

Hello all,

April 6th, 2006, 7pm, David Gebhard Public Meeting Room, 630 Garden Street, Santa Barbara, CA, 93101

MEETING:

On April 6th the City of Santa Barbara and the County of Santa Barbara will be hosting a public meeting to present, discuss, and take public comment on a proposal recommended by the Front Country Trails Working group. This proposal concerns the management of the Santa Barbara Trails. The proposal can be found here -http://www.sbtrails.org/Documents/TWG_Proposal.pdf

HISTORY:

SBMTV was invited by Forest Service to participate in the Front Country Trails Working Group (FCTWG) as a representative of the mountain bike community because of SBMTV's 18 years of volunteer service as first a Mountain Bike Patrol in the late 1980's, and then as the major organized volunteer force regularly maintaining SB area trails, developing and hosting a bicycle bell program, developing trail etiquette information for trailheads and bicycle shops, developing MTB rider education programs, as consultants on local trail issues, and successfully working with the Forest Service to avoid closure of Snider trail in year 2000.

SBMTV members that participated in this process included Chuck Anderson past SBMTV president, Chris Orr current SBMTV president, Kelly Steelman as a industry representative, and Dave Phreaner as another local rider representative. Other individuals and organizations that were represented in the FCTWG included the Montecito Trails Foundation, Mission Canyon Home Owners Association, Los Padres Trail Riders (equestrians), SB chapter of the Sierra Club, Safetrails, County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Committee (Crahtac), the Trails Council, and Los Padres Forest Association. Also representatives from the Los Padres Forest Service, City of Santa Barbara, County of Santa Barbara, a paid mediator, and UCSB Bren students attended the meetings.

FCTWG participants were assembled by the Forest Service to address the issues of trail user safety and trail user conflicts. The

Forest Service asked this group to develop a "recommended" trails management proposal to assist them in reducing those safety and conflict issues. And this is what the FCTWG did – submit to the City, County, and Forest Service a "recommended" proposal for trails management.

The FCTWG first met in September of 2002 and then on a semi monthly basis until (October 2004) when FCTWG submitted their recommended "FCTWG Proposal". These meetings at times were quite heated and included discussions on a broad range of trail issues, the full spectrum of trail usage from completely closed to completely open, and used trail information and trail data from around the world to develop the proposal.

SBMTV is proud of its involvement in the FCTWG process and proposal. This work represents the first time in the history of MTB usage (20+ years) on Santa Barbara trails that the varied trail groups were able to work together and develop consensus on important trail issues and trail management. In the late 1980's and early 1990's when the agencies called together public hearings (like the one coming up) on these same issues – the meetings were emotional shouting matches, no cooperative work was done, there was no consensus, and our trail system did not change. Many consider this status quo best. SBMTV does not. With the growing population, additional trail users of all types, and reduced agency resources, the three local trail management agencies need to actually start "managing" their trails – with assistance by concerned trail users.

SBMTV STATEMENT ON THE RECOMMENDED FCTWG PROPOSAL:

SBMTV supports the whole of the FCTWG Proposal which includes the creation of a "Trails Alliance", the creation of a broad user based trail hosting/education program, the installation of useful and informative trail signs, and an interim odd/even plan for mountain bikes in the Santa Barbara trail system.

Specifics of recommended FCTWG proposal:

– The Trails Alliance (supported):

This group has been created and has been functioning as a loose umbrella organization for trail users/groups to work within since

2004. This is the most important aspect of the FCTWG as it is creating the opportunity to improve the trails and reduced user conflict through cooperation by the varied groups. SBMTV visions this Trails Alliance as replacing the repeated 5 to 7 year cycle of trail use battles between trail users with improved relations between users, providing for additional trail maintenance, and assisting the agencies in the creation a "trails management" plan.

– Trail hosting and education program (supported):

The proposed trail hosting/education program is a natural extension of SBMTV's Trailhead education program to a broader based multi-user information program. For the last five years SBMTV volunteers have spent time at trailheads and on trail educating users about current trail issues, conflicts, trail etiquette, trail maintenance events, and distributing bike bells to mountain bikers. SBMTV's education and bell program has made significant improvements in bettering user interactions on the trail. A larger program could alleviate much of the user conflicts on trail and would include the same functionality and additional participation by all user types and may provide additional interpretive information and safety features (First Aid).

– Trail signage (supported):

Santa Barbara trails are poorly signed in the way of trail route, etiquette, safety, and interpretive information. To help, SBMTV has also for the last five years posted FS approved trail etiquette/responsibility signs for mountain bikes at trailheads. SBMTV has long pushed for better signage of our trails by the agencies and through the Trails Alliance signage has finally started to happen. New signs (made to be as unobtrusive as possible) will provide trail route, etiquette, interpretive, and safety information. Finally trail users will have a better idea of where they are going, their responsibilities, what type of plants, animals, rocks are on the trail, and what other types of users they can expect to encounter.

– Odd/Even Plan (supported):

The FCTWG proposal calls for an interim Odd/Even plan for mountain bikes on Santa Barbara trails – but this plan is not defined or detailed in the FCTWG proposal. SBMTV supports the idea of odd/oven on a trail or trails within the Santa Barbara trail system, but does not support an immediate trail system wide odd/even mountain bike plan. SBMTV believes that even for odd/even to be

interim on a single trail a number of important actions need to take place:

1)Data needs to be collected to determine the best location for an interim of odd/even.

2)The public and trail users will need to be notified and educated that a change will be taking place.

3)Appropriate signing would need to be developed.

4)The start and end dates for an interim Odd/Even plan need to be well defined.

5)Possibly most importantly, SBMTV and the MTB community need to see that progress is being made by the Agencies (and the Trails Alliance) to develop a comprehensive trails management plan that will provide access, enjoyment, and safety for all users – without the loss of trail miles(Yes, this means additional trails built). SBMTV strongly believes that if an interim plan for odd/even does not closely follow the points above that the plan will cause more conflicts on the trail and is doomed to failure.

Although the FCTWG proposal is very controversial, SBMTV views this proposal and Trails Alliance as major building blocks in the improvement of our trail community and system as a whole. The time has come for new management plans to meet user's needs, more public involvement, more agency involvement, the adding, modifying, changing of trails, and this process represents the first time in 20+ years of multiple use trails the public and agencies can work together to meet the needs of our growing population.

We encourage you to consider the Santa Barbara's past trail history, SBMTV's involvement, the current issues of user conflict and safety, your trail usage, and most importantly a trail system that can fit the overall needs of the community.

Please attend the April 6th public hearing on the FCTWG proposal and write/email your local representatives with your input on improving shared use – multiple use trails system. The list of representative contacts is found here –

www.sbmtv.org/docs/representatives.pdf. Also, please review the Trails Alliance website here – www.sbtrails.org.

Thank you,
The Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers Board.

"It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best since you have to sweat up them and coast down them" – Ernest Hemingway