

CITY OF RANCHO PALOS VERDES
PRESERVE MANAGEMENT/PUMP PUBLIC FORUM MEETING
OCTOBER 1, 2014

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

ATTENDANCE

City Staff: Carolynn Petru – Acting City Manager
 Cory Linder – Recreation and Parks Department Director
 Ara Mihranian – Community Development Deputy Director
 Katie Lozano – Recreation and Parks Department Administrative Analyst

PVPLC Staff: Danielle Lefer – Conservation Director

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

Director Linder welcomed attendees and explained that the Recreation and Parks Department will be facilitating the Preserve Public Forum Meetings and that the City's day to day responsibilities relating to operations and maintenance of the Preserve have been transferred from the Community Development Department to the Recreation and Parks Department. The Community Development Department will remain the lead for Preserve planning matters, including the NCCP, and the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy's (PVPLC) role remains the same. His goal is to drill down and focus on Preserve needs and maximize resources. Staff introduced themselves and explained their roles in Preserve management.

Preserve Planning

Future Malaga Canyon Reserve: Deputy Director Mihranian reported that Malaga Canyon will be enrolled in the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve in the future, and at that time, the Preserve Public Use Master Plan (PUMP) will be amended.

San Ramon Reserve trail connector to Friendship Park: Deputy Director Mihranian reported that a connector trail is being built, and that the Management Team is working on addressing potential issues of motorized vehicles entering the Reserve via Friendship Park.

Vista Del Norte/Crestridge Project Trail Connection: Deputy Director Mihranian shared that the developer is required to install a trail connector to connect the loop in Vista Del Norte Reserve. The City is coordinating work with PVPLC.

Trails Network Plan Update: Deputy Director Mihranian reported this update will consolidate and update the City's multiple trails plans. It will not include changes to Preserve Trails, as they have been more recently approved. Workshops began in May, and the next workshop will be held October 29th. Find more info on the City's website, and through the project listserv.

Public Comments/Questions

Barry Holchin expressed concern with trail building, trail widening, and increased use in Malaga Canyon. He has witnessed trail building increase substantially. He is also concerned about a connector that is being built from the Pacific Unitarian Church.

Sunshine asked who designed the new trails in San Ramon Reserve.

Deputy Director Mihranian indicated that Melendez designed the trails under the City's instruction, and one of the trails is an improved existing service road.

Peter Shaw asked if a transitional trail will be created from lower San Ramon to upper San Ramon for safety reasons since the current trail is directly adjacent to the road.

Deputy Director Mihranian indicated that that option could be explored.

Director Linder indicated that the City has witnessed the trend of mountain bike use moving from Portuguese Bend Reserve to the privately owned land south of San Ramon Reserve and Friendship Park. This area is also used by motorized vehicles.

Lynn Swank asked how the Infrastructure Management Committee (IMC) related to trails.

Acting City Manager Petru reported that the IMC is a seven-member committee to assess eight areas of infrastructure, of which one is trails. The committee will work with staff on an infrastructure assessment plan and to prioritize projects. No Preserve trails will be affected by the committee, because Preserve trails are managed by PVPLC, not the City.

Mayor Pro-tem Knight clarified that the committee's purview is maintenance rather than public use. He invited to the public to the committee meetings.

Peter Shaw requested a status update on the lower Vanderlip Trail and York easements.

Deputy Director Mihranian indicated that there is no change on the status of the lower Vanderlip Trail, and the City and Mr. York have come to an impasse. The Management Team is aware that a connector from Filiorum to Three Sisters Reserves is needed.

Greg Perkins asked if the City has trail width standards. He shared that growing up, his family rode bikes and hiked in upper Malaga Canyon. The improved access created by the Pacific Unitarian Church was built years ago, and was improved within the last year. The public is welcome to it.

Deputy Director Mihranian explained that the Preserve does not have trail standards. During the PUMP process, it was decided that the prism of a trail could be improved, but trails could not be widened or added. The drought is causing much of the vegetation that once delineated trails to fade away. As a result, the trails are widening. He also explained that Malaga Canyon was privately owned when the church built the connector trail, but now it is City-owned and will have different regulations as it becomes part of a larger trail system.

Eva Cicoria emphasized putting the protection of habitat before all else.

Hal Winton commented that he has been hiking in Malaga Canyon for a long time, and the trails have been passable for a long time.

Director Linder clarified that the Management Team would look into and address the Malaga Canyon Trail concerns.

Preserve Maintenance

Review of Active Habitat/Trail Projects: Director Lefer reported that PVPLC will hire a field operations position for spur trail closures, decal replacement, graffiti, and other trail issues.

Rim Trail: Director Lefer shared that the Volunteer Trail Crew (VTC) is assessing closing Rim Trail spur trails. PVPLC will install trail signs indicating that the trail is hazardous/challenging so the public does not use spur trails to avoid the difficult and challenging authorized route.

Landslide Scarp Trail: Director Lefer shared that PVPLC installed signage and closed the spur trail at the trail entry. The Management Team also met in the field with the Volunteer Trail Watch (VTW) Coordinator to discuss solutions.

Smuggler's Cove Trail Gate Opening: Analyst Lozano reported that Public Works installed a mechanism that allows mountain bikers to access the trail, but deters motorized vehicles.

Unauthorized/Spur Trail Closures

PVPLC has begun working on a Trail Management Plan to detail how to effectively close unauthorized trails.

Director Linder commented that the Management Team will be looking at unauthorized trails closely and focus management and enforcement in a unified way.

Rim Trail Closure of Duplicate Trails: Director Lefer reiterated that the PVPLC is working with their VTC on methods and strategies to close the unauthorized trails surrounding Rim Trail.

Signage (Regulatory/Welcome/Trail Markers, etc.)

Preserve Decal Replacement on trail markers: Director Lefer shared that PVPLC has completed decal installation on all trail markers in the Preserve.

Monument Signage, Entry Kiosks, and Welcome Signage: Director Lefer reported that PVPLC is working with the City to finalize the grant that will be used to acquire these signs.

Rules clarification signs at Abalone Cove, Portuguese Bend, and Rattlesnake Trail: Analyst Lozano reported that the City has ordered additional regulatory signage pertinent to specific public use issues at these Reserves. Abalone Cove: signs for no open flames and no animals on the beach. Portuguese Bend and Filiorum Reserve: signs for Preserve hours of operation.

Public Comments/Questions

Rod Jensen asked for clarification on where dogs are allowed at Abalone Cove Beach.

Director Linder clarified that leashed dogs are allowed in the Abalone Cove Nursery School parking lot, but they are not allowed on the rocks or the beach.

Grant Updates on Trail Improvement Projects

2009 HCF Grant for Portuguese Bend Reserve: Director Lefer reported that that this grant was used for spur trail closures in the Portuguese Bend Reserve. Funds are nearly depleted.

2012 HCF Grant for miscellaneous trail work Preserve-wide: Director Lefer indicated that this grant will be more focused on connector trails and signage.

Deputy Director Mihranian reported that funds have not been received because of a deed restriction stipulation that could prohibit Public Works Projects. The next step is for the City to conduct legal recordings of the land, and submit them to the grant agency.

Los Angeles County Grant: Funds have been received, and potential projects could include trail connectivity projects and spur trail closures.

City Preserve Maintenance Logs: Analyst Lozano reported that the City keeps quarterly maintenance logs, and they are available at the front table. Some of the patterns seen during the quarter have included were graffiti at Abalone Cove, structures/encampments found in the Preserve, and sign vandalism at Portuguese Bend Reserve.

Public Comments/Questions

Barry Holchin asked for clarification on citation fees.

Eva Cicoria reported that she sees many bikes on Rim Trail and Landslide Scarp Trail while hiking, and she would like to know more about citations.

Analyst Lozano shared that the City's bail schedule lists most infractions at \$50, however after the Los Angeles County Court applies their fees, a citation often is about \$260. However, it is completely at the Court's discretion to waive fees, dismiss citations, and lower the fees.

Ranger Johnson indicated that MRCA lists citations (violation and location) in MRCA quarterly reports posted on the City's webpage. She added that the Court gives citations associated with open space use lower priority compared with than other violations, such as traffic violations.

Director Lefer indicated that Preserve management will benefit from more day-to-day presence.

Randy Harwood inquired whether it is an option to close the Preserve to give it a break from public use. He asked if there is a point at which a biologist weighs in to make the determination to protect the habitat.

Director Lefer shared that she is a biologist. She shared that PVPLC's new Citizen Science Program includes volunteers monitoring and reporting on the habitat. The Program recently reported that the drought is impacting cactus wrens, likely because little water means few bugs, which is their food source. PVPLC is finding that even mature established plants are struggling in the drought conditions. Some have been lost. Some new spurs are forming and some existing trails are widening. Most unauthorized trails have existed for a long time. The new spur trails are of biggest concern and highest priority because they create new habitat damage. Per the NCCP, the PVPLC has the authority to close parts of the Preserve.

June Treherne reflected that the City was able to close Abalone Cove Beach for safety reasons; it might be best to close portions of the Preserve to protect the habitat.

Bill Lavoie introduced himself as a Sierra Club hike leader. He has been hiking in the Preserve for over 10 years, and he has seen a 10-fold increase in Preserve use in the past 3 years. He commented on the great health benefits the Preserve offers.

Hal Winton echoed the great health benefits the Preserve offers.

Director Linder shared that use at Abalone Cove has also increased dramatically, largely due to social media. He explained that it required a large amount of planning and coordination for the Abalone Cove Task Force to close the area for a short period of time. The issues raised tonight are largely maintenance and operations issues, and the Management Team needs to focus on them and work together as a team to resolve them. The Team is working within its means, and more resources may be needed in the future. He also indicated that the Management Team will work on effective unauthorized trail closures as part of an Unauthorized Trail Master Plan.

Director Lefer suggested waiting a year before making decisions to close trails, because after that time, in addition to the VTW Program, the Management Team will also have a new Greeter Program in place and a trails operations position filled. Presence is very important.

Eva Cicoria recommended asking neighbors near the Preserve to monitor Reserve trail heads at night.

Director Linder expressed that reaching out to HOA's is a great idea, and Analyst Lozano has started, and has already gotten some information out in their newsletters.

Deputy Director Mihranian shared that reaching out to neighbors for help is a good idea, but we need to remember that some of the issues are caused by neighbors, such as spur trails into the Preserve from private property and motorized vehicles in the Preserve.

Mike Jost commented that nature plays a large role in the health of the habitat. Rain makes an enormous difference. He spoke to the VTC's success with trail projects after a rain.

Christine Campbell commented that we don't have a culture of educated Preserve users. Perhaps in order to use the Preserve, visitors should have to complete some training.

Deputy Director Mihranian responded that it isn't possible to prohibit particular individuals from using the Preserve, because public funds were used to purchase it. He clarified that particular uses can be prohibited, but not individuals. He also reiterated that the Greeter Program may have a great effect on educating Preserve visitors that they are visiting a protected, special nature preserve, rather than a recreational facility.

Analyst Lozano pointed out that this message will be further strengthened by monument and welcome signage, as there currently is nothing at trail heads to indicate that the Reserves are protected areas.

Ranger Johnson pointed out that people don't currently identify these areas as nature reserves. Volunteers and Rangers need to continue to engage visitors, ask them about the experience they are after, and guide and educate them to protect the habitat.

Mayor Pro-Tem Knight clarified that the Wildlife Conservation Fund provided the City with funding for the purchase of the Preserve, because there is an NCCP in place with a primary focus to protect the habitat. Public use is addressed in the PUMP, however the primary focus is habitat protection.

Eva Cicoria suggested that enforcement has not been given a strong chance to change visitors' behavior.

Director Linder indicated that the Management team needs to maximize its resources. Right now we are limited to 50 hours per week of ranger patrol time and we are doing the best we can with our resources.

Mike Jost commented that more young people need to be engaged to help solve these issues. He also shared that he speaks with lots of people, most of which have no idea about the Preserve and how it was formed.

Director Linder indicated that the goal of the Junior Ranger Program is to reach out to kids on the importance of respecting the Nature Preserve, and Analyst Lozano has also reached out to the Mountain Bike and Equestrian communities to ask for their help.

Eva Cicoria recommended intercepting YouTube videos and commenting on them with information on Preserve rules.

Director Linder indicated that Rangers currently do this, and Acting City Manager Petru recommended that public also help in the intersection of the social media.

Lynn Swank expressed that the Preserve is not a playground. She would like to know the milestones in determining if it will fail in its habitat restoration requirements. She also recommends sending a report to Council on these milestones.

Director Lefer indicated that PVPLC has triggers on different impacts. PVPLC must make sure substantial habitat is not lost to new spur trails. A certain level of take (habitat loss) is allowable. The City gets penalized for that loss, and must mitigate it. It is taken very seriously. She explained that habitat loss is measured in acreage. PVPLC survey's birds and butterflies every 3 years. The survey varies. In 2012 the gnatcatcher population was down and the cactus wren population was up. PVPLC analyzes the potential reasons for population changes. The Citizen Science Program is new and is helping to evaluate these issues.

Barbara Ailor asked for the status of the VTW educational video approval, and asked to show it. She expressed frustration that she was not allowed to speak directly with City staff.

Deputy Director Mihranian indicated that the video would be shown at the end of the meeting, as it was not on the agenda.

Preserve Operations

Ranger Report and Enforcement Priorities: Analyst Lozano reported that ranger enforcement priorities for the past quarter have been the two most heavily used Reserves: Abalone Cove and Portuguese Bend Reserves. With the public safety challenges at the Abalone Cove

Beach Complex, Rangers have been largely focused there and participating in the Abalone Cove Task Force. Landslide Scarp Trail continues to be an enforcement priority.

Ranger Johnson reported that Rangers issued 32 citations in the last quarter for dogs on the beach, dogs off leash, fire, unauthorized trail use, areas closed, and reckless driving. Rangers conducted night patrols at Portuguese Bend and Abalone Cove Reserves. She reported that most of the activity seen is in Del Cerro Park. Rangers conducted joint patrols with the Department of Fish and Wildlife wardens. Overall, rangers see that voluntary compliance is good, but there will always be a small group of visitors that break the rules. She explained that as a park ranger, citations are a last resort. Rangers cite based on the totality of the situation. They need tools to cite, and these tools help the citations stand up in court.

Director Linder shared information on the Abalone Cove Task Force. It is a standing committee comprised of City staff, L.A. County Sheriff, L.A. County Fire, L.A. County Lifeguards, and MRCA Rangers. The group strategizes for the safe use of the Abalone Cove Beach Complex, and determines when unsafe conditions require beach closure. The group coordinates best use of resources. It was formed after the July 4th weekend, during which there was a death at Inspiration Point and numerous rescues at the Abalone Cove Beach Complex in a short amount of time.

City Preserve Public Use Logs: Analyst Lozano reported that the City's keeps quarterly public use logs, of issues and concerns reported to the City through various means and the logs are available at the front table. She reviewed some of the more prevalent and concerning reports, which included: hikers accessing private property via authorized and unauthorized Preserve trails at Forrestal, Abalone Cove, and Portuguese Bend Reserves; a motorized vehicle damaging habitat in Forrestal Reserve; misuse of trails by all user groups at Portuguese Bend Reserve; homeless people and unauthorized trail use at Vicente Bluffs Reserve; and heavy use, unsafe swimming conditions, poaching, dogs on the beach, bonfires, and nighttime activity at Abalone Cove Reserve.

Volunteer Trail Crew and Rapid Response Team Reports and Priorities: Director Lefer reported that the VTC has built a retaining wall at Abalone Cove Reserve and is assessing work needed to close spur trails off of Rim Trail. They are also helping find the best route for a connector trail in Vista Del Norte Reserve, and will begin a trail improvement project on Toyon Trail in the fall. She reported that the RRT continues to work, and will be even more productive with the guidance of the future trails operations position.

Stair Use at Filiorum Reserve: Analyst Lozano reported that the Management Team will be determining the best way to close the stair case located on HOA property which is a City easement located just above Filiorum Reserve near Rattlesnake Trail. The stairs have been connected to Filiorum Reserve by spur trails.

Acting City Manager Petru clarified that the stairs were not designed or intended for the heavy recreational public use. Their use is also an issue of City liability.

Public Accessing private communities: Analyst Lozano shared the City has received concerns from the Portuguese Bend, Narcissa, and Rolling Hills private communities that Preserve users are accessing their property through use of authorized trails. The Management Team is working to address this issue.

Public Comments/Questions

Eva Cicoria asked if a pinch point was included in the Toyon Trail improvement project. She opined that we are far behind addressing many Preserve issues affecting habitat, and that mountain biking has changed.

Director Lefer indicated that the pinch point was not currently in the plan, but could be considered.

Director Linder added that the overall scope of Preserve users has changed.

Deputy Director Mihranian shared that when the Preserve was formed, no one anticipated the heavy use and impact of social media.

Mike Jost expressed that there is a specific fitness component to Rim Trail users.

Hal Winton shared that Rolling Hills has made specific design improvements to certain trails that border Rancho Palos Verdes to increase compliance, and he recommends the management team take a look at them. In addition, Rolling Hills is dedicating \$5,000 to improve the lower end of Martingale Trail including signage and fencing.

Preserve Interpretive Activities

PVPLC-led nature walks: Director Lefer shared that a schedule of PVPLC nature walks is available at the front table. In addition, the City and PVPLC are partnering on the Abalone Cove Grand Opening Event on October 25th.

Los Serenos de Point Vicente Docent-led Nature Walks: Analyst Lozano shared that a schedule of Los Serenos de Point Vicente nature walks is available at the front table.

Junior Ranger Program: Analyst Lozano shared that the Fall Junior Program is a hit, and is sold out. The program has sold out for the past two years. This program instills an appreciation of the Preserve and open space in children ages 7-12, and runs in the spring and the fall.

Ranger-led Night Hikes: Analyst Lozano reported that ranger-led night hikes will begin again on October 8th, and run through March. Fliers are available at the front table.

Public Comments/Questions

None.

Director Linder thanked everyone for attending and expressing their ideas and concerns.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.