

QUESTIONS FOR WEBINAR:

Expanding & Strengthening Partnerships and Engagement Opportunities for Mountain Biking

July 16, 2020

Angela asks: How can Land Managers appeal to Mountain Bike groups to create more trails and work with us on the land in our care?

Jake B: In California, please reach out to CAMTB to find out who the regional organizations might be in your area. We've found that MTB/Trail groups usually have a large contingent of willing laborers - they just need to be pointed in the right direction. (Austin@camtb.org, jake@camtb.org, Steve@camtb.org, jake@camtb.org, matthew@camtb.org will all work!) - Nationally, a great place to start is with IMBA - they have partners all over the country, as well as their own trail crews. Start with Anthony: anthony.duncan@imba.com then Dave: david.wiens@imba.com

Steve M: To follow on Jake's response, if there isn't a mountain bike club or nonprofit in the area, I've seen mountain bikers gather around new opportunities, especially when they know there are willing land managers. If there is potential for new trails, announcing a series of public meetings to give community input on a trail plan will bring people out of the woodwork. If there isn't an existing organization, I've seen groups come together organically around travel management plans and trail master planning processes.

Barry asks: Have there been many issues with bike packing and back packers using the same trail?

Susie M: I have never heard of any conflicts of this type in San Diego area. I think these more back country uses are so dispersed that conflicts are rare. Also no MTB's on the Pacific Crest Trail or other Wilderness trails so shouldn't be any conflicts there.

Steve M: I've bikepacked a number of times, including twice on the Colorado trail in 14 and 18 days respectively. In those journeys I never experienced negative encounters. Most encounters resulted in friendly discussions about trail conditions, water sources, and shared experiences of some incredibly scenic landscapes we were all blessed to be in. Shorter overnight trips, especially here in Los Angeles, have never been an issue either.

Ben asks: What are some strategies for dealing with social distancing and safety during group activities?

Susie M: Most larger organizations and clubs have curtailed all group activities and events for the very reason that this is hard to manage. That being said small group rides are still occurring and hopefully most leaders are using good sense and safety guidelines. The Recreate Responsibly Coalition Guidelines are great! <https://www.recreateresponsibly.org/>

Bob asks: Is it worthwhile to hire a professional design firm to create a mountain bike trails plan or is best to let the users create the plan? What would you advise about using design-build companies instead of landscape architects?

Jake B: In California there are many reputable trail builders who vary from individual contractor/builders to partners with trail and construction firms. I would recommend doing some research into recent trail networks that reflect the design and style that you are interested in - and then let us help you connect with the folks that made those trails happen.

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Steve M: In our experience, the best outcomes begin with professional oversight of a trail plan development, with public input on desired destinations, connections and ranges of experiences desired. If the trails are to be designed for bicycles, the best planners to engage are those who are skilled mountain bikers as well as professional trail builders.

Christopher asks: My state has zero school MTB sports involvement. How did that come about in other states?

Answers from Attendees:

Matt shares: Probably the easiest way to engage with NICA teams in your state is to go to the NICA website page that has links to each league (below) and reach out directly to the League Director for your local league. The League Director can help connect you with local teams in the area --- <https://www.nationalmtb.org/nica-leagues/>

Danae asks Steve: In California, are any of the panel members aware of partnerships/collaboration between transportation entities (whether local or state level Caltrans) and recreation entities? Thinking of the overlap between recreation and transportation and how resources can be pooled to expand trail networks, etc.

Steve M: I serve on the [San Gabriel Mountains Community Collaborative](#), along with representatives from recreation, local government, utilities, conservation, and transportation. Caltrans is also a member. We have both a Transportation Committee, and a Recreation Committee which I chair. We've had many discussions about the overlap between transportation and recreation. At the moment our open recreation sites are more traffic-congested than the city, for example. During the webinar I mentioned that our Metro department is doing a long-term transportation plan for the city. We want to ensure their long term plan includes transit connections to our National Forest and National Recreation Area, and commented accordingly. We also need to consider the differing definition of trails. In mountain biker's parlance, trails refer to natural surface singletrack, but from the County and State Departments of Transportation, Class III bikeways are also trails. We definitely see both recreation and transportation use of those facilities. There's also growing demand for bicycle infrastructure in cities. We sometimes work with our road and transportation cycling counterparts, the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, and support each other's efforts.

David asks: Can you recommend trail design standards/guidelines resources?

Steve M: For mountain bike trail design, IMBA and the BLM collaborative on this great resource: [Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience](#). For trail design and theory, IMBA's Trail Solutions book is also a great resource. Visit <https://www.imba.com/explore-imba/resource-hub> and click on "books" as a resource type. Recently the Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz held a series of online "trail academy" classes, since they couldn't hold in-person training this year. While these resources will give you all of the basics, many land managers have their own trail standards or trail manuals to which new trails must comply. Many have borrowed heavily from IMBA's books and best practices. Here in Los Angeles we have the [LA County Trails Manual](#), but we also federal ([Forest Service](#), NPS) and State Parks each using their own standards.

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Henry asks: Where best to look for trail builds in / around the inland valley area?

J Adam asks: Is better to start NICA projects with less complex trail work projects.

Steve M: Yes, generally a first trailwork experience for most NICA projects is brushing a trail, or simple treadwork like clearing of drainage structures. But kids have often surprised me with their eagerness to learn once they appreciate the value of the work. I've had student-volunteers help me on a complex rockwork project, to varsity riders organizing and leading trail restoration events as a combined NICA/Boy Scouts Eagle scout project. With good supervision and a fun attitude, kids can get a lot done. Those who really enjoy it are the same who follow up by joining our regular, non-NICA work days.

Do you have any ideas for encouraging or helping to educate the MTB community regarding a conservation ethic? Especially in the urban interface?

Susie M - It is my experience that most mountain bikers and especially those who become engaged with their local organizations are very interested in conservation and are nature lovers just as much as any other user group. That is why many are outside in the first place. Teaching basic Leave No trace ethics and building stewardship is ongoing on many education efforts that MTB trail orgs undertake on a regular basis. Leading interpretive MTB rides is also a way to engage folks in the local flora/fauna/geology/etc. For example, here is a great article written by a MTB advocate/trail steward and leader from Santa Barbara which highlights conservation issue as related to invasive plants: <https://www.patagonia.com/stories/amidst-the-mustard/story-89292.html>

Jasmine asks: Can you speak to local and regional economic development associated with trails? I live in rural Appalachia (but I am a Los Angeles native -Heeeey). We're hoping to build a diversified economy by envisioning our forests as a natural resource for outdoor recreation, especially in a time when people want to spend more time outside and not in crowded social settings. Can you point me to any relevant research or anecdotal evidence of economic development around mtb trails in rural settings?

Steve M: As one of the other participants mentioned, there was a recent webinar on that topic: <https://www.americantrails.org/training/sustainable-advantage-outdoor-recreation-and-rural-community-development-in-california>

IMBA Canada published a great summary of best practices to promote mountain bike tourism. <https://imbacanada.com/tips-on-developing-mountain-biking-tourism/>. Essentially, it starts with having great trails with enough variety for everyone, a bike park, then having good maps, bike-friendly businesses, and coverage in mountain bike magazines and blogs, or on social media. Cap it off with an event or festival that brings the community together. It's a long process depending on how much funding is available.

A study in the [Journal of Vacation Marketing](#) reported that mountain bike tourists are predominately middle-aged affluent males who take an average of five short-break trips annually of about 400 miles per trip during the spring and summer months, and in the process spend approximately US\$400 per trip. What populations are within that range (200 mile radius) that you could draw from, and how much mountain biking is taking place in those locations? Those would help you figure out how much infrastructure would be needed to attract those populations.

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Leelau.net published a compendium of research papers and articles on MTB economic impacts in 2016: <http://www.leelau.net/sharonandlee/economic-impact-assessments-of-mountain-biking-tourism/>

However, that listing hasn't been updated. There are some newer case studies, and since 2016 some newer destinations have been developed. This article is a little more recent from [Pinkbike](#), or this from [Australia](#). There was a comparative "Critical Review of Economic Impact Studies" released in January this year, but it is behind a paywall. The abstract pointed out the difficulty in comparing the different studies due to the different circumstances of each setting, and the methodologies used in each paper they reviewed. That tells me that it would behoove you to look for studies of towns in a similar situation, size and trail potential to yours. There are many examples out there with some deep searching.

There are programs like People for Bikes RideSpot, or IMBA Ride Center that can help put you on the destination map, so to speak, and help you determine what infrastructure is needed to gain that status.

Answers from Attendees:

Jeff: Not a question, in regards to rural development, IMBA has a case study of Oakridge, Oregon on their website.

Kevin: <https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/learning/flash-cards/trails-and-cycling-in-northwest-arkansas>

Maureen: Just a comment about the rural development question: there was a webinar about this exact topic very recently!!

Mitch: I am the least PC guy around but what can we do to increase outreach to inner city/urban youth and families. I know there is a program at Malibu State Park. CORBA?

Nikki: SDMBA funded and built the Sweetwater Bike Park, which is a great off-road skills area. I would love to see more of those parks pop up in urban areas! I think it also goes along with bike tourism.

Patrick: Re: the question about tourism development in Appalachia (or anywhere else), the IMBA Trail Accelerator Grant is a great way to begin planning trails. Contact patrick.kell@imba.com or 802-371-9033 for details.

Tom: IMBA Trail Labs

Jeff asks: Are all NICA Chapters participating in the badging program? (That Brooke mentioned)

Jim asks:

1. Is there any way we, as CAMTB, encourage the MT bike industry to simply add trails etiquette guidelines to all MT bike-gravel or hybrid sales?
2. Requiring all new bikes to have, included with paperwork, a "rules of the trails" brochure?

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Susie M - This is always a great idea. It comes down to distribution and logistics in coordinating directly with manufacturers or with retailers and trying to get buy-in and consistency of delivery. Any suggestions about how to implement such a program would be welcomed.

Steve M: We have tried this approach with many local shops, and the only reliable way to make this happen at the local level is to have volunteers attach the "buyer's packet" that we create to every mountain bike on the floor. But as inventory turns over, shop employees have been wildly inconsistent in continuing the practice. So having it come from the factory would have a greater chance of consistency and success. As Susie mentions, we need to convince manufacturers that it is in their best interest.


3. Mt bike advocates in highly populated areas must build alliances with other "low rung of the ladder" outdoor groups (ex: dog walkers, trails runners). This has the potential to strengthen our position of furthering access opportunities when dealing with intransigent lands mgrs.

Susie M - Agree that alliances with other user groups help immensely. In San Diego, communications with Equestrians, trail runners and climbers go well as they are a little more organized and have some varying degrees of leadership. Engaging with hikers is harder, although I am continuing to try, as there is no clear organization or leadership in my area.

Steve M - Here on the Angeles National Forest, we work closely with the Angeles Crest 100 and the Angeles National Forest Trail Race. Both events require a day of volunteer trailwork as a condition of entry. We often coordinate trailwork efforts with them to ensure their course, which includes a number of trails popular with mountain bikers, is clear and in good shape for the race. For the last seven years mountain bikers have volunteered to sweep the course and remove course markings, which we can do much more quickly by bicycle. We also have good relations with the Sierra Club trail crew, and as I mentioned in the second case study, we coordinated our efforts and sometimes worked together on the same trail. There are far fewer equestrians here than there were 35 years ago, but when we restored the Doc Larsen trail in 2011, a trail built by equestrians, we worked alongside a hispanic equestrian group. Much of this coordination takes place at bimonthly forest service volunteer meeting. By bringing everyone together, we've increased cooperation and improved relations all around.

4. Supporting lands managers that implement slowing features into multi use trails that curb excessive speeds by MT bike riders (The main concern-complaint I continually receive from non-riders).

Slowing features seem our only alternative to outright trails banishment with some lands managers here in the SF Bay Area. Features to include: Rolling water dips, chicanes, maximizing lines of sight where applicable.

Kristine asks: Has anyone worked with any trail counting systems, and guidance as to what type works best.  Names?

Susie M - Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz has experience here. Check in with them. American Trails has business referrals for companies that manufacture such equipment as well.

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Steve M: I do not. Ironically, the Forest Service received 18 trail monitors in February and we were in discussions about where to deploy them in March. They are still in the boxes at the closed district office, at a time when their deployment could have been especially informative.

Kevin asks: Forest Preserve) that has been suddenly 'discovered' by hikers & walkers at the same time that the multi-use trail network has undergone a major expansion and improvement including optimized for mountain biking — a longstanding user group in this NYS Forest?

The local Mountain Bike Club Fats in the Cats has a longstanding Trail Stewardship Agreement w/ NYSDEC in this State Forest.

Steve M: We're seeing similar increases in new trail users as a result of social media and pandemic closures of other recreation facilities. The increasing number of people are also coming in less prepared and less knowledgeable about "leave no trace" or trail etiquette best practices. We're also learning how deficient our trail networks are under the current closures.

Lee asks: I am an Outdoor Recreation Planner dealing with Bandit trails coming up everywhere in my district, obviously there is a huge need, as we are trying to authorize legal trails how should I reach out to partners and engage the people when the current engaging activities are mostly boring NEPA paperwork? Meanwhile the groups are still building bandit trails.:(

Leigh asks: With the growth of fat bikes, do you think there will be more interest in the CA desert lands (non- Wilderness). What would that look like?

Steve M: I'd expect there will be some increase. The desert is a challenging landscape for bikepacking, but people are already out there. Water is the heaviest thing to carry, and necessary when there are few sources along the route. So it's often OHV routes with resupply points that are favored. I've done some of the OHV routes in the Mojave, but not on a fat bike. This guide will give you great insight into what it might look like: <https://bikepacking.com/plan/guide-to-desert-bikepacking/>

Mike asks Steve: Where is the best place to find out what the active local/regional MTB organizations are on the Peninsula in the Bay Area? Up to date list on CAMTB available?

Steve M: That will be in the works for our web site as we begin to sign up member organizations. Three of our current members are in the bay area, but they did not present. We've just started accepting memberships this month so stay tuned. There is a list of club on MTBProject.com at <https://www.mtbproject.com/directory/clubs/california>. The list includes everything from social riding clubs to advocacy organizations and nonprofits.

I would love to hear perspectives on e-bikes and working with land managers - some allow them, some don't.

Steve M: So would we. We just provided official comments to the four Department of Interior agencies developing regulations around their use. Before doing so we polled mountain bike groups around the state. Most have come to the realization that the cat is out of the bag, so to speak, and they are not

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going away. We've also seen some benefits in providing more access to people, and for administrative tasks such as patrols and trailwork. They're here and they need to be managed. We supported the use of class 1 pedal assist on natural surface trails where bikes are allowed, unless a land manager decides that it would not be appropriate on a particular trail.

The confusion began (in California) with the passage of AB1096 in 2015 in which state law classified e-bikes as non motorized. It also included ambiguous language that many interpreted as opening all natural surface trails in California to electric bikes, unless specifically prohibited by the land manager, an "open unless closed" policy. We would have preferred the reverse, because it instantly created confusion as to what is legal and what is not. New e-bike riders generally rode wherever they wanted after that law was passed, and the agencies don't have the capacity to do sufficient enforcement.

More confusion comes from the ability of each State Parks District Superintendent to set e-bike policy for their park units. Across California State Parks there is also a lack of consistency. We're still waiting on the release of a statewide e-bike policy for State Parks that was completed last year. And finally, federal lands to which AB1096 did not apply still considered eMTBs as motorized. That is now changing with the NPS, BLM, and USFWS as their draft regulations have been released for comment. We have worked to educate land managers on the potential problems, and the potential benefits they can bring to a trail network, and our volunteer mountain bike patrollers are tracking their rising usage and any reported conflicts. Or they were until the pandemic hit, and shut down all volunteer activities.

Ultimately, consistency in their management and clear guidance on where they're allowed across broad regions is worth striving for.

Best ways to manage user conflicts with hikers and equestrians? Bike bells catching on and effective?

Steve M: First we worked with local equestrian and hiking groups to put out a co-branded trail etiquette brochure, which was widely circulated by all three user groups. We also encourage the use of bells. CORBA deployed bike bell boxes in partnership with the Conejo Recreation and Parks District, with great success. Around 3500 bells have been distributed since we started in 2014. <https://corbamtb.com/news/2014/12/29/5-bell-boxes-installed-in-cosca/> Since making them available for free, we've seen the industry respond with more variety and better quality bells with features to mute them, for example. Once you've been thanked by several hikers, it becomes clear that it is a win-win. Most equestrians I've encountered also appreciate the bells, but a few horses can be spooked by bells. We still encourage cyclists to talk, and let the equestrian rider direct how a pass should be negotiated. We've also worked with equestrian groups to do "desensitization training" to help green horses get more comfortable around bikes, bikes with bells, strollers, umbrellas, balloons, etc. Those kinds of outreach efforts were well worthwhile.

Randy asks: Can you give some examples of circumstances under which you've engaged in partnerships with other trails organizations (e.g., hikers, equestrians, etc.) at both the local and state level?

Steve M: As a State organization, we're brand new. We're still getting our feet underneath us, and haven't yet worked or coordinated with other groups. Locally, CORBA (Los Angeles) worked extensively with local equestrians and hiking groups to co-produce an education trail etiquette brochure that was co-branded by a conservation group, a hiking/equestrian group and us as a mountain bike organization.

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The process of developing that brochure was informative for all involved, and helped our respective organizations better understand each others' viewpoint. We've also co-hosted equestrian desensitization events, to help local equestrians get their green horses more comfortable around bicycles (and strollers, umbrellas, really anything that can spook a horse). Those have been successful and productive events. With regards to trailwork, we regularly coordinate efforts with local hiking and trail running volunteer groups. We provide bicycle support to trail running events such as the Angeles Crest 100 trail race. In the Santa Monica Mountains NRA we regularly co-host trailwork events with hiking groups. It seems that equestrian groups have expressed little interest in engaging in trailwork as their numbers dwindle with the rising cost of keeping a horse in the city. There are many individual equestrians we've worked with, but no organized groups. Much of this cooperation is facilitated through regular volunteer meetings, where all the different volunteer groups come together bimonthly to discuss their recent efforts, and coordinate upcoming efforts. These volunteer meetings are led by the volunteers, but hosted by the Forest Service.

Sarah asks: We're a land trust that sometimes deals with enthusiastic mountain bikers who want to build new trails/or expand social trails on the landscape on their own. Any advice for sharing or explaining the CEQA/permitting requirements we have while maintaining a positive relationship?

Steve M: If there are already social trails that need to be addressed, inviting them into a trail evaluation and planning process as partners is more effective than just trying to close down trails. It's always helpful if there is an organization to deal with, rather than a group of individuals.

Tracie asks Susie: As a 50+ woman, I feel that the addition of beginner and family friendly trails is what changed the game for me and made it inviting. Would you say more MTB trail builders are erring on the side of making sure to offer family/beginner trails in their network?

Asking for Explore Georgia: For MTB tourism, do we need eco lodging near sites, evening activities, or what else in the bundle to keep the rider there overnight?

Steve M: I'd refer you to IMBA Canada's report at <https://imbacanada.com/tips-on-developing-mountain-biking-tourism/> and my answer to Jasmine's question above regarding MTB Tourism.

Aleta asks: What is a sustainable trail?

Jake: I think you touched on a juicy topic that hides just below the advocacy surface. I view sustainability as a continuum rather than a "is or is not". Most of us could look at a trail and if it has: pooling, mud, foot, tire or hoof prints, a secondary line to avoid defects, or anything other than a dry, firm and still looking like it was built - we would call it "not very sustainable" - it'll require significant intervention to fix, maintain or improve. On the other hand, a "more" sustainable trail was built to channel runoff away (minimizing turbidity and sedimentation), to harden soft spots, to minimize alt. routes, and to ensure that folks have no real reason to leave the intended trail. Then, the regular wear and tear can accommodate the user-load, AND be a manageable workload by the folks who we entrust to keep it in tip top shape. That would be a more sustainable trail on the sustainability continuum. Keep the discussion going - it's a fun exercise to write this all down. Again - I'm a student, and what I've written is probably the layman's definition. And, as you've seen, both Austin and Steve have much more experience dealing with the legal and policy definitions as they exist in myriad planning documents.

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Austin: Building on a definition for “sustainable recreation” that Steve Messer provided recently, I would say that a “sustainable trail” could be defined as, "A trail that meet the needs of its users, and for which any cumulative social and environmental impacts are manageable and/or mitigable over time, through adaptive management and ongoing maintenance and available funding." The term “sustainable” is challenging as it means different things to different groups.. This is a term that has been thrown around widely and it is helpful to have a clear and understandable understanding amongst those responsible for trail design, construction and maintenance.