

OC PARKS TRAILS SUBCOMMITTEE

STAFF REPORT

FROM: Brian Kurnow, Interim Executive Officer

DATE: November 9, 2023

SUBJECT: Trail Use Designation Pilot Project Report Addendum

Background

In 2021, OC Parks, Utah State University (USU) researchers, and the Natural Communities Coalition (NCC) engaged in a Trail Use Designation Pilot Project (TUDPP) with the overarching goal of evaluating whether changes to existing trail use and direction designations would improve user experience and alleviate trail user conflict. The Project was implemented on nine select trails in Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park (two trails), Laguna Coast Wilderness Park (two trails), and Santiago Oaks Regional Park (five trails). Researchers from USU conducted park visitor surveys and collected trail data before and during the designation changes. Additionally, park visitors using a TUDPP trail were invited to provide feedback through the project webpage and the OC Parks Trails Subcommittee (Subcommittee) email address. As of December 1, 2021, trails studied during the TUDPP returned to their previous designations.

In 2022, the USU researchers compiled analyzed data into the “Orange County Parks Trail Use Designation Pilot Project Technical Report” (Technical Report) for evaluation by the Subcommittee, OC Parks, and the public. The Technical Report provided an analysis and summary of the TUDPP findings and indicated that park visitors generally supported the trail direction and use designation changes that were implemented during the study period. Moreover, user survey responses indicated that trail designations resulted in a decreased perception of user conflicts and an enhanced sense of safety.

Following the release of the Technical Report, researchers from USU finalized an addendum titled "Assessment of the Trail Use Designation Pilot Project (TUDPP) on Ecological Resource Conditions in Orange County Parks" (Addendum). The Addendum evaluates the effects of the TUDPP on specific trail resource conditions, such as trail width and incision depth. It compares the monitored trails that underwent designation changes with those control trails that stayed unchanged during the same period. A brief summary of the Addendum’s analysis, findings, and discussion follows.

Analysis and Results

Two primary analysis techniques were used to assess trail resource conditions. The first technique evaluated if there were statistically significant changes in TUDPP trail width and depth between 2021 and 2022. The second technique compared changes in width and incision between the TUDPP and control trails to determine if there were any statistically significant differences.

Results indicate that changing trail use designations can contribute to increases in trail width and depth. However, the magnitude, or effect size, of the differences in trail width and incision were small and can be interpreted as subtle but measurable differences.

Discussion

The statistical significance of trail width and depth change identified in the Addendum does not necessarily indicate managerial action since the research shows the actual influence of trail use designations on trail conditions is relatively minor compared to other factors such as soil type, trail-slope alignment, and design. The findings acknowledge limitations such as the short length of study, varying results on different segments of the same trails (e.g., some trails widened in particular sections and narrowed in others), and other potential influences such as larger trail network complexities.

Taken together, the findings of the Technical Report and Addendum suggest that trail designation strategies can effectively address conflict and concerns about visitor safety, while emphasizing the need to evaluate ecological conditions when making changes to trail use. The Addendum specifically recommends assessing trail conditions when employing management strategies such as changes to trail use and direction designations to determine if trends in resource conditions are acceptable and meeting management objectives. Moreover, the existing trail assessment literature suggests that use-related factors generally play less of a role than trail design factors and therefore, some of the observed changes can likely be mitigated through trail maintenance actions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

1. Provide comments on the Addendum to OC Parks staff.
2. Receive and file.

 for Brian Kurnow

Brian Kurnow

ATTACHMENT:

Addendum to Trail Use Designation Pilot Project Report: Assessment of the Trail Use Designation Pilot Project (TUDPP) on Ecological Resource Conditions in Orange County Parks

Coastal Greenbelt Authority agenda Items concerning the 1998 General Development and Resources Management Plans for Laguna Coast Wilderness Park

- CGA meeting May 11, 2022 -The City of Irvine Open Space Management Plan was presented to CGA. This was presented as a prelude to future review of the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park's documents - General Development and Resource Management Plans.
- CGA meeting July 13, 2022 -Viewed the video "Inspired by the Land" to better understand the history of LCWP.
- CGA meeting September 9, 2022 -Agenda item: Habitat Sustainability and LCWP Trail Map review of changes since 1998.
 1. 2011 Woods End parcel purchased by City of Laguna Woods, leased to OC to be part of LCWP. Provided linkage to other trails - Ridgetop, Blackjack, Edison.
 2. 2015/2016 Lizards Trail added, involved closing and restoring 2 trails - Drunken Sailor and 9-5.
 3. Early 2000 added Bommer Ridge Trail for access to Ridge Park Road. Eliminated Laurel Canyon Staging Area Access and relocated access to Willow Canyon Staging Area.
- CGA November 9, 2022 -Agenda item: Habitat Sustainability and LCWP Trail Map review. Further discussion of trails within the Woods End section of LCWP.
- CGA January 11, 2023 - Habitat Sustainability and LCWP Trail Map review. More information about trails not included in the 1998 documents: Viewed illustrations of Woods End Trail, Ridge Top, Gravel and Edison trails and other trails in the Dilley section of LCWP. Complex ownership - Cities of Laguna Beach, Laguna Woods; Southern California Edison, Laguna Beach County Water District. All trails are managed by OC Parks and under the NCCP guidelines.
- CGA March 8, 2023 - Habitat Sustainability and LCWP Trail Map review for Field Trip. Approved Woods End Field trip for the May 10, 2023 CGA meeting.
- CGA May 10, 2023 -Woods End Field Trip -Stops included:
 1. Woods End Public Access
 2. Top of Woods End Trail at Ridgetop Road
 3. Top of buried Reservoir
 4. Barbara's Lake Shoreline
 5. Old Laguna Canyon Road Alignment
- CGA July 12, 2023 - Habitat Sustainability and LCWP Trail Map review. Review of Field Trip. Presentation of other trails not included in the GDP and RMP documents: Old Emerald Falls- new location, Morro sliver, extended Bommer Ridge connection from Dartmoor to Emerald Canyon, Mary's Trail, area east of Laguna Canyon Road off Fire Road.

ADDENDUM should include:

GDP/RMP Map Updates:

- Updated GDP map should indicate the new Laguna Canyon Road realignment instead of the old alignment.
- Old Emerald Falls- relocate start of trail from bottom of Emerald Canyon to middle of Emerald Canyon (old BVD Trail)
- Add Woods End Parcel and trails
- Add SCE parcel in Dilley Preserve and trails (Ridgetop and Blackjack and top of Barbara's Lake Trail on SCE parcel)
- Addition of Parcel 5 (from Barbara's Lake to COI boundary). I recommend keeping it a managed access area.
- Add Morro Sliver- Bommer Ridge to gate 9 (Ridge Park)
- Add Lizard Trail
- Add east side of Laguna Canyon Rd. that is legally in Laguna Coast WP
- Add Mary's Trail
- Move staging area on maps from Laurel Canyon to Willow Canyon
- Officially transfer park property on east side of Laguna Canyon Road from Laguna Coast Wilderness Park to Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park
- Update trails (remove/realign) in Los Trances. That area does not have public access except for the connector paved fire road between the upper and lower Newport Coast developments. Remove most of the other trails indicated on the GDP map and maintain it as a managed access area since this a much-needed refuge for wildlife to escape the growing human pressure at both CCSP and LCWP.

LCWP Historical Updates:

- LCWP acreage
- History of preservation for the remaining Laguna Canyon parcels.
- Ownership- State of California, County of Orange, Cities of Laguna Beach and Laguna Woods
- Revise Land Ownership map, Figure 2A in GDP as part of the Addendum
- Part of 22,000 coastal wilderness parks - state, county and cities - Newport Beach, Laguna Beach, Irvine and Laguna Woods
- Update RMP with latest Fire Management Plan
- Update GDP & RMP with latest Biological Resources
- Nix Nature Center- development history, interpretative exhibits, staff resources
- Willow Canyon Staging Area - resources
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