



# PRESS RELEASE

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## Off Trail Uses Damages Parks and Costs Taxpayers to Fix

**Newport Beach, CA October 14, 2016** – The Safe Trails Coalition released a factsheet detailing costs associated with off trail damage in our parks and preserves. The impetus for the review was to understand the actual costs associated with staffing, trail maintenance, and habitat restoration; and to understand how or if off trail uses impact a land manager’s budget. In short, it does. Creating and using unauthorized trails not only has impacts to habitat, but also directly impacts the public’s pocket book by creating the need to fund the restoration costs, which redirect staff time away from normal activities. Many land managers have underlying agreements associated with the land that require them to maintain the habitats to a specific stewardship standard.

By partnering with local, regional, state, and federal land managers, the Coalition quantified costs associated with staffing, trail, and habitat restoration costs. Here is a little bit about what we learned:

- Land managers reported costs of up to \$18,000 per year to simply track illegal trail use;
- Trail signage was regularly stolen, ignored or vandalized increasing costs and creating unsafe trail conditions; and,
- Taxpayers fund nine of the ten land managers in this survey; therefore damaging the parks or trails ultimately costs taxpayers to fix the problem.

“Many trail users don’t even realize they’ve stepped off a designated (authorized) trail. That’s why it is important to ensure the public is educated and that they are using maps created by park agencies which accurately show legal trails. Then visitors need to stay on the designated trails,” said Melanie Schlotterbeck, the Coalition Coordinator and avid hiker/backpacker. “We encourage trail enthusiasts to become part of the solution by buying park passes, volunteering for trail days, helping with restoration projects, and more.”

Land managers have used consultants and volunteers in addition to agency staff to restore damaged areas. Restoration costs varied considerably based on a number of factors: slope, availability of water, accessibility, permitting, and so forth. On the low end, the Coalition found the costs to be \$3,000 per acre and on the high end it was \$160,000 per acre. “Our park agencies have to prioritize limited staffing and funding. If we can educate the public to follow the rules, leave no trace, and be part of the solution, then hopefully our land managers can use their limited resources keeping our parks functioning well,” said Schlotterbeck.

The Safe Trails Coalition is grateful for the contributions of each of the area land managers. The Coalition encourages the public and park visitors to enjoy the more than 130,000 acres of protected lands in Orange County, but caution them to stay on the trails to keep the habitats intact and the limited resources focused on priority projects. The one-page factsheet and a longer more detailed version can be downloaded or viewed from our website:

[www.SafeTrailsCoalition.org](http://www.SafeTrailsCoalition.org).

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*Safe Trails Coalition is comprised of five conservation-focused organizations: Audubon California, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks, Laguna Canyon Foundation, Sea and Sage Audubon Society, and Sierra Club. Together we are working to find a balance between recreational needs and resource protection for our natural lands.*