

MOUNTAIN BIKERS OF SANTA CRUZ
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David Vincent, Superintendent
Santa Cruz District, California State Parks
303 Big Trees Park Road
Felton, CA 95018

Revised letter Nov 8

Dear Superintendent Vincent,

As you know, Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz (MBO SC), is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to promoting mountain biking as an enjoyable, healthy, and environmentally sustainable activity. We believe that mountain biking is good for our health and helps reduce diseases associated with physical inactivity, such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity. We believe it is good for the environment, because people who enjoy the parks develop a strong desire to protect them and the environment as a whole. Mountain biking has also been shown through many scientific studies to result in no more impact to the environment than hiking does, and so we feel confident that our form of recreation does not harm our natural resources. We also derive great emotional and spiritual benefits from riding through the parks. The beauty of the forests and ocean views enriches our lives by reducing the stress of our daily lives and helping us appreciate the wonder of nature.

Our access to trails is essential for us to enjoy our parks. We seek to establish fair access for mountain bikers to the public trails in the Santa Cruz Mountains and have been actively working over the past couple of years with local, regional, state and federal land managers in an attempt to meet the trail needs of mountain cyclists. In particular, we are interested in regional trail connections, and being able to complete long loop rides that pass through several jurisdictions, habitats, vistas and elevations.

It is well known that Santa Cruz County and the surrounding Bay Area is home to many of us mountain bikers. We thank you and California State Parks for protecting these parks and providing for public recreation for us and other trail users. As you know, we have enjoyed a great partnership with California State Parks, as well as other agencies and user groups, in supporting and enhancing the parks and trails. We have sponsored educational activities such as "Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day," the "Carrot Fest" with Santa Cruz Horsemen's Association, and contributed thousands of hours of volunteer work in partnership with Trailworkers.com.

Santa Cruz County, as a governmental agency, does not manage any significant trail network and operates only small city-like parks. Of 53,600 acres of public land and 413 miles of trails in the Santa Cruz Mountains, 38,900 acres and 308 miles of trails are in State Parks.

Consequently, State Parks is the de-facto provider of the vast majority (75%) of trails available for the local population.

Unfortunately, mountain bikers are relegated to a minor fraction of the total miles of trails available for public recreation in the region. Of the 413 miles of trails, 275 miles are closed to bikes and limited in use to hikers and equestrians (see Table 1). As the table shows, cyclists are not allowed to use 67% of the total trail mileage, and 89% of the singletrack trails are off limits. California State Parks restrictions on singletrack trails are even more severe, with 92% of the mileage off limits to bikes.

Since mountain bikers generally favor singletrack trails, and comprise approximately 50% of the visitors to the parks in our region, there is a serious imbalance between demand and supply. We are squeezed onto just a few miles of trail. This results in multiple-use trails being crowded and showing signs of over use, and reduces the quality of experience all users can enjoy in the parks.

We believe it is fair and a reasonable request to ask for some trails to be converted to multi-use, thus enabling cyclists to have more opportunity to find solitary and quiet experiences locally, and to decrease congestion and impact on multi-use trails throughout the trail system.

We are requesting the following trails be converted to multi-use. None of these requests requires any physical change to the parks or trails, other than modifying trail signage and maps to indicate the change in allowed use. If granted access, we would be happy to provide volunteer labor to help upgrade these trails through trail maintenance work parties, and to establish a volunteer trail patrol as a service to the public who use the trails. We believe our presence can be a net benefit to the parks and hope you will grant our requests.

Fall Creek Unit, Henry Cowell State Park

Opening the Fall Creek unit to cycling will allow cyclists to enjoy a fair share of the trails in the San Lorenzo Valley, and also bring our volunteer trail crews to assist in their maintenance and upgrade. We are requesting bicycle access to all the major loop trails in this area:

- Pine Flat Connector – 0.2 miles from Empire Grade to Lost Empire Trail.
- Lost Empire Trail – 3.6 miles from Pine Flat Trail to Cape Horn Trail.
- Big Ben Trail – 1.4 miles from Lost Empire Trail to Truck Trail.
- Truck Trail – 2.4 miles from Park Boundary to Ridge Trail.
- Fall Creek Trail – 3.1 miles from Big Ben to Fall Creek Drive.
- Ridge Trail/High School Trail. – 2.5 miles from Truck Trail to the high school.
- Cape Horn Trail. – 0.2 miles from Lost Empire Trail to Fall Creek Trail.
- S–Cape Trail – 0.3 miles from Fall Creek Trail to Ridge Trail.
- Bennet Creek Trail – 0.2 miles from Felton–Empire Road to Fall Creek Trail.

Big Basin State Park

We are seeking dispersed off-road cycling opportunities, including access to singletrack trails that provide long loops out in the perimeter of the park, and make regional connections while minimizing user conflict in the Park Headquarters Area. While there are roads in Big Basin that are open to bicycling, many end at hiking-only trails, and there is a lack of connectivity that prevents cyclists from accessing large sections of the park. We are asking for access to a minimal number of trails near the Park Headquarters to allow cyclists to stay off Hwy 236, while still being able to access campgrounds and the visitor center, and reach regional and loop trails further away. Our request avoids the vast majority of hiking-only trails in the center of the park. We are requesting bicycle access to the following trails that are open to both horses and hikers that are outside the State Wilderness area, and a few hiking-only trails to complete connections. These trails all have adequate width and grade and will not require any physical changes to accommodate mountain bicyclists.

- Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail, – approx 3.5 miles from Toll Road Interconnector trail in Castle Rock to China Grade at Big Basin State Park.
- Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail – 1.2 miles from China Grade, to the North Escape Road.
- Basin Trail – 1.5 miles. From Skyline-to-the-Sea to Lane Trail Camp.
- East Ridge Trail –0.3 miles from Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail to China Grade.
- East Ridge Trail –1.0 miles from East Ridge Road North to East Ridge Road South.
- East Ridge Trail – 2.7. miles from East Ridge Road South to Pine Mountain Road.
- Redwood Trail – 0.9 miles from East Ridge Trail to Park Headquarters.
- McCrary Ridge Trail – 2.1 miles from Waddell Creek Fireroad to Hihn Hammond Road.
- Whitehouse Ridge Trail – 1.0 miles from Chalks Road to Whitehouse Canyon Road.

Castle Rock State Park

As you know, Sanborn–Skyline County Park, on Castle Rock’s northern boundary, is undergoing a Trails Plan process, and is planning to open up many of its trails to bicycling. We would like to be able to pass through Castle Rock and make connections between Saratoga Gap Open Space Preserve, Sanborn Park, and Big Basin without riding on the highways. Since Castle Rock is also undergoing a Trails Plan, we would like to be clear that we are seeking access to the two regional trails in this park.

- Skyline Trail (Bay Area Ridge Trail) – 1.8 miles from Hwy 9 at Saratoga Gap to Sanborn–Skyline County Park.
- Bicycle Alternate to Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail as described below:
 - Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail, 0.3 miles from Hwy 9 at Saratoga Gap to Saratoga Toll Road;
 - Saratoga Toll Road, – 7.1 miles from Hwy 9 at Saratoga Gap to Hwy 9 at Waterman Gap;
 - Toll Road Interconnector trail, – 1.9 miles from Hwy 9 to Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail.

For a summary of the result of these changes in trail use designations, see Table 2. Also see the marked up maps (appendix A) to highlight the trails that would be affected by this proposal.

Our request to convert hiking-only or hiking- & equestrian-only trails to multi-use trails is consistent with the California State Parks policy identified in the California Recreational Trails Plan, which states as one of its goals:

“Provide the maximum opportunities for the public use of the trails by encouraging the appropriate expansion of multi-use trails.”

The plan also provides a guideline to:

“Involve user groups to help land managers make informed decisions regarding trail designations and design.”

Our request for trail conversion is also consistent with the State Park’s Trail Policy No. 2005–06, issued on 8/3/2005 (http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/1324/files/2005–06_trails_policy.pdf). This policy states in part:

“Multi-use trails and trail connectivity with adjacent public trail systems will be considered in the development of trail plans or individual trails . . . District Superintendents will be responsible for addressing trails issues that are brought to their attention by staff or the public within the District in a timely manner.”

We realize there will be a process as outlined in the State Park Trail Policy to convert these trails to multi-use, and we wish to meet with you to discuss the specifics of our proposal and the evaluation and implementation process. We will be in contact to follow up with our request and to set up a convenient meeting time.

Respectfully,

Mark Davidson,
President, Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz

CC:
Bill Dall, Sector Superintendent
Tom Ward, International Mountain Bicycling Association

Attachments:
Tables 1 & 2: existing conditions and proposed changes
Appendix A: Maps highlighting proposed changes
 Castle Rock
 Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail
 Big Basin
 Fall Creek

Table 1. Existing Conditions, Santa Cruz Mountains Public Parks and Trails

Agency	Acres	Total Miles, Singletrack	Total Miles, Fireroads	Total Miles, All Trails	* Singletrack No Bikes	* Fireroads No Bikes	Total All Trails, No Bikes	% Singletrack No Bikes	% Fireroad, No Bikes	%Total Trails, No Bikes
CA State Parks	38,926	183.6	124.5	308.1	169.1	33.0	202.1	92.1%	26.5%	65.6%
Other Agencies	14,673	76.8	27.6	104.4	62.9	9.1	72.0	81.9%	33.0%	69.0%
Totals	53,599	260.4	152.1	412.5	232.0	42.1	274.1	89.1%	27.7%	66.4%

Table 2. Summary of Proposed Trail Use Designation Changes

Park		Total Miles, Singletrack	Total Miles, Fireroads	Total Miles, All Trails	* Singletrack, No Bikes	* Fireroads, No Bikes	Total All Trails, No Bikes	% Singletrack, No Bikes	% Fireroad, No Bikes	%Total Trails, No Bikes
Castle Rock/STTS	Existing	24.0	14.0	38.0	24.0	12.8	36.8	100.0%	91.4%	96.8%
Big Basin	Existing	50.4	34.4	84.8	50.4	0.0	50.4	100.0%	0.0%	59.4%
Henry Cowell Fall Creek	Existing	14.1	4.8	18.9	14.1	4.8	18.9	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Totals, these parks	Existing	88.5	53.2	141.7	88.5	17.6	106.1	100.0%	33.1%	74.9%
Totals, all parks	Existing	260.4	152.1	412.5	232.0	42.1	274.1	89.1%	27.7%	66.4%
Castle Rock/STTS	Proposed	n/c	n/c	n/c	20.3	5.2	25.5	84.6%	37.1%	67.1%
Big Basin	Proposed	n/c	n/c	n/c	39.9	0.0	39.9	79.1%	0.0%	47.0%
Henry Cowell Fall Creek	Proposed	n/c	n/c	n/c	4.1	0.0	4.1	29.1%	0.0%	21.7%
Totals, these parks	Proposed	n/c	n/c	n/c	64.3	5.2	69.5	72.6%	9.8%	49.0%
Totals, all parks	Proposed	n/c	n/c	n/c	207.8	29.7	237.5	79.8%	19.5%	57.6%
Total miles of changes proposed					-24.3	-12.4	-36.7			
% change proposed, these parks								-27.4%	-23.3%	-25.9%
% change proposed, all parks								-9.3%	-8.2%	-8.9%

*Note categorization of trail width (singletrack vs. fireroad) is estimated