

LBHA Mountain Bike Trail Policy

Goal: A TRAIL SYSTEM THAT SAFELY ACCOMMODATES A VARIETY OF TRAIL USERS AND PROVIDES TRAIL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL.

Safety for equestrians is our primary concern. In this area, multi-use trails located on undulating or relatively flat terrain that have wide lateral clearance and/or good sight distances are enjoyed by a large number of equestrians, hikers and mountain bikers. However, many of the trails in our region were built over 100 years ago, were not designed for multi-use, and are essentially narrow ledges on the edge of steep canyon walls. Due to the physical constraints dictated by the terrain in which these old trails are located, many equestrians have been subjected to the life threatening 'choice' of impact or evasion over the edge of steep canyon walls when encountering bikers. As a result, equestrians have been injured and countless more have become defensive and displaced. It is time for all trail users and land managers to acknowledge the significant increase in the dangerous and foreseeable consequences of continuing to use or manage these trails as though they are appropriate for multi-use. In order to increase trail opportunities for all and safely accommodate trail users, a reporting system must be developed and some of these old trails must be redesigned and/or rebuilt for multi-use and more trails need to be constructed.

- 1) Multi-use Trail Design – Trail safety is a design/maintenance consideration. Design should include integrated, built-in enforcement features, particularly speed control. Multi-use trail designs can vary because requirements are dependent on site specific conditions such as the terrain and soil type in which the trail is located. Multi-use trails will of necessity not be ideal for any one type of trail enthusiast. They will serve the greatest variety of trail users. Safe multi-use trail design includes the following:
 - a. Speed control – pinch points, obstacles, etc., to reduce speed which would, in effect, self-enforce speed limits on narrow trails where maneuverability off trail and separation of users is limited.
 - b. Sight distances – sufficient to account for response time for users to pass each other or stop if needed.
 - c. Trail width – multi-use trails in steep terrain must have very wide lateral clearance or sufficient trail tread width, or both, to separate users and allow for passing each other. "User refuge areas" i.e., pull outs, are not safe for chance encounters on narrow trails on the edge of canyon walls. The use of a refuge implies a controlled encounter. Refuges could serve on trails where speed control and sight distances are in place.
 - d. Alternating days for bikes and horses is not realistic on narrow trails in steep terrain. The risks are too high should some be unaware or unwilling to abide by the schedule. Alternating days cannot mitigate inherent unsafe trail characteristics. Alternating days could serve to mitigate overcrowding on trails in less steep, undulating terrain with wide lateral clearance and good sight distances, in conjunction with a robust trail user reporting system, to analyze the success or failure of this option.

- e. Separate or parallel single track trails that split user groups should be considered on trails in steep terrain or areas with other features that inherently limit sight distances. Adequate signage and proper designs which enhance access for each trail user, and deters access for the non-approved user, would still be necessary for this approach to be a successful. For example, on equestrian/hiker trail, logs and/or other methods of speed control would still be built into the trail. The bike only trail would have features that bikers enjoy such as banked corners, fast descents, etc.
- 2) Land Management – Public safety must be a primary concern for land managers where visitors are encouraged to access often remote trails on our public lands. Trail safety is dependent on both well designed multi-use trails and the creation of a dedicated visitor reporting system. Since the mid 90's, the *lack of a data* has been relied on to *support* many ill informed and misleading *conclusions* that safety issues related to user conflicts are low. With the ever increasing number of trail enthusiasts, foreseeable, dangerous consequences are magnified, particularly for equestrians, in steep terrain where trails are simply *designated* multi-use but are not properly *designed*, rebuilt and maintained for multi-use.
- a. Create a dedicated visitor reporting system – To assist in identifying areas of concern so resources can be more efficiently utilized. Maintain a database of visitor complaints, notifications regarding trail conditions, and incidents to identify specific, tangible safety issues and conflicts in an effort to analyze which programs are working and which need to be modified. Over time, this user generated information would serve to develop location specific solutions.
 - i. Provide signage at trail heads and on brochures with agency contact information to encourage visitor reports. In the interim, Park Watch and Loomis Basin Horsemen's Association (LBHA.us) are available to provide visitor input regarding public land issues encountered in the field.
 - ii. Utilize real-world information and trail user generated content as a basis to support management decisions. At present, there is no concerted effort to collect, store and analyze information about close calls, incidents, or injuries. California State Parks' recent Conflict Study found that **"Information of trail use conflict is primarily based on opinion; little data about actual user conflicts are available."** Yet, without actual data, the authors came to the illogical conclusion that incidents/accidents are infrequent because of a "notable lack of citations." They failed to note there is minimal, if any, in-field/on-trail enforcement. The parties have no external identification and they leave the area well before any official, let alone the rare ranger with citation power arrives. Another misconception about trail safety is that if 'collisions' are low then trail safety is high. Collision is not a definitive factor to evaluate trail safety in a horse/bike incident. Horses, as prey animals, typically avoid impact/contact at all costs. Agencies should no longer use 'collisions' as

a prime indicator of trail safety in horse/bike encounters. Also, over-reliance on the relatively low number of actual life flight/ambulance calls to support the contention that trails are safe is flawed. Often, rather than make the expensive ambulance call, many injured trail users will just limp out and seek any medical care after the incident. In addition, the assumption that all horse related injuries are due to rider error undermines any deeper analysis of trail safety issues. Just as a driver can run off the road due to lack of skill so too can a driver be run off the road due to avoidance of a potential collision. Equestrian incidents should be viewed in this same light. Relying primarily on lack of data, low number citations, collisions or emergency visits is an unreliable method for assessing visitor safety. Particularly when "SAFETY", according to Parks is "... a critically important priority for visitors to CSP units and users of CSP trails." The time has come to proactively engage visitors to report conflicts or other trail issues and maintain these records to focus management priorities and generate data for further research.

- b. Enforcement – Add more Rangers to patrol trails. Actual record keeping would go far to justify this need. Adopt enforceable rules. Given our land managers' budgets, there is essentially no in-field/on-trail enforcement. Since so little enforcement exists, trail design must build in enforcement. Courtesy signage and education, while important, cannot substitute for enforcement. Signage and education has been shown to influence uninformed or careless acts, but not illegal acts.
 - c. Create a website of approved bike, run or ride events so trail users can plan their activities to avoid conflicts with the event. The website could be funded by event permit fees.
 - d. Reduce seemingly endless impediments for volunteers to maintain or build trails to provide better loop trails and connections to disperse users.
 - e. Develop joint bike/horse volunteer meetings and patrols on multiuse trails.
 - f. Utilize the expertise of State Park's volunteer bike and horse patrol's when trail change in use or trail modifications to control speed or the addition of bridges etc, is contemplated. These patrol volunteers have in-depth, on-trail experience with which to provide valuable input regarding changes to the trails which they patrol.
- 3) Trail User responsibilities – Work together to promote safety and fun for all trail users. Work together to help support land managers in preserving and expanding our fabulous trail systems. Report incidents and trail issues using the accepted data base. Real data will help all trail users and land managers over the long run. Develop a communication network so problems between groups can be addressed.
- a. Equestrians – While we cannot train fight or flight out of our horses, i.e. self-preservation, we can and should train ourselves and thus our horses to be less reactive to approaching bikes. Bikers have been willing to help with bike/horse training efforts. Help build trails with other trail users, even biker only trails. Clean up manure and loose hay at staging areas. Do not ride trails when wet.

Work with other trail users and give ground on the trail when it is safe for all. The right of way courtesy triangle does not always make the equestrian right! Be civil and remember you are representing the equestrian community with every interaction.

- b. Bikers – police yourselves; continue to work to expand the local mountain bike patrol. Use bells on bikes to alert others on the trail. Recognize that multiuse trails in public lands are not suited for the whole range of riding styles contained in the sport of mountain biking. While multi-use trails are not for technical challenges, well marked areas separate from the main trail system could serve for such trail challenges. Be civil and remember you are representing the mountain bike community with every interaction.
- c. Share information between user groups regarding events and trail information – Share information about bike, run or equestrian events between groups so all trail users are informed and can plan accordingly.
- d. Bikers, equestrians and hikers work together to leverage influence with agencies to develop more trails and expedite opportunities for volunteer groups to work on trails. Work together to address each other’s critical needs for access and safety. These goals are not mutually exclusive. Stop and say hello, you probably have more in common than you might’ve thought!