



# Preserve Calavera

Coastal North San Diego County



April 19, 2019

Charlton H. Bonham, Director  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
P.O. Box 944209  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090  
by electronic mail only

**Subject: Unauthorized Mountain Biking on Carlsbad Highlands Ecological Reserve, South Coast Region**

Dear Director Bonham,

The undersigned conservation organizations wish to express our gratitude for the current long-past-due actions of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to address the rampant proliferation of unauthorized mountain biking and mountain biking trails on the Carlsbad Highlands Ecological Reserve (CHER) in Carlsbad, CA. The groups signing have a long-standing interest in the protection of CHER.

California's ecological reserves (ERs) are CDFW's most protected lands. Their primary purpose is to develop "a statewide program for protection of rare, threatened, or endangered native plants, wildlife, aquatic organisms, and specialized terrestrial or aquatic habitat type" (Title 14, California Code of Regulations, §630). Biking is authorized on only eight of the 136 ERs statewide, and on those eight ERs, the biking is very restricted and often grandfathered in

during the formation of the ER. There are other, less regulated CDFW and other public lands where mountain biking is more appropriate. Moreover there are other mechanisms by which outdoor recreationists can secure the areas they need to pursue their activities without jeopardizing conserved lands.

Prior to its designation as an ER, biking was never authorized on the lands that comprise CHER; nor is biking now authorized on the Reserve. CHER contains 473 acres, of which 373 are mitigation lands set aside from 1993 to 1995. When it was designated as an ER in 2004, 100 acres of then privately-owned land were deeded to the conserved area. In addition to its ER status, CHER is an integral component of the Carlsbad HMP/NCCP adopted in 2004. Both designations require maintaining and enhancing the ecological values of the property.

CHER supports listed species, including coastal California gnatcatcher and thread-leaved brodiaea, other Carlsbad HMP/NCCP covered and sensitive species, including golden eagle, coyote, grasshopper sparrow, and black-shouldered kite, and sensitive coastal sage scrub vegetation. Conservation science and research has confirmed the impact of recreational use on sensitive species and ecosystems. The ever-increasing demand for outdoor recreational opportunities cannot be met without compromising CHER's protections and further jeopardizing the survival of species within it. At CHER, a dense web of trails has been illegally established throughout gnatcatcher breeding habitat.

Starting in 2017, representatives of our groups met with representatives from San Diego Mountain Biking Association (SDMBA), CDFW, USFWS, and City of Carlsbad, to eliminate biking from CHER, find alternative nearby riding locations, and discuss how to restore the areas damaged by the over 17 miles of unauthorized trails created on the 473 acres. Despite our and CDFW's efforts to educate the biking community about the purpose of ERs and to find solutions, no progress was made in finding solutions acceptable to the mountain biking community that would also protect the ER.

We are aware that CDFW has been underfunded for years and that the chronic lack of adequate management and enforcement on CHER is just one manifestation of that underfunding. Though the lack is extremely unfortunate, it does not justify the decades of trespass and vandalism that has occurred at CHER. We commend CDFW for its current activities to protect the covered species and resources at the Reserve.

We ask you to ensure that current protection and enforcement efforts at CHER continue. We also ask you to not approve mountain biking at CHER and retroactively reward trespassing and vandalism by subsequently legitimizing it in this ER. San Diego County already has over 1,000 miles of trails used by mountain bikers. Opening CHER to mountain biking would set a bad precedent for the NCCP and California's ER system acquired with public funds dedicated solely to conserve natural resources. We urge the Department to stay the course to ensure CHER is protected.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We are available to meet with you about this matter. Please contact Pamela Heatherington with any questions at 805-835-1833.

Sincerely,

Diane Nygaard  
President, Preserve Calavera

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Board of Directors, Environmental Center of San Diego

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ec: Senator Toni Atkins, 39th District  
Senator Patricia Bates, 36th District  
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