

Chronology of Growth of User Conflicts on the Santa Barbara Front Country Trail System

- Early 1970's --- bicycles begin to appear on frontcountry and backcountry trails and roads.
- 1985-86 --- Los Padres Forest Supervisor becomes aware of possible use conflicts and safety hazards on front country trails. Forest Service initiates a community "town hall meeting" to explore concerns and options and develop recommendations for trail management. This working group holds public meetings over an eight-month period with average attendance of 40-60 people. Meetings are very contentious and the group is not successful at reaching consensus. Overall there was agreement that continued trail use education opportunities and continued monitoring would be explored. The Forest Service agrees to develop a Mountain Bicycle User Guide.
- 1987 --- UCSB environmental studies class (under guidance of Ray Ford) completes the first Trail Encounter Field Survey with 1400 responses received. Survey finds that 89% of front country trail users are hikers, 4% are equestrians, and 7% are bicyclists. 67% of respondents say they have never observed bikes posing a safety problem; 18% say they have observed bikes posing a safety problem one time; 6% say they have observed bikes posing a safety problem two times; 9% say they have observed bikes posing a safety problem more than two times.
- 1989 --- Forest Service designs and installs "bike friendly" water bars (erosion control feature) on front country trails. The new design recognized the need to adjust erosion control measure for the linear travel of the wheel. The new water bar design was adopted on all trails to provide a path above the drainage structure to avoid and minimize damage to earthen water bars.
- 1989 --- USCB environmental studies class (under guidance of Ray Ford) completes second Trail Encounter Field Survey with 573 responses received. Survey finds that 72.2% of front country trail users are hikers, 3% are equestrians, and 24.4% are bicyclists. 69.8% say they have never observed bikes posing a safety problem; 16.3% say they have observed bikes posing a safety problem one time; 5.4% say they have observed bikes posing a safety problem two times; and 8.4% say they have observed bikes posing a safety problem more than two times.
- 1989 --- Santa Barbara District Ranger completes the publication, Mountain Bicycle Guide for Santa Barbara Ranger District. The guide does not recommend Front Country Trails for bicycle use and front country trails are not shown on the guide map. Copies of the guide are widely distributed. The guide includes a "Cyclist's Code of Ethics" that included the following recommendations:
 1. *Yield right-of-way to other trail users. Horses may spook when they see unfamiliar objects.*
 2. *Slow down and use caution when passing others. If necessary, dismount your bicycle on the downhill side and wait for horse and hikers to pass.*
 3. *Control your speeds at all times and approach turns in anticipation of others.*
 4. *Wreckless driving and high downhill speeds are not appropriate.*

5. *Stay on designated trails to avoid trampling vegetation and avoid creating a wheel rut that can channel water and cause erosion.*

6. *Stay off muddy trails and avoid cutting across switchbacks.*

- 1989 ---“Downhill” riders and speed continues to be a safety problem. The District Ranger drafts a personal letter dated April 16th, to alert the Mountain Bicycle Community that some bicyclists are riding down hill at excessive speeds and your continued use of these trails is in jeopardy! In this letter the Ranger addresses the concern that some groups of downhill riders are riding up on the bank’s edge/slope above the trail, causing an “eye-brow effect”, and soil is eroding onto the trail. Also, the braking action of fast riders is causing mechanical erosion in the tread (a “U-shaped depression) that is difficult to water bar and accelerating soil erosion and water channeling.
- 1990-92 --- Forest Service trail crews install trail hardening features (wooden water bars, and timber reinforced switchbacks) throughout the front country trails system. This is an attempt to reduce soil erosion and trail damage from bikes traveling downhill at excessive speed. Eight helicopter sling loads of lumber and project materials are lowered to various locations on these trails to support the construction efforts. The project cost approximately \$300,000.
- 1990 --- The Forest Service employs a temporary Mountain Bike Patrol person for 6 months to patrol front country trails and work with interested volunteers in trail maintenance and user education by promoting the Cyclist Code of Ethics. The Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers organization (MBTV) is established to maintain trails and repair damage caused by mountain bikes.
- 1993 --- MBTV begins a Trail Patrol to assist with education of downhill bike riders, and introduces the trail courtesy triangle sign, with the message: “Bikes yield to horses; bikes yield to hikers; hikers yield to horses.” MBTV introduces the “Chris King Trail Daze” trail maintenance events. The first project attracts 65 volunteers and subsequent events (2 per year for the next seven years) each attract more than 150 volunteers.
- 1994 --- the City and County of Santa Barbara and the Forest Service review bicycle use on trails. Problems with excessive speed on Tunnel Trail and Tunnel road continue to generate complaints and concerns. MBTV changes names to Bicycle Assistance Unit (BAU) and increases trail user education through weekend volunteer patrols. City, County and Forest Service receives petitions and letters with over 500 signatures supporting multiple use on all trails and is encouraged to continue volunteer efforts in education, trail maintenance and patrols.
- Mid 1990’s --- Mountain bike technology advances and the industry markets the “down hill bicycle.” Down hill racing becomes part of the extreme sport and X-Games scene.
- 1997 --- BAU evolves to “Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers” (SBMTV) with increased emphasis on trail etiquette signage and education.
- 2000 --- SBMTV begins providing weekend Trail Hosts at the top of some trails to contact and educate trail users; the emphasis is to provide peer guidance to bicyclists that ride solely downhill.

- 2001 --- The Tunnel Trail gains visibility on the Internet. This includes a posting on mybikesite.com called “Adult Version of Suicide”, chronicling the thrill of discovery and the downhill technical challenge of riding the Tunnel trail. There is a noticeable increase in downhill riders coming from out of town.
- SBMTV and International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) sponsor a 3-day clinic in Goleta on Sustainable Trails Through Design, with emphasis on volunteers and maintenance techniques. FS, City, County, and State participate in a workshop for land managers.
- 2002 --- SBMTV introduces the voluntary bike bell program. Bell boxes are placed on the tops and bottoms of some trails. Bells worn by riders going downhill alert others to their presence. SBMTV continues today (2006) to promote and supply bells to bell box program, as well as providing bells to the local bike shops. Comments from hikers tend to favor of the use of these bells and hikers are beginning to question riders riding without them.
- 2002-2004 --- In August 2002, the Forest Service calls the first meeting of the Trails Working Group (TWG), a coalition of community members committed to exploring solutions to trail use conflicts, particularly conflicts between downhill mountain bicyclists traveling at excessive speeds, and hikers/equestrians. The Los Padres Forest Association (LPFA), the official non-profit partner organization of the Forest Service, agrees to host and facilitate TWG discussions. TWG members represent local trail interest organizations, the Sierra Club, Los Padres Trail Riders, SBMTV, Mission Canyon Home Owner’s Association, Montecito Trails Foundation, County Hiking Riding Trails Advisory Committee (CRAHTAC), and representatives from City and County Parks and Recreation Staff. TWG meets regularly to develop their recommendations.
- August 2004 --- TWG presents the results of their collaborative efforts in a proposal to the Forest Service, City and County that includes both interim and long-range solutions. TWG disbands after presenting their recommendations.
- Fall 2004 --- the Trail Alliance (TA), one of four major recommendations addressed in the TWG proposal, holds their first meeting. TA agrees to hold monthly meetings to serve as a public forum and consortium of trail users to assist the three agencies in implementation of the TWG proposal and/or other innovative solutions. The City, County, and Forest Service begin the interagency process of moving the recommendations of the TWG forward.
- Winter 2004---Heavy rains create havoc on local trails. The Trail Alliance is instrumental in reopening many of our local trails through a series of volunteer trail maintenance projects.
- Fall 2005 --- an accident occurs on the Cold Springs Trail involving a meeting on a narrow section of trail between mountain bicyclists and an equestrian resulting in one horse falling to its death off the trail. Public interest in trail user conflicts is renewed and agency resolve for improving trail safety is accelerated.
- January 2006 --- in a letter to TWG dated January 19, the three agencies formally recognizes the body of work as proposed by the TWG, and begins the interagency process of implementing some or all of the TWG’s recommendations.