

MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

**Parks and Open Space Committee Meeting
February 9, 2011**

FINAL MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Nona Dennis, Robert Eichstaedt, Susan Stompe, Jean Starkweather, Connie Berto, Tom Boss, Larry Minikes, Greg Zitney, Arlene Halligan, Doug Wilson, Randy Greenberg, John Natt, Eva Buxton (later Mike Swezy, Mary Hanley, Robert Dobrin). Guests: Linda Dahl and Katherine Mindel Jones, Marin County Parks.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: 1) MCL will try to reschedule the Walk into (Conservation) History on the Jean and John Starkweather Shoreline Park trail in E. San Rafael, which was partly rained out on Jan. 21; 2) In anticipation of closures of a number of state parks, the State Dep't of Parks and Recreation and Natural Resources Agency will conduct a week-long staff training seminar on the Mothballing of Historic Buildings, Structures, and Landscapes, March 25 – 30. It will take place at Marconi (State) Conference Center and Olompali State Historic Park; 3) State Parks' 2012 California Trails & Greenways Conference will be held April 18 – 20 in Woodlands Hills; 4) MCL will hold a Business-Environment Breakfast on Feb. 16, 7:30 a.m., Embassy Suites, on the need for a regional approach to adaptation to sea level rise in San Francisco Bay. The speaker is Will Travis, recently retired Executive Director of Bay Conservation and Development Commission.

MINUTES for January 12, 2012 – Approved as corrected: Item 1), last sentence: "Arlene Halligan reported that Alden Olmsted, who has been raising funds to help the parks, has put in a proposal to pay for septic system maintenance at China Camp State Park."

ACTION ITEMS: None

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Linda Dahl, Director and General Manager of Marin County Parks gave a presentation on current concerns of the County Parks covering three basic topics that are related. They are summarized separately below.

- 1) County interests in China Camp SP and Olompali SHP. China Camp State Park is slated to close on July 1, 2012 unless attempts to keep it open are successful. Currently two rangers from Mt. Tam SP are servicing CCSP part time. Linda has been engaged in talks with Danita Rodriguez, Superintendent of Marin District State Parks, about various options under which the County might assist in keeping the park open. China Camp is of special concern because of its proximity to County Open Space and many neighbors, its numerous points of entry (9), and its heavy use. For these reasons it is

especially vulnerable to illegal activities, vandalism and other misuse. It is also a park with diverse ecosystems and particular historic significance, and it is used by diverse segments of the Marin community.

Costs to operate the park full-time range from \$532,000/year, the current SP estimate, and \$860,000/yr., the County's estimate. The biggest cost is ranger personnel. The County uses the Sheriff's Department for enforcement because rangers have limited authority. The County is concerned about inherited liabilities, but also realizes that the future cost of responding to 911 and other emergencies in a closed park could exceed costs of keeping it open. County Parks is faced with making 10 percent cuts in its budget – roughly \$500,000 – so funds to either take over or support continued State Parks operation are not available currently.

Some revenues could come from collecting user fees on North San Pedro Rd., where most users park free (about 50 percent of users come from out of the County), but that system would take funds to run and would not suffice without another major source. Other partial options include partnering with Friends of China Camp, or with other non-profits like Marin County Bicycle Coalition (MCBC). Partnering with non-profits has become a viable option under Huffman's AB 42. There are problems with local management of State Parks where differing management approaches may be in conflict. One possible option would be for the State to manage the Chinese Village, and the County to manage the Open Space areas. Linda believes that \$150,000 - \$200,000 is the most that could be raised from currently known revenue sources. The only real financial assistance from the County would have to come from a ballot measure (See #3 below).

Other options are being promoted by Friends off China Camp such as keeping the village open; Alden Olmsted would pay to manage the septic systems for a year; the FOCC is gearing up a major campaign to raise public awareness and funds.

Keeping Olompali State Historic Park open is also of interest to the County, but the County lacks experience in custodial care of historic properties and doesn't see much opportunity for involvement. Olompali will have to remain open even if part time, in that its acquisition was partially funded by federal Land and Water Conservation Act, which requires that it be open to the public.

- 2) County Parks Agricultural Easement Program, and agricultural uses on Open Space Preserves. Linda briefly described the County Parks Agricultural Easement Program, which has been formed in an attempt to give past easements that have been granted by the County a "home" in the County administration. It will be County Park's responsibility to monitor and steward these easements. The County currently leases grazing rights on Mt.

Burdell, Loma Alta and Horse Hill OSPs for agricultural and related uses (e.g., horse pasturing). The Dept is examining approaches to properly manage the easements, working with UCCE and others.

- 3) Possible Open Space and Agricultural Ballot Measure. The only way to raise sufficient funds for the County to consider operating China Camp SP alone or in some kind of partnership, as well as to fund other County Parks programs such as implementation of the pending Roads and Trails Management Plan, would be to put a 1/8 cents sales tax measure on the November ballot. A recent poll conducted by MALT revealed that the public ranks protection of open space, wetlands, hills, and agricultural protection among the highest of current issues in Marin. However, the Board of Supervisors expects the initiative for such a measure to come from the public – i.e., from a consortium of environmental, conservation, recreation, agricultural, cultural, and other nonprofits. The initiative will not come from the BOS. Also unlikely it will come from MCF. The ballot measure would focus on Open Space and Agriculture preservation. Linda and staff will draft a general concept with options for collaborating organizations to consider -- issues of concern, objectives in common, and how money should be spent.
- 4) Other Efforts to Marin County Parks Department Commission. Greg Zitney, County Parks Commissioner, reported that the BOS is interviewing several people to fill two vacancies on the commission. One replacement is Charles Higgins of Slide Ranch; the other replacement will be selected soon.
- 5) Marin County Parks Volunteer Watch/Patrol general meeting. Robert reported on Feb. 1 meeting, attended mostly by equestrians. The Patrol includes walkers and bike patrol also; all Patrol members have training needs in common. Ari Golan, Head Ranger for Marin county Parks, led the meeting, which included breakout groups who considered general training topics ranging from first-aid to coyotes; training for special units, such bike or equestrian patrol needs; how to increase participation of volunteers; and how to improve relationships with Ranger staff. The group will continue to meet bimonthly and recruit for qualified volunteers.
- 6) GGNRA Issues: The Draft Dog Management Plan and Environmental Assessment received 4,731 public comments. On the basis of public comment, GGNRA staff are collecting and analyzing new information, such as how the reduction in dog walking opportunities might impact adjacent public lands, and will prepare a Supplement to the EIS and circulate it. This will add a year to the overall schedule. A Supplemental DEIS will be released in late summer 2012 for public comment.
- 7) San Rafael Airport Soccer Complex. The San Rafael Planning Commission certified the Final EIR, and will conduct a hearing on the merits on March 13. The Committee discussion concerned outstanding issues not well covered in

the FEIR, e.g., safety obstruction lights to be affixed to soccer building, but not examined in FEIR. The Santa Venetia community has not determined whether to challenge the project on merits, or to focus on tightening mitigation measures. The City Council majority appears to favor the project. MCL continues to oppose the project, but will also argue for tight mitigation measures.

- 8) Pot Eradication Efforts on MMWD lands. MCL and TCC will jointly hold a video presentation and discussion on the efforts by MMWD and County Sheriff's office to eradicate dangerous and environmentally damaging marijuana plots in watershed lands and adjacent federal parklands. It will be held Feb. 28 from 5:30 – 7:00 at Marin Art and Garden Center, in the all-purpose room adjacent to the TCC office.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10
Minutes by Nona Dennis

Next meeting will be March 8, 2012