



ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE PARK DISTRICT

Third to last meeting planned - District interested in hearing specific recommendations that staff should bring forward, ideas for process improvements or anything else - please share with Brian, Devan, and/or Sean. The District does pay attention to all input, and is developing a summary. Have received many suggestions about specific parks (e.g., Briones) and considering how to implement solutions.

DISABILITY COMMUNITY'S PERSPECTIVES

PRESENTATION: Lori Gray and Bonnie Lewkowitz, BORP

Disability is a big term, can't cover the full spectrum. Focusing on our expertise: physical and visual disabilities.

Bonnie: wheelchair user with spinal disability. Continued to use trails, have seen great improvement in the last many years but still work to do. Limited from going to back country, spontaneous choices re using trails. Have visited over 200 trails, manages a website of accessible trails for the BORP website which includes many East Bay parks. Professionally, have worked with Land Trust Alliance to create a soon-to-be-published best practices guide for land managers on accommodating people with disabilities - a free resource which she'll share when available.

Lori: has had disabilities all her life. She is totally blind, uses a wheelchair, is asthmatic, epileptic, and deals with chronic pain. Adventures and Outings Program Manager at BORP, brings people into the parks regularly. BORP a non-profit fostering independence through recreation. Her love of nature has prevailed throughout her life. Is healthiest and safest in the outdoors due to her disabilities.

Bonnie: normally asks people to raise their hands if they identify as having a disability - usually 3/4 of the room raises their hands. Per 2010 census, over 19% of non-institutionalized, 18 and older population identifies as having a serious disability. Disability is non-discriminating.

Accessibility is continually improving.

No stats about park use by those with disabilities - they are overlooked. Rarely has heard mention of the disabled in discussions of equity in parks. Forgotten majority.

ADA: civil rights law that prohibits discrimination about people with disabilities (left out of civil rights act). Inclusion doesn't mean paving nature. Includes 5 Titles, impacts the parks.

Common Barriers to Hiking: lack of physical access (trails, bathrooms, parking), lack of maintenance of accessible features (e.g. broken gate, couldn't enter - District has been very responsive to reports)

Information barrier - no: accessibility info / info in alternative formats / signage - hard to judge if a park or trail will meet their accessibility needs. May find information about a trail having braille or large-print audio information on website - info line at least includes names of parks. That's how Lori starts to figure out where to go. Can only use computer on limited basis; depends on audio. As for signage, no braille signs at trailheads and elsewhere in the parks - must use guesswork as to location. Braille signage would make a difference, reward great effort to get to parks in first place. Also no one to call to get info.

Lack of variety of trail experiences. Most offered are short loop trails but disabled want varied experiences, hard to get info.

Transportation - not included in report to Board of East Bay Parks on barriers. Transit cut back, many don't drive, and paratransit is unreliable.

Paratransit requires a park address - often hard to find, even if found may be a long way from trail, hard to get to trail and then find way back to pickup spot in a timely manner. Paratransit may not even go to certain parks at times when it's limited.

DISABILITY COMMUNITY'S PERSPECTIVES

PRESENTATION: Lori Gray and Bonnie Lewkowitz, BORP continued

Equipment breakdown: e.g., losing a tire on trail, needing to get assistance by calling a friend and flagging down a ranger. Batteries last 5-7 miles; charging stations would be helpful.

More barriers: need for a companion / personal care attendant; weather; historical exclusion; no staff to identify with; previous bad experiences make many disabled persons reluctant to return; and issues with virtual programming as well.

Most complaints about infrastructure but there are also potential user conflicts:

- Parking - illegal use of disabled placards, no enforcement; uncontrolled dog behavior - understand it's important to be able to go out with your dog, but uncontrolled dogs can cause issues with guide dogs. Even if dogs are just approaching to be friendly, can't discern that. can't always have someone spotting for dogs.

- Speeding cyclists a problem.

- Lack of trail etiquette education: guide dog trained to be on left of handler, can be a challenge when all must move to right to make way for cyclist; helps if cyclists use bell or other warning signal. Also, many people lack experience around horses. Also, guide dogs or a person's white cane can be disturbing to the horse. Hikers must know to stop, step to side as much as possible and let the horse pass

Common mis-perceptions re accessible trails: paved or asphalt, flat, not too strenuous, disabled will always be with someone, blind person needs a guide wire to go solo, disabled prefer short distance hikes. All, including disabled, are interested in a varied experience, and disabled want the same experience everyone has - experiencing all nature around you.

Need standardized names for accessible trails. On EBRPD website, can find information by clicking on "Trail Access Information." Useful although some information can be confusing and hard to interpret, many don't know what terms mean. E.g., may state that there is an obstacle on trail but don't identify where it is located - which might make a difference in choice to visit that trail.

Key Access Features that disabled need to know about: accessible parking (with striping to designate spaces and leave room for ramp), restroom, length/width/slope of trail; surface; shade; benches; water for self and service animals - need to know, is there a place to refill?

Defining Access: advise that, rather than just calling a trail "accessible," people describe the accessible features so that individual can decide for themselves if it's accessible to them. If you don't know, don't guess.

Technology for disabled is improving, seeing new high-tech equipment in parks, some very expensive. Some parks loaning out advanced equipment. As technology changes, so do our options.

Other Power Driven Mobility Device (OPDMD) - allowed under the ADA, must be determined if it's really safe on trails but can't question whether someone is disabled

Takeaways: Disabled people want to experience parks and trails for all the same reasons as everyone else; accessibility needs vary from person to person; think inclusive design when building new trails

As technology changes, so does the ability to access trails; (fill in)

Contact: bonnie@borp.org, lori@borp.org

P.S. from Bonnie: I just looked at my notes and forgot to mention the of the 77+ parks in EBP there are only 25 of the trail profiles I gave an example of. There is room for improvement there.

DISABILITY COMMUNITY'S PERSPECTIVES continued

GROUP COMMENTS

Comments re. Presentation

Many trail users seem unaware that they need to be respectful of hikers who are autistic, hard of hearing, or visually impaired.

BORP is AWESOME! A profoundly-disabled young woman we know benefits from their high-quality outdoor recreation programs. This is such a relief to her family members, who always seek to enrich her life experiences

Seems like ParaTransit needs a list of manufactured/GPS "addresses" supplied by the park district so that disabled hikers can be transported to the correct trailhead location.

Google has an initiative called google Plus Codes: <https://maps.google.com/pluscodes/>. They make addresses that are google-able. District:

Great suggestions, I will share with our GIS team

Some (greenish) horses do react to wheelchairs. Wheelchair users should speak, saying "Good Horse!" In a friendly tone (even if the horse is acting out).

TWHA would love to work with BORP or others on disabled-equestrian cooperation.

@Bonnie - Thank you for bringing your experience at Middle Harbor Shoreline Park to my attention. MHSP is maintained by the Port of Oakland.

Please contact Ramon Dixon, MHSP Manager, rdixon@portoakland.com regarding your experience. You can let Ramona know that the Multicultural Advisory Committee referred you.

Maybe we could at least have small program where volunteers go to check out parks periodically for accessibility, and call the park if there is a problem- like to have a checklist and check the gates and bathroom doors etc for accessibility periodically.

It is improbable that a horse would be scared of a calm guide dog, but unfamiliar objects like baby strollers do scare some horses.

District: From Ordinance 38 - "a dog is considered under control when the owner or handler is aware of its conduct and when it returns to the owner or handler when called. The owner or handler may not be aware of the animal's conduct when it is out of sight.

Dogs are presumed to not be under control when:

- 1) They threaten, harass, chase or harm other animals or wildlife. This does not include play chase with other dogs.
- 2) They display threatening behavior.
- 3) They physically harm people directly or indirectly by their actions.
- 4) They run at large in leash-required areas or enter dog-prohibited areas.
- 5) They touch or jump on other park users who have not invited or engaged in interaction with the dog.
- 6) They are not within sight of the owner or handler (added 4/12).

Bonnie - what is your accessible trails website? The Ridge Trail would love to link to it on our website! Response: BORP accessible trail website: <http://www.accessnca.org>

DISABILITY COMMUNITY'S PERSPECTIVES continued

Reactions: Excellent presentation! Enlightening and educational. Eye-opening for me. Thank you.

District: please speak quickly about your experience working with Park District. What would be more helpful to ensure these considerations are part of design and management? BORP: perhaps an advisory committee to be consulted when designing new parks / trails / other features (e.g., picnic table that couldn't be used - Caltrans design, modifications were made). Best to catch these things before they go into place, advisory committee reviewing design plans would be helpful in increasing access. ADA is lowest standard, can go beyond and above it. May provide ideas you haven't thought about. Another example: can roll up to door at Botanical Gardens but door is too heavy for one person to move. Recreation Department, naturalists have been most helpful, have participated in their trainings and done sensitivity and awareness trainings throughout parks.

Have anyone reached out to BORP re. North Point Isabel? Not really a park design project, want to ensure accessible trail and features - would like to involve BORP. Remember, also must allow for disabled employees.

District re: picnic table at Sutter. Manufacturer claims it is accessible, but it doesn't meet all requirements - this is common. This one generally met all requirements but not East Bay's requirements for eating and food prep. Working now with another manufacturer to get common-fabricated benches. Amazing amount of complex detail goes into ADA bench design - exploring what's possible. Will also talk to designer about Point Isabel project. BORP: do you get to see finished benches? District: that particular picnic table didn't come through department, so not sure what happened. BORP: must design to broadest audience possible; can't always meet everyone's needs.

Question for BORP: FWHA would love to find ways orgs could help each other. Desensitization sessions with horses? Will be in contact.

Hiking with autistic youth: a different paradigm. For example, on trails heavily used by bikers - autistics may be very focused on nature and not discern a bike approaching. This is an education / attitude issue - how to approach it? Must be discussed. One reason why wider trails are better than narrower.

BORP would love to work with everyone to help all enjoy all aspects of parks. Conversation doesn't end here.

Reminder: identifying things for consideration as solutions for new trail engineering. Also, enforcement of standards necessary.

Advisory committee - Bonnie IS an advisory committee! Hope you're involved with Roddy Ranch. (property near Black Diamond Mines, the old golf course.)

Thank goodness we have the expertise of people like Bonnie, Lori, and 4-Wheel Bob Coomber to advise the park district!

DOG-OWNERS' PERSPECTIVES

PARK DISTRICT FRAMING (Public Safety):

District allows dogs off leash in certain situations but not on paved trails. Six-foot leashes that don't go across trails. Areas with leash requirements enforced. Other requirements for off-leash: dogs under voice control / control of owners. District ensures that there are areas appropriate for dogs and access. There is a process and rules for commercial dog walkers - more restrictive rules, maximum of six dogs. Info listed on website. District meets with commercial walkers on a regular basis to refresh them on the rules, educate and ensure compliance. Question re six-foot rule: discussion about retractable leashes. Should review it - that could easily stretch across a wheelchair. District: also, those leashes can be difficult to see, especially in dusk or early dawn. Are monitoring conversation on social media.

Link to Dog information on EBRPD's website: <https://www.ebparks.org/activities/dogs/default.htm>

Comments re. Park District Framing:

District: Dog Rules are specified in section 801 of Ordinance 38 (Page 22) (Page 31-page count in .pdf)
Denial is the first step

PRESENTATION: Mary Barnsdale, PIDO and ALDOG; Kathy Roth, Share Our Trails; Emily Scholz, Valley Humane Society

Mary: Dog walking advocates collaborate well with EBRPD; community engagement and education; cleanup; meetings; document on dog walking in parks with constructive suggestions on improving experience.

Dog walking advocates very committed to training and education, provide annual education programs in parks. Brainstorming ways to make park user experience better. One result: Be a Pup Pro campaign, very successful at EB parks.

Dog advocates care about the environment, not just dog-walkers. Examples: dog walkers brought EBRPD first big beach microplastics cleanup with 110 volunteers at Albany Beach, use of static pulse screens which microplastic stick to. Just an example of how we can all work together by getting all on same page.

The mission: a culture that encourages good trail manners and responsibility (social and environmental), even better compliance and tolerance and understanding among all user groups - complements the TUWG!

Definitions and Distinctions: data showing damage from off-leash dogs is actually due to feral dogs (wild, live in packs) and free-roaming, unsupervised dogs - none of either in EBRPD. We do have off-leash dogs who are companion animals in the parks with their humans, on trails, for 60-90 minutes at a time. Some occasional problems with them but overall working well.

Why is Dog Walking in Parks Important? 1) Low barrier to entry - often how people come to parks; 2) open to all; 3) physical and mental health benefits; 4) it's what many parks users want to do - not constructive to suggest that people simply come without dogs.

Dog walking advocates prefer trails - going off-trail dangerous to dogs as well! We want a safe, fulfilling, restorative time in nature not too far from home, like everyone else.

We believe trails are a good thing: 99% of dogs stay on trails, per studies. Good for wildlife and habitat - they pull back from trails. Want to channel park users together for less crowding, more access and do what's good - build more trails.

DOG-OWNERS' PERSPECTIVES

PRESENTATION: Mary Barnsdale, PIDO and ALDOG; Kathy Roth, Share Our Trails; Emily Scholz, Valley Humane Society continued

Kathy: Dog walking and recreation in the EBRPD - would like to continue doing so. Advocate for dog-walking as recreation and exercise, important for physical and mental health, but also care deeply about the environment and restoration, involved in projects re invasive plants, etc. Showed map of EBRPD land use in context of other open space in East Bay, then added progressive historical depiction of parkland added. Credit to those who had foresight to preserve lands. Shows all EBRPD lands; lands in land bank; water district; state parks; Walnut Creek Open Space, Save Mount Diablo, John Muir Land Trust. Reviewed various lands in terms of their features and potential for allowing dogs. With all these acres, allowing dogs in part of it should be acceptable.

Map with parks, land in land banks, other open spaces. Color-coded to show whether dogs are allowed: off-leash, on-leash, no dogs, limited on-leash trail in otherwise no-dog area. Dogs not allowed on trails in state parks. EBRPD are open to dogs in undeveloped areas, undecided re. landbanks, much EBMUD and Walnut Creek, John Muir open space where dogs are allowed. SF Water District's attitude is "don't even think about it." For interest: unspoiled land for sale at headwater of Alameda Creek, unclear what's happening with it. Much activity trying to protect Empire Mines/San Creek area. Hoping Roddy Ranch will be open to dogs (exclusive of vernal pools)

Much open space with dogs allowed, much room for dogs, don't think they're the threat.

Acreage of protected space in Alameda and Contra Costa: EBRPD: 122,024 acres, other open space 113,875.

List of where dogs are not allowed in EBRPD or where they are allowed only on leash.

New Acquisitions / Landbank: almost all new acquisitions subsequent to habitat conservation plan. HCP covenant very strict per recreation; subordinate to biological goals. Limit areas and cover how to keep neighbors out, maintain fences, etc. Concerned about how dogs will be welcomed in new parks. Have no argument with features such as vernal pools where dogs don't belong. Only sizable areas that could allow off-leash dogs is area along Palomares Road.

Would like to see: dog policies in Ordinance 38 continued in existing parks and any landbank areas not covered by HCP or other conservation (dogs off-leash allowed when in control of owners); areas covered by HCP allow dogs on-leash during daylight except sensitive areas; that a recreation ombudsman or other rep be involved in the planning process at an early stage so that recreational interests are represented.

Emily: Final wrap-up - estimates that there are many people in parks walking dogs and even cats! 44% of all households in the US have a dog, and 35% a cat. Close to one in five households acquired a dog or cat since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.

DOG-OWNERS' PERSPECTIVES continued

Comments:

That is amazing! (microplastics cleanup)

"Rancho Pinole" = 1,185-acre Fernandez Ranch, owned and operated by John Muir Land Trust, where dogs are allowed off leash, under voice control

Great maps, Kathy! Very impressive effort to compile all this information

Here are the sections that dogs are allowed on the Ridge Trail: <https://ridgetrail.org/dogs-on-trail/>

It's an overview of open space that I think many of us haven't seen before

Roddy Ranch golf course restoration and recreation planning is ongoing. There are no vernal pools in the former golf course, there are some restored in adjacent Horse Valley, but the public is restricted there. Please join the planning process if interested: <https://www.ebparks.org/about/planning/roddyranch/>

So Cute!!

Thanks for presentations. Would like to second suggestion of recreational ombudsman in planning process.

Have solutions been discovered for dog poo baggies left on trail? Cans on trails would help. Dog owners have been working on education - also use shame. Example of commercial dog owner who walks around with larger bags to collect them. Suggestion that should be more trash cans near trailheads.

Be a Pup Pro is a big part of education. Not just bagging, but removing bags (even if biodegradable!) There isn't a "poop fairy." If seen by park officers, will be addressed. Have heard justifications of why it's done, but it may negatively impact others' experiences.

Does your group do work to educate new owners who adopt a dog? Response: has been discussion of having a list of rules, park district doggie bags, etc. for new owners. Constantly educating people - would be very helpful to have education package.

Apart from Point Isabel and professional walkers, dog owners not really organized - must reach them one-by-one.

District: rules about controlling dogs are very clear. Have heard about conflict between equestrians and dog owners. Suggestions for District?

Mary: signs re. who gives way to whom are hopeless - need more clear instruction. Would like to do more "Pups and Ponies" sessions to get dogs more used to horses and vice-versa.

Mary's email: marybarnsdale@att.net.

John Muir Land Trust: Dogs chasing cattle is our greatest challenge - not acceptable. Also owners apparently training dogs to be vicious and letting them offleash to attack cattle. It's the exception, on margin but all dogs have that instinct, so something to be aware of - owners should recognize the issue. District: cattle used as fire prevention measure. Two years ago Board changed ordinance 38 - dogs can't be offleash in proximity of grazing animals (also use sheep and goats).

ASPCA in Oakland settled a suit with a horse owner who had been attacked by an adopted dog by agreeing to train dogs around horse's before adoption. Not sure how much follow through there has been over the last 10 years since then. Mary: will follow up.

Have participated in past with Partners on the Trail Dog and Horse Desensitization Program, once a month. Participants will not be the problem people. Immense range of education among dog owners - only extreme bad actors are problematic. In more urban parks, dogs trained to be aggressive are a problem, especially with off-leash dogs where the pack mentality comes into play. Horses been badly injured. Serious problems with off-leash dogs are rare - unofficial survey showed just as many issues with off-leash dogs as with cyclists but most commentary received was re. issues with cyclists, but not so much on dogs. Likely that's because the issues are primarily caused by cluelessness, lack of control or negligence, not deliberate bad behavior. Extreme behavior and habitat considerations are what is driving limits to off-leash in parks.