



Subject: Park Priorities for Sweetwater Planning Area

TO: Larry Duke - County Parks & Recreation District Park Manager Larry.Duke@sdcounty.ca.gov 858-966-1363
FROM: Sweetwater Community Planning Group
DATE: July 3, 2007

In response to your request for us to submit a list of suggested priorities for using Park Land Dedication Ordinance funds, the following priorities list has been compiled as a result of the July 3 Sweetwater Community Planning Group meeting, the June 14 Board Meeting of Bonita Valley Horsemen, and the June 21 meeting of the Sweetwater Community Planning Group Trails Sub-committee, which was publicly announced and open to the public – in accordance with the Brown Act.

PROPOSED PARK PRIORITIES

Rather than making “Sophie’s Choice” decisions... we have structured our proposed parks master plan in the spirit of an “L-Field” (the recently-discovered forces of intelligent energy fields that somehow guide the DNA of individual cells to form into a face, a hand, or a liver – to form a comprehensively integrated whole organism).

Frankly, we “want it all”, and we can be very flexible as to the timing and sequence – going with the flow of the restrictions and opportunities of grants and other funding sources as they become available.

We have found it useful organize our proposed projects into **7 themes**.

For full details and up to date status reports, you can visit:

BonitaTrails.org – for trails projects and trails maps

SR125.org – for park betterments projects associated with highway construction

Theme 1) Trail and Habitat Care

The people who care the most, and do the most to protect wild places, are the people who develop a personal bond with nature.

Trail care and habitat care are often performed by the same people.

In Bonita, we are blessed with a legion of trail care volunteers who patrol and protect our wilderness areas, generously volunteer Saturdays for trail care and erosion control projects, and are trained to identify and remove invasive species.

Our number one concern right now – for both trail care and habitat preservation – is **bamboo eradication**.

CalTrans replaced bamboo with willows in most of Sweetwater Park, but their contract for maintenance expires in 2007, and then responsibility will fall on County Parks to fend off habitat-destroying invasive plants.

We would like the County to convince CalTrans to clear the huge stand of bamboo on their land at the headwaters of Sweetwater Park – (near the Swap Meet). And then to obtain grant money to remove invasive species from the habitat-rich canyon in the eastern end of Sweetwater Regional Park – between the Swap Meet and the Bonita Golf Course.

By removing bamboo upstream – it will be far easier to maintain the downstream sections of Sweetwater Regional Park that have so recently been restored to a healthy native ecosystem.

Bamboo eradication requires at least 5 years of relentless attention, and will require a combined effort of grant money, County resources, and volunteers.

To increase the effectiveness of our volunteers, the County could **provide volunteer-enhancing resources** – such as: Regularly-scheduled probation labor for our monthly trail care events, trail care equipment (such as chipper, brush wacker, small tree puller...) trail care materials (such as decomposed granite, road base, dirt, culverts, erosion control diverters, fence poles, trail markers...), storage, and a mountain bike for Park Ranger mobility.

The single biggest thing the County could do to increase the effectiveness of our volunteers would be to **hire an additional Park Ranger**, whose full-time responsibilities have nothing to do with the campground, and everything to do with the care and maintenance of trails and habitat.

Theme 2) Wilderness Loop Trails

By far our most valuable trails are those that lead the trail user into unpopulated open spaces – immersing the trail user with a feeling of “truly getting away from things”, and bringing opportunities for reverent encounters with our area’s most unique and valued native plants and animals.

Proposed Wilderness Loop Trails include: the Sweetwater Reservoir Loop Trail, the Quarry Road Loop Trail, the short loop trails within and near Summit Park, and the Bonita Meadows habitat restoration area. All of these trail loops are on the eastern end of Bonita/Sunnyside, and many of them have segments traversing Chula Vista. (View & download maps at BonitaTrails.org)

As of July 2007, there is not a single complete wilderness loop trail.

Theme 3) North South Links

As of July, 2007, there is not one official trail or pathway that links the Sweetwater Park trails network (South of Bonita Road) to the Bonita Highlands and Chula Vista trail networks (North of Bonita Road).

There are 6 proposed North South Links:

- 1) Glen Abbey (from Bonita Road to Rice Canyon trail)
- 2) Otay Lakes Road pathway (from Vons to Allen School Road)
- 3) Acacia Avenue pathway (from fire station to Tim Street trail)
- 4) San Miguel Road pathway (from Conduit to Ames Ranch trail)
- 5) Proctor Valley Road pathway (from Jonel to San Miguel Ranch Road)
- 6) South Proctor Valley Road pathway (see description in Pathway Links below).

Theme 4) Pathway Links

The County divides responsibilities according to “Pathways” (trails alongside a vehicular road) and “Trails” (all other trails). As a rule, pathways cost more money, and take longer to approve and build.

From east to west, the proposed pathways within our planning group area are: (see maps at BonitaTrails.org)

- 1) South Proctor Valley Road pathway - in the undeveloped area near the toll road underpass - to connect the pathway segments on Proctor Valley Road built by the developers of San Miguel Ranch.
- 2) Proctor Valley Road pathway - from Jonel to San Miguel Ranch Road.
- 3) Central Avenue pathway – from Bonita Highlands trail to Ames Ranch trail.
- 4) San Miguel Road pathway – from Conduit Road to Ames Ranch trail.
- 5) Sweetwater Road pathway – from Quarry Road to the Bonita Golf Course.
- 6) Briarwood Road pathway – on the west side of the road - from Bonita Woods to Sweetwater Road.
- 7) Acacia Street pathway – from fire station to Tim Street trail.
- 8) Winnetka and Bram. There is currently only one property owner infringing on this pathway, but we would like to see it designated as an official County pathway – rather than relying on informal neighborhood enforcement.
- 9) Otay Lakes Road pathway – from Vons to Allen School Road. (This is in Chula Vista)
- 10) Connect Willow Street to the Northern Loop Trail (somehow, some way...)
- 11) Connect the Glen Abbey trail – with short pathway segments near the Jack In The Box at the corner of Willow and Bonita Road
- 12) Either Bonita Mesa Road or Equitation Lane – to connect Plaza Bonita to Alta Loma Drive
- 13) The Plaza Bonita bikeway (with a soft shoulder for unofficial equestrian use)

Theme 5) Northern Loop Trail

North of Sweetwater Road - there is a trail that wends its way between the back yards of hundreds of equestrian-zoned homes. For the little girls that ride those backyard horses, this Northern Loop Trail provides safe passage to the more enjoyable destination trails in Sweetwater Park and beyond.

Many segments of this Northern Loop Trail are officially dedicated and accepted trail easements. But some segments consist of Irrevocable Offers of Dedication that were (for lack of foresight) rejected by the County.

County legal staff has assured us that the County has longer than (the already expired) 25 years to accept these IOD's – but let's do it. Let's make them official.

Two years ago, a landslide blocked a segment of this trail (on Degen Road), and there seems to be no timeline for getting the trail repaired.

The eastern end of this Loop trail will soon consist of the recently-dedicated Grant House trail – which needs to connect to Degen through the Animal Shelter property. A home owner that has illegally graded County Animal Shelter property for his own private use has recently made this proposed trail much more difficult to construct.

The western end of this Loop trail empties out onto poorly-marked streets that get progressively busier the closer that a trail user gets to reconnect with the safe trail network at the corner of Willow and Sweetwater Road.

Frankly, there appears to be no easy solution for this western connection, and it is a low priority, but if there are ever plans to widen Willow, then a safe pathway to Valley Vista would be very helpful.

The biggest challenge to restoring the safety of the Northern Loop Trail will be to get a **safe pathway alongside Briarwood Road**.

The Northern Loop Trail has crumbled to a point that it is now rarely used. Action is needed soon to prevent all of those equestrian-zoned homes from being cut off from safe access to Bonita's trail network.

Theme 6) Western Gateway Links

The Western Gateway Staging Area (near the corner of Bonita Road and Plaza Bonita) currently connects only to a single front-and-back trail to Willow Street.

The top priority is to make official the tiny trail spur that connects the two horse ranches on the other side of Sweetwater River (which, like most southern California rivers, more resembles a creek).

And then to connect the many equestrian homes to this new trail spur, pathways might be considered for Alta Loma, Bonita Mesa, and/or Equitation Lane.

The new Plaza Bonita bikeway will soon connect with the bike trail alongside the north side of Highway 54 that leads all the way to the bay and beyond.

But the less busy unpaved trail on the south side of Highway 54, (which has always been favored by equestrians), has been rendered inaccessible for close to 10 years now – due to a homeless camp that has grown up on and around the river crossing trail that used to be regularly used by equestrians. We suggest that a win-win-win proposal for law enforcement, environmental agencies, and trail users would be to clean up the tons of trash and hazardous materials that currently pollute this environmentally-important habitat, and then re-open this historical trail – which could then be regularly patrolled by our Sweetwater Patrol volunteers – so that this recurring problem does not just resurface (as it has every time that a clean up has been attempted in the past – with no plan nor means for active park use).

Theme 7) Recreation Enhancement

Other than trails, most non-trails park improvements within our planning area have already been negotiated, funded, and are in the process of being designed and built – as part of the SR125 park betterments. These park betterments are itemized in the County Cooperative Agreement with CalTrans, and include a new community center, restrooms, picnic shelters, pavilion, par course, and water playground - all in Summit Park.

In addition to these already-funded betterments, some ideas that came up from the community include:

- **Equestrian Park on County land** – on the remnant park parcel on San Miguel Road – between the Little League fields and the Summit Park entrance. County Supervisor Greg Cox has envisioned a horse rental facility (right near the campground and most of our best trails) – that also serves as a boarding facility. As the last remaining large ranch-size parcels get sub-divided into small home lots, it might not be too long before this County-leased equestrian park might be one of the only remaining equestrian boarding facilities in the Bonita valley.
- **Round pen** at the Morrison Pond staging area.
- **Challenge park(s)** for equestrians and/or mountain bikes.

And under the heading of "Recreation Enhancement", we would like to ask the County to **reconsider plans for expanding the campground**. Many complaints have arisen about the campground's policy of renting campsites to long-term residents for months or even years. There is a concern that expanding the campground might prove disturbingly close to converting our park into subsidized low-income housing. We would like to open a dialog with the County about other possible uses of this park land. Or at a minimum, at least explore whether or not the proposed campground expansion would still "pencil out" if policies were put in place to rent only to bona fide short-visit campers.