

To the Trails Master Plan Review Subcommittee Members,

My name is Daniel Cooke and I reside on Hillview Drive in Ashland. After watching the youtube recording of the meeting conducted by the Subcommittee on November 29, 2021, I feel compelled to share some comments with you all. My wife and I are regular hikers in the Siskiyou Mountain Park (SMP) and this will be my eleventh year as a volunteer for Ashland Parks and Recreation removing scotch broom from SMP. Thus my comments to you draw upon familiarity “on the ground.” My comments:

While the maps that you used to discuss proposed mountain bike trails in SMP were fundamentally accurate.. in a 2D way.. they lacked many important details that struck me as critical. For instance, it was mentioned that a portion of White Rabbit trail was very steep and unsafe for mountain bikers, but there were no topographic lines on the map. Shortly after that a proposed bike trail was shown (a pink line on the map) that I know went through another steeper section. I believe Chris Chambers intends to provide better maps. Great idea!!

While hiking we frequently find dozens of other folks walking on White Rabbit in spite of the geologic issues and challenging sections spoken of. Point is- hikers use White Rabbit extensively from the SMP Park Street entrance to the top of The Ridge. I feel you will get a great deal of grief if you make White Rabbit bike-only.

By the way, what is the name of that ridge? It needs some kind of name or designation other than a set of grid numbers. I’m going to call it “The Ridge” just to be consistent. The Ridge consists of 3 high points, each higher than the next aligned roughly north to south with the southernmost falling inside the fence line. So I will define them as #1 (lowest) to #3 (behind fence line). Hikers are frequently on #1 and #2.

Implementing a bike trail along the “fence line” was identified as unsatisfactory because it’s private property on the south side of the fence. I believe there is an additional reason to avoid routing bikes through there. The section of fence approaching hill #2 is very, very narrow and runs along an extremely steep slope. In other words, it’s a safety risk.

The section of Uhtoff trail ascending the east side of The Ridge to #1 is brutally hot in the summer. Situated on a steep slope, it’s narrow and switch-back heavy. I think it would be a mistake to mandate hikers use it instead of White Rabbit to ascend to #1. Similarly it would be a mistake to encourage mountain bikers to ascend it. Safety again.

But there’s another reason to keep bikers off that east-side slope. The lower portion of that slope is heavily used by wildlife. It’s what you might call a linkage area between the watershed and the SMP. The manzanita berries have remained thick on that slope during this drought and it’s full of feeding wildlife. Also there are den sites there, in fall and winter. Babies are born there. Please don’t ruin this gem within the city park system.

Thank you to Jeff McFarland and Chris Chambers for noting the important geologic

weaknesses, wildlife habitat areas, fire safety and other important “layers” of the park. I was greatly relieved to hear the points they made.

Off the northwest side of The Ridge is an area that has no human trails and little to no human activity. It was mentioned that Pacific Fishers are active in that area. There's more wildlife than that. I hiked into there once and was pleasantly surprised to find it wild and full of animal sign. There was no scotch broom so I've never been back. We must have the conscience to leave fragments like that untouched. Unfortunately, a mountain bike descent trail going well into that area was proposed during the meeting. I say no. We don't need more pressure on wildlife in the park.. by people, dogs, bikes or any other. You're begging for conflict if you put a trail in there.

I note there was no discussion of increased need for parking at the Park street entrance/exit with greater mountain bike use of SMP. Little Tamarack Place lane is often packed on weekends already. Parking at exit points should be considered.

I note that there was no discussion of a possible egress from the trail system to Timberline Terrace. Isn't there a trail that branches off of White Rabbit and goes to that neighborhood?

I want all of the Subcommittee to know that I enjoy mountain biking and support finding ways to make our fine city a “must go” destination for the MB world. That would be so great! I was personally very excited to hear the ideas for the Imperatrice (SP?) area. Dual track sounds exciting and could draw both local and regional spectators. How cool would that be! But it's my feeling that relieving bike pressure by bringing bikes through the The Ridge and down to Park street can only be done if all users get funneled through a fairly narrow area and if so, that zone will get physically hammered, have decreased safety, and probably be less fun for everybody.

One final note. If you meet “informally” during a workday, please be sure to record the meeting. I'm a worker bee and I can't attend meetings during those times.
Thank you for all of your efforts.

Daniel Cooke
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From: [City of Ashland, Oregon](#)
To: [Parks Commissioners](#)
Subject: Contact the APRC Commissioners Submitted
Date: Tuesday, December 14, 2021 11:48:20 AM

[EXTERNAL SENDER]

*** FORM FIELD DATA ***

Name : **Pepper W Trail**

Phone:

Email : ptrail@ashlandnet.net

Subject: **Mountain bike trail proposals for the Imperatrice and elsewhere**

Message : **Dear Ashland Parks Commissioners: I recently became aware of an extremely aggressive set of mountain bike trail proposals submitted by the Rogue Valley Mountain Bike Association (RVMBA) to the APRC. ?This includes an extensive system of bike trails envisioned for the Imperatrice, including a "Dual Slalom" track concept that can only be described as industrial in scale and potential impact. ?For your convenience, here is the link to the RVMBA document:**

https://www.ashland.or.us/SIB/files/APRC/2021/TrailsMasterPlanReview_CreatedNov1_21/SMP_options.pdf.

?The Imperatrice section begins on page 13. ? The Rogue Valley Audubon Society, of which I am conservation co-chair, has a long and well-documented interest in the preservation of the Imperatrice property, and especially in its breeding Grasshopper Sparrows, a population of statewide importance. ?If permitted, these mountain bike trail proposals would destroy the habitat value of this unique property. ? I am unable to attend today's APRC session on the RVMBA proposals. ?While I will be preparing detailed comments on behalf of Rogue Valley Audubon, I want to send an immediate message of strong opposition to these destructive and anti-conservation proposals - which extend throughout the Ashland watershed and Lithia Park as well as the Imperatrice. ?I note that the public comments on the initial hearing for these proposals, mostly dealing with Lithia Park, reveal strong public opposition to expanding the existing extensive mountain bike trail network. Several years ago, the RVMBA succeeded in establishing a huge expansion of bike trails on Medford's Prescott Park (Roxy Ann Butte), despite opposition by RVAS. ?This has greatly compromised the value of Roxy Ann for wildlife - and for hikers seeking quiet and solitude. ?I fervently hope that the APRC commission will not allow such a fate here. Respectfully, Pepper Trail, Ph.D. 2011 Crestview Drive Ashland, OR? 97520

December 21, 2021

To the Ashland Trails Master Plan Review Subcommittee and the Ashland Department of Public Works:

Please accept these comments on the Imperatrice mountain bike trail proposals of the Rogue Valley Mountain Bike Association (RVMBA), which we are submitting on behalf of the Rogue Valley Audubon Society (RVAS) and the Siskiyou Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Oregon (NPSO). RVAS is a chapter of the National Audubon Society with over 600 members in Jackson County, many of whom live in Ashland. The Siskiyou Chapter Native Plant Society of Oregon promotes native plant education and appreciation while also advocating for native plant communities. Both our organizations have a long history of interest in the management and preservation of the Imperatrice property.

In 2014, our members discovered a colony of Grasshopper Sparrows nesting in the Imperatrice grasslands. This is a rare, local, and declining species in Oregon, with only sporadic breeding records in Jackson County.

Since then, in collaboration with the Klamath Bird Observatory and Southern Oregon Land Conservancy, we have supported formal bird and plant surveys of the property, documenting the occurrence of several rare plants and confirming that the Grasshopper Sparrow population is one of the largest ever discovered in Oregon. The Imperatrice is a precious surviving example of the grassland habitat that was once widespread in the Rogue Valley, but has now almost entirely disappeared due to intensive cattle grazing and agricultural and residential development.

Unfortunately, despite commissioning its own biological assessment which confirmed the outstanding ecological value of the Imperatrice, the City of Ashland has never appeared to be committed to preserving this unique property. Instead, it has considered a variety of uses and activities that would severely compromise or destroy the habitat values of the Imperatrice. These have included industrial-scale solar development, extensive cattle grazing, and now, a mountain bike trail system that threatens to turn this beautiful grassland into nothing more than a playground for a small but vocal group of mechanized recreationalists.

RVAS, NPSO, and our partner conservation groups have continually advocated for preservation of the Imperatrice, along with public access that is compatible with protection of the property's Grasshopper Sparrows and rare plants. Fortunately, the solar development plan has been abandoned (due to many problems in addition to the habitat conservation issue), and the impacts of grazing on the property have been limited by keeping livestock below the irrigation ditch. While we are grateful that the City has so far rejected destructive development of the Imperatrice, we are concerned that new schemes will continue to arise until there is a clear commitment to conserving the property for its unique habitat and scenic values.

The RVMBA mountain bike trail proposal is a case in point. The current proposal (at pp. 28-30 of:

https://www.ashland.or.us/SIB/files/RVMBA_SustainableMountainBikeTrails.pdf)

appears to focus on a loop trail encircling the property above the ditch, while also discussing a possible “dual slalom” track. More detail on the “dual slalom” concept can be found on pp. 14-22 of this document, as “2016 trails concept for Imperatrice”:

https://www.ashland.or.us/SIB/files/APRC/2021/TrailsMasterPlanReview_CreatedNov121/SMP_options.pdf. That “concept” also included a whole network of trails, which would

fragment the Imperatrice habitat and spread disturbance to every corner of the property.

It is the position of RVAS and NPSO that the Imperatrice is no place for mechanized recreation. Quiet and contemplative activities are the only appropriate human uses of this property – and mountain biking, with its emphasis on speed and adrenalin, certainly does not qualify. The impacts of bikes speeding around even a single loop trail would extend far beyond the footprint of the trail, causing disturbance that would likely lead to the abandonment of the area by Grasshopper Sparrows.

If the loop trail proposal is a serious concern, the “dual slalom” concept is a nightmare. The illustrations on pp. 18-22 of the “2016 trails concept” show a huge and ugly footprint, designed for large competitive events, with extensive areas for parking and spectators. Even if this was located below the ditch, such massive development would completely alter the character of the Imperatrice, permanently mar the Ashland viewshed, and preclude appropriate conservation-centered management of this unique property.

As stated, we are in favor of carefully planned and managed public access to the Imperatrice, including the concept of a hiking trail from Ashland to Grizzly Peak. But the overarching principle for the property, guiding all management, should be the protection of its habitat values, and the preservation of its populations of nesting Grasshopper Sparrows and rare plants.

We hope that the City will keep RVAS, NPSO, and our partner conservation groups informed of all development and management proposals regarding the Imperatrice, so that our perspective can be represented. We also hope that surveys of the property’s sparrow and rare plant populations can resume in 2022, after a gap caused by denial of access by the grazing lease-holder. We have demonstrated our standing as stakeholders in the future of the Imperatrice, but do not feel that has always been recognized.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

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