

2026 EBRPD Board Candidate Questionnaire

Your answers will not be saved until you submit the form at the end. If you don't feel you can answer these questions in one sitting, you may want to [download the questions](#) and draft your answers externally, then paste them into this form.

Email *

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Please record your full name below: *

John J. Mercurio

When you visit the East Bay Regional Parks, how often do you enjoy the following activities?

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Hiking	☒	☐	☐	☐
Cycling on dirt trails or natural surface roads (mountain biking, gravel riding, fire roads, etc.)	☐	☐	☒	☐
Cycling on paved trails and roads within the park	☒	☐	☐	☐
Running/Jogging	☐	☐	☒	☐
Dog walking	☐	☐	☐	☒
Horseback riding	☐	☐	☐	☒
Picnicking or other gatherings	☐	☐	☐	☒
Visiting park amenities (lakes, visitor centers, gardens, etc.)	☐	☐	☒	☐

Narrow Trail Maintenance

Historically, basic ongoing or scheduled maintenance of existing natural surface narrow trails has been a low-priority activity for the EBRPD. As a result many trails are badly eroded and even dangerous.

What are your thoughts on regular institutionalized EBRPD collaboration with volunteer organizations that have expertise and are eager to assist with such maintenance on narrow natural surface trails (singletrack) that are open to bicycles?

At a recent board meeting, I advocated for this very thing. Once a volunteer organization has established its commitment to properly implementing trail maintenance, I would encourage the District to allow their engagement on projects they deem to be most important to their members.

Historically EBRPD trails suffer from explosive vegetation growth during spring. As a result some of those trails are nearly impassable for weeks if not months until mechanized crews are able to clear the tall grasses and weeds directly impacting the trails. The volume of work is impractical and has safety concerns making volunteer hand work unreasonable. We understand the union MOU issues would need to be worked through. There are stewardship volunteers that would also like the authorization to operate line trimmers to do more effective work.

Do you support finding ways for volunteer groups such as BTCEB to operate powered tools for the exclusive purpose of trail brushing? Would you make this a priority objective? Why or why not? If not, do you support the park district making it a priority to clear vegetation impacted trails in a much more timely manner?

Save Mount Diablo (from my experience) allows volunteers to use line trimmers to maintain overgrown trails. I think it is well past time to look into allowing volunteers to use these tools. The District could consult with SMD to learn their approach to this. Since the need for this trimming occurs in a narrow window of time and there is no possible way for District staff to perform this work in the desired time period, I do not think this work actually affects union workers. It is work that would otherwise not be done.

Narrow Trails - Demand & Access Issues

Since 1995, EBRPD park acreage has nearly doubled while less than 25 miles of narrow trails have been added. Demand for access to these parks and its trail system is now at an all-time high. In the last few years much of this demand has been driven by the increase in popularity of mountain biking, especially among youth. High school and middle school teams have sprung up all over the Bay Area with many hundreds of young riders joining.

The imbalance of demand and supply of the Park's existing narrow trails (singletrack) has been magnified by historical inequity regarding access for bikes. Equestrians (a small and decreasing user group) have access to roughly 55% of the narrow trail system while cyclists (a much larger and growing group) have access to less than 25%. Pedestrians have nearly 100% access. Ordinance 38 allows broad pedestrian off trail access. All this has resulted in user conflicts - real and perceived. In addition, the Park has seen an increase in the creation of unofficial, unsanctioned trails due to the absence of EBRPD trail additions and actions on access.

There has been minimal addition of singletrack trails over the last several decades in part due to the high resource load for planning, environmental review for new trails, and funding. Change in Use is an option to address some of the access issues in a much shorter time frame.

What strategies do you have in mind to balance increased recreational demand overall for narrow trail experiences, with the preservation of natural habitats?

The impact of trails on the natural landscape is not equal across all District lands. So, there are no doubt thousands of acres of land that are suitable for new trails. I wholeheartedly support construction of singletrack trails for all users. They would be designed to have adequate sight distances and grades for safety. To provide an actual example, I am currently advocating for the addition of two singletrack trails in Round Valley Regional Preserve.

Another strategy is to provide bikes only trails in new parks before they open. This way, they are established before any visitors arrive.

Do you support consideration of Change In Use for existing trails to alleviate some of the lack of bike access? Why or why not?

The Park District has not utilized Change in Use for existing trails at a high enough rate. But with minor alterations such as speed limiting features, grade reductions and line of sight improvements, narrow trails can be made safe for all.

With the *Briones Pilot Program*, EBRPD took a significant step toward recognizing and addressing issues of trail conflict, non-system trail impact on habitat, and equitable access for bikes. The Pilot was a pragmatic approach to today's reality, the resulting impacts, and not a reward to rogue trail building.

What are your thoughts on the results from the pilot and how learnings & outcomes could be applied at other parks? What are your thoughts regarding further evaluation of non-system trails in other parks, adoption of those that can be sustainable and make sense in the trail system, along with closure and habitat rehabilitation of unsustainable non-system trails?

It would be very cool to improve non-system trails (to eliminate steep sections and improve drainage) and make them sustainable. I don't feel this is rewarding bad behavior. It is respecting desire lines established by users. One way to avoid illegal trail construction is to provide trails that users want.

I believe that many more miles of bootleg tails need to be restored, though. I would expect volunteers to do much of if not most of this work.

What has been learned in Briones should be applied in Las Trampas and Pleasanton Ridge, for sure.

The Wildcat Bike Trail Project

The Wildcat Bike Trail Project is proposed to add 1.4 miles of downhill directional bike only trail. The public process for this trail has been extraordinary given the very limited project scope. There has been some vocal opposition to the project while several thousand members of the public support the project. The project is currently working on an EIR. Staff brought the project back to the board for a second time requesting approval to proceed with an EIR. A majority of board members supported moving forward with the EIR and issuing the contract for the EIR.

If a vote to continue the EIR were to come before you today would you vote to support continuing or would you vote to stop the project and why?

I will never state how I will vote on an item before it is considered at the meeting. That is my commitment to the process. However, I feel that the EIR, however it is developed, must be complete and defensible. A complete EIR is needed to determine whether or not to proceed with this trail. AND, just as important, HOW to proceed with it.

One candidate has publicly opposed the Wildcat Project and and stated 'I don't see how recreational trails of this nature fit in the ethos of a park district', ' Briones was just expanded ... before that it was Crockett. What park is next after we do this one? ... Where does it end?'

Do you agree that recreational trails of this nature don't fit the park district ethos? Why or why not?

What opponents to trail development seem to ignore is the dual mission of EBRPD. If implemented in a sensitive manner, trails are completely appropriate in our parks right in there with habitat preservation. Balanced in the right way, human presence allows us to appreciate the natural world and motivate us to advocate for its preservation.

The Next Century District Plan and Future Bike Access

The park district is in the process of developing it's next century plan or district plan. The 2013 District Plan included Trails for All and envisioned both multi-use and single use trails. It did not provide a clear vision for a magnitude of trail expansion or additional bike access. BTCEB has proposed that the district set a vision of all residents in the park district having access to a park with 10 miles of bike legal singletrack within a 20-25 minute drive from their home. The lack of bike access is leading to increased unauthorized trail creation by park users which often may result in increased natural resource impacts. We ask that the district target reaching 75% of the district having this available to them in the next 20 years.

What is your vision for Singletrack bike access from a volume and timing perspective and why?

Do you support the above proposed level of bike access and trails? Why or why not?

I do not feel comfortable agreeing to such a prescriptive goal as that proposed above, especially without first exploring pros and cons. But I do agree with its spirit, and it will be a goal that I have always planned to advocate for since I have been on this board.

One trait that I have always tried to cultivate within myself is the willingness to think outside the box. So, along those lines, maybe there are opportunities for great bicycle trails on land that the Park District does not now manage. I would urge the BTCEB to investigate the possibility of building trails on GHADs. This is public land that should have a recreational benefit upon it. I suggest San Ramon as a starting point for this, but there is probably county land as well. And maybe Clayton could have some potential. This access would spread opportunities around especially in places where people live. I would be happy to assist this effort in any way deemed appropriate.

The Roles of Access, Education, and Enforcement

Singletrack bike access is limited in the East Bay Regional Park District. The addition of sanctioned access at Crockett Hills and the adoption of unsanctioned trails at Briones have shown a positive impact on unsanctioned trail activity. Those increases in access are significant yet much of the district has very limited opportunity to biking singletrack trails. Some members of the community call for increased enforcement and also self policing by the mountain bike community. Self policing is challenging in light of decades of access advocacy with EBRPD while other land managers demonstrate significantly more expansion in access. Meanwhile the net impact to habitat is much worse than additional well planned trails.

Where do you see the roles of increased access, education, and enforcement in the overall situation related to mountain bikes in EBRPD?

Increased access to trails that users want is key to eliminating the illegal construction of bootleg trails. So, my efforts to provide more trails should help. But peer to peer encouragement to always "do the right thing" has to be part of the approach. At some point, though, it becomes necessary to utilize education and enforcement by Park District police and others. There has to be potential consequences for bad behavior even if it involves very infrequent police patrols. Many other trail users are asking us for this.

Other Comments

If you have any other comments on the topics discussed here or any related topics, please leave them below. Press Submit when you are done. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I appreciate the chance to express my views to your membership and to communicate that there is a path forward toward better access for mountain bikes. The BTCEB has been a great group to work with due to your knowledge of the subject and your respect for the process. Going forward, a balanced approach will prove to be acceptable to just about everybody.

Please keep up the efforts on "slow and say hello" and peer to peer encouragement.

This form was created inside of The Bicycle Trails Council of the East Bay.

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