

July 13, 2011

Re: Comments on MMWD Friends of Mt. Tamalpais Business Plan



Mike Swezy
Marin Municipal Water District
220 Nellen Avenue
Corte Madera, CA 94925

Dear Mr. Swezy:

We appreciate your efforts to respond to the concerns we raised in our letter of May 18, 2011 and at workshops held to receive public comment on the Friends of Mt. Tamalpais business plan. In particular, you have added language emphasizing protection of District lands' natural resources as a priority over expansion of recreational opportunities, and continue to stress your commitment to reducing invasive plant populations and restoring native habitat. You have also dropped references to specific trail projects and, in the body of the text, to the affiliate memberships.

Nevertheless, we have some comments on the June 2011 draft of the business plan.

- The plan continues to suggest an expansive reach of the organization's mission to encompass the other major public land management agencies that steward Mt. Tamalpais, albeit at some time in the future. For example, the following statement (p. 11): "...if the organization has met with success and there is interest and opportunity for expansion, it could modify its mission and scope to become the 'Friends' organization for all of Mt. Tamalpais and the four primary agencies that manage lands on the mountain (California State Parks, GGNRA, Marin Parks and Open Space and the Marin Municipal Water District)." Given the well-established programs and robust support networks that these groups have worked to establish over many years, this suggestion may not be welcome. We suggest modifying or deleting these statements.
- In the same vein the plan invokes a "Friends" leadership team (p. 22) that will inspire major donors "to see that the 'Friends' is the strongest organization to carry out their legacy of conservation and stewardship in Marin." This risks being seen as overreaching to the many organizations that have given decades of guardianship to the resources of Mt. Tam as well as the rest of the County.
- Friends' geographic reach remains unclear. In various places the plan refers to 'Friends' possibly expanding to engage in joint planning and fundraising for lands adjacent to the

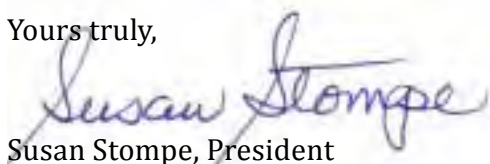
District, including those on Mt Tamalpais, throughout Marin County and throughout the region. For example it refers (p. 17) to providing a convening platform to “engage in joint planning and prioritization for the natural resources across Marin County.” Again, this seems to overstep the organization’s focus on District lands and educational programs. In view of all the other organizations involved with Mt. Tam and adjacent open space areas, and the uncertainty that is concomitant with getting a new organization off the ground, it is premature to suggest such an expansive vision at this stage.

- The discussion of educational programs includes a statement that one of the Friends’ goals (p. 18) is to eventually triple the number of the school programs run on the watershed. Several entities other than MMWD now also conduct educational programs on District lands. Although there are references to partnering with other groups it is not clear how these educational programs would intermesh and how the proposed educational center might serve them all. Further, the impacts of enlarging educational programs to this extent, such as traffic on local narrow roads, need to be considered.
- Although the plan states that the “Friends” will not be a membership non-profit, it goes on to describe membership fees and benefits, and seems to use the terms “supporters” and “members” interchangeably. In addition, although references to affiliate memberships have been deleted in the body of the text they are still in Appendix 4: Budget Assumptions. The distinction between “supporters” and “members” needs to be clarified in both the plan and the appendices.
- On p. 28, the plan states that, “Within a few years time, the ‘Friends’ expects to be able to run a docent program across the watershed...” We suggest that this should be a top and early priority, if only to “market” the ‘Friends’ organization.
- The extent of District staff time and their place in the ‘Friends’ budget is still not clear.

As you proceed with implementing the Friends organization, we hope you will ensure that its goals and activities remain consistent with your Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Management Policy: “The Mt. Tamalpais Watershed... “is held in trust as a natural wildland of great biological diversity, as scenic open space and as an area for passive outdoor recreation for Marin and much of the Bay Area. Passive outdoor recreation is defined as those activities that are based on nature and that require little or no development or facilities.”

For your convenience we attach several pages from the business plan on which we have written in major comments and suggested changes.

Yours truly,



Susan Stompe, President

"Friends of Mt. Tamalpais Watershed" business plan

Watershed activities that the district considers "core" include:

- protecting water quality,
- reducing wildfire risk,
- managing Lagunitas Creek per State Water Resources Control Board (order WR-17),
- complying with environmental regulations such as the Endangered Species Act, and
- providing for public safety and access.

The district fully funds these core activities, as part of its mission. Additional support from the community will not change the district's level of support and commitment to these fundamental watershed activities.

The watershed staff has greatly expanded activities on the watershed beyond its core responsibilities over the last few years. Today, they run a number of trails and facilities improvement projects, including volunteer trails days, as well as a range of natural resource management programs, including habitat restoration projects, management of invasive species, and monitoring of species at risk. They also run education and stewardship programs that serve nearly 1,200 elementary and high school students. These activities are partially funded by the district, but are also made possible through grants and volunteer support. District support of these "non-core" activities is frequently scaled back, or at risk during times of budget contraction. Though the Watershed Department does receive some grant funding, it is ineligible for most funding from foundations or individual donors because it does not have 501(c)(3) tax status. Further, most donors would prefer to give to the watershed through an independent organization where there is less risk of funds getting repurposed for other uses at the utility.

The watershed staff operates at an efficient level, and is doing high priority work. Their programs have already made a big difference in the quality of the watershed's habitat, the condition of the trails system, and the access provided to school children. Yet, there is much more that could be done. Watershed staff and community members alike point to a long list of projects and management systems that, if realized, would elevate the health of the watershed's natural systems. Implementing this suite of projects would also provide a more rewarding experience for all kinds of visitors, whether it is increased access and greater educational opportunities for school children, more interpretive materials for the casual visitor, or improved trail maintenance and invasive species control for the frequent user.

Several community-based organizations have been active partners and supporters of the district in the stewardship of its assets over the years. These organizations include the Mt. Tamalpais Conservation Club, West Point Inn Association, Marin Conservation League, California Native Plant Society, Sierra Club, Mt. Tamalpais Interpretive Association, Conservation Corps North Bay, Marin Stables and Trails, Marin County Bicycle Coalition, and many others (see Figure 2). However, most of these groups represent a specific constituency (e.g., hikers, bikers, equestrians, and native plant specialists) or are not capable of meeting the needs of the watershed effectively due to their focus on a narrower, broader, or geographically distinct set of assets. ~~Despite the deep love of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed among Marin residents, and the abundance of conservation and recreational groups, the county lacks a community-based organization that is dedicated to supporting watershed lands.~~ Not true!

"Friends of Mt. Tamalpais Watershed" business plan

executive director will be spent on program delivery. Program delivery in the case of "Friends" could be both educational programs and services, as well as on the ground habitat restoration and capital improvements. The interns, volunteer coordinator and the staff ecologist will be devoted to program delivery and their salaries are counted as a program expense. The administrative and fundraising expenses for the fully successful level of organizational build out at year five are estimated to be about 25% of the total budget.

Delivery of education programs will be accomplished in several ways. First, adding interns and a volunteer coordinator will allow "Friends" to augment the district's existing schools on the watershed program. Secondly, "Friends" funding could support existing programs such as STRAW to come on to the watershed and become involved in habitat protection and environmental education. Third, partnership with other existing organizations powered by volunteers or docents could bring new programs to the watershed (e.g. Junior Botanist program with California Native Plant Society).

District staff will continue to maintain primary responsibility for natural resource management and volunteer management on the watershed. District staff's role in regard to "Friends" will be to provide evaluation and direction for programs and projects. It is difficult to estimate any additional staff workload associated with the venture but is believed to be only a marginal impact overall.

Ultimately, the "Friends" will be housed at a facility that will serve as a watershed visitor center and a watershed education center ideally in close proximity to the district's watershed staff. "Friends" will undertake a capital campaign to build the facility. The Watershed Education Center will be staffed by "Friends" volunteers and will also serve as a central facility for school groups. Operating at the hub of its core activities will allow the "Friends" staff to keep close tabs on its programs and will allow for regular interactions with its volunteers and program participants as well as district staff. Because creation of an education center will take time to develop over the first few years, the "Friends" will seek donated office space elsewhere in Marin.

still not
well-defined -
Seep. 22:
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Governance

The "Friends" organization will be built to serve the long-term goals of the Marin Municipal Water District, specifically to help the district achieve an integral part of its mission - "to manage [its] natural resources in a sustainable manner". As a community organization, the "Friends" will not have the authority or jurisdiction to influence or change the district's policies and will operate entirely in accordance with the district's land use policies. Any project or fundraising effort that the "Friends" proposes will need to be approved by the District board. The role of the "Friends" and the limits to its powers will be clearly outlined in its bylaws (see Appendix 5 for draft bylaws). A cooperative agreement would govern the overall relationship between MMWD and "Friends" (see Appendix 6 for a sample cooperative agreement).

All of the projects and activities undertaken by the "Friends" must be in accordance with the district's policies and goals. The "cooperative agreement" with the district will outline the nature of the relationship between the groups and clearly articulate the respective roles and responsibilities of both organizations. Additional contracts or memorandums of understanding may be used to govern specific projects that the "Friends" and the district may engage in together (e.g., discrete capital campaigns, operations of the Watershed Education Center). These sorts of agreements or contracts are common for community-based nonprofits that work in partnership with agencies that manage public lands.

The district's role is somewhat analogous to that of landlord. They have the right to terminate the cooperative agreement if the "Friends" organization violates the terms or intent of the contract. Though the "Friends" if terminated could still exist legally as a community-based nonprofit, it would no longer be able to effectively serve its mission without the district sanction. Because the watershed staff will work in close partnership with the "Friends", they will effectively serve as gatekeepers to the watershed and ensure that the "Friends" and the district are operating synergistically. ~~If the "Friends" grows and expands to serve other agencies on Mt. Tamalpais, they will develop specific operating agreements with these entities as well, honoring and managing multiple contracts at once.~~ *Premature statement.*

Although the "Friends" will work closely with the district, it will seek to develop an independent profile as a community run entity. It is important that the "Friends" establishes a separate identity from the district so that it is clear that they are "friends" to the watershed and not to the utility. Organizations that are nonprofit, community organizations supporting public agencies and public assets largely do not have formal board representation from their sister agencies (these organizations include the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, California State Parks Foundation, Yosemite Association, Sequoia Parks Foundation, and the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation). Instead, representatives from the public agencies hold a non-voting or ex-officio board seat. The public agencies have strong channels of communication and coordination with their affiliate nonprofit leadership. The public agency representatives attend board meetings, report on activities, and weigh in on planning and strategy decisions.

However, because the "Friends" organization will be associated with an entity that is governed by a locally-elected Board of Directors, it will be operating in a different environment than those associated with administrative agencies such as the National Park Service or the California Department of Parks and

Risks

Ultimately, the success of the "Friends" depends on the level of community engagement. If strong leadership, a robust membership, and generous donors emerge who resonate deeply with the vision and mission of the "Friends", the organization will be a tremendous success. If the "Friends" does not resonate with the many residents of Marin who love Mount Tamalpais, it will struggle to find stable footing operationally and financially.

Specific risks include the following:

Leadership – The most important factor for success for the "Friends", as for any organization, is the quality of its leadership. Strong and dedicated leaders that embody the holistic mission of the "Friends" and are able to effectively navigate the organization away from single-issue politics will be necessary. Additionally, the leadership team needs to be adept at fundraising, inspiring and cultivating major donors to see that the "Friends" is the strongest organization to carry out their legacy of conservation and stewardship in Marin. Further, the leadership must be able to work seamlessly with the district as well as with its membership and the various user groups, skillfully navigating politics and conflicts of interest. Strong leaders are hard to find. Those that are effective are often in high demand. Finding and developing leaders that can serve the organization over several decades will be critical.

Risk management: The "Friends" will be launched with extreme care. The founding board will be appointed by a selection committee, whose composition (described above) will harness the energy, knowledge, and relationships of the district, the community, and outside experts. Once the founding board is in place, it will lead a rigorous search for a high quality executive director. The district staff and board will also invest significant time in the first few years of the "Friends" operations to help the organization to launch successfully. The close relationship between the district and the "Friends" will provide stability to the "Friends", especially in its early years.

Funding – To successfully execute its three program areas, the "Friends" will require an annual operating budget of approximately \$430,000 within the next several years. Building various revenue streams that can sustainably and predictably provide this level of funding will be a challenge and will require skilled and dedicated leadership. There are many membership-based organizations in Marin that are struggling to sustain far smaller operating budgets.

Risk management: The district is poised to make a substantial gift of \$175,000 to the "Friends" to help launch the organization. Before the "Friends" is formally launched and an executive director hired, the new "Friends" Board will work with the community to raise \$175,000 in matching funds. These matching donations from the district and the community will enable the "Friends" to build from a strong base. Ability to secure individual donations for the "Friends" (either directly or indirectly) will be an important criterion for board membership and the executive director.

Confusion in the marketplace – The vision of the "Friends" must be clearly articulated with a simple message that can be communicated quickly and easily throughout the county and the Bay Area. There

Raises
a red flag.
Could be
viewed as
slighting
other
efforts.

Still not
clear on
the extent
of staff
time, and
its place
in budget

their causes. Funders appreciate the joint planning process and the robust annual strategic plans that emerge. It provides confidence that their resources are applied efficiently and that organizations are engaging in longer-term planning for the region.

Although the "Friends" organization may never establish a formal "collaborative", it will serve a convening role for coordinated planning and fundraising for local organizations working on the watershed that are willing to engage. Over time, the scope of the "Friends" convening role could expand to include the organizations that are actively supporting adjacent land owners (e.g. Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Point Reyes National Seashore Association, and Marin Open Space Trust). This effort to engage in joint planning, prioritization and fundraising for the natural resources across Mt. Tamalpais, and, eventually Marin County, will ultimately help to optimize collective community efforts for natural resource stewardship throughout the region.

Primary strategies

Key strategies to reach its goal of providing a convening platform for the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed and neighboring lands:

- 1) Optimize volunteer efforts among the various user groups.
- 2) Provide a central point of contact between the district and the community groups for joint planning and fundraising.
- 3) Coordinate with nonprofit organizations that support adjacent public lands (e.g., Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Point Reyes National Seashore Association, MOST) to engage in joint planning and prioritization for the natural resources across Marin County.
- 4) Host a summit of Mt. Tamalpais focused environmental and user group organizations possibly in conjunction with the Mt. Tamalpais Science Symposium.
- 5) Reinstate the Willis Evans grant that provided small grants to community groups conducting watershed education and restoration projects within the District's service area.

See Appendix 2 for a complete logic model that summarizes the strategy for the "Friends".

Benefits to the district

The "Friends" will provide a range of tangible and intangible benefits to the district, which will expand and accrue over time.

In the near term, the "Friends" will assume the AmeriCorps interns from the district and/or provide additional interns to help with volunteer coordination and educational programs. Additionally, once the "Friends" is able to hire its own volunteer coordinator (year 2), it will double staff capacity for managing volunteers and school programs.

Over time, the value that the "Friends" provides to the district will expand. In a few years, the "Friends" will have created an active membership and volunteer corps that can support labor-intensive activities on the watershed including trails and restoration work. It will also staff the Watershed Education Center

Current programs

The watershed staff has built several effective programs over the years that already engage the public in their efforts, including:

- Natural resources management (e.g., volunteer habitat restoration days, at-risk species monitoring, management of invasive species)
- Trails and historic facilities improvements (e.g., volunteer trails days, grant-funded roads and trails projects, trail restoration)

Trail projects are those identified in the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed Road and Trail Plan for which an EIR was completed in 2005. The basic premise of this plan was that the District intended to both reduce the footprint of the existing road and trail network and reduce the environmental impact of the official network that would remain. Further, the plan has an explicit goal of not expanding recreational opportunities on the watershed.

A robust "Friends" organization will work in partnership with the watershed team to significantly ramp up these existing volunteer programs and also run capital campaigns for major habitat restoration projects, and discrete trails and historic facilities projects. Elevating the level of financial and human resources available for natural resource management will raise our collective capacity to respond to the pressures on the watershed and ensure that the watershed will continue to provide a range of critical services to the Marin community for generations to come. Additional resources will also ensure that users of the watershed have safe and deeply enjoyable experiences without threatening critical habitat.

Primary strategies

The "Friends" will employ three main strategies to reach its goal of ensuring that adequate financial and human resources are available for effective trails, facilities, and natural resource management across the watershed consistent with board policies that subordinate recreational use to watershed environmental health.

1) Provide financial and volunteer support for natural resource management projects.

- ✓ ○ Expand habitat restoration efforts including removal of invasive species, enhancement of native species populations, and reintroduction or simulation of ecosystem processes such as fire and flood episodes. (e.g., Potrero Meadow and rare plant species habitat restoration; Pine Point oak woodland restoration, enhancing salmonid habitat in Corte Madera Creek).
- Expand existing monitoring programs to include suites of species and habitats without regulatory protections (e.g., small mammals, fungi, pollinators, uplands grasslands).
- Build and operate a volunteer-supported native plant nursery to support habitat restoration, a model garden, and water conservation projects.

2) Provide financial and volunteer support for trails and facilities maintenance.

Goals, programs and activities

The "Friends" will provide an avenue for community stewardship on the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed, working in tandem with the Marin Municipal Water District. The priorities and activities of the "Friends" will be designed to support or enhance ongoing district programs and projects, and will be informed by their close working relationship with the watershed staff. The "Friends" will operate in support of the district's mission of "managing its natural resources in a sustainable manner", maintaining the biological health of the watershed, and providing safe and gratifying public access to the watershed lands. The "Friends" will operate entirely within the district's policies, and will not have any influence over these policies.

The "Friends" will be established to:

Promote community stewardship of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed, and other district-owned lands, to preserve and enhance their long-term ecological value for natural habitat, biodiversity, education, water quality, and community enjoyment, in partnership with the Marin Municipal Water District.

The "Friends" will pursue this mission through three goals.

1. **Enhanced resources for habitat, historic facilities and trails** - Ensure that adequate financial and human resources are available primarily for effective management of natural resources, and also for historic facilities and trails across the watershed.
2. **Stewardship through education** - Inspire all users of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed to act as active stewards of the resource and to treat it with exceptional care.
3. **Community convening** - Provide a platform to convene user and environmental groups across the watershed for stronger coordination of volunteer capacity, fundraising, planning, and knowledge sharing.

Over time, the "Friends" has the potential to expand its scope to serve not just the lands owned by MMWD, but all of Mt. Tamalpais' natural geography. Most visitors to Mt. Tamalpais and most donors in Marin love the mountain. They do not differentiate between the agencies that manage its various parcels. The "Friends" will begin with support to the watershed lands as a way to develop an effective model on a small scale. The district is eager to work with a community organization and willing to invest financial resources (the funds will come from a nonprofit fund that was started over a decade ago). The "Friends" will spend the first 3-5 years building a solid foundation and proving the concept with the district. ~~Then, if the organization has met with success and there is interest and opportunity for expansion, it could modify its mission and scope to become the "Friends" organization for all of Mt. Tamalpais and the four primary agencies that manage lands on the mountain (California State Parks, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Marin Parks and Open Space, and the Marin Municipal Water District).~~ This section suggests an expansive reach that is overly ambitious and premature.

Introduction

Mt. Tamalpais is the crown jewel of Marin County. Its vistas, redwood groves, creeks, trails, and wildlife have been close to the hearts of Marin residents for generations. The mountain provides nearly endless opportunities for recreation, enjoyment of the local flora and fauna, and spiritual rejuvenation. For many, it is Mt. Tamalpais that makes Marin home.

The history of Mt. Tamalpais is integral to the character of Marin County; a history of conservation, land stewardship, great vision and generosity, and deep respect for the natural environment and common resources.

Today, Marin County relies on several public agencies and dozens of private landowners to steward this incredible natural asset. Established in 1912 as part of the Marin Municipal Water District (the district, MMWD), the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed (the watershed) contains five storage reservoirs and a system of creeks. The watershed, along with two other district-owned reservoirs, Nicasio and Soulajule, provide the vast majority of the drinking water for Marin County. The Mt. Tamalpais Watershed is one of the few contiguous community water delivery ecosystems in California. Most other communities in California rely on water that is piped from hundreds of miles away. San Francisco draws its water from Hetch Hetchy in the Sierras. Los Angeles pipes its water 223 miles, lifting it 2,000 feet over the Tehachapi Mountains, to reach its destination. Marin draws its water from its backyard.

The Mt. Tamalpais Watershed is an administrative unit that comprises MMWD's lands on Mt. Tamalpais and whose boundaries include several physical watersheds. The four main watersheds that drain Mt. Tamalpais are Lagunitas Creek, Corte Madera Creek, Arroyo Corte Madera del Presidio, and Redwood Creek. In simple terms a large number of the district's customers live in watersheds that begin on the slopes of the mountain.

The Mt. Tamalpais Watershed provides a range of sustainable ecosystem services. Water delivery is the most tangible ecosystem service provided to the community and the only one that is paid for directly. ~~However,~~ ^{also} the watershed provides opportunities for recreation, an accessible outdoor classroom for students of all ages cleaner air, habitat for rare and endangered species, and an intact ecosystem that can strengthen Marin's resiliency in the face of climate change, as well as.

Thanks to the vision of early organizers, including William Kent, the water district infrastructure was developed in tandem with the purchase of surrounding lands, preserving the watershed lands and opening it as a beautiful natural resource accessible to the public. The district manages 18,600 acres on Mt. Tamalpais, nearly the entire northern flank of the mountain. The watershed is home to oak woodlands, old-growth redwood groves, native grasslands, and over 83 distinct plant communities. A wide diversity of habitat supports more than 900 species of vascular plants, including 50 that are federally or state listed as rare, threatened or endangered. The watershed also supports at least 400 species of vertebrate animals. Of particular note are the breeding populations of northern spotted owls, western pond turtles, ospreys, bald eagles, and foothill yellow-legged frogs. The primary creek system on the watershed, Lagunitas Creek, is one of the last preserves of endangered coho salmon, steelhead trout, and California freshwater shrimp in the state. This wealth of native habitat and species diversity