

HANDOUTS

Parks and Recreation Commission

Wednesday, October 4, 2017
5:30 P.M.

City Hall
Room W 118 & 119
200 E. Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113



District 1	Daphna Woolfe
District 2	Charles Dougherty Jr.
District 3	Frank Ponciano
District 4	Kelly Snider
District 5	Gregory Lovely
District 6	Demerris Brooks-Immel
District 7	Trami Cron
District 8	Chet Mandair
District 9	Rudy Flores, Chair
District 10	Brian Quint, Vice Chair
Citywide	George Adas

Councilmember Tam Nguyen,
Council Liaison

Angel Rios, Jr., Director, PRNS



COMMITTEE FOR
GREEN FOOTHILLS



CALIFORNIA
NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Santa Clara Valley Chapter

January 9, 2017

To: Honorable Chair Barbara Keegan and Santa Clara Valley Water District Directors

cc: Sue Tippets, Norma Camacho

Re: Item 6.2: Balancing Trails and Recreational Uses of District Creek Side Property with Stream Stewardship and Flood Protection Missions. 16-0877

Overview

As human population in Santa Clara Valley has increased, greenways and natural habitats for wildlife have substantially decreased. Desire for recreational access to remaining greenways and open spaces has caused further stress on the diminishing quantity and quality of wildlife habitats and animal corridors. Creek side trails pose an especially strong threat to local wildlife because they degrade vital, rare habitat. Community members are, by and large, unaware that their presence in riparian habitats degrades the very asset they value - nature. Riparian wildlife corridors are becoming bike commuter corridors. Furthermore, trail users feed wildlife and feral animals along creeks, exacerbating the conflicts with native wildlife.

With an extensive trail system already in place along most Valley creeks, there is now intense pressure to connect trail segments by installing trails where the remaining riparian space is too narrow to allow sensible development. Trail installation in these areas could require paving the creek bank, squeezing a trail at the top of the bank or even cantilevering the trail over the creek. We are concerned about biological impacts from these projects. As specified in Guidelines and Standards for Land Use Near Streams, "a biological resource assessment will be required for trail routes along streams or creeks." We ask for a public comment period and biological assessments on all new trail proposals along creeks.

Building trails along every reach of our county creeks is **not** compatible with the District's stream stewardship goal to maintain and improve riparian habitats.

We support Staff recommendations and urge District leadership to:

- **Uphold the District's responsibility for stream stewardship as higher priority when considering new trail projects**
- **Protect creeks and riparian habitats from excessive trail development**
- **Minimize the number of new bridges**
 - **Advocate for trail alignment outside riparian corridors, not below the top-of-the banks, and not cantilevered over creeks**
 - **Limit trails and other development to only one side of a creek**

- **Identify and designate “no trail” habitats as vital refugia**
- **Prohibit lighting of trails along creek corridors**
- **Prohibit night use of trails along creek corridors**
- **Work with municipalities to prevent feeding of wildlife and feral animals along creek corridors**
- **Encourage municipalities to place new trail connectivity away from narrow and highly sensitive creek corridors, using city streets instead**
- **Continue to educate creek trail users and municipalities on the impacts of human activity on biodiversity and species survival**
- **Provide biological assessments to the public before planning and construction of trails and bridges, as required in Guidelines and Standards for Land Use Near Streams**
- **Develop and promote clear policy for trail connectivity based on staff recommendations and inputs from stakeholders**

Discussion & Conclusions

Numerous studies document the negative impacts from the presence and activities of humans on riparian and upland habitats – species abundance, diversity, foraging and nesting opportunities, and predation patterns are all adversely affected. Lighting, commuter cyclists, and increased human presence all negatively impact the ecological value in riparian zones. Climate change ecologists emphasize the importance of maintaining *functional* habitat linkages for species survival; in Santa Clara Valley these linkages occur primarily along riparian corridors.

- Riparian systems are one of the rarest habitat types in North America. About 80% of all animals use riparian resources and habitats at some life stage, and more than 50% of breeding birds nest chiefly in riparian habitats (Krueper 1992).
- Riparian systems, because they provide connectivity between habitats and across elevational zones, will be especially important to allow species to respond and adapt to climate change (Seavy et al. 2009).
- Hiking and bicycling trails correlated with a five-fold decline in the density of native carnivores and a substantial increase in nonnative carnivore species (Reed & Merenlender, 2008).
- A related study suggested that bobcats, in particular, were displaced by the disturbance caused by bikers and hikers (George & Crooks, 2006).
- In a survey of birds in the riparian woodlands of Santa Clara County, it was determined that the number of bird species in a riparian area increased with the distance to the nearest buildings and with the width of undisturbed riparian habitat (Rottenborn, 1995).
- Additional studies provided on request (over 25 studies available)

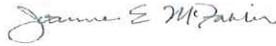
In the past decades, creek side trails were built in riparian habitats along and over almost every creek in the county. Federally endangered steelhead trout, shy bird species, plants and other animals are at increased risk due to human activity in riparian open space. Standard mitigation measures, such as installation of permeable concrete trails, strategic fencing, and planting native plants, have not adequately compensated for the devastating influence of human activity on

wildlife. To truly balance access to trails with wildlife and nature, we must allow the possibility of distancing human activity from creeks and allow some creek sections to exist without trail connections.

Sincerely,



Kit Gordon
Sierra Club



Joanne McFarlin
Senior Ecologist,
Grassroots Ecology



Shani Kleinhaus
Environmental Advocate
Santa Clara Valley Audubon
Society



Trish Mulvey
CLEAN South Bay



Alice Kaufman
Legislative Advocate, Committee for
Green Foothills



Eileen McLaughlin
Board Member, Citizens
Committee to Complete the
Refuge



Linda Ruthruff
Conservation Chair, California
Native Plant Society, Santa Clara
Valley Chapter