

The following pages show some of the impact that mountain biking has had and continues to have in the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA.

This was prepared in an effort to inform decision makers what they can expect if they decide to permit mountain biking in Los Angeles city parks.

Mountain bikers have carved numerous trails in the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, often down steep hillsides, over cliff faces, across pillow lava, over natural or built up “bumps,” and through slow-growing native vegetation. Such trails, and their continued use, have had an adverse impact on the topography, the habitat, animal life, and other users in the Preserve. Land managers’ (and volunteers’) efforts to restore damaged habitat, close off unauthorized trails, and eliminate safety hazards have repeatedly been thwarted by vandalism, destruction of mitigation efforts, and disregard of signs, warnings, physical closures, and reroutings.

A number of people have been hit by mountain bikers in the Preserve. Many people tell of having been startled by mountain bikers speeding past. And many people simply no longer hike or ride their horses in the Preserve, for fear of being hit by a mountain biker or having their horse throw them after being spooked by a mountain biker.\*

\*Dozens of people have submitted written correspondence and spoken up at Rancho Palos Verdes City Council meetings to inform decision makers of these experiences with mountain bikers.



Photos above are from 2006 and show mountain bikers using trails they carved over a low cliff to create a favorite jump spot. Below, a more recent photo of the same area shows the damage that has been done to topography and habitat. The mountain bikers also pose a hazard to others using the primary, wide, authorized trail (at bottom left, below).



Recognizing the hazard of the jump spot pictured on the preceding page, in order to block access to it, a post and rope blockade was installed by volunteers under the land manager's supervision. Bicyclists continued to go over and around it to access the jump spot. Cactus were installed. Over several months, the cactus and the post and rope were repeatedly removed, then repeatedly replaced by volunteers.



Photo at left shows the cactus installation at the access to the jump spot pictured on the preceding page. Photo at right shows many of the cactus have been uprooted. Several times the post and rope blocking access was taken out, then replaced. Eventually the rope blocking access was cut (photo at left) and virtually all cactus were removed.

August 2009



November  
2008



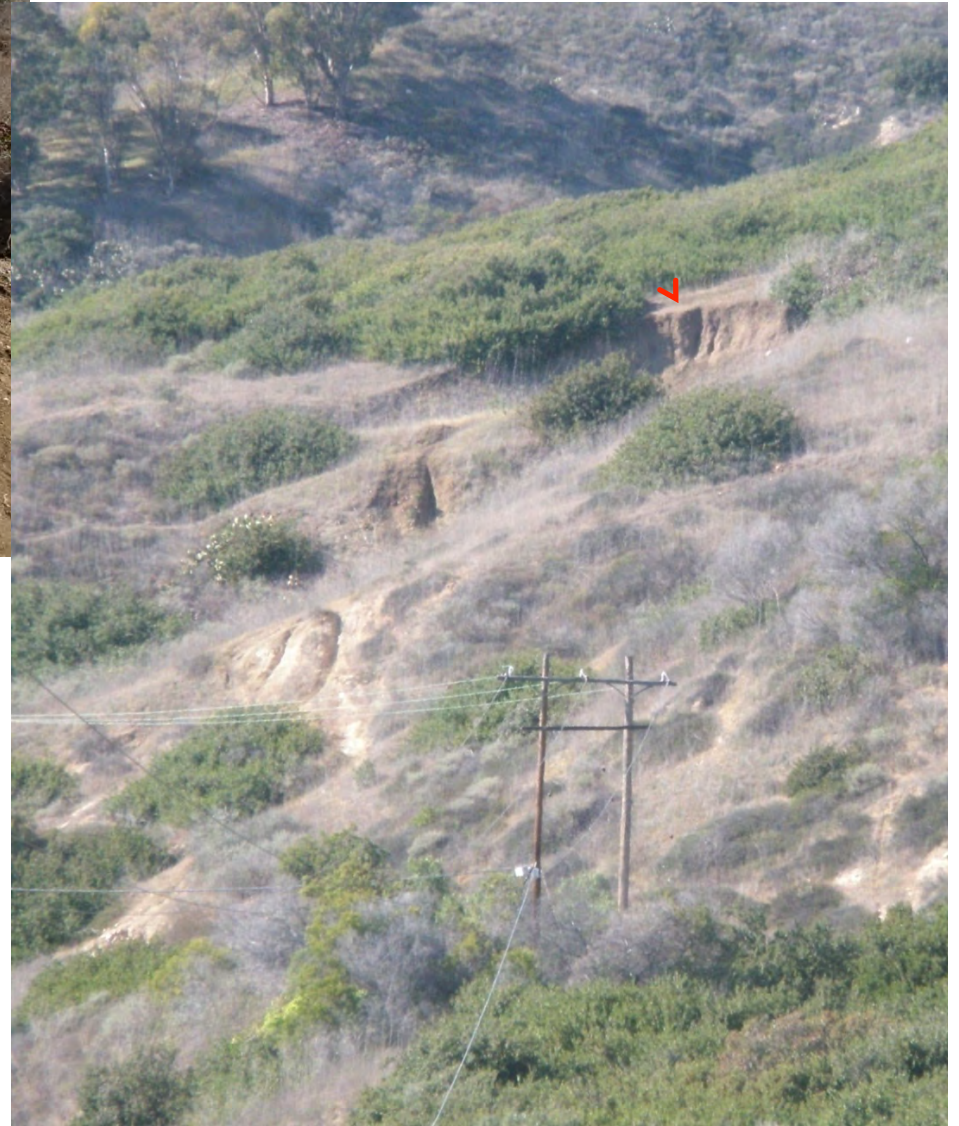
The photo at right shows bike riders jumping off another cliff near the entrance to the Portuguese Bend Reserve, part of the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve. Again, they land on a heavily used, authorized trail at the base of the cliff.



The photo at left shows the beginnings of another trail being carved down a steep hillside.

Yet another example of trails carved by bicyclists over a steep cliff side and into habitat below.

Point of reference



The photo below shows a mountain biker who came off the jump pictured on the preceding page and is riding down the unauthorized trail network pictured in greater detail on the following pages. May 2009





The photos above show just part of the damage done by mountain bikes carving up the habitat and displacing fragile soils beneath the jump pictured in the preceding photos.



These photos show more of the damage beneath the jump pictured on the preceding pages.



A typical scenario: The rider (pictured right) came down from the unauthorized trail network pictured on preceding pages (hidden from much of the Preserve's authorized trail system), continued down the unauthorized trail below left, across the heavily used authorized trail (below right), and cut into the side brush as evident from the track in the photo below right.



He then looped back around to ride the same unauthorized trail network again within less than 10 minutes.  
May 2009

Not all jumps are high.



The photos above and at right show the two ends of a short trail formed off the primary, authorized trail. This type of trail made to take advantage of a particular feature in the Preserve is illegal, yet occurs repeatedly in the Preserve.



January  
2007



Above is yet another example of a trail created up over a rise to the left of an existing, authorized trail, again putting at risk other trail users coming around the bend and damaging the natural contours of the land.

Despite rules put in place to prohibit this sort of thing, it continues.



Above, another unauthorized trail is being formed over a bump to the right of an existing, authorized trail. May 2009.



Not all jumps are naturally occurring.

These photos demonstrate how dirt piled on rocks, sandbags, wood and other filler can be built up to form doubles and triples, sometimes on a trail, sometimes off to the side.



Mountain bikers have carved numerous trails in the Preserve, down steep hillsides, over cliff faces, and over natural or built up “bumps” in an effort to add speed and technical challenges to their rides.



It may be fun for the mountain bikers riding such trails, but it has damaged plant life, intersected habitat, and created a safety hazard for users of the authorized trails. Above is another example of an unauthorized trail running down the hill (from the left), across the primary trail and on down the hill on the opposite side, creating a safety hazard for others.

These photos show another area of the Preserve that has many unauthorized trails, which continue to be heavily used by mountain bikers because they are technically challenging. In addition to the native vegetation here, what makes the area special are the area's unique geological features. Many of those features have been destroyed or irreversibly damaged by mountain biking.





Mountain bikes have caused irreversible damage to rock formations in the geologically sensitive pillow lava area of the Preserve.



The above photo demonstrates the trenching that can occur when a trail characterized by dry, powdery soil sees considerable use by mountain bikers. July 2009

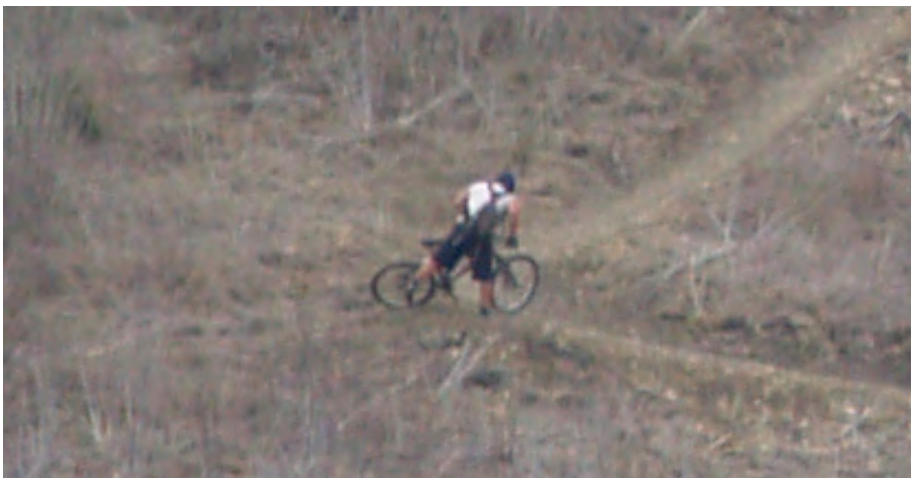
Not all of the trails made by mountain bikers were intentional.

Some were made accidentally by mountain bikers who lost control and veered or skidded off trail.

Biker down.



At the point where the tracks go off trail in each of the photos below, there is a curve after a downhill section. Mountain bikers often fail to slow before the curves and ride off the trail.





In the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, there is an approved trails plan. Approved trails are marked to indicate which trails are available for use by equestrians, pedestrians, and/or mountain bikers.

All but one of the trails in the above network are illegal.



New, illegal trails continue to be forged.  
July 30, 2009



Once a trail is formed, it's very difficult to close it off and return the trail bed to its natural state. Closing off unauthorized trails involves a lot of work which is often thwarted by bikers' attempts to take back such trails. The photo below, left, shows one fairly successful effort to block access to an unauthorized trail, but it took several attempts and many hours of labor and the result detracts from the natural environment. In the rare instances that unauthorized trails are abandoned and have the chance to grow back spontaneously, what grows in place of the original, high quality native vegetation is oats and other non-native, invasive species, as seen below, right.



The riders in these photos came to this area on pedestrian equestrian only trails (marked “no bikes”), then rode down trails that are not in the approved trails plan, then rode into the habitat.



Riding down unauthorized trails , then into habitat.



They see me, then . . .

... after seeing me, they  
turn around.



I can hear the  
vegetation being  
crushed beneath them.



Mountain bikers riding down a trail labeled for pedestrian equestrian use only, no bikes.

July 30, 2009 at about 6 PM

Again, it is evident that they know they shouldn't be here. When they see me, someone says "she's got a camera" and they turn and ride down another trail.



These mountain bikers may think that they aren't doing any harm—that they are riding through a weed patch or “dead stuff.” Much of the vegetation here is dry and brown and appears to be dead for a good part of the year. It is merely dormant. In addition, where there are patches of non-native “weeds,” there is also a seedbed of wildflowers.



In these photos the wildflower known as Pearly White attempts to gain a foothold.

And of course there is other wildlife disturbed here. . . .

Humans and plant life aren't the only ones to be at risk when sharing the trails with mountain bikers in the Preserve. The photo at right shows a baby snake on a trail in the Preserve. (close up below)



Note the nearby bicycle tracks and consider what the likelihood is that the rider would see this little guy and be able to stop or veer away. Consider what the likely result would be if the snake had been a few inches further over to the center of the trail at the moment the bike passed by.

That baby snake was lucky.  
These rabbits weren't so lucky.



Unsure about this one? See the next page.

The rabbit pictured below was found dead, just off to the side of a trail that winds down a hillside and is popular with mountain bikers. It appeared to have been hit with some force that likely broke its neck and knocked it into the dry mustard stalks just off the trail. There was no evidence that it had been attacked by an animal. Its fur was unmarred.





Another, this time a baby, found completely intact, just to the side of a trail at a bend where mountain bikes travel fast.

Some say maybe a fox or coyote attacked this little guy. If that were the case, wouldn't you expect the predator to have taken at least a little nibble?





Ask yourself where you would go if these mountain bikers were riding toward you fast on this narrow trail. It is not approved for bike use and yet mountain bikers ride here every day. This photo was taken one day when I was hiking with my two young daughters. These two mountain bikers were riding fast around a curve toward us. My girls were ahead of me at a point in the trail just beyond this which is a bit wider, so fortunately were not hit. On another occasion, on another trail, one on which mountain bikers are permitted, I wasn't so lucky. I saw the mountain biker coming and, when I had my back turned to him as I looked for snakes in the brush to see if it would be safe to step off the trail and out of his way, he sped by and hit me. I wasn't injured, physically, but what about the next time?

Several of the most vocal members of the mountain biking community have attempted to paint a picture of mountain biking that is much different from the way they engage in the sport. They want to paint it as a leisurely activity in which participants are out to enjoy nature. They want to paint a picture of families out riding together, as families might stroll through the hills on foot together. No doubt there are some mountain bikers who are content to ride in that manner. From what I've seen, more often than not, mountain biking is an aggressive, hard-driving sport in which participants challenge themselves and others to take on nature.

Those riders and that sport drive technology for increasingly sophisticated gear, with heavy duty shocks and tires to facilitate speed over difficult terrain and heavy duty protective gear for riders who fall. That technology is designed with the riders' needs in mind. It doesn't take into account the impact that increased speed and ability to be aggressive on trails has on other trail users.



It is vital that decision makers understand the impact mountain biking has on limited resources and it is vital that they understand that mountain biking, in general, brings an entirely different state of mind than that of most visitors to the Preserve and similar areas—those who come for the peaceful, tranquil setting away from the stress, intensity, and pressures of city life.