



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: November 20, 2013

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Administration Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Front Country Trails Program Status Report and Volunteer Recognition

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receive a report on the Front Country Trails Program and recognize the Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers and Dave Everett of the Multi-Use Trails Coalition for their volunteer maintenance of the front country trails.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The City of Santa Barbara, County of Santa Barbara, and the Los Padres National Forest share jurisdictional oversight of Santa Barbara's Front Country Trails (FCT). Located within the front range of the Santa Ynez Mountains, the main front country trails include: Arroyo Burro, Jesusita, Tunnel, Rattlesnake, Cold Spring (East and West), San Ysidro, and Romero Canyon. With these trails, over 35 miles are available to Santa Barbara South Coast residents and visitors.

Due to trail safety concerns and limited public resources for trail maintenance and management, the Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force began meeting in early 2007 to develop recommendations to foster responsible, coordinated, and comprehensive management of the front country trail system. Additionally, the Task Force provided a public forum to solicit and gather input from the public, trail users, property owners, community organizations and interest groups. The Task Force included two City Parks and Recreation Commissioners, two County Park Commissioners, and two U.S. Forest Service representatives. An inter-agency staff team also formed to administer the Task Force and implement trail programs and projects.

The Task Force and inter-agency staff team completed a number of key tasks, including:

- Development of Trail Management Recommendations

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Challenge Cost Share Agreement between the City, County, and Forest Service for trail management, maintenance and funding
- Trail Etiquette Signage
- Baseline Trail Conditions Assessment
- Trail use survey on three front country trails: Rattlesnake, Tunnel, and Cold Spring trails.

In addition, the three agencies strived to increase partnerships with local trail user groups and formalize and broaden participation in volunteer trail work days. The Task Force was suspended in early 2012 when the downturn in the economy led to staff and budget reductions within County Parks and the Forest Service.

Since then, staff has continued to work together to support the three main volunteer work days (State Trails Day, National Trails Day and National Public Lands Day) and engage and communicate with local trail user groups.

Current Activity

Both the County and Forest Service have recouped management staff and are engaged and supportive of the FCT Program. In addition, the MOU and Challenge Cost Share agreement are still in place. Over the past year, the FCT program has increased support for trail maintenance by supplying agency staff to the three main volunteer work days and financially sponsoring the post-event lunch. New approaches to community outreach have included use of social media sites Meet-up.com and Facebook, posting flyers at trailheads, detailed press releases and City News In Brief newsletters, emailing a growing list of personal contacts, and stationing staff at trailheads during the event as liaisons. These efforts have resulted in a steady supply of volunteers county-wide that have contributed to over 800 volunteer hours and over 12 miles of brush clearing, trail tread establishment and water bar/trail drainage maintenance since 2012. Coordination with the Forest Service and County is ongoing, and development of a two-year work plan has provided a path for the program to move forward.

The two-year work plan (2014/2015) addresses administration and organization, trail management and maintenance, and community outreach and education. Key aspects of the work plan include:

- Trail Maintenance Certification Training coordinated by Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers, Los Padres Forest Association, and the Los Padres Non-Motorized Committee;
- Hiring an hourly trail technician to provide consistent and accurate information on trail conditions and work with local user groups for trail maintenance;

- Stipend trail maintenance work; and
- Development of an outreach plan and long-term funding.

This work program will be funded jointly with a \$10,000 contribution from each agency. Although not currently identified in the 2014/2015 work plan, it is anticipated that work might resume on the development of a long-range trail management plan. When that becomes more feasible, agency staff will develop recommendations to initiate broad public discussion.

Role of Volunteers

Volunteers play a crucial role in trail maintenance, reporting, and documentation of trail conditions, and have been leaders in spreading the word on proper trail etiquette. Since the Parks and Recreation Department has few resources for trail maintenance, the volunteer work provided by local groups is a valued service to the Santa Barbara community. Several groups are actively engaged in trail stewardship within the front country trails, including:

- Santa Barbara Trails Council
- Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers
- Dave Everett of Multi-Use Trails Coalition
- Montecito Trails Foundation
- Los Padres Forest Association

Many of these groups have been involved in the discussions among public agencies and trail user groups related to trail maintenance, management, user conflict, and education concerns. Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers (SBMTV) and Dave Everett of Multi-Use Trails Coalition have provided important information regarding trail use and conditions, consistently work alongside agencies to seek user-conflict solutions and donate numerous hours of their time to enhance and improve Santa Barbara's trail system.

SBMTV has promoted trail access for all trail users since 1988. They play an important role in trail user education, including promotion of trail etiquette through signage and printed/electronic information and with the distribution of bike bells. SBMTV plays an integral part in volunteer maintenance events, providing tools, logistics, outreach, and as trail leaders. As a group, they provide several hundreds of hours conducting trail maintenance events in both the front and back country, and are involved with other local and regional trail steward groups.

Dave Everett of the Multi-Use Trails Coalition is also a local trail resource. Dave's use of GPS technology provides the community with trail maps available as downloads to mobile devices, personal GPS devices, desktop computers, and includes an

Interactive Trail Maintenance Map using Google Earth. Dave's interactive trail maps are used by the City to review trail conditions during volunteer trail event planning and as a way to communicate locations of trail work amongst agency staff. Dave also helps organize volunteer trail maintenance events, most recently working with the agencies at Arroyo Burro Trail for National Public Lands Day on September 28, 2013.

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