



69073

DATE: October 8, 2013

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Robb Courtney, Director of Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Calero County Park Trails Master Plan and Mitigated Negative Declaration

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Consider Recommendations relating to the Calero County Park Trails Master Plan and Mitigated Negative Declaration.

Possible action:

- a. Make all necessary and related findings for adoption/approval of the Final Mitigated Negative Declaration, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, and for approval of the Project based on the Board of Supervisor's independent judgment and analysis, in consideration of all comments received and a determination that this Project serves a park purpose and there is no substantial evidence in the record that the Project, as mitigated, will have a significant impact or effect on the environment; and, based on these findings of the Board, adopt the Resolution adopting the Final Mitigated Negative Declaration, the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and approving the Project. (Roll Call Vote)
- b. Identify the Clerk of the Board and Parks and Recreation Department as the location and custodian of the documents or other material that constitute the record of proceedings upon which this decision is based.
- c. Approve the Project.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no fiscal impacts to the County General Fund as a result of this action.

Funds for the preparation of the Trails Master Plan were made available in the Park Charter Fund in FY 2009 through the Calero County Park Trails Master Plan Project (710-CAL-C00057).

It is anticipated that upon adoption of a Final Mitigated Negative Declaration and approval of the Trails Master Plan, funds in the FY 2014 Park Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget

for the Calero Trails Plan Implementation Project (710-CAL-C00057-02) will be available for the preparation of design and construction documents for Phase I improvements.

CONTRACT HISTORY

A Professional Services Agreement (PSA) for a term of five years, with a Maximum Compensation Limit (MCL) not to exceed \$500,000, was executed with Bellinger Foster Steinmetz, Landscape Architects, on March 20, 2007, for various planning, design, and environmental consulting services required by the Parks and Recreation Department.

The PSA was amended on February 28, 2012, to extend terms of the agreement from March 20, 2012 to September 30, 2013, and to increase the MCL from \$500,000 to \$650,000.

A total of three project agreements were executed for planning, design, and environmental consulting services related to the Calero County Park Trails Master Plan. These included: Project Agreement #5 – Calero Trails Master Plan Program and Alternatives Phase, in the amount of \$151,519; Project Agreement #6 – Calero Trails Master Plan Study and Report, in the amount of \$ 98,500; and Project Agreement #7 – Calero Trails Master Plan CEQA Compliance, in the amount of \$113, 220.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

On September 19, 2013, the Housing, Land Use, Environment, and Transportation (HLUET) Committee accepted a report from the Parks and Recreation Department on the Calero County Park Draft Trails Master Plan and Mitigated Negative Declaration and forwarded a favorable recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to make all necessary and related findings for adoption/approval of the final Mitigated Negative Declaration, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, and approval of the Calero County Park Trails Master Plan.

The Draft Calero County Park Trails Master Plan (“Trails Master Plan” or “Project”) (**Attachment A**) is a comprehensive plan for improving the park’s existing trails while expanding the trail network into the newly acquired areas of the park. It will also incorporate new trail uses, including bicyclists and dogs on leash, within that network. Implemented in phases over a 10-year time period, the Trails Master Plan will expand the Calero County Park trail system to almost 36 miles and offer a variety of trails for a broad spectrum of users.

The Trails Master Plan represents a three year collaborative planning effort with the community to achieve solutions to the challenges of integrating new uses into an existing park. It balances existing user needs and concerns by maintaining some trails as equestrian and hiking only, while expanding other trails in the park to include multiple uses that accommodate all trail users, including bicyclists and walkers with dogs-on-leash. The Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) unanimously endorsed the Draft Trails Master Plan at their regular meeting on June 5, 2013.

The Trails Master Plan will serve park purposes as it will be in compliance with the goals and objectives of the Parks and Recreation Chapter of the County’s *General Plan* and countywide trails policies contained within that chapter. The Trails Master Plan would be in compliance

with the Board-approved *Santa Clara County Countywide Trails Master Plan Update (1995)* and its trails policies which seek to respond to an ever-increasing demand for trails by a diverse and growing population in a sustainable manner. In addition, the Trails Master Plan would be in compliance with the *Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation System's Strategic Plan (2003) Action Item 7.3.3*, which established the purpose of a park-specific Trails Master Plan "to identify opportunities to increase multiple-use trails and ensure consistency with the *Countywide Trails Master Plan* and *Strategic Plan*."

An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Project was prepared in accordance to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (**Attachment B**). Potential impacts to Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, and Transportation/Traffic were identified. These impacts will be reduced to less than significant through the implementation of mitigation measures proposed as part of the Project and by implementation of a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) (**Attachment C**).

CHILD IMPACT

The recommended action will have no immediate impact, although implementation of the Trails Master Plan will have a future positive impact on the Healthy Lifestyle indicator by providing increased access to parks and trails.

SENIOR IMPACT

The recommended action will have no immediate impact, although implementation of the Trails Master Plan will have a future positive impact on seniors by providing increased access to parks and trails.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The recommended action will be consistent with the Board of Supervisor's Sustainability Policies to promote a vibrant economy, foster a healthy environment, protect resources, and public health, safety, and recreation.

BACKGROUND

The Need for a Trails Master Plan

Calero County Park is located at the southern end of the Almaden Valley Area. Close to urban areas and other expanding parks and open space, it contains a little over 18 miles of trails. Trail use is limited to equestrians and hikers. No dogs and no bikes are allowed in the park. The park has recently expanded to over 4,400 acres. However, approximately 966 acres of the park, known as Rancho San Vicente, is not open for general public use due to lack of public facilities and connection to other areas of the park in use.

In April 2003, shortly after a Park's Department acquisition added 942 acres to the south end of Calero County Park, the PRC raised concerns at their regular meeting about the expanding size of the park and the need to identify opportunities for the addition of new uses into the park to ensure consistency with the *Countywide Trails Master Plan*. The PRC recommended a new trails planning effort for Calero County Park. That recommendation was carried forward in the *Parks and Recreation Department's Strategic Plan* approved by the Board of

Supervisors in August 2003. Following the acquisition of Rancho San Vicente in November 2009, the Parks Department initiated a trails planning effort for the park in August 2010.

Process for Public Input on the development of Project

Over the next three years, extensive public outreach was conducted to solicit community input for the planning effort. Outreach included trail user surveys, project open houses, community meetings, focus groups meetings, website posting of planning materials and interactive content, and direct contact with users and user groups. The predominant area of concern was the challenges of introducing bicycles onto the trails in the park.

Many equestrians voiced concern that opening Calero County Park to bicyclists would result in the loss of a tranquil and safe riding experience for riders. Many felt that bicyclists do not share the same concerns for safety or are simply not aware of the impact of their presence on some horses or riders. They were concerned that potential conflicts with bicyclists on the trails would result in accidents and injury to all parties. They were concerned that Calero County Park was one of the few areas in the County with equestrian-only trails. Other equestrians, who were open to sharing trails with bicyclists, were concerned that converting all trails to multi-use would limit the opportunities for trail riding for young or inexperienced equestrians who needed to gain more skill before riding on multi-use trails.

Bicyclists were concerned that keeping Calero County Park closed to them was limiting access to a large portion of the community, especially those bicyclists who are increasingly aware of the need to share trails and are responsible and considerate of other users. They advocated that all trails in County parks should consider a wider range of users and those Calero trails, which connected directly to other multi-use trails, such as those in the adjacent Open Space Authority's Rancho Canada del Oro Open Space Preserve, should allow multi-use. Bicyclists voiced concern that limiting trail use in Calero County Park would not fulfill the County's commitment to connecting all trail users to regional trails. They also advocated that multi-use trails would make bicycle riding safer between parks in the area.

Some trail enthusiasts cited that those walking and hiking for pleasure were statistically the largest user group of County parks but were marginalized in the discussions about use. They had experienced or witnessed poor trail etiquette by both equestrians and bicyclists and advocated that trail use in the park should be limited to pedestrians.

As part of the public outreach, the Parks Department conducted two user surveys and evaluated more than a 1,000 responses. Most respondents (97% in the Calero Park Survey/92.5% in the Countywide Survey) had used multi-use trails. Of those, most (60.5% in the Calero Park Survey/73% in the Countywide Survey) have not had conflicts with other users. Of those who have had a conflict, in the Calero survey, 61% were equestrians and in the Countywide Survey, 58% were hikers/runners. In both surveys, (91% Calero/75% Countywide) the conflict occurred with a bicyclist; however, in most cases (73%/89%) the conflict did not result in injury. No conflicts were cited in some parks that had already implemented multi-use trails.

The Parks Department reviewed trail use patterns in other County parks with multi-use trails and a large equestrian presence. These parks included Ed Levin, Joseph D. Grant, Almaden-

Quicksilver, and Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear Ranch. Ensuring that trails are designed with multi-use in mind to provide “solutions that work” (such as well-designed trails that provide adequate lines of sight for different trail users to avoid any conflicts on trails, turn out areas for trail users, etc.) had the biggest impact in minimizing conflicts. Improving trail signs for better public awareness/education about multiple users sharing a trails system, for more effective way-finding, and encouraging proper use of trails also added benefit. Supporting emerging technologies to improve user experiences and information retrieval, as well as dispersing use over a wide area as quickly as possible also had proven benefit.

The Parks Department evaluated accident/incident reports from the last 10 years for County Parks and three other local agencies; the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, and Henry Coe State Park. Findings were presented to the PRC in May 2012. Little quantifiable evidence was found to substantiate the concern that shared-use on trails resulted in a substantial increase in the frequency of accidents or injury in the greater Santa Clara County area. However, responding to user perception and personal accounts of near encounters on some trails is still an issue for most agencies. A consistent presence of field staff and on-site education was found to be another method with proven benefit of raising levels of awareness for trail etiquette.

Development of a Preferred Alternative and a Draft Trails Master Plan

The Parks Department prepared a series of alternatives in September 2011 for public review. A Preferred Alternative was prepared in November 2011. Based upon comments received, it was revised in April 2012. Following further input, the Preferred Alternative was refined again in April 2013 to address community concerns. A community meeting was held on the Refined Preferred Alternative on May 22, 2013, at the Casa Grande in Almaden-Quicksilver County Park. The meeting was attended by 40 people, equally representing bicycling and equestrian concerns. No one considered it the ideal plan as it did not completely open Calero County Park to multi-use or completely restrict it to hikers and equestrians. But many expressed that the April 2013 Refined Preferred Alternative represented a compromise that contained addressed the majority of concerns of each user group while retaining some unique trail experiences. A Draft Trails Master Plan was presented to the PRC on June 5, 2013.

The Draft Trails Master Plan includes components that will:

- Retain a cohesive core area of almost 1,000 acres, with 7.5 miles of trails, that are limited to equestrian and hiking only, in order to provide a riding and walking experience with extensive physical separation from other uses. Opportunity for connections into/out of this core area that are well-defined, strategically placed, and limited so it will be harder for non-authorized use to access trails in the core area. One trail will allow horse drawn carts.
- Create 1.5 miles of trails for pedestrian use only.
- At build-out, will double the mileage of the existing trail system in the park to almost 36 miles, of which 26.6 miles of trails will be open to all users.
- Create a number of park entrances to disperse use and reduce potential use conflicts that are often associated with concentration caused by limited park access.

- Improve the overall quality of the trail experience by providing better designed areas for vehicles with trailers, siting staging areas so users will not be immediately forced onto steep grades, provide separated trails immediately out of the parking lot, provide warm up/turn out rings to ease transition from trailer to trail and back again, and identify future parking area expansion or overflow parking for special events.
- Provide new staging areas with parking on Almaden Road and McKean Road. A walk/ride/bike-in entrance will be provided from Bertram Road. The existing Park Ranger Station staging area will be expanded. Both the Ranger Station and the Rancho San Vicente Staging Area will have designated parking for up to 75 cars and 25 horse trailers, have overflow parking areas, equestrian warm-up rings, picnic tables, and restrooms at build-out.
- Provide a range of trail widths both on the limited use and multi-use trails to provide a range of trail designs to suit different needs and riding styles.
- Provide the opportunity to create a multi-use trail around the entire Calero Reservoir, creating a unique trail experience in Santa Clara County for all users.
- Create new trails in the Rancho San Vicente area of the park, which will open the area up for general public use, facilitate connections to other parks in the vicinity, and foster regional trail connections as identified in the *Santa Clara County Countywide Trails Master Plan*.
- Make all trails open to users with dogs-on-leash. Out of consideration for OSA’s current policy that prohibits dogs on OSA lands, the Parks Department will temporarily designate those trails that originate, pass through, or connect directly to OSA lands as “no dogs allowed.” The Parks Department will continue to work with OSA to reconsider their policy, especially in context with Calero County Park, so as to strive for compliance with mutual efforts to provide a seamless user experience.
- Upgrade current trail alignments to improve user experience, address maintenance concerns, reduce trail closures, and protect natural resources. Approximately 4.5 miles of trails will be abandoned and replaced with better trail routes. All abandoned trails will be restored to native habitat following established guidelines.

Compliance with the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Plan

Calero County Park is located within the permit area of the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Plan (Valley Habitat Plan). Improvements proposed in the Trails Master Plan have been identified as a “covered activities” and have been developed to be consistent with the habitat conservation strategies of the Valley Habitat Plan.

It is anticipated that when portions of Calero County Park are enrolled in the Valley Habitat Plan’s Reserve system, the Trails Master Plan will provide the basic framework for the Recreation Plan that the Valley Habitat Plan requires for all parklands that are enrolled in the Reserve System.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Trails Master Plan was prepared in accordance with guidelines of CEQA. Mitigations were proposed for impacts to Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, and Transportation/Traffic. The Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration was circulated for public comment for 30 days between July 10, 2013 and August 9, 2013.

A total of four written comment letters and one set of verbal comments were received. Two agency comment letters (State Clearinghouse, Santa Clara Valley Water District) and three were from concerned citizens were received. Comments included concerns regarding potential project impacts to water quality, potential safety impacts to local residents as a result of a walk-in park entrance on Bertram Road, potential safety concerns for equestrians, potential increased fire risk, and increased traffic as the result of opening Calero County Park to new users.

The Parks Department has prepared a draft Resolution of Findings related to the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration, and developed a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Board's consideration in taking action on the Trails Master Plan. With adoption of the CEQA documents and final approval of the Trails Master Plan, steps toward implementing the Calero County Park Trails Master Plan would commence in 2014.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

If the Board of Supervisors does not adopt a Resolution to adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration, adopt the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and approve the Trails Master Plan for Calero County Park, project implementation will be delayed.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

1. Upon execution of the Resolution, the Clerk of the Board shall notify Elish Ryan of the Parks and Recreation Department at Elish.Ryan@prk.sccgov.org.
2. Forward one original copy of the executed Resolution to Elish Ryan of the Parks and Recreation Department
3. The Parks and Recreation Department will record a Notice of Determination with the Clerk-Recorder within five (5) working days of the Board's adoption of the Resolution.

LINKS:

- References: 68236 : Accept report from the Parks and Recreation Department relating to Calero County Park Draft Trails Master Plan and Mitigated Negative Declaration.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Resolution-Calero_County_Park_TMP_MND_and_MMRP (PDF)
- Attachment_A_Calero_TMP (PDF)
- Attachment_B_Calero_TMP_Final_IS (PDF)
- Attachment_C_Calero_TMP_MMRP (PDF)
- Attachment_D_TMP_PublicComments (PDF)
- Attachment_E_MND_Public_Comments_and_Responses (PDF)
- BOS Power Point Presentation (PDF)