

Marin Conservation League

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

AGENDA for January 8, 2015 3:00 – 5:00

Muir Woods meeting room, 1st Floor, 175 N. Redwood Drive (first left off Smith Ranch Road)

ANNOUNCEMENTS and CHANGES/ADDITIONS TO AGENDA: 1) Parks Forward Commission meeting, Old Railroad Museum, Sacramento, February 6.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: December 18, 2014

INFORMATION UPDATES:

1) Marin County Parks:

- a. RTMP – Next steps; issues to be considered in implementation of RTMP

2) MCL Trail Policy – Preliminary Draft (attached). Background: MCL does not have a policy concerning recreational trails on Marin public lands. This is an attempt to develop such a policy statement.

3) MCL Invasive Plants Subcommittee: Report from Subcommittee (Paul Minault)

4) Tamalpais Lands Collaborative: Brief update (for those who missed December 18 meeting)

5) State Parks update:

- a. Parks Forward Commission update – MCL letter sent; Next meeting of Commission on February 6, 2015, 9:30 – 12:00, California State Railroad Museum, Sacramento. (Susan Stompe)
- b. Marin State Park updates??

6) National Parks in Marin:

- a. Pt. Reyes National Seashore – Brief update on status of Ranch Comprehensive Management Plan and EA
- b. Muir Woods parking and traffic issues; brief recap of meetings convened by Rep. Jared Huffman (Nona)
- c. Proposal to raise GGNRA entry fees at Muir Woods (too late for comments – were due on December 16)

7) "Park Watch Program": Overview of program, likely adoption by Marin State Parks (Larry Minikes)

Next MCL P&OS meeting: **February 19, 2015 (NOTE CHANGED DATE – NOT THE 12th)**

MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

Parks and Open Space Committee December 18, 2014

DRAFT MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Nona Dennis, Chair; Larry Minikes, Greg Zitney, Eva Buxton, Linda Novy, Arlin Weinberger, Bill Long (MOST), Gordon Bennett, and Sharon Farrell, GG Parks Conservancy

Meeting was called to order by Nona at 3:00 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS and AGENDA CHANGES: Meeting date was changed to the 18th due to stormy weather on December 11. Upcoming: 1) Parks Forward Commission mtg, February 6, Old Railroad Museum, Sacramento

MINUTES for October 9 (revised) and November notes from joint committees meeting, of November 12, approved.

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS:

1. Marin County Parks

- a. RTMP Final Plan and Final TPEIR: The Board of Supervisors conducted a hearing on December 16 and approved the RTMP with several revisions, and certified the Final TPEIR. MCL submitted a letter to the Supervisors supporting most of the Plan but noting that the Plan does not contain design parameters specific to safe shared-use trails. MCL believes that this is a critical deficiency in the Plan and testified on this point at the hearing. The supervisors requested that the restriction to walk dogs only on leash on roads in sensitive zones in Giacomini OSP and Cascade OSP be removed. It was agreed that the restrictions would remain in Cascade OSP until further evaluation, but would be lifted on Giacomini OSP. The Board also agreed to remove dangerous ("mountain bike activities") from Policy SW13. MCL is concerned that removing leash restrictions on dogs in sensitive habitats will compromise wildlife. MCL will monitor implementation of the RTMP closely, with focus on protecting wildlife and habitats, and user safety and "peace of mind" for visitors on foot and horseback.
- b. Measure A Citizens' Oversight Committee met on November 13 to review the near-final audit report and expenditures for the first full year of Measure A expenditures. The full report is available on-line at marinparks.org. In brief, \$10,000,000 was budgeted, out of roughly \$14,500,000 received in tax revenues. Funds were allocated to three Measure A programs (County parks and open space, farmland protection, and local and district parks) according to the agreed formula. Each of the three programs has allocated funds to various impstaff (County parks) and improvements. Matching farmland funds went to MALT for acquisition of an easement on one ranch. The beneficial impacts of the funds are being experienced throughout the county.

- c. Sky ranch Acquisition: Bill Long, President of MOST, reported on the successful raising of funds for purchase at \$1.2 of this 16-acre property that straddles Fairfax and San Anselmo. Jonathan Braun should be thanked for monitoring the property for many years and advocating for its acquisition as open space. The owner died at age 100, leaving a property badly in need of restoration. MCOSD is taking ownership because the property is contiguous with Bald Hill OSP. Funds for purchase came from numerous sources, including County Parks, Fairfax Measure A funds, Marin Horse Council, Tamalpais Conservation Club, California Wildlife Federation, San Anselmo Open Space Committee, San Anselmo, State Coastal Conservancy, MMWD, and more than 170 individual donations. The 9 horses currently boarded there will be removed until such time as the property is rehabilitated and restored, which will take additional funds. At that time, it will be determined whether the ranch will continue to board horses or not.
- 2. MCL Invasive Plants Subcommittee: Eva reported briefly on the key priorities that the subcommittee has set for the coming year: 1) Monitor uses of Measure A funds for invasive species abatement; 2) Develop a coalition of supporters of invasive plant programs; and 3) Review local ordinances, general plans, etc. for policies and programs concerning invasive plants – begin advocacy for drafting of such policies and ordinances by local governments.
- 3. Tamalpais Land Collaborative. Sharon Farrell reported on “Mt. Tam Day of Thanks” activities on November 22 and gave an update on the status of TLC and launch of the “OneTam” website and publication of a brochure that lays out a 5-Year Strategic Plan. Two staff positions have been filled, one dealing with natural science, plants and wildlife, and the other with volunteer activities and community outreach. Sharon and Mike Swezy continue to meet with many organizations. Some issues have been raised by the public: concerns that too much private money will have the effect of reducing public budgeting, such as for parks and restoration, and that the TLC appears (to some) to be a “new” agency. TLC collaborators are working together to assure the public that this is not a new government entity. The TLC “staff” is seeking other ways to communicate with the public – periodic open houses? Small events? Advisory Committee? Of the many groups TLC has met with, each has a different relationship with Mt. Tam and therefore may have different interests for engagement. TLC is seeking optimum ways to balance the collaborative intent with the centralized (conservancy-driven) image, with stewardship as the common goal.
- 4. State Department of Parks: MCL submitted a letter to the Parks Forward Commission, outlining interests that have been previously discussed. Among other comments, MCL recommended that ranger career-track not be limited to peace officers. MCL members will attend the February 6 meeting of the commission in Sacramento.
- 5. National Parks in Marin:
 - a. Pt. Reyes National Seashore Ranch Plan/EA. As reported in Notes previously circulated, a joint meeting of MCL Parks & Open Space, Agricultural Land Use, and Land Use was held on November 12 at MCL

for the purpose of discussing some of the 3,000-some comments received in response to the NPS request for scoping comments for the Ranch Comprehensive Management Plan and EA. NPS staff gave a preview of issues that would be considered at two public workshops in Pt. Reyes Station, November 20 and 21. The first workshop dealt with Ranch practices, including pasture and soil management, diversification, and ownership succession; the second workshop focused on managing the elk that roam in the pastoral zone and are conflicting with some ranch operations. Small group discussions at the workshops produced a wide range of suggestions. The EA is in preparation, but will not be available for public review until late spring or summer 2015.

- b. Muir Woods Traffic and Parking and Reservation system. Rep. Jared Huffman has convened two meetings of stakeholders (November 4 and December 5), including two supervisors, GGNRA administration, local residents, Marin County public works, Marin County Transit, and others, in an attempt to reach consensus on the NPS plan to institute a reservation system, and how to limit or remove parking altogether from Muir Woods Road, and to put a cap on visitation to Muir Woods. The current condition of roadside parking is both hazardous to visitors and damaging to the stream habitat of Redwood Creek. The County has taken steps to restrict tour buses from driving on residential streets in Tam Valley, and is examining ways to alleviate traffic and parking. It is also necessary to improve physical road conditions, e.g., repair culverts and restrict parking, to prevent polluted runoff from entering the creek. Who will take responsibility and fund improvements has not been resolved. No conclusions have been reached; the discussions will continue.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00
Minutes by Nona Dennis

Recreational Use of Marin's Public Lands and Open Space

MCL Trail Policy – DRAFT 1

January 3, 2015

Preamble:

Marin County contains a wealth of public open spaces and parklands. Roughly half the county consists of federal or state parkland, public watershed lands, county open space, and community-owned open space. Some of the lands are former ranches; many are relatively pristine. In either case they include a rich diversity of fish and wildlife habitats as well as cultural and scenic values, and they are managed for the most part in a “natural” state.

We are fortunate in that hundreds of miles of old ranch roads, fire roads, and trails provide recreational access to these public lands. As a consequence, Marin attracts millions of visitors annually, both local and from elsewhere, who relish the opportunity to leave their urban preoccupations behind and experience nature in a variety of ways. Visitors walk, hike, ride horse-back, jog, bicycle, and exercise their dogs. Even with diligent park management, heavy recreational use and trends toward increased use threaten the health of the resources that we treasure. The challenge is how to allow for different recreational activities on Marin’s roads and trails without compromising the well-being of wildlife and other natural and cultural resources, or the quality of experience sought by visitors. *The primary concern in managing the road and trail network, in all cases, is to ensure that a healthy natural environment and sensitive habitats will persist into the future.*

Definitions. Trails serve many legitimate functions on public open space: traveling from one place to another, recreation and socializing, exercise and stimulation, connection with sites of ecological, cultural, or scenic interest, and/or opportunity to experience aesthetic values and solitude. Visitors use different travel modes to carry out these functions: stroll or slow walk – sometimes with a dog, vigorous hike, jog, walk or trot (horse), and ride (mountain bike), whose mode differs markedly with uphill or downhill direction, ranging from slow/moderate to very fast.

For purposes of this policy, the term “trails” encompasses both dirt roads that serve as multi-use trails and traditional narrow “foot paths.” A “narrow trail” (sometimes called a single-track trail) is generally a foot path that can vary in width from 12” to 24,” and is generally not safe for shared use by bike with slow-moving pedestrians or horses. A “multi-use” trail is designed for shared use by different users, such as pedestrians, bikes, and horses, and should be wide enough to safely accommodate passing for such users; a “fire road” by definition is wide enough to safely accommodate emergency vehicles as well as all recreational users.

New trails, including renovation of existing trails. MCL generally discourages the construction of new trails in Marin’s public and open space lands. Construction of a new trail into previously undisturbed land inevitably involves a suite of adverse impacts that are impossible to fully mitigate. Under limited circumstances, however, decommissioning an existing degraded social trail could partially mitigate for

new construction. Where a new trail might be proposed in newly designated open space, or an existing trail undergoes renovation, construction must minimize impacts, as follows:

- Use existing ranch roads or fire roads wherever possible;
- Avoid riparian corridors, stream crossings, wetlands, and other sensitive habitats, such as serpentine areas with rare plants, native grasslands, etc; maintain adequate buffers;
- Minimize tree and major woody vegetation removal;
- Design to prevent erosion, sedimentation, and other impacts to water courses;
- Note presence of source populations of invasive plants, and take measures to avoid spread;
- Require appropriate environmental review and public input.

Managing conditions on existing trails. Roads and trails undergo wear and tear with use over time.

Maintenance of existing trails should be directed to the following:

- Correct conditions leading to erosion and sedimentation;
- Avoid damage to vegetation, including gradual widening of tread into adjacent vegetation, excessive “brushing.”
- Close vulnerable trails during wet weather;
- Restrict access to nesting or breeding sites during appropriate seasons;
- Monitor for invasive plant species and use early response where possible to prevent spread;
- Monitor for litter and remove.

User Guidelines. Under all circumstances, the safety of users should be paramount. All users share in the responsibility to maintain safe and sustainable trails. Trails should be designed and their use managed to that end, according to the following guidelines:

- All users should stay on established trails and should not go cross-country or cut corners;
- All users should take care not to litter – “leave no trace behind”;
- All users should obey safety rules as prescribed by various land management agencies, at a minimum:
 - o Bicycles should be allowed only on ranch/fire roads and on trails safely designed for shared use, or designated for single use;
 - o Bicycle riders should obey speed limits of 15 mph maximum and 5 mph when going around blind curves or approaching pedestrians;
 - o Bicycle riders should stop and ask for permission to pass when approaching horse-back riders;
 - o Bicycle riders should use bell or voice to signal approach to pedestrians;
 - o Dog owners should stay off prohibited trails where posted and obey leash laws;
 - o Horse-back riders should stay off prohibited trails where posted;

Cooperation and enforcement of user guidelines. Compliance with rules and guidelines must rely heavily on cooperation and mutual respect of all users. However, to ensure that rules are observed, land management agencies must maintain policies with meaningful sanctions and provide adequate personnel to enforce rules in the field.