

## Closed for Restoration

2010

In Spring 2009 the Marin Municipal Water District launched Project Restore, a concerted effort to remove undesirable and unofficial trails from the Mount Tamalpais Watershed and to restore them to natural habitat—what MMWD resource specialist, Mike Swezy, calls “a first class restoration of landform, erosion control, and revegetation to reclaim natural conditions”.

The goals are to reduce erosion, which increases sedimentation in reservoirs; to reduce the impact of the trails on wetlands, riparian areas and other environmentally sensitive habitats that are home to special status plant and animal species; and to reduce the impact of the trails on the watershed's natural ecological functions. There are 150 miles of official roads and trails on MMWD watershed land for visitors to use.

These roads and trails are being upgraded and maintained to have minimal impact on the health of the watershed while providing a safe outdoor experience for visitors. The district's 2005 Road and Trail Management Plan identified more than 53 miles of undesirable and often badly built trails on Mt. Tamalpais. In the project areas watershed rangers are making a special effort to monitor closed trails and, if necessary, issue citations to users in closed areas.

Unofficial trails in the water district aren't a new concern. Back in 1916, botanist and founding father of the Sierra Club Willis Jepson wrote, “The trails on Tamalpais are abundantly marked with signs— except where you want one most.” It's likely his confusion was caused by trails established by hikers and other denizens of the area who, for whatever reason, wanted to forge new routes across the landscape. To this day, wandering off-trail isn't prohibited. “We don't have any regs that keep people on trails if they're on foot; if you're on a horse or bike you've got limited options,” says Swezy.

But carving new trails is now strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, since 2005 the district has mapped nine miles of new trails. In recent times renegade mountain biker trails have become of particular concern because of the persistence with which some of them are rebuilt. Hence, Project Restore's particular emphasis on enforcement.

Jim Jacobsen is a professional mountain-bike trail designer and builder who is well-known among local mountain bikers as the motivating force behind the creation of an eight-mile loop of bike trails at the Tamarancho Boy Scout camp west of Fairfax. When asked what he'd like to say about illegal trail building, he replied, “I'm against it. A big problem with illegal trail builders is they don't always consider sustainability, so they do stuff that's erosive. Frequently you'll find that half the work on a trail is on the hard stuff—things illegal builders don't do because it's too much work. Also, the site is typically overgrade, so it's too steep.”



*Conservation of biological resources is a part of MMWD's mission, so public trails must sometimes be rerouted or closed—as are illicit trails—to protect these resources. This beautiful madrone tree stands near the summit of Azalea Hill. Photo by Charles Kennard*

“Trail Closed” signs should be respected for the benefit of all; and if you are a compulsive trail builder, join the District’s volunteer trail maintenance crew on their first-Saturday-of-the-month workdays. Volunteer by contacting Suzanne at [swhelan@marinwater.org](mailto:swhelan@marinwater.org).

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