

Take a walk...in the watershed

Much has been written about why we must take good care of our watershed. From the summits of the Santa Ynez Mountains in the Los Padres National Forest to the Carpinteria beach where Carpinteria Creek enters the Pacific Ocean, our watershed possesses some of the greatest diversities of ecological communities within such a short distance. As we continue to learn how interdependent our own community's health and these environmental riches are, we also become better stewards of the resource. The Carpinteria Watershed Coalition, the Salt Marsh Park Docents and the Carpinteria Bluffs Advisory Board are examples of citizens groups working to learn, protect and educate everyone interested in the value, the enjoyment and the satisfaction of helping improve the natural beauty and environmental health of Carpinteria.

What isn't as obvious is that this appreciation of Carpinteria's natural wealth of diversity in plants and animals will also improve the physical and financial health of the community. Our public parks, natural public open spaces and the trails that connect them encourage walking or bike riding instead of using an automobile. Pedestrian bridges such as the 8th street bridge connect neighborhoods with business districts so that people can walk or cycle to work and school, complete errands, or to visit friends and neighbors. This reduces traffic congestion, reduces smog and makes the air we breathe clearer and our creek water cleaner.

Several studies have been conducted that show the use of trails and their proximity to users appears to increase regular physical activity in a community. The lack of physical activity impacts all of society through health care costs. It is a strategic investment in the health of our residents when the City invests in trails, parks and other pedestrian friendly infrastructure. While it is up to each of us to choose whether or not to exercise, it is possible for the City to make that choice easier. Most often, individuals cite lack of time or access to recreational venues as the most common reason for not exercising. If community and wilderness trails are more convenient than using your car, then the community will be healthier.

By routing our trails through fascinating environmental destinations such as the Carpinteria Creek, we promote their appreciation and protection. The Rhodes Fleming trail across the Carpinteria Bluffs, or the portion of the Coastal Vista Trail through Tar Pits Park are astonishingly beautiful as is the trail in the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Nature Park. Our community becomes stronger when we see our friends and neighbors face to face to say hello instead of riding anonymously inside an automobile. Working as Carpinteria's Parks and Recreation Director, I believe much more needs to be done so that we can claim Carpinteria as one of the most walkable cities in America. We must continue to promote a network of sidewalks and trails, safe and aesthetically pleasing walking areas, and a culture of promoting walking and bike riding with citizen activism and civic planning.

In the planning stages are significant new trail projects that will take shape in the next few years. These include a trail extension from Dump Road to Bailard Avenue, the replacement and improvement of the eighth street bridge, a trail connection from Tar Pits Park to the Casitas pier parking area, the reestablishment of the Franklin Trail from Carpinteria High School to East Camino Cielo, a pedestrian bridge over Franklin Creek in the salt marsh and a trail from Palm Avenue to Linden Avenue along the railroad. When completed, these will add to the community by improving

our health, community attractiveness and our appreciation and understanding of the importance of our environment. And they will do even more.

A highly walkable community will reduce the need for parking lots and reduce traffic congestion. It will also help an important economic consideration, that of tourism. The secured harbor seal rookery, restored creek areas, protected coastal bluffs and reclaimed wetlands promote the recovery of the native birds, fishes and other animals. This in turn makes Carpinteria not only one of the most desirable places to live, but also a wonderful place to visit. Ultimately, Carpinteria's trails, parks and open spaces serve to protect important natural resources, provide for exercise and improved community health and also create business opportunities to bolster our local economy.



The Trail through Tar Pits Park
Photo by Matt Roberts