

LATE SUBMISSION - Rcvd 02/17/16
OPEN FORUM - PUBLIC COMMENT

From
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Attn: Parks and Recreation committee, regarding El Dorado County Trail System
Re: "Walk on Left"

February 17, 2016

Dear Sirs:

First off, I would like to acknowledge all the park and recreation committee members, and other volunteers and paid staff, for making the El Dorado Trail system a shining gem of the county. The time and effort you have all put into this shows. **Thank you** for your contribution; it is very much appreciated from everyone I know. I use the trail often, mostly as a cyclist, sometimes as a hiker, I actually commute to work several days a week via the Forni Road section, and often ride up to the east end for pleasure.

I would, however, like to address the "Walk on left, ride on right" rule (law, guideline, suggestion? Not sure what the legal status of this is). Although I am sure there is some good rationale to have foot traffic on the left, riders on right,* in reality this has created a **confusing and potentially dangerous situation**.

By my estimation, based on quite a bit of on site observations, on average about 90% of the traffic on the paved trail is pedestrian traffic, only 10% bicycle, and equestrian use is minor.

Walk on left might work if, and only if, you have 100% pedestrian compliance. Not 40%, 60% or even 90%. However the **reality** is, from my repeated observations, that on average less than half the foot traffic adheres to the the rule, and this has been in place for quite a while now. I think we are maxed out on compliance**. This makes for a VERY confusing situation, where you often find two people on both sides of the trail walking towards or away from the cyclist, one complying, one not. The bigger issue, **which this does not address at all**, is when several people are using the trail and use both sides, with dogs, strollers etc., especially while listening to headphones or talking.*** When (or if) the cyclist is noticed, there is almost always some time lag as they try to figure out whether to move over to the right or left. There has been dozens of situations where I have rung my bell, called, coughed or otherwise made myself known, where the pedestrians do hear me, shuffle around and then move **-unpredictably-** to one side or the other, though in most cases to the right.

I have no resentment towards anyone using the trail. As a cyclist, I feel pedestrians **always** have the right of way, and it's incumbent on me to avoid them- I use a bell, slow down when passing, and even run on the dirt when there's doubt. But again, if it was just known to always move to the right, there would be far less confusion. Slower traffic (in this case foot traffic) on the right

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and passing on left is universally recognized, intuitive, and highly natural for **everyone** in North America.

In short, I would highly suggest you abandon this well intentioned rule, and simply revert to road rules- walk or ride on right, pass on left. And pedestrians ALWAYS have the right of way. This would make life much simpler for everyone, pedestrians and cyclists, and make the trail even safer and more pleasant for all. Otherwise I am sure we have created a preventable accident in the making.

Thanks for your attention to this matter.

Regards,

Hugh Hoeger



*I have in fact searched online and have failed to find any rationale of what makes this better or safer - if you google “walk on left ride on right trail rule” or similar, in the first three pages at least there is **nothing** I can find that defends or explains why this is better or safer. However there are several .org or .gov sites devoted to trail use which instead advocate ride/walk on right, pass on left. You'll find one of the first hits is a site lambasting the walk on left rule. And just because Sacramento and a few other places use it, I can't find anything that actually shows it works there either. Although I can't find it explicitly stated, it seems that the rationale may only work on a primarily bike based trail, and there's several indications that this works on trafficked roadways without sidewalks- but if you visit OUR trail, it is obvious the local trail system is mostly pedestrian, and of course no cars.

Overall, this does not seem to be widely adopted. If there are official peer reviewed studies showing fewer accidents in places that use these guidelines, I'd be interested in seeing them.

**To get 100% compliance would require, at least, better signage, education, and active enforcement. I'm sure no one wants to have to cite a hiker for walking on the right side, even if there are legal grounds for citation. The signage is spotty at best, I've only seen the painted symbols on the beginnings of parts of the trail. And I'm not sure who wants to volunteer to explain the rule to everyone who uses the trail- it would have to be done on site, not likely many people will come out for a town meeting. Plus many folks are occasional users, maybe going out a few times a year, or non-locals here on a visit.

Bikes are not the issue, riding on right is natural, and bike traffic is light.

*** Not related to safety, but how often have you seen people cleaning up after their dogs, but then leaving the blue bags on the side of trail- and you expect everyone to understand non-intuitive trail rules?