

Folsom Lake State Recreation Area  
General Plan/Resource Management Plan

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EQUESTRIAN STAKEHOLDER

**POSITION PAPER**

The eight or so equestrians who participated in this public process want to thank Jim Michael and Scott Nikaji for this opportunity. It has been a learning experience for some of us and thought provoking for all. We believe we have taken the subjects presented and done our best to integrate them into a constructive evaluation. The Sierra Foothills region is targeted for extreme growth and that fact has heavily influenced our perspective and resulting suggestions. As a part of our research, we prepared, distributed, collect and analyzed a survey to equestrians in the Sierra Foothills region. The results of our survey are interspersed here as a means of illustrating both the uniformity of opinion and the diversity of opinion among equestrians on the trail topics we have before us. We are pleased to have the results of our survey as a backdrop to the questions you have asked us to consider. In all honesty we were surprised by the results.

Several months ago we became aware of a task force that was formed by the City of Los Angeles to research some of the same dilemmas that the development of a new General Plan has confronted us with. A copy of the final report prepared by the Los Angeles Task Force is offered for your review. We have found the data collected through their research process to be straightforward and parallel to what trail users everywhere contend. We found the documentation they collected to be highly useful. Jacqueline Ball and Wallace, Roberts and Toss received copies of the Majority Report in June of this year. Copies are included here for Jim Michael and Scott Nikaji.

**Premise**

The equestrian stakeholders from Placer County, El Dorado County, Sacramento County, and Nevada County agree that the development of a new and progressive General Plan for Folsom Lake State Recreation Area (FLSRA) offers a great opportunity for stakeholders. They have eagerly participated in the process so that both current and future trail users will have facilities that meet their needs.

The perspective presented in this paper is drawn from equestrians who collectively have hundreds of years of experience using the trail system within FLSRA and have a genuine respect for all trail users. They have remained loyal to the premise shared by an overwhelming percentage of equestrians that our trail system needs to serve hikers, horseman and mountain bikers. To disenfranchise one user to accommodate a different user is completely unacceptable.

**Objective**

In the course of this paper and on behalf of those equestrians that ride the FLSRA trails every effort will be made to convey and document, where possible, the insights, determinations and preferences of those who enjoy the sport of equestrian trail riding. Parks and their consulting team have done an excellent job of capturing the most desirable qualities and characteristics as they were presented in the Trail Stakeholders Meeting #1. The Stakeholders' collective input on trail character, new trail facilities, trail maintenance, trail use and enforcement parallels our point of view and we will welcome the implementation of these. The same is true of the trail improvements discussed with the caveat that group camps with horse accommodations at Monte Vista and Rattlesnake Bar remain high on our list of desirable new facilities.

After finding common ground on all other points where input was requested, there remains only one significant topic that equestrians want to weigh in on and that is trail designation.

The opinions on the topic of multiuse expressed in this document are relevant to FLSRA only and are not to be construed as universal or applicable anywhere other than FLSRA. We realize that some, perhaps much, of the content here is most applicable to the Master Trail Plan but, in our opinion, the whole of the plan needs to be understood before the parts of the plan can be meaningful.

### **Survey**

The equestrian stakeholders were very cognizant of their role as representatives of the equestrian community and willingly put aside their personal opinions in order to honestly and accurately deliver the preferences, concerns and resolutions offered by the greatest number of equestrians. Our survey was prepared and distributed as a means of focusing and collecting opinions of a general nature and ones that were specific to Folsom trails.

The following six questions appears on the survey. An introductory paragraph explaining the reason for our inquiry and how we planned to use their collective responses preceded the list of questions.

1. What trails do you ride most frequently? Why?
2. What trails do you avoid riding? Why?
3. In a general sense, what would you like to see changed about our trails, trail network, trail users, trail conditions?
4. The following four trails at Folsom Lake are being considered for a change in designation from hiking/equestrian to multiuse: 1) Folsom Point to Brown's Ravine, 2) Brown's Ravine to Old Salmon Falls (and on to Sweetwater), 3) Beals Point to Granite Bay, and 4) Granite Bay to Beeks Bight/Dotons Point. What are your thoughts and how feasible do you consider such a change to be?
5. What general comments do you have on multiuse?
6. Data collected by State Parks indicates that the number of equestrians riding the trails has decreased. Assuming this is true, what in your opinion would explain this and has your use of the state park trails changed?

### **Conflict**

Equestrians, distance runners, hikers, bird and wildlife observers, conservationists and general nature lovers have shared the historic trails of the American River Canyon for more than 100 years. The amiable sharing of the trails by these users results from just one factor, speed of travel. When all trail users are moving at 3 miles per hour or less the reaction time needed to avoid a collision or interrupting an observer is minimal. The opportunity to unintentionally surprise another trail user is near nonexistent. The focus, albeit the reason, these trail users are on the trail is to enjoy nature, the peace and quiet of the forest, the sounds of the river and the sense of timelessness.

Add another user group is mountain bikers, who travel at speeds greater than the permitted 15 miles per hour and who focus on stretching the limits of their body, their bike and the trail. Conflict results. Even though mountain bike riders and equestrians travel at different speeds, want different trail experiences and place different values on safety there is one component that can equalize the desires of both groups, terrain. Auburn State Recreation Area

has one example of a multiuse trail that all users agree is ideal and one that is a complete failure. The difference between the two is terrain.

The trails out of the Cool staging area are enjoyed by all trail users with very few incidents of conflict. The terrain in this area is nearly flat with very gradual changes in elevation. Grass and oak trees cover most of this area making long range visibility excellent. One trail user can see another trail user far enough in advance to react appropriately. In addition, the relative flatness provides trail users with ample space to get off the trail if safety room or an emergency exit is needed. It is worth reiterating that all trail users consider this a very successful application of a shared use trail. In contrast, there is Drivers Flat, also called the Foresthill Divide. This trail is one of the newer trails in the area, was built to be multiuse on terrain that will not yield to the standards necessary for mixing trail users. Much of the trail is on a mountainside with no escape room provided. Deep curves, over grown brush, severe grades and blind corners make accidents very hard to avoid. These are the conditions that reasonable equestrians won't risk so today Driver's Flat is used almost exclusively by mountain bikes. In our survey this was the number one trail that equestrians said they avoided.

The contrast between Cool and Driver's Flat is drawn here for two reasons. The first reason is to make very clear that equestrians in general do not oppose the concept of multiuse trails but their experience with multiuse trails has been poor because the terrain here in the foothills is generally not conducive. The second reason is that nearly all of the equestrian/hiking trails at FLSRA being considered for conversion to multiuse are on terrain similar to Driver's Flat. History says that if mountain bikes are added to these trails, mountain bikes will soon be the only users. The Trail Task Force in Los Angeles documented the occurrence of hiker/equestrian disenfranchisement thoroughly.

Fifty-one percent of the Equestrians who answered question #2 on our survey said they avoid trails with bikes, specifically. Another thirty-two percent cited safety issues mostly relative to trail maintenance. In other words, eighty-two percent placed safety as their number one priority and the first factor they considered when selecting the trails they would ride.

*Survey Comments question #2:*

- I avoid... *"bikes illegally on trail that is single track with dangerous drop offs and blind corners"*
- I avoid... *"any trail my horse can not travel safely"*
- I avoid... *"bicycles combined with narrow trails = accidents!"*

The stalemate between equestrians and mountain bikes centers on the very high probability of accidents, serious accidents. Mountain bike riders are willing to trade safety for the opportunity to expand the number of trails they have to ride. Equestrians will not put themselves or their horses at risk when the reward to the other trail user is nothing more than a ride on a new bit of winding dirt. The potential cost compared to the potential reward is out of the question!

The establishment of multiuse trails satisfies some mountain bikers but it disenfranchises the original trail users, that being equestrians and hikers and, in our opinion, accounts for why Park data indicates a decrease in the number of equestrians using Park trails. Reliance on the same or similar data dilutes the voice of today's equestrian and fosters feeling that the concerns, particularly safety concerns, expressed by equestrians go unheard. This is bolstered by a lack of enforcement of existing trail designations and the fact that mountain bike enforcement is openly discussed as a low priority. As an equestrian, this clearly carries the message that the safety of hikers and equestrians must also be a low priority. Most equestrians that answered survey question # 6 commented that they felt the data was wrong but if they accepted it as accurate, fifty-one percent would attribute the decline to the increase in bikes and multiuse trails, specifically.

*Survey Comments question #6:*

- *“My opinion is people stop riding the trails because of all the bikes on the trail. It’s made me want to ride where there are no bikes”*
- *“I think if equestrian use is down, it is because we feel unsafe with the lack of enforcement of trail rules”*
- *“I have had two serious falls myself due to bikes on the trails. This discourages riders from taking their horses on the trail. Sad, but true.”*

### **Equestrians Acknowledge**

Equestrians acknowledge the significance of the new General Plan for today’s needs and that of several decades to come. Urbanization is closing in – more equestrians who work weekdays want to ride weekends but find current multiuse trails unsafe for one reason, mountain bikes. Until Parks has the ability to strictly enforce trail rules affecting speed and safety, we find it senseless to create more multiuse trails as a solution for handling a greater number of trail users, present or future.

Equestrians acknowledge that the trail rider of tomorrow may be very different from the ones we have today. It is reasonable to think that new types of trail users may emerge during the life of the new Plan and while we may not be able to name them or clearly identify them now, we still need to plan for their presence. This defines the need for a broad and very basic division in user types such as “mechanized” (bike, skateboard, trail skates, BMX riders, downhill racers) and “non-mechanized” (walkers, runners, hikers, equestrians, the physically handicapped where footing is compatible, bird and wildlife observers, etc)

Equestrians acknowledge that they have acquired a feeling of rightful ownership of many of the equestrian/hiking trails. It was equestrian money (more than \$200,000) and volunteer hours (Folsom MAU unit puts in more than 10,000 hrs *per year* patrolling and maintaining) that built the trails being considered for conversion. Some of the trails are 50 years old, were cut by Wendell Robie and have been maintained this entire time by equestrians. An interpretive walk was recently added to the trail accessing Sterling Point staging area, bulletin boards are regularly updated, water troughs, drinking fountains, picnic areas, trail signs and mile markers have all been paid for, installed and maintained by equestrians *throughout the canyon*. After all these years and all this work, it is hard to accept the possibility that another user group is in greater favor now and that the facilities that mean so much to equestrians could be converted to an environment unfriendly to equestrians. Sixty percent of equestrians answering survey questions #4 said “no” to changing the trail designation at Folsom. The number one reason was safety problems caused by the topography and terrain. In contrast, when asked for their opinion on multiuse in general (survey question #5), only 32% held a negative opinion, the balance (68%) was in favor under proper conditions.

*Survey Comments question #4*

- *“I’m not sure trails can be widened enough for safety to bikes and horses/riders”*
- *“I consider this change to be extremely dangerous to equestrians in that these trails are not configured to safely accommodate horses and bikes*
- *“Mountain bike use already occurs! I find it quite dangerous, as there are areas where moving aside is impractical. Blind corners are difficult and terrain unsuitable”*

*Survey Comments question #5*

- *“I think multiuse trails can work under certain conditions, width, grade and bikers manners. Not all trails are suitable for multiuse”*
- *“I don’t mind multiuse as long as it is safe for all concerned”*
- *“If people follow the rules, it’s great. When people don’t follow them it is a disaster waiting to happen”*

The responses to #5 clearly indicate that equestrians are not opposed to multiuse trails if they can be created safely. Equestrians have acquiesced to the influx of mountain bikes over the past 10 years, voicing very little opposition. Ten years ago, hikers and equestrians shared 9 significant trails (see attached map). Today, equestrians have 4 trails and their hold on those is tenuous because of the flagrant intrusion of mountain bikes riding illegally. The Auburn State Recreation Area offers a larger perspective of this same problem. Over the same ten year period mountain bikes have acquired access to 15 trails, officially or unofficially, within the park. It’s impossible to say that mountain bikes have nowhere to ride. No trail user is guaranteed access to every trail. State Parks has tried to accommodate the various users by offering trails for different users within a reasonable driving distance and given the gains made by mountain bikes in the last decade, the point of saturation and tolerance has been reached.

Equestrians acknowledge that riding with peace of mind is a critical part of the trail experience they treasure. Without officially changing any of the trail designations, renegade mountain bike riders have changed the state of mind that all equestrians must now ride with. Parks provides no enforcement of current trail designations and has left mountain bikers to ride where they wish including on equestrian/hiking trails – a reminder that equestrian safety is a low priority. Clearly if you are riding a multiuse trail on a horse suitable for multiuse you accept and are prepared for the probability of meeting a mountain bike under perhaps the worst of circumstance. However, if you choose to ride an equestrian trail *because* your horse is young, green, sensitive, recovering from an injury, etc, and you meet a mountain bike riding illegally on your trail, the outcome can range from a mere surprise to being killed. Resources are not available to manage the illegal rider. Where are the resources going to come from to manage the conflict when new multiuse trails are created? Be advised, *no* enforcement will not be an acceptable answer.

Equestrians acknowledge that trail conflict is not entirely a “people problem” and as a result can not be solved by educating bike riders or horses. Pick up any mountain bike magazine and analyze the advertisements, articles, special columns and pictures depicting how mountain bike riders are aggressive and fearless and injuries are just another badge of courage. Every advertisement for every product in a mountain bike magazine uses slogans like “you need to take risks to progress” (Oakley Footwear), “beyond all limits” (Azonic bikes), “feel the power” (KHS bikes), “it’s time to choose your weapon” (Mountain Cycle), “no one....telling you what to do” (Nema), “I’ve got rocket fuel” (Champion Nutrition), “make that all important choice....all or nothing” (Giant Bicycles) and on and on. The marketing machine of the mountain bike industry spends millions creating the worst possible bike rider for multiuse trails. Herein lies the reason that multiuse trails will never be a successful solution.

There are two types of mountain bike riders that will always exist and will always be a threat to other trail users, the novice and the “I will do what I want to do no matter what” rider. Too many times equestrians are sent scrambling by the novice rider screaming down a hill, his eyes glued to his front wheel, clueless that anyone else might be using the same trail. The “I will do what I want” guy does the same thing but knows better and doesn’t

care. There is no conceivable way of filtering out these riders and they are present in alarming numbers everywhere.

Equestrians are happy to acknowledge the very polite, very conscientious mountain bikers that make up the predominance of our encounters. Furthermore, we support mountain biking as a very worthwhile sport and feel they have unequivocally earned trails of their own, designed to their specifications for the trail experience they want.

### **Critique of Trail Designation Criteria**

#### Multiuse Corridor

- In concept, we find this design option to be the most accommodating for all users and the least invasive of natural resources.
- We would like to respectfully submit that the designation of multiuse, limited use and hiking be changed to mechanized, non-mechanized and hiking. The purpose is to establish trail designations that serve compatible trail users. Equestrians will always share with hikers and will forever remain a non-mechanized form of travel. Today's mountain bikes and the potential of trail skates and skate boards for trials in the future, travel similarly and enjoy a similar trail experience. This group will always use mechanized equipment/vehicle as their mode of transportation. Clearly, a certain type of terrain makes hiking the only means of travel and certainly justifies the need for a hiking designation. The hiking designation might also serve the need of the handicapped trail user where applicable.

#### Shared Use Trail

- Within the framework of a mechanized/non-mechanized system of trail designation, shared use trails would have limited application. There would certainly be facilities like bridges and road crossings that because of expense and/or logistics must be shared by all trail users.
- Shared Use Trails defined as "a combination of parallel Limited Use trails" is perfectly acceptable under conditions that do not allow for the use of an actual multiuse corridor. For instance, access to public concessions, staging areas, less than cooperative terrain, etc.
- Existing multiuse trails would be "grandfathered" in as Shared Use Trails but new trails would be designed as Mechanized, Non-Mechanized, or Hiking.

#### Limited Use Trails

- Limited Use – Hiking/Mountain Biking seems like a risky combination but these users should be the judge of that. Under the terminology that we are proposing, this combination of users would be "mechanized/hikers".
- Limited use – Hiking/Horses describes perfectly what we would like have referred to as "non-mechanized". In order to accommodate riders training for endurance events (Tevis, etc) the degree of difficulty should be "accessible to challenging". Under the Trail Designation Criteria the Hiking/Horse –Limited Use Trail is presently limited to "accessible to moderate" terrain.

## Summary of Recommendations

1. Enforcement of existing trail rules and regulations is a key factor in maintaining the expected standards of safe trail use and in minimizing trail damage caused by trail users. If State Parks is unable to provide this service, other agencies should be included as resources available to trails users who have trail violations to report. The volunteer efforts of retired or off-duty rangers, wardens, sheriffs and CHP officers on foot, bikes or horses are recommended as a means of putting qualified law enforcement personnel on the trails to cite and/or remove illegal and unsafe trail users.
2. Create and distribute current and accurate maps illustrating the trail system with FLSRA clearly depicting the trail designation of every trail. The FLSRA should website to display these same maps with current postings for trail conditions and facility changes. Bulletin boards and kiosks should display these maps and serve as a distribution point where the public can always secure this information.
3. Replace and maintain signage at all trailheads. Signage must include the trail designation, application rules and regulations, potential citations and fines for violations, and a phone number that is monitored 24 hours/7 days a week that trail users are *encouraged* to use to report trail violators or dangerous trail conditions.
4. Enable rangers and volunteer patrols to coordinate their efforts with precision by providing them with state-of-the-art communication devices.
5. Volunteerism is very strong in Folsom but is not fully utilized. More and better efforts need to be put into training individuals and crews for trail maintenance work, park communications, information distribution and patrols. Leadership can be pulled from capable volunteers and spare Park management from the labor-intensive side of using volunteers.
6. Maintain trails standard. Use volunteers or Park personnel to keep trail standards such as line of sight and trail width and height in compliance with design guidelines.

## Conclusion

Many, many of the equestrians who responded to our survey indicated that they chose the trails closest to home to ride. Many of those were from the Folsom area. If the trail designations at Folsom are changed and riders decide not to risk the chance of an accident, the impact will be large.

There are 6.9 million horses in the United States and one-half of those horses are used “recreationally”. To be considered “recreational” a horse can *not* be shown, commercially bred, raced, employed (police work), do ranch work or be used in an organized sports like polo or rodeo. Horses used for trail riding are strictly recreational and accounts for 2,970,000 of America’s horses. The horse industry pays \$1.9 million in taxes and, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employs more people than railroads, radio and television broadcasting, petroleum and coal products, manufacturing and tobacco product manufacturing. More recreational horses call California their home than any other state in the union, more than Texas and more than Kentucky.

Communities that cater to horses have higher property value and having trail access from your home is an important selling point, a point of distinction for your property. Property owners who deed easements to the county for trails, absolve themselves of all liability connected to the trail. All of the communities within Placer County are trying to educate property owners about the value of trails and the enhancement they bring to neighborhoods. The local trails need connectivity and presently FLSRA has that to offer.

There are equestrians who moved here and live here now because of the trail riding opportunities. Urbanization is not kind to horses or their owners. When the equestrians get tired of the fight and decide to move on, the community loses the employment, profit and sales tax on full-size trucks, fuel, horse trailers, feed and hay, vet services, barn construction, fencing, gravel and sand for footing, irrigation systems, boarding facilities, grooming supplies and tack, horse trainers and farriers. In addition, a new rural area will enjoy the business brought to their downtown district, restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations, hotels, etc. by local increase in equestrian events. It's imperative to all of the surrounding counties that FLSRA remain horse-friendly.

It's questionable if there are more mountain bike riders than equestrians but the amount of money brought to this area by mountain bike riders or the mountain bike industry is negligible by comparison to what equestrians spend in connection with their horses. This equation becomes overwhelming when the financial contributions made by hikers, seniors, families, bird watchers, conservationist and others who enjoy using and sharing trails with equestrians, are added in. And, this later group is a rapidly growing segment of the United States aging population.

Equestrians groups have supported the efforts of both county and State Parks in developing and maintaining a trail system that is usable by everyone and our commitment to continue such efforts remains unchanged. Again, we want to express our appreciation for the opportunity that we have been afforded and we hope that our participation has been helpful.

Sincerely,

**EQUESTRIAN TRAILS STAKEHOLDERS**

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