack of access to restrooms that are accessible, overflow at trailhead parking, having maps that show other local trails EBMUD/State Parks, issues with social trails. People with different disabilities having access to the trailheads, lack of accessibility information on website, issues with connectivity and wayfinding. Solutions include using apps on phones, listing distances on signs (ex. next bench/rest stop in one mile), complex issues around user conflict issues, fact finding segment to address assumptions, so everyone is on the same page.

5. Working Group Survey Results

Prior to the November meeting, all members of the Working Group were asked to complete a 25-question survey. Instead of presenting the results at the November meeting, it was decided for the sake of time to continue the discussion of the survey to next meeting. A memo with the survey results is posted to the TUWG web page.

6. Next Steps

The next meeting will be planned for the month of February. An Outlook invite will be sent with the date and Zoom link.

General comment asking, what are the legal ramifications on e-Bikes in the Park District? General comment questioning if there are ways to keep these conversations going between official meetings. Brian Holt responded that the Park District will explore the opportunities to keep the discussions going in between meetings.

Simone Nageon de Lestang announced that there is a Ridge Trail Challenge that is happening through December 2020: <https://ridgetrail.org/challenge/>

7. Meeting Close

Meeting closed at 1:01 p.m.