

MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE

**Parks and Open Space Committee Meeting
March 8, 2012**

FINAL MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Nona Dennis, Robert Eichstaedt, Susan Stompe, Jean Starkweather, Ernie Stanton, Joyce Britt, Larry Minikes, Greg Zitney, Arlene Halligan, Delos Putz, John Natt, and Eva Buxton. Guests: Ron Miska and Katherine Mindel Jones, Marin County Parks.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: 1) Presentation on Pot Eradication on MMWD watershed lands held at MAGC, March 7; 2) North Bay Watershed Association Conference on Climate Change, April 13, Petaluma; 3) California League of State Park Associations lobbying day in Sacramento, March 20; 4) Hal Brown Memorial, March 24; 5) MCL Annual dinner, April 20; 5) Earth Day at civic Center, April 21; 6) MMWD 100th Anniversary event, April 25 in MMWD Corp. parking lot; 7) 2012 California Trails & Greenways Conference, April 18-20; 8) Walk into (Conservation) History at China Camp State Park, May 5; 9) Bay Area Open Space Conference, May 10; 10) Official Opening of 680 Trail, May 5.

MINUTES for February 9, 2012 – Approved

ACTION ITEMS: None

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- 1) State Parks in Marin: Report on Open Parks Coalition meeting at Marin Community Foundation, March 8. Susan Stompe and Nona Dennis attended and reported (to the extent possible given the dynamic state of the parks) on various options to keep parks open, in particular China Camp. The Olompali People submitted a letter of intent in December to Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) in Sacramento and is in negotiation to operate the park three or four days a week. Both the County and Friends of China Camp (FOCC) have worked with the Marin District to develop detailed estimates of revenues and costs to keep that Park open. Several options are on the table, one of which would involve the Marin Parks District contracting with a vendor company (Kinsail) that has developed and manages fee collection systems at public parks throughout the U.S. Kinsail's proposal would establish points at either end of San Pedro Road to photo-track license plates of cars entering the park, calculate time spent within the park, and assess a fee (or annual pass) of about \$6.00 per presumed use, yielding up to a net of \$580,000/year, enough to keep the park open. This fee collection technology is being used currently at South Yuba River State Park. Net fees collected, after administrative costs, would go directly to the District, who would continue to operate the park. As an alternative means of enhancing revenue for the park, County Public Works has determined that it is not feasible to collect fees for cars parked on the County Road, nor would such a system provide sufficient revenues.

Another option, which is being explored by FOCC, would involve partnering with State Parks (DPR) and raising funds from a variety of sources, including donors and

fund-raising events, etc., and operating the park with limited number of rangers, technicians, and part-time personnel. Ernie Stanton reported that FOCC attended a DPR workshop to advise prospective non-profit partners on the basics of park operation. This included a workbook and template for crafting proposals and agreements for partnering with the DPR. DPR has emphasized, Ernie said, that every park is unique in its conditions and requirements, however; one size will not fit all cases.

There was some discussion about the Kinsail proposal, which would require public education and may be optimistic in revenue projections, given the number of alternate points of entry to China Camp that do not require driving through on San Pedro Road. Concerns were also expressed regarding the eventual disposition of parks after interim operating agreements and/or if the state budget problem is resolved. Are these temporary, or "patch," arrangements, or might they become permanent in the future? Will DPR take back management from a non-profit operating a park at some point? There was also some discussion of Jared Huffman's AB 1589 which is intended to address longer-term financial solutions for the parks. Arlene Halligan noted that Parks Associations from around the state are going to gather in Sacramento on March 20 to lobby the legislature in behalf of keeping parks open. In the meantime, operating agreements are under consideration at other state parks that are slated to close.

- 2) Marin County Parks Road and Trails Management Plan. Ron Miska provided an update on the progress of the RTMP. There will be another public Workshop on March 31. Since the last workshop, staff has been working on mapping visitor use zones, similar in concept to the resource sensitivity zones previously mapped for the Vegetation Management Plan. The maps will show areas of concentration, such as near trailheads, and other use conditions, and will aid in developing decision tools – that is, criteria to guide future projects. These could include making trail connections, decommissioning trails, placing restrictions on certain trails or, conversely, opening trails to limited uses, etc. During discussion, Delos Putz emphasized the importance of including safety as a major criterion in the plan, and Robert Eichstaedt emphasized the need for "best practices." There was some discussion of the County's regulations governing dog use, on and off leash.
- 3) Possible Open Space and Agricultural Ballot Measure. Discussion of a possible 1/8 cent ballot tax measure was similar to discussion at the February meeting: that is, that the measure, if approved for the ballot, would yield about \$5,000,000 per year, which would be allocated roughly 20 percent to agricultural easements, 10 percent to local parks projects, and the remainder to be allocated elsewhere among the County's Parks and Open Space Preserves, with possibly 10 percent going to assist China Camp State Park remain open. At present there are no funds to implement the RTMP. Fuel management (wildland fire prevention) is not being considered in this measure. According to Kat Jones, outreach coordinator to Marin County Parks, 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. A second poll to determine public support will be conducted in June. Kat also pointed out that County Parks has an estimated \$25 million in deferred maintenance on existing open space preserves and parks.

Some committee members expressed concerns about the credibility of a poll about open space conducted by an agricultural organization. Others were concerned that funds from the tax measure, if approved, might too strongly favor allocation to China Camp State Park, which is used heavily by the Mt. bike community, displacing other users for reasons of safety. Others said they would like more specificity on how funds would be allocated.

The Board of Supervisors expects the initial support for such a measure to come from the public – i.e., from a consortium of environmental, conservation, recreation, agricultural, cultural, and other nonprofits. There will be an opportunity to express public support at an upcoming BOS meeting in late March.

- 4) Marin County Parks Department Commission. Greg Zitney, County Parks Commissioner, reported that two vacancies have been filled. Meetings will be held at 6:00 to accommodate working people. The next meeting is on March 15 and should have a quorum. He is hoping that the Commissioners will be used as a resource to staff, as intended.

- 5) Commemorating Anniversaries of Parks and Open Space in Marin in 2012. Nona reminded the committee that 2012 is an important anniversary for a number of public lands and associated non-profits: MMWD – 100 years; Tamalpais Conservation Club – 100 years; Tomales Bay State Park – 70 years; Pt. Reyes National Seashore – 50 years; GGNRA – 40 years; Marin County Open Space District – 40 years. MCL's May-June Newsletter will feature their role in the history of conservation in Marin, and highlight some of the special events scheduled throughout the year. Larry Minikes reported that TCC has completed a draft of a book on the 100-year history of the Club, and that TCC will hold a festival this summer in Mountain Theater.

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