

MARIPOSA COUNTY

Merced River Trail Community Working Group

FINAL MEETING MINUTES (Technical Approval)

DATE: July 17, 2024
TIME: 12:00 PM
LOCATION: Development Services Conference Room
5100 BULLION STREET, MARIPOSA, CA

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Martin called the meeting to order at 12:05PM.

Members Present: Michael Martin, Kristina Rylands, Bill King, Jeff Jenkins
Members Absent: Susie Clark, Rosemarie Smallcombe (ex officio), Miles Menetrey (ex officio)
Staff: Will Fassett

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE May 28th, 2024 Meeting**
Unable to approve the minutes because we didn't have the quorum from the previous meeting.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

Bill King asked the question of what to do with the Merced River Trail Committee. He suggested that the group would have more flexibility and ability to do more if it were separate from the County as a Committee. King proposed that instead we have a Friends of the Merced River Non-Profit. That group could build public support by holding events, partnering with existing non-profits and partners, and pursuing funding. King stated that, for BLM staff to take the North Fork Bridge project seriously, they need to see a Department Head or someone from the County pushing the bridge as opposed to the committee. This discussion was tabled for a later agenda item.

Kristina Rylands shared that the Upper Merced River Watershed Council was thrilled to be the recipient of \$300,000 (\$100,000/year) grant through the Bureau of Reclamation to implement their four-year watershed workplan. This document formed the basis of their grant proposal. Without the funding, the

UMRWC would have returned to being an all-volunteer group. The grant will fund an AmeriCorps volunteer (SNAP Program) and a half-time position to do the work.

4. MERCED RIVER TRAIL UPDATES

a. Draft EIR for Lake McClure Recreation Facilities

Martin said that MID put out a notice of intent to submit a final ER/EIS that was developed in the FERC process and supplement their original submission with additional information. There's a separate EIR for the MID's recreation plan. The Recreation Plan EIR is missing commitments that were agreed upon during FERC negotiations.

The committee agreed that the best course of action is to request clarity in their descriptions, to ask about the missing components, and to tie that to the FERC document.

Martin mentioned that, in the County agreement with MID, there is an is a commitment to not oppose anything related to the FERC permit, so it may not be appropriate for the County to sign a letter of comment. Committee members agreed that they would draft a letter and have individual organizations sign. Martin said it was decided that the Sierra Freepackers would not be pursued as a signatory because the trail is envisioned as a pedestrian and bike trail only. King offered to draft the letter and distribute it to committee members.

Jenkins asked how we should address the BLM's bridge commitment over the North Fork. Martin said that the bridge does not need to be a major construction. Martin said he would be satisfied with wire crossed with a harness.

b. Incline Road Campgrounds

Brown said that the Incline Road campgrounds are closed and was curious about whether they were planning to re-open. She said that there was a dumpster that was overflowing from trash at the end of the road and mentioned that there was overgrowth of vegetation into the road. Martin said some of the tables and benches have been torn up and burned. King said that David Greenwood may have additional information too. King contacted a Forest Service representative who said that the Dirt Flat and Dry Gulch campgrounds will be worked on in the winter 2024-25. King said that it is the same contractor who is working on Jerseydale Campground.

c. Bear Creek Trail Background Discussion

Fassett said that he was interested in researching more about Bear Creek Trail. Rylands said she also had been looking into researching old records. Martin suggested that we reach out to Angie Heiss. King said that Mikey may have had documents related to the project. Martin said that the Caltrans District VI and had figured out that, along the public highway ROW, they could snake a portion of the trail. The proposed plan included crossing the road. Fassett said he would contact Mikey and Angie.

d. Ad Hoc Committee

Fassett said that there was no update yet on the Millers Gulch property discussion. The Committee has provided information to County Counsel, including the name of a land use lawyer and the background on the Miller Gulch property.

5. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The committee returned to the topic of the future of the Advisory Committee. Martin said if you get a bunch of people together you get action. The only hesitation is that it can get unwieldy. When you get everyone focused on one item, it creates energy and gets a lot done. He expressed support for trying to create a Friends Association.

King said that the Vision Plan talks about a Conservancy. He said that his organization doesn't have the capacity to take on this project in its entirety, but it could be a collaborative effort between different non-profits. Brown suggested that a future group should be careful about the name because Friends of the River is an existing group.

Jenkins suggested that we revisit this at the next meeting and commented that informal gatherings on the trail, having docents, facilitating hikes/informal discussions could be important functions of a sub-group of the Committee.

King suggested that a group could be formed to do clean-up events and day hikes, as Jenkins suggested, to build excitement and develop interest around a Conservancy/Friends group. Rylands said that a lot of the content in the Vision Plan is aligned with existing work of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council. Rylands emphasized the importance of determining the priorities of the current Advisory Committee. She asked, "How can we highlight the work on the MRT and embed that in the things that are already happening?" She offered

the example of CalWild, which was already funded – and is part of the Vision Plan.

Jenkins said the Committee's priorities are clear and are the items discussed: MID recreation agreement as it relates to the trail and Millers Gulch and other access bottlenecks. Martin concurred that the bottlenecks are an urgent issue.

6. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Bridge over the North Fork letter to BLM and recommendation to the Board

7. ADJOURNMENT

ADJOURN: Martin adjourned the meeting at 1:30PM.

Minutes Prepared by: Will Fassett