

Kelly Damschen
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Parks Commission
Monterey County Parks Department
P.O. Box 5249
Salinas, CA 93915

Via Email

Dear Parks Commission Chair, Board Members, and Staff:

My name is Kelly Damschen and I have lived in Monterey County since I moved here from LA in 2002 to attend CSU Monterey Bay. I currently hold a Master's Degree in Education and have been teaching middle school in Salinas for the past 10 years.

I am writing to express my gratitude and trust I have in you, our county officials, as the democratic process plays out for the future use of Toro Regional Park.

In any given Spring-time week, I am in the presence of over 80 local youth, from 7-18 years old, and more than 20 other adults consisting of parents and other community members, enjoying their free time together on mountain bikes. Between the trails of Fort Ord and Toro Regional Park, I am involved with the following mountain biking programs: directing the local chapter of Little Bellas, (mentoring on mountain bikes for girls ages 7-13), co-directing an after school mountain bike club for students from San Benancio Middle School and Buena Vista Middle School, and volunteering as a coach for Salinas and Palma High School mountain bike teams.

As a ride leader and trail user I promote trail etiquette and hold riders to a high standard of safety and stewardship both on and off the trails. It is commonplace for a group of 20 high school riders to pass another hiker/biker and have the hiker/biker be greeted with a "rider up!" followed by 20 hellos and thank yous.

Toro Regional Park's backcountry provides training grounds for high school racers looking to have an edge over their fierce competitors. It also provides a chance for kids and adults alike to see their county from a different perspective; from the post at 1800 their world gets a little bigger as they gaze from the mountains of Big Sur, across the bay to Santa Cruz and beyond the valley to Fremont's Peak. None of these kids would choose to run or hike to this location, as it can take over 4 hours, but since they have a bike they can get there and be back home in an hour and a half.

There are many solutions to keeping trails open to all user groups, which provide safe recreation for all parties involved and there's no need to "reinvent the wheel." For example, in Santa Barbara County, where trails are steeper than those currently used at Toro Regional, riders are met with signs at the top and bottom of each recognized trail with bells they must wear on their bikes which warn hikers they are coming down the steep terrain; hikers hear the bells coming, move out of the way and bikers ride down. In Marin County, Santa Cruz County and many places in Oregon, organized and official mountain bike groups are granted space to build "flow trails," which invite riders of all levels to ride safe, sustainable trails which are directional and used for bikes only. Still, other locations like China Camp State Park in San Rafael have trail systems set up to be hiker and biker friendly, with a fee station at the entrance of the trails for each user to pay for day use (yearly passes are also available). The list goes on and on, with each specific trail system managers choosing the best fit for their specific terrain and frequent user groups.

Although I ride a mountain bike or run in the backcountry at Toro at least once a week, have done so for the past 5 years and have never had a negative experience with other trail users, here are some solutions to problems that may have been reported: Signage at trailheads and ends establishing user yielding expectations, trail maps indicating difficulty levels and directionality of trails and creating a trail system that can incorporate multi use and single use based on trail sustainability and need for access to specific points of interest. There are many land management solutions already in place all over the world, with specific guidelines for sustainable trail building which can support hikers, bikers and horses. A quick Google search of "sustainable trail building" yields results for guidelines and non-profit groups who share knowledge and standards already accepted by numerous land management bureaus.

Moving forward, there is a need for a county-wide system to report trails that need work, opportunities for local, official, groups to conduct trail maintenance and for local, official, groups to propose and create new trails as per the standard the Monterey Parks Department chooses to adopt.

Thank you for your time and all of your continuing hard work. I am proud to be a resident of Monterey County and witness democracy in action that directly affects my daily life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kelly Damschen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kelly" being more prominent than the last name "Damschen".

Kelly Damschen

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