

April 23, 2014

Friends of Stafford Lake Bike Park  
c/o Steve Petterle, Principal Park Planner  
Marin County Parks Department  
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 260  
San Rafael, CA 94903



*via email*

***Subject: Web and Video Promotion of Stafford Lake Bike Park***

Dear Friends,

The recent circulation of a video promoting Stafford Lake Bike Park has prompted Marin Conservation League to register our concerns regarding “messages” being conveyed as that facility nears construction. The video, presented by Bell Built to promote the Park in a competition for a possible grant award to help fund construction, was posted on the Friends of Stafford Lake Bike Park web site and apparently has since been withdrawn, but not before wide circulation. The Friends’ web site shows on its Home page, lower left corner: “Copyright 2014 Marin County Parks and Open Space District,” and prominently displays the Marin County Parks logo. Presumably, what is posted on this web site has been sanctioned by the District (Department).

MCL’s concerns are not with the intended purpose of Park itself, which is clearly described in the web site. The Park was approved in concept by the Board of Supervisors in 2010 as a means of fulfilling recreational needs that have been expressed for a number of years by mountain bikers in Marin, and it enjoys broad political support. Rather, MCL is concerned that public communication about the Park and its uses must be consistent with and reinforce Marin County Parks policies and regulations for bike use on the County’s Open Space Preserves (as well as on other public lands in Marin). It is a County owned facility, notwithstanding that the majority of funding is from private sources. It is also an opportunity for County Parks, working with private sponsors, to distinguish the types of training and recreation that the Park will afford from appropriate behavior on public open space lands of Marin and guide mountain bike behavior accordingly. That is, what is appropriate in the Stafford Lake Bike Park will not be appropriate on Marin’s public lands, and teaching this distinction is critical.

The narrative and images shown in the video fail to make this distinction in several regards. The web site itself contains images that appear to condone inappropriate behavior on public lands. If these are indicative of a general attitude toward the Park in operation, they should be corrected. Images can be powerful in prompting both desirable and undesirable behaviors. The following images on both the web site and the posted video are of concern:

1. The Friends of SLBP web site background photo shows two bikers apparently off-trail, riding through open, vegetated land. If this behavior were transferred to public lands, it would

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violate explicit policies in the County's Draft Road and Trail Management Plan to remain on designated trails, as well as regulations of all other public lands in Marin that prohibit riding off trail. It is, however, the dominant image on the site.

2. The video narration begins by focusing on the apparent lack of trail facilities open to bikes in Marin and shows several photos such as "No bikes" signs to reinforce this myth. In point of fact, a recent calculation by Marin County Parks staff revealed that Marin public lands, taken together, can boast 600 miles of dirt roads and trails, 50 percent of which are open to bikes. Throughout the county, most narrow paths (i.e., "single-track trails") are closed to bikes with reason: they were not designed for shared use, and without extensive reconstruction continue to be unsafe for shared use. Many are regularly ridden illegally by bikers, however, threatening the safety of others on foot or horseback.
3. The strong message presented in the video is one of exclusion of bikers on public lands, a mentality that is portrayed as hostile and the antithesis of "community." This persistent message fails to show the wealth of opportunities in Marin County in which mountain bike riders can share recreation safely along with walkers, hikers, and equestrians.
4. At the conclusion of a segment of the video that shows kids and families riding bikes on fire roads and old ranch roads (a positive image!), there follows a single photo showing a bike aloft – an image of technical riding that would be wholly inappropriate on public open space land shared by other users.
5. The video suggests that the new bike park will be magnet for the whole Bay Area, emphasizing the sense of "community" that the Park represents. This is an existing reality (Marin County as a magnet) that makes it all the more essential that behavior appropriate to the Bike Park must be distinguished from behavior that is appropriate in heavily used public open space.
6. Other images of technical skill are shown in the video – jumping rocks, racing, etc. Any future communications on the Friends' web site and in other promotional media should reinforce the point that these are not allowed on public lands that are shared by other users.

Several months ago Marin Conservation League signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Marin County Bicycle Coalition and Marin Horse Council, forming a "Trail Partners" collaboration, with the objective of effecting a positive change in the culture of trail use in Marin. Our goals are to encourage legal and appropriate behavior so as to ensure both safety for all users of public lands and long-term protection of the natural resources that make Marin unique. We are counting on others copied on this letter to help in making this effort successful. The Stafford Lake Bike Park is in a special position to reinforce these goals, and we ask that the Friends and County and other organizations work together to make this happen.

We also ask that the Board of Supervisors (acting also as Directors of the Marin County Open

Space District) be fully assured that activities at the Stafford Lake Bike Park, whether sponsored by donors to the Park or the County, serve to promote the County's important long-term goals for stewardship of its public lands.

Sincerely yours,



Nona Dennis, Chair, Parks and Open Space Committee

cc: Linda Dahl, General Manager, Marin County Parks  
Greg Zitney, Chair, Marin County Parks and Open Space Commission  
Kathrin Sears, President, Board of Supervisors  
Marin County Bicycle Coalition  
Access4Bikes  
International Mountain Biking Association, c/o Tom Ward  
Marin Horse Council