

June 21, 2005

To: Pete Siemens  
Chair, Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan  
Board of Directors Representative, Ward 1  
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
From: Mountain residents in the 95033 region  
Re: Questions related to the SA/BCR Master Plan

Dear Pete,

Thanks again for agreeing to meet with our local residents' community group for a constructive dialog about the Sierra Azul + Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan. We recently polled our group for questions and concerns we'd like to ask you to address at our meeting on June 29th. Many people responded, which is perhaps not surprising. Because these preserves are adjacent to or within a short walking distance of many of our own back yards, we are deeply interested in the future of these lands.

There is a great opportunity for collaboration and bridge-building between the District and local residents at this meeting. Members of our group have expressed a willingness to help the District create and implement the master plan, as well as to volunteer for ongoing trail creation and maintenance, habitat restoration, trail patrol to assist the rangers, and docent and interpretive functions related to natural science and our rich local history. We are encouraged by the District's expressed interest in community involvement, as well as some of the initial outreach steps taken by the District such as the first public workshop and tours. Still, you'll see that we do have some valid questions and concerns. This is an opportunity to create a climate of open communication, mutual respect and trust between the District and the community.

We don't expect a formal, written response to each of these questions; our desire is to have an informal give and take with you about these issues. Here are our specific questions and concerns:

GENERAL:

1. One of the District's stated goals of this planning effort is to ensure that the Master Plan will "use a collaborative, community-based planning approach." With this in mind,
  - a. What is the process for developing/approving the master plan?
  - b. Besides providing our initial input to guide the plan, what other active, ongoing role can our community play in the master plan decision-making process?
2. From the time that the master plan is approved, what is the approximate overall timeframe for opening the new preserve trails and parking/staging areas to the public? What consideration is being given to a phased-opening plan, based upon readiness?
3. Related to #2, in the interim period before the master plan is approved and implemented, is any consideration being given to expanding the areas covered by the current Bear Creek Redwoods permit process, or creating a permit process for any of the not-yet-open areas in Sierra Azul (such as Rancho de Guadalupe)?
4. Have any new parcels been added to the Preserves beyond those published in the current Master Plan map?
5. How do trails get named?

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION:

6. When will the District publish the results of the flora and fauna surveys conducted in the Preserves? We have professional and amateur ecologists in our group who would like to review these.
7. What is the District's general policy for managing public access to sensitive resource areas, such as areas containing endangered species or archeological artifacts? When will the District share the location of these areas with the community, so that we can participate as a trusted partner in shaping the master plan accordingly?

ACCESS AND EASEMENTS:

8. What are the District's concerns, if any, regarding offering access to the Preserves from Summit Road and Highland road?
9. What access points into Bear Creek Redwoods are being considered from Summit Road?
10. What is the status of the parcel next to the Christmas Tree Farm on Summit Road (APN 54450002)?
11. What is the status of the land labeled "Moody Gulch County Park" on the master plan map? I.e., who owns it currently, is it expected to become part of Bear Creek Redwoods, and are access and trail policies within this land being considered as part of the master plan? Is walk-in (or ride-in) access being considered for residents of Redwood Estates?
12. Can the access problems to Mt. Umunhum be solved?
13. What is the status of current easements through private parcels within the Sierra Azul Preserve?
14. What is the current legal/political status of the former military base on the summit of Mt Umunhum?
15. What is the District's relationship with San Jose Water Company with respect to access easements through their land?
16. Will San Jose Water Company allow access to Mt. Umunhum from Wrights Station?
17. Has the District taken a public position on AB 672, which would require public reservoir and watershed managers to consider recreation and trail opportunities on their land? The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council favors this bill, along with many other Bay Area groups. Although it appears not to affect private water companies such as SJWC, it would seem to create a climate of more receptivity to public access to watershed areas. This might encourage San Jose Water Company to be more co-operative with the District and the public.
18. What are the District's policies with respect to parking areas which require crossing a road to reach a preserve trailhead? For example, would it be possible to access the Bear Creek Redwoods western area trails from a potential parking area at the Christmas Tree Farm?

MULTI-USE TRAIL POLICY: HIKERS, BIKERS, EQUESTRIANS AND DOGS

19. As a multi-user group committed to responsible, shared access to the preserves, we do want to encourage the District to consider multi-use trails whenever and wherever reasonable. A number of years ago, one of our members served on an advisory board for the District which studied the safety issues involved with multi-use trails. Our questions are: does the District have any formal guidelines or policies with respect to multi-use trails? For example, restrictions based on trail width and/or incline, visibility along the trail corridor, general terrain considerations, established trail use, etc? Does the District have any safety-related data or accident statistics which can help guide policy? Where visibility is limited, is it possible to create by-passes for horses and hikers?

BEAR CREEK STABLES AND EQUESTRIAN USE:

20. What concerns does the District have about preserving the historic Bear Creek Stables as an active, ongoing horse-boarding facility? What potential public benefits can the District envision if it is allowed to continue operating? What changes would the District like to see?
21. Is the District receptive to an open dialog with our community (which includes the stables owners and some of the boarders) about the Bear Creek Stables?
22. Is equestrian trail usage considered low-intensity? Are the stables themselves considered low-intensity? If not, why not?

DOGS:

23. What are the District's concerns, if any, about allowing some form of dog access to Bear Creek Redwoods? What are the criteria the District uses to allow or disallow dog access to open space preserves? (We assume that dog access to BCR OSP would be governed by the current dog access policies and restrictions used by the District's other OSPs.)

MOUNTAIN HISTORY CENTER:

24. To what extent has the District considered including a local mountain history center in the master plan? Would such an interpretive center be considered consistent with the mission of the District? What issues/concerns would the District have about creating or managing a mountain history center?

ALMA COLLEGE FACILITY:

25. What types of usage are under consideration for the former Alma College buildings? Are any of the buildings considered salvageable?

TIMBER HARVEST OPERATIONS:

26. Are all commercial logging operations within the Preserves now completed? Are all legally-approved Timber Harvest Plans within the Preserves now expired? Are there any commercial logging threats within the vicinity of the Preserves which should be of concern to the public?

PRESERVE SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT:

27. How does the District plan to handle the potential need for additional rangers, management and local police?

DISTRICT OUTREACH TO THE COMMUNITY:

28. Can the District improve outreach and education through more speakers at community organizations, and through more public meetings?
29. Why wasn't the first public workshop advertised or announced in the San Jose Mercury News and other local daily newspapers?

HOW CAN WE HELP?

30. We recognize that premature opening of trails and other areas not yet planned is ill-advised. With that said, what can we do to help the District open more public access to the preserves in a responsible, timely fashion?
31. In general, what can we do as members of the community to help the District plan, create and maintain these Preserves?

32. Is the District open to sharing master plan GIS data with our group (for example, data for existing trails), in order to facilitate our collaboration in the planning process? If not, why not? Community-based planning efforts around the world are increasingly relying on collaborative use of GIS data; see the recent book, "Community Participation and Geographic Information Systems". [Note: we have the same GIS software that the District uses, and will agree to restrictions confining use of the data to the public planning process.]
33. One of the District's rangers told us during the Mt. Umunhum tour that she was glad to see such local interest in the preserves, because we care so much about the land, and can help be the "eyes and ears" for the District. In that regard, what enforcement authority do volunteer docents have when patrolling trails on behalf of the District?
34. Can we, as the public, help the District lobby for federal and/or state resources to implement the clean-up of Mt. Umunhum? How can we help?

Pete, thanks again, in advance, for taking the time to meet with us, engage in a Q&A, and hear our community's draft proposal to the District about the future of these lands. We expect that it will be a fruitful discussion for all concerned.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Moore,

On behalf of the mountain residents of 95033