FEBRUARY 3, 2016

MEETING OF TRAILS ALLIANCE WITH CITY OF SANTEE

(WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO RIDE RESPONSIBLY)

ATTENDANCE. Martin Jorgenson, Diane Carter, Sandy Jones, and Lisa Wood met with Santee Planning Director Melanie Kush and Bill Maertz, Community Services Director.

ISSUE. Lisa began by summarizing troubling social media exchanges from December 14, 2015. She noted that the City of Santee provides useful safety and community information on its Facebook page. On December 14 Santee noted deep tracks left by a horse that had been ridden in Walker Preserve right after a rain. The post noted that Penasquitos Canyon is closed to equestrians and mountain bikers after rain.

Santee’s Face Book page blew up. Some equestrians, such as Julie Murphy, commented that it is common courtesy to avoid damaging trails, whether on foot, on bike, or on horseback, immediately following a rain. However, other Facebook-using equestrians insisted that horses did not damage trails, and accused the City of Santee of faking the hoof prints!

Lisa apologized on behalf of equestrians. She assured the City of Santee that equestrian clubs such as Lakeside Frontier Riders, Tijuana River Valley Equestrians, and the Trails Alliance urged responsible equestrian behavior.

Martin gave examples of work Backcountry Horsemen did in coordination with government agencies to develop and maintain trails on state and federal land. Diane described the mission of the Trails Alliance to bring all trail users together to promote multiuse trails.

The City of Santee has multiple responsibilities, and must balance uses for the entire community. Trails may not always be developed specifically for horses. However, horses are welcome in the community, although safety is always urged. California Department of Fish and Wildlife has specific concerns about horse manure, because it may attract cowbirds.

Cowbirds, which pick seeds out of manure, lay their eggs in the nests of endangered song birds. The song birds, least Bell’s vireos, don’t recognize the cowbird eggs as foreign. When the cowbird chicks hatch, the vireos feed them. The cowbird chick kick the vireo chicks out of the nest, the ungrateful little parasites. So cow birds are very bad for the little vireos. It is important that piles of manure not be noted by the agencies, and why trails are posted with a horse diaper requirement.

SOLUTION. Santee is not going to put “horse police” out to make sure equestrians aren’t leaving hoof prints after rain, or manure all over the trails. However, if the community at large or regulatory agencies note any problems caused by horses, the City will respond as necessary. Therefore, clearly the solution is for equestrians to ride responsibly and with consideration for the needs of all trail users. Here are some recommendations for considerate riding:

* When sharing the trail with non-equestrians, keep the speed to walk or at most a slow jog.
* When sharing the trail with non-equestrians, kick piles of manure so that they are less obvious, or, in very highly used trail areas, carry a bag and use it to scoop up and deposit manure in the nearest trash receptacle.
* Never leave piles of manure in staging areas – rake it into a trash receptacle.
* Do not ride on multi-use trails immediately following a rain when hoof prints will cause the most damage.

As a note to equestrians, unrelated to Santee issues, the deep sand of El Monte Valley is not inviting to bicycles or pedestrians, and has good footing even during a rain event. Unless the proposed sand mine ruins it, the sandy substrate makes the Valley a very nice place for equestrians to ride, even when it is wet out.