

Baywide trail plan afoot

-Trails

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SANTA CRUZ — It could be years in the making, but one day hikers and bikers may be able to traverse the entire Monterey Bay via a scenic trail.

Representatives from Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, state parks, the state Coastal Commission, the national marine sanctuary and U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, have been quietly working on the plan.

Initial estimates place the cost of the effort at about \$35 million, but that amount is almost sure to be revised.

The goal is to bring the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary alive to the millions of tourists who visit the region as well as provide a recreational outlet for area residents.

"The vast majority of visitors to the sanctuary enjoy it with their feet dry," said Lee Otter of the California Coastal Commission.

Two simultaneous efforts are under way — one that identifies possible routes and funding and another that is examining interpretive offerings along the way.

The trail likely would be built in phases, building upon existing net-

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U.S. REP. SAM FARR

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works in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

The string of governments involved, not to mention private property owners and possible sensitive animal habitat, means making the trail a reality will be challenging.

"We have to work in the biggest collaborative we've ever had to build a sanctuary trail," Farr said. "We've never had a big regional project like this other than creating the sanctuary. This is the second phase of that."

Farr said he will look for federal

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transportation funds for the effort and backers likely will look for money from Proposition 40, the \$2.6 billion parks and conservation bond passed in March.

As well as providing a hiking and biking outlet, the path would link to local trails. For example, spurs could be connected from such a coastal trail to trail networks at Elkhorn Slough along the way.

Moreover, interpretive signs would tell the stories of each distinct area that circle the bay, from surfing off Pleasure Point or farming the Pajaro Valley, for example.

For area bikers, that's good news. A bike trip from Santa Cruz to Monterey can be harrowing, especially through the Moss Landing area.

"You're dealing with a fair amount of traffic," said Todd Davidson, a cyclist who lives in Santa Cruz. "A designated trail would be a welcome change."

He said once cyclists get to Sand City, they can link with the trail system that runs to Monterey.

While the project brims with possibilities, it must overcome some hurdles.

On the good side, the state parks system owns about 40 percent of the land on the Monterey County side of the bay, said Kenneth Gray of the state Parks Department. Also, Fort Ord coast land is set to be transferred to state ownership and that would provide a crucial middle link.

However, backers likely will have to convince some homeowners — where hasn't been established — that the trail won't be a nuisance to their property or privacy. Beyond building the trail, plans will have to be made on how to maintain it.

Kyrrha Sevco of the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments said that public input will be sought.

"We'd like to solicit some feedback on the community level," Sevco said.

Already in Santa Cruz, a mix of local governments and agencies have been at work charting a tentative course from Wilder Ranch to Seacliff State Beach using existing paths and streets, an effort that dates to 1994.

This past winter, an interpretive sign



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Sunday strollers and cyclists crowd the popular path along West Cliff.

placed at the recently built Joseph G. Townsend Plaza that offers information on the harbor, and it's those kind of signs that backers envision that would dot the trail.

"The idea is to have the sanctuary tangible for people on land," said Kimbra Eldridge, operations manager at the Santa Cruz harbor.

The effort in Santa Cruz has received a \$100,000 grant from the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration to place eight more such signs in the Santa Cruz area, said Susan Pearlman, administrative ana-

lyst with Santa Cruz County.

A final design phase begun September 2001 is continuing and will look at where to place the signs, alignment and more detailed costs. The county, using grant funds, hired Leslie Stone Associates to perform that study.

Eventually, the bay trail would be part of a longer statewide coastal trail. The Coastal Conservancy has been mandated by the Legislature to complete a report on a statewide trail by January 2003, said Carla Chenault of the California Coastal Conservancy.

"Basically, we're going to look at existing trails," Chenault said. "They want to know how much is in public ownership."

The local effort is similar to the San Francisco Bay Trail project, which began in 1990. About 210 miles of path have been completed thus far. Eventually, a 400-mile network is planned that would encircle San Francisco and San Pablo bays.

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