



*“Finding a
Balance
Between
Recreation
and
Preservation”*

WALNUT CREEK OPEN SPACE

Trail Committee Recommendations for Managing Trails for
Safe, Sustainable, and Environmentally Friendly Use
2020

City of Walnut Creek Open Space Trail Committee

Recommendations for Managing Trails

DRAFT

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

In 2019, the Walnut Creek Open Space Trail Committee (Committee) was formed to document the current state of the Walnut Creek Open Space trail system, and to deliberate over the vision for its future. The Committee includes members from the PROS Commission, the Open Space Foundation, representatives from local mountain biking and equestrian user groups, and Open Space staff. Over the course of monthly meetings in 2019 and into 2020, topics of discussion have primarily included the following: safety of trail users, protection of natural resources, habitat restoration, education and outreach, Open Space policies, and ways to accommodate different types of user groups.

This document identifies existing management strategies, policies, and safety measures related to trails in the City of Walnut Creek Open Space areas, and presents the Committee's recommendations for managing the trail system moving forward. Information provided here is intended to serve the Park, Recreation and Open Space Commission (PROS) and/or City Council as a reference pertaining to future Open Space trail ordinances and policies, modifications and improvements, and education and outreach.



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1.2 Vision, Mission and Goals

The City of Walnut Creek Open Space was established by the citizens of Walnut Creek to preserve natural resources, protect wildlife habitat and corridors, and provide recreational activities for the community. The Committee recognizes the challenges of finding balance between recreation and preservation, as well as the need to align with goals set forth in existing documents pertaining to the City of Walnut Creek Open Space; most notably Chapter 3: Natural Environment and Public Spaces of the Walnut Creek General Plan 2025.

The vision of the Committee is that Walnut Creek Open Space is valued, preserved, and safely enjoyed by all user groups. The following actions, policies and related goals, as indicated in the General Plan 2025, support this vision and establish realistic, attainable projects that may be completed by City staff with feedback from community stakeholders.

The following goals related to the topics illustrated in this document were taken directly from the City of Walnut Creek General Plan 2025. Chapter 3 Natural Environment and Public Spaces.

Goal 1 (Chapter 3, General Plan 2025) - Maintain and enhance Open Space lands

Policy 1.1 - Protect, manage and improve Open Space lands.

Action 1.1.1. Prepare and adopt a plan for protection and management of the City's Open Space lands

Policy 1.2. - Protect and enhance the natural environment.

Action 1.2.1. Identify, protect, restore, and enhance sensitive biological and wetland resources and areas critical for habitat and habitat connectivity.

Action 1.2.2. Strive to eliminate non-native plant species and expand areas with native plants.

Action 1.2.3. Monitor and control the factors affecting the habitat value of Open Space, including trail use and grazing.

Policy 1.3. - Promote a variety of appropriate activities on Open Space lands

Action 1.3.1. Assess user demand and impacts on Open Space and natural resources.

Action 1.3.2. Allow on Open Space lands, only facilities, structures, and activities compatible with conservation, preservation and education.

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Action 1.3.3. Review and update existing policies for Open Space activities and monitor their effectiveness.

Goal 4 (Chapter 3, General Plan 2025) - Provide a system of safe, well-developed, well connected, and well maintained trails.

Policy 4.1. Plan for a full complement of interconnected trails and paths for walkers, joggers, bicyclists, and equestrians from the regional trails to downtown trails and paths.

Policy 4.2. Maintain and improve the trails system, including to and within the Open Space lands.

Action 4.2.1. Provide consistent, clear signage for all trails and at all trailheads.

Action 4.2.2. Promote rancher-friendly conservation and recreational trail easements over key agricultural lands.

Action 4.2.3. Monitor trails for signs of environmental degradation and repair the ecosystem along trails where necessary.

Action 4.2.4. Identify equestrian staging areas and add or improve as needed.

Policy 4.3. Promote safety on all trails and on the roads leading to them.

Action 4.3.1. Track safety complaints on trails and, where patterns are identified, work with user groups on solutions.

Action 4.3.2. Working with residents and equestrians, respond to identified road/trail (auto/horse) conflicts, including providing improved signage where needed.

1.3 Trail Descriptions

For the purpose of this document, Walnut Creek Open Space trails can be categorized into three types of trails. “Single-track” trails are defined as four (4) feet or less in width. “Fire roads” are defined as trails eight (8) feet or wider. “Social trails” are non-designated trails that are not maintained by City staff and are formed through various activities such as hiking, mountain biking, cattle grazing and wildlife use.

The current trail use designations were established prior to 1990. With a few exceptions, single-track trails are designated for hiking and equestrian use only. Fire roads allow for bicycle,

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hiking and equestrian use, while providing access for Open Space Rangers and emergency vehicles. Social trails are not formally authorized for use and therefore have no trail use designation.

1.4 Observations

The Committee identified a need to evaluate the current state of the Walnut Creek Open Space trail system for the following reasons:

- A. Development and growing population of the City of Walnut Creek and surrounding areas has led to increased usage of Open Space trails by various user groups;
- B. Trail usage for certain user groups has changed. For example, Committee members have noted that the number of bike users on trails has increased, while equestrian use appears to have decreased;
- C. An increase in the usage and formation of unauthorized social trails has caused soil erosion and the destruction of plant and wildlife habitat;
- D. Trail safety has been communicated to City staff as a concern by trail user groups and members of the community.
- E. Inappropriate activity on single-track trails has led to damage to the habitat and the trails reducing the suitability of the trails for approved activities.

1.5 Challenges

There are multiple challenges that staff and stakeholders will face when it comes to managing Open Space trails currently and into the future. The following challenges have been identified by the Committee:

- A. Finding a balance between recreation and preservation so that recreational activities do not adversely impact plant and wildlife habitat;
- B. Ensuring trails are safe, while accommodating growing demand by user groups;
- C. Managing the speed of bicycles on trails;
- D. Implementing trail management practices to control erosion and minimize impacts to plant and wildlife species;
- E. Restoring natural habitat in areas where unauthorized social trails have been haphazardly created by certain user groups. For example, bike trails have been cut through chaparral and coastal sage scrub habitat in Lime Ridge Open Space.

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2 Policy

2.1 Municipal Code

The following Parks and Open Space Regulations were reviewed by the Committee.

11-1.516 Bicycles and Skateboards.

a. Bicycles. All sections of this code and the State Vehicle Code pertaining to the use and maintenance of bicycles shall be enforced in City parks.

1. No person shall ride or operate a bicycle within a park:

(a) in a negligent, unsafe or reckless manner or in any way that endangers the life, limb or property of any person;

(b) at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent having due regard for weather, visibility, other trail or road users and the surface and width of the trail or road, and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property, or in excess of posted bicycle speed limits;

(c) on a single-track hiking or horseback trail unless specifically posted as open to bicycle use; or

(d) in any Open Space area, including but not limited to, Open Space hillsides, valleys, creeks, creekbeds, drainage areas, and ridgetops unless specifically posted as open to bicycle use.

2. Bicycles are permitted on paved roads, paved bicycle trails and unpaved graded road over 8 (eight) feet in width, unless otherwise posted.

11-1.518 Penalty; Misdemeanor or Infraction.

Any person who violates any provision of Chapter 1 of Title 11 of this Code shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor or an infraction.

a. If charged as an infraction, the penalty upon conviction of such person shall be a fine as set forth in Section [1-2.01](#) of this Code.

b. If charged as a misdemeanor, the penalty upon conviction of such person shall be imprisonment in the county jail for a period not to exceed six months, or by a fine not exceeding \$1,000, or by both such fine and imprisonment. (§2,

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Ord. 1692, eff. 9/2/88 and by §1, Ord. 1874, eff. 1/11/96)

11-1.520 Powers of Arrest.

a. Upon receiving the certificates described in subsection (b), the Open Space Supervisor, Senior Open Space Rangers and Open Space Rangers are hereby vested with the authority to cite and arrest any person who violates any of the provisions of this Title, the provisions of the Municipal Code relating to parking, the State of California Fish and Game Code, and the provisions of the California Vehicle Code relating to parking. (by §21 Ord. 2046, eff. 12/1/2005)

b. Upon completing training by the Walnut Creek Police Department in the powers of arrest, the Chief of Police shall issue a certificate of completion to the employees designated in subsection a. (§4, Ord. 1985, eff. 12/20/01.)

2.2 Enforcement

It is evident there are regulations in the Open Space that are not being followed. In various Open Space areas, it is common to see bicycle users on single-track trails and hikers and bikers on unauthorized social trails. Some of the more extreme unauthorized uses of these trails include the building of ramps, berms, and other features all of which can cause significant damage to the surrounding environment. The Committee believes that, in order to meet the goals and vision set forth by the City of Walnut Creek, it is imperative that Open Space regulations are followed by all user groups.



Example of re occurring unauthorized bike jumps that were created on a social trail in Lime Ridge in December of 2019. The section of trail cuts directly through chaparral habitat, destroying vegetation and disrupts natural wildlife behavior and water flow through the area.

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The Committee recommends that Open Space Rangers should take an “education first” approach to enforcement, but also have the autonomy to enforce policies and issue citations if deemed necessary and as established in Municipal Code 11-1.520 Powers of Arrest.



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2.3 Trail Use Evaluation

The Committee recognizes that there is a growing number of bike users in the Open Space, and that bike usage will rise further if this trend continues. In response, the Committee acknowledged that there may be an opportunity for additional single track trails to be converted to multi-use, while still maintaining trail safety standards. The committee recommends that all existing authorized single track trails in Walnut Creek Open Space be evaluated individually for potential change in use designation using a set of criteria that identify effects to trail safety, plant and wildlife protection, trail sustainability and trail circulation. Potential change in use designations include but are not limited to single track to multi-use trail and single track to nature trail. A nature trail being a specific trail that has unique plant species and or wildlife habitat where multi-use activities are not suitable. In addition, it is recommended that the network of well-established social trails also be evaluated using the same criteria to determine suitability for official designation.

2.4 Multi Use Guidelines

The committee also recommends that a set of multi-use trail guidelines be adopted and used as criteria a trail must meet in order to be considered a multi-use trail. The guidelines recommended by the committee include minimum trail tread and gradient, minimum sight line distance and minimum trail clearance. The method of evaluation would use a standard that if 75 percent of the trail met the multi-use guidelines, the trail could be designated as a multi-use trail. Mitigation measures should be taken to modify the remaining 25 percent of the trail by means of trail reconstruction and or signage informing users of safety issues or directing them to alter otherwise acceptable behavior for small trail segments. For example, having sections of trail where bicyclist must slow to 5mph or walk their bikes around a corner with a limited sight line.

The following are the multi-use guidelines recommended by the committee.

- A. Multi-use trail width for single track trails standard minimum of 48" with vegetation clearance 10' high x 8' wide and adequate room to step off trail for yielding.
- B. Line of sight minimum 100 feet.
- C. Trail gradient less than 10% and 12% max for short distances.

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2.5 Change in Use Procedure

To evaluate and determine whether or not a trail is appropriate for a “Change in Use” (CIU) designation, the Committee recommends the following procedures be completed by Open Space staff:

- D. The City of Walnut Creek should adopt a “Trail Evaluation Criteria Checklist” (see Exhibit A), which is similar to checklists that have been successfully implemented by East Bay Regional Parks District and CA State Parks.
- E. The Trail Evaluation Criteria Checklist will be completed by members of a designated evaluation team made up of Open Space staff. The evaluation team would survey the trail and make a recommendation based on potential impacts to public safety, trail sustainability, plant and wildlife protection and user circulation.
- F. Upon completion of an evaluation, findings would be submitted to the Public Works Director or her/his designee and a determination would be made as to whether or not a CIU designation is suitable or if further evaluation is needed. If further evaluation is needed findings would be submitted to the PROS commission for recommendation.
- G. If a CIU is recommended and approved, a timeline for designation change would then be established based on, funding, staff priorities, and maintenance or trail alterations required to be safe and sustainable and/or other criteria identified in the checklist.

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3 Modifications and Improvements

3.1 Signage

In order to meet trail safety goals and educate the public on trail etiquette, the Committee recognizes the need for additional and/or improved signage at trailheads, on closed trails, and in Open Space kiosks. With the Committee's input taken into consideration, new signs were developed and have been or will be posted at select locations throughout the Open Space such as at kiosks, trail heads, trail markers, trail closures or other areas Open Space staff deem necessary.



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3.2 Kiosks

The Committee recognizes that Open Space kiosks are an important tool where the public might expect to find important information upon entering the Open Space. Open Space Rangers will continue to post information in kiosks regarding the importance of preservation and restoration and presence of wildlife and native organisms. The Committee believes that posting pertinent trail information would also be beneficial. For example, maps with suggested routes for specific user groups and marked loops depicting estimates in trail length, hiking times and intensity will encourage users to contribute to a safe and sustainable trail flow, while assisting users who may be unfamiliar with the trail system.

With proper information and updates, the Committee believes the existing kiosks can be a valuable asset that welcomes visitors and provides them with necessary information that may be essential for all user safety and enjoyment.



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3.3 Social Trails

The committee recognizes that social trails are being used by various user groups and may offer linkages to other trails that are desirable to users and may enhance trail flow. Open Space staff has left some social trails that have been in existence for many years unblocked and unmaintained as they add desirable linkages between mapped trails and do not appear to be adversely affecting the surrounding environment.

In other instances, and in some cases over the course of several years, Open Space staff has worked diligently to close down unauthorized social trails that are potentially unsafe for use and have a negative impact on the area. These impacts include increased erosion, destruction of plant and wildlife habitat, and the safety of other users. There has been successful restoration in some closed areas and resistance and continued use in other areas. In certain areas and trails, staff efforts have been met with resistance as some users have ignored signs, taken down fencing, gone around barriers, and created alternate routes. The monitoring of social trails is ongoing and it is important that newly formed trails be identified and prevented from becoming highly trafficked routes.

3.4 Trail Closures

The Committee recommends allocating additional existing resources to fully restore areas shown but not limited to the maps in section 3.5. The closures have been identified as a focus of Open Space staff operations in 2020 and 2021. The proposed and or active closure areas in Lime Ridge total .9 miles of trail, and roughly 1 acre of intersecting trails in the Ohlone Quarry. In Shell Ridge, the proposed closure amounts to 1.2 miles of trail, including a social trail North of Flat Top, the closure and rerouting of roughly half of the Summit Ridge trail, and the closure of a section of the Ridge trail just NW of Ginder Gap. Additional areas, including new social trails and or bike routes not mapped are to be monitored and action taken as seen fit by Open Space staff.

3.5 Trail Openings

The Committee has identified unauthorized social trails that have been in existence for several years, are widely used, are safe and sustainable, and offer trail users good connectors to already existing trails. The Committee proposes authorizing the use of these trails to be maintained and added to the official trail system with a trail designation to be determined. In addition to the recommendation to evaluate all existing single track trails for potential multi use (Section 2.3 Trail Use Policies and Procedure), the committee recommends that suitable areas be identified for possible development of new multi-use trails.

The proposed trail openings and additions in Lime ridge include a roughly 1 mile new multi-use flow trail in South Lime Ridge; an existing social trail connecting the Manzanita trail to the Buckeye trail through the Ohlone Quarry area; the conversion/reroute of the Blue Oak fire road between Buckeye

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4 Education and Outreach

4.4 Education

As the number of Open Space users grows and demand for recreational opportunities continues to rise, it is vital that there is an emphasis set on educating Open Space users about important issues such as trail safety, trail courtesy, restoration and preservation, wildlife, biodiversity, and the history of the Open Space. It is important that citizens understand what types of activities are potentially damaging to the environment and how activities can affect other user groups' enjoyment of the Open Space. The Committee has identified the following methods to help educate visitors to the Open Space:

- A. Updated information in kiosks.
- B. Right-of-way and trail courtesy signage.
- C. Interpretative signage pertaining to plants, wildlife and trail etiquette along trails or at areas of significance.
- D. Contacts with Rangers on the trail and at trailheads.
- E. Guided walks or hikes.
- F. Information on trails, volunteer events, plants, and wildlife added to the Walnut Creek Open Space website.
- G. Open lines of communication between the public and Open Space staff.

4.5 Outreach

The Committee acknowledges that it will take a collective effort from all user groups to reach the vision that the Open Space is valued, preserved and safely enjoyed by all user groups. Engaging the community will be necessary to reach the goals set forth by the Committee and the City of Walnut Creek not only for the education component but because the City needs help from volunteers to help protect and preserve the Open Space. Listed below are the desired outcomes that the Committee believes can be achieved through on going community engagement.

- A. Citizens feel personally responsible for maintaining and preserving the Open Space.
- B. Citizens contribute time and resources to mitigate damage and improve preservation

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efforts and enjoyment of the Open Space.

- C. Citizens respect each other and the environment while using the Open Space.
- D. Citizens advocate for the ongoing protection of the Open Space.

4.3 Community Engagement

The Committee believes that through a subcommittee or staff facilitation, increased community engagement can be achieved through the following platforms:

- A. Development of a Trail Advocacy Group to help facilitate volunteer trail work days, to help Open Space staff monitor trails safety and maintenance purposes, and to communicate and work with staff on various trail projects.
- B. Continued partnership with nonprofit organizations such as the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation.
- C. Partnering with other nonprofit organizations such as The Bicycle Trails Council of the East Bay.
- D. Developing campaigns around community ownership on social media or community publications such as the Nutshell
- E. Partnering with local schools to engage and educate the youth on the importance of the Open Space.
- F. Create logo for t-shirt, pins, hats to spread pride and awareness of Open Space.

5 Conclusion

5.4 Summary

This document summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Walnut Creek Open Space Trail Committee resulting from monthly meetings focused on the management of the Open Space multi-use trails. The Committee believes that through policy and enforcement, modifications and improvements, focused restoration, and education and outreach, a balance between recreation and preservation can be achieved and Walnut Creek's Open Space trail system can be safer, more sustainable, and able to be enjoyed by all user groups.

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5.5 Priorities and Recommendations

The list below summarize the priorities, recommendations, and actions set forth by Walnut Creek Open Space staff and the Committee.

- A. Close unauthorized, potentially dangerous, and destructive social trails by installing barriers and signage with continued monitoring of areas by staff and or volunteers.
- B. Close trails or areas as seen fit by Open Space staff, such as those indicated in the maps in section 3 of this document.
- C. Restore natural habitat in closed areas and repair damage caused by social trails or improper use.
- D. Apply new closure signs at points of entry to clearly mark closed areas.
- E. Regularly monitor the trail system and areas known for bicycles traveling at high speed and make Ranger contact with users to promote and enforce safe trail use.
- F. Apply new right-of-way signage at kiosks, trailheads, and trail markers to educate users of trail etiquette and regulations.
- G. Add educational and informational material to Open Space kiosks regarding trail closures, restoration efforts, and the importance of preservation in the Open Space.
- H. Evaluate all Open Space single track trails using the Walnut Creek *Trail Evaluation Criteria Checklist* to make recommendations on any changes to trail designations.
- I. Explore the possibility of a new multi-use flow trails in Lime Ridge.
- J. Evaluate the trails proposed in Section 3 of this document for suitable use. Set trail use designation, names, difficulty/intensity, distance, and location on maps. Install trail markers, and add new trails to ongoing maintenance schedules.
- K. Build partnerships between the City of Walnut Creek and organizations such as The Bicycle Trails Council of East Bay to promote trail safety and get the bike community behind trail closures and restoration efforts.
- L. Facilitate the formation of a Trail Advocacy Group or similar volunteer group to assist with trail restoration, maintenance, construction, planning and trail monitoring.

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- M. Develop an online form or method for visitors to report suspicious or non-emergency activity/ incidents that occur in the Open Space. Similar to EBRP “Park Watch Report”.
- N. Hold additional volunteer trail days overseen and facilitated by Open Space staff to enhance community engagement.
- O. Develop and implement a Volunteer Patrol Program.
- P. Give Open Space Rangers the training and ability to issue citations for violations of Open Space policies at their discretion.
- Q. Spread awareness and promote Open Space appreciation through schools, social media and other community publications.

5.6 Endorsement

The Open Space Trails Committee is seeking endorsement from the PROS Commission on the following items.

- A. Additional funding to allocate toward trail closures, potential multi-use trail openings and restoration efforts.
- B. Formalization of the Walnut Creek Trail Evaluation Criteria Checklist (Exhibit A) as a step in determining the feasibility of changing the designation.
- C. Implementation of suggested procedure in regards to trail openings as presented in Section 2.3 of this document.
- D. Open Space Rangers ability to issue citations pursuant to Municipal Code **11-1.516 and 11-1.518**.

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Walnut Creek Open Space Staff

Walnut Creek Public Works Department

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to the wellbeing of Walnut Creek Open Space.