

MARIPOSA COUNTY

Merced River Trail Community Working Group

MEETING MINUTES

DATE: April 15, 2021

TIME: 10:00 AM

LOCATION: THIS IS A TELECONFERENCE MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Goralnik called the meeting to order at: 10:04 AM

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

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

Visitors: David Greenwood, Jeff Horn

2. **APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE 3/26/21 MEETING:** The minutes from this meeting were unanimously approved.
3. **DISCUSSION WITH REGIONAL BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT STAFF:**
Jeff Horn and David Greenwood from the Bureau of Land Management attended the meeting to discuss a range of topics related to the trail and river canyon in BLM jurisdiction. Key points include:
 - *What trail or trails does BLM think the Merced River Trail should connect with?*
There are no immediate plans to push the trail further downstream, or to start looking at a project of the scale of connecting with UC-Merced. There is not a lot of public demand for such a project. Upstream, BLM has never considered an extension beyond where the old railroad grade ends in El Portal. BLM does not want to extend the North Fork of the Merced to connect it with areas north of it to the Buckhorn fuel break in order to avoid providing access to the river for OHV/motorcycles.
 - *What types of support or encouragement can BLM use from the public, including NGOs?*
Help could primarily come through supporting maintenance of the trail, either in terms of labor or grant funding for labor. Local support could also provide design for and fund implementation of trailhead amenities like signage and kiosks with maps and other interpretive information. Interpretive or wayside exhibits could also be an appropriate contribution.
 - *Does BLM see an active volunteerism program for the Merced River Trail (i.e., docents, trail maintenance, etc.) in the near future? If so, what is their vision for its development and implementation?*
BLM is always interested in volunteers, and currently uses volunteers to help us simply maintain our current sites throughout the Mother Lode Field Office. They are not, however, interested in trail docents at this time.
 - *Challenges of managing and maintaining the existing trail:*
Annual maintenance of the trail itself is the biggest issue. Noxious weeds are also problematic, including yellowstar thistle and Italian thistle in the wild section below railroad

flat. Also, maintaining controls to keep motorized uses out of the areas where they are not allowed is a challenge.

- *North Fork footbridge*

Costs and logistics are a challenge, making a pre-engineered solution is essential. The project could cost upwards of \$350K, and local fundraising efforts would be helpful to offsetting costs, and/or to use as leverage for grants. Fibre reinforced plastic is a promising material to consider for logistical and cost purposes. Using existing abutments could be an option, or could be more trouble than its worth.

- *Private property access considerations*

On the north side of the river, BLM is actively working to acquire land (or access to it), but historically, there have not been issues with trail users accessing that property.

- *Whitewater takeout at Sherlock Creek at the bottom of Moser Road*

BLM thinks this project is a good idea for various reasons, but acknowledges that it will be expensive and time consuming to acquire the necessary easements. Local support and partnership with Mariposa County will both be helpful for solving these issues and implementing the project.

- *Gate at Hall Gulch*

The gate has a cattle guard-style barrier to prevent motorized travel in this area. BLM is willing to explore alternate designs that prevent motorized uses and enable equestrian use, if there is a need.

4. **DISCUSSION AND VOTE ON DRAFT PROJECT GOALS:**

Members of the subcommittee that have been working on synthesizing community input on the project's draft goals presented their recommended revisions for the full committee to consider. The subcommittee members also provided an overview of the process they went through to address specific and thematic responses to the survey. The committee voted unanimously to adopt the subcommittee's recommended goals.

5. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Goralnik provided an update on the Community Speaker and Engagement Series event, specifically that the speaker scheduled for May (Jeff Jones, BLM) has had to delay his presentation until later on in the summer. The committee provided input on potential alternates to consider for events in the near future. Amarina Weunschel from the USFS, Jamie Williams (CalFire), and Sean Rovito or Ted Pappenfuss (limestone salamander) were suggested.

Goralnik also sought input from the committee on whether future events in the series should be online, in person, or a combination of the two. Members expressed a preference for a combination of the two. Goralnik also mentioned that he anticipates future CWG meetings taking place in person.

Goralnik provided an update on the committee's expansion, clarifying that the Board of Supervisors are scheduled to vote on whether to expand the committee at their 4/20 meeting. If they vote to expand the committee, staff will begin reviewing applications as they come in beginning next week.

There was strong support from the CWG for presentations from land management partners at future meetings. In addition to USFS and NPS, CWG members suggested including MID.

6. **ADJOURN:** The meeting adjourned the meeting at 11:26 AM.