

# **HILRIDE** Progression Development Group

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## **Mountain Bikers Of Santa Cruz**

California State Parks Trail Designation Process Meeting  
and Skyline Trail Assessment in Castle Rock State Park

### **Site Assessment Report:**

Skyline trail in Castle Rock State Park runs parallel to HWY35/Skyline Boulevard. Nat and Rachael Lopes of Hilride Progression Development Group performed a pedestrian trail assessment with California State Park staff on May 9, 2007. The trail walk was performed north to south and the relative locations on the trail will be described accordingly.

We found the section of Skyline Trail between Saratoga Gap and Sanborn-Skyline County Park (See photo 1) to be compatible with mountain bike usage in its current condition. Further, we recommend it is a good candidate to help develop the California State Parks Trail Designation Process for the Santa Cruz District.

The approximately 1.7 mile trail is a textbook, rolling contour, full bench cut, singletrack trail. The entire length of the trail meets cross slope sustainability recommendations and has only two small sections of 50ft. or less with grades exceeding the 10% maximum grades recommended in the State Parks Trails Handbook. Fortunately, these sections only approach 20-22%, have good outsloped drainage and appear to have good compaction and soil stability.

There were signs of active trail maintenance throughout the trail including de-berming, crib wall construction and drainage enhancement. There were very few signs of recent equestrian or mountain bike use on the trail. There is one bridge in the beginning of the trail that measures only 28" wide and looks like it would pose a significant challenge for equestrian users to pass over, but is more than adequate for bicycle passage (See photo 2).

The width of the trail bench varies from 3 to 5-feet with one 500-foot section that has four or five rock outcroppings extending into the trail corridor 1 to 1.5-feet (See photo 3). These outcroppings would require cyclists to dismount and push/carry their bikes through these sections. While this is not a significant



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problem, it would be ideal to have the entire length of trail be accessible without dismounting.

The trail work required to enhance the trail tread in this section should require a maximum of two or three work days and could be completed by State Park Staff, the Local Skyline Trail Building Group, or the Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz (MBOSC) bike club.

This section of trail has a ½-mile designated optional route that completely avoids the problematic section, providing a fully accessible option with no additional required trail work. A foreseeable benefit of leaving the main trail unimproved is that most cyclists would rather not dismount and would chose the optional route voluntarily leaving the ½ mile section relatively unused by cyclists and providing hikers with a stretch of hiking only trail.

The trail enhancements recommended below would maximize the quality of experience on this trail for all users and ensure the long-term sustainability of the trail tread and minimize the environmental impacts associated with the trail itself:

1. Install rock “gateways” at the entry, exit, and optional trail junctures. These gateways would provide a subtle form of wayfinding for the user; calm user speeds and provide an additional level of safety and awareness at the interface with HWY 35/Skyline Boulevard.
2. Add two choke points at the beginning and middle of the two 20% grade sections of trail. This will provide speed calming and minimize most user conflict and user safety concerns along those two sections.
3. Rock harden one or two drainage crossings at the beginning of the trail to stabilize the drainage channels.
4. The main long term trail maintenance issues we found were all associated with the HWY 35/Skyline Boulevard storm water drains which are not installed to grade- lacking diffusers, rock hardened spillways, sediment traps etc. (See photo 4). These drains will certainly account for the most



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significant long-term environmental sustainability impacts on the trail and the surrounding trail environment.

It is our professional opinion that Skyline trail is suitable for re-designation as a multi-use mountain bike accessible trail in its current condition. This section of trail provides a high quality, safe transportation and connectivity option to riding on the side of HWY 35/Skyline Boulevard. The trail itself is quite beautiful and provides a much higher quality and intimate natural experience that mountain bikers will seek out and enjoy. This trail will provide a continuous natural experience for park users from Saratoga Gap to the soon to be opened trails in Sanborn-Skyline County Park.

It is our further recommendation that the timing for the re-designation of this trail coincide with the opening of the trails in Sanborn-Skyline County Park. With mountain bike usage being embraced in the surrounding open space jurisdictions, it would be unfortunate for Castle Rock State Park to experience either non-compliance from parks users or for park users to be unnecessarily exposed to the known life threatening hazards associated with HWY35/Skyline Boulevard. The clear duty of care the park manager has to provide high quality, safe conditions for park users should hasten the re-designation of the trail to multi-use mountain bike accessibility.

In closing, this appears to be a great opportunity for the California State Parks, County Parks and Open Space Departments in the Santa Cruz/Santa Clara Counties in partnership with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Project to provide a coordinated management effort for park users that will result in enhanced user experiences.

These recommendations are based on the best practices found in the information, training and resources developed by the California State Parks Department, National Parks Service, National Forest Service, the Municipality of Whistler British Columbia, Parks Canada, the International Mountain Bicycling



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Association and the Professional Trail Builders Association, in addition to our experience and expertise briefly outlined in the statement on page 7 and 8.



Photo 1: Signage at entry of the California State Parks section of Skyline Trail



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Photo 2: One of two bridges that may require maintenance to allow safe equestrian use.



Photo 3: Rock outcropping protruding into trail corridor.



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Photo 4: Storm water drain.



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### **HILRIDE Progression Development Group**

HPDG provides progression based design and development services leveraging expertise in trail planning, design and mountain bike tourism and vast travel experience throughout North America. HPDG is committed to sustainable trail building practices and concepts, environmental resource protection, and eco-tourism destination development. HPDG specializes in the design and integration of progression based riding opportunities that encourage the continuous development and acquisition of new knowledge and skills throughout the mountain bike tourism experience.

With more than three years working with the International Mountain Bicycling Association from 2003-2006 as the Subaru/IMBA Trail Care Crew, our mission was to create and enhance mountain biking opportunities for communities through education on the design and construction and marketing of sustainable trails, trail systems and riding destinations.

Projects have included:

- Riding, filming and providing mountain bike development expertise in 46 United States and 9 Canadian Provinces
- Invited speakers at the IMBA Mountain Bike Summit and World Mountain Biking Conference in 2006, the National Parks and Recreation Conference in 2005, and the California State Trails Symposium in 2004.
- Lead more than 100 trail building schools and trainings, including a national mountain bike training program for the Army Corps of Engineers and statewide mountain bike training programs for the New Mexico and Colorado State Parks Departments.
- Development of mountain bike master plans for Big Bend National Park, Texas, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and the Istrian Region of Croatia Department of Tourism.



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- Contributing writers and photographers for IMBA's 2007 publication "Managing Mountain Biking", including authoring the 'Managing Cultural Resources' section.

Our trail building experience encompasses some of the most diverse geographic, environmental and geological conditions possible, from the Alaskan Tundra, to the Chihuahuan Desert, to Temperate and Tropical Rain Forests. We understand how to maximize the specific terrain, topography, soils, ecosystems, culture, etc. to create world-class destination experiences.



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