

MARIPOSA COUNTY

Merced River Trail Community Working Group

MEETING MINUTES

DATE: March 27, 2024
TIME: 12:00 PM
LOCATION: Development Services Conference Room
5100 BULLION STREET, MARIPOSA, CA

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Harrison called the meeting to order at 12:30PM

Members Present: Michael Martin, Wendy Brown, Susie Clark, Jeff Jenkins
Ex-Oficio Members Present: Rosemarie Smallcombe
Members Absent: Bill King
Visitors: None

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER 20th 2023**
The minutes were passed by Brown, Clark, and Jenkins.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**
No public comment.

4. **UPDATE ON MERCED RIVER TRAIL**
 - a. **Site Visit with BLM and USFS** – Fassett shared that there was a site visit along the Forestra Road with Stanislaus National Forest representatives in October last year. About 10 SNF staff were present along with David Greenwood from BLM. The Stanislaus staff saw many administrative hurdles to redesignating the road as a trail and were concerned about the cost of pedestrian/road bridges to replace burned out bridges. Stanislaus National Forest appears reluctant to take steps to formally designate their portions of the railroad grade a trail and begin the NEPA process without the County resolving the easement at Millers Gulch and determining the feasibility of the Forestra bypass.

Supervisor Smallcombe said that Mikey Goralnik set up a meeting to discuss the bridges last summer. In that meeting, the understanding was that if a bridge were built to Caltrans standard, the Forest Service would be comfortable with it

and would not be concerned about liability (Caltrans standards would require a two-lane bridge). Apart from this question, Public Works would have extreme difficulty with grading the road, so the question of bridge repair has been set aside.

Brown asked what Caltrans has to do with a County road. Supervisor Smallcombe responded that Don Florence who was previously in the County's Office of Emergency Services sought two sources of funding to replace the bridges: CALOES and Caltrans. Caltrans was willing to provide funding for two new bridges. However, it would have been a significant expenditure with a limited number of trips per day along that road. Ultimately, it was decided that it would be hard to justify.

Brown asked if the bridges would be for motorized travel. Supervisor Smallcombe said that El Portal residents and Forestra residents are interested in using the road as an emergency route. Brown said it would be nice to have an alternative entrance to the park because of the safety.

Fassett shared that Stanislaus NF has agreed to allow trail work with no ground disturbance (i.e. brushing) along the railroad grade and that work is beginning next week with an AmeriCorps NCCC crew.

Harrison shared that there are only three members on the trail team for Stanislaus National Forest.

Martin said that his understanding was that County Counsel was looking at perfecting the easement at Millers Gulch. He emphasized that, as a matter of importance to the trail, this issue needs to be resolved. Supervisor Smallcombe said that she would ask County Counsel.

Martin further explained that, prior to being a railroad grade, the path was a toll road. It was the originally designated as the "Bolton Trail" – the Bolton Trail ran up the North Fork and, ultimately, adjacent to the Miller Gulch private holding. It was a horse trail and footpath. The document, Martin said, was adopted in 1856.

Fassett said that he would email Jose Hernandez from Stanislaus National Forest to see if trail workers have visited the site since their last conversation.

Supervisor Smallcombe said she serves on the Upper Merced River Watershed Council board. The Council has applied for an American Waters Grant: \$50K for a sign plan along the Merced River Trail.

Smallcombe asked two questions of the group: As the Upper Merced River Watershed Council becomes more active, how do we ensure some communication between UMRWC and this Working Group? If the Council is successful in getting the grant, Smallcombe wondered if the “no ground disturbance” question would apply to signage. Smallcombe emphasized the importance of signage. Clark said that signage should not require significant environmental study. Jenkins mentioned that we need to define, according to the Forest Service, what “ground disturbance” entails.

Martin said that previously he led an effort to establish full data loggers in the Merced River and they received a use permit. They had a restriction that you no navigation hazard could be created. Jenkins suggested that there was precedent for signage on the BLM land.

b. **New Maps** - Harrison shared that new maps were developed with the assistance of Mariposa County’s GIS team. The maps can shared when we speak publicly about the Merced River Trail. The map shows what roads are County-maintained and not County-maintained and what portions are in Forest Service, BLM property, etc.

c. **Updates from Committee Members** – Clark shared that she sent an email with what they have done so far. Brown asked how the subcommittees were decided upon. The committee discussed how the subcommittee structure came about.

5. **COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

a. **Approve 2024 Meeting Dates** – The group decided to meet every other month with ad hoc meetings outside of regular meeting times.

b. **Elect Officers** – Michael Martin was elected the chair of the group. The motion was raised by Clark and seconded by Brown. Wendy Brown was elected Vice Chair. The motion was raised by Clark and seconded by Jenkins.

c. **Discuss Future of the Community Working Group -**

Harrison said she will reach out to Tara about a representative from the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation joining the group.

Harrison said that after meeting with individual committee members, there was an interest in ad hoc committees that dealt with specific pressing issue.

Jenkins proposed having two groups: (1) right-of-way easements / (2) signage / interpretation. Harrison also suggested a group related to the MID settlement.

Martin shared what's happened in the last month related to the Merced Irrigation District's FERC re-licensing. Court actions will likely delay for another year the execution of the re-licensing and could lead to increased requirements for fisheries. Martin said he would personally continue on this regardless of which ad hoc he joins. He emphasized the recreation plan is feasible, proper, appropriate agreed to.

Supervisor Smallcombe and Clark discussed action priority items on the subcommittee list. Smallcombe asked if designating the USFS portion of the trail (2.4) was part of staff's discussion with USFS.

Smallcombe said that Caltrans is anticipating a walkway as part of the rockshed construction. Smallcombe said that she would contact Caltrans to better understand this. Martin clarified that Incline Road would be the focus for the Merced River Trail.

Clark and Jenkins emphasized the importance of consolidating all the information the group is collecting into a publicly available portal. Jenkins said it would serve as a toolbox.

Smallcombe said that we should ask the Upper Merced River Watershed Council about what their proposal.

It was decided that Brown and Martin would serve on the easement and right-of-way ad hoc and that Clark and Jenkins would be on the signage / interpretation ad hoc.

Harrison said that County staff would follow-up with ad hoc group to arrange the next meetings

6. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

7. ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned at 1:52PM.

Minutes Prepared by: Will Fassett