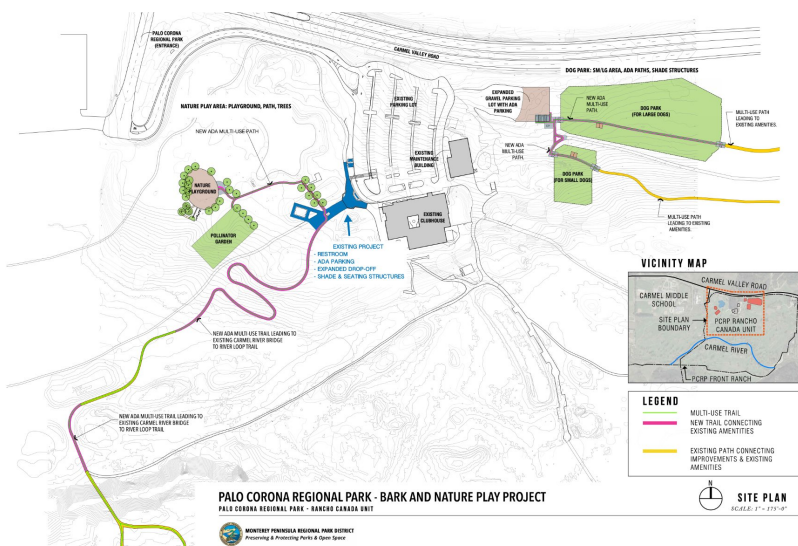




## The Bark and Nature Play Project Submitted for Regional Park Program Grant January 20, 2022

We did it! After ten months of collaboration with almost 1,000 residents, several key partner organizations, and two innovative design teams, the MPRPD applied for a Regional Park Program (RPP) Grant to help fund the Palo Corona Regional Park - Bark and Nature Play Project. This \$3 million project includes the proposed development of recreation features at the Rancho Cañada Unit at Palo Corona Regional Park: a dog park with separate areas for large and small dogs, an all-inclusive playground for ages 2 to 12 of all abilities, a pollinator demonstration garden adjacent to the playground, an ADA multi-use trail from the park entrance to the Carmel River footbridge, and a parking lot next to the dog park that includes three ADA parking stalls. The RPP Grant is a competitive grant from the California Department of Parks and Recreation and is funded by Proposition 68 (2018 Bond Act). The announcement of the award winners will be sometime in 2022. We will keep you posted!



**Bark and Nature Play Concept Site Plan**

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For now, MPRPD will continue to enhance the Rancho Cañada

gateway to Palo Corona Regional Park, which includes plans for the construction of new restrooms, ADA parking, a bus loading/unloading zone, navigational kiosk, and seating. This first gateway project is expected to be completed by Fall 2022.

### Features of the Bark and Nature Play Project

The Bark and Nature Play Project is a specific bundle of features that are highly valued by our community and are the most competitive combination of features for this grant. If awarded, it would be a tremendous jump-start in transforming the PCRPD's Rancho Cañada Unit into the community gathering space that so many of us envision. During the outreach process for this grant application, we learned so much about these and other features that could be developed

with different funding. Keep in mind that whether we receive the RPP grant or not, the Rancho Cañada Unit is planned to evolve into the recreational gateway to the Palo Corona Regional Park with opportunities for everyone to recreate and experience the wonder of nature.

### ***Dog Park***

The off-leash dog park is a three-acre fence enclosed area with separate areas for small and large dogs. ADA paths will be constructed to lead from the new parking lot, which includes three new ADA parking stalls, through the entrances to the small dog park and the large dog park. Within the small dog area and large dog area, the ADA paths continue to the new shade structures, and then to the exit/entrances at the east end of each area. From there, existing paths lead to other areas of the park.

During the public outreach process, the MPRPD received overwhelming support for the dog park through surveys, public feedback at the Open House event, and during meetings with the “Dog Park 4”—four advocates who organized a group of 400 dog owners.

The Dog Park 4 advocacy group reached out to local businesses, residents, and elected officials, and gave multiple presentations to local community centers to receive input on the need for the off-leash dog park. In addition, the dog park online surveys documented support from residents throughout the 20-mile radius. MPRPD is fortunate to have such a motivated group within the community who have expressed the desire to volunteer in the maintenance of the dog park and in the management of volunteers at the dog park. Dog Park 4 members are also prepared to financially contribute and fundraise for improvements once it is under construction. In anticipation of this effort and in response to their suggestion, the design of the dog park includes a kiosk area suitable for personally engraved commemorative bricks in appreciation of donors.

### ***Nature Play Area with Inclusive Playground***

MPRPD’s goal is to develop park features that are designed and inviting for all. The nature play area with an inclusive playground is a prime example. In anticipation of an exciting and engaging nature play experience, seniors and families with children will be greeted by an entry plaza and kiosk directing them to the open spaces beyond. In planning for the family experience, MPRPD is installing new restroom and water fountain facilities at the entrance trailhead within easy access to the proposed nature playground and adjacent pollinator garden.

The inclusive playground provides the opportunity for side-by-side play of children ages 2 to 12 with a range of abilities. Ramps and rails will be constructed for safety and assistance with balance. Play structures will be modeled after nature to spark curiosity, encourage exploration, and engage their senses. Some will incorporate natural site features and distinctive Palo Corona Regional Park elements into the design. Children will not only have the opportunity for physical exercise like climbing, jumping, sliding, and swinging, but opportunities to develop their social, emotional, and cognitive skills.

This nature playground area increases the opportunity to connect to nature that is increasingly missing from children's lives. The National Parks and Recreation Association reported that, "Children today spend less time outdoors than any other generation, devoting only four to seven minutes to unstructured outdoor play per day while spending an average of seven and a half hours in front of electronic media" ("Children in Nature: Improving Health by Reconnecting Youth with the Outdoors").

Constructing the inclusive nature play area within this substantial natural open space will lead to a "combined" experience wherein children enjoying the nature play area will have an opportunity to experience nature. This concurrent exposure to active play and nature will hopefully set the stage for generations to establish a life-long link to physical activity and a love of nature.

To continue the nature play experience, families can return to the trailhead to follow the new multi-use trail (in this project) over the Carmel River bridge and connect to the River Loop Trail in a journey to share a deeper immersion into the natural world. This is a full sensorial experience to introduce children to nature that expands with their abilities and increasing curiosity--starting with the nature playground and pollinator demonstration garden to the new ADA multi-use trail that crosses a river and leads to the floodplain and other trails in the rugged Front Ranch area of the park that lead to views of the mountains and the Pacific coastline.

### ***A Pollinator Demonstration Garden***

Open space parks have the responsibility to promote habitat conservation. As part of the MPRPD's efforts to re-wild the park, this pollinator garden will serve as a recreation activity and learning experience about how individuals can help natural habitats thrive by re-introducing native plants into our residential, institutional, and rehabilitated landscapes. The pollinator demonstration garden will be a place where plant and insect life are on display to elicit discussions and provide education about life cycles, pollinator habitats, and our role in sustaining healthy ecosystems.

Environmental education is a primary mission of the MPRPD, and the pollinator demonstration garden builds awareness of stewarding through native habitat restoration. The placement of the garden will be adjacent to the nature play area/playground and include interpretive signage about native plants, pollinator-friendly flowers, organic gardening, and the importance of pollinator protection not just for the park, but for neighboring gardens and everyone, in general, as well. MPRPD will coordinate with volunteers to plant and maintain the garden. Participants will not only have fun outdoors, but will learn employable skills related to gardening, habitat restoration, and environmental stewardship.

The pollinator demonstration garden will also serve as an extension of this park's Discovery Center and its programs through an outdoor classroom for Monterey Peninsula and Salinas Valley school field trips, site for researchers, and classes or activities offered by the MPRPD's Let's Go Outdoors! Program.

Visitors of all ages and physical and cognitive abilities will enjoy experiencing a beautiful natural garden within an expansive open space and watching and listening to bees, butterflies, and other insects among the leaves and flowers. It will also offer locals and visitors insight and inspiration about how they, too, can help restore the environment by incorporating native plants in their gardens and landscapes.

### ***ADA Multi-Use Trail***

The new accessible (ADA) multi-use trail allows for an immersion into nature and provides access to the existing trail system. It will start at the park entrance and new restrooms (existing project), and gently slope downhill, ending at the Carmel River footbridge, where visitors will learn about protecting the habitat of threatened steelhead trout, the California red-legged frog, and the rare tiger salamander.

The extant River Loop Trail continues from the bridge for one mile and meanders back to the bridge under cottonwoods, willows, and grand old oaks within a floodplain that is being restored to its natural habitat. Visitors are surrounded by a rich landscape that includes riparian, grassland, upland, and forested habitats that encourage year-round and migratory bird species. Hawks, quail, and woodpeckers are often spotted, creating a bird-watcher haven.

Park guests, who are interested in venturing beyond the recreational amenities at the entrance of the park, will experience nature within a safe, active, and comfortable terrain. The new trail provides accessibility to a location once difficult to reach for those with mobility challenges and is critical to ensuring access to the immersion experience in nature for everyone. Without it, crossing the Carmel River footbridge would require following the former golf cart paths that are too rough, too narrow, or too steep, per ADA and MPRPD standards.