

March 14, 2023

Contra Costa County Clerk
555 Escobar Street
Martinez, CA 945537

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

PROJECT TITLE: Briones Trails Pilot Project

LEAD AGENCY/APPLICANT: East Bay Regional Park District
Attn: Brian Holt
2950 Peralta Oaks Court, Oakland, CA 94605
Telephone: 510-544-2623

PROJECT LOCATION: The Briones Trails Pilot Project (Project) is located within Briones Regional Park, within unincorporated Contra Costa County. Specifically, the Project is limited to a 1,600-acre portion in the Northeast corner of Briones Regional Park and includes the Old Briones Road staging area and the Reliez Valley staging area (the Pilot Project Zone). The Alhambra Creek staging area and park office entrance are adjacent to, but outside, the Pilot Project Zone, and will also serve as access points to the Project area. (see attached map)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The East Bay Regional Park District (District) proposes to implement the Briones Trails Pilot Project (Project) to test new approaches to safely share trails and improve the trail experience for all users while protecting habitat, wildlife, and watersheds. A key component of the Project is the closure and restoration of illegally built “bootleg” trails. The Project is a pilot program and will take place for a limited duration, a maximum of twenty (20) months, at which time the Park District will evaluate the effectiveness of the Project and whether to adopt any permanent regulations. Additionally, during the term of the Project, trail use within the Pilot Project Zone and two trail segments adjacent to the Pilot Project Zone will be limited to specific uses on specific trails, such as hiking only, biking only, or biking/hiking only and direction of travel, based on the specific trail characteristics. Also, during the weekends, trail use within the Pilot Project Zone will be restricted so that bicycle and equestrian use will alternate days in which they are allowed to be within the Pilot Project Zone.

The project includes the following objectives:

1) *Protect Resources, Habitat, Wildlife and Watersheds*

The expansion of illegal bootleg trails is a significant issue for Briones and other East Bay regional parks. These user-built trails are often not built to sustainable trail standards with appropriate drainage and avoidance of sensitive natural habitats. Illegal trails can have negative impacts on wildlife and watersheds. The Project will include a robust monitoring and patrol program to document and prevent the expansion of bootleg trails in the Pilot Project Zone.

2) *Restore Natural Habitat by Closing Illegal Bootleg Trails in the Pilot Project Zone*

A primary objective of the Project is to engage with the trail user community to join park staff in restoring natural habitats already impacted by illegal bootleg trails and stop the construction of new bootleg trails.

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3) *Enhance the Trail User Experience*

The trail management strategies being tested during the twenty-month pilot project are intended to allow users to safely enjoy trails by limiting where certain user types are permitted to reduce the potential for conflict between different user types.

4) *Increase Volunteer Engagement in Trail Maintenance and Habitat Restoration*

Community volunteers play an important role in helping park staff monitor and maintain park trails. The Pilot Project will provide volunteer opportunities and encourage more members of the trail user community to join in trail maintenance and habitat restoration activities.

DETERMINATION: The District has reviewed the proposed project and determined it to be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements under *Article 19, Categorical Exemptions*, of the State CEQA Guidelines in the California Administrative Code:


Section 15301 – Existing Facilities. Class 1 Categorical Exemption for repair and minor alteration of existing public or private structures or facilities or topographical features. The Project includes trail operation, maintenance and repair of existing trails within the Pilot Project Zone. In addition to the maintenance and repair of the existing trails, the Project would also include the maintenance of existing landscapes and natural habitats. Implementing the Project and evaluating whether existing trails should be incorporated into the official Park District trail system and conducting routine maintenance on those existing trails would be a negligible or no expansion of existing uses.

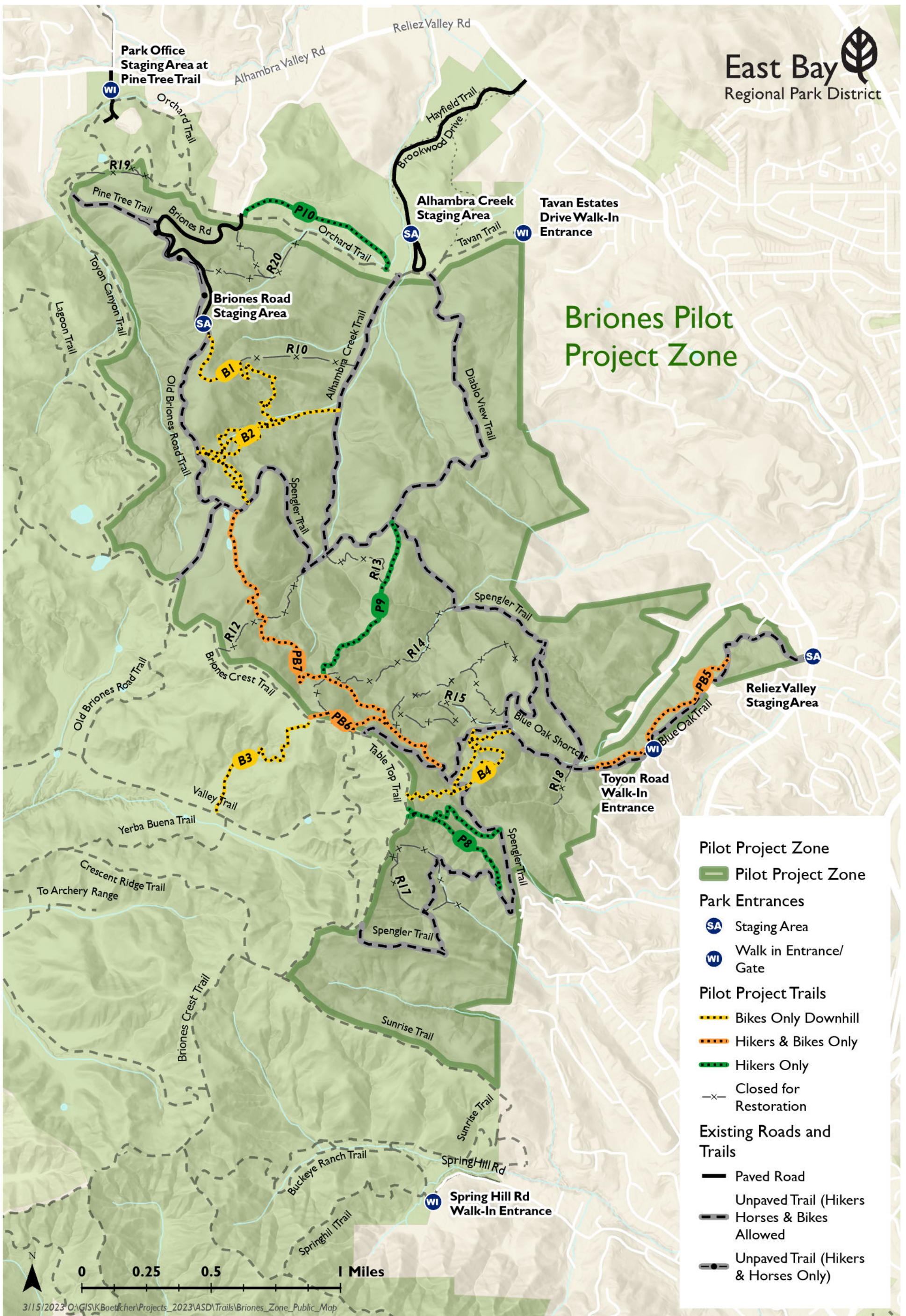
Section 15302 – Replacement or Reconstruction. Class 2 Categorical Exemption for replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities. The Project includes trail operation, maintenance and repair of existing trails within the Pilot Project Zone. As part of the Project, some trails may be repaired and will have substantially the same purpose, with no increase in capacity or use. Implementing the Project and evaluating whether existing trails should be incorporated into the official Park District trail system and conducting routine maintenance on those existing trails would be a negligible or no expansion of existing uses.

Section 15304 – Minor Alterations to Land – The proposed project meets the requirements of a Class 4 Categorical Exemption – Minor Alterations to Land which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Section 15304 specifically allows the creation of bicycle lanes on existing rights of way. This project will include the temporary use of bicycles on existing trails. The Project also includes operation, maintenance and repair of existing trails which may involve minor alterations in the condition of land and vegetation within the Pilot Project Zone.

Section 15307 – Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources — The proposed project meets the requirements of a Class 7 Categorical Exemption – Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources. As part of this Project, the Park District would not be removing any existing environmental protections. The project is intended to prevent damage of natural resources from continued construction of unauthorized trails by the public. Additionally, the project includes restoring unauthorized trails constructed by the public within sensitive habitats, therefore resulting in habitat restoration and a net benefit to natural resources over the existing condition. Implementing the Project and temporarily adopting the existing trails into the official trail system and restricting trail use by activity and day is an action to assure the maintenance and enhancement of trails within the Park District. By allowing temporary use of these trails within the Pilot Project Zone, the trails can also be designed, engineered and maintained in a manner that will be according to best trail building standards with regards to erosion, safety, and maintenance.

Section 15308 – Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment – The proposed project meets the requirements of a Class 8 Categorical Exemption – Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment. As part of this Project, the Park District would not be removing any existing environmental protections. Implementing the Project and temporarily adopting the existing trails into the official trail system and restricting trail use by activity and day is an action to assure the maintenance and enhancement of trails within the Park District. The project is intended to prevent damage of natural resources from continued construction of unauthorized trails by the public. Additionally, the project includes restoring unauthorized trails constructed by the public within sensitive habitats, therefore resulting in habitat restoration and a net benefit to natural resources over the existing condition. By allowing temporary use of these trails within the Pilot Project Zone into the Park District’s trail network, the trails can also be designed, engineered and maintained in a manner that will be according to best trail building standards with regards to erosion, safety, and maintenance.

Approved by  _____ **Date** 3-15-2023
Brian Holt, Chief
Planning, Trails, & GIS Department
East Bay Regional Park District
(510) 544-2623 / BHolt@ebparks.org

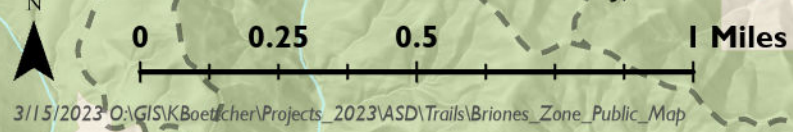


Pilot Project Zone
 Pilot Project Zone

Park Entrances
 Staging Area
 Walk in Entrance/ Gate

Pilot Project Trails
 Bikes Only Downhill
 Hikers & Bikes Only
 Hikers Only
 Closed for Restoration

Existing Roads and Trails
 Paved Road
 Unpaved Trail (Hikers & Bikes Allowed)
 Unpaved Trail (Hikers & Horses Only)



Briones Pilot Project Zone




Briones Pilot Project NOE

Final Audit Report

2023-03-15

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