INTRODUCTION

This report examines the feasibility of two uses for the West Flat Area of the Coyote Lake/Harvey Bear Ranch County Park Master Plan: BMX/Dual Slalom Bicycle Use, and Hang Gliding/Paragliding. While other uses have been considered for the West Flat Area and are included in the Master Plan Program Document (Draft October 2001), the BMX/Dual Slalom uses were suggested later in the master plan process. While a hang gliding/paragliding landing site on the Mendoza property has been included in the Master Plan Alternatives, a launch site on the property has not been identified, with the assumption that launching may occur on adjacent property not owned or managed by the Parks Department. Consequently, a launch and landing site on the west side of the ridge is under consideration.

BMX/DUAL SLALOM BICYCLE USE

Program Description

There are several different categories of BMX and off-road bicycle use. The Master Plan alternatives currently recommend use of mountain bikes on many of the trails proposed for the park. In addition to this use, cycling advocates have requested a dirt BMX practice area and a dual slalom course. The BMX practice area would be a minimum of 1 acre in size but could be larger (up to three acres). The area would be primarily dirt and would allow riders to build mounds for jumps and other stunts. Cycling advocates have suggested that the course could be self-managed: hand tools could be provided to allow users to manipulate the jumps and course. The area should be easily accessible to trails and/or parking areas, and should be fenced. The BMX dirt course can attract a wide range of ages and abilities with jumps of varying difficulty.

According to the National Off-Road Bicycle Association (NORBA), a dual slalom course allows “two competitors to race head-to-head down two parallel slalom courses.” As such a dual slalom course requires a grade (from 5 to 20 degrees). Typically, a course is designed
with switchbacks to allow for bank turns as opposed to a course going directly down a hillside.

The course design (steepness, difficulty of jumps and turns) dictates the level of ability required to use the course, from beginner to advanced. However, because of the slope involved, a dual slalom course generally requires a higher level of riding ability than a flat BMX course.

Fig. 1

Existing and Planned Similar Facilities in Neighboring Cities
The City of Morgan Hill has a temporary dirt BMX park on VTA property near the train station and the temporary skate park. It is not known how long the temporary facility will remain at its current location. Calabazas Park in San Jose also has an area that is used for dirt BMX riding.

Both Gilroy and Morgan Hill are planning to build permanent BMX Parks. Morgan Hill is planning to build a multi-use concrete skate-bicycle park adjacent to the proposed Community Recreation Center and Community Park. Morgan Hill is not planning to have a permanent dirt facility. Gilroy is in the process of planning one or a combination of BMX facilities. It has not yet been determined whether facilities will be concrete, dirt, or a combination. Site locations have not been selected.

Fig. 2

Fig. 3
There currently are no known formal dual slalom courses in Santa Clara County. Most riders find unofficial areas to build courses for practice. The Sea Otter Classic bicycle competition at Laguna Seca Raceway in Monterey County includes a “Mountain Cross” event, which is similar to dual slalom, except that four riders compete at the same time rather than two. A course is built for this event, but is not a permanent facility. Typically the course is built by bringing in soil as opposed to cutting the hillside. This allows berms to be built that also reduce erosion impacts.

**Environmental Issues**

The primary environmental concerns associated with these uses include: visual, erosion, and damage to sensitive plants. Visual concerns are higher for the dual slalom course given the grade requirement and the potential for the course to be visible from the Valley floor. If a dual slalom course was proposed, it should be located so as to be screened by vegetation and should not be located on a hillside facing directly west towards the valley floor. Erosion concerns are also higher for the dual slalom course given the steeper topography. Erosion at the flat BMX site can be more easily controlled and isolated. Erosion concerns on the dual slalom course can be reduced through careful course design and restricting use during the winter months. This will require a higher level of management. The west flat areas where these uses are considered do not contain native plant species of concern, and therefore, damage to existing habitat or sensitive plant communities should not be a significant issue.

**Liability Issues**

The BMX and Dual Slalom uses are “hazardous recreational activities” as defined by State Law (Government Code Section 831.7) The County would be immune from liability for allowing these uses on County property, provided that certain conditions are met. Some of the conditions that are required for immunity from liability include the following:

- A fee cannot be charged for the specific hazardous recreational activity. (A general park entrance or gate fee can still be charged.)
- The facility must be constructed and maintained in good repair by the County.

**Potential Revenue**

Given the fact that the County would most likely not charge a use fee based on the above conditions for liability immunity, additional revenue would be raised only through the en-
trance fee revenues from additional park users. In addition, the County could sponsor special events, similar to the Sea Otter Classic, which could generate additional revenue through gate fees, sponsorship fees, concessions, etc. There would also be additional operational costs associated with hosting a major event.

**Development Costs**

Development cost for the flat BMX practice course would be relatively small and would consist primarily of scraping an area for use, and possibly providing a storage area for tools, running water, and a fence. Costs for a 1.5 acre facility have been estimated at $1.00 per square foot, or $65,000. It is assumed that parking will be provided in other areas of the park as noted in the Master Plan alternatives. The dual slalom course would have higher development costs to allow for contouring and erosion protection. With an approximate size of 1.5-2 acres and a cost of $2.00 per square foot, the cost is estimated at $130,000-$175,000. Again, this does not include parking costs, which are assumed to be included in the Master Plan alternatives.

**Maintenance**

Given the liability issues noted above, it would be problematic for the County to rely on volunteer labor to construct, repair and maintain these facilities. Based on experience at the County’s Motorcycle Park, maintenance of dirt-track type facilities requires considerable staff time compared with other general park maintenance activities. The sloping qualities of a dual slalom course would require an even higher level of maintenance, especially considering the need for erosion control.

**Alternative Consideration**

As an alternative to permanent BMX/dual slalom facilities, the County may wish to consider designating an area for temporary facilities that could be constructed for special events and then removed, similar to facilities at the “Sea Otter Classic”. This approach could address many of the concerns related to liability and maintenance, and could provide additional revenue generating opportunities.
If special event facilities are to be considered, this type of use would be most compatible with Alternative B, where fairly large open spaces can accommodate special event/festival staging areas.

**Hang Gliding/Paragliding**

This potential use is already discussed in the *Master Plan Program Document*. A landing site has been identified on the Mendoza Property, but a launch site has not been identified on-site. While the program document identifies a 100-diameter landing circle, a larger landing buffer area is required. At Ed Levin Park, the buffer area for the landing zone is approximately 20 acres. If launching is to be permitted on the western ridge of the property, it should be noted that access to the launch site will need to be on foot as private motor vehicles will not be permitted on trails leading to the ridgeline. The landing site should be located near staging areas but away from potentially conflicting uses such as equestrian areas. Launch and landing areas require a low level of development and maintenance, provided that adequate open space (no trees, power lines, structures, etc.) can be found.

**San Martin Airport**

The proposal to allow hang gliders to launch from the western ridge and land in the west flat area was reviewed with Jerome T. Bennett, Director of County Airports. It was concluded that hang gliding/paragliding would not pose a conflict for airport operations at this time. While the airport may expand in the future (the County is currently undertaking a master plan for its general aviation airports), expansion plans have not been finalized and any consideration of future airport operations would only be speculative at this time. In order to provide a good margin of safety, flight altitude for paragliding/hang gliding should not exceed 500 feet Above Ground Level.

**Potential Environmental Issues**

The primary environmental issue is that the launch site is very near or within an area designated as a “Special Status Species Habitat”. Launches and emergency landings may disturb this habitat.
**Liability Issues**

Hang gliding and paragliding are also “hazardous recreational activities” as defined by State Law. At Ed Levin County Park, Wings of Regallo Northern California Hang Glider Association (WOR) administers all hang gliding and paragliding activities through a special use permit. WOR provides training, certifies the proficiency of pilots, and ensures that pilots have insurance. WOR is also responsible for pilot access to the launch sites. A similar type of arrangement could be made with an organization to administer hang gliding/paragliding at Coyote Lake/Harvey Bear Ranch County Park if such uses are included.

**Conflicts with Other Proposed Uses**

Since vehicular access will be prohibited along the ridge of Coyote Lake/Harvey Bear Ranch, pilots would access the launch site by multi-use trails that will also be used by hikers, cyclists and equestrians. Launch and landing sites should be located to minimize conflict between user groups, especially equestrians. Horses could be spooked by hang gliders/paragliders.

**Development Costs**

Development costs are relatively minor for developing the launch and landing sites, and may consist of limited grading along with fencing. Costs could be more significant if emergency communication is installed. At Ed Levin Park, emergency telephones are installed in protective enclosures at two launch sites. There is also an automatic phone-in weather station installed at one launch. Communications installations could significantly increase the development costs.

**Potential Revenue**

Revenue would be limited to additional entrance (gate) fees due to additional use. It is not anticipated that a user fee would be charged.

**Similar Facilities within the County**

Currently Ed Levin Park is the only county park where hang gliding/paragliding is permitted.

**Criteria for Hang Gliding/Paragliding on the Western Ridge**

- Private vehicular access to the ridgeline should be prohibited. Access to a launch site would be by hiking or cycling on multi-use trails.
- Launch and landing sites should be located to protect sensitive habitat areas.
• Launch and landing sites should be located to minimize conflict with other park users, especially equestrians.
• Pilots should be required to provide insurance.
• Access, training, insurance and other aspects of the activity must be addressed, possibly through an agreement with an organization similar to the current agreement at Ed Levin Park.
• Flight altitude should not exceed 500 feet Above Ground Level.
• An adequate landing buffer zone should be designated in the West Flat Area. Alternatives A and C (golf course alternatives) would require a reduction and reconfiguration of the golf course acreage in order to accommodate the landing zone at a reasonably safe distance from equestrian and other uses. The landing zone acreage could be more easily accommodated in Alternative B.

Photo References
Figure 1. Dual Slalom Course Layout, www.dual-slalom.de/trail/dstrail.html
Figure 2. Dual Slalom Course, http://www.mickeysmtn.com/dual.asp www.mickeysmtn.com/dual.asp
Figure 3. BMX Jumps at Calabazas Park, www.waltscycle.com/calabazas7.jpg
Figure 4. Sea Otter Classic, www.seaotterclassic.com/soc2002_pix/wellman02/pages/Dsc_09431_jpg.htm