

CRAHTAC

**County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Committee
610 Mission Canyon Road
Santa Barbara, CA 93105**

January 10, 2011

Mr. Kim Kimball, Chair
Gaviota Planning Advisory Committee
112 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, Ca, 93101

Re: Gaviota Plan Update; Trails System and Coastal Access Expansion

Dear Chair Kimball:

The Santa Barbara County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Committee (CRAHTAC) is a standing committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors to advise the County on matters related to the planning for and implementation of recreational trails. CRAHTAC is composed of four members from each supervisorial district, including Third District. CRAHTAC is extremely interested in ensuring that the Gaviota planning process currently underway results in plans for expansion of the County's trail and coastal access system provision of detailed recommendations for the location, acquisition and eventual development of a comprehensive trail and coastal access system for the Gaviota Coast.

CRAHTAC is aware that the County is currently in the early stages of creating a Gaviota Plan, which will guide growth, development and public infrastructure for the greater Gaviota Coast area. CRAHTAC is particularly interested in the area stretching roughly from the City of Goleta to west to the Gaviota Tunnel and Gaviota State Park and from the Pacific north to the crest of Santa Ynez Mountains. CRAHTAC is familiar with the planning trails and coastal access provisions from the County's 1980 Comprehensive Plan and 1982 Local Coastal Plan and the status of major trail proposals in the planning area.

On March 3rd, 2010, CRAHTAC members briefed the Gaviota Area Planning Advisory Committee (GAVPAC) on our initial concerns for trails planning in the area and provided a set of 10 initial principles to guide such planning (attached) endorsed by CRAHTAC for Gaviota. This letter is a follow up to that initial briefing. In summary, the CRAHTAC strongly recommends that GAVPAC pursue both planning for a long-term trail and coastal access system and ensure that pending development projects closely adhere to the same principles which should be applied to long range planning as set forth below.

CRAHTAC respectfully request that GAVPAC and staff from County Parks Department and Long Range Planning provide for detailed planning and environmental review of the location for existing planner and new trails and coastal access provisions throughout the study area, with a focus on areas from Gaviota state Park east, and also include measures to expedite implementation of existing trails as a priority of the new Gaviota Area Plan. Acquiring easements and developing trails will require creativity and persistence from County staff. In particular, we believe that GAVPAC and County staff should pursue the following:

- 1. Interagency Cooperation:** The County should work cooperatively with the State Parks Department and the US Forest Service to expand the foothill trails and coastal access system in areas where jurisdictions overlap. The agencies coordinate and cooperate with each other in planning and development and to seek funding for the preparation, as may be required, of CEQA and NEPA documents as well as any other permit requirements. For the State Parks Department, this could involve lands within Gaviota and El Capitan State Parks in particular linking with Forest Service lands. For the Forest Service, this could include exploring linkages to trails in the State Park System such as those connecting Gaviota Peak to Squat Camp or the County's new Baron Ranch Trail system. Of particular importance would be coordination between the County and State parks, and possibly the City of Goleta on detailed design and implementation of the segment of the planned California Coastal Trail, and associated coastal access points, extending from roughly the Ellwood Mesa in the City of Goleta to El Capitan State Park. We understand that the Santa Barbara Trails Council is currently coordinating trail improvement options with State Parks in this area.
- 2. Cooperation with Property Owners:** CRAHTAC believes that implementation of major new foothill trails and coastal access points will require the active cooperation of foothill ranchers and property owners. In some instances, this may require the County exploring new options to actually acquire and build trails. This may require GAVPAC balancing development options and their relationship to obtaining easements for new trails. CRAHTAC supports the County considering limited new development in exchange for provision of trails and that GAVPAC explore zoning and general plan tools to obtain trails as part of the Plan update, consistent with protection of important resources. In either case, the CRAHTAC urges that the GAVPAC to actively reach out to property owners along currently proposed or potential future trail easements to assess property owner goals and interest in providing new trails and tools that may be required to obtain such trails. Only with such active outreach will it be possible to obtain easements to support new trails.
- 3. Coordination with CRAHTAC and Trails Groups:** CRAHTAC believes that effective planning for and implementation of new trails and coastal access points will require active participation by CRAHTAC and groups such as the Santa Barbara Trails Council, Sierra Club and both equestrian and mountain bike volunteer organizations. In order to provide for such coordination and allow for more fine grained planning, GAVPAC may want to consider appointment of a subcommittee of interested GAVPAC members supported by members from CRAHTAC and other interested groups. Alternately, at GAVPAC's request, CRAHTAC would be happy to coordinate such an effort. Regardless of which group leads the effort, we believe that the outcome should be a detailed coastal access and trails map and accompanying policies as part of the final Gaviota Plan.
- 4. California Coastal Trail and Coastal Access Points:** It is time for the County to seriously pursue final design and implementation of the California Coastal Trail between Gaviota State Park and Goleta, especially that segment between Goleta and El Capitan State Park. The location and general design standards for accompanying coastal access points should also be addressed. We strongly recommend that CRAHTAC ensure that the final Gaviota Plan contain a very detailed map for the location of this trail and access points, including design parameters as set forth in our accompanying Statement of Principles.

5. **Pending Development:** We are concerned that pending development projects in the eastern end of the Gaviota Planning area included a variety of trail and coastal access improvement options. CRAHTAC is extremely concerned that some of these developments may contain proposals for the California Coastal Trail and access options that are inconsistent with sound planning principles and which may not conform to CRAHTAC principles for siting and design of the Coastal Trail and access points. We urge GAVPAC to set standards for the Coastal Trail and various access points that would apply to both the trail and access points set forth in pending development and that such standards and access points be consistent with CRAHTAC principles.
6. **Trails and Access Section of Future Gaviota Plan:** The potential for expanded trail and coastal access along the Gaviota Coast represents a recreational resource of outstanding importance on a county- and state-wide level. We urge that the final Gaviota Plan contain detailed maps, policies and development standards for a trail and coastal access systems and this matter receive detailed environmental review as part of consideration of the final plan to explore and expedite trail and access construction issues.
7. **Protection of Trail Aesthetics:** The County's existing policy framework is silent on protection of views from existing and proposed trail corridors. GAVPAC should consider adoption of new policies which mandate measures to protect the aesthetic character of existing and proposed trails, particularly the Coastal Trail, as part of any new development projects along or adjacent to trail corridors.

Thank you for considering this input. CRAHTAC hopes that the GAVPAC and County staff can utilize this new Plan update to jump start efforts to expand the areas trail and coastal access system. CRAHTAC is willing to work with GAVPAC and county staff to realize this vision. We look forward to working cooperatively with you and your staff to explore this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Art Najera" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Art Najera
CRAHTAC Chair

cc. Glen Russell, Director, Planning and Development Department
Claude Garciacelay, County Parks Department
Eric Axelson County Parks Department
David Lackie, Supervising Planner, Long Range Planning
Doreen Farr, 3rd District Supervisor

Gaviota Coastal Planning Preliminary Trails Policy Principles

The following set principles has been endorsed by the County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Committee (CRAHTAC) to help guide both long range planning efforts along the Gaviota Coast and review of pending development projects.

1. A continuous coastal trail from Winchester Canyon to Vandenberg.
2. Siting of this trail to be as close to the coast as reasonable. Where it can be sited on the beach and still be accessible during high tide, that is fine. Where it needs to be on bluffs above the beach, then it should be sited on the bluff with no man-made structures that impede ocean views.
3. Easements for the trail should be ambulatory to accommodate future erosion.
4. The trail should be multi-use (hikers, equestrians, bicyclists). In places it may be appropriate to divide the trail so that one or more uses take a different route.
5. The composition of the trail should reflect allowed uses. For example, a trail segment for bicyclists should be paved, but one restricted to hikers need not be.
6. Vertical beach access should be provided at a variety of locations along the coast spaced so as to provide continuous beach access with reasonable walking. Parking and freeway access are relevant considerations.
7. Vertical beach access should use natural features as much as possible (e.g., existing canyons or draws rather than artificial stair structures).
8. Trail siting and vertical access should be sensitive to special ecological concerns (e.g., seal haul-out areas, endangered habitats) and cultural concerns (Native American archaeological sites).
9. Trails and vertical access should be specified in terms of (a) responsibility for construction and (b) responsibility for maintenance. A program for monitoring compliance is appropriate.
10. The connection of the coastal trail to inland trails (existing or not yet constructed) that provide access to the mountains and West Camino Cielo is an important desiderata in trail design.
11. The County should strive to substantially expand foothill trail opportunities as part of the Gaviota Area Plan; the new Plan should provide detailed maps for proposed trail and coastal access locations and new detailed polices and development standards to protect and expand access and trail opportunities.