

San Diego Mountain Biking Association
Comments on Cuyamaca Rancho State Park General Plan Update
May 22, 2014

We support most of what has been presented. Here are some specific items we strongly support:

Movement of State Wilderness boundaries to permit multi-use and maintain/enhance connectivity:

- Moving Wilderness Boundary to Blue Ribbon Trail (Point #11) – very important to get cyclists off Highway 79 wherever possible, and a key connection to the south end of the park.
- Moving Wilderness Boundary to East Side Trail between Sweetwater parking lot and East Mesa Fire Road (Point #10). Key North-South connection currently used heavily by bikes.
- Moving Wilderness Boundary to East Side Trail at Green Valley (Point #7). This is another key connection and will help create new loop opportunities.
- Moving Wilderness Boundary to West Side Trail (Point #9). Key North-South connector that will help create new loop opportunities.

Changing the allowed use within Cultural and Natural Preserves to include bikes on designated roads and trails is very important for maintaining access to existing routes and key connectors. Thank you for making that change. (Page 4-12/13)

We agree that a Roads and Trails Management Plan needs to be completed once the General Plan Update is completed and look forward to working with CRSP on that plan. (Page 4-97)

Our main concern is the suggested closure of Deer Park Trail to bikes (Point #8)

We recognize bicycles have been allowed to use a trail located within designated Wilderness for many years. However, we are not aware that such use has created any problems within CRSP such as habitat or other resource damage, conflict with other users, or any impairment of Wilderness values. Is Wilderness designation necessary to protect this part of the park? Two main reasons we do not want to lose access are popularity of the trail itself being in a spectacular area of the park, and the connection it offers between Cuyamaca and Cleveland National Forest.

Deer Park Trail provides us access to one of the most beautiful and remote areas of the park. This is the only area in Cuyamaca we are allowed to ride that is not easily accessible to hikers and horses given the distance to get there. We seldom see other users on Deer Park Trail. Mountain bikers want to protect Wilderness values too, and we value quiet and solitude just as hikers and equestrians do. We have the ideal low impact means to access “low use” Wilderness areas. Yet, we are normally restricted to high-use front country and moderate-use backcountry areas. Deer Park Trail represents a highly-prized backcountry area for mountain bikers. This is one of the few trails we have access to in all of Southern California that runs through a healthy oak and meadow ecosystem.

Connectivity is the more important reason we do not want to lose access to Deer Park Trail. This is our only connection to Cleveland National Forest aside from long distances on paved highways. A closure would not be well received by mountain bikers in any case due to the trail's popularity. Given its importance as a connector we are concerned that many riders would continue using it regardless of status unless a viable alternate connector trail is constructed and opened prior to Deer Park closure. This is the only way a closure will work as it would be difficult if not impossible for the park to enforce new rules given the remoteness of the area.

Unfortunately we cannot rely on construction of an alternate trail to replace Deer Park Trail at this time. Not only would it be a massive project (estimated 3 to 4-mile trail) with lengthy approval process during a time of funding shortages, it would also be entirely on Cleveland National Forest, outside the jurisdiction of CA State Parks. Given these facts it is very possible a project like this could not be completed at all. That said we will certainly work with State Parks and Cleveland National Forest to make it a reality.

We could support closure of Deer Park Trail to bikes with a viable alternative, but until such a trail becomes feasible SDMBA offers the following solutions to maintain access to bikes Deer Park Trail:

- 1) Apply an alternative designation to this area that would not ban bikes but still offer significant protection, such as Natural Preserve.
- 2) Cherry stem Deer Park Trail to create a Backcountry corridor through the Wilderness zone. This has been done before in Federal Wilderness Areas.
- 3) Designate Deer Park Trail as "excluded from Wilderness". This has also been done in Federal Wilderness and could be done here with an executive order from the Park Superintendent.
- 4) Move the Wilderness Boundary so that most of the Deer Park Trail would be outside of Wilderness. See attached map for an example of how this could be accomplished. Temporarily, until an alternate connector can be constructed, an order from the Park Superintendent could be made to allow continued bike access through the remaining Wilderness. In the meantime a segment of trail could be constructed to make Deer Park a lollipop loop that would make for a logical destination route (2 options shown on the map; Wilderness boundary would run adjacent to this trail.) Upon completion of a connector, the segment of Deer Park which drops down to Indian Creek Trail could be closed and rehabilitated, as it is essentially an old, steep, eroded road bed. This would add a significant amount of habitat to the area once restored.

We believe Option #4 above would be the best alternative as it would preserve bike access to the most desirable part of Deer Park Trail permanently with minimal reduction in Wilderness, and still providing for a connection to Cleveland National Forest both temporarily and in the long term. We believe this would be strongly supported by the mountain bike community and hopefully represents a good compromise to State Parks as well.

There are a number of changes we think still need to be made to the General Plan to strengthen it:

- 1) Adjust Wilderness boundary so that Kelley Ditch Trail may become multi-use.
 - This area does not have high Wilderness value being adjacent Engineer Road and close to the high use Dam/Lake Cuyamaca area and nearby housing tract.
 - Narrow shoulders on Engineer Road present a safety issue for cyclists; ability to ride the trail would be safer
 - Kelley Ditch trail may include part of an alignment for the Trans-County Trail and is therefore important for County-wide connectivity; this trail is also a key connector to William Heise County Park and to Julian.

- 2) Adjust Wilderness boundary at Point #6 to the East Side Trail so that trail can be multi-use from Cuyamaca Outdoor School to Stonewall Creek Fire Road
 - This area does not have high Wilderness value due to close proximity to developed Visitor Center, Outdoor School, and power line easement.
 - For a small reduction in Wilderness an excellent beginner loop will become available to cyclists which would be one of the few in the park that does not have significant elevation change. This would be heavily used and would help draw trail users in to the Visitor Center.
 - The loop would be from Visitor Center on East Side Trail to Harvey Moore Trail, and follow that back to Green Valley Fire Road where it intersects Stonewall Creek Fire Road.

- 3) Creation of a new trail camp up near top of Middle Peak
 - Most riders climb up Middle Peak Fire Road and descend the west Middle Peak singletrack
 - Locating a trail camp off the east Middle Peak singletrack would make it accessible yet remote feeling and should have a great view

- 4) Addition to the plan of a bike lane along Highway 79
 - This is very important for cyclist safety given the heavy traffic
 - A bike lane would make the area much more appealing for road cyclists to visit and stay in the area, which will bring business to hotels, motels, campgrounds and restaurants in Julian, Descanso and Pine Valley.

We agree with most points and comments in the report. There are a few questions and/or clarifications we feel are important:

- 1) Trail Use (2-14). CRSP is also heavily accessed at the North end from Anza Borrego State Park (CHRT, La Cima, Lucky 5 Trails). For mountain bikers the main routes are singletrack trails with one of the most popular being the "Grand Loop:" North on East/West Side Trails up to the Outdoor School, Upper Green Valley Fire Road to La Cima singletrack, into Anza-Borrego and around on CHRT and Soapstone Grade and then up to Middle Peak before descending back to West Side Trail via fire road.

- 2) Page 4-24 lists reasons why CRSP is not a top-three mountain biking destination. A predominance of hilly (more difficult) terrain is not accurate; the adjacent Cleveland National Forest offers more difficult terrain and sees much more use. Lack of singletrack trails open to bikes is the biggest reason, the other being lack of connectivity and available distance both within the park and to adjacent areas (CNF/Julian) which also limits ride options. Bikes can cover up to 50-60 miles per day so it is possible to cover most of the trails in CRSP and CNF in one ride. Low public awareness is a result of the above factors. Promotion of trails will not be needed if access for mountain bikes improves, they will come.
- 3) Page 4-24, Item 4 states that some strategic trails could be converted to bike only. While we would certainly support this where appropriate, we believe all trails in CRSP outside of Wilderness should be multi-use where appropriate. Segregating users on different trails does not help different user types acclimate and learn how to interact with one another on the trail. Shared trail use also allows usage to be spread over a greater number of trails.
- 4) Page 4-24, Item 7 – spending resources on marketing would not be needed, all the park needs to do is permit more events to take place within the park such as the Annual CRSP Benefit Ride and the Julian Death March. These would bring users into the park, raise awareness and could also be set up to contribute revenue to the park. Trail users are very good at spreading information via word of mouth, and if the trails plan is improved via the recommendations on the table, people will spend more time at Cuyamaca.
- 5) Draft Wilderness Boundary Adjustments with Justifications: why is the Wilderness boundary being moved back 100' for dirt/fire roads but only 50' for paved roads? I would expect it to be the same or greater for paved roads given higher traffic.