



Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed

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Policy on Open Space Roads and Trails

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Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed recognizes that there are large existing networks of fire roads and trails in public and private open space in our watershed, and that these have recreational, health and safety functions. Some fire roads and their margins are maintained as fire breaks. Fire roads and trails also provide the means for users to have the first-hand experience of nature that can engender a knowledge of and sense of responsibility for the natural environment.

All roads and trails through open space also have deleterious effects on the natural environment, e.g., they can create breaks in plant communities and wildlife habitats; destroy stands of rare or endangered plants; cause soil erosion and excess sedimentation in creeks; disturb animal activities, including nesting; facilitate the spread of invasive non-native plants, plant pathogens, and littering; and facilitate vandalism and illicit camping. Different user groups have different expectations when they use open space roads and trails; these expectations are often diametrically opposed. Because Friends is an organization focused on the protection of natural resources, we do not support any use of trails that excessively compromises the environment and natural resources.

In light of the above, Friends resolves that:

1. Fire roads and trails must be regraded or maintained to minimize erosion.
2. In areas of the Corte Madera Creek watershed with a high road and trail density, the density should be reduced by decommissioning and revegetating roads and trails most likely to compromise natural resources. Duplicative or unused roads and trails should be decommissioned and revegetated.
3. No new fire road or trail should be constructed unless it is for net environmental enhancement or habitat restoration. If a new trail is constructed, an existing designated trail should be eliminated, so that there is no net gain in designated trails. So the removal of undesignated trails should not be used to justify building of new trails. All undesignated trails should be removed unless they are more environmentally beneficial than designated trails nearby, in which case they can be retained and the designated trail should be removed.
4. Any vegetation cutting or removal for creating firebreaks or travel way clearance should be thoroughly reviewed using the most up-to-date protocols to avoid or significantly reduce environmental impacts.
5. No trail should be widened; nor should a trail be regraded for the purpose of facilitating its use by users other than pedestrians. Specifically, no trail should be altered for the benefit of cyclists or horses, excepting short sections connecting to fire roads.
6. The existing network of narrow public and private trails is not suitable for use by bicycles or horses. Bicycle tires cause rutting of the trail surface, and horses are too heavy for the tread of pedestrian trails. Bicycles and horses should be prohibited from using narrow public pedestrian trails, excepting short sections connecting to fire roads, and private landowners should be discouraged from allowing bicycle or horse use of narrow pedestrian trails.