



Dear SHARP Committee,

Throughout the SHARP outreach process, Sierra Meadows Ranch (SMR) has maintained involvement as a neighbor to the project, as the way in which it is built will have a significant impact on our operations. Specifically, our attention is focused on the proposed multi-use trail planned just east of the Sierra Meadows Ranch property line, and its potential impact on our equine boarding and riding facilities, as well as the safety of our visitors.

The Sierra Meadows Ranch team has been working closely with the local Forest Service office on a new Master Development Plan for the area defined within our permit. At this stage, it is evident that decisions made within the SHARP program could significantly affect equestrian activities on the ranch and the public's use of the proposed trails running along—or possibly within—the permitted area.

Equestrian activities and boarding are central to SMR's operations. Horses are known for their strong "fight or flight" instincts when faced with unexpected stimuli, so we take great care to insulate our riding and boarding areas from potential conflicts that could startle or spook them. A spooked horse poses a serious risk to its rider and others nearby due to its unpredictable behavior.

Phase IV of the SHARP plan proposes a multi-purpose path running very close to the eastern portion of our permit area. This space is dedicated to horse boarding and serves as the primary entry point for riders accessing equestrian trails from the ranch. The presence of an inconsistent stream of cyclists—including pedal-assisted bikes and often energetic children—could compromise the safety of horseback riders navigating near or crossing the bike path. Cyclists themselves may also be at risk if startled horses react unpredictably by rearing, bolting, or veering into their path. Additionally, horses housed near the bike trail would be subjected to constant activity, causing undue stress and negatively impacting their well-being.

While we fully support the SHARP program and welcome increased cycling activity in the Sherwin Recreation Area—I am an avid cyclist myself—we strongly recommend routing the bike path away from SMR's permit area. Sherwin Creek Road is lightly traveled, primarily serving recreational users, and offers a safer alternative for bypassing the inherent challenges of an equestrian facility. Cyclists could rejoin the designated bike trail at the propane tank parking area after passing SMR.

In the event the Forest Service identifies significant heritage or cultural findings along the originally proposed trail route, we respectfully request that alternative re-routing options include Sherwin Creek Road, as previously suggested, or position the trail further east than currently planned. This adjustment would create an additional safety buffer for both trail users and equestrians (see the current SMR boundary below).

Since its founding in 1965, Sierra Meadows Ranch has operated as a commercial equestrian center and resort. Our current special use permit allows for boarding up to 100 horses and conducting hourly and daily trail rides. Preserving and maintaining the trails is crucial to these operations. SMR has submitted plans to the USFS to expand its boarding facilities and reintroduce guided trail rides. Future trail planning should prioritize reducing user conflicts, establishing proper signage and wayfinding, and educating non-horseback users. Clear etiquette and safety guidelines should be prominently displayed along all trails.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our concerns and suggestions. We believe this approach will best serve both the public and the equestrian community by addressing the mutual risks and impacts of cycling and equestrian activities.



Sincerely,

Robert Lopata

Sierra Meadows Ranch