

MARIPOSA COUNTY

Merced River Trail Community Working Group

MEETING MINUTES

DATE: September 16, 2021
TIME: 10:00 AM
LOCATION: TELECONFERENCE ONLY

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Goralnik called the meeting to order at: 10:34 AM

Members Present: Wendy Brown, Jeff Gabe, Dean Bernacchi, Ralph Mendershausen, Rosemarie Smallcombe, Tony McDaniel,

Members Absent: Art Baggett, Ben Goger, Michael Martin, Nick Ross-Rhudy, Jessica Thompson

Visitors: Bill King, Tara Fouch-Moore

2. **APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE 8/19/21 MEETING:**

This item was tabled for a future meeting.

3. **UPDATE ON PROJECT ACTIONS SURVEY AND NEXT STEPS:**

Goralnik reminded CWG members that the survey on the draft project actions was released on September 8, and provided an update that so far 32 responses had been logged. He also provided an update that the Mariposa Gazette would be running a story about the survey and project in the following week's paper, and reminded CWG members to continue spreading the word about the survey to increase the response rate. There was a comment to make the comment box larger to accommodate longer responses.

4. **UPDATE ON DOCUMENT PRODUCTION TIMELINE:**

Goralnik provided an update on the production of the early chapters in the draft vision plan document. Drafts of these chapters, which include an introduction/overview chapter and a chapter on the steps in the visioning process, are anticipated to be ready to be shared with the CWG in November.

5. **OCTOBER MEETING RESCHEDULING:**

There was a brief consideration of changing the date of the October 2021 meeting, but it became clear that no change was necessary, so the October meeting will occur on October 21 as a teleconference, as scheduled.

6. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Goralnik provided an update on the two technical assistances that the County is current receiving from the EPA regarding the Miller Gulch site. He shared that the Targeted Brownfield Assessment technical assistance work is nearly complete, and that the results could be made public with landowner approval in the near future. He also shared that work under the Land Revitalization Technical Assistance would begin shortly.

Bill King, on behalf of Mariposa Trails, provided public comment regarding the draft action of routing the trail to avoid passing through the communities of El Portal and Foresta. He provided a letter of public comment and a suggestion for an alternate route (both attached), which the CWG indicated they would consider along with the other previously discussed alternative route options.

Wendy Brown and Dean Bernacchi expressed general agreement with the content of the letter. It was emphasized by several CWG members that a primary factor in the previously discussed alternatives was that they bypassed the communities of El Portal and Foresta, which was a commonly and unequivocally expressed sentiment at numerous points throughout the visioning process. Several members emphasized the importance of honoring this community feedback, and the CWG's prior assurances that the trail would bypass those communities in accordance with the community's input.

It was clarified that no decision on the route had been or would be made during the visioning process. Rather, the vision plan will identify several potential routes to consider in later, more formal trail planning efforts, and that the vision plan will identify pros and cons of these alternatives to evaluate in the future. It was suggested that a discussion of the route through the communities of El Portal and Foresta be included in the vision plan to record that it was initially considered and faced significant opposition from the community. In this discussion, the vision plan could convey the stated reasons for the community's opposition to that route alignment, as well as the perspectives expressed by Mariposa Trails in the attached letter of public comment.

Rosemarie Smallcombe requested that Mariposa Trails provide the CWG specific examples of the best practices for mitigating trail impact on adjacent communities, for evaluation and to consider sharing with community groups in El Portal and Foresta. Mr. King indicated that he would try to do so, in which case the CWG could discuss them at the October meeting (and potentially future meetings).

Tara Fouch-Moore reiterated that regardless of which routes are included in the vision plan, the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation will advocate to ensure that cultural resources throughout the trail corridor are protected.

7. ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned the meeting at 11:45 AM.

Minutes Prepared by: Mikey Goralnik

MARIPOSA TRAILS
BUILDING TRAILS AND COMMUNITY

September 13, 2021

Mikey Goralnik
Community Design and Development Planner
Mariposa County Planning Department
5100 Bullion Street, Mariposa, CA 95338

Re: Merced River Trail Master Plan

Dear Mr. Goralnik,

Mariposa Trails applauds the county's continuing community outreach in crafting a guiding plan for the "Merced River Trail" (MRT). The county vision to create a regional plan is not only admirable, but within reach. In 2016, I solo backpacked from Mono Lake to UC Merced. This route passed through Foresta, El Portal and utilized the entire length of the MRT to Bagby. The MRT was an essential element for this 160-mile, 21-day journey.

Earlier this summer, I spent time with my son Jon in Portland Oregon. He brought me to *Forest Park*, located immediately adjacent to downtown. While there, Jon and I witnessed the magic of trails. Families were bike-riding together; athletes were training for events; teachers were with students; and friends were walking together smiling and laughing. Besides enjoying the trail and forest, we all shared one other thing in common- we had all walked respectfully through someone's neighborhood to get to the trail. Let's build community, and with the MRT Master Plan, celebrate the time-honored tradition of El Portal's name, "The Portal – The Gateway" to Yosemite.

In support of the county's vision of the MRT, the board of Mariposa Trails offers three points for your consideration:

1. Alternative Action to Goal #1

Draft Goal #1, which reads, “***Ensure that the Merced River Trail does not jeopardize or negatively impact the public safety, social well-being, or historic character of adjacent and surrounding communities,***” is fantastic, as it recognizes the need to address impacts that may occur in communities that are located along the MRT, including those of El Portal and Incline Road. Trail use impacts may include such things as noise, parking and litter. Interface trails like the MRT, which connect communities with adjacent public lands, are common throughout the nation; thus, there are many examples of how such trails can be designed to minimize impacts (see Exhibit 1 for a list of recommended actions).

2. Extend the MRT to El Portal

The magic and vision of the MRT is regional. Ending the MRT several miles downstream of El Portal is inconsistent with previously adopted county plans, as well as the vision and goals of the draft MRT Master Plan.

It’s been long envisioned and planned that the MRT “would use portions of the abandoned Yosemite Valley Railroad grade along the Merced River to connect Merced County to Yosemite National Park” (2011 *Mariposa County Bike and Pedestrian Transportation Plan*). This grand vision is also noted in the county’s recently adopted 2021 *Recreation and Resiliency Plan*. To **not** extend the MRT to El Portal significantly detracts from these long-held plans. Additionally, the Vision Statement for the draft MRT Master Plan states, in part, “The trail will serve as a central connective component of an existing and future network of trails.” Ending the MRT at the Foresta Bridge several miles downstream of El Portal precludes connection to (1) the best route into Yosemite National Park, and, (2) its extensive trail network. Finally, MRT Goal #2 reads: “Facilitate the elimination of barriers to the creation of a continuous, year-round trail from Bagby to Yosemite.” The committee’s suggested implementation actions of Goal #1 actually create barriers for trail-users that wish for a continuous recreational experience to existing roads and trails that originate in El Portal.

3. The Reroute

Whether called a “reroute” or an “alternative,” the bottom line is that the proposed trail is extremely unlikely to be built-out, maintained or used (Exhibit B). It occurs on private property, is largely waterless, and in many places very steep and fully overgrown, very long and completely different in character to the MRT. As a hiker and backpacker myself, and in my work with Mariposa Trails, it is beyond apparent to me that this route is unrealistic. At best, it may one day be a side trail off the MRT.

We hope you find these comments helpful. Thank-you for your efforts.

Sincerely,

Bill King

President/Executive Director
Mariposa Trails – *“Building Trails and Community”*

CC Sarah Williams, Mariposa County Planning Director
MRT Community Working Group Members
Rosemarie Smallcombe, Board Liaison

OUR MISSION

We provide trail access and promote its use for adventure, health, stewardship, education and community prosperity.



CONNECT WITH US

209.626.9898
mariposa.trails@yahoo.com
P.O. Box 5008-139 Mariposa CA 95338
www.mariposatrails.org

EXHIBIT A

Suggested Actions for Goal #1:

Litter

- Encourage zero tolerance of litter through educational and volunteer programs.
- Provide trash cans and recycling containers in the MRT corridor at high-use areas.

Public Safety

- Coordinate with Yosemite National Park and residents of El Portal to design and place wayfinding signs that direct MRT-users safely and respectfully through the neighborhood.
- Establish a volunteer MRT-user patrol that advocates on safety issues and problem areas. Develop on-going safety education and etiquette events and information.
- Provide MRT etiquette information to minimize impacts between users and adjacent property owners and residents.

Parking

- MRT-based parking, if deemed necessary, should be designed and constructed to be compatible with the setting in which they are placed.

Impact Assessments

- Use regular surveys, counts, and other methods to collect data and monitor long-term trends in order to determine the types and extent of neighborhood impacts from trail use.

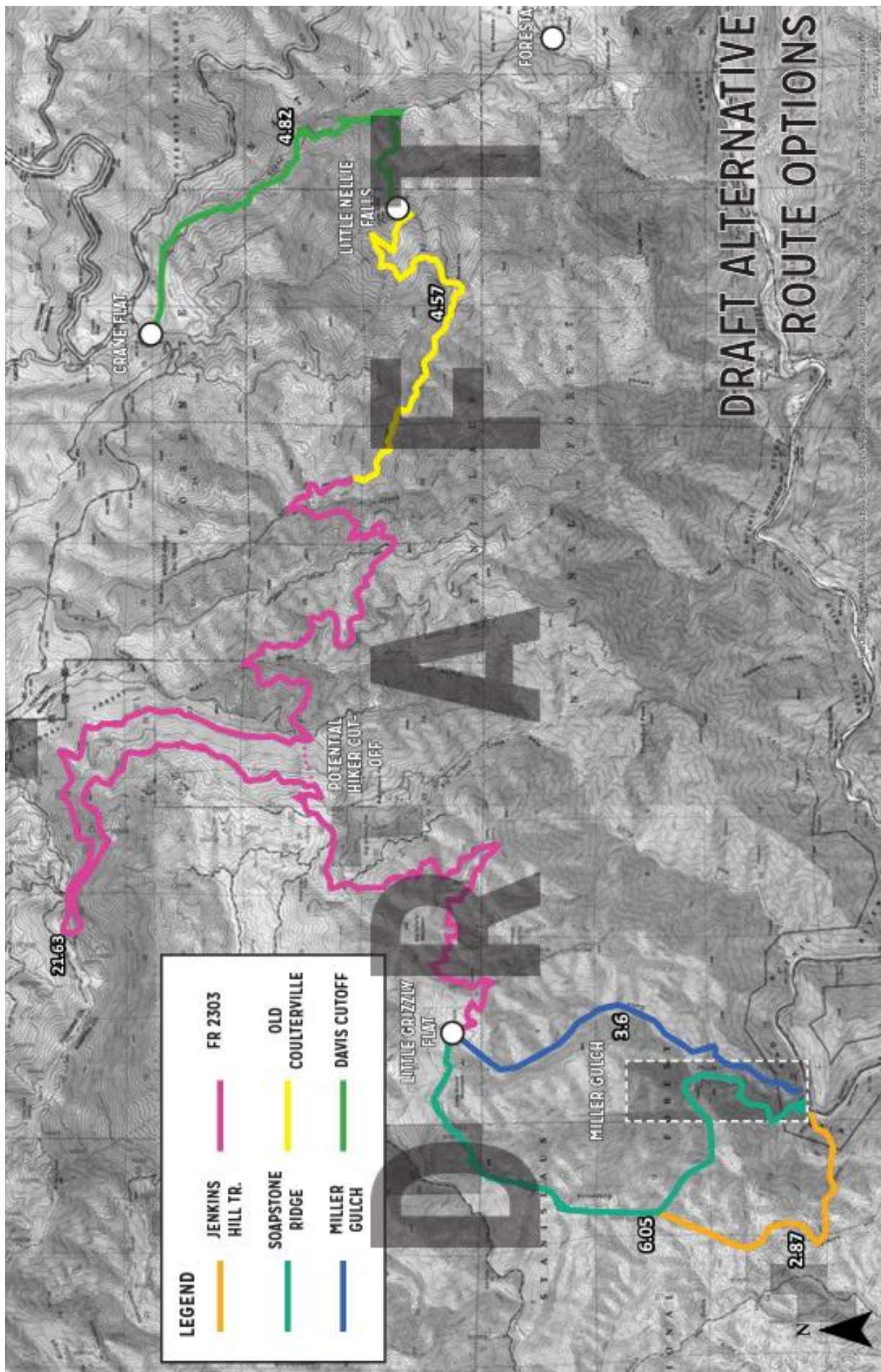


EXHIBIT B

