

June 9, 2017

Dear Parks and Recreation Commissioners,

To understand the current controversy regarding new mountain bike trails in the Pogonip, it is helpful to look at Marin and Contra Costa Counties.

For several decades now, mountain bikers and the biking industry in these two counties have been pushing for more trails in the Bay Area. The response from land use agencies, hikers and environmentalists in Marin County, where mountain biking got its start, has not been welcoming. Mt. Diablo State Park in Contra Costa County has been equally firm. This has led bikers and the biking industry to search for more favorable conditions in Santa Cruz County.

Linda Novy, who has successfully worked to limit mountain biking in Marin County Parks, has worked in sustainable landscape management in the Bay Area for more than forty years. She says, "I don't think that public lands can meet the appetite that mountain bikers have for narrow trails that flow and have jumps," she said. "I think that's an unrealistic expectation. **There has to be an awareness that public lands are not thrill parks and can't meet the desires of the mountain biking recreational industry.**"

In Marin County today, among an estimated 600 miles of roads and trails open for recreational use, only about half are open to bikes, and, more importantly, of that half, about 83 percent are fire roads. That leaves 51 miles of the narrow, twisting trails that mountain bikers love and seek.

Similarly, in the East Bay, most of the trails in the 110,000 acre Mt. Diablo State Park in Contra Costa County have been declared off limits to mountain bikers. "I don't like to ride much in Mount Diablo State Park because there are very few trails open to mountain bicycles," said Mike Udkow, president of the Bicycle Trails Council of the East Bay. "Mountain bicyclists are frustrated that the state park has basically limited them to riding on big wide roads that go up and down. It's not inviting." According to the official Mt. Diablo State Park website, "Most single track trails are closed to mountain bikes. Mountain bikes may be ridden on paved roads, maintained fire roads and authorized trails. The website lists 6 such authorized trails currently open to bicycles."

Frustrated by the strong resistance offered by the state and county park systems to the north and east of the Bay Area, mountain bikers in the Bay Area and the mountain biking industry have looked southward to Santa Cruz County. So far, they have been met with a warm welcome by Mountain Bikes of Santa Cruz, made up of riders and the industry. MBoSC is betting on the fact that Santa Cruz City, unlike the North and East Bay, will not be able to muster the resolve to protect its natural resources from adventure sports and the biking industry.

I decided to see for myself who was using the current mountain bike trails in the Pogonip. On Saturday, May 20th, I talked to 24 bikers for about a half-hour at the McCrary Trail entrance and on Thursday, May 25th, for about an hour at the Rincon Trail entrance. I asked all the riders where they came from. My short, informal survey indicated that 62% of the McCrary Trail riders were from out of town (3 San Carlos, 2 Fremont, 4 Danville, 3 San Jose, 1 El Centro, 2 Berkeley and 9 Santa Cruz County.) 64% of the Rincon trail riders were from out of town (7 San Jose, 1 Walnut Creek, 1 Danville, 5 Santa Cruz). Many mentioned their frustration and disgust about the lack of trails in Marin and Contra Costa Counties. They were hoping that Santa Cruz would be more permissive.

Clearly, mountain bikers from the North Bay and East Bay, prevented from developing trails in their own areas, are turning towards Santa Cruz.

I do not believe that a thrill-seeking adventure sport belongs in small and sensitive natural ecosystems like the Pogonip, nor does it belong where hikers seek serenity and beauty in a natural setting. Santa Cruz should welcome all outsiders to share in the beauty of our natural resources. But we should be firm, as have government agencies in other counties, that mountain bikes do not belong in environmentally sensitive areas.

I have quite a few mountain biker friends, and find them a very friendly group of people. I sincerely hope that skilled mountain bikers will find environmentally appropriate obstacle courses that will test their mettle and skill, while not endangering wildlife or other humans.

I hope that the Commissioners will strongly recommend that the City Council not permit more mountain bike trails to be built in the Pogonip.

Thank you,

Barbara Childs