




**EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT  
BOARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING  
AGENDA STAFF REPORT**

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<b>DATE</b>	December 6, 2024
<b>TITLE</b>	Briones Pilot Project – Pilot Project Review and Recommendations
<b>DIVISION</b>	Acquisition, Stewardship, and Development
<b>FROM</b>	Brian Holt, Division Lead, Planning, Trails and GIS Ken Wysocki, Assistant General Manager, Acquisition, Stewardship and Development
<b>APPROVED</b>	Sabrina Landreth, General Manager 

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**RECOMMENDATION**

The General Manager recommends that the Board of Directors amend Attachment A of Ordinance 38 to include trail designations and rules on 5.75 miles of trails within Briones Regional Park.

**BACKGROUND**

The Briones Trails Pilot Project (Pilot Project) officially started on April 21, 2023, and is slated to last twenty (20) months. The Pilot Project was initiated following two years of meetings by the Trail Users Working group, which sought to find solutions to real and perceived conflicts throughout the East Bay Regional Park District (Park District) following the increase in recreation in Park District parks during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pilot Project was made possible by the General Manager’s authority to issue temporary rules and regulations to preserve parklands and public health and safety, protect sensitive habitat and threatened or endangered species, and to distribute parkland resources and facilities among competing uses, pursuant to Section 200.5 of the Park District’s Ordinance 38.

The Pilot Project was limited to a 1,600-acre portion in the northeast corner of Briones Regional Park (Pilot Project Zone) accessible by three formal staging areas: Alhambra Creek Staging Area, Old Briones Road Staging Area and the Reliez Valley Staging Area. The Pilot Project tested new approaches to safely share trails and improve the trail experience for all users while protecting habitat, wildlife, and watersheds. A key component of the Pilot Project was the closure and restoration of illegally built “bootleg” trails. During the term of the Pilot Project, trail use was limited to specific uses on specific trails within the Pilot Project Zone and two trail segments adjacent to the Pilot Project Zone. Trail designations included hiking only, biking only, or biking/hiking only. The biking only trails were designated as downhill direction of travel only. During the weekends, trail use within the Pilot Project Zone was restricted so that bicycle and equestrian access to the Pilot Project Zone alternated days they are allowed based on calendar date.

ANALYSIS

The Pilot Project included six goals to quantify success in achieving Pilot Project objectives. Below is a list of the six goals with a summary of the metrics and the outcomes.

**Goal # 1: Eliminate the Creation of New Illegal Bootleg Trails in the Pilot Project Zone**  
This goal will be considered successful if zero new bootleg trails are established in the pilot zone during the term of the Pilot Project.  
*Status: Achieved*

Potential new trail development was monitored during the Pilot Project through various methods. Briones staff and Public Safety officers conducted regular patrols of the Pilot Zone to deter and evaluate existing restored trails and found no new trail development within the Pilot Project Zone at any time during the Pilot Project. There were also no reports of new trail development within the Pilot Project Zone by park users during the Pilot Project. District staff also reviewed trail use heat map data (Strava) and crowd sourced cell-phone data (Placer AI) on a quarterly basis and confirmed that there were no new trails created within the Pilot Project Zone during the Pilot Project. A complete trail inventory of Briones trails was conducted by AECOM in August 2024 with extensive ground-truthing that provided further confirmation that no new trails had been created within the Pilot Project Zone since the outset of the Pilot Project.

**Goal # 2: Close and Restore (Remove) Designated Bootleg Trails**  
During the two-year term of the Pilot Project, it is expected to complete 75% or more of the recommended priority closures and restorations. At the end of the Pilot Project, we expect 100% of the closures maintained (barriers and signage in place and no signs of usage) and the trail vegetation reestablished.  
*Status: Achieved*

Trail closure and restoration of select trails began in spring of 2023 with support of volunteers and oversight by Park District staff. Nine trails were closed with signage, and seven (77%) were physically closed and removed by de-compacting, recontouring, covering with debris and adding jute netting where necessary. Trails Program staff conducted monthly assessments of the restored illegal trails. Early in the Pilot Project, some signage was vandalized or removed and required replacement. Some signs were reinstalled using concrete. As the Pilot Project progressed, sign vandalism steadily decreased to the point where sign vandalism is no longer an issue. Use of restored and closed trails was also monitored using heat maps, trail counters and cameras. All physically removed trails were confirmed to have no use after closure. There were two trails designated to be removed that have portions within jurisdictional waterways requiring regulatory permits to do so, therefore the physical closure of these trails has not yet been completed. The two closed trails that were not physically removed continued to receive very infrequent use (one trip per day on average), due to the lack of physical closure. Once permits are obtained for work on these trails, that work will be implemented. See Table 1 below.

Table 1 TRAIL RESTORATION / CLOSURE		
R10	Close & Restore	0.36
R12	Close & Restore	0.42
R13	Close & Restore	0.36
R14	Close & Restore	0.78
R15	Close & Restore	1.36
R17	Close & Restore	0.72
R18	Close & Restore	0.14
R19	Close & Restore	0.26
R20	Close & Restore	0.59
Total		4.99

### **Goal # 3: Increase Trail Volunteerism to Assist with Restoration (Removal) and Maintenance**

Success will be based on number of events held and number of participants attending

During the two-year term of the Pilot Project, it is expected to complete 90% or greater of scheduled events and activities are held and 90% of projected/requested minimum volunteer participation is reached for each event.

*Status: Achieved*

Volunteer programming and community engagement has played a vital role in the success of the Pilot Project. Engaging with volunteers, especially the local riders, not only provided an enthusiastic source of labor, but more importantly, opened a direct link to the community of passionate trail users. These in-person, on-trail interactions allowed for a better understanding and ability to influence the conversation that may be driving the issues of user conflict and bootleg trail construction within the park.

Soon after the first community Dig Day on May 13th, 2023, some of the local mountain biking community organized and established the Stewards of Briones, a non-profit created to help organize riders for Dig Days, to advocate for trail stewardship and access while helping bridge the gap between Park District staff and mountain bikers.

Once the Stewards of Briones was formed, they eagerly provided insights into trail issues and maintenance concerns, while helping promote the Pilot Project and the Park District's talking points related to responsible riding and trail stewardship. The Stewards of Briones proved their ability to organize and communicate with a large contingent of East Bay riders to promote and support the 2023 Dig Day events. They were invited to "co-host" the 2024 Community Dig Day events along with Park District staff and continue to provide input on project identification and planning, volunteer coordination, reporting, and participate in crew leader positions.

This model has allowed the Stewards of Briones to take responsibility for stewardship of the bike trails in Briones which is resulting in a growing base of volunteers to help maintain trails and spread messaging about trail etiquette and policy, while providing a platform for Park District staff to educate volunteers about the park's natural resources and the negative impacts of bootleg trail construction.

This community support has been instrumental in making the volunteer program a success, with a grand total of 23 events with 389 volunteers working 2,456 hours on trail maintenance and trail closures in support of the Pilot Project.

### **Goal # 4: Compliance with Management Strategies and Pilot Project Rules**

During the two-year term of the Pilot Project, it is expected to have a compliance rate of at least 80% of total usership.

*Status: Achieved*

The Pilot Project rules were posted through extensive signage in the Pilot Project Zone, with improvements to the signage completed at the halfway mark. The Briones Pilot Project website offered information on the Pilot Project rules, and Public Safety supported the Pilot Project with a robust social media presence. Pilot Project rules were further instilled via communication at outreach events, volunteer dig days, weekend tabling by the trail safety patrol, and countless interactions with the public by Park District staff.

Compliance with the Pilot Project rules was enforced by Public Safety through 262 hours of patrol, responding to 94 reports, and administering 99 citations between April 21, 2023 and November 1, 2024. Compliance was also assessed through Strava, Placer AI, trail counters and cameras. Compliance with alternative days rules by bikers was measured at 81% in the Pilot Project Zone, and

79% for equestrians. Compliance with trail use designations was measured at 91% for bikers on hike-only trails, and 94% for hikers on bike-only trails, and 79% for horses on dual use trails. Compliance with directional use designations was measured at 99% for bikers and hikers.

**Goal # 5: Collect Qualitative Data in Relation to Management Objectives**

At the end of the Pilot Project an overall positive response rate of 75% or greater will indicate a positive outcome. Feedback regarding strategies will also be collected and a positive rate of 60% or greater will be considered successful.

*Status: Achieved*

Qualitative data was collected throughout the Pilot Project and relied on in-person and online methods. Key in-person methods included the Trail User Working group meetings from 2021-2023. The Park District received feedback from the public at onsite meetings in February 2023 and June 2024. Each of these meetings included large group discussions, breakout groups with maps and notes, and feedback cards. Feedback was also solicited at volunteer dig day events and anecdotally by Park District staff through regular interactions with park users. Sentiments throughout these interactions trended toward a positive response with many reports of improved interactions with previously feared user groups.

Online opportunities to provide feedback included a Pilot Project email account opened and regularly monitored prior to and throughout the Pilot Project, the Pilot Project webpage comment submittal link, and two surveys: one in Fall 2023 (600 responses) and one in Summer 2024 (199 responses). 93% of respondents felt positively about the outcomes of the Pilot Project. Over 88% of respondents also felt positively about each of the strategies, apart from the alternative days, which had 56% support. This follows anecdotal conversations where park users have been split on this strategy.

**Goal # 6: Obtain Trail Use Data**

During the two-year term of the Pilot Project monitoring and data collection from the digital tools will be conducted at least monthly.

*Status: Achieved*

Data was collected by District staff monthly to understand demographic and temporal use of the park. This information was evaluated to instruct public safety patrols, trail reroutes and confirm compliance of Pilot Project rules. From April 21, 2023 through November 1, 2024, the Pilot Project Zone has averaged 645 trips per day, with a trip breakdown of 82% hikers, 16% bikers, and 2% equestrians. The trips were split amongst the three staging areas of the Pilot Project Zone as follows: 66% at Alhambra Creek, 16% at Old Briones, 18% at Reliez Valley.

The Pilot Project opened roughly 3.5 miles of bike only trails, 2.25 miles of hiker/biker shared use trails, 1.25 miles of hiker only trails, and decommissioned just under 5.0 miles of illegal bootleg trails as shown in the *Table 2: Trail Adoption Recommendations* below. With the successful outcomes of the strategies employed for the Pilot Project, the General Manager recommends that the Board of Directors adopt the Pilot Project trail use designations and amend Ordinance 38 to add the 5.75 miles of bike accessible trails to Attachment 'A'. By the metrics identified at the outset, the Pilot Project has been successful. The recommended action will formalize adopt the designated biking and shared use trails opened during the Pilot Project. Maintenance work totaling approximately 2,200 feet (PB7 & B1) will also be implemented to provide line of sight improvements, drainage improvements, widening at strategic locations to provide passing room, and improved signage. Additionally, given feedback received during the Pilot Project, a change in use on a popular hiking segment previously designated as bike only (B4) will be established to allow hikers bi-directional access and limit bike access to uphill travel only. These rule changes and maintenance actions aim to further reduce potential user conflict and aim to prevent resource impacts from erosion.

Staff will continue to adaptively manage the trail network in Briones and pursue trail improvement projects that will further enhance user experience and reduce environmental impact. Future projects that require CEQA adoption and regulatory permits will be brought before the Park District Board of Directors as they are progressed. Staff will use its discretion to identify potential reroutes, install safety measures, and remove or restore trail segments as necessary within the former Pilot Project Zone and throughout Briones Regional Park. The Park District will continue to evaluate the lessons learned from the Pilot Project and implement management changes as it sees fit in Briones and other Park District parks.

In summary, the proposed action will amend Ordinance 38 Attachment A: Specific Parks or Areas of Parks with Bicycle Restrictions to establish an exception to the following trails (see Table I): Curl of the Burl, Hank and Frank (Upper Jedi Line, Jedi Line, Upper Zombie Line, Zombie Line, Muir Line, Lower Runout), Isaac's, Radio Tower, Texas Toast, Blue Oak Stoke, Swoopies, Reliez Valley Trail, Traverse Connector, and Lagoon Traverse. The following trails listed in Table I will be added to the Briones Park Map and formally adopted as pedestrian only trails, but do not require an amendment to Ordinance 38: Echo Springs Ridge Trail, Desert Trail, and Orchard Ridge Trail. The Briones Pilot Project map is included as an attachment for reference.

Table 2: Trail Adoption Recommendations				
Trail Name	Pilot Name	Trail Type	Miles	Totals
Curl of the Burl	B1	Bicycle single use directional	0.71	
Hank & Frank	B2	Bicycle single use directional	1.37	
Isaac's	B3	Bicycle single use directional	0.56	
Radio Tower>Texas Toast>Blue Oak Stoke	B4	Bicycle single use directional	0.93	
<b>Bicycle single use directional</b>				<b>3.57</b>
Reliez Valley Trail	PB5	Hiker & Bicycles Only	0.6	
Traverse Connector	PB6	Hiker & Bicycles Only	0.29	
Lagoon Traverse	PB7	Hiker & Bicycles Only	1.3	
<b>Hiker &amp; Bicycles Only</b>				<b>2.19</b>
<b>ATTACHMENT A TOTAL</b>				<b>5.76</b>
Echo Springs Ridge Trail	P8	Pedestrian only both directions	0.53	
Desert Trail	P9	Pedestrian only both directions	0.75	
Orchard Ridge Trail	P10	Pedestrian only both directions	0.6	
<b>Pedestrian only both directions</b>				<b>1.28</b>
<b>TOTAL NEW TRAIL ADOPTION</b>				<b>7.04</b>

A presentation will be provided to the Board Executive Committee showing qualitative and quantitative data results for additional detail and discussion.

## FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the amendment of Ordinance 38.

## ATTACHMENTS

Briones Pilot Project Map