



P.O. Box 57576 • Sherman Oaks, California 91413  
<http://CORBAmtb.com> • [info@corbamt.com](mailto:info@corbamt.com) • 818.206.8213

---

October 26, 2010

Hon. Bill Bogaard, Mayor  
City of Pasadena  
100 N. Garfield Avenue, Room S228  
P.O. Box 7115  
Pasadena, CA 91109-7215

Re: Pinecrest Gate at Eaton Canyon Park

Dear Mr. Mayor,

We urge you to remove or open the Pinecrest Gate to allow full 24/7 recreational access to the Altadena Crest Trail, the Mount Wilson Toll Road and Angeles National Forest.

As a non-profit serving and representing off-road cyclists from the greater Los Angeles region, CORBA has received numerous reports from our concerned members about the condition of the Pinecrest gate. The Pinecrest trailhead is a historically significant and popular access point to the Angeles National Forest for off-road cyclists, hikers and equestrians alike.

It is our understanding that the Pinecrest gate was closed after the winter rains of 2005 because of "hazardous road and trails." The landslide-damaged roads that created those hazards have long since been repaired. The gate closure never actually prevented people from traveling near the alleged hazards, as access has always been possible from other trailheads. We can only surmise that the closure of the gate has been driven by a perceived liability rather than any authentic concern for public safety. Locking the gate is, in fact, its own liability with associated hazards as noted below.

Prior to the full-time closures in 2005, local neighbors and residents in the vicinity of the trailhead were given their own personal keys to the gate. The public at large were locked out from access to these public lands, while a privileged few were able to use the trail system as their own private playground any time they wished. This is still the situation today.

Being trapped behind the Pinecrest gate, especially after dark, is a continuing hazard for all trail users. A local resident has taken on the volunteer service of opening the gate in the mornings, and closing it again in the evenings around dusk. While we appreciate the generous actions of this local resident, we believe that he or she has no official authority to open or close the gate. That local resident just understands the dilemma and the need. At the same time, they are unable to provide consistent service (opening and closing at the same time each and every day), exacerbating the problem of having a closed gate. One can never be completely sure whether the gate will be open or closed.

Because of the inconsistency of the opening of the Pinecrest gate, many CORBA members and off-road cyclists, in addition to hikers and equestrians, have become trapped behind the gate. Cyclists are then unable to exit the National Forest without either an arduous and lengthy detour back up the Mt. Wilson toll road or Altadena Crest trail in the dark, or breaking the law by exiting through Eaton Canyon which remains closed to bicycles. Exiting through Eaton Canyon involves steep, unstable hillsides and trails, and traversing a wash which presents a flash-flood danger, even if it is not raining locally. These options are far less safe for hikers and equestrians than the Pinecrest gate access, and Eaton Canyon is completely off-limits to cyclists. All trail users are adversely impacted.

One very possible scenario is that of an injured trail user, unable to move quickly, and therefore taking much longer to exit the trail system than they had planned. They arrive at the Pinecrest gate after dusk, only to find themselves helplessly trapped, unable to exit. They may be forced to spend a night in the wild for which they may be completely unprepared. An uninjured trail user who is familiar with the area and knows where other possible exits exist may be able to spend the hour or more needed to get to another exit. An injured one, or somebody unfamiliar with the area, may be forced to spend a night, or longer, in the wild. If their injuries are such that they need medical attention, this could escalate to a life-threatening situation. This is not just an inconvenience, but a genuine hazard.

Another scenario is that of trail users walking their dogs. If they arrive at the gate after it has been closed, they face the harrowing prospect of walking or carrying their dog through rough terrain in the dark, in the presence of coyotes, bobcats and mountain lions that may be attracted by the prospect of a free meal in the form of a leashed pet. In fact there have been documented cases of fatal mountain lion attacks on cyclists in similar habitats.

Having a closed gate is also a deterrent to people getting out and using the trails for exercise and recreation. This is especially true in winter months when the gate is usually closed at dusk, before people get home from work. In this age of rampant obesity and related health problems, we should be doing everything possible to encourage people to get outside and exercise. An ominous razor-wire laden fence 10' high that is reminiscent of a jail yard does not make people feel welcomed when they enter their own public lands. Just the existence of this foreboding fence and gate is a deterrent to outdoor exercise and recreation on our public lands.

Guidebooks, web sites and trail maps that have been in use for decades list the Pinecrest gate as a trailhead. Those unfamiliar with the area and relying on a guidebook or map may inadvertently find themselves trapped, or denied access to their public lands. If they are unfamiliar with the area (which is likely if they are relying on the guidance of a map or trail handbook), it is unlikely they will know where they can exit the Forest. Again, this presents a demonstrable hazard.

Trail users can easily enter the forest and trail system at another location, planning to exit at the Pinecrest Gate. Upon arrival at their final destination they can find themselves trapped and forced to backtrack in the dark.

We are unaware of any other ingress/egress point of the National Forest or the Altadena Crest Trail that is completely closed to recreational, non-motorized use (other than official Forest Service closures due to the Station Fire). Nor are there any such trailheads that are under the control of a private citizen.

Since the landslides on the Mt. Wilson Toll Road have been repaired, the hazards cited as reasons for the 2005 closing of the gate no longer exist. In fact, distributing keys to local residents so they could have access clearly demonstrates that safety is not a concern. If there was a significant safety issue, local residents would not be given the privilege of using the forest and trail system at their own whim and leisure. While safety issues have been used to justify full closures, it appears the underlying reason for nighttime closures is the misperception of security. This does not appear to present a problem at other trailheads or access points to the national forest.

There have been many signs on the Pinecrest gate indicating the nature of the closure. Some are still in place today. Most of those signs appear to have been hand-made, and some appear to be intentionally misleading. None appear official; none bear any official City seal or City Ordinance numbers, nor that of any other agency. We are unable to find any official reason why this trailhead should not be returned to its former state of being open 24/7 to recreational non-motorized use.

While one particular hand-made sign denies the City of Pasadena controls this gate, it is within City's purview to have the gate removed or replaced.

Along with the Altadena Crest Trail Restoration Working Group and other concerned trail users, we urge the Mayor's office and the Pasadena City Council to immediately resolve this hazardous and possibly illegal restriction of public access to and from our public lands.

Please remove the unsightly gate and replace it with one that allows free passage to hikers, equestrians and cyclists, while restricting only motorized access.

Should you or your staff require more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Steve Messer  
Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association  
[steve@corbamt.com](mailto:steve@corbamt.com)  
323-743-3682

cc: Steve Haderlein, *Pasadena Council Member*  
Robert Staehle, *Meetings Chair, ACTRWG Steering Committee*  
Rhonda Stone, *Field Deputy for Council Member Steve Haderlein*  
Sussy Nemer, *Field Deputy for Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, 5th District*  
Robert Ettleman, *LA County Parks and Rec*  
Mike McIntyre, *District Supervisor, Los Angeles River Ranger District*  
Larry Wilson, *Pasadena Star News*  
Jennifer Klausner, *Executive Director, Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition*