

Why don't grasses and tiny plants take over the trails? Even the lesser-travelled trails are clear. Is something put on them (crushed rock or something) to keep vegetation down?

Believe it or not, it does not take much work for us to keep trails clear of small plants. Once a trail has been established, it will usually stay a trail until someone decides to unmake it. Grasses and other small are fairly fragile especially when they are young and just trying to get a foothold in some ecosystem (like on a trail bed). If you can do even a small amount of damage to a very young plant it is fairly likely to die.

Also it does not take much to mark a grassy area. If you walk through a field of dry grass, your footprints will still be there until the field is full of fresh green growing grass. Marks made on healthy growing grasses (especially marks from some type of damage) can be visible for several days. Next time you mow a lawn keep track of how long the mower tracks are visible. Or next time you watch a baseball game on television look at the field; the patterns in the grass are from damage made by mowers (cut grass).

Folks who do habitat restoration work (like our Friends of the Foothills) now that many plants are most easily controlled by pulling them when they are young and choose that stage of life to pull young non-native invasive plants.

Trail surfaces are also usually fairly hard. We try to establish trails in areas where soil is firm, not overly muddy or sandy; because, a hard stable trail requires much less work to maintain. Plants tend not to like to grow in hard compacted soils. As a comparison, visit Palo Alto Baylands and look at some of the oyster shell paths. They are a fairly loose surface and plants can easily get a foothold in them. Those paths require maintenance work year round.

Additional trail clearing helpers include deer, coyotes, bobcat and small mammals etc. that may walk down the trail and or take a break on their walk and make a snack of the tender young plants trying to grow there.