



# STAFF REPORT – CITY COUNCIL MEETING

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July 17, 2024

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

**FROM:** Emily Sinkhorn, Director of Environmental Services

**PREPARER:** Brigitte Price, Administrative Specialist

**DATE:** July 10, 2024

**TITLE:** **Approve the Arcata Community Forest Trail 9.5 Project.**

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the Council Approve the Arcata Community Forest Trail 9.5 Project.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The Arcata Community Forest provides recreational opportunities for many different user groups. The Trail 9.5 Project aims to make improvements to an existing unsanctioned mountain bike trail adjacent to Trail 9 in the Arcata Community Forest. The Forest Management Committee and the Open Space, Parks & Trails Ad Hoc Group support the Trail 9.5 project, which will make safety and stewardship improvements to an unsanctioned mountain bike trail to create a directional bike trail and reduce recreational user conflicts on nearby multi-use Trail 9. The Trail 9.5 Project will be completed in-house by City staff utilizing industry acceptable design standards and best management practices in trail design to improve drainage and long-term maintenance of the trail.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Arcata Community Forest provides many benefits to the City including, but not limited to, recreational opportunities along designated trails for mountain bikers, hikers, and equestrian users; watershed and habitat benefits for the region; research opportunities; as well as economic benefits from sustainable forest management. Improving trail users' experience and safety while protecting the natural environment is a priority of the Forest Management Committee and the Environmental Services Department. Trail 9 is a multi-use trail/management access road in the Arcata Community Forest that is accessed from Fickle Hill Road by many different user groups. Creating a new Trail 9.5 to the south of Trail 9 by improving the existing unsanctioned trail alignment and designating it for downhill directional mountain bike use only will increase rider safety and reduce trail conflicts on the nearby multi-use Trail 9.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The Trail 9.5 Project will include realigning the existing trail prism to increase user safety, improve drainage, and restore select areas of the current trail alignment that are to be abandoned. All existing

hazards will be reconfigured as necessary to improve the trail experience and safety for users. The improvements will be conducted during the dry season (June-November 15) by City staff with small equipment and will utilize trail development standards from the following manuals: California State Parks Trail Manual, the US Forest Service Trail Manual (FSM 2355), the USDA Forest Service Trails Management Handbook (FSH 23.09.18), USDA Standard Specifications for Construction and Maintenance of Trails (EM-7720-103, USDA/FHWA), and the 2004 International Mountain Biking- Trail Solutions Guide.

The new trail, depicted in the attached Location Map, will be designated a directional bike trail and will reduce recreational users' conflicts on the nearby multi-use Trail 9. Over the past several years the City has constructed bicycle-specific trails and a braided trail network in other areas of the Arcata Forest Tract (e.g. Peanut Butter Trail) and the Sunnybrae Forest Tract (e.g. Sunnybrae Downhill Trail and two route options for trail users from the Margaret Lane Trailhead) which have reduced trail use conflicts between faster downhill bicyclists and pedestrians.

The total length of new trail development proposed as part of this project in the Arcata Community Forest is approximately 375 feet and the total length of the existing unsanctioned trail to be improved is 1,491 feet, for a total final length of 1,866 feet for Trail 9.5. As part of this project, 1,417 feet of unsanctioned trail located on City property, that connects to the proposed new trail alignment, will be actively decommissioned and restored. In addition, the City will actively discourage public use on another 654 feet of the unsanctioned trail that is located on private property adjacent to the Arcata Community Forest.

The Project builds on and enhances the elements of an existing legacy trail. The proposed improvements are minor in nature with limited ground disturbance. The Forest Management Committee and the Open Space, Parks & Trails Ad Hoc Group reviewed the Project and determined that improving the legacy trail while decommissioning a segment of this trail will reduce habitat fragmentation and improve safety for trail users.

Botanical surveys, an archaeological survey, and a wetland reconnaissance survey were conducted between fall 2023 and early summer 2024 in compliance with the standards for the City's Hillside Development Permit review process. In addition, the City Engineer determined that a geotechnical report is not needed for trail development in this geologically stable area of the Arcata Community Forest based on the proposed trail alignment and past trail work in the area.

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS:**

The City Council has a goal under Resident and Community Health to provide recreational opportunities for all residents. The proposed Trail 9.5 Project will enable more Arcata residents and community members to recreate safely in the Arcata Community Forest. The proposed public improvements to an existing legacy mountain bike trail and forest restoration activities are consistent with the General Plan and the Forest Management Plan as it improves recreational activities, drainage, and forest habitat.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA):**

A CEQA Notice of Exemption (NOE) will be filed for the Trail 9.5 Project. The Project involves minor alterations to an existing trail located on the Arcata Community Forest. The Environmental Coordinator determined the project qualifies for a CEQA exemption as a minor alteration of an existing bicycle and pedestrian trail (CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15301(c)). In addition, construction of the proposed trail will not involve the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees and therefore qualifies for Minor Alterations to Land (CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15304). Finally, this project will decommission approximately 1,417 feet of unsanctioned trail and the bare mineral soil will be covered to allow passive revegetation of the area and no significant adverse impacts will occur on

endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat because of this project, therefore qualifying the project as a Small Habitat Restoration Project (CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15333). No conditions causing exceptions to these exemptions, including unusual circumstances, hazardous waste, or historic resources, are present.

**BUDGET/FISCAL IMPACT:**

Funding to implement the Trail 9.5 Project is included in the 2024/2025 fiscal year budget under the Open Space, Parks & Trails Special Tax Fund 202.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Trail 9.5 Project Location Map (PDF)