



WILDWOOD

February 23, 2016

The Honorable City Council
City of Wildwood, Missouri
16860 Main Street
Wildwood, Missouri 63040

Re: **City Policy for Wet Weather Trail Use**

INTRODUCTION

The City of Wildwood has two (2) facilities where natural surface trails have been constructed by a group of dedicated volunteers, including off-road cyclists (GORC – Gateway Off-Road Cyclists), AmeriCorps volunteers, and others. St. Louis County government personnel have led the trail development efforts for these two (2) referenced facilities. The trail development truly represents a great partnership of interested parties to develop facilities for all users throughout the St. Louis Region.

These trails are located in Rock Hollow and Bluff View Park, but do not connect. Such connection is to be constructed this spring and will offer many miles of fun and enjoyment for a range of users, including walkers, runners, and cyclists, as well as equestrians. These trails are not typical of the City's other paved surface facilities, which have been developed along many of its major roadways, rather they are a natural surface type, meaning the soil and rock that exists in place is shaped, with the trees, vegetation, and rocks removed to allow for their construction, but nothing else is completed upon them. These trails required less money to construct, but also need more care in terms of maintenance, given they are more susceptible to heavy use and weather effects. Therefore, these trails offer a completely different experience for users and require special care on the part of the City and its partners in their development, use, and on-going upkeep.

This circumstance has led to the need for the City to consider a Wet Weather Policy for the system of natural surface trails located upon Wildwood properties. Wet Weather Policies are used by a number of communities across the United States, including St. Charles County and, to a degree, St. Louis County. Again, these policies are intended to protect the trail from undue damage, while protecting the users of them, as well as the environment, which benefits from less erosion and degradation of the waterways in the vicinity of them. These policies are based upon an honor system of enforcement; acknowledging the City cannot be at all locations to address the application of the policy.

CONSIDERATIONS

The Committee was asked by the Department of Planning and Parks to consider adopting a Wet Weather Policy that would include the needed items to address the safety of users, the protection of the environment, and the preservation of the trail, which reduces the needed resources to repair them, if no policy were in place. This policy would be based upon an honor system. Not all users will adhere to the policy, but, in other jurisdictions, compliance is generally good.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

After consideration of this matter at two (2) of the Committee's meetings, it is recommending the following components identified below become the City of Wildwood's Wet Weather Policy:

1. With an inch of measurable precipitation, the trail network would be closed for a minimum of twenty-four (24) hours thereafter. For each additional inch of precipitation, the trail would remain closed for another twenty-four (24) hour period of time, i.e. 2 inches of precipitation – 48 hours, 3 inches of precipitation – 72 hours, etc.
2. The City's Wet Weather Policy regarding trail use is applicable year-round, with particular focus during spring and fall seasons.
3. The determination of trail closures relative to this policy will also be based upon field inspections, whenever possible, by City staff. Otherwise, if no field inspection is completed, the described precipitation, timeframes, and on-site conditions will be used for the purposes of protecting the trail from undue damage.
4. The City will use a combination of private consultants and the National Weather Service's Station at Spirit of St. Louis Airport (KSUS) to gauge the extent of rainfall relative to its decision to close the trail to use. The use of private consultants is intended to refine precipitation amounts to the highest level of accuracy to the specific trail locations.
5. The City will place information pertaining to all trail closures on its website, Facebook, and Twitter accounts, along with posting the park entry areas, when capable of such.
6. The closures will be applied to all users.
7. The notice of the opening of the trail, after a weather-related closure, will be placed on the City's website, Facebook, and Twitter accounts.
8. The enforcement of this policy can be undertaken by the City's Code Enforcement staff, St. Louis County Police Department officers, and St. Louis County Park Rangers, with penalties set forth in Chapter 100.140 General Penalty of the City of Wildwood Municipal Code.

The application of this policy is intended to protect users from injuries associated with poor trail conditions, while also preserving the condition of the trails as well. Ancillary benefits to this policy's implementation should include a reduction in the use of the trails during and after inclement weather, which lessens the tendency for their widening by users avoiding wet, rutted areas, thereby preserving vegetation in these same areas, which stabilizes slopes from erosion. These benefits are cited often in other wet weather trail policy discussions.

REQUESTED ACTION

Given the associated benefits with the adoption of such a policy, which is necessary here in Wildwood, due to soil and slope conditions in the City, along with weather extremes, the Committee hereby endorses this proposed Wet Weather Trail Policy referenced above. With this policy comes an understanding that enforcement will be primarily by the honor system among users, and is seeking the City Council's approval to prepare a Resolution for a future meeting, so as it can be adopted. It is also important for the Committee to note that such a policy will result in negative comments from most user groups, particularly when faced with less time on these popular trails. However, the Committee also believes that exceptions can be entertained for special events and other considerations, so as activities that may have been in the planning stages for weeks or months can be addressed and conditions monitored closely to the benefit of all parties.

INFORMATION

The Committee, along with the Department of Planning and Parks, will provide more background on this matter at tonight's meeting. If any of the City Council Members should have questions or comments before tonight's meeting about this information, please feel free to contact the Department of Planning and Parks at (636) 458-0440. A presentation is planned on this matter at tonight's meeting. Thank you for your review of this information and participation in tonight's discussion.

Respectfully submitted,
CITY OF WILDWOOD

Jim Baugus, Chair*
Planning/Economic Development/Parks Committee

Cc: The Honorable Timothy Woerther, Mayor
Ryan S. Thomas, P.E., City Administrator
Rob Golterman, City Attorney
Kathy Arnett, Assistant Director of Planning and Parks
Gary Crews, Superintendent of Parks and Recreation
Tom Ott, St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation
Bryan Adams, Gateway Off-Road Cyclists (GORC)
Wildwood Horse Owners and Acreage Association (WHOAA)

* The Department of Planning and Parks developed this report, in conjunction with the Planning/Economic Development/Parks Committee. Content reflects the Committee's consideration of this subject, and not necessarily an individual's position or opinion.