



CITY OF
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ALTO**

CITY OF PALO ALTO
Parks and Recreation Commission
Regular Meeting
Tuesday, April 22, 2025
7:00 PM

Agenda Item

6. Update on the Ad Hoc Nature Access Policy and Proposed Trail Closure at Pearson-Arastradero Preserve – 45 minutes *Staff Presentation*



Parks and Recreation Commission Staff Report

From: Community Services Department

Meeting Date: April 22, 2025

Report #: 2504-4518

TITLE

Update on the Ad Hoc Nature Access Policy and Proposed Trail Closure at Pearson-Arastradero Preserve

BACKGROUND

In January 2023, the State of California passed Assembly Bill 1909, which reclassified electric bicycles (e-bikes) as bicycles. This legislation granted e-bikes the same access rights as traditional bicycles on public trails and bikeways, unless a local agency takes formal action to regulate or restrict such access.

In response, the City of Palo Alto revisited its policies regarding e-bike and electric coasting device use in City parks and open space preserves, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas. On January 23, 2023¹, the City Council removed a proposed ordinance related to e-bikes from the consent calendar for further discussion. The ordinance was later brought back as an action item at the February 27, 2023, City Council meeting.

At that meeting, staff presented background information, including recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) regarding regulations for e-bikes and other electric coasting devices. In developing the proposed policy, staff and the PRC considered several factors, including:

- Environmental and ecological impacts
- Safety and enforcement
- Bicycle transportation and commute corridors
- Public access and recreation

¹ City Council, January 23, 2023; Agenda Item #7; SR 2301-0723,
<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=61850&repo=r-704298fc&searchid=d6ae7ac6-e4d6-4e99-b126-f1be4b1b3c34>

- Compatibility with local and regional policies
- Equity and public feedback
- Clarity and simplicity

Ultimately, the City Council adopted an amendment to PAMC 22.04.220, regulating the use of electric bicycles and electric coasting devices in City parks and open spaces. Council also supported updated Parks and Open Space regulations (R1-18 and R1-37) and referred the following additional items to staff for further evaluation, particularly in the Baylands and Pearson-Arastradero Preserves:

1. Reduction of speed limit
2. Whether and where to restrict bicycle and horse access in the Baylands and Arastradero Open Space Preserve
3. Add bike racks at trail heads to the open space where lacking

The PRC's FY 2024–25 Council-approved work plan² includes several high-priority items: Following up on the FY24 Ad Hoc Committee recommendations concerning unauthorized trail use and natural resource stewardship. Reviewing access at the Adobe Creek Loop Trail and Byxbee Park. Responding to the Council's February 2023 referral. The lower-priority items on the work plan include reviewing access in the Pearson-Arastradero Preserve Bowl Loop area and evaluating general trail network access.

Since February 2023, staff and the PRC Ad Hoc Committee have met regularly to monitor emerging trends and address the Council referral. Updates have been presented at multiple PRC meetings:

April 23, 2024³: Open Space Rangers joined the Ad Hoc Committee to provide an update and answer questions. During this meeting, mountain biking activity in the Bowl Loop area of Pearson-Arastradero Preserve was raised as a concern by the Ad Hoc.

April 30, 2024: Staff and the Ad Hoc Committee met with members of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee (PABAC). The primary topic was review of the ordinance and the comprise reached for e-bike. There was disagreement on e-bike access on unpaved trails in the Baylands and Adobe Creek Loop Trail.

² City Council, October 7, 2024; Agenda Item #17; ST #2406-3167, <https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=98619&repo=r-704298fc&searchid=ae358e72-8813-4f5b-861d-67772f4729b1>

³ Parks and Recreation Commission, April 23, 2024; Agenda Item #4; <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/parks-and-recreation-commission/agendas-minutes/2024-agendas-and-minutes/04/04.23/04.23.24-bikes-ad-hoc-report.pdf>

July 23, 2024: Rangers shared an update on Pearson-Arastradero Preserve, including discussions about seasonal trail closures.

September 24, 2024: Baylands Rangers reported the installation of 25 e-bike regulation signs (clarifying that e-bikes are allowed only on paved trails) and 13 new bike racks at the following locations:

- Sail Station parking lot (4)
- Baylands Athletic Center (4)
- Duck Pond (3)
- Baylands entrance lot (2)

February 3, 2025: Staff and the Ad Hoc Committee identified priority focus areas in both preserves. Baylands was noted to be functioning well under the current ordinance, while discussions at Arastradero focused on the potential need for access limitations, especially in the Upper Bowl area. A field visit was scheduled to further assess conditions.

ANALYSIS

On February 19, 2025, Open Space staff and two PRC Ad Hoc members conducted a site visit to the Upper Bowl area of Pearson-Arastradero Preserve. During the visit, two children were observed riding mountain bikes in the upper bowl areas at the time the bowl had water present. Based on this observation, the Ad Hoc Committee recommended consideration of a seasonal closure of a portion of the Upper Bowl to support habitat protection and species reproduction during the wet season.

During the site visit, there were two informal social trails in the area that are not part of the official trail network. These trails will be decommissioned and restored as part of routine Ranger stewardship efforts. When this was raised at a subsequent PABAC meeting, staff clarified that the proposed trail closure involves an unmarked trail, with existing connectivity to the rest of the trail system. Additionally, wildflowers and a mature tree in the area would be better protected by discouraging use of the unofficial route.

On April 1, 2025, staff and Ad Hoc member presented the proposed trail closure to PABAC⁴. While several members were unfamiliar with the specific trail network, one member shared

⁴ Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee, April 1, 2025; Agenda Item #7.a.; attachment 1; https://www.paloalto.gov/files/assets/public/v/1/transportation/bicycling-walking/pabac/pabac-meetings-2025/2025-04-01_pabac-agenda_packet_final.pdf

personal experience riding in the Upper Bowl, however not on the proposed trail closure. PABAC supported the recommendation to increase community outreach, which staff has already initiated through signage placed at the trail. PABAC also observed that overall trail connectivity in the area appears adequate and that the proposed closure would likely have minimal impact on public access.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to:

- Conducting community outreach related to the proposed trail closure
- Gathering public feedback via posted signage and direct engagement
- Evaluating the need for additional educational materials and maps to increase public awareness of trail rules and seasonal closures

Staff will report back to the Parks and Recreation Commission with findings and recommendations following the outreach and evaluation phase.

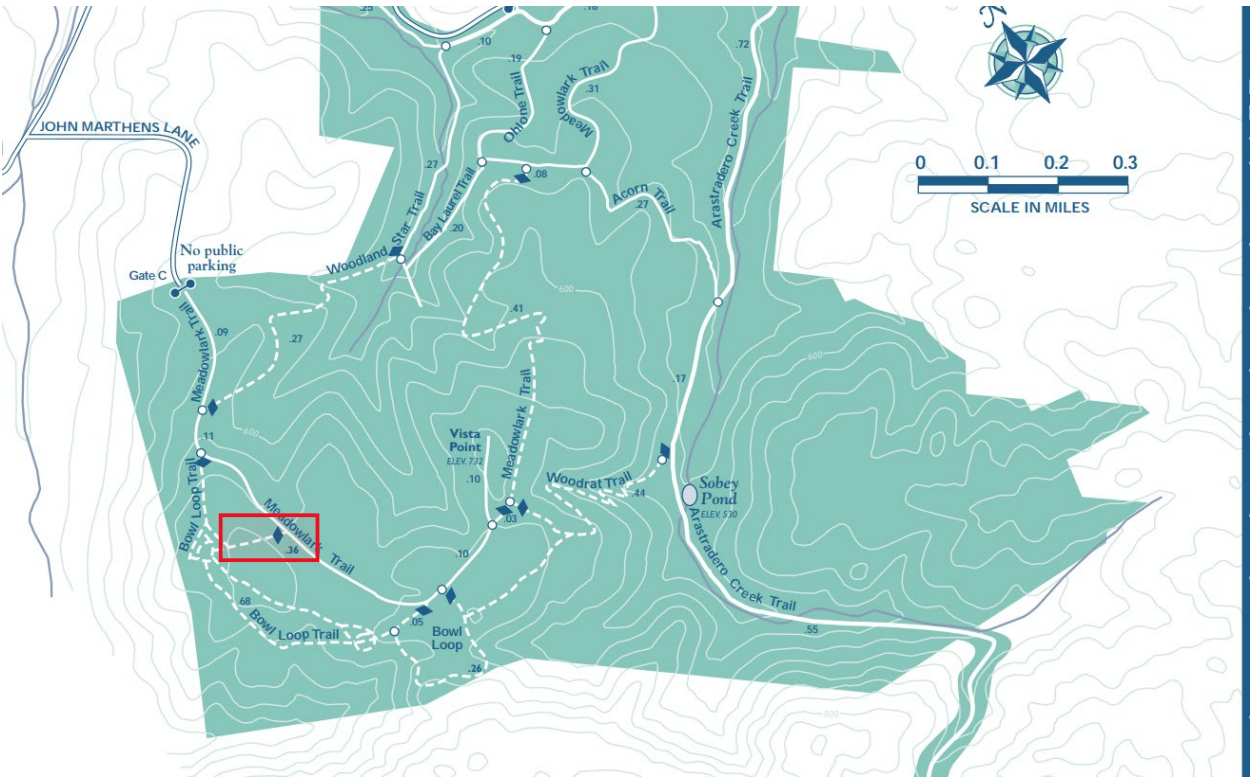
FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

The proposed trail closure would require minimal resources, as the work would be completed by Ranger staff during regular business hours.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Proposed Pearsons-Arastradero Trail Closure

Proposed Pearson-Arastradero Trail Closure



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- No smoking.
- Open to the public 8am to sunset, every day.
- Dogs required to be on leash at all times.
- Stay on marked trails only.
- Bicycle helmets required.
- Note seasonal trail closures posted at the parking lot.
- Park in designated parking areas.
- Ca. Fishing license required, no swimming, wading or boating in lake and pond.
- Feeding wildlife prohibited.
- No remote controlled devices.

