



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Parks
Department No.: 052
For Agenda Of: May 20, 2008
Placement: Administrative
Estimated Tme:
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Daniel C. Hernandez (568-2461)
Director
Contact Info: Erik Axelson, South County Deputy Parks Director (681-5651)
SUBJECT: Recommendations of Front Country Trails Task Force

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

(a) Accept the recommendations of the Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force and the Santa Barbara County Park Commission.

(b) Direct County staff to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the County Parks Department and two other public agencies, the City of Santa Barbara/Parks & Recreation Department and the U.S. Forest Service, to formalize this agreement between these agencies.

Summary Text:

The Front Country Trails (FCT) Task Force was established in late 2006 and began meeting in January 2007. The Task Force's purpose was to develop recommendations to foster coordinated and comprehensive management of the system of trails that extend over the jurisdictions of the three agencies into the foothills above Carpinteria, Summerland, Montecito, and Santa Barbara. Comprised of six members (two each from the respective agencies – Park Commissioners Suzanne Perkins and Jim Hickling are the representatives from Santa Barbara County), the Task Force held a series of nine public meetings throughout 2007 to hear comments and ideas from trail users and to consider research and information about effective trail management practices in other jurisdictions.

Topics reviewed by the Task Force included trail management and regulatory issues, trail maintenance issues, trail classification systems, user education strategies, trails management funding, and natural

resource protection considerations. The Task Force also received presentations from a range of trail use stakeholder organizations, including the Los Padres Forest Association, Montecito Trails Foundation, Los Padres Chapter of the Sierra Club, Santa Barbara Trails Council, Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers, Lost Padres Trail Riders, Multi-Use Trails Coalition, Santa Barbara County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Council (CRAHTAC), and the Santa Barbara New Trails Committee. On a regular basis, between 35 and 55 members of the public attended the Task Force meetings.

On February 6, 2008 the Task Force voted to recommend several initiatives for consideration by the County, City and U.S. Forest Service. Subsequently, these recommendations were endorsed by formal actions by the City of Santa Barbara's Parks & Recreation Commission (on February 27, 2008) and the Santa Barbara County Park Commission (on April 24, 2008) as well as the County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Committee (CRAHTAC), on April 10, 2008. The recommendations are organized under three broad categories:

1. Administration and Organization

- (a) Develop an inter-agency memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the County, City, and Forest Service for trail management, maintenance, and funding
- (b) Develop a Front Country Trails Strategy
- (c) Develop a funding plan to address trails planning and maintenance, capital projects, enforcement, and education and outreach
- (d) Establish an inter-agency FCT Coordinator staff position that would be funded jointly by all three agencies
- (e) Foster development of an umbrella non-profit community organization to assist with trail maintenance, education, fundraising, and community support
- (f) Confirm/maintain multi-agency/non-profit partner agreements

2. Community Outreach and Education

- (a) Re-implement education efforts, including trail signage, trail hosts, and other sources of information
- (b) Develop interim voluntary trail use guidelines
- (c) Build broader community support for the FCT by working with user groups to sponsor quarterly events/work days and an annual event to recognize volunteers and collaborative partnerships, among others

3. Trail Management and Maintenance

- (a) Conduct an assessment of existing trail conditions and use to evaluate the application and scope of a trail classification system
- (b) Develop a trail classification system and trail standards that are appropriate to Santa Barbara County's front country
- (c) Explore developing consistent standards for trails planning, policy, permits, and regulations
- (d) Explore a pilot program of trail use designations

The key action for the Board of Supervisors to consider initially is to authorize County staff to move forward with drafting an inter-agency MOU that would establish a formal collaboration for management of the Front Country Trails system between the three public agencies. It is envisioned that the final draft of an MOU will be presented to the Board for formal action within the next two to three months, and

that further recommendations for Board action will be forthcoming from the Task Force in the future. It is important to note that while the County Park Commission, in its action on April 24th, unanimously recommended that the suggested position of FCT Coordinator be housed within County Parks, it is understood that establishment of such a position would require Board approval and will not be recommended without a specific cost-sharing commitment among the three agencies.

Background:

In recent years, the popularity of Santa Barbara County's Front Country Trails have soared, with many more hikers and cyclists availing themselves of the natural beauty and athletic challenge of traversing this system of trails. Some trails in the front country date back decades, before mountain biking was even conceived of as a recreational pastime, and many trails are winding and narrow. Several of these older trails have been regularly used by equestrians, in addition to hiking enthusiasts. With the increased use of the trails by cyclists over the past 20 years, conflicts between hikers, equestrians and cyclists have occurred. In one case, several years ago, a horse was killed in a fall precipitated by the sudden appearance of a mountain biker on the Cold Springs Trail.

Groups of trail users have sought to mediate the conflicts between user groups, with very limited success. Proposals by a trail advocacy group working with the U.S. Forest Service's Los Padres National Forest staff for some trail designations and pilot-testing of some trail restrictions did not advance in large measure because other public agencies (City of Santa Barbara and Santa Barbara County) had not been adequately involved. Out of this stalemate, the Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force was born in late 2006. The Task Force, which began meeting in January 2007, includes two members from the City's Parks & Recreation Commission, two members from the County of Santa Barbara's Park Commission, and two members from the U.S. Forest Service. The purpose of the Task Force is to develop recommendations to foster coordinated and comprehensive management of Santa Barbara's front country trails and to encourage cooperation between different trail user groups. Coordinated by the City of Santa Barbara/Parks & Recreation Department, the Task Force also received staff support from Santa Barbara County Parks and the Los Padres National Forest.

Initial meetings of the Task Force in the first half of 2007 were at times contentious, with different groups of trail users staking out opposing points, guarding their own unfettered access to the trails, and either professing that no problem existed or that another group of trail users was responsible. To the credit of the patient process followed by the Task Force, after these initial statements, once-opposing trail user groups began to work together in researching how other jurisdictions had dealt with similar conflicts and accommodated a wide range of trail users. In particular, a November 17, 2007 Task Force workshop was a key turning point. This event brought representatives of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) to explain to Task Force members and trail users how similar problems of user conflicts and multiple jurisdictions had been artfully ameliorated. Another milestone has been the reorganization of the Santa Barbara Trails Council, a private, non-profit organization, to include representatives from most of the other trail user groups. From a point a year ago where common ground seemed very distant, great progress has been made.

On February 6, 2008, the Task Force approved a series of recommendations and referred them to the City of Santa Barbara's Parks & Recreation Commission, the Santa Barbara County Park Commission, and the Los Padres National Forest Supervisor. Included as Attachment 1 to this staff report, the

recommendations represent the culmination of Task Force discussion during nine public meetings, public input, trails management research, and an assessment of the conditions, opportunities, and

constraints within the Santa Barbara front country. These recommendations are listed in detail in the Summary Text section of this report.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: No

Fiscal Analysis:

<u>Funding Sources</u>	<u>Current FY Cost:</u>	<u>Annualized On-going Cost:</u>	<u>Total One-Time Project Cost</u>
General Fund	\$ -	\$ 35,000.00	
State			
Federal			
Fees			
Other:			
Total	\$ -	\$ 35,000.00	\$ -

Narrative: So far, the work of County Parks staff and the extensive volunteer efforts of the County’s two Park Commissioner representatives to the Task Force have been accomplished without any significant expenditure of County funds. It is the recommendation of the Santa Barbara County Park Commission that a suggested position of FCT Coordinator be hosted within County Parks. The estimated total annual cost for this position is \$105,000. The County’s share of the annual cost would be approximately \$35,000, with the City of Santa Barbara and the U.S. Forest Service each contributing \$35,000.

Staffing Impacts:

Legal Positions:

FTEs:

Currently, existing County Parks staff (primarily the South County Deputy Director and the Parks Planner) are coordinating the County’s involvement in the FCT Task Force and conducting outreach with trail user groups. This status is likely to continue through the remainder of FY 2007-08 and into the first six months of FY 2008-09. It is requested that at a future date, the Board consider hosting the FCT Coordinator position in County Parks, at an annual cost of approximately \$35,000 to the County. This action would be contingent on the other two public agencies agreeing to contribute a total of \$70,000 to subsidize this position (for a total annual cost of \$105,000), as well as approval of a new position by the Board of Supervisors. It is important to note that at this time, no commitment for the position is being requested.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force, “Final Management Recommendations for the Front Country Trails,” February 2008.

Authored by:

Erik Axelson, South County Deputy Director

cc: