

Leah Carter, BAKERSFIELD, CA.

Bakersfield has a lack of accessible hiking trails, as evidenced by Bakersfield ranking 90th out of the top 100 cities in the US for park and greenspace access and by the number of people who leave Bakersfield to hike. Creating additional hiking trails and recreation opportunities in the area will increase the satisfaction of locals and improve the appearance of Bakersfield as a desirable place to live. The Kern River Canyon is a natural wonder with excellent potential for developing hiking trails that allow people to admire the Canyon's natural beauty, improve Bakersfield's ranking of parks and green spaces, and attract visitors from across the state.

A local community group of volunteers promotes the development of the Kern River Canyon's trails. This group proposed the creation of a network of trails on the south side of the Kern Canyon, starting at the mouth of the Kern River Canyon and extending 15 miles to Democrat Dam. A network of trails was already made for the hydroelectric power plant, but these trails are not all interconnected, even though they could be. The trails are not posted as public trails, even though they are on USFS land. To promote these trails as public, improved access to parking, trailhead signage, and bathrooms would need to be added.

The trail was named the Kern Gateway Trail (KGT) as it will be the gateway to experiencing the magic of the Kern River Canyon and the vast outdoor recreation opportunities the Canyon offers. The KGT is hundreds of feet above the Kern River and provides a unique experience of the powerful beauty of this great California waterway as it cuts a path through the Southern Sierra Nevada range. To learn more about the KGT, please visit our website.
<https://www.kerngatewaytrail.com/>

The local hiking clubs support the establishment of the KGT. There is a petition with approximately 2,000 signatures in support of developing the KGT. The KGTC hosts dozens of community hikes in the Project area to showcase the KGT. Each community hike is well attended, with hundreds of people showing up in support of the KGT. To view the KGT petition, please visit the petition website.
<https://www.change.org/p/usfs-city-of-bakersfield-kern-county-create-a-hiking-trail-system-at-the-gateway-to-the-kern-canyon>

Some portions of the KGT start on trails in the Project Study Area. These Project trails continue onto Sequoia National Forest Service land. The existing sections of the Project trails should be connected to newly formed trails to create a 15-mile continuous hiking trail above the Kern River, thus providing access to the dramatic beauty of the steep Kern River Canyon walls while viewing the beautiful Kern River below the trail. Developing the KGT trail will bring a unique and scenic recreational asset to Bakersfield that will promote healthier behaviors and a better quality of life for residents, which could help improve Bakersfield's poor ranking in its ranking of chronic disease rates, and the KGT will promote economic benefits to Kern County. The entire KGT proposal, including a map of the KGT, can be found at the link below.
https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/tnt86fjcvv1gmoyvvyu4pw/01_Lower-Kern-Canyon-Trail_Project-Proposal.pdf?rlkey=mct5k3gbturgryr6lflk88kgwa&dl=0

Proposed Study Plan

Table 2. Stakeholder Study Requests and Associated SCE Responses

The Draft REC 2 TSP proposed to collect trail use data on Project trails using two data collection methods: self-survey forms using QR codes and trail cameras. Based on comments received, the study was revised to use paper self-survey forms and drop boxes instead of QR codes and trail cameras. The Kern Gateway Trail Committee supports using all three data collection methods: trail counters/cameras, drop boxes with paper forms, and QR codes to obtain the most user feedback and collect the most comprehensive data, including quantitative and qualitative data.

REC 2 " Recreation Facility Use Assessment Technical Study Plan

The KGTC appreciates the inclusion of our requested study modifications in the Updated Draft REC 2 " Recreation Facility Use Assessment Technical Study Plan (Draft REC 2 TSP).

There are additional modifications that would further improve the study:

• The study should include users of nearby existing trails in the Kern River Canyon, such as the Kern River Trail,

Mill Creek Trail, and Remington Trail.

• The focus groups should include local hiking groups and the Kern Gateway Trail Committee members.

• The study should define in detail how opportunistic in-person surveys will be conducted.

â€¢Expand the Project to include the impact of the Project on undeveloped recreation sites along SR 178 and on Project trails.

Study Approach

Characterize Recreation Use at Developed Recreation Facilities and at Undeveloped Recreation Areas Along the Bypass Reach

Undeveloped Recreation Sites

The main Project trail that is utilized is located across the highway from the Lower Richbar Picnic Area in an unmarked parking area by a cattle gate. In order to capture the most hiker input, the undeveloped site across from the Lower Richbar Picnic Area should be included.

Study Duration

The proposed study time is April-September 2024. The prime time to hike in the Canyon is when the weather is cool; therefore, the study duration should be modified to be conducted for the entire year.

Estimate Future Recreation Use

The Project trails are not marked, well-defined, or accessible; therefore, the Project trails are not well-known or widely used. If the trails were marked and accessible, more hikers would utilize the Project trails. Given this, determining future use potential is essential to capture in the study. Questions on the survey and focus groups should include potential future use. The survey and focus group questions should be distributed to local hiking groups for input. Users of nearby established hiking trails should be included in the surveys and focus groups to help determine future use.

Document Content(s)

126778.txt.....1