

**MONTEREY PENINSULA REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

DATE: May 06, 2020
TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Rafael Payan, General Manager
SUBJECT: DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEM: COVID-19 Response

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends the Board receive and file this report.

(NOTE: Staff may update this report at, or in advance of, the May 06, 2020 MPRPD Board of Directors meeting to provide the latest information and recommendations.)

FISCAL IMPACT:

Not Applicable

FUNDING SOURCE:

Not Applicable

FUNDING BALANCE:

Not Applicable

DISCUSSION:

The County's most recent Order (Order), issued April 3, 2020, gives special districts and other local government entities discretion to determine what functions it provides are essential and what employees and contractors are essential for carrying out such functions, so long as the determinations do not violate the general restrictions.

Regarding parks, the only specific County-wide restriction is that playground areas with play equipment be closed. This is extended to include sports facilities, such as basketball courts and sports fields, because use of these types of facilities may result in users not maintaining social distancing. Other than that restriction, the various Federal, State and local agencies managing parkland in Monterey County have discretion to determine how to manage their parks during the current situation. MPRPD has approached this task by attempting to balance the following factors: (1) health benefits to park users from MPRPD park use; (2) health risks to park users from potentially contracting COVID-19 at MPRPD parks; (3) effectiveness of various restrictions on limiting risk of park users contracting COVID-19 at MPRPD parks; and, (4) ability of MPRPD park users to comply with restrictions for minimizing the risk of contracting COVID-19 at MPRPD parks.

The National Recreation and Parks Association, medical community, and numerous governmental bodies acknowledge the essential role parks and open space play in

sustaining personal and community health -- especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Order contains language allowing the public to legally engage in specific outdoor activities, such as walking, hiking and running at our parks, while still following social distancing and other measures to diminish potential community transfer of the novel coronavirus. The Order also identifies essential personnel as staff whose services are necessary to continue the provision of essential services. MPRPD Rangers are essential personnel.

It is estimated that most people spend 90% of their lives in enclosed spaces.¹ Disruptions to the 10% of time not spent indoors may greatly exacerbate stressors that negatively affect mental, emotional, physical and economic health. The negative effects caused by prolonged social distancing and isolation may especially affect our most vulnerable populations, including the poor, people of color, and elderly because their access and options to engage in healthy activities are often limited, raising questions of social equity.² Already, the incidence of domestic abuse, personal conflict, violent crime, and child abuse is increasing.³ The social impacts current measures are having parallel those evident during wartime or those experienced after severe natural disasters.⁴ However, unlike war, a date-certain cease fire will not soon happen; and, unlike the passing of a cataclysmic storm, a favorable overnight barometric change signaling the end to the severe event is improbable. Excessive television viewing as we strive to become more informed or seek an escape via entertainment, combined with increased computer-time imposed by the exigencies of maintaining productivity or teaching and learning, magnify these impacts.

There is a countermeasure. Numerous studies demonstrate that exposure to nature and participation in outdoor activities improves a person's adaptation to, and tolerance of, stress.⁵ A stroll through a park, open space, natural area, or a neighborhood demonstratively provides a beneficial option that not only enhances mental, emotional, and physical health, but may also reduce a person's sense of isolation even if they are not going outdoors to socialize.

MPRPD fully supports the State's and County's Orders and other measures necessary to minimize, if not eliminate, COVID-19 transmission. MPRPD also believes that access to our parks, open spaces and natural landscapes play a very important role in our communities' wellbeing. In alignment with the CDC's recommendations and the State's and County's Orders, MPRPD continues to simultaneously provide access to our natural areas and open spaces, while stressing adherence to social distancing measures. Towards that end, MPRPD's coronavirus-related cautionary/informational signage includes the tagline: "PLEASE STAY SAFE SO WE CAN STAY OPEN." This message has also been conveyed during recent media-broadcast interviews, reinforcing

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1. Klepeis NE, Nelson WC, Ott WR, Robinson JP, Tsang AM, et al. The National Human Activity Pattern Survey. *Journal of Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology*, 2001.
 2. Beard H. Ring alarm: COVID-19 presents grave danger to communities of color. *Colorlines*, 2020.
 3. Farnitano C, Radhakrishna R. *Contra Costa Health Officer Guidance*. 2020.
 4. Cluver L, Lachman JM, Sherr L, et al. Parenting in a time of COVID-19. *The Lancet*, 2020.
 5. Mitchell R and Popham F. Effects of exposure to natural environment on health. *The Lancet*, 2008.

that if park users do not adhere to social distancing and other requirements, the parks and trails they presently enjoy may require temporarily closure until the Order or Orders are lifted.

MPRPD's Staff and Legal Counsel continue to research, formulate, implement, evaluate, and adjust as necessary to enhance the responsible provision of essential services to our clients (**ATTACHMENT 1**). The District continues to regularly meet with the Bureau of Land Management, California State Parks, and the County of Monterey to exchange ideas and vet recommendations, provide information to the public, and plan for the "re-opening" of those facilities and sites that have been temporarily closed -- as applicable and appropriate. MPRPD will continue to promptly adjust its practices to ensure full compliance with all Orders issued by federal, state, or county regulatory agencies.

To date, MPRPD's response to the novel coronavirus has generally been well-received by our clients and community. Most email and FACEBOOK comments support MPRPD keeping our parks, open spaces, and trails open for public use. Ms. Linda Mullaly recently wrote, "Thank you to you as president, the board, Dr. Payan, staff and the dedicated park rangers, who are making it possible for the community to get out in nature. You deserve special kudos for going it alone, when county and state open spaces were all shut down this [Easter] weekend. We are so lucky to have MPRPD!"⁶

ATTACHMENT:

1. [Actions Taken by MPRPD to Keep Some Sites Open for Public Use](#)

6. Mullaly L. Correspondence to MPRPD. Email; April 13, 2020.