

**MONTEREY PENINSULA REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT  
STAFF REPORT**

**BOARD MEETING:** December 06, 2023

**SUBJECT:** Monthly Staff Report

**PRESENTER:** Dr. Rafael Payan, General Manager

**REPORT:** The following briefly summarizes some of the key tasks and projects the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District (MPRPD) staff undertook from mid-October through mid-November 2023 in addition to performing MPRPD's regular business.

**ADMINISTRATION DIVISION**

**1. Committees**

Staff met with several Board members, division personnel, and key stakeholders to explore key components that will help improve MPRPD's many products and their delivery, identify potential means how broad-scale improvements can be achieved, and identifying means of expanding MPRPD's relevance within district boundaries and beyond. Research continues.

Several key parties still remain to be interviewed. Once contact is made with all parties and their information is obtained, the numerous recommendations will be compiled into key groups.

These findings will be presented to the agency's various Committees for review and prioritization. The Committees' recommendations will then be presented to the full Board of Directors for their consideration and direction, and staff's subsequent implementation. Alternatively, Key findings may be presented to the Board during the Strategic Planning Meeting.

**2. FEMA – Winter 2023 Storm Damage Compilation**

Administrations' and Operations Divisions' staff continued working on FEMA's Damages Reporting Requirements and Requests for Additional Information. Two contracts have been entered into for work in the PCRPD backcountry and San Clemente Blue Rock Open Space. Staff received notice of an additional Category B obligation of \$12,995. Category B obligations include emergency protective measures before, during, or after an event to protect or eliminate immediate threats of significant damage.

### **3. Office Space Assessment**

An initial spatial needs assessment was performed by several staff. This exercise will be expanded to include additional staff to ensure that their needs and recommendations are heard. Initial concepts were developed and shall continue to be developed and refined. An architectural consultant will be secured to help evaluate staff's recommendations, leading to improvement of work areas.

### **4. Palo Corona's Project-B Construction in General**

Electrical work by PG&E scheduled for November 30, 2023, was unable to be completed and was rescheduled to December 15. If work can be completed at that time, project closeout should follow closely behind.

Original landscaping and irrigation plans designed for the project have been redesigned. Low water consumption native plants and native plant cultivars will be used. A split rail fence will replace the flimsy symbolic fence and signage reminding visitors to stay on trails will be incorporated.

SWCA continues to provide biological monitoring services for the project.

### **5. Policy Creation/Updates Project**

Administration Division staff are working on various policies and updates which will be presented for Board approval in the coming months.

### **6. Pre-qualified Consultants and Contractors**

Administration Division continued to assist MPRPD's staff in developing an expanded list of pre-qualified consultants and contractors. MPRPD developed a list of pre-qualified architects, landscape architects, and engineers 5-years ago. This list of pre-qualified professional consultants has served the District very beneficially over the past five years. With the RCU Floodplain and Upland Restoration Project and other projects approaching, additional consultants with expertise in environmental consulting are being added to the existing pre-qualified consultant list.

The District's online e-procurement tool, known as **OpenGov Procurement**, shall be used by all MPRPD divisions to pre-qualify consultants. After the consultants are ranked on their qualifications and narrowed into a small pool to select from, staff from the appropriate Division will present the Board their respective proposed professional service agreements for the specific services required.

### **7. Strategic Plan**

To ensure MPRPD's Board and Staff are aligned with implementation of short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals, the District shall hold a public meeting to develop its Strategic Plan. This meeting is in the process of being scheduled for either January or February 2024. The Strategic Plan will guide MPRPD's budget development.

## 8. Training

Staff participated in training including the California Public Employers Labor Relations Association conference.

## 9. Year End Audit

Staff continue working on the annual financial audit and preparation of the Financial Statements. Clifton Larson Allen anticipates presenting the Board with the Draft Financial Statements at the January 2024 Board Meeting.

The California Department of Finance's Office of State Audits and Evaluations completed its audit of the District's COVID-19 Fiscal Relief Certified Application. The District received \$1,059,975 in COVID relief funds in February 2022. Results of the audit are available upon request.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH (EECO)**

### 1. Community Outreach

#### A. North District Environmental Education Coalition

Staff facilitated a kick-off meeting between city staff from Monterey and Seaside to discuss program opportunities and advertisement in the *Let's Go Outdoors!* publication. During this meeting, next this coalition formulated next steps, including holding a public to seek their input. Public comments and recommendations will help determine what types of programs each community would like. The location of each program will be vetted by the multi-jurisdictional staff to determine where these new programs will be held.

#### B. Social Media Posts (October 16-November 15, 2023):

For this reporting period, posts consisted of district news, promotion of upcoming *LGO!* programming, and educational content about the flora and fauna of MPRPD parks.

The following of MPRPD social media accounts grew in October-November.

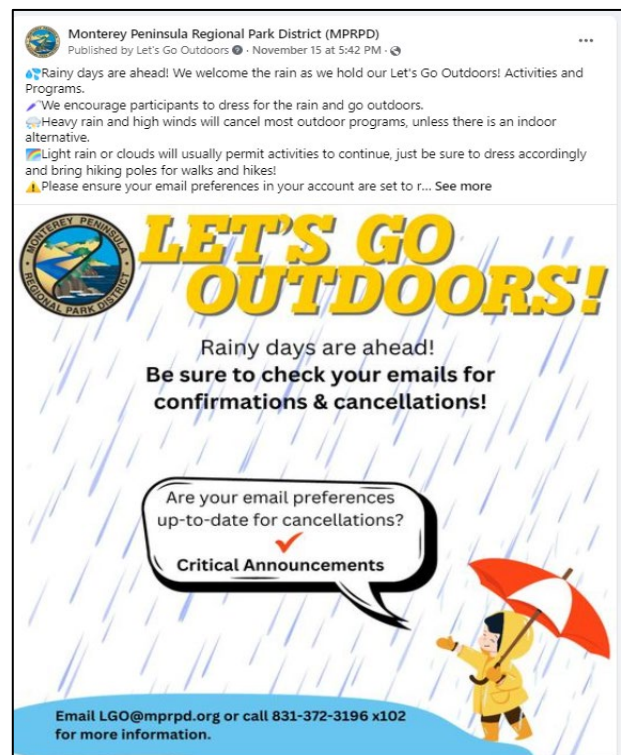
#### i. **Facebook stats - @MPRegionalParkDistrict (1) Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District (MPRPD) | Carmel CA | Facebook**

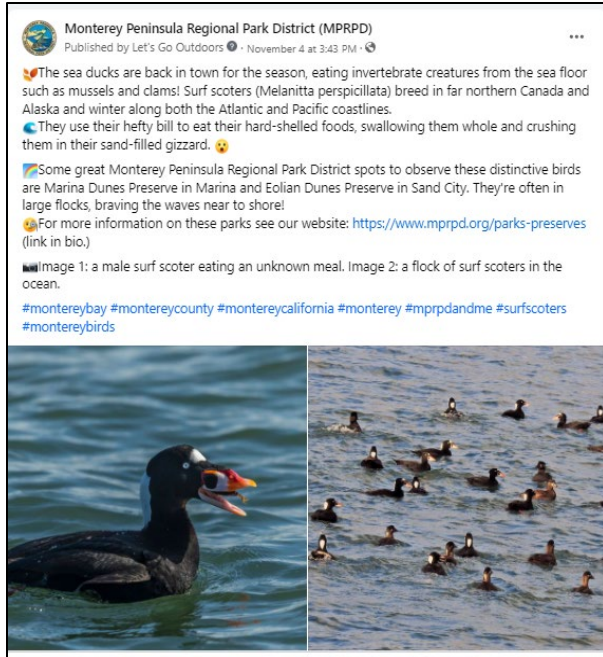
1. November 15 Follower Count: 2,403 (+21)
2. Facebook Page Reach (number of accounts that viewed a piece of content at least once): 12,067 (↑ 27.9%)
3. Top 3 posts for likes/reactions (October 16-November 15):
  - a. November 11: GRRP seasonal footbridge removal (4,200 reach) (74 likes/reactions)

- b. October 28: California red-legged frogs at Animas Pond (1,800 reach) (52 likes/reactions)
- c. November 1: Upcoming “Improve Your Bike Skills on the Trails” LGO! program (2,100 reach) (35 likes/reactions)

ii. **Instagram stats - @mprpd\_igo: Monterey Peninsula Parks (@mprpd\_igo) • Instagram photos and videos**

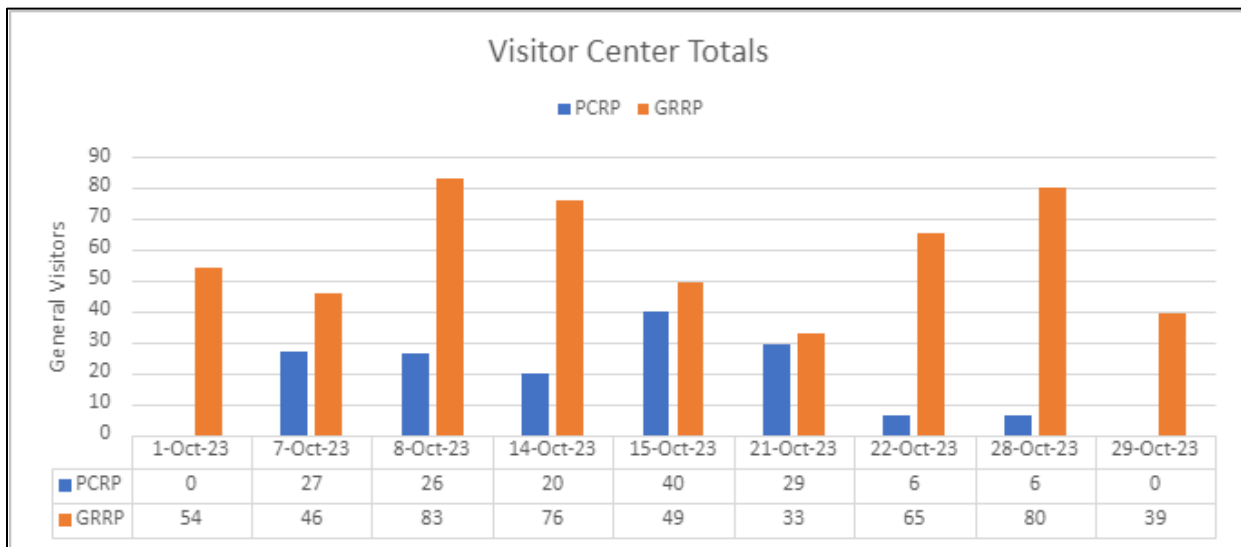
- 1. November 15 Follower Count: 1,379 (+20)
- 2. Instagram Page Reach (number of accounts that viewed a piece of content at least once): 847 (↓ 13.7%)
- 3. Top 3 posts for likes/reactions (October 16-November 15):
  - a. November 8: Upcoming “Meditative Painting in Nature” LGO! program (314 reach) (35 likes/reactions)
  - b. November 4: Surf scoter info. (303 reach) (34 likes/reactions)
  - c. November 11: GRRP seasonal footbridge removal (247 reach) (32 likes/reactions)





### C. Visitor Center Totals

Staff are continuing to record visitation during weekends, 10 am-4 pm, at both the PCRPD Discovery Center (DC) and the GRRP Visitor Center (VC). The chart below summarizes weekend visitor contacts with staff or volunteers in October 2023. Dates with 0 contacts recorded (10/1 and 10/29 for the DC) indicate that the center remained closed due to limited staff availability. On 10/22 and 10/28, the DC was only open from 10 am to 1 pm, also due to limited staff availability.



**Visitor contacts at the PCRPD DC and GRRP VC in October 2023**



## 2. Education and Interpretation

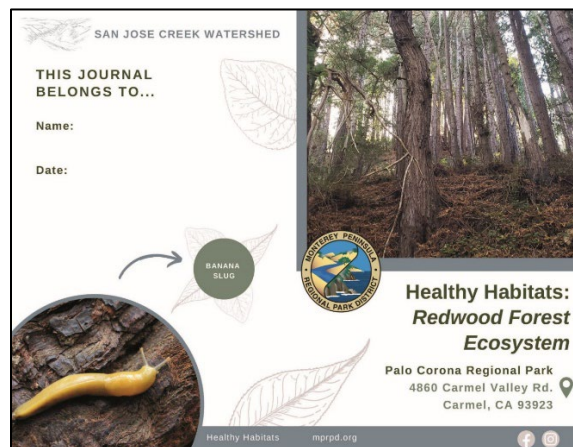
### A. Educational Programming and Resource Webpage

Staff continue to develop and pilot activities and online content in preparation for launching a suite of educational resources by the end of the fiscal year:

1. The group of 10–14-year-olds from the Monterey Military Home School participated once again in piloting new material for the Healthy Habitats program. They enjoyed taking a nature walk to the redwoods, identifying the parts of a forest, and observing living and non-living things along the way by using a journal to guide and record their learning.
2. Drafting of the new “Teachers and Students” subpage under the “Education & Outreach” tab on the [mrrpd.org](http://mrrpd.org) website has begun. The first draft of this new webpage will tentatively contain fieldtrip and visitation information for teachers, downloadable resources, and links to local partners to create a hub of environmental curricula customized to local ecosystems in and around the Monterey Peninsula.



**Monterey Military Home School students piloting Healthy Habitats: Redwood Forest Ecosystem material along San Jose Creek.**



**Journal covers (back, front from left to right) for Healthy Habitats: Redwood Forest Ecosystem, curriculum based on the San Jose Creek area.**

### 3. Facilities

#### A. GRRP Outdoor Classroom

Staff continue to work with the environmental and archaeological consultants. Development of the construction plans and county permitting are in development. The purchase of the prefabricated classroom structure from Romtec is under review by legal counsel.

#### B. GRRP Arboretum

MPPRD staff and arboretum project lead, volunteer Lois Davidson, met with board members, volunteers, and staff of the Monterey Bay Master Gardeners (MBMG) at the Garland Park Arboretum to discuss opportunities for partnership at the facility and other MPPRD parks. Ideas discussed included mission-aligned offerings in the *LGO!* catalog, volunteer activities, classes at the Arboretum, and MBMG participation in MPPRD's public events.

### 4. *Let's Go Outdoors!* Guide and Programs

#### A. Fall 2023/Winter 2024 Season

There were 28 MPPRD-sponsored programs that took place between October 16 and November 15. The most popular programs are still located in the San Jose Creek area, highlighting its natural beauty.



Slow Flow Yoga in Nature with instructor Suzy Adra.





**Snively's Ridge from Holt Road hike with Instructor-MPRPD Volunteer Sharon Osgood**

## **5. Volunteers**

### **A. Monthly Enrichment: Volunteer Facilitator Orientation**

Volunteers attended a training session at the Discovery Center (and available virtually) to facilitate *Let's Go Outdoors!* programs, classes, and activities. Those attending in person enjoyed a potluck meal during on-site training.

### **B. Service Learners (Fall 2023)**

CSUMB students Meg Gostanian, Noah Riendeau, and Karen Maldonado are finishing their commitments with MPRPD and their respective classes. They have been part of our inaugural program training Service Learners to assist staff and volunteers at the Garland Visitor Center and Palo Corona Discovery Center.

The students are helping to improve and streamline the process by evaluating the orientation and training:

*"Thank you so much for this opportunity! I feel like I've learned so much. This has been very helpful for my class and for myself. I'm glad I did my Service Learning with MPRPD." – Meg*



### C. Volunteer Recruitment

1. Staff created a volunteer recruitment advertisement for the December Regional Health magazine published by the Monterey Herald. This guide is inserted in an issue of the Herald and is delivered to over 400 local medical office waiting rooms and senior living facilities. The magazine is also available on their website for one year.



2. Staff and partners developed save-the-date outreach material recruiting volunteers for the March 2024 California Wildlife Day Event.

### D. Tours

Volunteers Pat Herro and Mark Laycox led a tour of the Palo Corona Discovery Center for the Cottages of Carmel Seniors.



Cottages of Carmel residents tour the Discovery Center

## **E. Volunteer Facilitators and Instructors**

During this reporting period, volunteers facilitated the following LGO! programs: Awe Walk, Palo Corona Cabin and Orchard Hike, Qi Gong, Meditative Painting in Nature, Exploring Nature with Children, Mindful Meditation, Raptor Encounter, Discover San Jose Creek, Ixshenta State Park, Whisler Overlook to the Redwoods, Slow Flow Yoga in Nature.

## **OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE DIVISION**

### **1. FEMA-funded Storm Damages**

After a lengthy process, staff finalized contracts and issued Notices to Proceed for FEMA-funded damage repairs suffered during the January 2023 atmospheric river events including the Palo Corona Regional Park backcountry road repairs and San Clemente Blue Rock Open Space road repairs. Ideally, these projects will be completed prior to any significant rainfall events in 2023/2024.

### **2. Frog Pond Wetland Preserve Seasonal Maintenance**

Staff recently completed seasonal drainage maintenance at Frog Pond Wetland Preserve with the assistance of a Gabilan Inmate Crew. This channel is cleared annually utilizing inmate crews to remove overgrown vegetation and prevent flooding. At the same time, vegetation is thinned around the pond floor to increase surface water and improve habitat conditions for wildlife.



**Gabilan Crew clearing FWP drainage channel**

### **3. Garland Park Seasonal Footbridges Removed**

The seasonal footbridges at Garland Ranch Regional Park have been removed for the winter season. An inmate crew is utilized, as each bridge section weighs approximately 300 lbs. These bridges will be reinstalled following the rainy season next spring. The seasonal footbridges in Redwood Canyon have also been removed for the season.





**Gabilan Crew removing GRRP seasonal footbridges**

**4. Joyce Stevens Pine Forest Preserve Fuel Clearing**

Operation Division staff investigated a report of vegetation clearing on JSPFP property along the property boundary with Monterra residential development. Staff met with the responsible homeowner and determined no enforcement action would be taken. Staff will work with this homeowner in future years to address their concern collaboratively.



**Area cleared by neighboring property owner**

## 5. Marina Dunes Fence Repairs and Relocation

Rangers worked with Point Blue Conservancy staff to relocate the snowy plover symbolic fencing at Marina Dunes Preserve in advance of the winter season. Each year, this fence is relocated to the toe of the foredune to accommodate winter high tides. At the same time, Rangers addressed a property boundary fence that had been vandalized thereby allowing unauthorized access north onto Cemex property.



**Symbolic fence relocation**



**Boundary fence repairs**

## 6. Memorial Bench Policy Revision

Staff proposed a revision of MPRPD's memorial bench policy at December's Board meeting. This revision will include an increase in fees and recognize Palo Corona Regional Park's Front Ranch Unit as a suitable location for memorial bench installation.

## 7. PCRP Backcountry Gate Repairs

Staff recently repaired a broken gate post in the Palo Corona Backcountry along the Palo Corona Trail. As with any infrastructure, fences age and fail. MPRPD needs to consider this when acquiring new property, constructing new facilities, or agreeing to any new long-term maintenance obligations.





**Broken gate post in PCRP Backcountry**

#### **8. PCRP Front Ranch Trees and Slides**

Rangers recently removed several trees that had fallen along the access road paralleling Highway 1 at the Palo Corona Front Ranch Unit. There were also two areas where the hillside had sloughed and blocked the road, which Rangers cleared utilizing MPRPD equipment.



**Tree down on frontage road**



**Slide across frontage road**



## 9. Race for Open Space Planning

Operations staff facilitated a second site visit for Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT) staff to ground-truth the proposed routes for the upcoming 2024 Race for Open Space. BSLT's race event concessionaire, ITR (Inside Trail Running), was also present during the tour. Staff will continue to work with BSLT staff toward issuance of a special use permit for next year's event.

## 10. RCU Ranger Office Access Road Improvements

Rangers recently surfaced the access road and parking area in front of the Rancho Canada Unit's mobile ranger office. Historically, this area would become very muddy following any significant rainfall, forcing Rangers, Wedgewood staff, and delivery vehicles to navigate a muddy/uphill road when exiting the parking lot.



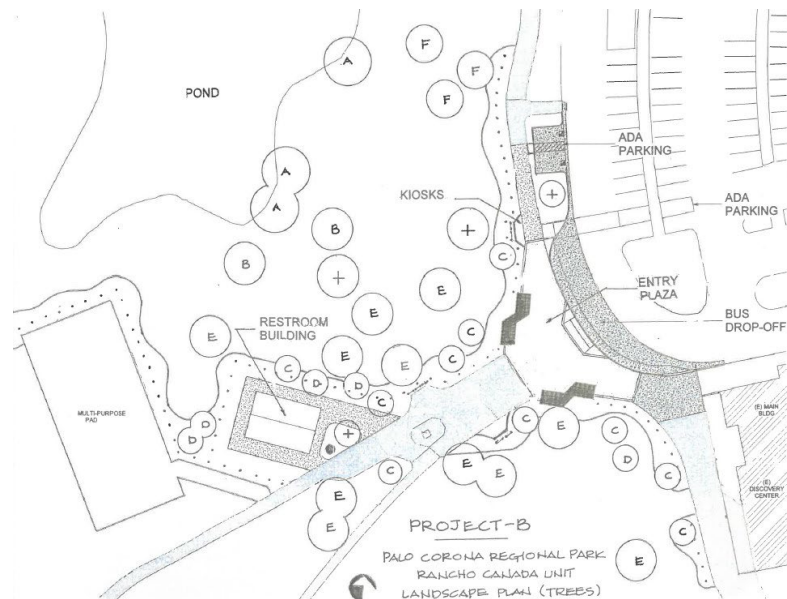
**Assured Aggregates delivery**



**Ranger staff spreading and compacting material using MPRPD equipment**

## 11. Project B Improvements

Rangers assistance has been requested to develop and install a revised conceptual landscaping plan for the Project B site. Courtesy of MPRPD's General Manager, this revised plan includes approximately 500 feet of split rail fencing, multiple species of trees to be planted, wood chip border, and the removal of existing symbolic fencing.



## 12. Southbank Trail Seasonal Maintenance

With the assistance of a Gabilan Inmate Crew, Rangers recently weed-whipped and cleared overgrown vegetation along the South Bank Trail at Palo Corona Regional Park. This seasonal maintenance occurs annually and involves clearing along the north and south sides of each fence line. MPRPD's small brush chipper was utilized during this project.



**Gabilan Crew and Rangers maintaining Southbank Trail**

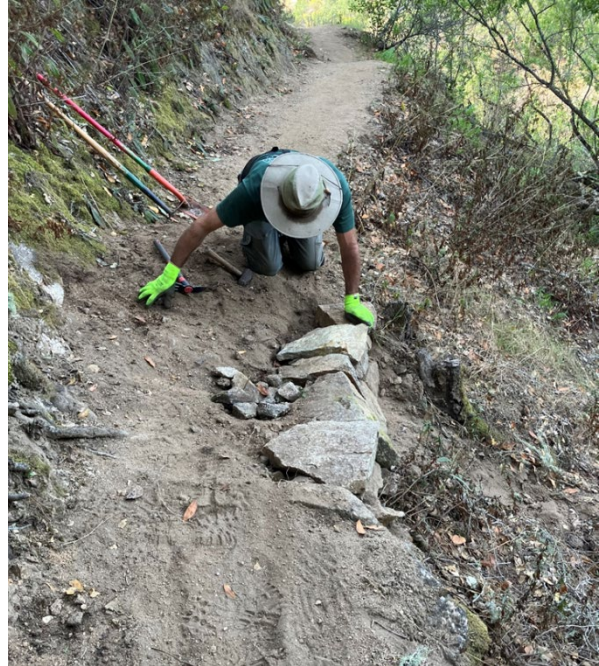


### 13. Terrace Trail Rock Wall Construction

Rangers recently constructed a rock retaining wall along Terrace Trail at Garland Ranch Regional Park. This wall was built to address a very narrow section of trail that became hazardous as a result of a fallen tree undermining the existing trail head. Using large rock harvested on site, Rangers constructed the wall and backfilled using native soil to regain the adequate tread width.



Ranger staff harvested rock onsite



Rock wall construction

### 14. Trees Down

As we have experienced multiple rain events earlier this year, so have we experienced multiple trees down along MPRPD trails. Rangers recently cleared downed trees on Manzanita Trail, Hitchcock Trail, Garza's Canyon Trail, and Laureles Trail. Downed trees will continue to be a routine operation for Rangers as we progress through fall and winter.



Tree down on Manzanita Trail





**Tree down on Laureles Trail**

### **15. Winter Preparations**

Staff continues to make preparations in advance of winter rain events, including channel clearing, drainage feature maintenance, gutter and downspout cleaning, and drain dip installation as needed. Staff hopes we continue to receive rain in small amounts as opposed to the significant atmospheric river events that caused widespread flooding, road damage, and soil erosion in early 2023.

### **16. XC Season Finale**

Rangers attended the final cross-country event as part of the Big Sur Marathon Foundation's (BSMF) cross-country season. Staff appreciates the hard work and commitment by the BSMF to coordinate these events and especially for funding the necessary repairs following last winter's storm damage. Staff is looking forward to continuing the partnership with BSMF to provide a Multi-Benefit Community Trail that serves as a community asset while also meeting cross-country requirements.



**Start of the final XC event of the season**

## **PLANNING & CONSERVATION DIVISION**

### **1. Frog Pond Wetland Preserve Fort Ord Regional Trails and Greenway Mitigation**

Planning and Conservation, Operations, and Administration divisions staff continue to work with the Transportation Agency of Monterey County (TAMC) and its consultant team on proposed riparian and oak planting activities at Frog Pond Wetland Preserve as mitigation for vegetation that will need to be cleared at the Preserve during construction of the Canyon Del Rey/Highway 218 segment of the FORTAG Trail. Staff are requesting, from TAMC, that MPRPD maintain the ability to manage mitigation areas at the Preserve to ensure that mitigation plantings do not increase fire risk to adjacent residential neighborhoods. Other public safety concerns at the Preserve are also being discussed.

### **2. Garland Ranch Regional Park Fuel Mitigation Projects**

MPRPD staff continue to work with The Resource Conservation District of Monterey County and Denise Duffy & Associates on environmental review and permitting for Cal Fire and Coastal Conservancy funded projects at Garland Ranch Regional Park, including thinning of the eucalyptus grove near the Rancho Loop Trail and a shaded fuel break along East Garzas Road.

Staff are seeking Board approval to release a request for proposals for implementation of the eucalyptus thinning and shaded fuel break projects so this work may proceed shortly after all necessary permits and approvals are secured.

### **3. Low-effect Habitat Conservation Plan for the Rancho Cañada Unit of Palo Corona Regional Park**

MPRPD's Planning and Conservation, Administration, and Operations divisions' staff and MPRPD's consultant, SWCA, continue to work toward the development of a Low-effect Habitat Conservation Plan (LEHCP) for the Rancho Cañada Unit of Palo Corona Regional Park. The Project team is currently working on development of a comprehensive list of projects, operational activities, and programs that are expected to occur at the park over the next 20 years. This information will be the basis of what activities will be covered by the LEHCP.

Covered Activities in the LEHCP include Wedgewood Weddings and Banquets activities, off-leash dog park, continued use of the Discovery Center and trailhead restroom building, MPRPD's maintenance building, the multi-use pad, RCU's trail network and its numerous public activities, and various site improvements.

### **4. Marina Dunes Preserve Coastal Dunes Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Project**

Staff filed a CEQA Notice of Exemption after the Board approved the Coastal Dunes Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Project (CDREP) and found it to be exempt from CEQA, as presented, during the November Board meeting. Staff are now working with Planning staff from the City of Marina to determine the appropriate permitting route to ensure compliance with the City's Local Coastal Program.

Assuming all necessary approvals are in place, Habitat Stewardship Project Monterey Bay is planning to host three volunteer events at the Preserve later this year that will consist of ice plant removal, planting of ~1,000 native container plants, and education and interpretation curriculum for school-aged children.

**5. Multi-Benefit Community Trail**

Planning and Conservation and Administration divisions staff continue to work with resource agencies and grant funders to develop a plan for realignment of sections of the Multi-Benefit Community Trail.

**6. Pre-qualified Consultants & Requests for Qualifications**

In compliance with the State of California's Procurement Code's process for selection of consultant services, Regional Government Services and MPRPD staff issued three RFQs for Environmental Planning & Management, Strategic Communications, and Environmental Sites Assessment & Remediation Services.

Staff will work with these firms on an as-needed basis, expediting project delivery at MPRPD. Staff continue to draft RFQs to pre-qualify firms for other services and expect to solicit additional on-call services.

**7. Rancho Cañada Floodplain Restoration Project**

After Board approval, on October 4, 2023, Planning and Conservation and Administration divisions staff executed a License Agreement with Lombardo Land Group I that allows for a critical component of the Rancho Cañada Floodplain Restoration Project (Project) to be constructed on adjacent private property.

Now that site control has been secured, the project team is able to advance design of the preferred project alternative and is reevaluating the project schedule to determine if it is still possible to begin construction in summer 2024, or if the Project may need to be rescheduled to commence summer 2025. It is anticipated that a go-no go determination will be made on December 11, 2023. Staff expect to provide an update on Project timing in January 2024.