**SDTA/BCHC-SD Meeting with the County of San Diego**

**Concerning the Park Lands Dedication Ordinance**

On March 22nd representatives from the San Diego Unit of Backcountry Horsemen and the San Diego Trail Alliance (SDTA) met with San Diego County Department of Parks and Recreation staff concerning the proposed revisions to the county’s Park Lands Dedication Ordinance (PLDO). Representing Backcountry Horsemen were President Martin Jorgensen and Public Lands Chair Terry Jorgensen. Representing the San Diego Trail Alliance were SDTA board members Mr. Jorgensen and Diane Carter. Representing county Parks and Recreation were Maryanne Vancio (County Trails Program Coordinator), Marcus Lubich (Park Project Manager) and Jill Bankston (Parks Department Chief of Development).

Mr. Lubich had contacted SDTA concerning the proposed review of the ordinance and SDTA responded by asking for a meeting. The meeting went very well, with a lot of information being shared. The county staff were open and willing to listen to our questions and opinions, and all agreed the meeting was successful. In addition to this meeting Mr. and Ms. Jorgensen had attended a meeting the previous week where the Fallbrook Planning Group had been briefed by the county concerning the ordinance. They were able to come away from that meeting with information and questions that were useful at the subsequent meeting.

The Park Lands Dedication Ordinance is a county ordinance that is used in the planning process for developments and projects to provide funds for park lands in the same area. The Developers of the projects are assessed fees and those funds are used to establish parks. (The goal of the county is to have three acres of parks per 1000 people.) The ordinance has not been updated for several years, so the county is currently looking to revise it to address concerns of both developers and parks and trails advocates.

PLDO funds can be used to create or upgrade parks, but not to maintain them. (The county’s stated intent is that once parks are created local agencies should maintain them, and the funds needed for maintenance should come from local taxes or CSA’s- community service areas.) Private parks are not affected by the PLDO, nor are wildlife preserves or designated open spaces where public access is not allowed.

The county currently divides parks into two categories- “active” and “passive”. “Active” parks are large, grassy areas where people can roam at will without limitations. Passive parks are those whose access is though defined trail systems and trailheads. The way the ordinance is currently worded, funds collected for the ordinance can only be used for active parks. The county is looking at changing the wording of the PLDO so that trail use and other uses of passive recreation would also be funded by the PLDO, which they are currently not. (The county’s current goal for trails is 1 mile of trail per every 1000 people.)

Discussion ensued about the best way to do this, and the best way to make sure that the funds collected for trails ended up there. It was generally agreed that the funds for active parks and trails should be kept separate to make sure that the money ended up where it was supposed to.

One of the reasons for calling trail construction and use “passive” recreation (even though we know how physically active it is) is that “passive” recreation is allowed in areas affected by the Multiple Species Conservation Plan, while “active” recreation is not. This might give trail users (and land managers) a tool to use to establish trails in biologically sensitive areas and ease the concerns of the biological community.

Discussion also ensued concerning what types of developers are currently being assessed PLDO fees and if more types of developers (such as hotels or industrial) should be assessed in order to create more funds for parks and trails. Currently all funds collected as part of the PLDO must be used within the same planning area as the assessment.

Another item of discussion was maintenance of the areas acquired and developed as part of the PLDO. As stated earlier, the county expects local entities to take over the maintenance of these assets once the county constructs them. And when the park is proposed the maintenance entity and costs must be identified and established before construction can begin.

In the end the equestrians present from BCHC-SD and SDTA agreed that funding for trails should be included in any revision of the PLDO, that funding for trails and “passive” recreation be kept separate from funding for “active” recreation, and that the county’s Community Master Trail Plan should be used as a guide to determine trail construction priorities.

The proposed revisions to the PLDO are supposed to go back to the County Board of Supervisors for review in June and it is expected to take one to five years to upgrade the ordinance. There will be designated public comment periods during the process, but Mr. Lubich stated he is open to receiving any input or comments at any time. His email is marcus.lubich@sdcounty.ca.gov

More information about the county’s Park Lands Dedication Ordinance can be found at:

<http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/parks/public_review/park-lands-dedication-ordinance--pldo-.html>

I feel this is an extremely important issue for equestrians to monitor and provide input. It has the potential to affect trail construction on San Diego County land for years to come. Please take the time to read the available information and provide your feedback (both to the county and to your equestrian leaders and public lands representatives) so that we can make sure that the voices of equestrians (and all trail users) are heard and our needs addressed. BCHC-SD and SDTA will continue to be part of the process and will pass on whatever information we have.

Martin Jorgensen