

Gonzales Canyon Enhancement Planning (CEP)

DRAFT Notes for Stakeholder Workshop #3

January 12, 2015, Carmel Valley Library, 10:00am to Noon



Stakeholder Attendees

SD Canyonlands Staff

Freddy Arthur, Field Supervisor

Dave George, GIS/Ecologist

Eric Bowlby, Executive Director

Gonzales Canyon Stakeholders

Ed Christensen, City Open Space Div., Senior Ranger

Laura Ball, Project Officer II, City Open Space Division

Jess Norton, Conservation Manager, SD River Valley Conservancy

Mike Kelly, Conservation Chair for Friends of Peñasquitos Canyon

Shawna Andersen, Principal Planner for the San Dieguito River Park

Andra Davis, Neighbor, Gonzales Canyon Friends Group member (7 years)

Michelle Paulus, Carmel Valley Resident, Equestrian Community Rep., SD Canyonlands Patron

Rod Simmons, SD Mountain Bike Association -Black Mountain Open Space

Julie Sherlock, Local Girl Scout Troop, Gonzales Canyon Friend, Gonzales Neighbor

Bhurana Ramanathan, Girl Scout Mom, Gonzales Neighbor

1) Self introductions, announcements and brief statement on prior workshops.

Announcement: San Dieguito Explorers is still being planned and will be starting in March with High Tech High.

Eric began with Canyon Enhancement Planning (CEP) overview, Gonzales CEP progress so far. First workshop was a CEP orientation, a review of the new existing conditions maps and a photo report on the unique conditions, issues, opportunities and constraints in Gonzales Canyon. Second workshop was a field visit from Gonzales Canyon to the Coast to Crest Trail (CTC) looking at alternatives to connect the canyon to the CTC near El Camino Real (ECR).

Introductions:

Mike Kelly- Friends of Peñasquitos Canyon, FPC have developed a management/restoration plan that includes Gonzales Canyon and they are funded. Melanie Johnson (Rock Environmental), is the project consultant and conducting biological surveys. Mike handles invasive plant species contracts at Gonzales and on Pardee Parcels for the River Park, also restoration plantings.

Shawna Anderson- SDRP – restoration projects with SANDAG, connecting SDRP, Coast To Crest Trail (CTC)

Jess Norton-SDRVC- managing restoration projects

Michelle Paulus- Mentioned that the equestrian community loves using the trails and could be a source of funds.

Rod Simmons- SD Mountain Biking -Black Mountain Open Space, Trail Building CAC; Rancho Peñasquitos Planning Board etc.

Julie Sherlock- Neighbor, Girl Scout leader, Girl Scouts support SDCL outreach efforts at Gonzales Canyon as well as stewardship projects, Girls interested in earning their Silver Badges doing canyon projects.

Andra Davis-Gonzales neighbor, Friend of Gonzales Canyon for 7 - 8 years.

Bhurana Ramanthan - Scout mom, Carmel Valley neighbor

2) Review current maps and discuss Gonzales Canyon Coast to Crest Trail (CTC) connections.

Shawna led discussion: Coast to Crest Trail (CTC) currently ends at El Camino Real (ECR) but is planned to continue east under the new El Camino Real bridge (when constructed by City) and along Polo Fields. JPA is also conducting a feasibility study to extend the trail from Polo Fields to San Dieguito Road. Six month study will examine essential river crossing. JPA has also been examining potential trail routes to link Gonzales Canyon trail system to the Coast to Crest Trail .

- **Old El Camino Real (OECR)**- Gonzales trail ends here. Equestrian stables exist in the area.. New Rancho La Bella 10-unit residential development has a planned trail in place going around it, and an extension is planned to the north to ECR and to link to the new bridge.
- **New El Camino Real Bridge** – A new bridge project by the City would have four lanes for traffic plus a bike lane and a sidewalk. There is no separate bike/equestrian path included in the design plans, although it is possible to add a cantilevered structure on the new bridge later to separate trail user groups from traffic, (which is supported/requested by the community). A cantilevered trail is not currently funded. New bridge would be higher to allow for higher flood flows (the 100 year flood).

The stakeholders discussed the Pros and Cons of the CTC trail connection alternatives.

Alternative A : Asking for a cantilever (or dedicated/separated path) on west side of new bridge with a path down to the planned CTC undercrossing.

Pros: Cantilever will add safety and comfort for two user groups crossing the bridge, (Ped./Mountain Bike uses). JPA would also want the cantilever to accommodate horses.

- Basic project is being planned and has funding. It includes the design for the addition of a cantilever in the future if/when funding is procured.
- No other river crossing exists in the area, so ECR bridge would provide that crossing. A stand-alone trail bridge would be difficult if not impossible to get approved by the agencies.
- **Cons:** Despite a cantilever, many equestrians may not be comfortable using it. In addition to unpredictable traffic/noises, the height can disturb some horses. "Trail horses" may be better suited for trails that include bridges, but near Gonzales Canyon, the vast majority of the equestrian community uses hunter/jumper horses and these equestrians also love to use the trails. Mike mentioned a horse fatality on a bridge in Peñasquitos Canyon.
 - Using the existing sidewalk/pathway immediately adjacent to the ECR, and crossing ECR at the intersection/signal at San Dieguito Road would still be required.
 - A cantilever/separation for trail users is not funded.
- **Alternative B:** Coming north out of Gonzales Canyon toward ECR and heading east before crossing the river, **Alt. B** suggests using the earthen trail that is just below the existing sidewalk, and at least partially within an existing easement, through the Armenian Church and Lutheran Church properties.
 - **Pros:** In and of itself, using the existing earthen road, below the ECR sidewalk that leads up to the traffic signal, would improve the user experience until it came up and out of the open space and reached the intersection/signal and rejoined the existing sidewalk.

- **Cons:** Additional easement/agreement may be required. New segment to connect back up with existing sidewalk may need to be built.

There was a discussion about turning east at San Dieguito Rd. and crossing the road at a less busy location. Then the trail would continue east on the south side of the river and link to the potential new river crossing near the Polo Fields (if studies determine this crossing to be feasible).

- **Pros:** Alternative seeks to provide a safer equestrian user alternative, avoid crossing the 4-lane bridge at the busy intersections. Alternative would allow for crossing at a smaller, lower profile bridge further up-stream that would be dedicated to trail user groups.
- **Cons:** Problems related to crossing San Dieguito road and building a trail on the south side of the river include:
 - Fairbanks Ranch Golf course has expanded and may preclude trail opportunities on the south side of the river.
 - Polo Field trail is already approved on north side of river so a parallel trail on the south side is duplicative.
 - San Dieguito Road is very busy. An at grade crossing (further east) would not necessarily be safer.
 - Traffic engineers would very likely not support an additional at-grade crossing on San Dieguito Rd.

Alternative C: A new, lower bridge for trail users, beneath the new ECR bridge was suggested. Discussion:

- **Pros:** Alternative seeks to provide a safer and more pleasant trail experience, avoids the busy traffic on the new, 4-lane bridge.
 - Alternative would improve user safety and user experience.
- **Cons:** Engineering, and flooding of lower bridge were listed as issues. Unlikely it would be approved, it would be in floodway and would impact more wetlands. Costs would be prohibitive.
 - Alternative would still require crossing ECR at the San Dieguito Road intersection to access the new bridge.

Alternative D: Use old ECR bridge for trail users. It was suggested to reuse the old bridge for trail users. It was also suggested to take out the old bridge and replace it with a smaller trail bridge that would be closer to the ground, which would also serve equestrian users.

- **Pros:** Alternative would improve user safety and user experience.
 - Alternative would provide safer equestrian use than the new vehicular bridge due to lower height and no vehicles.
 - Michelle suggested that using the middle of the bridge for horses might also increase safety.
- **Cons:** Wildlife agencies may require that the old bridge be removed to make room for Clapper Rail habitat (endangered bird species, listed 1970). Mike Kelly stated , "this location has the largest Clapper Rail population in the state". Getting rid of the old bridge would make their habitat larger.
 - Keeping old bridge may conflict with City's ECR Bridge mitigation design that will expand the riparian area .
 - The San Dieguito River Valley Park Joint Powers Authority (JPA) was asked by the City several years ago if they would take ownership of the old bridge, but JPA decided to not accept ownership because of maintenance and liability . The bridge is under the 100 year flood levels.
 - Replacement with a lower bridge has all the same issues.

Alternative E: Use the wildlife underpass under ECR to connect to planned trail on east side of ECR.

- **Pros:** Users could avoid ECR traffic/noises and crossing at the light to connect to the bridge.
 - The experience and safety would be improved.
 - Armenian Church *may* provide a trail easement.
- **Cons:** It's mucky in the wildlife undercrossing and has sediment 15"-18" deep.
 - Even removal of the sediment may not provide enough headroom for some equestrians – all would have to dismount.
 - Conservation agencies consider it a wildlife corridor and City MSCP may not allow a trail or would require mitigation.
 - Armenian Church is planning to mitigate (restore habitat) on the land surrounding the south (east) side of the tunnel, (so a trail through this area would conflict).
 - The underpass serves as a culvert for drainage during storms. Trail needs to be higher.

3) Gonzales Canyon Trail improvement near Dog Park adjacent to Torrey Pines High parking lot.

Re-route trail so that it doesn't cut through dog park. Would need to cut existing fence and put in gates. There was consensus that this would add safety and improve experience.

There was consensus that we should keep it simple to avoid triggering permit requirements.

- Install new pedestrian gates on front and back.

4) Gonzales Canyon Connections to the south to existing bike paths, and south of the 56.

a. The group discussed the canyon trail up to Del Mar Heights (DMH) Rd., past the Cathedral Catholic High School and down through an easement at Seabreeze Farms eventually to bike paths near the 56.

Seabreeze has been gated off for at least 3 years. Laura will approach Seabreeze to discuss the City's easement for trail users through the property. The proposed trail is shown on the adopted Pardee Plan map as an "equestrian only" trail. Michelle mentioned the Wildlife corridor to the east (out of Gonzales Canyon to the east) is the only likely path for equestrians. It has a huge DMH Rd. underpass, and the underpass for the 56 freeway is big too. One can get all the way to Peñasquitos using that corridor. The "Big Steps" that lead to the "Seabreeze easement" are not useable by the equestrian community. It was suggested they are, steep and difficult for any user group. The tunnel under DMH Rd. for this trail is not accommodating for equestrians either.

Laura says that wildlife agencies will prefer that the wildlife corridor not be used as a people corridor. It is heavily used by all users, but cannot be promoted as an official trail.

b. SDG&E has a power line road south of Torrey Pines High School, in the center of the neighborhoods. It is quite steep and not a connection to the 56.

c. Bicyclists can perhaps bike to Carmel Country Rd. and use the parking at Clews Ranch Rd. There is another culvert at Carmel Valley Riparian Enhancement Project (CVREP). Bike lanes are supposed to connect the developments.

d. Mike mentioned that it cost between \$1 and \$3 million for a grade separated bridge or undercrossing. They have funding for a tunnel project under a two-lane road, dimension: 13' high x 21' wide 171' long. Peñasquitos has a trail under Black Mountain Road.

Other tunnels can be seen at Scripps Poway Freeway, Carmel Country Road, Del Mar Heights at Cathedral Catholic High School trail.

Rod says McGonigle Canyon trail is chain-linked off.

5) Stewardship and Gonzales Canyon Friends Group Developments

a. **There is a new Friends Group leader**, Pennie McLaughlin, and a new time for routine stewardship events, the third Sunday of each month from 1:00 - 3:00pm, meeting at the Sword Way Trailhead to Gonzales Canyon.

b. **Girls Scouts:** Proposed Silver badges project, planting native plants, and native plant identification and beautification project, targeting Sword Way entrance. Resources for signage, preferred materials, plants etc. are available from SDCL for the project. They may also want to help with the Dog Park trail realignment.

Closing Comments-Next Meeting Suggestions: Trail Visit to revisit the lights at ECR and connections to CTC. Must speak with traffic about bridge plans. Rod suggested sending out tunnel links so attendees can go look at the site on their own, then we should meet in the field to look at our CTC connections again.

Next meeting: Field Trip: TBD.