



# Monterey County

## Parks Commission

### Agenda Item #6

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- a. Receive report on Toro Park trails;
- b. Consider the US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Central Coast District's trail standards for multi-use trail management; and
- c. Support the RMA's next steps to move towards a multi-use trail management system.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Parks Commission:

- a. Receive report on Toro Park trails;
- b. Consider the US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Central Coast District's trail standards for multi-use trail management; and
- c. Support the RMA's next steps to move towards a multi-use trail management system.

#### SUMMARY:

Toro Park consists of 4,783 acres, including active and passive recreational uses. The current Toro Park Trails Map was originally adopted in 1974, however, it has been revised multiple times, with the last revised date of October 30, 2009. This revised map illustrates trails within the park, including what type of use is allowed. Trails in Toro Park have been an ongoing and challenging issue with increasing use by bicycles and unauthorized cutting of new trails. This has created an "us vs them" attitude where it is difficult, if not impossible, to have civil conversation. The size and nature of the park with old barbed wire cattle fences make it impossible to secure all the boundaries, which adds to this challenge.

Parks was added to RMA in December 2016 with no new resources. A committee had been meeting with parks staff to discuss how to address trails in Toro Park. RMA participated in a couple meetings until we determined that the effort was not productive given some personalities involved not being willing to consider how we work together. On one end, there is a group that feels Toro should be limited to hiking trails only in order to preserve the natural features that are being impacted by biking activities. On the other hand, there are biking interests that feel they can go out and cut trails wherever they feel, until/unless they get caught. There are a few in the middle-ground area that are trying to help develop solutions and assist in resolving this issue.

Staff finds that having trails designated to specific groups only fuels the "us vs them" attitude. Separate trails designated for specific recreational users creates conflict while also excluding other recreational users. It also presents challenges to enforce designated use, trail maintenance guidelines for each trail type, and unauthorized trail building, which ultimately threatens the natural habitat and separates use for all recreational types. Scarring of hillsides has become visible from

Highway 68 and other public areas, and there is evidence of accelerated erosion.

As a public park, we need to develop a plan that works for all uses (hiking, jogging, biking, equestrian). Staff recommends moving towards a multi-use trail system incorporating trail standards utilized by Bureau of Land Management, hereinafter referred to as “BLM”. These standards are used in the National Monument that is charged to protect natural features and the ecosystem, while allowing public reasonable access. Some areas are not accessible by trail, which is what staff would propose in Toro Park. Alternatively, the County could prohibit bikes in Toro Park; however, enforcing such a restriction would require resources beyond our current capacity.

This report provides a background and timeline of trails in Toro Park, a discussion on how BLM implemented their own multi-use trail system and the RMA’s next steps to embrace our vision to move towards a multi-use trail management system. Staff is developing a base map that includes authorized trails, unauthorized trails, fire breaks (roads) and emergency service infrastructure, as well as identifying where there is legitimate public access (e.g. easements, agreements) into the park. A follow up discussion will include trail guidelines we will use to determine which trails are retained versus what is restored, ultimately resulting in a new trail map presented to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

#### DISCUSSION:

In May of 2015, community members who use the trails at Toro Park alerted the County of unauthorized trail work that had taken place, in addition to other issues such as enforcement of rules and regulations related to trail use, deferred maintenance and trail user conflicts. In early 2016, the Parks Department began an effort to address the issues and reached out to the local community to start discussing the concerns and possible solutions.

On February 4, 2016, the item was presented to the Parks Commission where it was decided that a larger community meeting was needed along with the idea of forming an ad hoc working group of interested and willing community members.

To begin the community effort, a hike was led by the Parks Department that took place on February 13, 2016, open to all interested community members and trail users who were invited to see the sections of unauthorized trail work in advance of the community meeting that was held on February 29, 2016 with over 70 participants in attendance (**Attachment A**). At the meeting community members were given the chance to provide comments, input and suggestions and any historical background information on past trail work that was known to have occurred.

There was a lot of information that was discussed, including the realization that a significant amount of work needed to be done. A Toro Park Trails Working Group, hereinafter referred to as “working group” was formed and comprised of different trail users who began to map the existing trails in a greater detail. The following provides a summary of the working group’s activities related to the planning and analysis of the trail system at Toro Park:

- The working group members met on several occasions and researched and mapped all known existing trails and listed whether they were official or authorized, unofficial or unauthorized; their designated use and actual use (whether designated or not, i.e., hiking,

mountain bike and/or equestrian).

- The mapped trails showed discrepancies between their original designated use and actual use. In addition, there are trails that have been made under the direct supervision of previous Park's staff that are not on the (current) trail map that is used for public distribution (**Attachment B**).

The working group completed their mapping assignment and developed a County generated Toro Park Trails Plan showing official (authorized), and unofficial (unauthorized) trail routes, in addition to required fire breaks (roads) and the identification of emergency service access routes. At the time, it was envisioned that the next steps would include on-site survey and analysis of each trail to confirm locations, better understand the use, surface condition, need for restoration, possible re-routing, in addition to documenting other site specific items. It was also recognized that there may be the addition of new trails to close gaps or address conflicts, or close other segments of a trail route if deemed necessary. Additional items that had been noted and discussed, yet not fully addressed:

- Establishing criteria to evaluate the various trail routes
  - Develop design guidelines
  - Develop a signage program: rules/regulations, trail markers (with trail names), directional and interpretive)
  - Develop an updated Toro Park Trail Map/Brochure
  - Develop a Trail Etiquette Brochure to address user conflicts
  - Organize volunteer work crews for trail maintenance
  - Organize volunteer patrol groups to report trail issues, conflicts, vandalism
- Budget to plan, design and develop renovations or improvements to existing trails and implement new, proposed trail routes where deemed appropriate

In August of 2016, the efforts of the working group were placed on hold due to the closure of Toro Park to be used as a base camp for the Soberanes Fire. At the end of October 2016, the base camp closed and on November 12, 2016, the park re-opened. Efforts were made to reconvene the working group activities and tentative dates to meet were set for November 21, 2016 and December 5, 2016. On November 18, 2016, the Park's Department received a complaint that unauthorized work on the trails had resumed at Toro Park. On November 19, 2016 County Park Rangers investigated and were able to catch the responsible individual.

At the time when the unauthorized work was reported, it was not clear who might be responsible for the action. Originally, it was reported that some of the members of our local mountain bike community may have been involved or responsible for the unauthorized trail work in the park. This was not the case and many of the working group members, including cyclists denounced the action and have helped provide information as well as spread word throughout the community that their trail planning work and efforts to address the various issues and opportunities related to "Trails" was being compromised by one rogue individual. Because of tensions created by this unauthorized trail work and the uncertainty surrounding it, the County decided to suspend the working group meetings until further notice.

Soon after in 2017, the Parks Department was restructured and merged into the RMA. One of the first priorities was to establish a process for granting permission to do some of the required trail maintenance work by volunteers who come forward to seek permission to assist the RMA, which we are tracking. This approach has been identified in the Parks Department Strategic Plan, which is to solicit community volunteer groups or individuals to help enhance, maintain and preserve the parks.

Information developed by the working group was an extremely large undertaking and could not have occurred without the help of the willing trail users and volunteers of Toro Park. These individuals have intimate detailed knowledge of the existing trail system, and share a passion about developing a well-designed and managed system of trails. Some have volunteered time and resources to help complete the mapping assignment and/or hands-on maintenance work. RMA plans to develop a small (new) working group to help in developing a well-designed multi-use trails management system at Toro Park.

To address the complexities surrounding the existing Toro Park trail systems, RMA intends to focus on a multi-use trail management system using the BLM model as a standard for implementation. The RMA will also be looking to California Department of Parks and Recreation's Trail Managers Toolbox (**Attachment C**) and Federal Trails Data Standards (**Attachment D**) through the National Park System, to establish trail standards.

BLM's development of multi-use standards began when they were granted 7,200 acres of land to manage as a natural resource management area. Their implementation of multi-use trails began with an inventory of their existing road and trail network to develop a road and trail management strategy by measuring road and trail widths. As BLM completed their inventory, which also included the use of global positioning system (GPS) for mapping of authorized and unauthorized trails mapping. BLM also conducted a recreation assessment of trail users: hikers, joggers, cyclists/mountain bikers and equestrians, who utilize their trails. This information yielded the following results: 50-55% hikers/joggers, 40-45% cyclists/bikers and 2% equestrians.

The inventory of trails and assessment of trail users was led by a Fort Ord BLM volunteer, who trained interns to identify current uses and provide numerous road and trail width categories identified in the Central Coast Watershed Studies Report titled: *"Road and Trail Resources Inventory (RATI): Bureau of Land Management Lands, former Fort Ord"* (**Attachment E**).

While partnering with Monterey Off Road Cycling Association ("MORCA") a local chapter of the International Mountain Biking Association also known as "IMBA", California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and local community volunteers, BLM began their consideration for restoration and removal of over 170 miles of trails. Trail criteria included the following:

- Trail height and width (4 to 6 horizontal feet) for recreational use
- Fire/EMS roads (12 horizontal feet and 15 vertical feet)
- Slope and Grade (< 12%)
- Trail surface/soil composition balance
- Vegetation clearance
- Removing attributes designed for high speed such as bermed corners
- Creating two (2) directional trails and removing flow trails (purpose-built single track trails)

Implementing a multi-use trail system has been an ongoing project for BLM since they began their implementation in 1999. BLM continually removes trails and adds new multi-use trails each year. The RMA likewise recognizes this will be an ongoing project that will require many continued and new partnerships within our community with a solution-minded approach and appropriate staffing and budget to achieve a multi-use trail system for Toro Park.

The RMA's next steps are to continue the review of the BLM standards and other multi-use trail standards previously noted, to develop trail criteria. This updated map will be presented to the Parks Commission in May 2018.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

RMA-Land Use and Community Development, RMA-Public Works, Facilities and Parks, and US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

FINANCING:

There is no financial impact to receiving this report on the Toro Park Trails Project.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

This project represents improvement to a county facility that will provide recreational opportunities by hikers, bikers and equestrians at Toro Park by establishing more effective resource management of County lands, promoting equitable opportunities for our community, developing a more sustainable and physical infrastructure that improves the quality of life for County residents, and a safer environment for people to enjoy nature.

   Economic Development

X Administration

X Health & Human Services

X Infrastructure

X Public Safety

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Approved by: Carl P. Holm, AICP, Resources Management Agency Director

Attachments:

Attachment A - Toro Trails Public Meeting, 2.29.16

Attachment B - Toro Park Map of Trails (rev. 10/30/2009)

Attachment C - California Department of Parks and Recreation's Trail Managers Toolbox

Attachment D - Federal Trails Data Standards

Attachment E - Central Coast Watershed Studies, Road and Trail Resources Inventory Report by the Watershed Institute, Earth Systems Science and Policy California State University Monterey Bay