

February 13, 2020

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1616 North Carlotti Drive
Santa Maria, California 93454

Subject: West Cuesta Ridge Recreation and Botanical Area Restoration Project

The Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club supports the initiative of the Forest Service to control incompatible recreation activity and restore drainage and the habitat of the Sargent Cypress Botanical Area, within the West Cuesta Ridge area of the Los Padres National Forest. The project summary indicates a desire to limit and even reduce the extent of non-authorized recreation trails, contain the parking and travel of motorized vehicles, and restore the Sargent Cypress grove. Our Conservation Committee has discussed the proposal, and some members viewed the project corridor on December 16, 2019. The following comments are provided for your consideration:

1. Due to uncontrolled vehicle access, this high point of the Santa Lucia Ridge suffers from severe negligence and vandalism. We endorse the project proposals to limit vehicle access on TV Tower Road.
 - a. The project should determine the most effective structural methods to limit vehicle access and to retain the road and parking areas in excellent condition and drainage.
 - b. TV Tower Road should be planned for improved access by hikers and bikers, perhaps as a multi-use path, similar to the Bob Jones Trail on San Luis Obispo Creek.
 - c. It should be expected that signage will be vandalized, so the project should consider the most durable and replaceable signage which a reasonable budget can afford.

2. The project should develop improvements to provide access to different classifications of users through the proposed gate on TV Tower Road – location shown here.



- a. A lock system should be provided to identify and allow groups or individuals to obtain a key or digital entry at the proposed gate.
- b. Controlled access should allow handicapped and disabled people to drive to designated usage areas.
- c. Trails should be identified for disabled and for handicapped people as two potential types of users.



- 3. Camping, motorized travel and firearm shooting should not be allowed within the project area.
 - a. The Botanical Area should be protected from waste, litter, and increased fire hazard, particularly in view of the problematic nature of evacuation in the event of fire.
 - b. Permits for National Forest access should be enforced.
 - c. Fire rings and evidence of previous camping should be removed.
 - d. Other access points for motorized vehicles should be closed off.
 - e. Information about other regional camping opportunities might be provided.



- 4. The West Cuesta Ridge provides incredible scenic views of the coastal valleys and hills, the Seven Sister Morros, the city of San Luis Obispo, other communities and the Pacific Ocean. The project should create and manage several viewpoints.



5. Hiking trails should be given a separate category within the project, since they are typically not as steep as mountain bike trails on the ridge and sharing trail space is threatening and potentially dangerous for riders and hikers.
 - a. New trails should be proposed within U.S. Forest Service guidelines for hiking gradients.
 - b. Suitable trail corridors which primarily align with elevation contours, should follow existing roads such as TV Tower Road and minimize threats to existing resources. TV Tower Road might be partly maintained as a hiking trail. Even beginning and moderate trails can be provided.
 - c. Trails should close at sundown.



Within the Botanical Area, trails should only be for natural resource interpretation. The existing signage should be restored and better protected from vandalism.

6. Bicycle trails were created by users with purposes of thrills, danger and skill challenges. The Project is supported to reduce the continued use of unauthorized trails, develop safer and less invasive trails, and to develop habitat restoration.
 - a. The Project should plan how to minimize the incredible erosion which resulted from steep trails.
 - b. The Project should demonstrate expert concepts for configuring trails to provide downhill rides and hikes which do not erode and fail.
 - c. Connections to other properties are supported to provide long-distance hiking trails as well as biking ones.



The Sierra Club supports the purpose of the project, “to improve resource conditions and protect desirable landscape attributes, including the botanical special interest area.” Please include us in your communications about project research activity, policy development and proposals for public review.

Sincerely,

Andrew Christie
Director, Santa Lucia Chapter

s/Susan Harvey
Chair, Sierra Club Conservation Committee

s/James Lopes
Conservation Committee Member

