

that DWR's proposed warmwater fishery improvement program (Proposed Article A110) would sufficiently improve habitat and catch rates for warmwater fish.

Anglers Committee et al. recommend that DWR construct additional public boat launching facilities in the Feather River downstream of the fish barrier dam and downstream of the Thermalito afterbay outlet and fund trash removal at all public facilities in the OWA.

The Recreation Management Plan includes additional boat launch development at the OWA and appendix B of the Settlement Agreement includes a measure to provide funding to manage the OWA. We therefore conclude that the Anglers Committee et al.'s recommendation is already adequately addressed by DWR's Proposal.

Trails and Trail Management—Individuals, agencies, and organizations filed a multitude of letters both in support of and in opposition to the trail designations in the Recreation Management Plan.¹¹⁵ Most of the opposing commentors are equestrian users and most of the supportive commentors are bicyclists.

In terms of the number of users, DWR's use studies showed that there was low to moderate use on trails throughout much of the year with hikers constituting most (65 to 82 percent) of the existing trail users, with the exception of the Thermalito diversion pool where most users were equestrians followed by bicyclists. At Lake Oroville, equestrians were the second largest user group representing 15 percent of the existing trail use closely followed by bicyclists (11 percent). These data indicate that the existing use of most of the project trails is primarily pedestrian with the remainder of the use attributed to almost equal percentages of equestrian and bicycle use.

Based on DWR's study results, we determined there may be slightly greater existing demand for more bicycle trails than equestrian trails in the project area. Looking into the future, demand for all types of trail use will increase over the term of the license. DWR's studies indicate that hiking will have high demand and both bicycle and equestrian use will have moderate demand.

Currently, there are 2.6 miles of trails available only to hikers, 21.5 miles of trails available only to hikers and equestrians, and 51.4 miles of trails available only to hikers and bicyclists, with some segments of those trails also open to equestrians (see figure 17). Bicycle trails are mainly paved near the Thermalito forebay and Thermalito afterbay, whereas unpaved equestrian trails can be found in the hills surrounding the Thermalito diversion pool and Lake Oroville. Under the Proposed Action there would be 2.1 miles of trails available only to hikers, just over 4 miles of trails available to hikers and equestrians, and the remaining 69 miles of trails available to hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. DWR would also develop approximately 0.5 mile of trail available only to hikers, approximately 5 miles of trail available to hikers and bicyclists, and approximately 5 miles of trails available to hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. DWR would increase the total amount of trails accessible by all groups and create different route options through trail designation changes and the addition of connector segments. The most notable change would be opening more than 17 miles of trails to bicycle use where it historically has not been allowed. This change would give bicyclists access to more unpaved terrain in the hills, but would result in about a 68 percent reduction in the length of trails where equestrians could ride without expecting bicycle encounters.

Although the intent of DWR's proposed draft Comprehensive Non-Motorized Trails Program is to increase access for all user groups and retain portions for equestrian-only use, it does not allow for continuous access on the project trails for each group. For example, implementation of the program would convert most of the Dan Beebe trail to multiple use, except for the switchback portion in the middle of the trail. This would create a discontinuous route for bicyclists and equestrians who do not want to ride with bicyclists. In effect, equestrians would not have an 'equestrian-only' way to access to

¹¹⁵ Commenting entities are identified in section 3.3.6.2, *Recreational Resources*.

this portion of the trail. Creating a parallel trail to provide separate trails for each type of use would eliminate this circumstance. However, as proposed, the parallel trail would be built after the Dan Beebe trail would already have been changed to multiple use. While the Proposed Action would increase access to more miles of trail in absolute terms, increase access to different types of trails, and create more route options, there are several fundamental issues that must be resolved.

Considering our 2004 finding and our conclusion here that there is almost equivalent demand for equestrian and bicycle trails in the project area, we find it is premature to change all trail designations to multiple use as outlined in the draft Comprehensive Non-Motorized Trails Program. The fact that existing trails appeal to bicyclists is not necessarily sufficient rationale for reducing the existing opportunity for a unique recreational experience for equestrians. Because the data DWR collected relative to trail use has several shortcomings (as discussed in section 3.3.6.1 *Affected Environment, 2002–2003 Estimated Annual Use: Trail Use*) that bring into question the foundation of its proposal, we find there are insufficient recreational data on which to base any final decision to change trail designations to multiple use. We make this finding given the concerns of commentors, our 2004 finding that the current recreation plan provides for a unique equestrian experience, the absence of a trail condition inventory, and the apparent existence of trail maintenance problems. However, we recognize existing and projected levels of trail use generally supports increasing access to more trails and that the data provide enough information to form preliminary determinations and trail plans.

We recommend that DWR revise the Recreation Management Plan and the draft Comprehensive Non-Motorized Trails Program to allow for the definition of trail maintenance standards and data collection that reflects existing trail designations. We recommend these revisions include provisions that DWR complete the following assessments: (1) conduct a trail condition inventory relative to the trail maintenance standards within the first year of the license; (2) conduct visitor use surveys (on-site and mail-back, including methodology to focus on multiple use and user conflicts); (3) collect additional trail use data; (4) survey the users who are not using the trails to determine latent demand; (5) complete trail feasibility investigations (as proposed); and (6) use all of this information to make final recommendations regarding a need to change the trail designations within 3 years of license issuance. Survey and trail use data collection should occur within the first 2 years of license issuance and capture data during spring, summer, and fall seasons.

Our recommendations here are consistent with DWR's statement in the draft Comprehensive Non-Motorized Trails Program that "additional trail planning and design assessment is necessary to effectively balance public access and recreational needs or desires with management requirements to ensure appropriate levels of resource protection and public safety." Finally, we recommend that the final Non-Motorized Trails Program outline a more specific, phased implementation schedule. The current draft Non-Motorized Trails Program includes a draft schedule that states which trail changes will occur in the first 10 years after license issuance and which changes will occur in the second 10 years. Instead, the schedule for trail program implementation should include specific timelines for the assessments listed above, the development of final recommendations, and prioritized trail modification or construction. This schedule should be developed with public input representing the various user groups.

We recognize that this recommendation could eliminate existing access to some equestrian and hiker-only trails and this could decrease opportunities for equestrians who do not want to ride with bicyclists. However, this program can strike a balance between retaining some single use trails and expanding public access to the project for all users. In addition, our recommended modifications would address the safety concerns and future needs for trails at the project that were raised by entities who filed comments in opposition to the proposed trail designations. We consider both DWR's proposal and our staff modification relating to trails and trails management would have approximately equal costs.