

Published September 23rd, 2015

Head to Head: Bikers Vs. Horses (and Hikers)

By Chris Lavin



Marianne Mckay on Zane (the dark horse) and Zette Thierra on Ruby Slippers wait for a group of Orinda hikers to pass on a Moraga EBMUD trail. Photo Chris Lavin

since the mid-1990s and is due for an update.

"At issue of course, first and foremost, is to preserve water quality," Figueroa said. "Second is preserving the environment, but we also have a priority to provide recreational activities in the watershed. But the first two issues come first."

The Lafayette and Orinda reservoirs allow some watersports, and hikers can use 82 miles of trails in the watershed as long as they buy a permit. Bikers would be allowed access to some of those trails with the permitting process.

"One of the things we'll have to look at is the enforcement process," said Scott Hill, a district supervisor based in Orinda. If more people are using the watershed, more rangers might be needed to police the trails.

"It will take more staff time and there will be costs involved," Figueroa said.

The opinion of every bicyclist who spoke at the meeting said it wasn't fair that horsemen and hikers were allowed to use the trails but not bicyclists. They also said there was an issue of safety: Many East Bay Regional Park trails cross over EBMUD trails. Bicyclists have to stop when they reach watershed lines, and are forced to divert into traffic to go around those sections.

Richard Disstra, a bicyclist who did not speak at the meeting but was interviewed while diverting his bike on a trail near Moraga, said he did not think it was fair that bikers had to get off the trails to find alternative routes in traffic. "I just don't think it's right," he said. "If they are allowed onto the trails, I think we should be allowed on the trails. I think 99.9 percent of bikers would be respectful of horses."

Janet McBride, the executive director of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, suggested a compromise: All bicyclists who have to traverse the trail over just those EBMUD sections on the ridge trail should be allowed to pass.

"It's something we think the board should look at," she told the directors.

Mckay doesn't like that idea. "People with dogs are supposed to have them on leashes," she said, "but 99 percent of people let their dogs off leash." Her horse got nipped one day "and now he's afraid of dogs."

Few things raise hackles more than when people who are passionate about their interests disagree. That is why the East Bay Municipal Utility District is gearing up for more public hearings on a hot topic: whether to allow mountain bikers on horse trails in the Lamorinda watershed.

"I think it's a really terrible idea," said Marianne Mckay, who keeps her Missouri trotting horse Zane at the Moraga Horsemen's Association barn at the Valle Vista Staging Area. "Some bikers are responsible, but others just are not. We have a lot of blind curves on these trails and if a biker came round one of them, it could be really scary."

The first public hearing on the issue was held in August at EBMUD headquarters in Oakland. Dozens of bikers and horsemen signed up to speak to board members and staff regarding the proposal, which probably won't be voted on until after the first of the year, said Abby Figueroa, the agency spokeswoman. At issue is a new approval of the Watershed Master Plan, which hasn't been revised

Even hikers can spook horses. She likes to take her time when riding Zane on the trails - never trotting. She goes slowly, particularly around large numbers of people. On a recent morning she and a friend had to pull off the trail to allow a large number of hikers from Orinda to pass them by. "Hikers love to see the horses, so it's a treat for them," she said. "But ... it's very slow going."

EBMUD will likely review the watershed plan early next year, Figueroa said. "There will be more public hearings, you can count on that," she said. "We'll try to work out a fair solution for everyone. But the important thing is protecting the watershed."



From left: Zette Thierra on Ruby Slippers and Marianne Mckay on Zane Photos Chris Lavin



Keegan Beattie, 11, of Lafayette explores a trail in Moraga on his mountain bike. Keegan's face brightened when told that nearby EBMUD trails might be opened to bikers. He would "definitely" use them, he said.



Members of the Hercules Cycling Club ride through the EBMUD watershed in Moraga. Many members would be happy to get off the roads and use trails, they said. Bikers include Christopher Bunag, Andy Manuel, Arnel Dionisio, James Tolosa, Kenny Leduc, Mario Olivarez, Ron Magcauas and Walter Weber.

Reach the reporter at: chris@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA