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Rubicon Trail Route Recognition 2009

Please accept these comments from the BlueRibbon Coalition into the official record for the Rubicon Trail Route Recognition process as per the public meeting December 10, 2009.

The BlueRibbon Coalition (BRC) is a non-profit (501.c.3) national grassroots organization that champions responsible use of public lands and waterways, and encourages individual environmental stewardship. BRC represents over 10,000 individual members and 1,200 organization and business members, for a combined total of over 600,000 recreationists nationwide. (1-800-258-3742; www.sharetrails.org).

First of all thank you for the opportunity to comment and for your on-going exemplary efforts to include the users and Friends of the Rubicon in the management and maintenance of this icon of four-wheeling, the Rubicon Trail. BRC (through Del Albright) has led the Friends of the Rubicon since the very beginning and we are proud to be part of your leadership efforts.

In general, BlueRibbon supports the “corridor” concept of managing the Rubicon Trail. Leaving a width of public road/trail, rather than one single, sometimes ill-defined route, is better for maintenance, management, user enjoyment, and the environment.

The advantages of a corridor are many. Many of the existing bypasses are necessary for safe passage, to ease congestion, allow for the continued flow of traffic, AND to assist in the extrication of damaged/dead vehicles, and in some cases for safe winter travel.

We further support leaving serious obstacles like Soup Bowl and Little Sluice so folks can have challenge along with adventure. It would seem wise at the same time to develop a new bypasses where needed, such as around Soup Bowl to avoid trail backups and possibly dangerously crowded (congested) conditions.

Basically, BRC feels the County should work closely with the USDA Forest Service and private property owners to leave as many existing routes, alternate routes and bypasses as possible during this phase of maintenance, and use Best Management Practices (BMP’s) to determine if FOTR and the county can adequately maintain all the routes.

Our comments and recommendations are ***highlighted in yellow with bold italic text.***

Rubicon Trail Route Recognition

Specific recommendations follow each line item in the outline of the Rubicon Trail Route Recognition document.

A. Vicinity of Postpile (CGS 1.3, 1.4, 1.5)

There are at least two routes currently used. BRC Recommends:

Create a trail corridor, and manage the routes within the corridor using BMPs; keeping both the Postpile Route (CGS 1.0) and at least one other alternate/bypass route for all the serious obstacle areas of Postpile.

B. Top of Postpile (No CGS Reference)

After passing the top of the Postpile, the shelf road empties onto a granite slab through fading trees where the trail is a bit vague to spot and both routes run on solid granite. The upper trail is best used during winter, so BRC recommends:

Create a trail corridor, keeping both routes, and manage the routes within the corridor by BMPs.

C. Ellis Creek Campground Stub (USFS Road 14N34B) (No CGS reference)

West of Ellis Creek at 39°01'20.53"N and 120°18'25.39"W, there is an intersection where a historic route (USFS Road No. 14N34B- also known as the McKinstry Trail) splits off uphill and to the north, and the original trail proceeds straight to the east.

BRC notes that this is not recognized as part of this Route Recognition process, however our members want to go on record that this route is very desirable, and in some cases, necessary to the safety and trail enjoyment of trail users. We very much would like to see this section of trail open back up to Rubicon Trail users.

D. Trail Split After Ellis Creek (CGS 1.6)

After Ellis Creek at 39°01'22.23"N and 120°18'14.68"W, there is an intersection where an easier bypass splits off uphill and to the north (CGS 1.6), and the original trail proceeds straight to the east (CGS 1.0). There is a lot of two-way traffic in this area and plans should accommodate safe ingress and egress to the trail. The lower route can be armored by Friends of the Rubicon in support of the County, while the upper route is better for wet weather winter use. BRC recommends:

Create a trail corridor and manage the routes within the corridor by BMPs, and prescribed weather conditions. The "wetter" route can be avoided by using the upper route as weather conditions dictate. Trail signage, user education and FOTR Trail Patrol involvement can ensure the success of this BMP.

E. Soup Bowl (No CGS reference)

At Soup Bowl, where two routes diverge, a newer and more challenging bypass splits off uphill and to the north, and the original trail proceeds straight to the east through an off-camber granite notch. Traffic backups sometimes occur here and part of Soup Bowl has become a challenge spot, perfectly acceptable to more ruggedly built rigs. BRC Recommends:

Create a wider trail corridor and manage routes within the corridor by BMPs, while also creating a new bypass route around and away from the Soup Bowl and adjacent trail area to facilitate traffic flow, and obstacle congestion.

F. West of Winter Camp (CGS 1.7)

After descending the stair steps, there is an intersection near 39°01'17.33"N and 120°16'42.83"W where a bypass (CGS 1.7) splits off directly downhill and to the west, while the original trail (CGS 1.0) proceeds due east and downhill into a drainage. The bypass parallels the original trail and joins it near 39°01'17.05"N and 120°16'39.23"W. The Bypass has gotten much wider in recent years and drains sediment where it is hard to mitigate. On the ground further assessment is needed, but it appears the choice that makes the most sense now is to:

Limit use to the single traditional route (CGS 1.0) only, close bypass (CGS 1.7).

G, H, I and J. Little Sluice and its Bypasses

The original trail through Little Sluice (CGS 1.0) follows a deep seam in the granite that runs almost straight to the southeast with granite cliffs on the north, and a smooth granite slope on the south. The high or short bypass goes just to the north; the long bypass goes way around to the north and comes in at Thousand Dollar Hill; and a south bypass gets up on the slabs. All bypasses are needed, necessary and manageable by Friends of the Rubicon with assistance from the County.

Moderate or even well-built rigs cannot get through the Little Sluice, thus the high and long bypasses (that travel mostly over solid granite) are needed for normal traffic. Little Sluice is needed to provide trail challenge and driver experience. The south bypass on the slabs is needed to recover disabled vehicles in the Little Sluice.

The combined use of all these routes facilitate the flow of traffic, two-way as needed, and recovery of rigs that might be broken down.

If any bypass had to be removed, it would be the high or short bypass, thereby rerouting traffic out and around the long bypass.

Therefore, BRC Recommends:

Create a trail corridor and manage the routes within the corridor (CGS routes 1.0, 1.8, 1.9 and map item I) by BMPs. All routes within the corridor should open initially, with individual assessment and monitoring over time as FOTR maintains the routes.

G. Little Sluice Short Bypass (CGS 1.9)

Already covered in

H. Little Sluice Long Bypass (CGS 1.8)

Already covered above.

I. Little Sluice South Bypass (No CGS reference)

Already covered above.

J. Thousand Dollar Hill Bypass (east end of CGS 1.8)

The original trail descends tall ledges that are very challenging to the best built rigs. As a result, most traffic takes the Thousand Dollar Hill bypass from 39°01'10.31"N and 120°16'19.81"W northwest to 39°01'11.07"N and 120°16'20.30"W. Thousand Dollar Hill itself is a loose, rocky climb with several dangerous off-camber spots.

BRC Recommends:

Keep both the traditional route (CGS 1.0) and the Thousand Dollar Hill bypass (east end of CGS 1.8) as the only two routes. Leave the tough spots and maintain the easier route, with adequate signage for the dangerous spots.

K. Middle Sluice Trail (CGS 1.10) and Indian Trail (CGS 1.10)

The original trail (CGS 1.10) is called Middle Sluice (or sometimes Old Sluice, True

Sluice, or Flatfender Alley), with its southern third commonly referred to as Old Sluice Box. Indian Trail is a well-defined alternate route across the granite slabs northeast of Old Sluice. This amounts to two separate trails that diverge and re-converge. Both routes are needed to facilitate two-way traffic on the trail, as well as to provide choices in vehicle capability.

BRC Recommends:

Keep both the Middle Sluice route (CGS 1.10) and the Indian Trail (CGS 1.0).

L. Buck Island Trail (CGS 1.0) and Bypass (No CGS reference)

The original trail (CGS 1.0 0) went close by the shore of Buck Island Lake, but when the lake level was raised by SMUD as part of a hydro project, the original trail is now partly submerged depending on the time of year, weather, and SMUD operations. At 39°00'16.24"N and 120°15'06.71"W, where the main trail (CGS 1.0) goes down to lake level, the Buck Island Bypass (CGS ___) splits off to the north and east and follows the contour of the hillside. There is no need other than camping access for vehicles to be on the route down by the lake edge.

BRC Recommends:

Close the original route (CGS 1.0), and improve the bypass, manage with BMP's.

OTHER ITEMS NOT SHOWN ON MAP

Several locations of concern are not shown on the current DOT Proposed Rubicon Trail Route map. They are listed below for discussion purposes

M. Wentworth Springs Campground Bypass (CGS 1.1)

A user-created bypass (CGS 1.1) goes around a low lying area that held water prior to the road maintenance done by DOT and FOTR in 2006 and 2007.

BRC Recommends:

BRC supports the recommendations of the Friends of the Rubicon.

N. Granite bypass west of Postpile (CGS 1.2)

CGS route 1.0 is actually a user-created bypass, and CGS route 1.2 is the original trail. The bypass goes over granite around a low lying area.

BRC Recommends:

BRC Supports the recommendations of the Friends of the Rubicon.

Q. Alternate Routes Near Placer County Line (CGS 1.11)

BRC Recommends:

BRC supports the recommendations of the Friends of the Rubicon.

For the BlueRibbon Coalition
Del Albright, BlueRibbon Ambassador