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Trails belong to all of us -- not just the hikers

Voice From Santa Barbara; Michael Hecker

8/6/03

Who owns the trails that we all use? Do these trails belong to you? Do the trails belong to them? Do they belong to me?

The trails in the Santa Barbara frontcountry belong to all of us. The trails are mostly the property of the U.S. Forrest Service or Santa Barbara County. No private party, let alone the Sierra Club, has jurisdiction over the trails. Then why does one faction think it can dictate who uses these trails?

My opinion is that there is a lack of a TRUE understanding on behalf of those who advocate for trail closures, that understanding is that all trail users need to coexist and be patient with one another. Claims that mountain bikes cause damage to trails are fabricated, but easily believable, especially since most people don't want to or are too lazy to educate themselves on issues like this.

What do horses or even people do to trails after a rainy day? Well, if they're responsible, they stay home. But some like the wet weather and go out and muck it all up for the rest of us. The visible damage is as much caused by rain season runoff, because of the steepness and the lack of proper designing influence on our local trails, as it is by mountain biking.

The real issue is safety. For those of you who are concerned about being scared by a mountain biker on a narrow, single-track trail, most mountain bikers



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understand this. This is why members of the SB Mountain Bike Trails Volunteers and just mountain bikers in general have been out in force for so long trying to educate our fellow riders. Great programs like the bell program, trailhead education and numerous trail maintenance days have helped ease this issue greatly. These efforts will continue -- they must continue.

Sure, there are bad seeds out there that just don't care. There are many in every crowd or activity. But closing trails is not the answer. An action like that will only lead to further problems and undo all the good that has been ongoing for a very long time. I ask you reasonable people out there who have any input on this issue: please do not take us down a road that has been proven not to work in other places like Marin County.

Don't give up on us mountain bikers; we're doing our best to coexist.

Michael Hecker is a board member of the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition and operates www.ridesb.com.

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