

MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE
Parks and Open Space Committee
April 17, 2014

FINAL MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Nona Dennis, Chair; Larry Minikes, Eva Buxton, Robert Eichstaedt, Greg Zitney, Ernie Stanton, Gordon Bennett, Arlin Weinberger, Paul Minault, Eileen Boken, Linda Novy, Tom Boss, Damon Connolly, Bill Long, Susan Stompe, Jill Templeton, Priscilla Bull, and Linda Dahl.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS and AGENDA CHANGES: 1) MCL Walk into Conservation History, Old St. Hilary's and the Martha Company property, Tiburon Ridge, May 3; 2) Bay Area Open Space Council, Annual Conference, May 8, Presidio. Tom Boss announced that MCBC and Ocean Riders are conducting maintenance projects on Diaz Ridge at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, April 19; and Groundbreaking for Central Marin Ferry Connector project will take place at noon on April 28. Paul Minault announced that he would like to form a working group to focus on invasive species, and asked interested individuals to speak with him after the meeting. Arlin Weinberger announced that May 6 will be State Parks Advocacy Day in Sacramento, a day for lobbying legislators. ADD TO AGENDA: Information Item 7: "Heron Hill L.L.C" (650 North San Pedro Road).

MINUTES for March 13, 2014 – Approved

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS:

1. Marin County Parks:
 - a. RTMP. As reported previously, County Parks has revised Chapters 4 and 5 of the Draft RTMP, and will recirculate the Draft EIR later in 2014. The Workshop on March 15 reviewed the revisions, especially in Chapter 5, which details how projects will be screened and evaluated using a criteria-based process. The objective is to ensure that any new project must result in net environmental benefit to each region of open space preserves. Environmental benefit will not be measured in terms of the ratio of miles of *new* trails to miles of *decommissioned (or narrowed)* trails or roads, but rather in relation to numerous environmental criteria, added up as points. Proposed projects will be carried forward for possible implementation if they can demonstrate overall net benefit. Linda Dahl further elaborated on the evaluation and decision process the department will follow every year, as projects are proposed. Several questions and comments followed: How will behaviors on trails and roads be monitored? Linda's answer: by ranger staff – (other details on indicators and monitoring not provided); Bill Long: Slogans like "Don't Mess with Texas" (to reduce roadside trash) could be effective in changing behavior and trail "culture," but, as several pointed out, must be supported by enforcement; Several commented: impacts on both wildlife and erosion/sediment need to be considered among evaluation criteria, but may in some cases conflict with each other. Social criteria, such as desired experience, need to be evaluated.

The discussion concluded by noting that MCL needs to monitor the project evaluation process closely – perhaps in a future workshop – since it is complicated and requires close attention.

- b. Stafford Lake Bike Park Promo Video: The committee viewed a video posted on the Friends of Stafford Lake Bike Park web site to promote the Park as a candidate for funding assistance from Bell Built (?). The committee was critical of several “messages” in the video, which give the impression that bike activities appropriate for the Park might be transferred inappropriately to public lands. It also appears that the Marin County Parks Department, whose name and logo are conspicuous on the web site, was not given the opportunity to control the content of the video, although staff did remove a portion that was critical of Parks Department. The question arose: Whose web site is it and who controls content. The only contact given is County Park Planner Steve Peterlee. It was moved and passed unanimously that MCL should write a letter to the “Friends” organization, with copies to Board of Supervisors and others. The following points should be included in the letter:

- i. The dominant image on the web site (background photo) is a photograph of two bikers riding cross-country over vegetated land – not permitted on any public lands in Marin.
- ii. The Video promotes the myth that Marin allows almost no place for mountain bikes to ride (photos of “no Bikes” signs shown at trail-heads); portrays the need for places for bikes as “acute.” (In reality, the combined public lands of Marin offer 600 miles of roads and trails, 50% of which are open to bikes (most narrow paths are old and were not designed for safe shared use)
- iii. Promotes idea that other users (of open space) are simply protecting their own turf by denying opportunities for bike access.
- iv. Numerous images show technical skills – jumping, racing, other activities that are okay for the Park, but would not be appropriate on public lands. The distinction needs to be made clear. The video does contain some positive images of families riding on dirt roads.
- v. Video promote Bike Park as magnet for whole Bay Area – this is already the case; Marin trails are already heavily used by many non-residents of Marin. Will the Bike Park attract more out-of-county bike traffic to public open space lands?

2. State Department of Parks and Recreation:

- a. Trails and Greenways Annual Conference: Nona reported briefly on a presentation that “Marin Trail Partners” (MCBC, MHS, and MCL), made at the annual Trails and Greenways Conference, April 8 – 10, in Palm Springs. The PwrPt showed how the three organizations have come together to promote constructive dialogue among conflicting user groups. It was well received at the conference, but the group (Trail Partners) must now take the next step in defining and launching a campaign focused on behavior change and establishing ways to measure progress. Public lands in other states and locales face similar challenges and are developing similar partnerships.
- b. State Parks Forward Commission: This Commission was formed last year to comprehensively address the fiscal non-sustainability of the state park system.

After regional workshops, focus groups, etc., the Commission released a detailed “Baseline Financial Assessment” late last year. Susan Stompe reported key findings from the financial report (a copy of her report is attached). In brief, fundamental problems of fiscal sustainability confront the Park Department. Funding from voter-authorized bond measures is ending; sustained support from the General fund is uncertain; costs of deferred maintenance are staggering; and the Department uses antiquated information and financial reporting systems, with the result that it is impossible to track costs of operating individual parks. The gap between assumed revenues and anticipated costs is running at about \$22 million annually, but could rise to over \$100 million, taking deferred maintenance into account. One problem in estimating the future gap is the Department’s use of *existing costs* of operation, which provide an inaccurate baseline. Various strategies for growing revenues are being studied, including better managing park revenues and costs; expanding partnerships; and special bond measures. Key findings: 15% of parks support the rest. The best earning parks include water (ocean, lakes, rivers, etc.), camping opportunities, are near urban centers, and Hearst Castle. The peace officer career path is more costly than a non-peace-officer path. We question it is necessary for interpretive staff and administrative personnel to follow peace officer career track. Why not more interpretive personnel rising through the ranks?

A draft report with preliminary recommendations has just been released and will be discussed at the next public meeting, April 30, 9:30 – 12:30, at Holiday Inn at S.F. Airport. Susan will draft a letter to the Commission and present oral comments at the meeting. We have 60 days to comment. The Commission hopes to have a final report end of 2014 or early 2015.

3. National Parks in Marin:

- a. Muir Woods Traffic, Congestion, and Parking. The scoping meeting for the EA has not been announced. Nona plans to meet with Mia Monroe, Supervising ranger, to discuss the NPS ideas.
- b. Pt. Reyes National Seashore: Ranch Plan and Tule Elk in Pastoral Zone. MCL has formed a Agricultural Land Use Committee, which will determine when and where to meet. Co-Chairs are Judy Teichman and Sally Gale. They will follow the Seashore Ranch Planning process by formulating scoping issues for the EA, and the current issue of free-roaming elk in the pastoral zone of the Park. MCL Parks and Open space Committee will also track as the Ranch Plan process intersects with broader Park issues. Scoping meetings have been announced for May 6 (Dance Palace, Pt. Reyes Station, 5:00 to 7:00), and May 7 (Bay Model, same time).

4. Expansion of Gulf of the Farallones/Cordell Banks National Marin Sanctuary. Draft EIS Eileen Boken, of San Francisco Neighborhoods introduced this topic. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is proposing to expand the boundaries of Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (GFNMS) and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary (CBNMS) to an area north

and west of their current boundaries, as well as to amend existing sanctuary regulations and add new regulations, some of which include new exceptions. NOAA is also proposing to revise the corresponding sanctuary terms of designation and management plans. The purpose of this action is to extend national marine sanctuary protections to an area that has nationally significant marine resources and habitats and is the source of nutrient-rich upwelled waters for the existing sanctuaries. A draft environmental impact statement and draft revised management plans have been prepared for this proposed action. NOAA is soliciting public comment on the proposed rule, draft environmental impact statement, and draft revised management plans.

The San Francisco Neighborhoods Association would like the boundaries to be extended south-ward to include San Francisco County and San Mateo, citing the administrative advantages of putting the four counties together. The Sanctuary is headquartered in San Francisco. Gordon pointed out that some of the regulatory changes (exceptions) should be reviewed closely and challenged. Comments on the Draft EIS are due June 6. Public meetings include one at the Bay Model, May 22, 6:00 – 8:00. Nona will review the Draft EIS and recommend possible comments at the May 15 meeting.

5. Easton Pt. (Martha Property): (No change from last meeting) Nona reported that the BOS declined to certify the Final EIR for Easton Pt. document. Many issues are still unresolved, and with the agreement of County Council, the Board will retain jurisdiction over the EIR and agreed to move the project toward merits hearings before the Planning Commission so that more details can be fleshed out before certifying the Final EIR.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m. **PLEASE NOTE: The next meeting is rescheduled to May 15, 2014, from 12:30 – 2:00, due to conflict with Annual Bay Area Open Space Council Conference on May 8, and meeting of Marin County Parks and Open Space Commission at 2:30 – 4:30 on May 15th.**

Minutes by Nona Dennis

ATTACHMENT to April 17th P & OS meeting minutes

California State Parks - Baseline Financial Assessment, Susan Stompe
Report by FTI Consulting for Parks Forward Commission – dated November 30, 2013

“Based on our analysis, and under the direction of new leadership, we see substantial opportunities for enhancing financial sustainability by continuing to increase revenue, better managing (and possibly reducing) costs and partnering on a broader basis with stakeholders and supportive outside private and public organizations”

Funding support comes from SPRF and the state General Fund which has averaged \$239 mil. over last 4 years. Augmented by voter approved bond measures, special state & federal funds averaging \$76 mil. Bond funds are running out. Projecting continued levels from SPRF, general fund and other continuing sources, declining bond funds and expenditures remaining at \$320 mil./yr. the gap between funding and expenditures with maintenance (estimated at \$350 mil/yr) will increase to over \$100 mil. Without any capital expenditures.

What is not taken into account is that current expenditures are woefully short for adequate operation of existing facilities.

Recommended are 3 Key Strategies:

- 1) Continue to grow revenue (almost 75% park revenues from 15% of parks)
- 2) Proactively manage costs, esp. park unit operating costs – incl. maintenance & capital costs(better data)
- 3) Expand use of partners who can help absorb costs, plus new bond or other state funding

High priority recommendations:

- 1) Complete and refine analysis of park unit costs
- 2) Zero-base budget the infrastructure and maintenance databases
- 3) Develop an electronic database of park unit attributes
- 4) Develop and maintain a repository of agreements with outside parties and proactively identify candidate organizations for potential partnering arrangements.
- 5) Address data integrity and continuity issues across divisions – with better accounting and financial reporting

Most of the report gets into detail about funding sources, analysis of interim funds to keep parks open, how different partners are operating state parks, and the lack of information. The Off Road vehicle funds are separate, but those parks doing well because of their funds. They studied those parks with positive revenue streams to determine whether some practices could be transferred to other parks.

Infrastructure and maintenance costs were determined to be unreliable, but the needs are real and must be accurately quantified. Five different kinds of partnership arrangements were studied: Jack London Operating agreement with Valley of the Moon non-profit; Anza Borrego cooperating agreement with the AB Foundation; East Bay Regional Park Dist. operating agreement for 4 state parks; NPS interagency agreement for 4 north coast redwood State parks; American Land & Leisure concession/operation of 3 state parks.

Toward the end of the report under “Asset Prioritization” they reviewed a DPR staff generated criteria for evaluating whether a park unit should continue to be in the system. The team, PSCT: Park Significance Criteria Team, completed three documents: Process and background, park significance criteria and Park significance workbook. Criteria include natural, cultural, recreational and educational values as reflected in DPR’s mission statement. The workbook suggests application of the criteria be given high, medium, low or negligible rating for each park. Only samples were done, not all 280 parks. Secondary criteria are included. These evaluations are also suggested for funding allocations