



Buck Gulch Falls Trail Improvement Project

The Buck Gulch Falls Trail and the Spyglass Trail are public hiking and equestrian trails used to access the Buck Gulch waterfall. The existing trails are experiencing degradation due to stream proximity and unimproved stream crossings. In total, nearly 2,240 feet of the existing trail are to be improved, 850 feet to be decommissioned and restored, and 850 feet to be realigned away from the top of the streambanks – including the installation of pedestrian trail bridges, puncheons and boardwalks at stream crossing locations, and the implementation of stream restoration and riparian vegetation plans.

Setting

The Buck Gulch Falls Trail extends west from Fairway Drive, which is classified as a local street. It connects adjacent residential neighborhoods to Ignacio Boulevard, serving as a collector street for local trips. It is generally 40 feet wide, though the width reduces to 32 feet west of Saint Andrews Drive near the trailhead. Traffic counts obtained on Fairway Drive east of Saint Andrews Drive on Friday, November 14, and Saturday, November 15, 2025, indicate that this segment of the road carries about 230 vehicle trips per day. It is noted that the weather on these dates was clear, with afternoon temperatures in the mid-60's.

There is no on-site parking for the Buck Gulch Falls Trail, so users must park on Fairway Drive and Saint Andrews Drive, which is 30 feet wide. With homes on only one side of the segments of each street nearest the trailhead, the on-street parking on the side without homes could reasonably be considered as the parking supply for the trailhead. Within a walking distance of less than 1,000 feet from the trailhead, there is curb space for approximately 25 vehicles to park in legal spaces on the undeveloped side of the streets.

Initial Study Checklist

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) sets forth specific topics that can potentially result in an environmental impact. For transportation, there are four issues, as discussed below.

Programs, Plans, Ordinances, and Policies

Would the project:

- a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?**

The *Road and Trail Management Plan*, December 16, 2014, requires the Marin County Open Space District (MCOSD) to establish and maintain a sustainable system of roads and trails that meet design and management standards; reduce the environmental impact of roads and trails on sensitive resources, habitats, riparian areas, and native and special-status plant and animal species; and improve the visitor experience and safety for all users, including hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians.

A review of the applicable policies for both the County of Marin and City of Novato indicates that there are no policies with which the proposed project would conflict. Though sidewalks are generally required on both sides of streets per Marin County Municipal Code Section 24.04.440, sidewalks may be eliminated on one or both sides of streets where it is found that topography, density, or other circumstances make them impractical, as determined by the agency. Similarly, Novato Municipal Code Section 5-34.008 indicates the need for sidewalks on both sides of the street except where residential frontages are 150 feet or more, where a sidewalk on one side is allowed. The lack of sidewalk on the undeveloped side of the street is therefore consistent with policy due to the topography and density of development. Because the proposed project would improve existing facilities used by pedestrians and cyclists, it would have a net beneficial impact on these modes.

Significance Finding – The proposed project does not conflict with any policies for transportation facilities and would therefore have a less-than-significant impact on these facilities.

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)

Would the project:

b) Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines § 15064.3, subdivision (b)?

Under guidance provided by the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) in the publication *Transportation Impacts (SB 743) CEQA Guidelines Update and Technical Advisory*, 2018, several criteria are identified that may be used by jurisdictions to identify certain types of projects that are unlikely to have a VMT impact and can be "screened" from further VMT analysis. One of these screening criteria pertains to small projects, which OPR identifies as generating fewer than 110 vehicle trips per day.

Trip Generation

The anticipated vehicle trip generation for a project is generally estimated using standard rates published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) in the *Trip Generation Manual*, 12th Edition, 2025. This source provides a means of estimating the anticipated change in the number of trips associated with land uses of various types. There are no land uses that are applicable to an open space recreational area. Further, the independent variables used to estimate additional trips are either the acreage of the park or the number of trail miles. As neither of these variables would change, the proposed improvements to stabilize the trails and provide crossings that protect the streams could reasonably be expected to result in no increase to a negligible change to the site's vehicle trip generation.

Significance Finding – The proposed project would be presumed to have a less-than-significant impact on VMT due to being expected to generate no new trips.

Introduction of Hazards

Would the project:

c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?

Collisions

The collision history for the study area was reviewed to determine any trends or patterns that may indicate a safety issue. Collision rates were calculated based on records available from the California Highway Patrol as published in their Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System (SWITRS) reports. During the five-year period of January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2024, there were no collisions reported between the trailhead and 250 feet east of Saint Andrews Drive.

The proposed project does not include any modifications to the street system and would improve the trails, which are currently used by pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians. The proposed improvements would need to adhere to applicable design standards and would eliminate existing unprotected stream crossings, which are less safe than the conditions that would exist upon completion of the project. Further, the proposed project would potentially eliminate use by equestrians, which would reduce the potential for conflict between various types of users.

As there is a sidewalk only on the south side of Fairway Drive and no sidewalk on Saint Andrews Drive, pedestrians must either cross over to the sidewalk on the south side of Fairway Drive or walk in the road or on the shoulder to access the trailhead from the on-street parking. The roadway has open-sighted lines, so oncoming vehicles are visible from far enough east for pedestrians to move out of the travel lane, if necessary. Given the very low volumes of traffic that use this short segment of Fairway Drive as well as Saint Andrews Drive, and the absence of any collisions being reported during the five-year study period, the lack of sidewalk does not present a safety concern.

Significance Finding – The proposed project would not increase hazards due to geometric design and would not represent a new (and therefore potentially incompatible) land use, resulting in an impact to safety that would be less than significant.

Emergency Access

Would the project:

d) Result in inadequate emergency access?

As with the topics discussed above, the proposed project would not include any changes that would affect emergency responders, except that the trail modifications would improve access for responders in case of an emergency on the trail itself. As a result, the proposed project would have no effect on emergency response or access.

Significance Finding – The proposed improvements to the trails at Buck Gulch Falls would have a less-than-significant impact on emergency access.