

CITY OF RANCHO PALOS VERDES
PRESERVE MANAGEMENT/PUMP PUBLIC FORUM MEETING
MAY 22, 2013

The forum began at 6:05 p.m. in the City Hall Community Room, 30940 Hawthorne Boulevard.

ATTENDANCE

City Staff: Carolynn Petru - Deputy City Manager/Interim Recreation & Parks Department Director
Joel Rojas - Community Development Department Director
Emilio Blanco - Maintenance Superintendent, Public Works
Bindu Vaish - Associate Engineer, Public Works
Katie Howe - Administrative Analyst, Recreation & Parks Department

PVPLC Staff: Danielle Lefer - Conservation Director

MRCA Representative: Jewel Johnson - Supervising Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) Ranger

Director Rojas introduced the team of City staff, PVPLC staff, and the MRCA Ranger present, and gave an overview of each agency's responsibilities designated in the Preserve Management Agreement.

Status Update of PVPLC Trail Projects (Presented by Danielle Lefer):

Smuggler's Trail Connection to PV Drive South (Abalone Cove Reserve): This proposed project will better define the approved public trail from Palos Verdes Drive South to a popular view point overlooking Portuguese Point. A volunteer trail crew helped with a part of the project. It is anticipated to be completed in the fall.

North Spur Trail Work (Alta Vicente Reserve): An Eagle Scout project to clear the trail from the trailhead adjacent to City Hall will begin June 8th.

Status Update on Unauthorized Trail Closures: PVPLC has spent a lot of time this past winter closing spur trails in the Peppertree and Ishibashi Trail areas. Recently, the post and cable barrier to one of these spur trails was cut and native vegetation was damaged. The PVPLC is concerned that public use will pick up on these spur trails in the summer. PVPLC staff also noted a new spur trail starting in the Peppertree Trail area. The PVPLC is working with the City and Rangers to try to eliminate public use of these spur trails.

Installation of “Walk Bike” signs at Filiorum Reserve: Per City Council direction, PVPLC will be installing signs instructing mountain bikers to walk bikes through the three steep canyon crossings in the Filiorum Reserve within the next two weeks.

Decal Replacement on Trail Signs (Preserve-wide): PVPLC is replacing the trail user designation decals on existing trail markers with a more user friendly format throughout the Preserve. Work began in the Portuguese Bend and Filiorum Reserves, and the City will fund work in the remaining nine Reserves. The next phase will be in Forrestal and Abalone Cove Reserves. It is anticipated that all Reserves will be completed in the fall.

Implementation of the Volunteer Trail Watch Program (Preserve-wide): PVPLC is finalizing the Program with the City, and it will be presented to City Council for consideration at the June 1st adjourned regular meeting. Barbara Ailor is proposed to be the Volunteer Manager, and the public should contact her if they are interested in participating. Volunteer orientations and trainings are planned to begin this fall.

Public Comments/Questions

Eva Cicoria commented on the spur trail off of Ishibashi Trail. In April, she encountered two suspicious looking men about 30-40 years old, that did not have mountain bikes with them, in the area where the reported cables had been cut. They moved very quickly away from the area, leading her to believe that it will be very difficult to catch individuals vandalizing spur trail closures, even if they are stumbled upon in the act. She was in favor of the plan to make trail marker decals more user-friendly. She questioned the location of the “walk bike” signs at Filiorum, as she felt that many portions of the Zotes Cut Across Trail are too steep.

Anke Raue expressed concern that the current trail markers are easily vandalized, and metal posts might be a better solution.

Director Lefer responded that PVPLC’s experience is that metal is subject to scratches, and that if someone is determined to vandalize a trail marker, the marker material makes little difference.

John Wessel (PVPLC Keeper for east Filiorum Reserve) is pleased with the “walk bike” signs that will be installed. He is concerned about the spur trail leading from the overlook near Del Cerro Park into the Filiorum Reserve. Signage is needed to indicate it is not an authorized trail. He would also like better trail signage at the bottom of Kevin Canyon Trail, where the unauthorized trail meets Burma Road. There is an arrow and “stay on trail” verbiage, but it is unclear to users.

Director Lefer responded that PVPLC agrees signage is needed at the Del Cerro spur trail, and signage will be placed at that location in the near future. They will also work to clarify the Kevin Canyon Trail.

Lowell Wedemeyer (Three Sisters and Upper Filiorum PVPLC Keeper) asked if there is a procedure whereby interested parties can nominate spur trails for closure.

Director Lefer indicated that interested persons should send requests to the PVPLC or City. She emphasized that there are many spur trails in the Preserve that PVPLC is attempting to close; they are working to get signage at all spur trails, but it is not feasible to install post and cable at all spur trail locations.

Judy Herman suggested posting language, similar to that used in the Santa Barbara open space area, that if a trail is not posted as an official trail, then the public cannot access it.

Director Rojas responded that the City and PVPLC are currently working on a comprehensive Preserve signage plan, as signage is critical for enforcement.

Ranger Johnson commented that Rangers are able to cite individuals on trails not designated for a particular use, even if the trail marker has been vandalized/removed. However, it is ideal for all trails to be clearly marked.

Sunshine recollected that a section in the City's Trails Network Plan calls for an extensive formal signage study when funding is available. She asserted the benefit of this sort of comprehensive study.

Hal Winton (Trails Consultant for the City of Rolling Hills and U.S. Forest Service Volunteer) suggested that the City and PVPLC find an alternate route to complete the Fire Station Trail loop. An alternate trail was created when a portion of the Rim Trail on the private Nakamura property in Rolling Hills was closed. This was a great precedent for finding a solution. Volunteers can be used to create the trail.

Status Update of RPV Public Works Projects (Presented by Bindu Vaish and Emilio Blanco)

San Ramon Canyon Project/Potential Trail Connection to Friendship Park (San Ramon Reserve): Associate Engineer Vaish shared that the Public Works Department is currently overseeing the San Ramon Canyon Storm Drain Project. As part of this project, if the contractor's engineers are able to safely construct a trail across the canyon once fill has been placed in it to stabilize the area, it will provide a public trail connection from the San Ramon Reserve to Friendship Park.

Installation of Additional “No Trespassing” signage at Peppertree Trail (Portuguese Bend Reserve): Maintenance Superintendent Blanco indicated that, in addition to two “no trespassing” signs located near the private property at the Peppertree Trail, the City will install two additional signs in strategic locations to help further direct the public away from the private residential community.

Installation of “Closed Spur Trail” Sign at Del Cerro Park (Filiorum Reserve): Maintenance Superintendent Blanco reported that the Public Works Department will be installing “closed spur trail” signage at the spur trail leading from Del Cerro Park into the Filiorum Reserve.

Removal of Dead Eucalyptus Trees along Burma Road (Portuguese Bend Reserve): Maintenance Superintendent Blanco reported that the Public Works Department will be removing three unhealthy Eucalyptus trees on Burma Trail near Kubota and Water Tank Trails in July.

Public Comments/Questions:

Sheri Hastings requested “no trespassing” signage at the entry to the Vanderlip neighborhood from the Preserve. The neighborhood has problems with theft, rude hikers, and teenagers drinking and smoking afterhours.

Lowell Wedemeyer inquired as to what would be done with the eucalyptus trees after they are removed.

Maintenance Superintendent Blanco clarified that they would be cut apart, and dispersed in the Preserve for potential wildlife habitat.

Sunshine recommended the signage discouraging use of the Del Cerro spur trail have strong language such as “don’t even think about it,” similar to signage located along the cliffs at Vicente Bluffs Reserve.

Director Rojas clarified that similar signage is already in place, and the City will be adding additional signage at the actual location of the unauthorized trail prohibiting use of the spur trail.

Status Update of RPV Community Development Projects (Presented by Joel Rojas)

Use Agreement between City and Jim York for Jack’s Hat Trail (Three Sisters & Filiorum Reserves): Director Rojas shared that Mr. York has agreed to enter into an agreement with the City to allow continued public trail use of the portion of Jack Hat’s Trail that traverses the northwest corner of his Point View property. The agreement is scheduled to be considered by the Council sometime in June.

Possible Use Agreements for Peppertree Trail (Portuguese Bend Reserve):

Director Rojas noted a location where the Peppertree Trail traverses private property. He noted that Staff has spoken to the private property owners who are open to the idea of entering into use agreements with the City. The City is waiting to secure the use agreement with Mr. York before working on getting these additional agreements.

Unauthorized Trail Connection between Fire Station and Rim Trails (Portuguese Bend Reserve): Director Rojas reported that the previous Fire Station Trail route traversed private property, and the property owner, within their rights, closed access to the portion of the trail on their property due to trespassers onto her property. Recognizing the loss of the connection to the Rim Trail, the City has had numerous discussion with the City of Rolling Hills and the Community Association in an attempt to find a way to relocate the trail within the City of Rolling Hills, but the City of Rolling Hills is not interested in pursuing this option. An unknown individual or group has illegally tried to complete the loop by creating a spur trail that cuts into sensitive sage scrub habitat, which is in violation of Federal law. The City and PVPLC will continue to look for viable solutions to complete this trail loop.

Director Lefer clarified that completing the loop through the adjacent canyon is not feasible because of the steepness of the canyon.

Installation of Preserve Rules Signs/Citywide Park and Preserve Sign Inventory Update (Preserve-wide): Director Rojas indicated that consistent signage is necessary for effective enforcement. The Management Agreement between the City and PVPLC designates rules signage as the City's responsibility. After spending extensive time researching other agency's signage protocols, and receiving City Attorney, Sheriff, and Ranger feedback, the City is poised to install 58 rules signs at Preserve entry points in the upcoming months.

Public Comments/Questions:

Sunshine inquired as to the difficulty of finding a solution to complete the Fire Station Trail loop.

Director Lefer clarified that trail engineers have expressed great hesitance in building a trail in the area because of the steep canyon.

Kathy Nichols shared some history and reasoning on her decision to close the portion of the Fire Station Trail located on her property. As the Preserve became more popular, she became increasingly alarmed for the public's safety, and for liability concerns, with multiple user groups, including children, dangerously interacting on the very steep trail. She also had issues with motorcycles using the trail and robberies in the neighborhood. She spent a lot of time and money working with the cities of Rolling Hills and Rancho Palos Verdes and with the Sheriff's Department to make the trail safe, but a solution could not be found.

Sheri Hastings reported that she was thrown from her horse while riding on Ishibashi Trail, just below the switchbacks on the trail above Burma Road. A mountain biker spun out on the trail above her which threw rocks down the slope which spooked her horse (she was down-trail). She was thrown from her horse, resulting in cracked ribs and a broken collarbone. She expressed her opinion that equestrians feel they are the minority in the Preserve, and many are hesitant to report incidents with mountain bikers for fear equestrians will lose access to trails. She inquired as to how emergency responders access the Preserve. In this particular instance, her husband drove his Gator into the Preserve to help her.

Deputy City Manager Petru clarified that emergency responders have access the Preserve by 4-wheel drive vehicles and by helicopter.

Director Rojas emphasized the importance of reporting incidents to the City so enforcement personnel can prioritize areas for enforcement and user conflict instances.

Eva Cicoria communicated frustration that equestrians and hikers have informed the City Council before of incidents in which mountain biking activity has threatened or caused serious injuries such as that of Ms. Hastings, and that Council Members and staff have told the public that if they hear of such incidents changes will be made, but changes aren't being made. She also pointed out that the map being used at the meeting seemed to show another trail already traversing the canyon from Fire Station Trail and asked about the feasibility of using that as an alternate route to complete the Fire Station Trail connection.

Jim Igly recommended adding verbiage to Preserve entry signage indicating that the area is a Preserve and not a park.

Barbara Gleghorn commented that if the City really wishes to protect the Preserve, it could prohibit all users from the property.

Director Rojas indicated that the Council made the determinations as to what user groups use what trails in the Preserve when the PUMP was approved. The quarterly Management meetings are to inform the public of what Staff is doing to help make current policies work and to get feedback from the public as to where the City should focus its education and enforcement resources.

Status Update of RPV Recreation and Parks Projects (Presented by Katie Howe)

Review of Ranger Reports on Enforcement Issues in the Preserve (Preserve-wide): Administrative Analyst Howe discussed that enforcement issues reported to the Recreation and Parks Department are logged on the Ranger Hotline log

and a Preserve Issues log. Copies of both were available at the meeting. She led the group through some of the more recent issues reported to the City by PVPLC, Rangers, and the public. Some of these included dogs off-leash, Preserve gates left unlocked afterhours, spur trail use, and homeless activity. She encouraged the public to report Preserve enforcement issues and observations through the Ranger Hotline (310-491-5775), with detailed information on location and time, as these reports help the City and Rangers focus the enforcement efforts.

Ranger Johnson led attendees through the quarterly MRCA report covering January through March 2013. Copies of this report were available at the meeting. She reported that overall, compliance in the Preserve is good. However, there are the few who continue to break the rules. The Rangers patrol the entire Preserve, but focus in the Reserves with the most concentrated use and habitat restoration activity. Some issues reviewed included unauthorized trail use and vehicles entering the Preserve from main roads and private communities. She reported that the most common violations, as is common throughout all open space areas patrolled by the MRCA, are dog-related: dogs off-leash, dogs on the beach, and owners failing to pick up after their pets. She also shared that hikers are forgetting to bring water on their hikes, especially when walking up Burma Road. She encouraged the public to call the Ranger Hotline and report in detail what the public sees.

Public Comments/Questions:

Sheri Hastings agreed that most mountain bikers are fine, but it is the few rogue mountain bikers out there for speed that cause the problems.

Barbara Ailor suggested that the mounted Posse assist.

Deputy City Manager Petru indicated that the Posse is currently assisting, and will continue to patrol this summer. In addition, it is likely that City Council will continue the CORE Deputy bicycle patrols along Palos Verdes Drive South in the next fiscal year, which cover the coastal area, including the Reserves.

Anke Raue asked if Ranger citations were an effective deterrent, and asked if a financial penalty was attached to them.

Ranger Johnson responded that Rangers are peace officers with the authority to issue citations. These are real citations, and individuals must appear at the Torrance Courthouse and substantial fines are attached to the citations.

Eva Cicoria shared that she no longer calls the Hotline, but did call repeatedly for a series of days to demonstrate the frequency of violations she encounters. She also indicated that she did not think Rangers' use of ATVs was a good idea in the Preserve.

Ranger Johnson indicated that ATV's are a useful tool Rangers have to assist with enforcement in the Preserve and in the Santa Monica Mountains. However, she did not anticipate a high level of use in the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve due to the terrain.

Deputy City Manager Petru clarified that CORE Deputies also use ATV's, primarily on Burma Road and to access the beaches.

Director Rojas thanked everyone for the excellent commentary and participation, noted that the next public forum meeting will be sometime in August, and adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.