

## State to close off upper stretch of Bump and Grind

California Fish and Game officials plan to put a gate across the upper portion of the popular Bump and Grind trail in the Santa Rosa Mountains west of Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage, though past efforts to do so have proven futile.

Fish and Game Senior Environmental Scientist Eddy Konno said the half-mile path, which branches off to the west where the Bump and Grind meets the Herb Jeffries trail to form a loop, juts into a preserve for the endangered peninsular bighorn sheep and other wildlife.

“Magnesia Spring Ecological Reserve is not multi-use,” Konno said. “It was purchased with wildlife money and is there to manage wildlife. Allowing access is secondary, if it’s compatible.”

Konno said studies done in other locations have shown hiking and other activities do affect bighorn sheep survival, and he’s already changed wildlife regulations to allow Palm Desert to build other trails into the perimeter of Fish and Game property.



The decision could make a lot of hikers unhappy; Konno said a study done a few years ago found a daily average of 200 users during higher-use morning and evening hours in July and August.

Work on the new gate should be finished around the end of March, Konno said.

Past efforts to block that part of the trail have never stuck, former Palm Desert City Councilman Buford Crites said.

“A number of years ago they put a gate up, and the gate was down within a day,” said Crites, who thinks the segment should be kept open.

Philip Ferranti, founder of the 19-year-old Coachella Valley Hiking Club, said the club supports greater access, period, and doesn’t think humans’ presence harms the bighorns.

“I actually walked with a bighorn sheep a couple of weeks ago,” he said. “I’ve had a number of positive experiences with bighorn sheep, they’ll come up to me and sometimes I’ll offer them a power bar or peanut butter brittle. They’re not nearly as frightened of people as they say.”

A local study about the effect hiking and other human activities have on bighorn sheep is to be done as part of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, but hasn’t been funded yet, Konno said.

Ferranti, the author of “140 Great Hikes In and Near Palm Springs,” said more trails should be built to encourage a healthy, inexpensive form of recreation.

Konno responds, “We have lots of places to exercise, but not a lot of places for wildlife.”

Heidi Winter of Palm Desert lives about 10 minutes away from the trail head and is a frequent user.

“It's not just physical fitness for a lot of people; it's a spiritual experience.”

The popularity of the Bump and Grind trail, also known as the Mirage trail, has caused other issues for local officials. In 2008 Rancho Mirage closed off three access points from where hikers would cross over private property, after residents complained and one hiker was killed after being hit by a garbage truck.

Palm Desert then widened turnouts on the Mike Schuler trail so the Bump and Grind would be easier to get to.

---

Copied from: <http://www.mydesert.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2011102150309>