



Cyclists enjoy a sunny ride along the shoreline in Vaughn. Photo: Anna Brones, KP News

# A Ride for Everyone: Bicycling on the Key Peninsula

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John F. Kennedy once said, "Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of riding a bike." The Key Peninsula has a lot to offer those who enjoy the simple pleasures of a bike ride, whether it's on the road or on a trail.

Key Pen Parks' 360 Trails has become a hot spot for riders near and far, giving the community access to an impressive mountain biking playground. "There's something for all skill levels at 360," said Mark Michel, a Longbranch resident and Key Pen Parks commissioner.

As both a road cyclist and a mountain biker, Michel is drawn to the two-wheeled world for the chance to get outside and explore. "You can see so much scenery," he said. "Every ride is different; every road is different."

"It's much better than being in a gym," said Alyssa Eckert. "You get to be in nature while working out, so it doesn't feel like working out." A resident of Port Orchard, Eckert is a part of Ms. Fit, a group of women mountain bikers that regularly rides at 360 Trails. Founded by Jessica Combs in March 2017, the goal of the group is to get more women mountain biking.

"Any age level, anyone who has an interest, we want them to come," Eckert said. "Really, we just want more women on bikes." As the spring and summer weather make for warmer weather, the group aims to host a weekly ride at 360 Trails.

While the hills and fast cars of the Key Peninsula Highway may put a lot of people

off riding, Michel said those interested in cycling should explore other roads. "There are places you can get off of the KP Highway and there are big roads that are very seldom used," he said. Those types of riding conditions make cycling "enticing and appealing." Those roads also draw people from farther away; both Joemma and Penrose state parks offer hiker and biker campsites for those arriving by bike or by foot.

Cycling also makes good health sense, and those health benefits can come with even a small addition of cycling habits to an everyday routine. A San Francisco Bay Area study found that increasing biking and walking from four to 24 minutes a day on average could reduce cardiovascular disease and diabetes by 14 percent. Being physically active outside has its benefits too. A 2009 study published in "Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise" showed that people exercise longer when they did so outside. Studies also show that cyclists age better, and it helps keep your immune system young.

"The cycling community is so open to anyone who wants to try," Eckert said, suggesting that beginners reach out to others who ride and groups that offer classes. For those new to cycling, look for dedicated bike trails like the Cushman Trail in Gig Harbor. Other bike trails in the region include the Pierce County Foothills trail, which goes from Puyallup to Orting, and the Olympic Discovery Trail on the Olympic Peninsula.