

Elephant Hill Illegal Off-Roading Mitigation Plan

February 7, 2022

Background. Illegal off-roading activity on 110-acre Elephant Hill in El Sereno has become a serious problem on properties owned by the City of Los Angeles and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) as well as over 300 privately owned parcels. In addition to trespassing and the degradation of Elephant Hill's sensitive habitat, residents living nearby must deal with a steady stream of dust, exhaust, and noise along with other nuisances and dangerous conditions created by illegal off-road activity on Elephant Hill.

Representatives from MRCA, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Save Elephant Hill developed and presented this draft mitigation plan to Los Angeles City Council District 14. This plan seeks to address the problem of off-roading through installation and maintenance of gates at critical access points where off roaders enter Elephant Hill. A shorter-term strategy to address the problem involves posting signage to notify the public that vehicle use in high fire zones is prohibited by law and enforcement activities by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).

Objectives. The remainder of this plan outlines the key steps required to achieve the following objectives:

1. Immediately post signage about legal restrictions and fines, and activate enforcement activities by the Los Angeles Police Department as a deterrent.
2. Physically prevent illegal off-road vehicle access to Elephant Hill through the installation of reinforced gates while allowing access by emergency vehicles and residents who have homes on the hillside.
3. Finalize the MRCA trail from Pullman to Lathrop to create public access to Elephant Hill and appropriate public usage of protected open space.

Next Steps

Several steps are necessary to achieve the stated objectives. Each of these steps, numbered to correspond with the objectives above, should be translated into detailed plans identifying associated tasks, person responsible and a timeline.

1a. Los Angeles Fire Department posts signs on Elephant Hill about High Fire Hazard Zone vehicle restrictions and fines.¹

1b. Los Angeles Police Department notifies officers about laws restricting off-road activity on Elephant Hill and deploys LAPD all-terrain vehicles on the hillside and cruisers on adjacent streets to issue citations.²

1c. City Attorney approves nuisance closures and restricts access, with exceptions for emergency vehicles residents who have homes on the hillside.

¹ LAMC 57.4908.8.3 prohibits operation of motor vehicles within the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone without appropriate permission from the LA Fire Chief. Additionally, LAMC Sec. 57.4908.8 restricts entry into Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, which includes the Elephant Hill area. Exceptions include residents or owners of private property and public officers.

Note that these provisions have been enforced in High Fire Hazard Severity Zones in the Hollywood Hills area of the City of Los Angeles for some time.

² Per 57.4908.8.3, as referenced above.

2a. Bureau of Engineering conducts street boundary analysis of existing paper streets; off-roaders currently utilize informal roads that follow the contours of Elephant Hill's topography.

2b. City Planning Department vacates paper streets on MRCA, and City owned property to create a consolidated area that would facilitate enforcement and development of the MRCA trail – from Pullman to Lathrop - and public access.

2c. [City department/MRCA] installs gates at select access points to Elephant Hill area.

3.a. Acquire additional parcels necessary to construct Burr to Lathrop public access trail, per Regional Parks and Open Space District requirements.

3.b. Identify and reach agreement with a community NGO partner to construct the project, with intent that construction staff has local hire component.

3.c. Apply for Prop A funding to sustain MRCA Operations and Maintenance activities on Elephant Hill parcels.