



Off Trail Use Costs The Public

Reducing Habitat Impacts & Costs to Land Managers



Orange County has many attractions, including its beaches, parks, and preserves. Understanding that our natural resources are finite and that these lands receive sustained pressure from continual use prompted the formation of the Safe Trails Coalition. Audubon California, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks, Laguna Canyon Foundation, Sea and Sage Audubon Society, and Sierra Club founded the Coalition to find a balance between recreational uses and resource protection. This factsheet focuses on the financial costs associated with trail misuse and abuse.

Confidential surveys were sent by the Coalition to land managers at the local, regional, state, and federal level. The respondents included public entities, cities, agencies, and conservancies.

After tabulating the responses, the most revealing information was the extensive costs involved with the public's use, and sometimes abuse, of the parkland—especially as it related to off-trail activities. We learned:

- Some land managers reported costs up to \$18,000 per year associated with tracking illegal trail use;
- A few reported expenditures up to \$25,000 per year for trail technology like counters and cameras; and,
- Together they reported adding trail signs (such as mile markers, restoration signs, or trail closures) cost ~\$112 each.

When trail misuse occurs, land managers must fix the problem through habitat restoration to curb future abuse or to meet required agency obligations. We learned:

- Simple restoration projects may cost as little as \$3,000 per acre, while complex ones can cost upward of \$160,000 per acre; and,
- Sensitive habitats like coastal sage scrub, cactus scrub, and wetland and riparian areas cost much more to restore, likely because, those habitats contain threatened or endangered species and require permits.



Many of the costs associated with trail and restoration expenditures exist only because of the creation and use of unauthorized trails. Those impacts force land managers to spend money fixing impacts, instead of maintaining the existing trails and resources. All but one of the surveyed land managers are funded by public tax dollars. In short, creating and using unauthorized trails has impacts to habitat and a direct connection to the public's pocket book to fund the restoration and staff costs. Trail users must 'become a part of the solution', not the problem.

Immediate steps you can take: Stay on the trail. Leave no trace. Be responsible. Follow the Rules. Self-police.