



COMMITTEE FOR
GREEN FOOTHILLS



January 29, 2015

To: Sarah Young, Santa Clara Valley Water District

cc: Sue Tippets, Liang Lee, Norma Camacho, Brian Mendenhall

Re: Measure B Grants and Responsible Trail Placement

Overview

As human population in Santa Clara Valley has increased, greenways and natural habitats for wildlife have decreased. Desire for recreational access to these greenways and open spaces causes further stress on the diminishing quantity and quality of wildlife habitats. Numerous studies have shown negative impacts from the presence of humans on nearby riparian and upland habitats – species abundance, diversity, foraging and nesting opportunities, and predation patterns may all be adversely affected. As currently implemented, there are conflicting outcomes from the Water District's Priority D3 grant goals to provide "access to trails" and to "protect ecosystems." Inputs and partnerships from agencies and organizations can help the District achieve both goals.

Concern

The purpose of this letter is to express concern about the conflicting goals of improving watershed and riparian habitat while increasing trail access along creeks in the County. We are concerned with:

- Cumulative impacts to wildlife and wildlife movement, and
- Trails or other development encroaching on both sides of creeks, and
- Need to designate "no trail" habitat refugia along Santa Clara county creeks.

Measure B Safe Clean Water Program expresses,

"District policy is to protect, enhance and restore healthy Santa Clara County creeks, watersheds and baylands ecosystems;"

and also

"to engage in partnerships with the community to provide open spaces, trails and parks along Santa Clara County creeks and watersheds."

To accomplish both goals, priority D3 reads,

"2. Provide 7 grant cycles and additional partnerships for \$21 million that follow pre-established criteria related to the creation or restoration of wetlands, riparian habitat and favorable stream conditions for fisheries and wildlife, and providing new public access to trails."

Unfortunately, the [criteria](#) allow trails to be constructed along all creeks, with no restrictions for sensitive habitats. While we do not oppose providing access, the emphasis on providing trail connectivity has seriously degraded wildlife habitat connectivity and refugia along local creeks. Providing the public with access to creeks does not need to be widespread trail connectivity. For the health of the creeks and their aquatic and riparian habitats, some places are simply too sensitive to allow trails. Guidance for Trail Design near streams proposes,

"The design of an appropriate re-vegetation program shall fully compensate for the lost habitat and shall be designed by a qualified biologist. Riparian and wetland habitat will typically be mitigated at a 3:1 ratio for high quality habitat areas and at a lower ratio where lower habitat quality justifies a lower ratio "

There is no sensitive habitat in Santa Clara County that is off-limits, and that riparian disruption in our region, in our valley, can be compensated elsewhere.

Discussion & Conclusions

In the past decade, creek side trails were built in riparian corridors along almost every creek in the county. In each case, mitigation focused on impacts from the trail's physical presence, with no mitigation for the impacts from the disturbance the trail use has on the surrounding terrestrial wildlife. As environmental organizations that work in the valley, we are asking the District to delineate "no trail" zones in sensitive riparian habitats. In addition, we would like assessments to be publically available before construction of trails, as specified in the Guidance for Trail Design; "a biological resource assessment is required for trail routes near streams or trails."

The Safe Clean Water Program is about maintaining the health of our watersheds, for both trail users and wildlife. Measure B dollars should not be spent to build new trails that negatively affect riparian habitats. We look forward to working with the District to improved watersheds and achieve all goals specified by Measure B.

Sincerely,



Kit Gordon
Excom member, Sierra
Club, Loma Prieta Chapter



Alice Kaufman
Legislative Advocate, Committee
for Green Foothills



Michele Beasley
Regional Director, Greenbelt
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Eileen McLaughlin

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