

HSU and Arcata community cycle to expand trails in the Community Forest

by Susan Aksu

Collegiate cyclists from UC Davis, UC Berkeley and Stanford, among others, will compete against the Humboldt State University cycling team and local community during Ridge Trail Festival this weekend.

The festival will include musical entertainment, organic food and bike races on the trails of the Arcata Community Forest. The event will take place at Redwood Park on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and in Willow Creek's Horse Linto Camp on Sunday from 9 a.m. to noon.

The festival is organized and funded by the Trail Council, a committee made up of cyclists, volunteers, concerned citizens and the City of Arcata. It will raise money for more trail-building in the Arcata Community Forest.

HSU Cycling Club President Justin Graves said the plan is to connect the west end of the community forest to Sunnybrae Community Forest. The forested property between Arcata and Sunnybrae must first be purchased from the Green Diamond Resource Company and other private land owners.

Race director and owner of Revolution Bicycle Repair Sean Tetrault said the goal of the expansion is to create more local recreational opportunity. Tetrault said there is no remaining room for trails in Arcata Forest's 600 acres.

He said the expansion of accessibility to more trails will give Arcata the economic benefits of tourism as well.

"We've seen towns that were not doing so well economically bring in trail networks and [market] themselves as ... destination[s] for mountain biking, hiking and running. Their tourism dollars shot through the roof," said Tetrault.

The goal for the 2011 Ridge Trail Festival is to raise \$30,000 dollars, event director Kirk Cohune said. In 2010, fundraising efforts by the The Race for the Ridge Trail, Bat n Rouge and several sponsors accumulated \$30,000 to go toward new trails.

HSU journalism alumnus Rocky Brashears has been working on designing the race courses for this weekend. However, he said rain delayed the planning and may affect the course of the trail.

"It's a fresh trail and [the dirt is] freshly churned, so we might have to shorten the race a bit because it will be difficult to ride through," Brashears said.

Brashears, who began volunteering with local trail-building six years ago, has been helping design the trail which will connect the Arcata and Sunnybrae community forests.

"There is no legal way to cross through to Fickle Hill from the Arcata forest," Brashears said. In addition, it would help bring two separate areas of Arcata together, he said.

About 30 volunteers have signed on to help with different aspects of the festivities. The HSU Cycling Team is helping with the marking and clearing of trails.

HSU Cycling members are also registered to compete in the different events.

In the Arcata Forest, bike races include an eight-mile cross country mountain bike race, and a 0.7-mile short-track race. Racers will do multiple laps in both events. Another run will be open to the public between the two cycling events. There will also be kids' races and a casual citizens' bike ride on Saturday.

Super-d and downhill races are slated for Willow Creek on Sunday. The downhill race is a fast and treacherous race that will take riders around three to five minutes to complete. Super-d racers will do much of the downhill course, but with some uphill and flat terrain mixed in. It will take closer to 10 minutes. Racers who do three of the four cycling events over the weekend and have the best times are eligible to win the "Queen and King of the Ridge" award.

All skill levels are welcome. However the mountain bike cross country race is very competitive, said Tetrault. He predicts HSU cyclist Matt Schiff will take first place. Schiff won two collegiate races hosted by the University of Nevada, Reno two weeks ago.

Tetrault said he predicts HSU riders Jake Hinlicky or Justin Graves will win the downhill races in Willow Creek. In 2010, Graves came in second for the cross country and short track events, and won the Super-d.

Brashears recommends spectators watch the short track race on Saturday, because the course is easily accessible and loops around Redwood Park

"HSU cyclists are going to be competing in the races, so it's a great way for students to come out and show their support," Brashear said. "It's going to be fun. There is going to be good music, good food, good brews and good weather."